

PRIVATEERING IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: ITS EFFECTIVENESS, ITS  
ANNOYANCE, AND THE BRITISH ASSAULT ON CONNECTICUT

by  
KIMBERLY R. GOODLING

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Chair of Committee: Dr. Matthew J. Clavin

Committee Member: Dr. Thomas F. O'Brien

Committee Member: Dr. Mark Allan Goldberg

Committee Member: Dr. Walter Woodward

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For Zoe, it's never too late.

## **ABSTRACT**

Privateering, a form of armed force, was used for centuries to advance imperial missions and wage war. During war, merchant vessels, retrofitted with munitions and men, targeted adversaries' provisional and trading ships, or "prizes," to confiscate supplies and ships. Britain perfected this practice in the New World and called on North American colonists to serve as privateers in Britain's colonial wars of the 1700s. Americans used their privateering expertise to gain their independence in the American Revolution.

This dissertation confronts the body of privateering historiography that largely fails to recognize the significance of the American privateering effort in the war. "Privateering in the American Revolution" argues that privateers were a major factor in the American victory and caused extreme anxiety for the British. To confirm the extent and effectiveness of American privateering, this study relies on evidence from the opposing narratives of British and American political and military leaders and print media. This evidence establishes that America's privateers numbered in the thousands, and that they had a substantial effect on British merchants and British war strategy, including raising British insurance rates, reducing British merchants' revenue, and dictating how the British responded to the American privateers. The number of colonists who signed on to American privateers also prevented the complete development of a Continental navy. In the end, a Continental navy never rivaled the quantity, or success, of American privateers.

One aspect of British war policy was a "scorched-earth" strategy on privateering ports. This project effectively proves the degree of American privateering

through a case-study of Connecticut, the scope of Connecticut privateering, and the violent raids that the British carried out against Connecticut privateering ports in the summer of 1779 and September 1781. Through the framework of the Connecticut raids, this dissertation engages with the historiographies of revolution regionalism and violence. Repositioning the spotlight on Connecticut reveals the continued relevance of the Northeast colonies and military history. The personal stories of the raid victims, expose the consequential violence suffered by privateering communities, including women and elderly civilians, and how they navigated the American Revolution.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the American Revolution, the New England coast became a haven for privateers, sailing vessels retrofitted into armed ships to seize enemy merchant ships (called “prizes”) during wartime. The goal of privateering was two-fold: obtain supplies for the American military and profit for the privateer owner. One colony that produced privateers throughout the war was Connecticut. Its privateers proved especially effective in hindering the flow of Britain’s trade and supplies to its forces and those privateers troubled the British.<sup>1</sup>

On June 15, 1775, British Vice Admiral Samuel Graves learned from Britain’s North American commander, and future Massachusetts Governor, General Thomas Gage, that Connecticut privateers trolled the coastline for British merchant vessels. Graves, desperate to feed his troops which were “in great want of pork and beef,” advised Gage to patrol Connecticut’s coast at Block Island and New Haven for incoming cargoes of meat from the West Indies.<sup>2</sup> Two days later, the same day that American and British forces clashed near Boston’s Bunker Hill, Graves ordered his Captains to intercept rebel ships and “impress,” or kidnap, seamen into Royal Navy service. The British Captains were “not to spare even their fisherman.”<sup>3</sup> On July 24,

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<sup>1</sup> Edgar Stanton Maclay, *History of American Privateers*, (New York: The D. Appleton and Company, 1899),

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015050936635>, 52-65, 69, 73-74.

<sup>2</sup> William Bell Clark and William James Morgan et al., eds., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, (hereinafter referred to as “NDAR”) (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, Dept. of the Navy, 1964), <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/publications/publications-by-subject/naval-documents-of-the-american-revolution.html>, 11 vols., General Thomas Gage to Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, June 15, 1775, 1:685.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Narrative of Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, June 17, 1775, 1:704.

General Gage warned Lord Dartmouth that the “rebels have fitted out some privateers to intercept our supplies.”<sup>4</sup>

Some of these privateers were Connecticut’s most productive: the *Spy*, *Broom*, *Washington*, *Warren*, and *Shark*. The *Spy* fitted out in September 1775. In 1776, the *Warren* took a sloop in April, a transport with guns and one hundred soldiers and another ship in June, and a brig with guns, swivels, gold dust, and ivory. That August, the *Broom* captured two brigs, one snow, and one ship. In September, the *Washington* took one brig, one schooner, and a snow with cannon on board. In 1779, the *Shark* took four prizes. During the first two years of the war, Connecticut commissioned twenty-two privateers. In comparison to Connecticut producing thirteen state naval vessels during the entire war, the colony commissioned 300 privateers.<sup>5</sup> By all accounts, the country had gone “mad-a-privateering.”<sup>6</sup>

In the War of Independence, a fledgling United States faced the daunting task of waging war against a global super-power. Lacking a substantial navy, the U.S.

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<sup>4</sup> Clark et al., eds., NDAR, General Thomas Gage to Lord Dartmouth, Boston, July 24, 1775, 1:960.

<sup>5</sup> Maclay, *History of American Privateers*, 73-74; Middlebrook, *History of Maritime Connecticut*, 10; Louis Middlebrook, *History of Maritime Connecticut during the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, (Salem: Essex Institute, 1925), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015027757734>, Vol.1, 10, 15-16. Four new classes of sailing vessels began being built in the eighteenth century: the sloop, schooner, brig, and snow (smallest to largest). The differences in the classes were the rigging, hull forms, suspension for the “fore-and-aft” sails, and tonnage. Joseph A. Goldenberg, *Shipbuilding in Colonial America*, (Newport News, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1976), <https://archive.org/details/shipbuildinginco0000gol>, 77. Sloops weighed from twenty to 100 tons. Schooners were approximately the same size, but with different sail placement. As a result, the schooner could withstand harsher weather conditions. Brigs weighed up to more than double sloops or schooners. Snows were ten to twenty tons larger than brigs. Ibid., 77-80.

<sup>6</sup> Maclay, *History of American Privateers*, 69-70.



relied heavily on privateers. Privateering began in earnest in 1775 along the New England coast and quickly became a key part of American strategy and a major nuisance for the British. In response to privateers, the British launched a series of brutal assaults on Connecticut's coast in July 1779 and September 1781.

Americans served as privateers for Britain in the early colonial wars but proved vexing to merchants and the British Parliament in the American Revolution. By 1777, dozens of British businessmen appealed to Parliament about the effects of privateering on insurance rates. The merchants pleaded for help in stopping American privateers from taking their trading vessels. That May, the British merchant company, John Barton & Co., informed Lord Stormont, a British diplomat in France, of the American privateer *Lexington's* plans to strike the coasts of Great Britain and Ireland, and of the *Polly*, that had taken the British ship *Falmouth*, and was sailing to rendezvous with four other privateers off the coast of Nantes, France.<sup>7</sup> The writer complained to Stormont that "trade to England and Ireland is entirely stopped by fleets of American privateers."<sup>8</sup> In 1778, members of the House of Lords heard of the devastating financial impact wreaked by privateers. Alderman Wooldridge, a secretary to Lloyds' of London's subscribers, testified before Parliament and estimated that the Americans had apprehended or destroyed 733 ships, causing the price for insuring commercial vessels to more than double.<sup>9</sup> British manufacturing exports fell so

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<sup>7</sup> Clark, et al., NDAR, "Memorial of the Merchants, Traders, and Ship Owners of London to Lord Weymouth," November 24, 1777, 10:1023-24; John Barton & Co. to Lord Stormont, May 10, 1777, 8:837.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., John Barton & Co. to Lord Stormont, May 10, 1777, 8:837.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., "Proceedings in the Lords Respecting the Commercial Losses Occasioned by the American War," February 6, 1778, 11:967-71; 985-87; 994-96. The

dramatically because of American privateers that “the American war had been the cause of many bankruptcies.”<sup>10</sup> Lawyer William Creighton attested to staggering losses in the amount of over two million pounds “in consequence by the captures made by the American Privateers.”<sup>11</sup> Even though the British recaptured ships back from American privateers, the balance of success tipped in the Americans favor—the rebels confiscated seven British merchant ships for every one American vessel lost.<sup>12</sup>

If the British intended to win the war, they needed to win the battle against American privateers. Around the time of Commander-in-chief Sir William Howe’s resignation in early 1778, George Germain, political counselor to King George, advised Howe that he needed to move men from land troops to the fleet to supplement naval forces.<sup>13</sup> This was necessary to attack the seaports of Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, to destroy “ships of war and privateers, by which

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hit on British trade and manufacturing was evident as early as spring of 1777. See *The Public Advertiser* reporting that Nevis and the Leeward Islands befell harassment from American privateers, putting British trade ships in danger. February 10, 1777, 8:576.

<sup>10</sup> Clark, et al., NDAR, 11:967.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 11:969.

<sup>12</sup> James Richard Wils, “In Behalf of the Continent: Privateering and Irregular Warfare in Early Revolutionary America, 1775-1777,” (Master’s Thesis, East Carolina University, Summer 2012), Abstract; Maclay, *History of American Privateers*, 69, 113; Reuben Elmore Stivers, *Privateers & Volunteers: The Men and Women of our Reserve Naval Forces, 1766-1866*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1975), 25. Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Foreword by President Bill Clinton, 10:vii; Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 21, 178.

<sup>13</sup> Clark, et al., NDAR, Lord George Germain to General Sir William Howe, February 18, 1778, 11:1016-17.

the trade of this kingdom has been so greatly annoyed,” and to keep them from fitting out more.<sup>14</sup>

Germain recommended to Howe’s replacement, Sir Henry Clinton, that if the American forces could not be quickly defeated, Clinton should forget “offensive operations against the rebels within land.”<sup>15</sup> Instead, Germain suggested that Clinton take or destroy American vessels and attack shipbuilding efforts to stop American privateers from injuring British trade. Consequently, a plan emerged to send a number of British ships from New York and another from Halifax, one to attack the Connecticut coast, one to assault Maine and New Hampshire, and then for the two to come together to strike at Boston and Massachusetts’s Bay.<sup>16</sup>

Germain rightly focused on privateers and the ports that harbored them because a sizable American navy never materialized. From being in disrepair or taken or sunk by the British, the number of Continental ships dropped from thirty-one in 1776 to four by 1782. The number of privateers, on the other hand, grew exponentially every year of the war. Starting with 136 in 1776, privateers increased continuously with seventy-three in 1777, 115 in 1778, 167 in 1779, 228 in 1780, 449 in 1781, and 323 in 1782.<sup>17</sup> In the words of naval historian Edgar Stanton Maclay, “had it not been for our privateers the Stars and Stripes would have been, for all practical purposes, completely swept from the seas.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Lord George Germain to Lieutenant General Sir Henry Clinton, March 8, 1778, 11:1069-73.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Maclay, *History of American Privateers*, 113

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 206.

This dissertation argues that privateering made the American victory in the American Revolution possible. Privateers provided an American maritime presence in the absence of a sizeable navy, threatened Britain's military supply, and damaged Britain's economy. Privateering, moreover, distressed the British military and political leadership to the extent that it shaped war tactics and incited a hostile response to it. American privateers were so successful that they pushed the British to employ a "scorched earth" policy on privateering centers along the Connecticut coast in 1779 and 1781.

An analysis of the effects of American privateering, and, in particular, the activities of Connecticut privateers, reveals the significance of privateering in the American Revolution. The practice of privateering provided the Americans a better chance of success and created an obstacle that the British needed to overcome. Britain addressed it by assaulting privateering ports on the North American seaboard, including the Connecticut coast. The consequential violence incurred by Connecticut's coastal inhabitants and communities was devastating. Displaying the amount of privateering and connecting it to Connecticut's raids, illustrates its impact on the war.

This dissertation adds to three distinct historiographies of the American Revolution: (1) privateering; (2) regionalism; and (3) violence. Despite privateering's impact on the war's outcome, the historiography fails to substantially address the practice adequately. "Privateering in the American Revolution" intersects the disciplines of military, maritime, and Atlantic history establishing privateering as a key element to the U.S. victory. Using privateering and the British raids on the Connecticut coast as a framework brings the story back to military conflict, the East Coast, and the

thirteen colonies—all themes that have fallen out of favor in the historiography. This dissertation combines traditional and current approaches, and insists that the American eastern coast, and military engagements still matter. This is shown through the extent of American privateering activity, how its scope affected British war strategy, and how it moved the British to invade privateering communities.

Military history of the American Revolution underwent a renaissance during the 1960s-1970s. New approaches included employing “bottom-up” histories inspired by the social upheaval of those decades.<sup>19</sup> Scholars also left the “guns and battle” focus of prior historiography to focus on two new areas: (1) the administration of war, including the decision-making process taking place far from the fight; and (2) a sociological look at those willing to put themselves in the fight.<sup>20</sup> A 1969 collection of

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<sup>19</sup> For examples of the changing military history, see John Shy, *A People Numerous & Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1990) Revised Edition; *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) Revised Edition; Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789*, (Boston: Northwestern University Press, 1983); Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People At War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Charles Patrick Niemeyer, *America Goes to War: A Social History of the Continental Army*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996). For meticulous detail of the evolving military historiography of the American Revolution, see James K. Martin and Mark E. Lender’s “A Note on Revolutionary War History and Historiography.” *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic 1763-1789*, 3rd ed. (John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2015), x, 219-31. Martin and Lender provide an extensive breakdown of how the field has transformed and extended itself out in different directions.

<sup>20</sup> George Athan Billias, ed., *George Washington’s Opponents: British Generals and Admirals in the American Revolution*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc. 1969), ix, x, xiii. David Syrett examined the British transport system, the “administrative machinery” that undergirded the British military supply effort. This department, responsible for moving men and munitions, was riddled with “unprecedented administrative and logistical problems.” Britain failed to recognize that

essays in *George Washington's Opponents: British Generals and Admirals in the American Revolution* turned the emphasis to “problems of strategy, logistics, and civil-military relations.”<sup>21</sup> These interpretations scrutinized British leadership, some concluding that “political considerations” or “nonmilitary factors” calculated into mismanagement of the war.<sup>22</sup> Several essays explored military choices and exposed organizational nightmares, and divulged an overwhelmingly, burdensome, bureaucratic system.<sup>23</sup> The British suffered from a tangled administration.

Privateering in the American Revolution has either been rejected as a driving force in the American war effort or is largely absent from the historiography. The key to political independence was fundamentally connected to land. The Americans cultivated it, governed it, and revered its ownership. However, every original American

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the inter-connected, but flawed web between tactical, operational, and distribution measures affected all aspects of Britain's greatest loss. Syrett argued that too many considerations—“contradictory forces of the ministry's strategic desires, military necessity, economic reality, and administrative possibility,” impeded a British victory. David Syrett, *Shipping and the American War. A Study of British Transport* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1970), vii, viii, ix, 243. In 2013, Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy revisited British war-time leaders and came away with a more favorable, sympathetic view. He denounced unfair criticism of Britain's oft-maligned officers and politicians for the American victory and the British defeat. He used evidence of the innumerable complications of having three different and uncoordinated departments until 1779, all responsible for transporting soldiers, ordnance, and provisions, on a voyage that took from two to four months to complete. According to O'Shaughnessy, the “absence of [a] central command to provide coordination between various departments” was one of the factors that almost certainly secured America's victory. O'Shaughnessy attributes the defeat to this and a combination of other things such as “a war of counterinsurgency” alienating Americans, looming debt, foreign intervention by France, Spain, and the Dutch Republic, and having to also safeguard Britain's West Indian, Mediterranean, African, and Indian possessions at the same time. O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 12-14.

<sup>21</sup> Billias, ed., *George Washington's Opponents*, ix.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. xiii.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

colony settled at the water's edge, either bordering the Atlantic coast or a waterway leading to the ocean. Most colonists lived near the sea and depended on it for their survival. Revolutionary America cannot be fully understood without considering its maritime history. Another reason that privateering is not a bigger part of the historiography is because at its foundation, privateering is a money-making venture. Privateers profit from war, receiving a share of the proceeds from prizes they take from the enemy. This notion lies outside an ideological interpretation of the American Revolution. In the case of privateering, the reality overshadowed the rhetoric.

Early privateering historiography either briefly acknowledges it or dismisses it outright. Examples include scholarship by Alfred Thayer Mahan, Gardner Weld Allen, William Fowler, and James M. Volo. A few works by Edgar Stanton Maclay and Robert S. Patton celebrate privateering in narrative form with little focus on its overall war contribution. More recent scholarship looks at privateers' motivations, and the economic and trade impacts of privateering. The overwhelming direction of the historiography is that revolutionary privateering's impact on the result of the war was negligible.<sup>24</sup> This dissertation challenges this conclusion by arguing that privateers played a pivotal role in the war and helped determine its outcome.

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<sup>24</sup> For works which characterize privateering as a companion to the navy or a backdrop in the war, see Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, (London: Low, 1889), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo1.ark:/13960/t0bv82j8d>, and *The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of Independence*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1913); Gardner Weld Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1962), vol. 1; William Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail: The American Navy during the Revolution* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976); and James M. Volo, *Blue Water Patriots: The American Revolution Afloat* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006). Works which applaud privateering include

Two early works demonstrate the two different views on privateering. Noted architect of American foreign policy and of the increased U.S. naval and global presence in the nineteenth century, Alfred Thayer Mahan, referred to the practice as an unsophisticated technique to destroy the enemy's commerce that proved largely ineffective. Mahan, however, overlooked its effects on the total war effort.<sup>25</sup> An analysis of British and American records herein proves that the actions of American privateers consumed British naval activities and improved rebel chances for victory. These findings support the argument of maritime historian Edgar Stanton Maclay who considered privateering a critical war practice and argued "that our maritime forces were a powerful factor not only in attaining American independence, but in maintaining it."<sup>26</sup> However, Maclay saw privateering as being closely connected to the United States Navy largely on the basis that naval captains served on privateers. In his catalogue of privateers and their captures, Gardner Weld Allen recognized their usefulness, but again

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Maclay, *History of American Privateers* and Robert S. Patton, *Patriot Pirates: The Privateer War for Freedom and Fortune in the American Revolution* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008). Many of these books expand coverage of privateering through the War of 1812. For other books that do so, see David Head, *Privateers of the Americas: Spanish American Privateering from the United States in the Early Republic* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2015); Andrew D. Lambert, *The Challenge: Britain against America in the Naval War of 1812* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012); Faye M. Kert, *Privateering: Patriots and Profits in the War of 1812* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); John A. McManemin, *Privateers of the War of 1812* (Spring Lake, NJ: privately printed, 1992); John Philips Cranwell and William Bowers Crane, *Men of Marque: A History of Private Armed Vessels Out of Baltimore During the War of 1812* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1940). For colonial privateering before the American Revolution, see Carl E. Swanson, *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare 1739-1748* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, 400.

<sup>26</sup> Maclay, *History of American Privateers*, vii.



as a part of naval operations. These notions neglect the early and crucial start of colonial privateering prior to the Congress authorizing the practice in the Spring of 1776. Allen concluded that privateers played a crucial role in “naval defense, and so to the fortunate outcome of the war,” but they also prevented growth of a Continental navy, a frequent and recurring criticism.<sup>27</sup> The evidence in this study does not reveal a coordinated effort between the two American maritime operations but confirms that the practice hurt the development of an American navy. The result was that privateers became a much more significant military resource.

At the time that the larger revolutionary historiography went through a sociological shift in the 1970s that focused more on the revolutionary impulses of ordinary Americans, so did privateering historiography. Reuben Elmore Stivers and others turned from a prototypical celebratory narrative to examining the source of privateers’ motivations. In short, were privateers businessmen or partisans? Stivers determined that privateers were patriots and likened them to volunteer militia or naval reservists. These privateers might have been motivated to some extent by profit, but the damage they did to British commerce and supply chains effectively ensured the war’s objective.<sup>28</sup> Stivers held that privateering operated in cooperation with the navy, but contended that the practice is “one of the principal means used by the Americans to achieve independence.”<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, William Fowler stressed privateering’s negative impact on the development of a national navy, criticizing the number of men

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<sup>27</sup> Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution*, 48.

<sup>28</sup> Stivers, *Privateers and Volunteers*, 17, 19, 24-25, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

privateers took from creating a naval force. Fowler disagreed with Stivers and argued that “a short and lucrative voyage aboard a privateer outweighed any patriotic notion of serving aboard one of Congress's warships.”<sup>30</sup>

Two mid-twentieth century treatments explored privateering regionally, and along the Connecticut coast, but did not emphasize privateering's specific war contributions. Richard Buel, Jr., concentrated on the profitability of the practice, and the impacts of privateering on trade and the economy, not on its complete value as a war strategy. Louis Middlebrook provided more of a privateer directory, akin to Maclay. Buel followed up with a more tangentially, broader study which drew connections between the relationship of privateering to naval power, but still fixated on economic

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<sup>30</sup> Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail*, 282. Maclay and Stivers briefly tackle an undercurrent in the privateering debate: distinctions from, or similarities to, piracy. This is a complicated correlation or comparison to make. To attribute actions of piracy to basic greed or privateering as pure patriotism, or to characterize an individual as one or the other, are gross simplifications. As will be shown in Chapter One, these are blurred lines, easily and frequently crossed. For newer works that favor past approaches see James M. Volo, *Blue Water Patriots: The American Revolution Afloat* and Robert S. Patton, *Patriot Pirates*. Volo gives more credit to naval forces, portraying privateering as a supplement to a navy, giving it little attention to its impact on the war. Patton praised privateering and featured aspects of colonial and George Washington's contribution to privateering. Washington understood the need for privateering and ventured into it early on during the Boston siege but had differing views on the practice. Like Maclay, Patton emphasized privateering accounts and described certain clashes, but did not analyze its overall effect on the war in detail. Like Stivers, Patton supported a combination of motivations. Volo, *Blue Water Patriots*; Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 26, 124. For works on George Washington's ventures into privateering see William Bell Clark, *George Washington's Navy: Being an Account of his Excellency's Fleet in New England Waters* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960); Chester G. Hearn, *George Washington's Schooners: The First American Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995); James L. Nelson, *George Washington's Secret Navy: How the American Revolution Went to Sea* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008).

considerations.<sup>31</sup> Even though privateers attacked British merchant ships and interrupted supply lines, Buel concluded that when balancing Americans' captures and British recaptures, privateers' accomplishments came out as a wash: "A prize might yield as much trouble as profit."<sup>32</sup> He also noted that privateers frequently recovered indulgences such as wine, rum, and West Indian produce, but not indispensable necessities such as salt. Buel acknowledged that privateering offered more money and less strict and rigorous employment which hamstrung the build-up of a navy. He credited privateers as being effective as a small navy, but also attributed that to the fact that they did not offensively engage with the British navy.<sup>33</sup> While a fair point, that was not their purpose, or primary objective. It was to hijack Britain's efforts to supply its armed forces and to equip rebel troops by attacking British merchant and supply ships—it did that well. Nevertheless, Buel mistakenly asserted that privateers had little impact on giving an advantage in naval power over Britain.

More recent privateering scholarship still fails to directly address how the practice aided the American revolutionary victory, confirming the relevance of this study. Michael J. Crawford's 2011 article, "The Privateering Debate in Revolutionary America," covers two debates—the historiographical and the revolutionary. The range of "the debate among historians as to whether privateering helped or hurt the cause of

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Buel, Jr., *Dear Liberty: Connecticut's Mobilization in the Revolutionary War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1980); Middlebrook, *History of Maritime Connecticut*.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Buel, Jr., *In Irons: Britain's Naval Supremacy and the American Revolutionary Economy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 104.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-96, 103-04. For a similar analysis on Massachusetts privateers, see Gardner Weld Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927).

American independence” went from counting more than either Saratoga and Yorktown to contributing very little.<sup>34</sup> Not outrightly deciding this debate, Crawford argued that with Piers Mackesy’s evidence of the British Treasury department hiring its own cargo ships and David Syrett’s evidence of the increase of shipping expenses, “it is hard to sustain the position that American privateers had a negligible effect on the British conduct of the war.”<sup>35</sup> The actual debate on privateering in Revolutionary politics as presented by Crawford range from those in favor of privateering to those against, with privateers being described as anywhere from self-sacrificing to “villainous.”<sup>36</sup> Crawford ultimately never made a definitive statement on privateering’s efficacy in war. This dissertation addresses a long-standing historical debate on the benefits and hazards of privateering, arguing that the evidence overwhelmingly confirms that privateering had a profound impact on the American victory over Britain.

John B. Hattendorf’s 2011 anthology of essays on the origination and effectiveness of a navy throughout American history does not go far enough in recognizing privateering’s significance. He noted the complications of creating a navy during the American Revolution but agreed that privateering was a necessary choice. Hattendorf blamed not having “the resources to create either a strong naval organization or an efficient naval administration,” on slow construction and repair efforts, and the scarcity of sailors and supplies, but still asserted that there was an alliance between

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<sup>34</sup> Michael J. Crawford, “The Privateering Debate in Revolutionary America,” *The Northern Mariner/le marin du nord*, XXI, no. 3, July 2011, 219-34, 221.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

privateering and the navy.<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, Hattendorf contended that privateering activities “joined in a larger enterprise in which more than 1,697 U.S. privateers attacked enemy trade in a way that had a much broader effect than any single action,” as well as raised Britain’s expenses such as insurance.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, privateers diverted resources away from a Continental navy, as they vied for men, munitions, and provisions. Hattendorf relegated privateering to having a “relatively small” impact.<sup>39</sup> Crawford and Hattendorf miscalculate privateering’s magnitude. Up against the most powerful navy in the world, and with a miniscule navy in comparison, the Americans faced incalculable odds. Privateering became the U.S.’ most quickly implemented and most efficient maritime operation, both in accomplishment and cost.

Recently, PhD candidates and graduate students have looked at privateering through a variety of economic, motivational, and geo-political lenses. In his dissertation, Edward J. Martin analyzed privateering and trade networks between Canada and the New England states, delving into its commercial connections and recognizing its use as a “capitalistic mode of warfare.”<sup>40</sup> Focused on New World developments, Trevor John Whitaker argued that privateering influenced Britain’s imperialist endeavors, as well as

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<sup>37</sup> John B. Hattendorf *Talking about Naval History: A Collection of Essays*, John B. Hattendorf, (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>40</sup> Edward J. Martin, “The Prize Games in the Borderlands: Privateering in New England and the Maritime Provinces, 1775-1815,” PhD. diss, (The University of Maine, 2014), 6. Focused primarily on northern borderlands, Martin provides historiographical insight into that geographic area, along with others addressed herein.

contributed to its “economic enrichment.”<sup>41</sup> Two other projects link privateering more closely with the Revolutionary War itself. Culling through prize cases, Michael Scott Casey used mathematical and statistical models in determining whether privateering or the Continental navy did more for the war effort. Based on his numbers, privateers were more effective. According to Casey’s research, privateering brought in 1,377 vessels for the Americans, and took 52,000 potential navy men out of service. These were ships and sailors the Congress did not have to build and pay for. They not only secured approximately 600 British vessels worth around \$27 million, they captured or sank more Royal Navy warships than the Continental Navy. Casey concluded that privateers’ actions planted seeds of doubt within the British public and dampened popular opinion in favor of war.<sup>42</sup> Scott D. Wagner’s senior thesis concentrated on privateers’ motivations and ideological considerations. Wagner contended that privateers operated for more than profits; they were also furthered by ideas of republicanism and identity.<sup>43</sup>

As this historiographical analysis suggests, most historians have underestimated or ignored privateering’s contributions to the United States’ victory over Great Britain in the American Revolution. Using British and American sources to demonstrate the impact of the American privateering enterprise on British war efforts

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<sup>41</sup> Trevor John Whitaker, “The Economic and Military Impact of Privateers and Pirates on Britain’s Rise as a World Power,” Master’s thesis, (Arizona State University, May 2020), Abstract.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Scott Casey, “Rebel Privateers: The Winners of American Independence,” Master’s thesis, (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1990), Abstract, 90-91, 94.

<sup>43</sup> Scott D. Wagner, “For Country, Liberty, and Money: Privateering and the Ideologies of the American Revolution,” Senior thesis, (The College of Wooster, Spring 2017).

along the Connecticut coastline, this dissertation offers a correction. It finds that privateering played a much bigger part than previously considered and surpassed the role of a nascent Continental navy. The extent of American privateering generated great concern for British leaders and the practice prompted the British to brutally attack privateering communities.

A second historiographical intervention this dissertation makes is through the geographic concentration on the Atlantic seaboard. Since the turn of twenty-first century, scholars have reoriented the revolutionary landscape and turned their attention away from the East Coast. This geographic trend leans two ways. The first is “Atlantic” looking east and beyond the North American mainland.<sup>44</sup> This perspective ascribes a

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<sup>44</sup> Atlantic world historians have expanded the historiography for some time, appreciating the American Revolution as a transformative event with long-lasting global impacts. Ideological and traditional, it continues a consensus convention, but with broader themes such as viewing the American Revolution as part of a larger age of revolutions, encompassing the French, Haitian, Spanish, and Latin-American revolutions, or examining it as arising out of global contexts and having major impacts as a key event in the growth of a modern world. Wim Klooster brings comparative reading to the American, French, Haitian, and Spanish-American Revolutions. With a sociological slant, Klooster concentrates more on issues of race and gender, and the social costs of political maneuverings. He exposes recurring themes in the four uprisings such as democracy as a secondary purpose, social stratification and a divided population, and the social and economic price of war and international discord. Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009). Nick Bunker brings a British perspective on the American Revolution, looking at British leaders’ failures to recognize a growing colonial autonomy and discontent, ill-advised legislation that punished colonials for not footing their share of the war bill, and Britain’s economic distress and imperial over-extension which ultimately distracted from the problems in America. Bunker contends that Britain's biggest downfalls were in large part due to its lack of authority over America’s colonization, relying too much on the private sector to finance and grow settlements, and to the East India Co., a company with too much governmental power and influence, the collapse of which would have been ruinous to many in Parliament. Therefore, tea became a subsequent catalyst to rebellion. Nick Bunker, *An*

global relevance to the revolution, particularly the British effect on the revolution. Within the Atlantic context and specifically what Patrick Griffin calls a “Britishization” model, scholars look at the time before revolution and reassess the setting, or influence, as more British than American.<sup>45</sup>

Maya Jasanoff’s work epitomizes the sweeping Atlantic history that can come from analyzing the American Revolution. Studying the fate of British loyalists after the war, *Liberty’s Exiles: Loyalists in the American Revolution* informs the process of revolution with an Atlantic assessment. Jasanoff demonstrated how war’s aftermath considerably altered loyalists’ lives in places far from the center of revolution. Through a series of micro-studies, she analyzed loyalists including Whites, Blacks, and Indians, and how they navigated threats of violence and backlash after the war, following their journeys to Canada, Africa, the West Indies, and the western edges of the Republic. Jasanoff illustrated how personal impacts of revolution on individuals extend beyond the conventional geographic and temporal boundaries of the American Revolution.<sup>46</sup>

In the course of evaluating privateering on the East Coast, this dissertation positions the inquiry on the Atlantic seaboard and is Atlantic in nature. The development and protection of Connecticut’s maritime industry, including early West

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*Empire on the Edge: How Britain Came to Fight America*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Patrick Griffin, Robert G. Ingram, Peter S. Onuf, and Brian Schoen, eds., *Between Sovereignty and Anarchy: The Politics of Violence in the American Revolutionary Era*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press 2015), 2, 6-8.

<sup>46</sup> Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: Loyalists in the American Revolution*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).



Indian trade and privateering, as well as relocating the focus back to the eastern seaboard, brings an Atlantic perspective. Whereas Jasanoff's focus is after the war and on places far from the battlefields, this study examines the lives and experiences of those during the revolution itself, and contributes to the process of, or navigating, revolution.

The second geographic development in the historiography is "Continental." This outlook concentrates on the North American interior. Continental analyses go inward, west, south, and north, "placing contests over the lands of North American interior front and center."<sup>47</sup> These treatments tend to associate the process of navigating the war with the making of an American or national identity. Several studies that take the inquiry far away from the eastern seaboard to the south and west, downplay ideological and patriotic fervor, and focus on surviving the chaotic situation. Academics now connect narratives outside of the combat center to illustrate points of indifference or neutrality, not political idealism. Further, from the Atlantic and Continental paradigms, a particular emphasis emerged—uncovering moments that define the founding of the American Republic.

The "Continental" approach is represented in scholarship by Kathleen Duval and Claudio Saunt. Duval enlarged the geographical span south to those who lived far from the ideological core of revolution, and worried of things other than political independence. Using a process framework through micro-studies in *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution*, Duval linked eight diverse individuals

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<sup>47</sup> Edward G. Gray and Jane Kamensky, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4

and experiences with the unfolding consequences of war in the Deep South and across the Gulf Coast. The narratives are multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-perspective, including a Scottish-Native American, a New Orleans merchant and his Irish-immigrant wife, a Chickasaw warrior, and a mulatto slave. All made self-serving decisions, as some negotiated with Spanish, French, or British sovereignty based on what suited the colonists' concerns at the time. As Duval's title suggests, most lost, not gained, independence after the war, whether it be a financial, legal, political, or physical independence. These losses determined how these groups emerged on the other side of revolution and how they imprinted on the developing American Republic.<sup>48</sup>

Claudio Saunt positioned his investigation west, but looked at one moment in time, 1776. Saunt not only takes the revolutionary center away, he removed revolution from the main story, cutting out military strategy or political rhetoric, and instead focused on "events that originated half a world away."<sup>49</sup> Out of a concern that historians spend too much time on the British colonies, "rarely straying more than a few hundred miles from the Atlantic coast," Saunt sought to "extend the bounds and discover the continent west of the Revolution."<sup>50</sup> Like Duval, Saunt used micro-histories, but differently—through location-specific events. From accounts of Alaska's Aleutian Islands, the Canadian interior and South Dakota's Black hills, Spanish-held San Francisco and San Diego, and Creek lands of Georgia and Florida, as well as Osage

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<sup>48</sup> Kathleen Duval *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution*, (New York: Random House, 2015), 226, 350.

<sup>49</sup> Claudio Saunt, *West of the Revolution: An Uncommon History of 1776*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), 16.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

country on the Mississippi River, Saunt attempted to discover how “eighteenth-century Americans confronted revolutionary challenges.”<sup>51</sup>

Early American historiography explores the ideological or behavioral explanations behind the Revolution. The historiography changed in the twenty-first century, when academics moved from the classic question of why the Revolution happened, to exploring the process, and how people traversed it. This was manifested in a variety of ways, making it challenging to label. As one observer put it, contemporary approaches do not correct deep-rooted dogma but are new ways for thinking of new narratives “beyond the bounds” of rhetoric.<sup>52</sup> Regardless of turning outward, or away from decades-old ideological debates to the process, historians continue to reconsider the Revolution in original and inventive ways. Scholars analyze the process of the American Revolution through micro-studies of women, African Americans, Native Americans, immigrants, or narratives of political and military men, middling men and women, “British” and “American” identities, and even “reluctant patriots and often-ambivalent loyalists, with many neutrals” in between.<sup>53</sup> As a result, recent scholarship is varied and inclusive, incorporating different socio-economic, racial, and political groups. Using micro-studies of little-studied groups and places narrowed analyses instead of performing broad, sweeping examinations. They also produced provincial concentrations to reveal how communities made sense of the dramatic events occurring

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>52</sup> Alfred F. Young and Gregory H. Nobles, *Whose American Revolution Was It?* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 191.

<sup>53</sup> Gray and Kamensky, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution*, 2.

around them. Like Duval and Saunt's work on process and negotiating revolution, this dissertation shows how individuals and communities experienced and navigated the revolution, personally enduring war, and its violence.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast to their examinations, this study takes the history back to the Northeastern seaboard and one of the original thirteen colonies. As a case-study of the Connecticut shoreline, it collects narratives of the raids including military men and women and elderly civilians, and displays how those directly involved, and those entangled, navigated their way through war, not from thousands of miles away, but when their hometowns and habitats became battlefields. Where clear revolutionary idealism is missing in the first-hand accounts of the raids, what is there is pure survivalism. Events such as the violent raids on Connecticut's coast underscore that there remain important stories to tell, experiences to reveal, and things to learn from in the place of revolution.

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<sup>54</sup> Three historiographical reviews influenced these paragraphs: Young and Nobles, *Whose American Revolution Was It?*; Gray and Kamensky, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution*; and Griffin, Ingram, Onuf, and Schoen, eds., *Between Sovereignty and Anarchy*. From the ground-breaking work of the economically based "Progressives" in the early 1900s, to the "Consensus" ideological strand of the 1950s, scholars grappled with the motivations of revolutionary actors. Employing "bottom-up" histories inspired by the social upheaval of the 1960s-70s, New Left historians focused the revolution around women and the lower classes. Historiography of the 1980s-90s moved to how African Americans and Native Americans shaped the revolution, sparking a trend that continues today. Gordon S. Wood gave an impassioned defense of Bernard Bailyn's *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, what Wood calls "the most important book ever written about the American Revolution," and a critique on the current deliberations on ideas over interest in "Reassessing Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* on the Occasion of its Jubilee" *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. XCI, no. 1 (March 2018), 78-109. For supportive commentary on the new historiographical directions, see Alan Taylor's "Introduction: Expand or Die: The Revolution's New Empire," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 74, no. 4 (October 2017), 619-32.

A third historiographical discussion that this dissertation joins is on violence in the American Revolution. War is violent and the Revolutionary War was no different despite long-standing societal and pedagogical efforts to glorify it. To remedy inaccurate impressions about the American Revolution, historians now expose and explicitly describe the violence. War does not only have violent individual impacts but produces local and regional consequences as well. This dissertation adds to that effort.

Relevant works that feature the violence of the war look at how Great Britain influenced the type of violence in the American colonies. They embrace an Atlantic and Continental viewpoint. Wayne E. Lee's *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1865* argued that "violence and restraint" used in colonial Indian wars, the American Revolution, and the American Civil War, descend from the Irish/English clashes of the sixteenth century and the English Civil War of the seventeenth century.<sup>55</sup> Lee concluded that the nature and amount of hostility in those British conflicts, and whether enemies were viewed as barbarians or brothers, grew into a distinct "military culture."<sup>56</sup> For example, the thought of Irish beheading British (even as the monarchy routinely conducted executions) produced a paranoia and/or rage and instigated British soldiers to commit "hot blood" plunders, rapes, and fires.<sup>57</sup> This was contrary to the English Civil War, a war between brothers, which produced a temperate conflict with "productive control of the countryside," not devastation.<sup>58</sup> Lee

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<sup>55</sup> Wayne E. Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1865*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

saw these patterns translated to Revolutionary America and to the racial conflict and extreme violence in the interiors between Native Americans and settlers, as well as closer to the fight where British and American forces pillaged the countryside.

In a volume of essays on violence, Patrick Griffin addressed behavior against Native Americans on the frontier away from warfare. Like Lee, Griffin attributed the extreme level of violence to British experiences in Ireland and Scotland.<sup>59</sup> Griffin argued further that out of revolutionary violence came, not liberty from tyranny, but identity formation of a uniquely “American” identity.<sup>60</sup>

Neither distinctly Atlantic nor Continental, Holger Hock’s *Scars of Independence: America’s Violent Birth* unapologetically and explicitly depicts heinous acts of violence during the American Revolution. Hock is confident that his is “the first book on the American Revolution and the Revolutionary War to adopt violence as its central analytical and narrative focus.”<sup>61</sup> He certainly capitalized on the theme. Hock identified violence perpetrated by British and Patriot alike and committed in different venues and geographic areas. Whether it be violence toward, or perpetrated by, loyalists, or by American troops against indigenous peoples, Hock contended that violence makes statements about the “persecution and suffering, barbarity versus civilization, retaliation and reconciliation, that accompanied physical and psychological

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<sup>59</sup> Patrick Griffin, “Destroying and Reforming Canaan, Making America British,” in *Between Sovereignty and Anarchy*, eds., Griffin, Ingram, Onuf, and Schoen, 40-59.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>61</sup> Holger Hock, *Scars of Independence: America’s Violent Birth*, (New York: Crown, 2017), xi.

violence.”<sup>62</sup> He insisted that to “understand the Revolution and the war—the very birth of the nation,” violence must be written into the history, no matter how gory.<sup>63</sup>

A case-study on the ordeals of war along Connecticut's coast, this dissertation insists that wartime episodes remain critical to analyzing revolution, including how attacks disrupted civilian lives in their homes. Patterns arise between Hook's showcase of violent episodes and the Connecticut raids. Building on violence literature, this dissertation shows the violence that ensued at privateering ports and communities. Personal, first-hand accounts of rape, murder of civilians, massacre of surrendered troops, and plunder of homes during the Connecticut raids follow the growth of, and aggravation toward, privateering and Connecticut's involvement in it. Accounts of rebel fighters and of women and elderly victims highlight injustices and how the British conducted themselves toward American military and non-military alike, and certainly support Wayne E. Lee's revelation of a “hot blood” type of “military culture.” Through depositions, affidavits, and accounts, this dissertation examines the violence that the residents of privateering ports experienced during the American Revolution.

“Privateering in the American Revolution” builds on the traditional historiography of the American Revolution while offering new paths of investigation. It targets Connecticut coastal communities through multi-narrative and multi-perspectival accounts from opposite sides and from different stations, whether it be British or American, military or civilian, or female or elder. Featuring those navigating the revolution through violence and destruction, it repositions the spotlight back to the east

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 12.

where revolution unfolds. By exposing the violence and linking it to privateering, it reminds that military history remains relevant.

To effectively reconsider and establish privateering's significance and critical role in the American Revolution, the chapters that follow are situated chronologically. Chapter One provides foundation and context for the conclusion that privateering in the American Revolution helped achieve independence as the British used the practice for colonization efforts. The chapter briefly maps, and reveal historical patterns about, privateering throughout the world. It then turns to how the practice advanced British colonialism and colonial Connecticut. This inquiry explains privateering's use in the American Revolution. In a broader sense, Chapter One argues that global and British privateering played a substantial part in creating nation-states and an open, global economic system. The chapter also strengthens the use of Connecticut as a case-study and connects the Connecticut raids to privateering. Chapter Two tells the story of American, and of Connecticut, privateers, influencing war strategy for both sides. British and American records reveal the depth and breadth of American privateering. Evidence from British political and military leaders, such as Sir Henry Clinton, William Tryon, and Lord George Germain, expose the panic over privateering, and the problems it posed, establishing the effectiveness of the practice. The evidence also confirms the Connecticut coast as a specific concern, answering why it became a particular target.

Chapters Three and Four bring the summer 1779 and September 1781 raids into sharp focus and explicitly lays bare the violence. The violence exacted on Connecticut's coasts and civilians is established through opposing accounts.



Understood through reports of the physical attacks during the raids, as well as the destruction to Connecticut's landscape, the picture becomes clear when combining all these chronicles—the British and American leadership, and the Connecticut communities and victims. Altogether, this dissertation confirms the overwhelming success and usefulness of American privateering, Britain's anxiety about it, and the subsequent violent attacks on privateering hamlets.

This study shines the spotlight back on the center of rebellion—New England and the Atlantic eastern seaboard and exposes the reality that privateering caused so much concern that it influenced British military strategy and intensified civilians' experience of war. American privateers' efforts dominated British deliberations and Britain laid siege to Connecticut's privateering ports, terrorizing combatants and noncombatants alike. Connecticut civilians faced the war on their home front as the British turned their communities into battlefields. They were attacked literally at their doorsteps and in their homes.

# CHAPTER 1

## **PIRATES AND PRIVATEERS: THEIR ROLE IN BRITISH COLONIALISM AND THE RISE OF THE MODERN STATE**

Pirates have occupied imaginations for hundreds of years. From the always-inebriated Captain Jack Sparrow of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the bumbling but devious Captain Hook of *Peter Pan*, and a liquor-loving Captain Morgan on a bottle of rum, real pirates' legacies have been manipulated to capitalize on their mystique and aura. But bona fide pirates were more than the subjects of swashbuckling fantasies and fairy tales. For thousands of years, they were real, sometimes frightening characters who prowled the seas for survival and fortune.

In times of war, pirates turned into privateers when circumstances found it more financially and legally beneficial to court favor with sovereigns. Britons went to sea as privateers for their country, often to assist in Britain's colonization mission, and they sometimes became pirates at the end of war when unemployed. There was a fine line that separated pirates and privateers that mariners frequently crossed for political and personal reasons. However unlikely, pirates and privateers aided in colonizing the Americas, and helped create the modern world. This chapter argues that these seamen underpinned British colonialism in the New World for centuries, and that when the American Revolution came, they served the American cause.

### **Pirates and Privateers in the World and the West Indies**

The historical track of piracy and privateering parallels colonialism and the rise of the modern state. Pirates coincided with a time before states' political institutions and geographical boundaries were set and accepted by its own citizens and other states, and privateers operated as a defense force for infant states. Examples exist in Ancient Greece and Rome. A Greek "city-state" arose from a loose conglomeration of small territories, which created cohesive political

authority and shared interests that worked together to reduce piracy in the waters of the Adriatic Sea.<sup>1</sup> When this united Greek force failed to stop pirates in the area, the Romans stepped in using a privatized system for protection, or privateering, before developing a navy. When Illyrian kings turned to pirates to attack Roman ships and provide plunder to the monarchy, Rome fought back with an early form of privateering by depending on “client-states” who assumed the costs themselves and furnished their own ships and crews.<sup>2</sup> Only after establishing a permanent navy and political stability did Rome fight piracy and end its reliance on privateering. These lessons translated into the eighteenth century as European kingdoms recognized that only when political power, borders, and authority materialized did states effectively confront piracy. In fact, the modern state developed both in part because of, and in spite of, pirates and privateers.<sup>3</sup>

In the Middle Ages, the British state confronted Viking pirates who had established themselves on England’s southern shores. To contend with pirate attacks on British merchant ships, the British government instituted several measures. Henry V granted licenses to sail, required bonds to assure a Captain’s good behavior, and issued “safe-conduct” passes.<sup>4</sup> During Henry VII’s reign in 1495, laws passed against piratical activities including allowing the taking of enemy ships and their cargo in time of war. Henry VIII established the letter of reprisal or

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred S. Bradford *Flying the Black Flag: A Brief History of Piracy* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2007), 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of over 2,000 years of piracy, see Bradford *Flying the Black Flag*, 4-56; see also Cruz Apestegui, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Buccaneers, Privateers, Freebooters and Filibusters* (London: Conway Maritime, 2002); David Cordingly, *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life Among the Pirates* (New York: Random House, 1995). Greece and Rome are early examples of consolidating power and relying on private parties to combat piracy. Bradford and Cordingly’s works confirm economic and political patterns of piracy which continue throughout history from the classical to the early modern period.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Gosse, *The History of Piracy* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2007), 101.

marque—written documents with official authorization for English merchants to recover their losses from those who had stolen from them. These measures ultimately led to the practice of privateering, a vehicle to colonize lands and fight wars. This practice included Britain’s entrance into the Iberian Peninsula and the Americas, which opened opportunity for privateers and pirates to profit from the founding of the New World. Several factors during the time of Elizabeth’s rule facilitated the acceleration and use of privateering: England’s war debt, chaotic global, economic conditions because of restrictive trade policies, high maritime unemployment when wars ended, and a mission to exploit and protect new colonies.<sup>5</sup>

A historical precedent for Britain’s sanction of pirates and privateers for state purposes was the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Barbary pirates. The affiliation between the Ottomans and the Barbary’s produced formidable fleets which controlled the Mediterranean and sea lanes and trade, and largely determined the pattern of life and commerce in the Mediterranean until the nineteenth century. When the center of trade shifted to the New World, the Barbary threat declined—though it did not disappear. In the early nineteenth century, the United States balked at paying tribute to these pirates to participate in trade and sent its budding navy to intervene. This show of force ended the Barbary’s hold over the Mediterranean, which helped further worldwide free trade.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bradford, *Flying the Black Flag*, 57-64; Janice E Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns: State-Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 23; Mark Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570–1740* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 35-36, 39, 106; Gosse, *The History of Piracy*, 88, 93-94, 101-02, 104, 108, 112-13, 130.

<sup>6</sup> Bradford, *Flying the Black Flag*, 121-36; Kris Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Global Piracy on the High Seas, 1500-1750* (New York: Routledge, 1998, 2016), 12; Thomson, *Mercenaries*, 44-45, 107, 111, 140; C.R. Pennell, “The Geography of Piracy, Northern Morocco in the Mid-Nineteenth Century” in *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*, ed., C.R. Pennell (New York University Press, 2001), 55-68; Gosse, *History of Piracy*, 10-11, 58-59; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 60; Jacques Heers, *The Barbary Corsairs: Warfare in the Mediterranean, 1480-1580*

Wars between Britain, France, and Spain created instability at a time when states were beset with having modest military forces, fledgling economies, and undeveloped political structures. It is because of these realities that Britain relied on non-state violence and commercial schemes for protection and profit. Britain used piracy and privateering to augment military forces, conquer lands, and overrun markets; and consequently, these practices helped stabilize volatile, political and economic conditions and at the same time, modern states arose.<sup>7</sup>

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(London: Stackpole, 2003); Robert J. Antony, *Pirates in the Age of Sail* (New York: W. W. Norton, (2007); Alan G. Jamieson, *Lords of the Sea: A History of the Barbary Corsairs* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012). The most successful Barbary pirates, the Barbarossa brothers, coincided with Spain discovering the New World and Sultan Mehmed II capturing Constantinople. The brothers combined legitimate trade, military authority, and piracy, and helped the Ottoman Empire expand their territory and dominance. By the end of the century, the Barbary's ascended to the top of political power—operating out of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, as state-run enterprises. For details on the lives and activities of the Barbarossas, see Bradford, *Flying the Black Flag*; Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*; Adrian Tinniswood, *Pirates of Barbary: Corsairs, Conquests, and Captivity in the Seventeenth-Century Mediterranean* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010); Ernle Bradford, *The Sultan's Admiral Barbarossa: Barbarossa: Pirate and Empire Builder* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2008); Heers, *The Barbary Corsairs*; Bradford, *Flying the Black Flag*; Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*; Tinniswood, *Pirates of Barbary*; Bradford, *The Sultan's Admiral*, 57; Heers, *The Barbary Corsairs*; Jamieson, *Lords of the Sea* (2012); Antony, *Age of Sail*. For a discussion of trade patterns between the medieval period and the middle of the eighteenth century, see James D. Tracy, *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long Distance Trade in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Gosse, *History of Piracy*, 54-55, 62-63; Thomson, *Mercenaries*, 48-49.

<sup>7</sup> Regarding theory on state formation, I rely heavily on Janice Thomson's *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns*. Thomson maintained that prior to the centralization of a state penal system, states relied on forms of extra-territorial violence. Violence committed by private entities and individuals was necessary to surmount limitations on political stability, military dominance, and economic growth. States authorized public forms of violence—privateering, mercantilism, and mercernarism—enterprises Thomson described as “democratized, marketized, and internationalized,” respectively. Thomson's *Mercenaries*, 4. Thomson argued that when states recognized the need for accountability over violence, then globally recognized territories and political structures emerge. Jan Glete contended that state formation in early modern Europe arose largely due to new complex and permanent organizations connected with sea warfare—armies and navies. *Warfare at Sea, 1500-1650: Maritime Conflicts and the Transformation of Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2000); see also Marcus Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014). However, development of armies and navies needed state funding, a challenging feat if not for non-state violence.

Britain leapt at the opportunities that private, state-sanctioned violence offered. Through privateers and mercantiles—public commercial ventures that furthered states’ settlements and defenses while turning a profit—Britain saved money and avoided potential liability for criminal actions of their citizens. Mercantilism, the economic system of sixteenth-century Europe, was one part of private military systems that helped states grow into global super-powers. Mercantile companies, predecessors to modern day corporations, combined state and commercial interests to pursue power over other peoples and prosperity by dominating international trade. With the state’s permission, mercantiles relied on privateers as a military force to advance trade and colonization. Both mercantiles and privateers played a role in the escalation and entrenchment of extra-state violence, which infected international affairs and warfare for centuries. Only when modern nations fostered more open trade and when states accepted each other’s sovereignty did non-state forces become moot. Until then, privateering was unavoidable. The practice of privateering helped finance and secure colonization and helped nations become a global community. Outsourcing defense, however, also produced and perpetuated the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries problem of piracy in the New World. Seamen often served as both privateers and pirates making it difficult to distinguish between the two.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> A third branch of privatized defense, mercenarism, also thrived at this time. Under a feudal system, nobility served as a military, but there were not enough nobles to form an ample force. Thus, troop size correlated to a state’s ability to buy soldiers from the international market. Incorporating foreign mercenaries into existing armies or buying whole foreign units from other states became commonplace. By the eighteenth century, European state armies consisted of multi-national members. Germany was the leading supplier of mercenaries, manning the armies of 1660’s Venice, prerevolutionary France, and the Hessian troops of the British in the American Revolution. Thomson, *Mercenaries*, 21, 27-28, 41; David J. Starkey, “The Origins and Regulations of Eighteenth-Century British Privateering,” in *Bandits at Sea*, Pennell, ed., chapter 4, 70. Largely ending in the eighteenth century, mercenarism became another casualty of modern states. Mutual recognition of other states’ sovereign authority, permanent borders, and responsibility over citizens’ actions did not allow for foreign citizens to fight in other nations’ wars. International partners started understanding the benefits of a state-run military, and a

British pirates, privateers, and mercantiles profited from war and colonization in the New World, while alternating feuds between England, Spain, and France worked against stabilizing economic and trade conditions within, and between, the countries. Privateers served in these wars, and after peace, struggled to find employment. This volatility between war and peace produced masses of desperate seamen who had little if no option but to become pirates. When warfare resumed, pirates often received pardons, and resumed their work as privateers. Men drifted between respectable and questionable employment. One notable example is Captain Henry Morgan who commanded an unsanctioned raid on Panama in 1671. This cycle of war and privateering, and peace and piracy, continued until nations recognized each other's governments, territorial boundaries, and took responsibility for the actions of its citizens. When these things came together, then states appreciated peaceful, world-wide open trade. Until then, the British monarchy and mercantiles relied on pirates and privateers for defense and supplies.<sup>9</sup>

Columbus's New World discoveries repositioned piracy from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean and West Indies, and South and Central America. Spain, already a dominant world power, only got richer from silver and gold mines discovered in the New World. Regular convoys of "treasure fleets" brought fortune from the West Indies back to Spain, catching the

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"[c]ommon interest in building state power produced an international norm against mercenarism." J.L. Anderson, "Piracy and World History: An Economic Perspective on Maritime Predation." *Journal of World History*, 6:2 (Fall 1995), 187; Thomson, *Mercenaries*, 32, 35, 37, 59; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 34, 46, 68, 179-180, 183, 224-225, 316, 328; William M. Fowler, Jr., *Rebels Under Sail: The American Navy During the Revolution*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 13; Carl E. Swanson, *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 6; James M. Volo, *Blue Water Patriots: The American Revolution Afloat*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 2, 88; Nathan Miller, *Sea of Glory: The Continental Navy Fights for Independence, 1775-1783*, (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1974), 7, 262.

<sup>9</sup> Thomson, *Mercenaries*, 23; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 39, 106.

eyes of sea-raiders.<sup>10</sup> Eager to share in the wealth, the English, Dutch, and French sent privateers to attack Spanish vessels. In a misguided effort to keep its power in the New World, Spain closed its markets to foreigners and only allowed trade between its American colonies and the homeland. When these colonies were not provided with necessary provisions from the mother country, the colonists turned elsewhere. As a result, Spain's colonization and closed-market system led to trade wars, black markets, and the proliferation of pirates and privateers in the West Indies.<sup>11</sup>

For decades, English pirates and privateers harassed and attacked Spanish ships in the Americas in quest of bullion and other treasures. The English conducted short-distance piracy which operated from, and within, English coastal waters, and oceanic, long-distance piracy. Ships that sailed longer distances to plunder Spanish and Portuguese coasts facilitated the growth of British colonies. The British upper class, including English merchant families such as John Hawkins', headed these voyages. These English mariners became the most active pirates and privateers assembled in the Elizabethan era.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jon Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean: How Piracy Forged an Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>11</sup> Excluding foreigners from trade with the West Indies, the Spanish government hoped to prop up the home economy by supplying missing products and purchasing Spanish goods and products, not competing with it. However, restricting trade encourages black markets and cooperation with pirates. Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean*, 2-3, 7, 12-13, 17-19; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 36-7; Gosse, *History of Piracy*, 141-42; Arne Bialuschewski, "Pirates, Markets, and Imperial Authority: Economic Aspects of Maritime Depredations in the Atlantic World, 1716–1726," *Global Crime* 9 (2008), 52-65. There is another historical pattern of trade restrictions and piracy. Asian piracy is documented as early as the mid-sixteenth century as a survival response to trade bans and restrictive maritime policies of the Ming dynasty. This will appear again in the North American colonies. See Robert J. Antony, *Like Froth Floating on the Sea: The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Gosse, *History of Piracy*, 88, 93-94, 101-02, 104, 108, 112-13, 130; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 35-36; Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*; Kris Lane, *Blood and Silver, A History of Piracy in the*



A combination of religious, imperial, and financial motivations kept England's Protestant Queen Elizabeth interested in the sugar and gold mining operations in the West Indies. Soon, however, disease and deadly working conditions decimated the indigenous population. The British needed manpower and English aristocrats went to sea to procure labor. John Hawkins and Francis Drake entered the Caribbean as slave traders in the 1560s. Additionally, their sea-raiding against Spain in the West Indies (whether during war as privateer or peace as pirate) escalated between 1568-1603.<sup>13</sup>

A group of privateers and pirates emerged from Elizabethan England's efforts to expand territory and commerce in the New World and a war with Spain in 1585. Difficult to distinguish between piracy and privateering, the activities existed alongside each other. In the capacity of both pirates and privateers, Hawkins and Drake sailed to the Canary Islands, stole Portuguese slaves, and sold them to island colonies. By doing this, Hawkins and Drake straddled the line between pirate and privateer, but waivered little on attacking Iberian targets. After raids on Panama in 1572-73, looting Spanish possessions in the South Sea from 1577-80, and open war with Spain after 1585, word of Hawkins' and Drake's successes spread. Scores of privateers followed, and unprecedented levels of English privateering and piracy afflicted Spanish American waters throughout Elizabeth's reign. England began their New World colonization and Spain rushed to improve its New World possessions' defenses, building faster and better armed ships and stone forts. This outlay of defense costs produced a financially weakened Spanish government and piracy and privateering contributed to a stronger and successful England.<sup>14</sup>

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*Caribbean and Central America*, (Oxford: Signal Books, 1999), 27-28; Antony, *Age of Sail*, 8-11; Peter Earle, *The Pirate Wars* (London: Methuen, 2003), 22-24.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, Ch. 2; Lane, *Blood and Silver*, Ch. 2; Antony, *Age of Sail*, 8-11; Earle, *Pirate Wars*, 23-25. During initial stages of settlement in the West Indies, both

Because of the upsurge in English pirates and privateers in the Americas, England prospered and increased their possessions in the Americas. England took Jamaica from Spain in 1655. This spurred British merchants' prosperity with tobacco, then sugar, plantations. Britain did not intend to slow down. Following Charles I's execution in 1649, Oliver Cromwell's "Western Design" campaign sought Protestant supremacy by expanding naval and commercial dominance through "piety, plunder and plantation," led by private citizens and companies.<sup>15</sup> Plantations grew and required more slaves, which fueled a booming West Indian slave trade. At the same time, to protect its place in the West Indies, Spain regularly drove out English and French colonists who had settled in the islands. This prompted England and France to issue letters of marque to increase their numbers of privateers in the area. Artisans, sawyers, carpenters, bricklayers, shoemakers, now fled those countries seeking refuge, camaraderie, and fortune in the West Indies.<sup>16</sup>

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Spain and Great Britain in the Americas restricted local economies—a move that had permanent and catastrophic consequences on imperial control of those regions. Piracy bypassed the prohibitive, commercial policies and English merchants profited from trade with pirates. A black market presented potential profits in early colonial economic development before the explosion of the plantation economy and the escalation of free trade. This pattern appears again in North America. Bialuschewski, "Pirates, Markets, and Imperial Authority," 52-65. Anne Pérotin-Dumon maintains that it is incomplete to blame economics for piracy, but that politics and state-building must be considered as well. "The Pirate and the Emperor: Power and the Law on the Seas, 1450-1850," in *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350-1750*, ed., James D. Tracy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 204. Even though Spanish domination deteriorated partly because of its closed-market strategy, an influx of American bullion increased European purchasing power, making purchase of Asian goods possible. In total, the eighteenth century witnessed exceptional development of European trade with Asia and the Americas. James D. Tracy, *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long Distance Trade in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 99.

<sup>16</sup> Latimer, *Buccaneers*, 80, 83-84, 94-95.

These immigrants became resident West Indies' pirates, or buccaneers, in the early seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup> They were societal outcasts—military deserters, indentured servants, debtors, and runaway slaves—who acted in self-interest. Many West Indies buccaneers started as cowboys on Hispaniola and Tortuga who hunted and cured wild livestock. These buccaneers traded the meat and hides with French and British planters and Spanish colonists, or with smugglers for gunpowder and alcohol. Relatively peaceful hunters, they turned pirate when the Spanish drove them off the islands and into the sea, prompting them to attack Spanish ships. Later, they acted as privateers for Britain's island colonies and served alongside seamen like Sir Francis Drake and Captain Henry Morgan.<sup>18</sup>

One of Britain's greatest imperial acquisitions in 1655, Jamaica, became a buccaneer den for decades. Buccaneers served as suppliers and defenders of this British colony. A Spanish possession since Christopher Columbus's discovery, the Spanish largely neglected Jamaica because of the absence of gold and silver. Soon with British development, sugar became worth its weight in gold (or silver), and the Jamaican sugar plantation economy grew to the point that pirates, privateers, and smugglers were no longer needed to supplement Jamaica's economy. Attention to profits and losses motivated merchants and planters to complain about buccaneers to the home government. However, buccaneers remained strategically necessary for defense, for

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<sup>17</sup> The word "buccaneer" comes from several derivations. "Boucaniers" comes from the Brazilian word "boucan" meaning the instrument used to cure meats, and the French verb "boucaner" means the act of curing meats over a fire. Benerson Little, *The Buccaneer's Realm: Pirate Life on the Spanish Main, 1674-1688* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2007), 40; Latimer, *Buccaneers*, 72-73, 76.

<sup>18</sup> Gosse, *History of Piracy*, 142, 144; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 17-18, 110; Latimer, *Buccaneers*, 4, 6, 72-73, 76.

supplying slaves to work the sugar plantations, and for smuggling in other commodities and luxury goods to the Spanish, French, and English colonists.<sup>19</sup>

Walking a tightrope between pirate and privateer, buccaneers filled the supply gaps created by Spain's short-sighted, closed market strategy. They received political legitimacy as privateers from England, but to Spain, they were pirates. Buccaneers typically, but not always, held letters of marque or commissions from island governors and home governments. Extensive pillaging of Spain's merchant and treasure ships, and the resulting illegal trade, helped expand England's islands' plantation economy. When Britain pressured island governors to end piracy, island governors were slow to act. The governors held show trials, meaning that after conviction, they quickly issued pardons and new privateer commissions because with buccaneers the islands prospered. Britain depended on state-appointed governors to carry out orders given from thousands of miles away. But their noncompliance often resulted in their being recalled, arrested, or replaced.<sup>20</sup>

The British government wanted to colonize the West Indies, but also wanted peace with Spain. The Treaty of Madrid in 1670 between Spain and England, banned full and open trade with any Spanish colony, and restricted the English from issuing letters of marque and state-sanctioned privateering. Nonetheless, based on rumors of a Spanish attack, Captain Henry Morgan, with thirty-six ships and 1,800 men, took Panama without commission or authorization

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<sup>19</sup> Earle, *Pirate Wars*, 91-94; Douglas, R. Burgess, Jr., *The Politics of Piracy: Crime and Civil Disobedience in Colonial America* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Foreedge, 2014), 26-34; Gosse, *History of Piracy*, 142, 144; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 17-18, 110; Latimer, *Buccaneers*, 6, 72-73, 76. For extensive evidence of these cycles, see Latimer, *Buccaneers*, Chapters 12 and 13.

<sup>20</sup> Gosse, *History of Piracy*, 142, 144, 154-56, 159; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 17-18, 99-100, 102-03, 110, 130, 132; Latimer, *Buccaneers*, 4-6, 72-73, 76, 119, 128, 135, 142-43, 162-64, 205-09, 222, 226, 235, 260; Thomson, *Mercenaries*, 11, 144.

by the Jamaican governor or the English king. Morgan returned to Britain to face punishment, and instead of prosecuting him at Spain's request, Charles II knighted Morgan and made him interim Jamaican governor. At the same time, the local Jamaican government put buccaneers on trial at Port Royal to appease Spain. Buccaneers retaliated by leaving for Tortuga which hurt Jamaican commerce. Economic concerns forced Jamaican officials to continue to partner with buccaneers.<sup>21</sup>

Tired of wars and the financial toll that they take, European states began accepting each other's sovereignty and territorial boundaries. Once states assumed a duty to protect merchants' ships and to prosecute their citizens for attacking others' ships, and merchants agreed to regulation and taxation, privateers and pirates became obsolete. For its part, Britain intensified a naval campaign in the Caribbean, led by Woodes Rogers, to bring pirates under control. Rogers was successful to an extent, but some pirates left the West Indies for the coasts and islands of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Africa.<sup>22</sup>

The change in attitude toward pirates pushed West Indies' pirates north up the Atlantic coast. This era became the height of western piracy. Conditions were ripe for piracy to flourish on the east coast of North America in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These conditions included the shift in British policy toward piracy; another peace treaty between England and France throwing thousands of privateers out of work; fisherman struggling with low wages; and restrictive economic policies placed on the mainland colonies. Another reason for the

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<sup>21</sup> Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 101-14; Bradford, *Flying the Black Flag*, 105-09.

<sup>22</sup> Pérotin-Dumon, "The Pirate and the Emperor," in *Bandits at Sea*, ed. Pennell; Earle, *Pirate Wars*, 190; Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 7, 8, 257, 283, 285, *Villains of All Nations, Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 31-32; Starkey, "Pirates and Markets," in *Bandits at Sea*, ed. Pennell. 113-15; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 13.

relocation to the North American Atlantic was a “shift in hunting grounds from the Red Sea to the Atlantic shore” due to the British situating more convoys and naval ships in the Indian Ocean.<sup>23</sup> Pirates sought refuge along the Carolina and Virginia coasts. Without political protection, these rogues, once tolerated and loyal, became “freebooters” who no longer fought for country, but only for themselves.

### **Pirates and Privateers in Colonial North America and Connecticut**

Pirates and privateers diminished in South and Central America and the West Indies, and they relocated to North America. Wanting peace, James I had little appetite and money for war. His succession to the throne in 1603 changed the course of Elizabethan privateering and piracy and British colonization in the Caribbean. Determined to avoid future conflicts with Spain, James rejected Elizabethan-era privateering that had dominated the West Indies. By the start of the new century, England was financially drained by civil war in Ireland and religious wars between Protestants and Catholics and with Spain. The British government needed money and new territory. With no right to trade in the West Indies, Britain looked to the North American mainland, north of Spanish Florida, for land and settlement.<sup>24</sup>

Once the British Crown proclaimed sovereignty over land, it became the responsibility of private groups to colonize the area. In 1606, King James gave royal permission to two London merchant companies to settle present-day New England and Virginia. Fourteen years later, his patent incorporated the Plymouth Company for “the planting, ruling and governing of New

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<sup>23</sup> Burgess, *The Politics of Piracy*, 230. For theory on North American piracy, I rely heavily on Burgess’ *The Politics of Piracy*.

<sup>24</sup> J.H. Elliott, “The Iberian Atlantic and Virginia,” in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, ed., Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, published by the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2007), Part V., J547-548.

England in America.”<sup>25</sup> These colonial ventures resulted in the establishment of English settlements along the northeastern seaboard. The companies issued charters, parceled out land, and attracted settlers. A few colonies, including Connecticut, started without a charter. Lacking formal consent, Connecticut colonists worked with area tribes, purchasing land from them, living next to them, and eventually overtaking them.<sup>26</sup>

Privateers were some of Connecticut’s earliest settlers. In 1631, Robert Rich, the Second Earl of Warwick and one of Connecticut’s first privateers, issued the colony’s first patent as President of the Plymouth Company. The patent specifically named the area as a “part of New England in America” and extended from the colony’s borders from the Atlantic, west to the Pacific, and down into the South Sea. These extensive, even over-exaggerated, borders were a common feature written into several colonial-era patents, including Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. Connecticut settlers moved quickly to claim their place.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Trumbull, *A Complete History of Connecticut, Civil and Ecclesiastical, from the Emigration of its first Planters from England in MDCXXX, to MDCCXIII* (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1797), <https://archive.org/details/completehistryo97trum/> , Vol. I, 4.

<sup>26</sup> James Horn, “The Conquest of Eden: Possession and Dominion in Early Virginia” in *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World*, eds. Robert Appelbaum and John Wood Sweet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 30-31; Clarence Winthrop Bowen, *The Boundary Disputes of Connecticut* (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1882), [https://www.google.com/books/edition/The\\_Boundary\\_Disputes\\_of\\_Connecticut/XJUNAAAAQAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Boundary_Disputes_of_Connecticut/XJUNAAAAQAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1), 13-14; Trumbull, *A Complete History of Connecticut*, 3-5; John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 35.

<sup>27</sup> Following in his father’s example as an Elizabethan-era privateer, the Second Earl, at one time or another, was the head of the Virginia Company, the Bermuda Company, and (with Sir Francis Drake) the Guiana Company, even named Lord High Admiral of the Royal Navy during Britain's civil wars. At the same time, Rich carried out decades of privateering and piracy in the Caribbean and South America. Wick Griswold, *Connecticut Pirates & Privateers: Treasure and Treachery in the Constitution State*, (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2015), 39-41; Trumbull, *A Complete History of Connecticut*, 2-3, 12-14. Other early Connecticut privateers were Indian trader, Captain Stone, whose murder started the events toward the Pequot War, and Captain John Underhill, who participated in that war burning two Pequot villages in 1636. Future

Colonists saw Connecticut's extensive waterways, successive harbors, and inroads for commerce as promising for settlement, navigation, and trade. John Winthrop Jr., son of the Massachusetts Governor, began settling Saybrook on the Connecticut river in 1635. Colonists from Massachusetts settled Wethersfield that same year. Planters established Hartford by the next spring. By the end of 1636, four river plantations—Wethersfield, Windsor, Hartford, and Fort Saybrook—existed with 800 persons and 160-170 families in total. Enterprising men left for the coast, founding future privateering ports and British targets, New Haven, Fairfield, Norwalk, and New London, by the next decade. By 1650, Connecticut included Hartford, Windsor, Wethersfield, Saybrook, Fairfield, Norwalk, New London, Stratford, South Hampton, and Farmington. The New Haven colony consisted of New Haven, Milford, Guilford, Southhold, Stamford, and Branford. At the end of the seventeenth century, Connecticut's coastal cities belonged to an expanding North American Atlantic shoreline alongside Boston, Newport, Philadelphia, Charleston, and New York.<sup>28</sup>

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Connecticut communities, New London and Fairfield, became other battle sites in the Pequot War. Trumbull, *A Complete History of Connecticut*, 120, 157; Robert J. Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut: A History*, (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1979), 74-75, 77; Rev. Charles M. Selleck, *Norwalk*, (Norwalk, CT: published by the author, 1896), 26; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 43. For histories on the Pequot War, see Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996); Charles Orr, *History of the Pequot War: The Contemporary Accounts of Mason, Underhill, Vincent, and Gardener* (Cleveland: The Helman-Taylor Company, 1897).

<sup>28</sup> Jackson Turner Main, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 367; Edward R. Lambert, *History of the Colony of New Haven*, (New Haven: Hitchcock & Stafford, 1839), [https://www.cga.ct.gov/hco/books/History\\_of\\_the\\_Colony\\_of\\_New\\_Haven.pdf](https://www.cga.ct.gov/hco/books/History_of_the_Colony_of_New_Haven.pdf), 18. Where England battled with Spain in the Caribbean, the English competed with the Dutch in northeast America. The English maintained that Henry Cabot discovered Newfoundland and St. Johns in 1494 and 1497. While the Dutch claimed discovery of New York harbor in 1598, Henry Hudson, commissioned by England, saw Long Island and named the Hudson River in 1609. He sold the rights to the area to the Dutch the next year, who occupied New Amsterdam until it later became New York. An English King issued patents for New England throughout 1607-1620. Notwithstanding competing sovereignty declarations, both empires rushed to stake land. Bowen,



New Haven's harbor, four miles from Long Island Sound, lured yeoman and tenant farmers, and attracted clergy and successful businessmen, mostly from Massachusetts. Combining religious and commercial incentives, Reverend John Davenport, and businessman Theophilus Eaton led the formation of New Haven in 1638. The Reverend, motivated by weakening religious influence in Massachusetts, joined with Eaton, a former ambassador to Denmark and commercial agent of Charles I at Copenhagen, and the previous deputy governor of the East India Company, to found a great trading city. Other business-minded men joined the endeavor. The son of notable revolutionary figure Connecticut Governor Trumbull described "The New Haven adventurers [as] the most opulent company, which came into New England; and they designed to plant a capital colony."<sup>29</sup>

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*The Boundary Disputes of Connecticut*, 13, 15; Frances Manwaring Caulkins, *History of New London Connecticut: From the First Survey of the Coast in 1612 to 1860*, (New London: H.D. Utley, 1895), <https://archive.org/details/historyofnewlond00caul>, 24-26; Trumbull, *A Complete History of Connecticut*, 12-13, 15, 19, 21-22, 48-51, 58-59; Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 36. The New Haven colony subsumed into the Connecticut colony in 1664. Edward E. Atwater, *History of the Colony of New Haven to its Absorption into Connecticut* (New Haven: privately printed, 1881), [https://www.google.com/books/edition/History\\_of\\_the\\_Colony\\_of\\_New\\_Haven\\_to\\_It/omW7vnDOcEwC?hl=en&gbpv=1](https://www.google.com/books/edition/History_of_the_Colony_of_New_Haven_to_It/omW7vnDOcEwC?hl=en&gbpv=1), Ch. 21.

<sup>29</sup> Rollin G. Osterweis, *Three Centuries of New Haven*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 7; Trumbull, *A Complete History of Connecticut*, 12, 90, 94; Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History, The Settlements*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), Vol. II, 144-194; Lambert, *History of the Colony of New Haven*, 40-41; Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut*, 50. Davenport and Eaton purchased New Haven from the local tribes for "twelve coats of English cloth, twelve alchemy spoons, twelve hatchets, twelve hoes, two dozen of knives, twelve porringers (bowls), and four cafes of French knives and scissors." Osterweis, *Three Centuries of New Haven*, 10-11. A second purchase for thirteen coats expanded New Haven ten more miles to the north and south, thirteen miles in diameter, eight miles east of the Quinnipiack river, and five miles west of it towards the Hudson. The boundaries of New Haven became fully completed two years before the American Revolution through additional minor transactions. Lambert, *History of the Colony of New Haven*, 24; Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut*, 52; Osterweis, *Three Centuries of New Haven*, 62, 67.

New London became Connecticut's largest and most valuable port. In the southern waters of Long Island Sound, New London offered accessible harbors of the Connecticut seaboard with extensive navigable waters. The Thames River formed a deep, unobstructed, and open harbor lying open to Long Island Sound. The configuration allowed ships to enter at any time of the tide. In the American Revolution, New London harbor arose as an important colonial naval station and privateering base for the Continentals between Newport and New York.<sup>30</sup>

Connecticuters went to sea soon after settling the coastline, quickly establishing inter-colonial, intra-colonial, and international trade. Developing the Connecticut coast produced some of the most financially successful early American communities, linking them to the Atlantic world. To compete in a commercial Atlantic, ships must be built. New London became Connecticut's earliest shipbuilding center. Shipwrights John Coit, Joseph Coit, and Hugh Mould led shipbuilding efforts there by 1660. Henry Mould, a master builder whose ships were called "Mould's vessels," constructed the first bark vessels, the *Speedwell*, *Hopewell*, and *Endeavor*, between 1660-1664. John Elderkin built the first merchant vessel, the *New London Tryall*, in 1661. Five years later, John Coit and Mould built and launched the seventy-ton *New London* for European voyages. The shipbuilders constructed the 100-ton *John and Hester* in 1678. Shipwrights Joseph Wells and John Leeds built vessels specifically for European trade for maritime businessman John Wheeler.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> D. Hamilton Hurd, *History of New London County, Connecticut, with Biographical Sketches of many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men*, (Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co, 1882), <https://archive.org/details/historyofnewlond00hurd>, 12-13, 27; Frances M. Caulkins, *History of New London*, (New London: H.D. Utley, 1895), , 42-43, 229.

<sup>31</sup> William Douglass, M.D., *Summary, Historical and Political, of the First Planting, Progressive Improvements, and Present State of the British Settlements in North America*, (New York: Arno Press, 1972), [https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/ps/i.do?p=ECCO&id=GALE%7CCW0103617492&v=2.1&it=r&sid=SE RVICE\\_ID&userGroupName=txshracd2588](https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/ps/i.do?p=ECCO&id=GALE%7CCW0103617492&v=2.1&it=r&sid=SE RVICE_ID&userGroupName=txshracd2588), Vol. II, 162; Hurd, *History of New London County*,

Connecticut's eight ports became a mecca for privateers, but New London was especially renown. In 1755, William Douglass compiled a history of Britain's North American settlements and wrote of Connecticut's "eight convenient shipping ports for small craft, but all masters enter and clear at the port of New London."<sup>32</sup> In 1660, the Spanish vessel *Hope* from Malaga, Spain, bound for Virginia, put in at New London to repair leaks after a rough voyage. In 1752, a ship from the Spanish colonies, carrying indigo and gold and silver coins, came in to rest at New London after suffering distress in the Gulf of Mexico. The harbor proved so successful that New London held one-third of the colony's tonnage in 1680, contained another shipping yard in 1699, and by 1725, became known for building large ships. Master shipwright, John Jeffries, immigrated to New London from England in the 1720s, and over his career, established a shipyard on the Thames and contracted with Portuguese merchants to build the largest vessel ever in North America at over 700 tons. In 1769, Connecticut built fifty ships, second only to Massachusetts.<sup>33</sup>

Connecticut's burgeoning maritime trade underpinned the colony's successful communities, but success also brought unwanted consequences. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Connecticut's coastal communities thrived economically. An expanding economic influence at the turn of the eighteenth century meant that business professionals led the colony as Puritan influence waned. A traveler's description of New Haven as a "town of trading, and [a]

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207; Caulkins, *History of New London*, 231, 237-38, 242, 462-63, 465-66; Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut*, 101; James P. Walsh, "Connecticut Industry and the Revolution," *Connecticut Bicentennial Series*, (Hartford, CT: The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Connecticut, 1978), Vol. 29, 53.

<sup>32</sup> Douglass, M.D., *Summary*, 162.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*; Hurd, *History of New London County*, 207; Caulkins, *History of New London*, 231, 237-38, 242, 462-63, 465-66; Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut*, 101; Walsh, "Connecticut Industry and the Revolution," Vol. 29, 53.

harbor full of vessels” depicted a busy and prosperous community in the 1750s.<sup>34</sup> By 1762, New Haven’s port could hold 108 ships. From 1,400 in 1748, New Haven’s population reached to over 8,000 in 1774, including 756 seamen, or ten percent of the population. One historical commentator portrayed the ill-effects of the development as a “train of comers and goers, its compact busy street.”<sup>35</sup> An inundation of outsiders made it “easy to raise a mob here; easy to get up a feast, a frolick, or a fracas.”<sup>36</sup> Progress changed New London from a “quiet inland town” to a place with “more coarseness, ignorance and vice.”<sup>37</sup>

Connecticut’s West Indian trade became a prime business venture and expanded the colony’s reach and reputation in an Atlantic economy. Overseas trade to the Caribbean grew with Connecticut exports including cattle, horses, and provisions, in exchange for rum, sugar, cotton, salt, and tobacco. By the late 1660s, trading voyages between New London and West Indies merchants regularly occurred. From 1680-1730, ship travel increased between Great Britain and North America from 500 to 1,000 voyages per year. During 1724, six vessels left New London for the West Indies with its primary export at that time, horses, up from just one voyage eight years earlier.<sup>38</sup> Connecticut’s trade ranged from exchanging beef and fish for sugar and molasses in the seventeenth century, to swapping flour and lumber for mules in ports on the

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<sup>34</sup> Osterweis, *Three Centuries of New Haven*, 75, as described by an English visitor traveling from New York to Boston during 1754 and published in 1776, Thomas Pownall, *A Topographical Description of the Dominions of the United States of America*, Lois Mulkearn, ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1949), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015003945295&view>, 58, original publication in 1776.

<sup>35</sup> Caulkins, *History of New London*, 246.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*; Osterweis, *Three Centuries of New Haven*, 76, 102-04, 111-13.

<sup>38</sup> Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 223; Elizabeth Hubbell Schenck, *The History of Fairfield, Fairfield County, Connecticut From 1700 to 1800* (New York: published by the author, 1905), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc2.ark:/13960/t07w6b048&view>, 46; Hurd, *History of New London County*, 207; Caulkins, *History of New London*, 241.

Mediterranean Sea in the eighteenth century. Demographics of immigrants also changed between this expansion. Connecticut welcomed new Scottish, French Huguenot, and New Amsterdam Dutch settlers in the beginning of the settlement. By the mid-eighteenth century, French Catholics, Portuguese Jews, and Venetians immigrants called Connecticut home. Connecticut, initially a “Puritan Davenport vision,” evolved into a cosmopolitan and diverse colony and joined a broader Atlantic sphere.<sup>39</sup>

Connecticut colonists did not just seek success for themselves. On behalf of Britain, these colonists participated in a series of colonial wars to defend Britain’s imperial mission. Because of Connecticut’s location on the Sound and its reputation as a leading maritime destination, England’s colonial wars directly impacted Connecticut. Connecticut provided 400 men between 1702-1713 for Queen Anne’s War. In response to an act of Parliament in 1705, Connecticut’s shipbuilders supplied masts and stores for the Royal navy and other shipping for Britain, and sent supplies to Port Royal, Nova Scotia, where the English took the fort from the French. Intelligence in the Fall of 1739 during the War of Jenkins’ Ear described Spanish attacks against British commerce making unlawful seizures of English subjects and property near Connecticut’s coastal communities. This prompted British letters of marque and reprisals against Spain. With every reason to expect war on their coastline, New London leaders petitioned Connecticut’s governor in January 1740 for help in fortifying the town. To defend the colony, Connecticut’s

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<sup>39</sup> Osterweis, *Three Centuries of New Haven*, 76, 102-04, 111-13. At the time of his ministry, Ezra Stiles documented encounters with foreigners visiting New England. For example, he frequently visited the synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island built in his neighborhood in 1762-1763, where he met with a “romish Priest, a Knight of Jerusalem or Malta, travelling from Hispaniola to Quebec.” *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D.*, Franklin Bowdler Dexter, M.A., ed., (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), <https://ia800200.us.archive.org/13/items/cu31924092461817/cu31924092461817.pdf>, Vol. 1, 5-6.

Committee of War commissioned the sloop, *Defence*, in 1743. The next year, French war ships and privateers harassed North American coastal settlements and captured vessels to an extent that the aggression effectively suspended fishing business. Along with the *Defence* and several hired transports, Connecticut and Rhode Island furnished another twelve vessels that sailed from New London. In the meantime, the British ministry launched a large expedition against Spanish West Indies' dominions and possessions off the northern coast of South America. These military operations frequently embarked from, and landed into, New London.<sup>40</sup>

By the Seven Years War, more than 6,000 Connecticut men fought for Britain.<sup>41</sup> In addition to naval service, New London's port and privateers kept busy:

"May 15, 1757, Capt. Lee came in from a six months' cruise; no prize."

"June 12th. Capt. David Mumford, in a New London privateer, fell down to Harbor's Mouth."

"June 17th. A prize schooner taken by David Mumford, from the French, in latitude 33° arrived."

"June 10th [1758]. A French prize schooner is brought in by two privateers of Providence; seventy-five tons, ten guns and seventy-five men."<sup>42</sup>

The British government relied on American privateers to help fight and fund its eighteenth-century colonial wars. Throughout the War of Jenkins' Ear and King George's War, merchants owned hundreds of vessels worth thousands of pounds sterling and employed thousands of sailors. These sailors included New England privateers. During these two wars, the number of privateers surpassed the total of sailors in the Royal Navy, and more than 300

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<sup>40</sup> Lambert, *History of the Colony of New Haven*, 37; Caulkins, *History of New London*, 384, 387, 390-92; Schenck, *The History of Fairfield*, Vol. 2, Ch. VIII, 5, 24-25, Ch X, 126, 143-47.

<sup>41</sup> Lambert, *History of the Colony of New Haven*, 38.

<sup>42</sup> Caulkins, *History of New London*, 470-71.

privateer vessels sailed. Britain issued 490 letters of marque in colonial wars against France alone.<sup>43</sup> These privateers seized enemy commerce, added to a depleted treasury, and strengthened Britain's sea power.

While colonial wars kept privateers in business, closed markets ensured piracy's survival and additional work for privateers. Piracy and privateering continued in the British mainland colonies and the resemblances between what happened there and in the West Indies cannot be understated. The example of Jamaica is a precedent for the last and largest surge of pirate activity of the early eighteenth century in British North America. Jamaican governors turned to privateers and pirates for cheaper and unavailable goods, and flouted government orders to criminalize their behavior. North American colonial governors walked the same path.<sup>44</sup>

England's Navigation Act of 1651 and a series of navigation laws from 1660-1696 closed markets for the North American colonies. It had disastrous consequences just as Spain's restricted markets in its New World colonies. Britain's legislation forced colonial merchants to trade only with their English counterparts and required colonial exports to pass through the home

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<sup>43</sup> Swanson *Predators & Prizes*, 3, 6, 103, 139-40, 222-23. Infant states could not bear the cost of fleets and create large navies, giving rise to privateering. This practice augmented sea power by encouraging the private sector to engage in non-state violence. Volo, *Blue Water Patriots*, 2, 88; Miller, *Sea of Glory*, 7, 262; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 39, 106, 179-80, 183, 224-25, 316, 328; Thomson, *Mercenaries*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> This escalation has been termed the "Golden Age of Piracy," a period that roughly lasts from 1650-1730. In his pirate studies, Marcus Rediker focuses on the pirates of 1710-1726 claiming they were the most numerous and successful, attacking all nations and creating crisis in the Atlantic sea trade. Putting their numbers in the 5,000s, and capturing hundreds of merchant ships, the era has been described as the greatest ever in history of robbery at sea. These numbers do not compare, however, to the height of Chinese piracy at 70,000 which collapsed in the early nineteenth century. This new brand of North American pirate now began to attack any ship and town. Once viewed as free traders around the Navigation Acts, heroes became villains. Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*; Antony, *Age of Sail*; Antony, *Froth Floating on the Sea*.

country first in order to levy customs duties. These laws went generally unenforced until 1675. As seen in the West Indies, however, restricting trade created consequences, included piracy.<sup>45</sup>

Pirates operated up and down the Connecticut coast at the same time as privateers. In 1654, the authorities apprehended a ten-gun ship at New Haven for unlawful trade. While on trial, the crew made off with the ship, came under fire, and escaped, leaving the boat adrift. The ship was brought into harbor and condemned as a prize. By 1695, threats of pirates resulted in vessels carrying guns and ammunition. In 1696, Connecticut passed legislation to arrest pirates and deserters from ships of war. Pirates seized vessels and stole livestock from Long Island Sound communities. The authorities began locking pirates up. British privateer turned pirate, Captain Kidd, is believed to have buried loot along the Connecticut and Long Island coasts, including near Greens Farm (south of Fairfield), where in later years, digs recovered a large amount of gold. Kidd is also rumored to have visited Milford (between New Haven and Fairfield) several times, burying money on the island. The Raymond family claimed that Kidd frequented Block Island and Gardiner's Island, where Mercy Raymond fed and supplied him.<sup>46</sup> Before he left the area, he is said to have told Mrs. Raymond to "hold out [your] apron...and he threw in handfuls of gold, jewels, and other precious commodities, until it was full, as the wages of her hospitality."<sup>47</sup>

This interaction between pirate and respected members of society was not uncommon. Piracy and smuggling became enmeshed in social and legal structures and allowed pirates to infiltrate colonial society for a while. Restrictive trade policies like the Navigation Acts forced

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<sup>45</sup> Osterweis, *Three Centuries of New Haven*, 77; Schenck, *History of Fairfield*, Vol IV, 2-5, 8-21, 72, 78-79, Ch. VI; Caulkins, *History of New London*, 95, 223.

<sup>46</sup> Lambert, *History of the Colony of New Haven*, 29-30; Schenck, *History of Fairfield*, Vol. 1, 220, 287-89.

<sup>47</sup> Caulkins, *History of New London*, 292-93.



colonies to work with privateers and pirates to skirt the legislation. A cozy relationship developed between wealthy merchants, governors, and sea-raiders. Merchants financed pirate voyages and governors secured commissions for privateer captains. Privateers Henry Avery and Captain Kidd (who later turned pirate), and pirate Thomas Tew, attacked Indian Ocean and African Atlantic ports, returned to American waters, and sold goods to the colonial political and business elite. Pirates even married into colonial families. When pirates were brought to trial (a rare occurrence), juries declined to punish the men that brought in luxuries at a cheap price.<sup>48</sup>

A “salutary neglect” approach to the North American colonies by British authorities eventually gave way to increased intervention into political matters. Britain instituted measures which interfered with America’s self-governing tradition. Britain threatened to revoke charters, remove governors, and install vice-admiralty courts, and issued proclamations to prosecute pirates. In 1684, the King ordered colonies to suppress piracy. In 1696, vice-admiralty courts and a Board of Trade replaced local officials who, likely, worked together with, and financially benefitted from, pirates and smugglers. The result was disappointing. In fact, no change in colonial law or practice came to pass. Colonial dealings with pirates went on until the turn of the

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<sup>48</sup> Lane, *Blood and Silver*, 46; Burgess, *Politics of Piracy*, 213-14. Swanson, *Predators & Prizes*, 222. For close examination of pirate ships in the eighteenth century, Marcus Rediker’s *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* and *Villains of All Nations* are the seminal studies. Rediker’s works are cultural, social, and labor histories, arguing that development of piracy was a response to problems of class and capitalism. Theories on the growth of piracy in the early modern age range from tyrannical treatment on merchant and navy ships, to constant war, to simple supply and demand, economics, and greed. Meager economic opportunities and a feudal system that benefitted a few at the top, left little optimism. Life on land was bleak; life at sea was just as arduous.

century. Colonial governors had to choose—obey English rule or serve the best interests of the colony. They chose their colonies.<sup>49</sup>

North American colonial governors balked at the trade board's demand to prosecute pirates. Like Jamaican officials, governors put on show trials, granted more commissions, and convened their own prize courts. Merchants also ignored royal proclamations and traded openly with pirates. Colonial politicians and merchants reversed their course of working with pirates when trade from the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea stopped, and the marauders attacked colonial ships to survive. Like the West Indies, with the Crown and colonies holding common financial interests, merchants and governors now saw pirates as a threat to, rather than a partner in, maritime trade. Governor Spotswood of Virginia went after Edward Teach, or Blackbeard. Teach was killed in 1717. Western piracy faded by 1726 after colonies increasingly prosecuted pirates. Protection for, and partnerships with, pirates ended in North America.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Burgess, *Politics of Piracy*, 35, 51, 197, 213-14; Osterweis, *Three Centuries of New Haven*, 77; Schenck, *History of Fairfield*, Vol IV, 2-5, 8-21, 72, 78-79, Ch. VI; Caulkins, *History of New London*, 95, 223.

<sup>50</sup> Burgess, *Politics of Piracy*, 35, 51, 197, 213-14; Osterweis, *Three Centuries of New Haven*, 77; Schenck, *History of Fairfield*, Vol IV, 2-5, 8-21, 72, 78-79, Ch. VI; Caulkins, *History of New London*, 95, 223; Earle, *Pirate Wars*, 193; Burgess, *Politics of Piracy*, 222-23. Another round of pardons enticed pirates to join Britain in the War of Spanish Succession which lasted from 1710-1714. The war ended and with trade diminishing in the Red Sea, pirates now attacked colonial ships, unraveling the close connection between pirates and colonies. Two quintessential, freebooters, became synonymous with piracy—Blackbeard and Bartholomew Roberts, or Black Bart. Now acting on their own accord without government sponsors, they were quasi-anarchistic, primarily Anglo-American, who rejected national and religious authorities. Earle, *Pirate Wars*, 193; Burgess, *Politics of Piracy*, 222-23. There are differing levels of explanations for the decline of piracy in North America. Peter Earle credited British navy patrols in the Atlantic to ending piracy. Douglass Burgess criticized this emphasis on the navy contending that when colonial administration worked with pirates, the navy had no effect against them. The end to piracy was not a war on piracy, but a shift in colonial attitudes regarding pirates. Once colonies no longer gave them safe-haven, pirates were prosecuted and executed. Arne Bialuschewski tied their fall to levels of crop success. He contended that South Carolina's attitude towards pirates turned when rice crops produced affluence and piracy raised insurance and interest rates, and, therefore, commissions, cutting into profits. On the other hand, North Carolina prolonged a

Connecticut merchants schemed to continue their business outside of Britain's Navigation Act restrictions and relied on privateers. Goods that could be cleared through customs "might be run, and if sugars and indigo could not afford to pay the customs, they might be shipped as flaxseed, or landed in the silence and shade of midnight, and the duty wholly avoided."<sup>51</sup> Connecticut merchant and privateer owner Nathaniel Shaw wrote that "Matters of this kind are daily practiced in New York and Boston."<sup>52</sup> Amid the 1765-1766 Stamp Act controversy, Shaw documented Britain's Customs commissioners inspections: "The sloop *Liberty* is now stationed here and searches every vessel in the strictest manner. Our cruising pirate sailed yesterday for Newport."<sup>53</sup> Shaw's description of his vessel as a pirate is ironic. Soon, the British called the American privateers who turned against them in the American Revolution, pirates.

### Conclusion

For hundreds of years, European nations exploited privateering, using privateers to supplement naval power, disrupt enemies supply lines and commercial circuits, and accumulate wealth. Privateers could not be controlled when conflict ended. Restrictive economic policies

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pirate partnership because of dropping tobacco prices and corresponding wealth. Bialuschewski, "Pirates, Markets, and Imperial Authority," 204. Gabriel Kuhn speculated that Golden Age pirates could not have feasibly sustained their counterculture. Describing it as a "nomadic" and "libertarian" lifestyle, these pirates lacked a social organization which was an "inherent weakness of pirate society." There were no women, no children, no land, and no nation to perpetuate it. Gabriel Kuhn, *Life Under the Jolly Roger: Reflections on Golden Age Piracy*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 176.

<sup>51</sup> Caulkins, *History of New London*, 483.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Ezra Stiles recorded in his July 31, 1769, diary entry that the "Sloop Liberty burnt." Dexter, M.A., ed., *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 19. A footnote documents that it being the "first overt act of violence offered to the British authorities in America," and that the "vessel was scuttled in Newport Harbor on July 17, in revenge at her part in detecting violations of the revenue laws; and was set on fire about the 31<sup>st</sup>." Ibid, 19, fn.2.

encouraged the rise of black markets and furnished goods where distribution gaps existed. When sovereigns failed to send sufficient supplies and defenses, merchants partnered up with pirates and privateers who infested the waters where imperial powers instituted commercial supremacy. Merchants profited from low defense costs and closed markets in which they were the sole provisioners of island colonies, expanding power and dominance.<sup>54</sup>

British imperial strategy transferred a considerable burden of risks onto private parties by relying on privateers and self-governing commercial interests. This also gave states little say in how these actors behaved. Chaos resulted from state-sanctioned non-state violence: piracy stemmed from privateering. In the meantime, colonialism created wealth and power for states. As economies and militaries matured, states no longer need to outsource private defenses. They could end non-state violence and accept domestic and international authority. These developments made a citizenry-led military possible, and “marked the transition from heteronomy to sovereignty and of state into a national state system.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Thomson, *Mercenaries*, 4, 27-28, 41; Pérotin-Dumon, “The Pirate and the Emperor,” in Pennell, ed., *Bandits at Sea*; Earle, *Pirate Wars*, 190; Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 7, 8, 257, 283, 285, *Villains of All Nations*, 31-32; Starkey, “Pirates and Markets,” 113-15; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Thomson, *Mercenaries*, 11, 144. The British monarchy and other states ended dependency on privateers with internal “changes in the institution of sovereignty,” and external cooperation. Janice Thomson argued that “the demise of privateering was the result of states’ simultaneously adopting a prohibition stemming from international agreement.” Furthermore, when nations finally understood that open markets increased revenue, allowing the build-up of navies, and that a sprawling Atlantic empire drained resources faster than turning profit, piracy and privateering declined. Gosse, *History of Piracy*, 142, 144, 154-56, 159; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 17-18, 99-100, 102-03, 110, 130, 132; Latimer, *Buccaneers*, 4-6, 72-73, 76, 119, 128, 135, 142-43, 162-64, 205-09, 222, 226, 235, 260. Different theories claim different factors for the expansion of global trade through imperialism of European states. One hypothesis is that how much governmental versus private control in a commercial enterprise predicts how successful that enterprise will be. M.N. Pearson posited that European states such as England which were “facilitative, helpful, but not determinative or interventionist,” saw a greater success with early modern international trade. This may have been true early on, but policies of restricting colonial trade had disastrous effects in the end. Other theories focus on military or sea-faring

Britain, however, instituted controls to rid its North American colonies of pirates and manipulate trade. Among them was modifying charters to gain more control over local leaders, issuing proclamations to enforce criminal laws against pirates, and passing laws that restricted colonial trade. These actions intruded on local governance, a governance that the colonies enjoyed since their beginning. Through political independence and self-government, colonies established government institutions, organized autonomous assemblies, chose governors, and created an American common law. These colonial features led to political separation from Britain and a unique American individualism, preventing imperial administration from taking hold. After half a century of governing on their own, Britain's new interest into colonial affairs backfired. These intrusions sowed the seeds of revolution.<sup>56</sup>

Decades before the American Revolution, pirates' influence in the North American colonies waned and American colonists served as privateers in a series of colonial wars. As

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advancements and dominance which forecast successful imperialism. M.N. Pearson, "The Rise of Merchant Empires, 1400-1700," in James D. Tracy, ed., *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, (New York: Cambridge University Press 1991), 115; Geoffrey Parker, "Europe and the Wider World, 1500-1750: The Military Balance," in Tracy, ed., *The Political Economy*, 161-195; Thomson, *Mercenaries*, 41-3, 67, 97, 105, chapter 1, chapter 3; Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 40; Thomson, *Mercenaries*, 4, 27-28, 41.

<sup>56</sup> The beginnings of the crack in the relationship between Britain and its North American colonies has long been blamed on Britain failing to aggressively control and supervise colonial life from the start, instead tolerating a system of self-government and self-identification. George L. Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907); Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Background of the American Revolution: Four Essays in American Colonial History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924); Lawrence H. Gipson, *The British Empire before the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1936-1970); Burgess, *The Politics of Piracy*. For the growth of American common law, see William E. Nelson, *The Common Law in Colonial America: The Chesapeake and New England (1660-1750)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Vol 3; Chicago-Kent Law Review, Vol. 89, Issue 3, "The Making of a Legal Historian: Reassessing the Work of William E. Nelson," June 2014, 937-956, Lauren Benton, Kathryn Walker, "Law for the Empire: *The Common Law in Colonial America* and the Problem of Diversity, Christopher Tomlins, *Freedom Bound: Law, Labor, and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America 1580-1865*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

pirates faded from memory, the privateering lesson was never forgotten. It became crucial to America's fight with the British. When American colonists revolted, they relied on private, state-sanctioned privateers, or pirates, to help a poor, ill-equipped military win the War for Independence. One northeast colony that played an imperative part in this strategy in the American Revolution was Connecticut. The colony's established shipyards, ports, and privateers were a threat to the British, and for it, the colony's privateering ports paid a devastating.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Hanna, *Pirate Nests*, 18, 94, 157, 200, 219, 250, 360-362, 367, 417; Rediker, "The Seaman as Pirate," in *Bandits at Sea*, ed., Pennell, 139-140, 168; Latimer, *Buccaneers*, 272; Miller, *Sea of Glory*, 8; Gosse, *History of Piracy*, 176-77, 193, 206, 208, 212.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRIVATEERING IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: “PIRATES” ACT AND BRITISH REACT

*“if [our] Privateer should engage an armed vessel and be taken, (which we are determined by divine assistance never to be) we shall be deemed & treated as **pirates**.”*

-Petition to the Massachusetts General Court, July 19, 1775<sup>1</sup>

*“...proceed together in search of these **Pirates**...to take, sink, burn or destroy by all means in your power.”*

-Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, July 18, 1775<sup>2</sup>

The tradition of American colonists serving as British privateers is a long one. During Britain’s various eighteenth-century wars, Americans showed their allegiance and worth as privateers. These privateers made their way along the North American eastern seaboard defending against those who threatened Britain’s claim there. American colonists would use the practice against their previous rulers in the American Revolution. In fact, much of the credit (or blame) for American privateers’ success in the American Revolution was their privateering service for Britain in the earlier colonial wars.

American privateers garnered the interest of the British monarchy and Parliament when intelligence indicated that by the Spring of 1776, North American ports would teem with the

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<sup>1</sup> William Bell Clark and William James Morgan, et al., eds., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, (hereinafter referred to as “NDAR”) (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, Dept. of the Navy, 1964), <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/publications/publications-by-subject/naval-documents-of-the-american-revolution.html>), 13 vols., Petition of Benjamin Foster and Jeremiah O’Brian to the Massachusetts General Court, July 19, 1775, 1:924, emphasis added. Author's note: When quoting from primary sources, I have corrected eighteenth-century spelling and capitalization peculiarities and have occasionally added punctuation and words where necessary. No changes alter the original meaning of the text.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Lieutenant John Graves, His Majesty’s Schooner, *St. Lawrence*, July 18, 1775, 1:913, emphasis added.

rebel sea-raiders. The experience of those privateers worried British officials. Lord Dartmouth heard that many American privateer captains from the French and Indian War “proved their intrepidity to the world by their prizes, and some of them have already taken many valuable prizes” in the current war.<sup>3</sup> In a Parliamentary address, David Hartley reminded his House of Commons colleagues of the effectiveness of American privateers: “We know their skill and bravery as privateers in the last war.”<sup>4</sup>

Thousands of American colonists served as privateers in the American Revolution and the degree of the practice dominated deliberations among Britain’s political and military leaders. Connecticut’s privateers and ports were especially effective in harassing the British. In turn, the colony became a prime target of Britain in the summer of 1779 and September 1781. The number and efficacy of colonial privateers hurt the British war effort in a variety of ways. Privateers obstructed supplies from reaching the British and affected the Royal Navy’s operations. American privateers also inhibited the build-up of a Continental navy.<sup>5</sup> These factors resulted in an extraordinary reliance on privateers.

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<sup>3</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, B.P. to Lord Dartmouth, December 20, 1775, 3:186-87.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., David Hartley’s Remarks in the House of Commons against the Prohibitory Act, December 21, 1775, 3:437-38. In the same speech, Hartley, in rather dramatic fashion, admonished that Britain’s “land force has been disgraced and annihilated in the first campaign...The fate of America is cast. You may bruise its heel, but you cannot crush its head. It will revive again. The new world is before them. Liberty is theirs.”

<sup>5</sup> Marcus Rediker, “The Seaman as Pirate: Plunder and Social Banditry at Sea,” in *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*, ed., C.R. Pennell (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 139-140, 168; Jon Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean: How Piracy Forged an Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 272; Nathan Miller, *Sea of Glory: The Continental Navy Fights for Independence, 1775-1783*, (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1974), 7, 8, 262; Philip Gosse, *The History of Piracy*, (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1932), 176-177, 193, 206, 208, 212; Mark G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 18, 94, 200, 250; James M. Volo, *Blue Water Patriots: The American Revolution Afloat*, (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 2, 88; Charles Hervey Townshend, *The British Invasion of New*



This chapter shows the extent of American privateering throughout the war, with a particular focus on Connecticut. It is imperative to look at the entire American privateering effort to establish the significance of the practice to the American victory. Revealing Connecticut's privateering activities and the impression that it made on British political and military leaders, connects those actions to the British raids on Connecticut. This chapter argues that the prevalence of privateers dealt a crushing blow to Britain's war effort, supplied a poorly equipped Continental army, and provided a maritime force for the Americans. The pervasiveness and effectiveness of American and Connecticut privateers drew the wrath of the British. Just as Britain used privateers to help establish their place in the global world, so would a rebellious United States. Privateers proved crucial in securing an American victory.

From the very outset of the American Revolution, coastal colonies engaged in privateering. British naval patrols cracked down on illegal smuggling into Rhode Island and as early as 1774, the colony had six privateers and its government voted to outfit more. Worcester, Massachusetts residents armed three vessels and chased after two British war ships that had commandeered a cargo ship full of provisions meant for the town in May 1775. One month later, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress resolved to arm vessels in response to British naval actions.<sup>6</sup> The practice of privateering even caught the attention of Thomas Jefferson. On July 4,

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*Haven, Connecticut: Together with some Account of their Landing and Burning the Towns of Fairfield and Norwalk, July 1779*, (New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, Printers, 1879), 2; Frederic Gregory Mather, *The Refugees of 1776 from Long Island to Connecticut*, (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1913), 214.

<sup>6</sup> James Richard Wils, "In Behalf of the Continent: Privateering and Irregular Warfare in Early Revolutionary America, 1775-1777," (Master's thesis, East Carolina University, Summer 2012), Abstract; Robert H. Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008), 26; James L. Nelson, *George Washington's Secret Navy: How the American Revolution Went to Sea*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), 58-59; Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, *Massachusetts Spy*, Wednesday, May 24, 1775, 1:515; Diary of Dr. Ezra Stiles, June 17, 1775, 1:705.

1775, he remarked that “New Englanders are fitting out privateers, with which they expect to be able to scour the seas and bays of everything below ships-of-war, and may probably go to the European coasts to distress the British trade there.”<sup>7</sup>

The New England colony of Connecticut not only provided privateering prospects for the Americans. The colony’s geographic features, robust maritime industry, and established ports on the Atlantic seaboard piqued the Continental Congress’s interest early in the war. In October 1775, Congress requested Connecticut leaders “send out several vessels to intercept two transports with powder, etc.”<sup>8</sup> Connecticut Congressional delegate, Silas Deane, proposed New London harbor as a “rendezvous of an American navy.”<sup>9</sup> Congress asked Commander General George Washington to survey ports from New London, Connecticut to Cape Ann, Massachusetts for building forts to protect trade, privateers and their prizes, and determine “what is necessary to be done to put them in a state of defense.”<sup>10</sup>

Connecticut privateers impeded Britain’s ability to supply its troops. Keenly aware of the ongoing struggle of supplies, Thomas Gage, Royal Governor of Massachusetts and first North American Commander-in-Chief, told Lord Dartmouth that “rebels have fitted out some privateers to intercept our supplies.”<sup>11</sup> In June 1775, British Captain James Wallace warned Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, commander of British naval forces in North America, that besides Rhode Island outfitting several privateers, there were at least two more fitting out at New

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<sup>7</sup> Paul H. Smith, ed. *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1976-2000), <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwdglink.html>, 25 Vols., Thomas Jefferson to Francis Eppes, July 4, 1775, 1:581.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates*, Samuel Ward’s Diary, October 5, 1775, 2:123; To George Washington, April 17, 1776. 3:546-47.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Silas Deane’s Proposals for Establishing a Navy, October 16, 1775, 2:191.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., To George Washington, April 17, 1776. 3:546-47.

<sup>11</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, General Thomas Gage to Lord Dartmouth, Boston, July 24, 1775, 1:960.

London, Connecticut.<sup>12</sup> These innocuous statements failed to depict the degree of a problem that became a recurring British concern throughout the war.

Commander Washington also proceeded to arm privateers to seize British supplies by the end of the summer of 1775.<sup>13</sup> British troops led by Generals Howe, Burgoyne, and Clinton had arrived in Boston at Governor Gage's request. Washington reached Boston not long after his appointment as commander and stationed his troops on high ground surrounding the city. This left Boston's port open to British supply ships and Washington needed munitions. Washington requested daily reports of the harbor and for privately-owned whaleboats to patrol the harbor nightly. With little naval support and financial help to bring in supplies, he quickly recognized the need for privateers. Washington planned for privateers to make runs to Europe and the West Indies. He asked a Rhode Island privateer to sail to Bermuda and confiscate badly needed gunpowder. In August, Washington contracted for the first armed vessel, the *Hannah*, and commissioned two more armed vessels.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Captain James Wallace, R.N. to Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, *Rose*, Rhode Island, June 19, 1775, 1:720. Upon receiving this information, Graves sent out a missive to the *Glasgow* to cruise along the "back of Nantucket shoals to the west end of Long Island" in order to look for fifteen transports arriving from England that might fall to these privateers." Ibid, 1:761-62.

<sup>13</sup> Nelson, *Secret Navy*, 17, 42, 157, citing Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Journal of the Continental Congress, November 25, 1775, 2:1132-1133; see also Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1905), <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwjc.html>), Congressional Resolves, December 2, 1775, 3:401.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Letters of Members*, John Hancock to George Washington, May 16, 1776, 4:8; E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Arm at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture 1775, 1783*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 20-21; Nelson, *George Washington's Secret Navy*, 54, 60-61, 83-84, 107-08, 111-12, 128, citing to W.W. Abbot, ed. *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series* (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1985), 1:79; William B. Reed, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed*, (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1847), 138. See also, Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, John Hancock to Nicholas Cooke, October 5, 1775, 2:312-314. For other works that address George Washington's ventures into privateering see

The impact of American privateers on the supplies of British troops and on the minds of Britain's leaders cannot be overstated. In late 1775, Commander William Howe voiced concerns over the safety of British supply ships and worried that American privateers would "do more mischief, unless the King's ships can contrive to cut them off."<sup>15</sup> Of those that had already been taken by the rebels, Howe believed the prizes "must afford great relief to their most essential wants."<sup>16</sup> Admiral Graves wrote of the lack of supplies and that the only recourse was to coordinate Royal Navy ships to protect supply lines and ships from rebel privateers.<sup>17</sup>

The toll that American privateers took on British supply lines became clear less than a year after the war started. British convoys sent to guard supply ships failed to stop rebel privateers and supplies ran short in early 1776. Britons in Boston reported a lack of vegetables and flour with "the King's stores so very short, none can be spared from them."<sup>18</sup> There was also a shortage of

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William Bell Clark, *George Washington's Navy: Being an Account of his Excellency's Fleet in New England Waters* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960); Chester G. Hearn, *George Washington's Schooners: The First American Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Nelson, *Secret Navy*, 209, 251, citing Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Narrative of Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, November 26, 1775, 2:1143; Major General William Howe to Lord Dartmouth, November 27, 1775, 2:1155.

<sup>16</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Major General William Howe to Lord Dartmouth, December 13, 1775, 3:81-82.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Major General William Howe to Lord Dartmouth, November 27, 1775, 2:1155. Commander Howe wrote that "ships cannot block up the several ports of Cape Ann, Marblehead, Beverly and Plymouth which afford protection to these pirates without the assistance of a land force that cannot at present be spared." Captain Montague told Admiral Graves that "he cannot put a stop to the insolence of the privateers without more force." Nelson, *Secret Navy*, 281, citing to Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Narrative of Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, January 27, 1776, 3:1006. Other British concerns were the privateers' ability to outrun or chase down larger British vessels, and the geographic features of the North American coastline. Howe complained of the "rebel privateers infesting the [Boston] bay, who can take the advantage of many inlets on the coast, where his majesty's ships cannot pursue them." See Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Major General William Howe to Lord Dartmouth, November 27, 1775, 2:1155; Major General William Howe to Lord Dartmouth, December 13, 1775, 3:82.

<sup>18</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, *London Chronicle*, Thursday, January 18 to Saturday, January 20, 1776, 3:516, 518.

fuel to keep fires warming or cooking. One of three British coal ships (one of which also contained livestock) came close to Boston but were captured by American privateers at the harbor's entrance. A particularly harsh winter left British troops and civilians "literally, starving for want of provisions and fire."<sup>19</sup>

The supply problem also meant that British officers needed to reduce the volume of provisions required. General Guy Carleton, Governor and defender of Quebec, freed approximately 800 prisoners and sent his Indian allies away to decrease the amount of supplies he needed.<sup>20</sup> The success of American privateers explains why the British became consumed by them and why the frustration intensified their response to privateering communities. British concerns about, and attention to, privateering supports the conclusion that privateering played much more of a part in the American Revolution.

The practical benefit of privateering and its function of seizing supplies became clear to the Continental Congress and Washington with the hunt for, and taking of, the *Nancy*. Possibly the most valuable ordnance storeship taken by the Americans, the account of the *Nancy* exemplifies the importance of capturing British supplies and the anxiety it created for the British. In November 1775, the *Nancy*, and a protection convoy of four ships sailed from Britain. A violent storm prevented the *Nancy* from entering Boston's harbor. The British learned that rebel vessels were searching for the ship and a frantic search began.<sup>21</sup> *Nancy's* cargo would be a boon for the Continental Army. Admiral Graves instructed Lieutenant Henry Mowat of the *Canceaux* to "put

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., M. Garnier to Vergennes, October 4, 1776, 6:630-33.

<sup>21</sup> Nelson, *Secret Navy*, 207-12.

to sea immediately to look for the brig *Nancy*.”<sup>22</sup> Graves wanted the ship found and burned if his men could not retake it. Mowat was to sail to Cape Ann harbor where Graves believed that the *Nancy* was stranded due to inclement weather. However, the *Canceaux* became unseaworthy, and its grounding combined with the heavy storms, delayed Mowat’s mission. The *Nancy* remained missing on November 27.<sup>23</sup>

*Nancy*’s Captain, Robert Hunter, seemed ignorant to the import that *Nancy*’s cargo could have to the American cause. The ship was easily apprehended in Boston harbor. When the weather cleared up, Captain Hunter foolishly asked an American vessel to guide his ship into port. Eight armed rebels from the American ship boarded the *Nancy* and took the ship to Portsmouth.<sup>24</sup> The British well understood the *Nancy*’s capture as a “fatal event.”<sup>25</sup> The list of cargo was priceless: 2,000 muskets with bayonets, scabbards, ramrods, 2,000 cartridge boxes, 105,250 flints, 3,000 twelve-pound cannon balls, 4,000 six-pounders, seven ammunition wagons, and one brass mortar with complete mortar bed. William Tudor wrote to John Adams of the *Nancy*’s capture and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 209; see also Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Major General William Howe, November 12, 1775, 2:1000; Narrative of Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, November 12, 1775, 2:1000.

<sup>23</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Narrative of Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, November 12, 1775, 2:1000. Both sides commonly destroyed, burned, or rendered vessels so as not to be taken by the enemy and used against them. A British ship resecured a vessel being convoyed by an American privateer and “set fire to the vessel, to hinder her falling again into the hands of the provincials.” Chased by British sloops *Hope* and *Diligant*, rebels ran a “privateer on shore and left her and set her on fire.” Ibid., *New England Chronicle*, Thursday, September 28 to Thursday, October 12, 1775, 2:416; “Extract of Letter from Bristol, Aug.13,” *Public Advertiser* September 3, 1776, 6:578; For an account of this, see Master’s Log of H.M. Sloop *Hope*, September 27, 1776, 6:1030.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson, *Secret Navy*, 213.

<sup>25</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Lord Sandwich to Lord George Germain, December 28, 1775, 3:460; Nelson, *Secret Navy*, 220.

estimated that it would have taken eighteen months for the rebels to gather the equivalent supplies.<sup>26</sup>

The munitions from the *Nancy* became instrumental in resecuring Boston. Short on ammunition and losing men to attrition and apathy, Washington had no leverage to take Boston back. Stores from the *Nancy* and Colonel Henry Knox's recent cannon acquisition from Fort Ticonderoga created the opportunity that Washington needed. Washington used the combination of the newly acquired cannon, mortars, and arms to disguise an advance and his troops' work on rebel fortifications. The Americans improved their position with fortifications greatly. These factors and a violent storm postponed Commander William Howe and Admiral Shuldham's plan to launch an attack against the Americans. Howe evacuated Boston two weeks later.<sup>27</sup>

Connecticut colonists added to the growing force of American privateers sent to seize British supplies. In May 1776, the New Haven privateer, the *Gamecock*, received its privateering commission. The privateer's agent obtained authorization to withdraw 400 pounds of gunpowder from New Haven's stores. Nathaniel Shaw, one of Connecticut's most prolific privateers, applied for a privateering commission in June 1776 for the *American Revenue*, a 65-ton sloop. Another one of his privateers captured the HMS *Bolton*, which Shaw refitted for American use three months later. The New Haven privateer, *Broome*, brought four prizes into Dartmouth: the *Charming Sally*,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, December 12, 1775, 3:69-72; *Boston Gazette*, Monday, December 11, 1775, 3:46-49; William Bartlett to George Washington, December 9, 1775, 3:17; William Tudor to John Adams, December 3, 1775, 2:1248. The day after *Nancy*'s capture, Captain Manly carried a ship from London and a brig from St. Eustacia into Beverly, Massachusetts, bringing in cannon, guns, and men, along with coal, porter, cheese, hogs, rum, gin, cocoa, sugar, and oranges.

<sup>27</sup> Nelson, *Secret Navy*, 297-300. Knox brought to Boston forty-two cannons, sixteen mortar Howitzers, six eighteen-pounders, one twenty-four-pounder, two six-pound field pieces, barrel flints, and boxes of lead. See Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Colonel Henry Knox's List of Cannon at Ticonderoga December 9, 1775; Partial List of Cannon and Ammunition Transshipped by Boat on Lake George, December 9, 1775, 3:21.

the *Ann*, the *Carolina Packet*, and the *John*. The Connecticut privateer, the *Fanny*, captured six prizes originally intended to reach Commander Howe in New York.<sup>28</sup>

American privateers were not just responsible for redistributing British supplies. The sea-raiders' actions influenced the enemy's military decisions from stopping British naval maneuvers, to affecting the layout of British ships, to compelling a brutal policy on privateering communities. The presence and daring of privateers dictated British naval activities along the northeast coastline. In January 1776, Admiral Graves ordered his ships docked "if they should see any privateers."<sup>29</sup> The British waited for hours until they received the location and number of American privateers before letting naval ships go on patrol; Many times, the British had "no cruisers out."<sup>30</sup> It was no better two months later. The British fleet remained anchored off Boston when they spotted five rebel privateers known to have taken several ships within the last month.<sup>31</sup> The ubiquitousness of American privateers kept some Royal Navy ships at a virtual standstill or from ever entering American ports. One British seaman wrote that not one British ship docked in any port along the Atlantic seaboard from Boston to Nova Scotia, since the previous summer. He attributed this to the threat and success of American privateers.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Application for Privateering Commission for the Connecticut Sloop *American Revenue*, June 15, 1776, 5:547-48; Nathaniel Shaw, Jr. to Governor Jonathan Trumbull, September 12, 1776, 6:789-90; *New-England Chronicle*, Thursday, August 29, 1776, 6:346-47; *Providence Gazette*, May 10, 1777, 8:945; *Boston Gazette*, Monday, May 12, 1777. For a detail of men leading Connecticut privateering, see John A. McManemin, *Captains of the Privateers During the American Revolution*, (Spring Lake, NJ: Ho-Ho-Kus Publishing Co., 1985).

<sup>29</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, J. Loring to John Blackburn, January 29, 1776, 3:1030.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., Captain Frances Hatcheson to Major General Frederick Haldimand, Adventure Transport in Nantasket Road Boston Harbor, March 24, 1776, 4:488.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Taylor to Thomas Flucker, January 16, 1776, 3:811.



When comparing American privateers and British Royal Navy ships, the success of the Americans is surprising considering the difference in size. The smaller and more agile American privateers continued capturing British vessels within sight of Britain's war ships. In response, the British adjusted the design of ships. One structural modification made to their war ships was removing the lower deck guns and filling them with enough sailors "to defend themselves against these pirates."<sup>33</sup> Another adjustment made in response to American privateers was to increase the size of British ships, and therefore, the number of guns and men. The Secretary of the Admiralty hesitated to impress sailors because he needed more ships with seventy-four guns to be built.<sup>34</sup> Lord Germain understood that in order "to be superior to any rebel privateer," they needed ships big enough for forty guns and all the men and munitions it could carry. This plan was put in action against "skulking privateers."<sup>35</sup> British shipbuilders began constructing 300-ton ships with six nine-pound cannons on deck to overpower the smaller privateers.<sup>36</sup>

The amount of privateering activity originating out of Connecticut ports troubled the British and guaranteed that the colony would be a target. British Captain Hyde Parker learned of two New Haven privateers being readied to sail to Barbados to seize powder at Needhams Fort. The American privateer, the *Betsey*, loaded with duck, gunpowder, and small arms, docked in New London after a fifteen-day journey from St. Eustacia.<sup>37</sup> In October 1776, a British sloop fired at a privateer that escaped into Norwalk's harbor. The sloop then trolled the Connecticut shore to Fairfield. Frederick Mackenzie, an officer in the Royal Welch Fusilier regiment, logged

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<sup>33</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Major General William Howe to Lord Dartmouth, December 13, 1775, 3:82.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., M. Garnier to Vergennes, October 4, 1776, 6:30-33.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Lord George Townshend to Lord George Germain, August 21, 1776, 6:558.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., *New York Packet*, Thursday, May 30, 1776, 4:940.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Captain Hyde Parker, Jr., R.N. to Lord Sandwich, *Phoenix*, January 6, 1776, 3:654; *Newport Mercury*, Monday, August 5, 1776, 6:60.

Royal Navy ships moving from Long Island Sound up the Connecticut coast and documented several British war ships near Fairfield in February 1777. When stationed on the Thames River at New London, Mackenzie saw vessels in the harbor that he supposed were privateers, “as many are fitted out from that place.”<sup>38</sup> The privateering ports of New Haven, Norwalk, Fairfield, and New London were productive and their communities will be raided by Britain in the summer of 1779 and fall of 1781, respectively.

Connecticut Governor Trumbull seemed to understand the trouble that awaited these communities and residents. Minor exchanges of fire conducted between rebels on land and the HMS *Halifax* near Norwalk and Fairfield, prompted Governor Trumbull to reserve the provisions of four prizes recently taken by a Connecticut privateer.<sup>39</sup> The communities needed the supplies, Trumbull wrote, to quickly arm militia and provide for “the relief of our inhabitants who may be forced from their dwellings.”<sup>40</sup> In April 1777, ten English war ships and approximately eighty transports lay in New London harbor. Trumbull warned that it was “high time for the New England colonies to be alarmed.”<sup>41</sup>

By August 1776, the thousands of privateers were the topic of conversation among revolutionaries. They were productive and prolific. From Boston, James Warren reported the extent of the privateering to Samuel and John Adams. Warren wrote to Samuel Adams that the “spirit of privateering prevails here greatly” so that it will “make a whole country privateering

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<sup>38</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Diary of Frederick Mackenzie, December 6, 1776, 7:386-87.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., Journal of H.M. Sloop *Senegal*, Captain Roger Curtis, October 22, 1776, 6:1364; see also Master’s Log of H.M. Brig *Halifax*, April 25-29, 1777, 8:466-67.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., Governor Jonathan Trumbull to Samuel Eliot, April 29, 1777, 8:466.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Governor Jonathan Trumbull to Governor Nicholas Cooke, December 5, 1776, 7:375.

mad.”<sup>42</sup> Warren could not keep up with the number of privateers and prizes in Boston harbor, telling John Adams that “I am quite lost in my estimate of them.”<sup>43</sup> A Continental Congressional delegate wrote that leading into 1777, prizes came in to New England every day.<sup>44</sup> By December, estimates were that at least 10,000 New Englanders were privateers.<sup>45</sup>

Even with the success of American privateers, Royal Navy ships captured some colonial vessels. The British also recaptured their own ships back from the Americans. Despite these accomplishments, the achievements never equaled American privateers’ success and failed to counteract the damage to the British war effort. For example, Britain’s *Liverpool* retook several British ships taken by American privateers.<sup>46</sup> However, “nine out of ten” rebel privateers escaped British capture.<sup>47</sup> From Martinique, West Indies Agent, William Bingham, told Silas Deane, now an American diplomat in Paris, that even with the seizure of American ships, the rebels had “uncommon success.” Bingham confidently stated that “the balance will be immensely in our favor.”<sup>48</sup>

One purpose of privateering is to hijack the enemy’s supplies and hurt an adversary’s trade. The Committee of Secret Correspondence informed Silas Deane of privateering success, telling him that attacking Britain’s trade will “make their men of war weary of their unprofitable and hopeless cruises, and their merchants sick of a contest in which so much is risked and

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<sup>42</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, James Warren to Samuel Adams, August 15, 1776, 6:191.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., James Warren to John Adams, August 11, 1776, 6:143.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., William Hooper to Joseph Hewes, November 1, 1776, 7:12.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Benjamin Rush to Richard Henry Lee, December 21, 1776, 7:543.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., *Whitehall Evening Post*, Tuesday, November 12 to Thursday, November 14, 1776, 6:1076.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., *Public Advertiser*, Monday, July 15, 1776, 6:476.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., William Bingham to Silas Deane, September 29, 1776, 6:1046.

nothing gained.”<sup>49</sup> Deane’s belief that an American victory depended on “vigorous & bold operations at sea, & by carrying the war to their commerce, & factories in distant quarters of the globe” proved prescient.<sup>50</sup> The damage inflicted by American privateers turned out worse than the British expected. Admiral Howe called for “suppressing the spirit of privateering which has prevailed in a greater degree than could have been foreseen.”<sup>51</sup> In early 1778, Parliament projected business losses because of American privateering to be “at least two million” by the preceding October, and that at the present, not “less than 2,200,000£.”<sup>52</sup>

The quantity of American privateers in the West Indies created financial difficulties for British insurers and merchants. The number of captures “roused the underwriters from their lethargy.”<sup>53</sup> Insurance providers denied claims on the basis that policies covered pirate, not privateer, attacks. Insurers refused to underwrite policies as too many privateers pursued ships travelling back from the West Indies. Tracking losses, insurer Lloyds’ of London estimated that privateers took ninety merchant ships in the first year of the war.<sup>54</sup> In one instance, an American privateer captured nine ships from the West Indies, raising insurance rates from five to fifteen percent.<sup>55</sup> Merchant ships remained idle in Barbados, waiting to return home until a convoy

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<sup>49</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Committee of Secret Correspondence of the Continental Congress to Silas Deane, August 7, 1776, 6:103.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Silas Deane to Governor Jonathan Trumbull, May 23, 1777, 8:861.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Vice Admiral Viscount Howe to Secretary of the Admiralty Philip Stephens, May 9, 1778, 12:304-07.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., “Proceedings in the Lords Respecting the Commercial Losses Occasioned by the American War,” February 6, 1778, 11:969.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., *Public Advertiser*, Friday, July 19, 1776, 6:480.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., *London Chronicle*, Saturday, March 9 to Tuesday, March 12, 1776, 4:966. “The loss of a ship taken by the provincials is like to make work for the lawyers; the Underwriters declaring they are not pirates and the policy not providing against rebels.” Ibid., *Public Advertiser*, Monday, July 29, 1776, 6:512; *Public Advertiser*, Saturday, November 9, 1776, 7:734.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Summary, 6:383; M. Garnier to Vergennes, July 26, 1776, 6:503.

arrived because “of the multiplicity of American privateers.”<sup>56</sup> American privateers operating out of French ports, “had the British mercantile community in a state of near panic.”<sup>57</sup> The effects of privateers on Britain’s trade were extensive.

The increased attacks by American privateers off British and European coasts rattled the enemy. Even so, British reports underestimated the number of privateers. The appearance of rebel privateers was a “complete refutation of what [Britons] have been so often told concerning the reduced state of the Americans.”<sup>58</sup> Britain’s insurance industry had been misled to believe that “the Americans had very few privateers out,” when in reality, “the Americans are very powerful at sea.”<sup>59</sup> The adversary’s admission to their enemy’s maritime prowess is a testament to the merit of American privateers. This compliment is also quite remarkable considering the skill of the British Royal Navy and the insufficient size of the Continental navy.

The impact of American privateers on the United States navy was as great as their influence on the British war effort. As the Continental Congress deliberated about privateering, it contemplated creating a navy. Congress accepted John Adams’s naval rules and regulations on November 28, 1775, but waited to appoint a standing committee until December 11, and postponed employing naval ships until January 4, 1776.<sup>60</sup> That also meant a delay in enlisting sailors. By then, thousands of Americans had already signed on as privateers. Of potential naval enlisters, John Bradford, Massachusetts’ Continental Agent, told General Washington that “I am

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<sup>56</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, *Public Advertiser*, Wednesday, July 10, 1776, 6:472; M. Garnier to Vergennes, July 26, 1776, 6:503.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction, 9: ix-x.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, *Public Advertiser*, Thursday, May 15, 1777, 8:847.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, *Public Advertiser*, Saturday, July 19, 1776, 6:480.

<sup>60</sup> Ford, *Journals*, 3:387-389. In favor of a navy, John Adams felt that a national fleet “as well as privateers might make prey enough of the trade of our enemies to make it worthwhile.” Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, John Adams to James Warren, October 19, 1775, 2:528.

taking every measure to efface that notion of their being privateers,” as there is a need for “a reform in our little navy.”<sup>61</sup> Bradford also wrote John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress, that although “successful in the privateer way[,] I wish our little navy was more so.”<sup>62</sup> In September 1776, Samuel Cooper expressed regret to Benjamin Franklin that an “American fleet is not in greater forwardness.”<sup>63</sup> The Continentals never developed a navy that rivaled privateers’ numbers or results. The number of men serving on privateers versus in the Continental navy confirms privateering’s significant contribution in the war. America’s maritime strength was due to a heavy privateering presence.

The competition for American seamen between privateer and naval ships persisted throughout the war. The disparities of pay between the two operations amplified the problem. American Commodore Esek Hopkins complained to the Continental Marine Committee that naval ships stood ready, but each had just one hundred men on account of “so many privateers a fitting out which give more encouragement as to shares.”<sup>64</sup> Captain John Paul Jones protested that his ship, the *Alfred*, had just thirty men because privateering induced seamen away with higher pay. Jones warned that unless naval pay increased, an American navy “never will become formidable.”<sup>65</sup> Jones strongly believed that a navy—not privateers—was necessary to win American independence.

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<sup>61</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, John Bradford to George Washington, August 12, 1776, 6:153.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., John Bradford to John Hancock, September 16, 1776, 6:853.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Samuel Cooper to Benjamin Franklin, September 17, 1776, 6:871.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee, September 30, 1776, 6:1055-56.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., John Paul Jones to Robert Morris, October 17, 1776, 6:1303. For a history of the differing prize schemes awarded by the Continental navy, colonial navies, and privateers, see Journal of the American Revolution, Jackson Kuhl, “Samuel Smedley and Prize Division,” August 22, 2013 at <https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/08/samuel-smedley-and-prize-division/>.

By the summer of 1778, recruiting contests between the Continental navy and privateers for Connecticut seamen reached a feverous pitch. The allure of privateering over naval service is clear when comparing notices for privateers and navy ships in the same paper. A tour with the New London privateer, the *Revenge*, sounded downright restful seeking those ready for “a six-week *cruise* against the enemies of the United States,” “who are inclined to make their fortune with ease & pleasure.”<sup>66</sup> The owner of another New London privateer, the *New Broome*, sought “VOLUNTEERS who are desirous of making their fortunes in eight-weeks time.”<sup>67</sup> The Continental Navy’s deployment notice sounded less appealing—enlisted men were ordered to report immediately at New London or to board the ship *Warren* in Boston.<sup>68</sup> The Governor of Maryland complained to Virginia’s Governor, Patrick Henry, that the navy ship, the *Defence*, lay idle because it needed at least sixty more sailors.<sup>69</sup> The reason for the sailor shortfall was simple—an inability to compete with privateers’ high wages. To slow the recruitment of privateers, an article published the names of navy deserters, offered a \$10 reward for each capture, and warned all “commanders of privateers, merchant ships, and others,” from hiring them.<sup>70</sup>

Privateering affected not only naval recruitment, but it also contributed to already low army enrollments. The degree of army enlistments and the effect of privateering on it is

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Navies switched from the one-third/two-third division to the more generous 50/50 privateering-like division, to attract recruits.

<sup>66</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, *Connecticut Gazette*, Advertisement for Seamen for Connecticut Privateer Sloop *Revenge*, June 26, 1778, 13:207, emphasis added.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., *Connecticut Courant*, Advertisement for Seamen for Connecticut Privateer Brig *New Broome*, July 25, 1778, 13:511.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., *Connecticut Gazette*, Notice to Continental Navy Seamen in Connecticut, June 26, 1778, 13:207.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Governor Thomas Johnson to Governor Patrick Henry, April 29, 1777, 8:476.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., *The Freeman’s Journal*, Advertisement for Deserters from Continental Navy frigate *Raleigh*, April 21, 1778, 12:122-23.

important because it supports the magnitude of privateering, and therefore, its contribution in the war. Benjamin Rush, renowned doctor and Congressional delegate, felt that an army was essential to win the war, but that “owing to that excessive rage for privateering,” it would be difficult to meet the army quota.<sup>71</sup> This combined with the decline in army enlistees strengthens the importance of privateers to an American victory.

Scholars documented the decrease in army enlistments. Historians James K. Martin and Mark Lender argued that after Washington’s New York defeats starting in August 1776, army desertions were the norm by November. Once enlistments expired on December 31, 1776, interest to fight never reappeared even after the surprise defeat of the Hessians, the German mercenaries hired by the British, at Trenton and the subsequent rout of redcoats at Princeton.<sup>72</sup> Historian Piers Mackesy noted that when army enlistments dropped, “American privateers had multiplied at an alarming rate, and with French connivance were swarming in the British seas.”<sup>73</sup> At the beginning of 1777, just one thousand men reenlisted, 35,000 less of Congress’s goal and 8,000 below that of 1776.<sup>74</sup> Service in the army “never again reached the lofty levels of

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<sup>71</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Benjamin Rush to Richard Henry Lee, December 21, 1776, 7:543.

<sup>72</sup> For an overview of these victories at Trenton and Princeton, see Edward Lengel and Mark Lender, “The Middle Theater: The Decisive Front of Independence,” in *Theaters of the American Revolution*, eds., James Kirby Martin and David Preston, 60-65.

<sup>73</sup> Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1964), 172-73.

<sup>74</sup> James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 3, 5, 18, 31, 56-57, 59, 63, 90; Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 190, citing Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 68, 89, 206. One result of the declining enrollment numbers was Washington’s campaign for a standing army, initially a detested concept that went against the fundamental ideals of freedom and liberty, but which became “central to the process of constructing a specific form of well-ordered republicanism.” Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 3, 5, 18, 31, 56-57, 59, 63, 90;



enthusiasm that had been prevalent before the Battle of Long Island.”<sup>75</sup> The patriotic sense of duty, or the “rage militaire,” had deteriorated by 1776.<sup>76</sup> The decline in American enlistments and “rage militaire,” but the continued increase in privateers, makes the numbers of privateers more noteworthy and further demonstrates the significance of privateering in the war.

In the second year of the war, army enlistments decreased, and navy enrollments remained low, yet the number of privateers rose. Did they do so under the guise of patriotism or because of it? Historians have based mariners’ motivations during the American Revolution on different factors. Jesse Lemisch argued that seamen were not “simply irrational fellows who moved only when others manipulated them,” but were more likely men with minds of their own and “genuine reasons to act.”<sup>77</sup> Paul Gilje portrayed them as neither class-conscious nor patriot. They were “living for the moment.”<sup>78</sup> The evidence in this study leads to similar conclusions. During war, privateers chose a lucrative profession rather than serving in the army or navy. While it is challenging to determine whether privateers served to advance the revolutionary cause or to make money, they preferred a profit-making business over military service. These were personal, individual choices in negotiating their way through revolution.<sup>79</sup>

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O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 190, citing Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 68, 89, 206.

<sup>75</sup> Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 63.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 3, 30, citing Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and the American Character, 1775-1783*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 24.

<sup>77</sup> Jesse Lemisch, “Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 3, (July 1968), 371-407, 401, 407.

<sup>78</sup> Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), xiii.

<sup>79</sup> Marcus Rediker determined the lure for eighteenth-century pirates as being class-conscious. Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* and *Villains of All Nations*.

The decision of so many colonists to privateer ended in devastation for their communities. The most drastic British response to American privateering was employing a “lay waste” strategy and calls for a scorched-earth approach began appearing in 1775. British officers chastised their commanders for not responding aggressively enough to American privateers. Those criticisms persuaded British officials to employ a “lay waste” strategy to penalize privateers. In one case, General John Burgoyne’s damning critique of Admiral Graves to Lord George Germain, close advisor to King George, condemned Graves for failing to stop colonial privateers. Burgoyne expected Graves to pursue privateers and burn towns in retaliation for American privateers targeting the British Crown’s ships and sailors. Burgoyne thought Graves surely would have reacted by “cannon and laying the towns in ashes which refuse his terms — Alas!”<sup>80</sup> Burgoyne complained that Graves instead succumbed to “pitiful attentions and quaker-like scruples,” and treated his enemy with “righteousness and peace.”<sup>81</sup> Burgoyne wanted Graves to react more forcefully against privateers by leveling privateer ports by cannon and fire.<sup>82</sup>

Other officers wanted retribution against privateers and criticized Graves’s failure to respond more harshly to them. After colonial whaleboats “from well-known towns on the coasts,” attacked islands and burned a lighthouse within sight of a British convoy, British officers asked why there were no orders for “laying the towns in ashes where boats had been furnished, privateers

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<sup>80</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Major General John Burgoyne to Lord George Germain, August 20, 1775, 1:1190.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> A long-held notion of why the British lost the war is the incompetence or inaction of its political and military leaders. One of the most oft-repeated theories is that the Howe Brothers wanted reconciliation with the American colonies and “felt some sympathy for American grievances” and that the brothers worried that brutality would “alienate the Americans and set the stage for yet another civil war in the years ahead.” Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 52.

fitted out, prizes carried in, or provisions refused.”<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, burning boats and towns became a favored response to privateering.

At the end of 1775, Parliament debated the propriety of a “lay waste” strategy. Member of the House of Commons, David Hartley, warned that it could backfire. He questioned whether, as their towns burned and their ships and property taken or destroyed, colonials “will sit with their arms folded, or whether they will not be driven to repel injury by injury.”<sup>84</sup> Hartley was not the only one concerned. Sir Henry Clinton believed that the purpose of the American war was not to commit cruelty, but “to gain the hearts and subdue the minds of the people.”<sup>85</sup> Hartley also suspected that, as many in Parliament, “the nation is not with that war.”<sup>86</sup> Hartley’s suspicion had merit. The next month a London newspaper reported on Britons’ sympathy toward seventy-five Americans brought into Portsmouth, England, on a captured privateer. Residents there gathered to witness these prisoners disembark and collected money for their support during their imprisonment.<sup>87</sup>

As Admiral Graves was being judged by his peers and subordinates, he ordered the destruction of American privateering bases. In September 1775, Graves wrote of his intent to

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<sup>83</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Lord Rochford to Lord Sandwich, September 8, 1775, 2:708-09. Whaleboats used for whale fishing were similar to row boats, 30-feet or more in length, “sharp at either end,” and powered by between “two to ten pairs of oars.” Frederic Gregory Mather, *The Refugees of 1776 from Long Island to Connecticut* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Co., Printers, 1913), 220.

<sup>84</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, David Hartley’s Remarks in the House of Commons against the Prohibitory Act, December 21, 1775, 3:437-38.

<sup>85</sup> Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 52.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, *London Chronicle*, Tuesday, January 9 to Thursday, January 11, 1776, 3:503; Extract of a letter from Portsmouth [England], January 7, 1776, 3:484.

retaliate against the “scourge the inhabitants” of coastal communities home to privateers.<sup>88</sup> He commanded Captains James Wallace and John Collins of the *Rose* and the *Nautilus* to “take, burn, sink, and destroy all and every *pirate* or rebel you meet in arms whether on shore or at sea; and you are to do your utmost to lay waste and destroy every town or place from whence *pirates* are fitted out.”<sup>89</sup> Privateers that Britain exploited during colonization and wars were branded as pirates. Whether British military encountered American privateers on the ocean or on land, Britain’s response would be the same—decimating privateering ships and communities. The British Crown committed a great deal of energy and resources to do so.

American privateers’ actions motivated Britain to set fire to privateers and their home ports. Because the four New England colonies were “in open avowed rebellion against his Majesty,” Admiral Graves ordered an attack on their coastal towns.<sup>90</sup> Graves directed Lieutenant Henry Mowat to sail to Massachusetts’ Cape Ann harbor, where residents attacked the HMS *Falcon*. To respond, Graves wanted Mowat “to burn, destroy, and lay waste the said town, together with all vessels and craft in the harbor.”<sup>91</sup> Mowat’s mission did not end there.

Graves sent Mowat on to Marblehead, Salem, Newbury Port, Portsmouth, Ipswich, Saco, and Falmouth in Casco Bay. Also on this list was Machias, Maine, where the inhabitants took the HMS *Margueretta*, captured prisoners, and killed the commanding officer. Graves demanded Mowat “go to all or to as many of the above-named places, as you can, and make the most

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<sup>88</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Narrative of Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, September 1, 1775, 1:1282; Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Captain Edward Le Cras, H.M.S. *Somerset*, September 4, 1775, 2:11.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., Vice Admiral Samuel Graves's Order to Captain James Wallace, H.M.S. *Rose*, Vice Admiral Samuel Graves's Order to Captain John Collins, H.M. Sloop *Nautilus*, September 17, 1775, 2:129-31, emphasis added.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Lieutenant Henry Mowat, H.M. Armed Vessel *Canceaux*, October 6, 1775, 2:324.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

vigorous efforts to burn the towns and destroy the shipping.”<sup>92</sup> On June 2, 1775, the *Margueretta*’s crew arrived at Machias demanding lumber for British troops in Boston. Townspeople, “armed with guns, swords, axes, & pick forks,” overtook them, killed its captain, and confiscated the cannons and arms.<sup>93</sup> These weapons were used to refit other privateers. Although the residents prevented any burning, Graves’ “lay waste” tactic became a lasting policy.

The British attack on Machias, which followed with an attack on Falmouth, Maine, foreshadowed the fate of Connecticut’s privateering ports. Twelve days after the conflict at Machias, Mowat led a strike on Falmouth. Mowat sent a two-hour warning for the town to submit or else “a Red Pendant will be hoisted.”<sup>94</sup> Residents refused. The HMS *Canceaux* and accompanying vessels fired on the town, demolishing the north side. Witnesses described how the houses burned down, one by one, like a row of dominos. When the fire failed to engulf the south side of town, British sailors landed onshore, and set fire to those structures. The residents’ future was stark. Inhabitants, now homeless during an unusually early and brutal winter, “went out poor

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<sup>92</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Lieutenant Henry Mowat, H.M. Armed Vessel *Canceaux*, October 6, 1775, 2:324.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., James Lyons, Chairman of the Machias Committee, to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, June 14, 1775, 1:677; Narrative of Daniel Tucker of Falmouth, October 18, 1775, 2:500-01; Pearson Jones’ Certificate Concerning The Burning of Falmouth, October 24, 1775, 2:590-92; Major General William Howe to Lord Dartmouth, November 27, 1775, 2:1155-56; see also Edgar Stanton Maclay, *History of American Privateers*, (New York: The D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 52-65.

<sup>94</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Lt. Henry Mowat to the People of Falmouth, October 16, 1775, 2:471.

and had to live among a people as poor as themselves.”<sup>95</sup> The destruction was overwhelming—500 houses burned, and fourteen vessels captured without a single British casualty.<sup>96</sup>

American privateers remained problematic for the British after Falmouth’s firing. Sir George Collier, senior naval commander, and future co-leader of the Connecticut raids of 1779 and 1781, told Lieutenant Henry Mowat, that destroying “*piratical* privateers of the rebels is to be one of your principal objects.”<sup>97</sup> To carry out of that mission, Collier gave Mowat several directives. Collier instructed Mowat to keep rebels from being resupplied through New England ports, to destroy American privateers, and to do all that he could to protect British trade.<sup>98</sup> The assignment and instructions indicate how much American privateers annoyed the British.

Privateering ports were at great risk of British attack. Despite the danger, the number of Connecticut privateers increased. In July 1777, Andrew Huntington told his brother Joshua that the “enemy have determined to burn and destroy all the towns on the seashore that they can come at. It is most likely they will soon be at New London.”<sup>99</sup> Three months later, the *General Putnam*, the *General Mifflin*, the *Two Brothers*, and the *Polly* were some of the privateers outfitted. That next February, Nathaniel Shaw owned interests in the *Trumbull*, *American*

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<sup>95</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Narrative of Daniel Tucker of Falmouth, October 18, 1775, 2:500-501.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, Major General William Howe to Lord Dartmouth, November 27, 1775, 2:1155-56.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., Sir George Collier to Captain Henry Mowat, R.N., October 24, 1776, 6:1393, emphasis added. Collier became commodore and commander-in-chief of the North American station in April 1779.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society*, Vol. XX, Huntington Papers, Correspondence of the Brothers Joshua and Jedediah Huntington during the period of the American Revolution (Hartford: The Hartford Printing Company, 1923), Andrew Huntington to Joshua Huntington, July 14, 1777, 350.

*Revenue*, *Revenge*, and *Nancy*.<sup>100</sup> Shaw published newspaper ads to recruit seamen and relied on the appeal of serving on a privateer. An announcement for his *American Revenue* read: “This is the PRIVATEER. To all Gentlemen Volunteers, who are desirous of making their FORTUNES.”<sup>101</sup> An ad for the *Nancy* called for “GENTLEMEN Volunteers, who are desirous of serving their country and at the same time making their fortunes, an opportunity is now presented them on board the privateer brig *NANCY*.”<sup>102</sup> Connecticut privateer, the *Beaver*, was publicized as “fitting for a Cruise” for all “Gentlemen Volunteers that have a mind to ship.”<sup>103</sup>

Throughout the summer of 1778, Connecticut privateers continued to bring British prizes into the same ports that would soon be raided by the British. Admiral Howe wrote to the Admiralty Secretary of how Connecticut privateer, the *Nancy*, captured a ship coming from England and brought it into New London. Another Connecticut privateer, the *Suffolk*, brought

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<sup>100</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Isaac Sears to Thomas Shaw, November 5, 1777, fn.1, 10:402; Isaac Sears to Thomas Shaw, November 25, 1777, fn.1, 10:595; General Mifflin, Captain Richard Deshon to Nathaniel Shaw Jr., Stonington, October 14, 1777, fns. 3-4, 10:153; *Connecticut Gazette*, Friday, October 17, 1777, 10:192; *Connecticut Journal*, Wednesday, October 29, 1777, 10:341; Nathaniel Shaw, Jr. to Patrick Moore, February 26, 1778, 11:437-38; Advertisement for Seamen for the Connecticut Privateer Brigantine *Nancy*, *Connecticut Gazette*, March 27, 1778, 11:803. Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., owned and operated not less than ten armed vessels during the war, in addition to his merchant vessels. Commissioned in April 1778, iron for the *General Putnam* came from the Salisbury furnace. It took fourteen prizes. The privateer was burned in the Penobscot expedition to prevent it from falling into British hands. Ernest E. Rogers, *Connecticut's Naval Office at New London During the War of the American Revolution* (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 1933), 54-55. Benedict Arnold owned an interest in Connecticut privateer *General McDougall* commissioned in April 1778. Three years later, he would lead the raid on Connecticut's most productive privateering port, New London. Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Trial and Verdict in Admiralty Court of Nova Scotia in case of Connecticut Privateer Ship *General McDougall*, July 13, 1778, 13:365, fn1.

<sup>101</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, *Connecticut Gazette*, January 29, 1778, 10:230.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., *Connecticut Gazette*, Advertisement for Seamen for the Connecticut Privateer Brigantine *Nancy*, March 27, 1778, 11:803.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., *Connecticut Gazette*, Advertisement for Seamen for Connecticut Privateer Sloop *Beaver*, June 17, 1778, 13:136.

three prizes into New Haven. Nathaniel Shaw's privateers, the *American Revenue* and *Revenge*, took British ship, the *Lovely-Lass*, which was being guarded by a two-ship protection convoy. Together, Connecticut privateer *Revenge* and Rhode Island privateer *Industrious Bee* brought in the HMS *Success* into New London.<sup>104</sup>

The practice of privateering kept the attention of General Washington, and he continued to advocate for the use of Connecticut's privateers. In 1778, he wrote to the governors of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts that "I am so fully convinced of the advantages that will result from having all our frigates, privateers, and armed vessels of every kind cruising off the east end of Long Island, that I have taken the liberty of mentioning it again to you."<sup>105</sup> The success of American privateers satisfied Washington to the extent that three years into the war, he continued to see their usefulness.

The skill and extent of American privateers was felt by Britain on the North American seaboard and on its home coasts. British reports agreed that "New England produces as fine and brave sailors as old England," and that New England privateers took three-fourths of prizes since the war started.<sup>106</sup> The British recognized that rebel privateers "have kept us in sufficient play on their own coasts, and now, they even venture to assail ours."<sup>107</sup> In the shadow of two British war ships, two American privateers patrolled Ireland's coast hunting transport ships meant for

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<sup>104</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Vice Admiral Viscount Howe to Secretary of the Admiralty Philip Stephens, July 18, 1778, 13:428, fn.6; *The Connecticut Gazette; and the Universal Intelligencer*, July 3, 1778, 13:253; *The Connecticut Gazette; and the Universal Intelligencer*, June 12, 1778, 13:96-97; *Connecticut Journal*, July 8, 1778, 13:312; Nathaniel Shaw, Jr. to Governor Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut, July 13, 1778, 13:366, fn. 5; *The Connecticut Gazette; and the Universal Intelligencer*, May 8, 1778, 12:297-98.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., General George Washington to Governor Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut, July 18, 1778, 13:427.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., *Public Advertiser*, Friday, July 19, 1776, 6:480; *Whitehall Evening Post*, Saturday, November 9 to Tuesday, November 12, 1776, 7:736.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., *Public Advertiser*, Thursday, May 15, 1777, 8:847.



General Howe.<sup>108</sup> Out of a fleet of 118, forty-four British ships returned to England, and it was thought that many of the missing vessels had “fallen into the hands of the Americans.”<sup>109</sup> British citizens felt panic because of the influx of American privateers in the area. A resident of Whitehaven, England wrote, “I believe no time last war were the people on this coast half so frightened as they have been lately on the appearance of the American privateers.”<sup>110</sup>

### Conclusion

The American privateers proved a great success. The magnitude and efficacy of privateering, and how it distressed the British, establishes its greater role in the U.S. victory over Britain in the American Revolution. Calculations of the number of American privateer ships in the war vary. Some scholars say that 1,700 privateers disrupted British supply lines. Some sources estimate that 142 privateers were fitted out in the first two years of the war, that number exploding to 449 by 1781. Others claim that privateers captured seven British ships for every one American vessel lost. Other evidence shows tens of thousands of Americans became privateers in the war. Irrespective of precise numbers, the evidence is overwhelming that those privateers had a significant impact on the outcome of the American Revolution.<sup>111</sup>

The number of American privateers is also unexpected considering the dismal numbers of American men enlisting in the Continental army or navy. The belief that the U.S. needed a substantial navy to win the war was not necessarily the case. The Continental navy was “a

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<sup>108</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, *Public Advertiser*, January 6, 1777, 8:512.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., *Public Advertiser*, Saturday, November 9, 1776, 7:734.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., Extract of a Letter from Whitehaven, July 15, 1777, 9:498.

<sup>111</sup> Wils, “In Behalf of the Continent,” Abstract; Maclay, *History of American Privateers*, 69, 113; Reuben Elmore Stivers, *Privateers & Volunteers: The Men and Women of our Reserve Naval Forces, 1766-1866*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1975), 25. Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Foreword by President Bill Clinton, 10:vii; O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 21, 178.

modest naval program.”<sup>112</sup> On the other hand, Congress issued as much as 1,607 letters of marque for privateers during the war while approximately 70,000 men signed on. This number dwarfs the roughly 3,000 who served in the new navy, which at its peak had fifty-three ships, but never more than eight sailing at a time.<sup>113</sup> A strong navy never materialized. Instead, men became privateers, playing a crucial function in the war.

American privateers excelled against a superior British navy making privateers’ contributions striking. In the early summer of 1776, a “flotilla of unparalleled proportions set sail for America.”<sup>114</sup> Admiral Richard Howe appeared off the New York coast on July 12 with close to 150 war ships, 10,000 seamen, and 11,000 troops. Another group of 2,000 men and forty-five ships landed in August.<sup>115</sup> The size of the British fleet and the British navy and army, compared to the Americans’, makes the success of American privateering impressive.<sup>116</sup>

American privateers affected the administration of war in many aspects. British supplies were redirected from the British to the Americans. British vessels were taken and refitted as

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<sup>112</sup> Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 147.

<sup>113</sup> Leonard Szaltis, *Chesapeake Bay Privateers in the Revolution*, (Charleston, S.C: The History Press, 2019), 40, citing Charles R. Lampman, “Privateers of the Revolution,” *SAR Magazine*, 106, no. 4, (Spring 2011): 21.

<sup>114</sup> Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 50.

<sup>115</sup> O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 92, citing to Mackesy, *The War for America* 102; Gruber, *The Howe Brothers*, 135; and Bowler, *Logistics*, 64-65, 71.

<sup>116</sup> Scholars disagree on Britain’s naval superiority in the war. George Billias claimed that the Royal Navy held “undisputed control in North American waters the first three years.” Billias, *George Washington’s Opponents*, xix. James K. Martin and Mark Lender maintained that many of the 130 British war vessels were in extreme disrepair and lacked manpower. Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 48, 50. Andrew O’Shaughnessy asserted that Howe had just “fifteen spare ships” on the Atlantic coast explaining why Howe failed to execute a blockade, launch raids along the coast of New England, and provide back-up support to the land forces. O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 103. Ibid., 177, 103-104, citing David Syrett, *Admiral Lord Howe*, (Naval Institute Press, 2006), 63; 177; see also Gruber, *The Howe Brothers*, 102, 136, 139-41, 157. Billias, *George Washington’s Opponents*, xiv-v, xix-xxi, xxxii. Regardless of the number of British ships and sailors, it was vastly more than what the Americans had.

American privateers. Rebel privateers also provided a sea force the Americans needed in place of a navy, which never fully developed.

Britain's response to American privateers was multi-pronged. The Royal Navy surveilled New England and Connecticut coastal communities. Britain redesigned ships to compete with privateers. The British navy resisted deploying their ships at the sight of privateers. The British also set fire to privateers' communities, destroying the vessels and the means to produce them, and civilians' homes. The British Crown elected not just to attack, but to "take, burn, sink, and destroy" privateering ports.<sup>117</sup>

Machias and Falmouth were early examples of Britain's devastating policy against privateering communities. British leaders kept implementing the strategy before striking at Connecticut in 1779. The year before the British raids on Connecticut's privateering ports, the British attacked Egg Harbor, New Jersey, home to thirty armed American privateers. On October 6, 1778, Sir Henry Clinton, now Commander Clinton, forwarded a force there "to destroy a nest of privateers, which had done us a great deal of mischief."<sup>118</sup> The British devastated "fortifications, houses, and supplies."<sup>119</sup> Several privateers escaped. Those that remained were

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<sup>117</sup> Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, Vice Admiral Samuel Graves's Order to Captain James Wallace, H.M.S. *Rose*, Vice Admiral Samuel Graves's Order to Captain John Collins, H.M. Sloop *Nautilus*, September 17, 1775, 2:129-31.

<sup>118</sup> Joseph A. Wroblewski, "The Affair at Egg Harbor: Massacre of the Pulaski Legion," *Journal of the American Revolution*, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2017/10/affair-egg-harbor-massacre-pulaski-legion/>, citing Henry Clinton, *The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of his Campaigns, 1775-1782, With Appendix of Original Documents* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 105.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* Connecticut's interior was attacked when Danbury was fired on one year before Egg Harbor. William Tryon, co-leader of the 1779 raids, landed near Fairfield and Norwalk on April 25, 1777, with 2,000 men. The British received "little opposition," killing five and taking a few prisoners. The British found "the greatest magazine the rebels had ever collected" and recovered large amounts of meat, flour, and rum. After destroying what the rebels hid, the British "left the town in flames," burning homes where rebels were believed to have fired from. The Americans inside perished. At Danbury, the casualty count was lopsided with seventy British

burned or scuttled by the Americans. Just as Britain “laid waste” to the privateering haven of Egg Harbor, the same destruction comes to Connecticut privateering ports in the summer of 1779. Connecticut prioritized privateering and it will pay a high price.

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and 300 patriots dead. Admiral Howe made no comment on the burning of the town. This is akin to what happens in the 1779 and 1781 raids. See *Collections*, Vol. XX, Huntington Papers, Jonathan Trumbull to Jabez Huntington, April 27, 1777, 59; Mather, *The Refugees of 1776*, 225; Clark and Morgan, et al., eds., NDAR, A British Officer’s Account of the Danbury Raid, April 21-28, 1777, 8:455-57; Vice Admiral Richard Lord Howe to Phillip Stephens, May 18, 1777, 8:407-409.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONNECTICUT UNDER ASSAULT: THE RAIDS OF 1779

Since the beginning of the American Revolution, the extent and effectiveness of American privateers out of New England and Connecticut disrupted Britain's operations, supplies, and trade. Connecticut's privateering activities particularly held the attentions of Britain's military officers and political advisors. Since 1775, Admiral Graves openly exhibited frustration and disgust toward American privateers by ordering his naval captains to "burn and destroy" those ports along the Connecticut coast that engaged in privateering. From 1776 to 1777, the Royal Navy watched and pursued Connecticut privateers around New Haven, Fairfield, Norwalk, and New London. In the year and a half leading up to the devastating raids on the Connecticut coastline in July of 1779, Lord George Germain and Commander Henry Clinton corresponded specifically about destroying privateering ports and their ability to produce more privateers.<sup>1</sup>

Britain's irritation with American privateers turned to something more extreme. The concern came to a boiling point for Connecticut's coastal communities who received the brunt of

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<sup>1</sup> William Bell Clark and William James Morgan, et al., eds., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, (hereinafter referred to as "NDAR") (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, Dept. of the Navy, 1964), <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/publications/publications-by-subject/naval-documents-of-the-american-revolution.html>, 13 vols., Captain James Wallace, R.N. to Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, *Rose*, Rhode Island, June 19, 1775, 1:720; *New-England Chronicle*, Thursday, August 29, 1776, 6:346-47; *Providence Gazette*, May 10, 1777, 8:945; *Boston Gazette*, Monday, May 12, 1777; Diary of Frederick Mackenzie, December 6, 1776, 7:386-87; 7:1340; Vice Admiral Viscount Howe to Secretary of the Admiralty Philip Stephens, July 18, 1778, 13:428, fn.6; Lord George Germain to General William Howe, February 18, 1778, 11:1016-17; Paul David Nelson, *William Tryon and the Course of Empire* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 148, 150, 157-58, 163-64, 168-69.

Britain's fury in the summer of 1779. That fury did not discriminate and the ensuing violence shocked.<sup>2</sup>

First-hand accounts detail the indiscriminatory violence of the raids against Connecticut privateering ports and their residents. The British targeted all groups, military and civilian, male and female, young and old, often ignoring acts of surrender and pleas for mercy. Rebels wounded by gunshot were finished off by bayonets. British soldiers committed a variety of heinous crimes against civilians, including murder and sexual assault. Female residents testified to escaping efforts to violate their "chastity,"<sup>3</sup> but also to soldiers having their "will."<sup>4</sup> Other instances of violence involve the slaying of a reverend, the killing of a gentleman in the doorway of his home, the beating and cutting out the tongue of a mentally impaired man, and the murder of an old man, who in his own home and in front of his daughter, was run through with a sword.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas J. Farnham, "The Day the Enemy was in Town," *Journal of the New Haven Colony Historical Society*, Summer 1976, No. 1, 15. Traditionally, scholarship has idealized, may be even sanitized, the Revolutionary War. The concept of *jus en bello*, or "just war," developed and has been used to characterize and venerate the American Revolution. More recently, scholars expose the actual violent consequences and results of this war. This dissertation follows in that mold. For the seminal work on *jus en bello* see Emer de Vattel, *The Law of Nations: or Principles of the Law of Nature, Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns, with Three Early Essays on the Origin and Nature of Natural Law and on Luxury*, (Indianapolis: IN, Liberty Fund, 1758, 2006); see also Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin. "Target New London: Benedict Arnold's Raid, Just War, and 'Homegrown Terror' Reconsidered," *Journal of Military History*, 82, No. 4 (2018); James Kirby Martin, "A Contagion of Violence: The Ideal of *Jus En Bello* Versus the Realities of Fighting on the New York Frontier During the Revolutionary War," *Journal of Military Ethics*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 57-73 (April 2015); and Wayne E. Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1865*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 107, 187-89, 191, 210.

<sup>3</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, (Washington: National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1958-59), Deposition of Rose Luke, July 27, 1779.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Deposition of Christiana Gatter, July 26, 1779.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Hervey Townshend, *The British Invasion of New Haven, Connecticut: Together with some Account of their Landing and Burning the Towns of Fairfield and Norwalk, July 1779*, (New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, Printers, 1879), 2, 16, 22, 27; Farnham, "The Day the

Beyond the physical violence, the British burned, plundered, and destroyed homes, and killed livestock. No one and nothing were immune from British hostility toward those living in Connecticut privateering ports like New Haven, Fairfield, and Norwalk. Even loyalists suffered, making post-war claims to the British government for damages to property. This chapter details the 1779 assaults on those towns. The ferocity of the raids illustrates the impact that privateering had on the British war effort, demonstrates how colonials navigated their way through revolution, and puts the violent nature of war on full display.<sup>6</sup>

Connecticut privateers plagued the British throughout the war and in return, Britain targeted Connecticut. Spared from attacks since the 1777 assault on Danbury, the British redeployed to Connecticut in 1779. As Britain's military leaders complained about privateers, Britain's Secretary of State for America, Lord Germain, advocated for destruction of privateering bases.<sup>7</sup> Admiral Richard Howe protested that his fleet was not big enough to support the army and to control American privateers. Vice Admiral Collier noted how American privateers had nearly wrecked British trade traveling through the Long Island Sound.<sup>8</sup> In the same letter that Germain accepted Commander William Howe's resignation, Germain pushed Howe to go to the seaports of Massachusetts's Bay, Connecticut, and New Hampshire and destroy "their ships of

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Enemy was in Town," 31, 48; *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Sarah Townsend, July 26, 1779.

<sup>6</sup> For loyalist claims, see Papers and Records of the American Loyalist Claims Commission, Great Britain Audit Office, David Library of the American Revolution.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of protests, see Clark et al., eds., NDAR, Lords Commissions to Captains John Brooks, R.N. and Francis Reynolds, R.N., February 1, 1777, 8:558; Lord Commissioners, Admiralty, to Captain John Jervis, R.N., and Capt. Joshua Rowley, R.N., April 7, 1777, 8:747. For Lord Germain's request, see NDAR, Lord George Germain to General Sir William Howe, February 18, 1778, 11: 1016-17.

<sup>8</sup> Ira D. Gruber, "Richard Lord Howe: Admiral as Peacemaker" in *George Washington's Opponents: Generals and Admirals in the American Revolution*, (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1969), George Athan Billias, ed., 246; Farnham, "The Day the Enemy was in Town," 15.

war and privateers, by which the trade of this kingdom has been so greatly annoyed, and incapacitating them from fitting out others with the like intent.”<sup>9</sup> After Commander Howe resigned, Germain instructed Howe’s replacement, Sir Henry Clinton, the year before the Connecticut raids, to strike the coasts of New England and destroy American privateers and colonists’ ways of fitting out more privateers. Clinton ordered New York’s last loyalist governor, William Tryon, to descend onto the Connecticut coast, including New Haven and Fairfield, to demolish privateers and munitions stored there. They did that and more. Connecticut residents received no sympathy.<sup>10</sup> The British hit New Haven, Fairfield, and Norwalk in a series of fiery raids at the beginning of July 1779 on the heels of New Haven’s planned Independence celebration.

Henry Clinton showed great promise under William Howe but became a cautious and hesitant commander. For some historians, he underperformed. Much of the criticism stemmed from Clinton’s inability to carry out plans and his petty personality conflicts with officers including Generals Guy Carleton and Charles Cornwallis. Clinton excused military shortcomings on lack of men and supplies. At times, he claimed that his troops had only four days of food, and that the Royal Navy could not escort supply ships, leaving them vulnerable to privateers, and his troops open to starvation.<sup>11</sup> John Ferling’s 2021 article on Clinton gives a more favorable

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<sup>9</sup> Clark et al., eds., NDAR, Lord George Germain to General Sir William Howe, February 18, 1778, 11: 1016-17.

<sup>10</sup> George Germain to Sir Henry Clinton, January 23, 1779, George Sackville Germain papers, Box/Vol. 18, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan; Nelson, *William Tryon and the Course of Empire*, 148, 150, 157-58, 163-64, 168-69.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 224; Billias, ed., *George Washington’s Opponents*, xvii. Taking over in 1778, Clinton commanded fewer troops than Howe, had one-third of naval support, all while contending with France. By that summer, Clinton advised that he required an additional 15,000. He found himself subject to a priority shift. Ordered to send thousands to the Caribbean and Canada, he received just 4,700 reinforcements and watched as naval support left for the West Indies. O’Shaughnessy, *The Men*



assessment of the commander and provides several reasons for that view. Ferling's analysis of Clinton focuses on practical matters, rather than what he describes as unwarranted speculation of Clinton's psyche. Ferling supports Clinton's complaints of "manpower challenges."<sup>12</sup> According to Ferling, the significance of the French entering the war and Clinton's southern successes in Savannah and Charleston, showed Clinton's strategies were a combination of "bold action and prudent caution."<sup>13</sup> Ferling turned the blame on Germain for failing to send two thousand troops to Yorktown. Here, the evidence backs those interpretations. Clinton targeted privateers and their ports, which caused a great deal of havoc, but was affected by governmental and commercial interests in the West Indies and their subsequent interference into war policy.<sup>14</sup>

British leaders contended with conflicting military objectives and competing policies. The British government concentrated on protecting West Indian colonies, as Commander Clinton focused on the North American mainland. One strategy was to induce George Washington to leave the protection of encampments and fight in the countryside. Lord Germain believed that without Washington, colonial support for the war would fall apart. Germain also supported raiding the North American Atlantic coast to address the American privateer problem. Clinton

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*Who Lost America*, 227-228, 212, fn. 43, citing William B. Willcox, ed., *The American Rebellion*, (New Haven: Yale Hist. Pubs, Manuscripts and Edited Texts, XXI, 1954), 84-85, 107, 211, 216-19.

<sup>12</sup> John Ferling, "Sir Henry Clinton's Generalship," *Journal of the American Revolution*, April 27, 2021, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2021/04/sir-henry-clintons-generalship/>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* After indecisive victories in New England, thought to be the "center of rebellion," King George and Lord Germain stayed resolute in going on the offensive, but decided to move that to the southern colonies. Reasons for the geographic shift include the perceived larger support base of loyalists, Indian allies, and slaves in that region. The strategy ultimately failed based on that the British did not follow through with firming up and properly using this support base and the rebels "remaining persistent in the face of defeat," and winning "a war of attrition." Jim Piecuch, "The Southern Theater: Britain's Last Chance for Victory" in *Theaters of the American Revolution*, (Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2017), eds., James Kirby Martin and David L. Preston, 90, 137.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

had mixed feelings about the effectiveness of attacking colonial communities. On the one hand, he heard objections from his men of the extent that rebel privateers threatened British supply lines. On the other hand, he hesitated for fear that coastal raids would embolden colonists' mutiny against the Crown.<sup>15</sup>

Fear of alienating colonists was a reasonable concern. This concern started from the very beginning of the war. The Howe brothers believed that being overly aggressive would incite a deeper devotion to the revolutionary cause among the American colonists. In his book on violence in the American Revolution, Holger Hock found this trepidation valid. Hock noted how the British decision to embrace "violence, far from terrifying rebellious colonials into submission, seemed instead to fan the flames of insurrection."<sup>16</sup> But Lord Germain remained convinced that raiding would slow privateers, cripple the American economy, and provide the best opportunity to defeat militia and return those areas "to their allegiance."<sup>17</sup> The British needed to prevent the Americans from gaining too much power on the seas and from stifling British trade. Germain wrote that to do so, they needed to wage war against privateers. The next spring and summer, Clinton ordered the strikes on Connecticut's coast in July.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Farnham, "The Day the Enemy was in Town," 13-15, citing to Henry Clinton papers, letters by Germain dated September 27, 1779; George Germain to Sir Henry Clinton, January 23, 1779, George Sackville Germain papers, Box/Vol. 18, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan; O'Shaughnessy, *The Men who Lost America*, 227-228.

<sup>16</sup> Holger Hock, *Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth*, (New York: Crown, 2017), 90.

<sup>17</sup> George Germain to Sir Henry Clinton, November 4, 1778, Germain Sackville papers, Box/Vol. 18, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., George Germain to Sir Henry Clinton November 7, 1778; Farnham, "The Day the Enemy was in Town," 13-15. Historians believed that Clinton "hoped to lure Washington away from his safe position on the Hudson and defeat him decisively." Also influencing Clinton was Connecticut's involvement in an "active supply effort" to attack British trade in the Sound by New Haven privateers. Albert E. Van Dusen, *Connecticut*, (New York: Random House, 1961) p. 167, citing Willcox, ed., *The American Rebellion*, p. xxxi.

Six months prior to the summer of 1779, Lord Germain became increasingly committed to conducting raids on privateering ports. He advised the King of the need for a division of 4,000 men and a naval presence on the coasts of New England and New Hampshire, and another such regiment to the Chesapeake Bay. Clinton gave command of the Connecticut raids to William Tryon and Sir George Collier. Before Connecticut, Tryon gained plenty of experience with raids, burning parts of Tarrytown, New York, and Haverstraw, New Jersey.<sup>19</sup> In February 1779, John Davenport from Stamford, Connecticut wrote that leading 15,000 men, “Mr. Tryon the plunderer” paid Horseneck, New York a visit.<sup>20</sup> The raiders took out the town’s salt kettles, a large schooner, a small sloop, stole residents’ clothing, furniture, and necessities, and “beat the houses and windows to pieces.”<sup>21</sup> Davenport described it as “a scene of desolation.”<sup>22</sup> A Connecticut paper reported how residents chased the enemy out of town and forced them to abandon three cannon. The residents could not stop the British from stealing 200 cattle. This British military behavior grew worse with Connecticut’s 1779 raids. After initially dismissing a

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<sup>19</sup> George Germain to Sir Henry Clinton, January 23, 1779, George Sackville Germain papers, Box/Vol. 18, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan. Tryon assumed the war would easily end within a year after it started. In December 1775, he felt that even with the Continentals’ early victories, “the spirit of rebellion in this colony, especially in the city of New York, is abated.” William Tryon to Sir Henry Clinton, December 13, 1775, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 12, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan. A swift victory did not appear for the British. After Washington’s 1776 Christmas victory at Trenton, Tryon touted a more forceful approach. Over the course of the next three years, he championed a “desolation warfare” strategy—first against noncombatant leaders’ property, then against American civilians in general, warning that “they shall have no quarter for time to come.” Nelson, *William Tryon and the Course of Empire*, 157, 164. After the 1779 raids, Tryon still believed in extreme, depredatory excursions to squash the rebellion. *Ibid.*, 148, 150, 157-58, 168-69.

<sup>20</sup> *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society, Correspondence of the Brothers Joshua and Jedediah Huntington during the Period of the American Revolution*, (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1923), Vol. 20, John Davenport to Joshua Huntington, February 28, 1779, 123-24.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

plan to set fire to towns, Clinton approved a devastating campaign against Connecticut privateering ports. Connecticut Governor Trumbull's long-time fears of attack were about to be realized.<sup>23</sup>

Connecticut leaders and residents expected New London to be Britain's first target. In March 1779, Governor Trumbull directed Jabez Huntington of the state militia to travel to the coastal town and ready it for an assault. Trumbull also ordered all vessels secured in the harbor and the removal of any cannon. On the same day, privateer, Captain John Deshon, who worked with Nathaniel Shaw, wrote from New London to Joshua Huntington of an expedition by Clinton against New London and asked for bread and other provisions to aid in their defense.<sup>24</sup>

Intelligence obtained by the British reveals the reconnaissance and preparation for raids on Connecticut privateering ports. Three months before the first raid at New Haven, David Carrol and Native American, David Nonsuch, provided valuable information to the British of privateering and fortification efforts at New London. Both men had various incentives for helping the British. Carrol and his family had recently left their home in Simsbury, Connecticut because of the "persecution he met with for not bearing arms against his majesty."<sup>25</sup> Carrol hired Nonsuch, a member of the Nehantic tribe, to accompany him across the Sound to New York City to deliver supplies to the British. Nonsuch worried whether his people were safe to stay at their

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<sup>23</sup> *The Connecticut Courant and the Weekly Intelligencer*, March 2, 1779, 2; Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1964), 270.

<sup>24</sup> *Collections*, Governor Trumbull to Jabez Huntington, March 28, 1779, 130-31; John Deshon to Joshua Huntington, March 28, 1779, 131-32; Ernest E. Rogers, *Connecticut's Naval Office at New London During the War of the American Revolution*, (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 1933), 58. An article reported on March 30 that militia in the area arrived to help in "erecting some works on an advantageous eminence for the better defense of this town and harbor, in case of an attack from our unnatural enemies." *The Connecticut Courant and the Weekly Intelligencer*, March 30, 1779, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Intelligence from D. Carrol, April 11, 1779, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 56, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

settlement, six miles west of New London, if British troops discovered them. Nonsuch also expressed concern of catching smallpox if forced to join the Continental army. The disease had already ravaged his tribe and reduced the number of families on the settlement to just sixteen.<sup>26</sup>

In light of their motivations, Carrol and Nonsuch conveyed that privateers docked in New London's harbor, and the militia was building a fort there. Nonsuch stated that there were five or six privateers, one large ship, and a prison ship that held Tories at New London. Carrol gave more specific information. He described a thirty-gun ship, thirty smaller ships, five of which were privateers. He also provided the fort location—Town Hill, approximately one mile southwest of New London.<sup>27</sup>

Five weeks before the July raids on New Haven, Fairfield, and Norwalk, Patrick Ferguson meticulously documented the harbors and the geography of the Connecticut privateering ports of Fairfield, New Haven, and New London for the British, even going so far as to provide detailed sketches. Ferguson's ending statement in his description directly connects the coming raids with privateering: "I am persuaded that a detachment from the garrison at Rhode Island would be sufficient to disable all the privateering towns of the Sound in two, three weeks."<sup>28</sup>

The Americans had their own intelligence of the British raids along the Connecticut coast, but it arrived too late. Arthur Lee, a British resident and diplomat who worked in Paris on behalf of the Americans, tried to warn the Continental Congress of Britain's intentions toward Connecticut. On April 6, 1779, he wrote of British plans to send a contingent across the Sound and

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; Intelligence from David Nonsuch, April 11, 1779, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 56, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Patrick Ferguson, Description of Part of Connecticut with a pen and ink map, May 27, 1779, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/vol. 59, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

up the Connecticut River to New Haven, all the while “having plundered, burnt, and destroyed all in their way.”<sup>29</sup> Joshua Johnson received the same information and forwarded it to Congressional Maryland delegate, William Carmichael, in the “hope it will arrive in time to prevent any mischief.”<sup>30</sup> Lee’s news arrived in Congress three months later on July 15, days after the raids. The Committee for Foreign Affairs replied to Lee on July 16, telling him that his letter failed to arrive on time. Lee’s correspondence also went to General Washington and Governor Trumbull, “but too late!...Fairfield had been destroyed by the fire of the enemy.”<sup>31</sup> Joshua Huntington wrote to his brother of the fear of British soldiers plundering Connecticut towns. His brother received the letter on July 14, nine days after that raid.<sup>32</sup>

Clinton’s summer operation against the Connecticut coast began the first week of July. Facing little opposition, Tryon and his troops took New Haven and Fairfield easily, burning ships, wharfs, and houses. Norwalk experienced the same fate, but on a much grander scale.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Arthur Lee to Continental Congress, April 6, 1779; Arthur Lee to Governor Trumbull, April 6, 1779; Joshua Johnson to William Carmichael, April 11, 1779.

<sup>30</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Joshua Johnson to William Carmichael, April 11, 1779.

<sup>31</sup> Paul H. Smith, et al., eds., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, 25 Vols. (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1976-2000), <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwdglink.html>, Committee for Foreign Affairs to Arthur Lee, July 16, 1779, 13:229-230.

<sup>32</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Joshua Huntington to Unnamed Brother, July 14, 1779.

<sup>33</sup> Mather, *Refugees of 1776*, 225, 230, 232; Townshend, *British Invasion*, 40.

**New Haven: “the only port in which the rebels have any vessels, other than New London.”<sup>34</sup>**

New Haven was the first community to experience Britain’s wrath that summer. British Admiral George Collier described it as “a spacious and a very considerable town; it has the largest university in America and might with propriety be styled the parent and nurse of rebellion.”<sup>35</sup> His characterization might correlate to the fact that leading Patriots such as John Hancock, John Adams, James Warren, James Otis, Jr., and Silas Deane, all attended Yale University. It might also be due to privateers.

Correspondence traveled furiously between Commander Clinton and Connecticut raid leaders, William Tryon and Admiral Collier. In the days leading up to the first raid, New Haven is the subject of two consecutive letters from Clinton to Tryon. Clinton instructs Tryon how to conduct the raid, and that it was imperative to complete the attack within twenty-four to forty-eight hours. Just days before the raid, Collier objected to American privateers: “The rebels are so much in force by sea, that I am very apprehensive for the Cork victuallers & every other merchantman which approaches these coasts—vessels laden with provisions are ready to sail from the Delaware under convoy of 2 or 3 frigates.”<sup>36</sup> The evidence is that leading up to July, complaints of American privateers motivated the British attack.

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<sup>34</sup> Sir Henry Clinton to William Tryon, received July 2, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 64, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>35</sup> Ithiel Town, ed., *A Detail of Some Particular Services Performed in America, During the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, and 1779*, (New York, 1835), <https://archive.org/details/detailofsome00town>, 92-93.

<sup>36</sup> Louis Leonard Tucker, “Connecticut’s Seminary of Sedition: Yale College,” in *Connecticut Bicentennial Series*, (Chester, CT: Pequot Press, 1974), Vol. 8; George Collier to Sir Henry Clinton, June 28, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 62, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

As the British planned their attack, New Haven's residents planned their Independence Day celebrations for Monday, July 5<sup>th</sup>, because July 4<sup>th</sup> fell on the sabbath. On a hot Sunday, seventy-year-old President Emeritus of Yale, Professor Naphtali Daggett, whose story became a powerful part of the raid itself, preached in Yale Chapel. After service, Dr. Daggett and Ezra Stiles sat down for a meal with congregants, and a group of students and townspeople gathered at the town meetinghouse to finalize the next day's festivities. The celebratory event would start with a military-led parade to the center of town, and end with toasts to "the new republic."<sup>37</sup> As the crowd made their way home that night, the guard on watch sounded a three-shot alarm. Residents erroneously assumed the British fleet was on to New London, or that privateers were announcing their arriving into the port with prizes.<sup>38</sup>

Admiral Collier and William Tryon prepared for the raid while onboard the *Camilla* and the *Scorpion* in New Haven's harbor. They penned a circular that explained to residents that they would receive mercy for staying in their homes and not taking up arms. The "Address to the Inhabitants of Connecticut" reeked of disrespect and contempt toward ungrateful subjects. Frustrated by colonial resistance, the Britons condemned "the frenzy which has distracted this unhappy country."<sup>39</sup> Questioning whether Connecticut's firm resolve reflected the sentiment of the other twelve colonies, the men cautioned against the colony's insistence to revolt when the rest of the country had reservations about the war. The two men mocked American revolutionaries for engaging in insurrection at the direction of "designing men, for private

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<sup>37</sup> Farnham, "The Day the Enemy was in Town," 4.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 3-4; Charles L. Cutler, "Connecticut's Revolutionary Press," in *Connecticut Bicentennial Series*, (Chester, CT: Pequot Press, 1974), Vol. 14, 50.

<sup>39</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Address to the Inhabitants of Connecticut.



purposes.”<sup>40</sup> Collier, who frequently complained about American privateers, helped author the *Address*. This cryptic quote could very well be a veiled reference to Connecticut privateers.

The British pronouncement promised to pardon all colonists who remained peaceful. For those resisting, there would be no clemency. Tryon and Collier disseminated the address as their troops attacked. Tryon brought 3,000 land forces to New Haven with him, and pledges of leniency and mercy are disputed. In his report after the raids, Tryon doubted whether the address had any effect at all.<sup>41</sup>

The only explanation given for why the British raided New Haven first was simply because it had vessels just as New London did. British ships that trolled near Connecticut’s coast provided Clinton that intelligence. New Haven privateers were such a threat that Clinton was eager for the raid to commence, telling Tryon that the “sooner you embark the better.”<sup>42</sup> Clinton believed that the best way to counteract the number of revolutionary sympathizers in town was to take Black Rock battery at the head of the harbor first, then “all becomes easy.”<sup>43</sup> He was right—the assault went quickly.

Tryon documented his recollection of the events in his report to Clinton. The fleet left Whitestone, New York on the evening of July 3, but did not reach New Haven until the morning of July 5<sup>th</sup> due to light winds. Coincidental or not, this sets July 4 as the original arrival and attack. Starting around five a.m. on the 5<sup>th</sup>, the British made two landings—William Tryon on the south side of the harbor, and General Garth on the east side of the creek. This two-landing

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Address to the Inhabitants of Connecticut; William Tryon to Sir Henry Clinton, July 20, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 64, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>42</sup> Sir Henry Clinton to William Tryon received July 2, 1779, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 64, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

approach proved so successful that it became the standard for every other British raid on the Connecticut coast. Garth marched the first division, including companies of Fusiliers, the Fifty-fourth Regiment, and Jagers, seven miles to a creek head west of town. Rebels shot with rifles from bushes and by cannon from small ships and galleys. Regardless, the British made it to shore fairly unscathed.<sup>44</sup>

Tryon with the Twenty-third Regiment, Hessian Landgraves, and the King's American Regiment marched three miles. When the enemy reached the Black Rock battery, the rebels hastily abandoned it. But as the British marched closer to town, they faced enemy fire. When Garth tried to enter town, patriots forced him to divert from an advantageous position on higher ground to the northeast of town. Tryon stood guard in the hills above the fort. The two divisions met up the next morning.<sup>45</sup>

General Garth sent a communiqué to Tryon during the landing with an update of the foray. Garth and his men suffered from high heat and a band of colonists that followed with cannon. For Garth, this alone justified taking all of the country's cattle. He planned to burn the town but rationalized it on the fact that the residents had "almost entirely deserted" the place and therefore, "merit the flames."<sup>46</sup> Garth decided to start the fires around 1:30 p.m. after securing the Neck Creek bridge. He estimated that entering and leaving would take only a few hours with little or no opposition.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Jackson Kuhl, *Samuel Smedley, Connecticut Privateer*, (Charleston: The History Press, 2011), 78; William Tryon to Sir Henry Clinton, July 20, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 64, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan; Town, ed., *Details of Some Particular Service*, 91.

<sup>45</sup> William Tryon to Sir Henry Clinton, July 20, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 64, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, George Garth to William Tryon, July 5, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 64.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

A variety of Connecticut colonists responded to the British invasion. Volunteers, including Yale students, acted as snipers, harassing the British troops as they marched closer to town. Even Aaron Burr, visiting relatives and recuperating after the Battle of Monmouth, assembled with militiamen to keep the enemy from reaching the West Bridge. The patriots dismantled the bridge as they fired at the British coming into town. At that point, the enemy confronted a sole gunman, septuagenarian and former president of Yale, Naphtali Daggett. While the British reported a relatively insignificant skirmish at New Haven, accounts of Continentals and residents told a different story.<sup>48</sup> Dramatic recollections of the raid reveal the disturbing violence suffered by defender and civilian victims alike.

Daggett described the drama in detail. He started his narrative as an “account of the cruelties and barbarities” that he received after his surrender.<sup>49</sup> Daggett positioned himself on Milford Hill, moved north when the enemy approached, but turned back down to get cover under bushes.<sup>50</sup> He found the British closer than expected, a “little more than twenty rods distant.”<sup>51</sup> The British fired between fifteen and twenty rounds as Daggett ran. Remarkably, he was not hit. Concealing himself, he had a clear view of them. He took aim at one redcoat and fired. As he reloaded, however, the British overtook him. Daggett “begged for quarter,” and his captors called him “a damned old rebel” and threatened his life.<sup>52</sup> When asked why he shot at them, Daggett said, “because it is the exercise of war.”<sup>53</sup> This angered the British soldier who then

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<sup>48</sup> Farnham, “The Day the Enemy Was in Town,” 24-25; Van Dusen, *Connecticut*, 167; William Tryon to Sir Henry Clinton, July 20, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 64, William J. Clements Library University of Michigan.

<sup>49</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Doctor Daggett’s Narrative, July 26, 1779.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> A rod, an old unit of measure used by the English, is relatively 16.5 feet. Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/science/rod-measurement>.

<sup>52</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Doctor Daggett’s Narrative, July 26, 1779.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

attempted to bayonet Daggett. Daggett blocked the blow with his hand and begged for his life. Daggett received four cuts on the head with the bayonet, which caused him to lose a profuse amount of blood. Another soldier stuck him three times on the body, though no stab proved fatal. It was not the bayonet strikes that bothered Daggett as much as the blows of the guns to his abdomen. Daggett insisted that it was the blows of the gun that hurt the most and which almost killed him.<sup>54</sup>

Daggett's torment did not end there. After surrendering his shoe, knee, and stock-buckles, a handkerchief, and an old tobacco box to the British, they forced him to march toward town another 200 yards. Interrogated as he went, Daggett implored his prisoners to stop abusing him. Instead, they drove him barefoot about five more miles. On the way, the redcoats threatened him with bayonets and cursed whoever had spared his life. Under a blazing sun, Daggett stumbled shoeless, wounded, and weak from blood loss, as British soldiers repeatedly struck him with a walking staff and kicked him. Daggett described almost fainting several times as the "world around me several times appearing as dark as midnight."<sup>55</sup> He asked to be carried to widow Lyman's house where he rested in bed for a day and a half but remained in severe pain. Daggett's injuries left him incapacitated and bedridden. He never fully recovered and died sixteen months later.<sup>56</sup>

Other accounts expose the British treatment toward civilians, including women, the disabled, and the elderly. Former Continental naval officer, John Collins, described what happened to his hostess, Mrs. Mary Worster. In the nine months prior to the raid, a disabled Collins resided at Captain Thomas Worster's home. Collins confirmed that an enemy soldier

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

entered the Worster house during the raid and demanded Mrs. Worster's "silver and plate."<sup>57</sup> She denied having any as they took her by the shoulders and searched her body. After she refused to produce what was in her pockets, a soldier swore she had the wares and threatened to kill if she refused. Mrs. Worster handed over a watch and a few trinkets, then ran to escape. They grabbed her, damned her, and one "laid violent hands upon her and one of them leveled his gun at her breast."<sup>58</sup> They swore to shoot her if she moved and started to rip the earrings and handkerchief off her body. She demanded to know how they could treat a woman in that way. A British soldier cursed at her and said that he needed a handkerchief just as much as she. She relented and relinquished her belongings.<sup>59</sup>

After relaying what had happened to Mrs. Worster, Mr. Collins turned to his own treatment. The British robbed him of his hat, shoe, and knee buckles. They threw Collins on the floor and pointed at him "a bayonet then wreaking with the blood," thought to be from Captain Benjamin English who had just been murdered.<sup>60</sup> When the soldiers demanded money, Collins told them that he did not own the house. They damned him, called him a liar, and swore to kill him.<sup>61</sup>

Mrs. Abigail English described her husband Benjamin's murder. As she stood outside with British regulars who were drinking from the English's well, one soldier emerged from her back door. Captain English, her seventy-four-year-old husband followed, clutching his chest and crying out "he has stabbed me, he has stabbed me."<sup>62</sup> With three bayonet wounds to his chest,

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<sup>57</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of John Collins, July 26, 1779.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Abigail English, July 28, 1779.

Captain English walked a few feet, fell, and died in front of her.<sup>63</sup> It must have been hard to understand why a seventy-four-year-old, clearly not a privateer, had to be murdered.

Elias Beers recounted his father's experience. Nathan Beers carried a dying British officer into his home and dressed his wounds. For his kindness, the officer thanked him, and said Mr. Beers would not be hurt. Another group of British soldiers found Mr. Beers peacefully at his front door but accused him of firing at them from his house. He denied the charge, insisting that he did not own a gun. Nathan scolded the redcoats for threatening to kill such "an old infirm man," who has no gun and cannot do them any harm.<sup>64</sup> While the soldiers pointed their guns at Mr. Beers, one fired. The ball lodged in Beers's right hip. Fearing that they were about to end his life, he implored that he was already "mortally wounded," and "begged to be spared."<sup>65</sup> This persuaded the group to leave him alone, but they plundered his house before they left. After already losing a lot of blood, Nathan laid down on his bed and applied pressure to stop the bleeding. His respite was not over. Another band of soldiers came in, dragged him off the bed, and demanded money as they kicked him and "set his wound bleeding again."<sup>66</sup> Without reprieve, several more parties came in one after another, threatening him with bayonets as they plundered and destroyed his belongings. The elder Beers died five days later.<sup>67</sup> Nathan's other son, Isaac, who had been taken captive, revealed that he overheard General Garth tell Mr. Israel

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Elias Beers, July 26, 1779.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Wooden, another wounded prisoner, that Garth was sorry his men had not killed Mr. Wooden. Garth swore that “no militiamen taken in arms would receive quarter.”<sup>68</sup>

Lois Cook gave her account of how the British treated a mentally impaired man. The British brought Elisha Tuttle, “a distracted delirious person,” to Mrs. Cook’s doorstep, and asked Mrs. Cook to identify him.<sup>69</sup> Tuttle lay wounded in blood and after some washing, she recognized him. She identified Mr. Tuttle and told the soldier about his impairments. Mrs. Cook noticed large gashes on Elisha’s head, body, and tongue. In fact, part of his tongue fell off out of his mouth. Mr. Tuttle, obviously not a privateer, died a senseless death three days later.<sup>70</sup>

Sarah Townshend testified to being robbed and her husband taken prisoner. After the British took her husband, Mrs. Townshend was left alone in her home with several small children and an aged aunt. Throughout the day, British troops entered her house. She tried “to oblige and mollify” them with drinks, but they never relented, stealing what they could carry, and threatening her life as she and her children cried.<sup>71</sup> She learned that Admiral Collier was next door and hoped that he “would at least act the gentleman and take pity.”<sup>72</sup> With a baby in her arms, and a child clinging at either side, Mrs. Townshend pleaded with Collier that her husband had stayed in in his house without weapons. Collier looked at her baby then spoke, “you have got a pretty child there, is it yours?”<sup>73</sup> Mrs. Townshend responded affirmatively, then Collier said,

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<sup>68</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Isaac Beers, July 26, 1779. Isaac Beers ran a tavern in town which catered to social and political events. Farnham, “The Day the Enemy was in Town,” 7.

<sup>69</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Lois Cook, July 24, 1779.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Sarah Townsend, July 26, 1779.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

“Are you willing that it should be cut up and made a pie of, the Congress they say eat such pies and they are very good.”<sup>74</sup> She stood speechless until Collier agreed that she should not be hurt.<sup>75</sup>

Women’s accounts of sexual assault during the New Haven raid are among the most unconscionable. The fact that their only possible connection to privateering was potentially being the wife of a privateer makes their encounters even more troubling. These unsettling stories of rape and attempted rape are no longer hidden from view.

Historians began focusing on women in American Revolution historiography rather late beginning with two seminal monographs in 1980. Mary Beth Norton broadly interpreted women’s conditions and experiences during the revolutionary period, and how the war impacted them. Norton used some of the same depositions referenced herein to show the fear that women experienced of physical assault by military forces.<sup>76</sup> Linda Kerber looked to correct the absence of women in the revolutionary story and to “assess women’s experience as carefully as we do men’s experience.”<sup>77</sup> Kerber analyzed what it meant for women to be “political” and concluded

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 203-205. For detailed treatment on rape, see Sharon Block, “Rape in the American Revolution: Process, Reaction, and Public Re-Creation,” 36, 38 in Elizabeth D. Heineman, ed., *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones: From the Ancient World to the Era of Human Rights*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006); Holger Hoock, “Rape, *ius in bello*, and the British Army in the American Revolutionary War,” *Journal of Military Ethics*, 14:1 (2015), 74–97; and Elisabeth Sadie O’Kane Libartito, “The Misfortunes and Calamities of War: Civilians and Society in the American Revolution and After, 1775-1830,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Houston, Spring, 1993), 46-52.

<sup>77</sup> Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), xi. These two immensely influential monographs were followed by analyses of how women affected other domains of early American Republican life such as culture, law, commerce, and fertility. Ruth H. Bloch, *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650-1800* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of



that the Revolution produced Republican mothers. Revolutionary women stood for political virtue and values in the domestic sphere. Kerber also documented instances of American women raped by British soldiers.<sup>78</sup>

In terms of sexual assault, the Gatters suffered the gravest treatment. Heeding the warning of Collier and Tryon's "Address," Mr. Gatter remained at home during the raid. British soldiers who entered his home, accused him of firing at them from his house anyway. Gatter begged them not to kill him, saying he had not done them any harm, and had no guns. Still, they struck him on his head with both a bayonet and a club, knocking him down.<sup>79</sup> He was "smeared with blood" and left feeling weak.<sup>80</sup> Groups continued to ransack the Gatters' house throughout the night. After the Gatters locked up the house for the night, soldiers broke in around 2:30 in the morning. Distressed from the day before, Mr. Gatter fled out the back and hid in a corn field until morning. He returned and found his family alive but learned that his wife had been assaulted.<sup>81</sup>

Mrs. Christiana Gatter's harrowing account details the events leading up to her sexual assault. Her traumatic experience started when she came face to face with a British soldier in her

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North Carolina Press, 1986); Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties that Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Susan E. Klepp, *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, and Family Limitation in America, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2009); See also Sarah M. S. Pearsall, "Women in the American Revolutionary War," in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution*, Edward G. Gray and Jane Kamensky, eds., 273-290.

<sup>78</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 46-47. For other attention to sexual violence against women see Hoock, *Scars of Independence*, 164 and O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 116.

<sup>79</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Martin Gatter, July 26, 1779.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

garden. He pointed his gun at her and told her to “lie down.”<sup>82</sup> She tried to diffuse and deter the situation. Knowing her husband was inside, she said that they should go into the house. The soldier insisted that Mrs. Gatter go with him down to the cellar. She refused and he suggested they go upstairs. Instead, she persuaded the soldier to go to the town green.<sup>83</sup> Outside, she “flattered him along.”<sup>84</sup> They encountered Mr. Chandler in front of his house, and Mrs. Gatter called to him for help. At this point, Mrs. Gatter was able to go home to her family.<sup>85</sup>

Mrs. Gatter confirmed that more intruders awakened the Gatters during the night, and Mr. Gatter ran out the back door, leaving Christiana and her children alone. At this point, her sexual assault took place. Two soldiers grabbed her, threw her on the bed, and swore if she made any sound or resisted in any way, they would kill her. Undoubtedly in a much humiliating moment, Mrs. Gatter detailed to the Justice of the Peace taking her statement that “one of them had his will of me whilst the other kept the door; afterward the other had his will of me while the other kept the door.”<sup>86</sup> The perpetrators left when called to evacuate New Haven.<sup>87</sup>

Some of New Haven’s female residents escaped sexual assault. Rose Luke tried to flee her home when a small group of soldiers entered, but she got only as far as the door when one of them grabbed her. She put her fists at the door latch to keep it from closing, but the soldiers pried her body away from the door. Mrs. Luke’s husband appeared and grabbed Mrs. Luke from the soldier. The soldiers stopped their abusive behavior when their superior arrived. After he left, however, the men “did all possible damage” to the house.<sup>88</sup> Next, one soldier tried to coax Mrs.

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<sup>82</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Christiana Gatter, July 26, 1779.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Rose Luke, July 27, 1779.

Luke to go with him next door. When she declined, he damned her and threatened her with a cane as he forced her next door.<sup>89</sup> When he demanded Mrs. Luke “go up into the chamber,” she refused, and he told her that he would kill her.<sup>90</sup> Mrs. Luke begged an elderly African American woman in the house to go with her, but the soldier said he would kill her too. Once upstairs, he took hold of her, picked her up, and carried her into the room.<sup>91</sup> He attempted to revile her “chastity,” but she resisted.<sup>92</sup> Someone heard her struggling and crying out and saved her from most likely being sexually assaulted. Mrs. Luke ran to a neighbor’s where she endured further verbal abuse and insults by British officers.<sup>93</sup> She scolded them for not being at all “ashamed to treat an old woman who had had ten children in such a manner.”<sup>94</sup>

Accounts of those who returned home and witnessed the aftermath are also graphic. The morning after the New Haven raid, Dr. Ezra Stiles recorded seeing “the desolations, dead corpses and conflagrations.”<sup>95</sup> He described the atmosphere as “a scene of mixt joy and sorrow—plunder, rapes, murder, bayoneting, indelicacies towards the sex, insolence and abuse and insult towards the inhab[itants] in general, dwelling houses and stores just setting on fire at East Haven in full view.”<sup>96</sup> Charged with burying the dead, Charles Alling determined that Captain John Gilbert had been shot through the knee but was most likely killed by a blow to his head with a bloody club that lay on top of him. Alling found Asa Todd dead with bayonet wounds to the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D.*, Franklin Bowder Dexter, M.A., ed., (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), <https://ia800200.us.archive.org/13/items/cu31924092461817/cu31924092461817.pdf>, Vol. II, 357.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

head and body. Alling observed Joseph Dorman's corpse had a broken thigh, bayonet strikes to the skull and body, and a bloody stone next to him. Alling ended his deathly tour discovering Samuel Wooden killed by gunshot.<sup>97</sup>

Residents of nearby communities became incensed when they learned of what happened at New Haven. Mrs. Betsy Pool, the wife of a New London privateer, wrote weeks later to her brother of "the unprecedented accounts of the enemy's wanton barbarity at New Haven."<sup>98</sup> She could forgive the killing, but not the treatment and sexual assaults of women. Mrs. Pool felt it more appropriate to kill the culprits than absolve them. She closed the letter with news that her husband soon sailed out for a three-months cruise on the privateer *Nancy*.<sup>99</sup> The New Haven raid, and the violence committed there, did not discourage privateers.

Unsurprisingly, British sources paint a less violent picture of the raid on New Haven. The *Rivington's Royal Gazette* explained in short shrift that British forces found New Haven mostly abandoned and did little more than destroy storehouses and burn two privateers. The *New York Gazette* simply stated that British troops drove off a few groups of militia and seized a small fort. The author blamed the damage to the buildings and houses on munitions blowing up and accused a resident bar owner and militia group of plotting to burn rebel and loyalist houses, and a barn and the grain inside. The article briefly mentioned that the British troops next went to Fairfield and Norwalk, where the towns were burned and destroyed.<sup>100</sup>

William Tryon also downplayed New Haven's destruction. He claimed that, after being fired at from houses, General Garth and his men marched into New Haven, and destroyed only

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<sup>97</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Charles Alling, July 26, 1779.

<sup>98</sup> Betsy Pool to Unnamed Brother, July 26, 1779, New London County Historical Society.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Rivington's Royal Gazette*, July 10, 1779, 1; *New York Gazette*, July 19, 1779.

public structures and stores, and some vessels and ordnance. Following the assault, the fleet left the harbor with little harassment and anchored the next morning off Fairfield.<sup>101</sup>

**Fairfield: “a heap of ruins, a sad spectacle of desolation and wo.”<sup>102</sup>**

A booming agricultural town with a main street, town green, and courthouse at the center, Fairfield had 150 houses and two churches along a road that connected New York to Boston. A new schoolhouse stood on one side of the courthouse, with a jail on the other side. Home to Black Rock harbor, one of Connecticut’s finest, several other bodies of water and salt marshes surrounded the town.<sup>103</sup> Briton Patrick Ferguson’s sketch of Fairfield five weeks before, prepared for the British mission to incapacitate that privateering port, most assuredly allowed the British to efficiently raid the place.

The raid came to Fairfield during a bountiful harvest and much anticipated prosperity. Reverend Andrew Eliot, who surely preached to privateers in his congregation, gave a lengthy account of the raid at Fairfield. Reverend Eliot called the time “a season which promised the greatest plenty that has been known for many years, if within the memory of man.”<sup>104</sup> Reverend Eliot’s description indicated overflowing fields which contained “so ponderous a load” that Fairfield residents’ futures were “bright.”<sup>105</sup> But after the raid, he gravely noted how “this once pleasant and delightful town” became “a heap of ruins, a sad spectacle of desolation and wo.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> William Tryon to Sir Henry Clinton, July 20, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 64, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>102</sup> “A Letter from Rev. Andrew Eliot to Rev. John Eliot of Boston; concerning the Burning of Fairfield, in July, 1779” in *The Burning of Fairfield*, (Southport, CT: The Pequot Library, n.d.), Lynne Perigo, comp., 187.

<sup>103</sup> Farnham, “The Day the Enemy was in Town,” 41.

<sup>104</sup> “A Letter from Rev. Andrew Eliot to Rev. John Eliot of Boston; concerning the Burning of Fairfield, in July, 1779” in *The Burning of Fairfield*, Lynne Perigo, comp., 187.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

At four in the morning on July 7, the town watch fired a single shot from the small fort on Grover's Hill when he spied the British navy. At first, the fleet appeared to be on their way to New York and residents did not show much concern. But when a thick fog lifted around nine or ten that morning, the fleet came into full view. There was an immediate rush to pack valuables; women and children concealed themselves in the woods; a pregnant woman fled to outside of town; a washwoman secreted her laundry in the bushes; a watchmaker hid customers' watches down a well; and the local militia gathered. As the residents hurried, the British fleet stayed anchored in the harbor most of the day with smaller boats moving back and forth between the flotilla and the beach. The British regiments landed by 3:30 or 4:00 p.m.<sup>107</sup>

Reverend Eliot noticed that by the time the enemy disembarked, the town was almost deserted. Some residents had prepared for such an attack beforehand, and they quickly escaped. But a number of ladies wrongly assumed their gender, and previous "kind treatment and submissive behavior" by British military, would keep them safe, and they stayed to protect their property.<sup>108</sup> "Alas! they were miserably mistaken, and bitterly repented their confidence and presumption."<sup>109</sup>

The British took Fairfield just as easily as they had New Haven. Two enemy divisions marched from their beach landings into town, and after meeting at the town green, "proceeded to their infernal business."<sup>110</sup> The British approach was so sudden and unexpected once the fog cleared that only a few American men assembled—just twenty-three defended the fort. Reverend Eliot noted the disparity between redcoats and rebels—there "was no thought of opposing their

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., Farnham, "The Day the Enemy Was in Town," 43.

<sup>108</sup> "A Letter from Rev. Andrew Eliot to Rev. John Eliot of Boston; concerning the Burning of Fairfield, in July, 1779" in *The Burning of Fairfield*, Lynne Perigo, comp., 187.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Farnham, "The Day the Enemy Was in Town," 43-44.

landing, as our force was nothing to theirs.”<sup>111</sup> Even so, patriots fought, shooting as the enemy advanced. The British easily gained ground, forcing the small rebel group into the heights at the back of town. Other rebels came from surrounding areas and joined the defenders there.<sup>112</sup>

William Wheeler, a teen-aged town guard, captured the events in his journal. When the clouds cleared, and the enemy’s fleet appeared in the harbor, the alarm sounded. Wheeler saw residents busily moving things out of their homes. He and his father cleared their cattle into the woods to hide them from the enemy. Three hours later, 1,500 troops landed on the beach. Rebels at the battery fired a twelve-pound cannon as the enemy marched along the beach lane.<sup>113</sup> The two adversaries kept firing and Wheeler described the unending barrage as “so hot you could hardly hear your hand thereon.”<sup>114</sup> Residents assembled at Grover’s Hill and watched helplessly. The townspeople heard incessant shooting the rest of the afternoon.<sup>115</sup>

Tryon’s report confirmed a relatively swift invasion and capture. Tryon and his troops were shot at from the battery as they moved into town, but the rebels promptly abandoned it. Tryon appropriated Benjamin Buckley’s house for his headquarters, as General Garth and his men occupied the southern side of town. The British took Fairfield in under an hour. Colonel Whiting of Fairfield’s militia received Tryon and Collier’s *Address*, but given only one hour to provide an answer, the town was burning before he finished reading it.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> “A Letter from Rev. Andrew Eliot to Rev. John Eliot of Boston; concerning the Burning of Fairfield, in July, 1779” in *The Burning of Fairfield*, Lynne Perigo, comp., 187.

<sup>112</sup> Farnham, “The Day the Enemy Was in Town,” 43-44; “A Letter from Rev. Andrew Eliot to Rev. John Eliot of Boston; concerning the Burning of Fairfield, in July, 1779” in *The Burning of Fairfield*, Lynne Perigo, comp., 187; Van Dusen, *Connecticut*, 168.

<sup>113</sup> Lathrop, ed., *Black Rock*, Wheeler, “A Journal for the Town of Fairfield,” 29.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> William Tryon to Sir Henry Clinton, July 20, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 64, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan; Farnham, “The Day the Enemy Was in

Wheeler corroborated the rebel resistance coming from houses and stores. Mr. Tucker fired from his shop and was subsequently shot and taken prisoner. Mr. Parsons shot and killed a British soldier in the road and ran out the back door of his house. As the British disembarked around noon, angry residents chased them through burning houses. The sound of rebel guns “continued like the roll of a drum.”<sup>117</sup> But because the British levelled the stone barriers on the beach that the Americans could use for cover, the British escaped the mob.<sup>118</sup>

Fairfield’s female population had expected decent treatment but quickly realized their miscalculation. Eunice Burr, wife of attorney, Thaddeus Burr, knew several British officers, and believed they would be polite. Collier and Tryon’s *Address*, which promised leniency, convinced Mrs. Burr to ignore friends’ advice and stay to save her house and belongings. Once in town, “a pack of the most barbarous ruffians” rushed into Mrs. Burr’s home, repeatedly yelling “you dam rebel where is your husband, he is a selectman.”<sup>119</sup> Vandalizing her house, the attackers stripped her of buckles, tore down her curtains, broke her “dressing glass,” and pulled out table and desk drawers. Just as soon as one group left, another arrived, and demanded cider, breaking all of her dishes. Tryon appeared and stated politely that they were taking the homes. She handed over her house papers to Tryon’s subordinate who took them straight to the courthouse.<sup>120</sup>

Tryon left and another group arrived searching Mrs. Burr’s person for a watch that they believed she owned. She ran out of the back of the house, praying to God for mercy. She received none. Men in the group threw her to the ground, pulled and tore at her clothes to find

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Town,” 44; *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Samuel H. Parsons to George Washington, July 10, 1779.

<sup>117</sup> Lathrop, ed., *Black Rock*, Wheeler, “A Journal for the Town of Fairfield,” 30.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Eunice Burr, August 2, 1779.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*



the watch. She pleaded with them to stop, and a British Captain ran to her side and chased the abusers away.<sup>121</sup> Mrs. Burr chastised Tryon's officer, Chapman, as to how "he could have a heart to burn the house where he had spent so many agreeable hours."<sup>122</sup>

Tryon posted guards at Mrs. Burr's home and wrote out and signed protections for Mrs. Burr and Reverend Eliott, but a good deal of New Haven was already on fire. Mrs. Burr began to doubt Tryon's intentions when she observed buildings all around her in flames. She sheltered neighbors whose homes were ablaze, who in turn, helped to keep her home from burning down. As the British evacuation started and the guards left, a British rear unit began their destruction. That group came in and rummaged through Mrs. Burr's house. Hearing screeching from one of the rooms, Mrs. Burr discovered soldiers abusing an elderly lady, tearing at her cap and hair. As another group came through her gate, Mrs. Burr begged them to save her house. She presented Tryon's written protection, but they cursed him, tore up the protection, and set the house afire. Mrs. Burr fled to the meadow and watched her house and everything in it burn.<sup>123</sup> Later, Mrs. Burr recalled that some British soldiers shot and bayoneted her neighbor's "aged negro," and left his body to be consumed by the flames.<sup>124</sup>

Lucretia Radfield fared worse than Mrs. Burr. Alone with her child, Mrs. Radfield told home invaders that she did not know if her husband was fighting alongside the rebels. Those soldiers told her that they had already taken another man prisoner from the area and burned his house and set out to do the same to Mrs. Radfield's. The men started the fire which she somehow extinguished. Later that night, soldiers "went where they pleased, and did as they pleased."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Eunice Burr, August 2, 1779.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Lucretia Radfield, July 21, 1779.

They subjected her to foul language and behavior, destroyed her belongings, and demanded she “yield to their unchaste and unlawful desires.”<sup>126</sup> When she refused, three soldiers tried to force her to submit. They dragged her to the bed, but another soldier came to her aid. Her rescuer said that he had been treated well here as a prisoner of war. He guarded her for the rest of the night. She endured four more attempts to burn her house until the next morning, but successfully put out the flames each time, saving her house and an adjacent store.<sup>127</sup>

Mary Beers claimed that a party of Hessians broke into her home where she hid in the cellar with three small children. The intruders screamed at the family with bayonets pointed. Mrs. Beers and the children ran out the back cellar door right into a group of British soldiers. She asserted that her husband was sick in bed and had not left the house for two days. Unbeknownst to her, the British had already taken him prisoner.<sup>128</sup> Mrs. Beers entreated the Hessian general for “protection for myself, children, and property, and release of my husband.”<sup>129</sup> But just as he swore to protect her, her family, and her property, he put his hand on her baby’s head and said, “poor child, I pity you; I cannot spare your house, it must be burnt.”<sup>130</sup> They plundered her house of what they could carry and set the fire. She put out the flames and fled to David Beers’s house, who was at home with his wife, daughter, and grandchildren.<sup>131</sup> Later, the British imprisoned David Beers, stole his property, and burned his house and shop.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Mary Beers, July 24, 1779.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Isabella Truber, July 23, 1779.

Fairfield burned extensively. Several guardhouses around town went first. The flames became so bright that British sentries could be seen in the firelight around town setting houses on fire. A storm contributed to the fiery night. William Wheeler vividly portrayed the scene as:

a column of fire from the flaming buildings & frequent flashes of lightning from a western cloud with discharges of cannon and musketry formed a prospect the most gloomy & comfortless imaginable to the poor inhabitants who, many of them sheltered only by the canopy of heaven, without a second suit to their backs, or a penny in their purse, beholding from a distance the fruit of all their toll & labor expiring in a cloud of smoke & cinders.<sup>133</sup>

Reverend Eliot described what he saw once the sun rose. At first, a “considerable part of the town was standing; but in about two hours the flames became general. The burning parties carried on their business with horrible alacrity.”<sup>134</sup> Around eight a.m., the enemy’s retreat started, and a group in the rear set fire to buildings that General Tryon had given protection, including the church meetinghouse, ministers’ houses, and Mrs. Burr’s home.<sup>135</sup> None of these civilian structures were owned by privateers, whom the British sought to punish with the raid. The victims suffered merely because they lived in a privateering port.

Though British accounts denied setting buildings aflame intentionally, Fairfield’s firing was no accident. Ruana Roberson fled to a neighbor’s house and found General Tryon and officers sheltering a pregnant woman, Mrs. Beardsley. During the night, Mrs. Roberson heard the men agree that “there should not be left a house or barn standing in the town.”<sup>136</sup> The house where Mrs. Beardsley went into labor was spared, but orders were sent to burn everything in town, including the church.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Lathrop, ed., *Black Rock*, Wheeler, “A Journal for the Town of Fairfield,” 29.

<sup>134</sup> “A Letter from Rev. Andrew Eliot to Rev. John Eliot of Boston; concerning the Burning of Fairfield, in July, 1779” in *The Burning of Fairfield*, Lynne Perigo, comp., 187.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Ruana Roberson, July 22, 1779.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

Jane Buckley's account also disputes the British narrative of accidental burnings and the British vows to keep safe those who stayed in their homes. Mrs. Buckley's house was set fire to at least five times. Able to put the flame out each time, she heard officers say that every house in Fairfield would be burned by morning, and that "we should not fare so well as New Haven."<sup>138</sup> Mrs. Buckley described the British burning houses and barns through the night. General Garth gave her his word of protection and a soldier to stand guard. Garth's protection lasted only until sunrise when drunken soldiers plundered and burned her house.<sup>139</sup>

Fairfield and its inhabitants, including women and the aged, suffered greatly from the raids. Many who survived, lost everything except the clothes on their backs. William Wheeler and Reverend Eliot recorded the devastation and death. Residents rushed to put out flames to several houses. The church building and the Reverend's house and property burned. Wheeler wrote that the British separated wives from their husbands and subjected them "to the indecencies of an infuriated soldiery, rendered truly diabolical by the spirits they found in plenty in the town."<sup>140</sup> An old, bed-ridden, Black man inside Mr. Parson's house was accused of being a sniper, bayoneted, and left there as the house burned. Wheeler's brother found the dead man's body the next day "about half burnt up & a beam laying on him."<sup>141</sup> Another elderly man, Joseph Gold, was shot dead for refusing to stop drinking from a spring.<sup>142</sup> Reverend Eliot's friend, Joseph Bartram, was shot through the chest. An elderly man, Solomon Sturgis, "and a negro man

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<sup>138</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Jane Buckley, July 24, 1779.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Lathrop, ed., *Black Rock*, Wheeler, "A Journal for the Town of Fairfield," 30.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> "A Letter from Rev. Andrew Eliot to Rev. John Eliot of Boston; concerning the Burning of Fairfield, in July, 1779" in *The Burning of Fairfield*, Lynne Perigo, comp., 187.

belonging to Mr. Lewis” were killed by bayonet.<sup>143</sup> After the occupation, Wheeler watched as waves washed away sand revealing a dead body.<sup>144</sup>

Partisan accounts in newspapers demonstrate how different the adversaries portrayed the raid. The *Connecticut Courant* published an account of brutal treatment of a British deserter, who after recaptured was stuck with bayonets, and “wrapped in a linen sheet wet with spirits, which was barbarously set on fire, and thus the unhappy victim exploded in flames!”<sup>145</sup> British troops were accused of being abusive toward women, treating them most indelicately. Fairfield’s women bore “bruises of that horrid conflict.”<sup>146</sup> The British, on the other hand, diminished their conduct. The Loyalist *Rivington’s Royal Gazette* reported that in the “course of the operations the town of Fairfield was UNAVOIDABLY consumed.”<sup>147</sup> In his report to Commander Clinton, Tryon admitted to the burning, but deflected responsibility for it. He granted that they burnt most of the town, but feigned regret for the burning of two churches, which he blamed on flames from surrounding buildings.<sup>148</sup>

Panic persisted as Fairfield feared future attacks. Two weeks later, the militia still posted guards. One night, William Wheeler, on watch with two others, heard a boat rowing. The three “ran to the shore and lay on the beach ready for them” as the boat passed on to Green’s Farms.<sup>149</sup> The sound of alarm by cannon frightened one man so much “that he dropped down.”<sup>150</sup> Wheeler

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> *Connecticut Courant*, July 13, 1779, 1.

<sup>146</sup> “A Letter from Rev. Andrew Eliot to Rev. John Eliot of Boston; concerning the Burning of Fairfield, in July, 1779” in *The Burning of Fairfield*, Lynne Perigo, comp., 187.

<sup>147</sup> *Rivington’s Royal Gazette*, July 10, 1779, 1.

<sup>148</sup> William Tryon to Henry Clinton, July 20, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 64, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>149</sup> Lathrop, ed., *Black Rock*, Wheeler, “A Journal for the Town of Fairfield,” 31-32.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

recalled seeing thirty ships in the harbor which gave the impression of another pending attack. Alarms came almost every night. Although many were false, anxiety remained high through the entire year, as residents drove cattle and carted furniture away so as not to be taken.<sup>151</sup>

News of the destruction at New Haven and Fairfield spread. Of the two first raids, Congressional delegate Henry Laurens wrote his son that Tryon “landed at New Haven, burnt part & probably the whole of that town, penetrated to and burnt all Fairfield said to be one of the prettiest towns in America.”<sup>152</sup> The British were not done, however. They rushed to resupply before moving on, trying to keep ahead of rebels assembling in the area. The troops and fleet returned to Long Island on July 10 to repair, resupply, and rest before heading to Norwalk.<sup>153</sup>

**Norwalk: “Circumstances: towns burnt, property desolated & such scores of cruelty exhibited as would disgrace the annals of the savages of the wilderness.”<sup>154</sup>**

An agricultural community, Norwalk lay along the Norwalk River. Built on a series of hills and surrounded by Long Island Sound in the front, farms and fields spread around town. Farmers harvested their crops in the fields behind the beach the day the British arrived. Residents, some with livestock, some sleeping on the ground, hid in the woods, in the swamp, or scrambled to safety outside of town.<sup>155</sup>

Mostly unaffected by the war, the privateering port of Norwalk felt the full force of the British military on July 12, 1779. Five weeks before, Admiral Collier received privateers’ location at Norwalk. On June 5, from his ship, the *Camilla*, Collier advised Clinton that the

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates*, Henry Laurens to John Laurens, July 17, 1779, 13:250.

<sup>153</sup> William Tryon to Sir Henry Clinton, July 20, 1779. Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 64, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>154</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, John Glover to George Washington, July 12, 1779.

<sup>155</sup> Farnham, “The Day the Enemy Was in Town,” 52-53.

“rebel galley at Norwalk must at all events be destroyed, or she will do a vast deal of mischief in the Sound.”<sup>156</sup> Because of its successful privateering efforts, the enemy torched Norwalk’s magazines, stores, and houses. Tryon watched the inferno sitting leisurely on the other side of the harbor.<sup>157</sup>

The British raids became rote with experience. Again, they landed at two different positions. Tryon with his troops reached shore first after sunset, rested for some time, and then marched two miles to the town center. There was little opposition. The redcoats easily chased off fifty Continental soldiers and a few militiamen.<sup>158</sup> From the middle of town, Tryon “relaxed to wait for Garth.”<sup>159</sup> Two hours later, General Garth landed, and the forces reunited.<sup>160</sup>

It took just one hour for the British to occupy Norwalk. Relatively unchallenged, the British received fire from rebels in the hills, but the defenders numbered too few to stop the intruders. Residents fled to the outskirts and soon saw smoke. The burning started early as the enemy systematically set fires to houses occupied by patriot snipers. Tryon issued orders to leave town by ten that morning.<sup>161</sup>

Despite its brevity, the assault on Norwalk traumatized its residents. A Continental soldier confirmed others’ harrowing experiences and gruesome injuries. Captain Stephen Betts substantiated that around fifty rebel troops and militia were unable to beat back the larger British force. Betts testified that American soldier John Waters “fell into the enemy’s hands and

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<sup>156</sup> George Collier to Henry Clinton, June 5, 1779, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 60, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>157</sup> Farnham “The Day the Enemy was in Town,” 51, 58, citing to Willcox, *Portrait of a General*, 278, Sir George Collier to Philip Stephens; Mather, *Refugees of 1776*, 225, 230, 232; Townshend, *British Invasion*, 40; *Connecticut Courant*, July 13, 1779, 1.

<sup>158</sup> Farnham, “The Day the Enemy Was in Town,” 54-55.

<sup>159</sup> Van Dusen, *Connecticut*, 168.

<sup>160</sup> Farnham, “The Day the Enemy Was in Town,” 54-55.

<sup>161</sup> Farnham, “The Day the Enemy Was in Town,” 56-57; Van Dusen, *Connecticut*, 168.

delivered up his arms and begged for life.”<sup>162</sup> The British stabbed Waters with bayonets and shattered his arm with gunshot. Remarkably, Waters escaped, but not John Rich. Betts relayed how after falling when shot, Rich demanded that his captain and company leave to not put any others in jeopardy. Survivors found Rich “dead, and the top of his skull torn off supposed to be blown off by a musket.”<sup>163</sup>

The British version of the Norwalk raid does little to depict the destruction. Inside a lengthy article about New Haven’s raid, the *New York Gazette* gave barely a one-sentence mention to Norwalk: “on Sunday, the Army paid another visit to the coast of Connecticut, and it is said, after having destroyed the town of Norwalk, reimbarked yesterday morning.”<sup>164</sup> Tryon’s report provided only a hint of the damage and dismissed questionable behavior on the intruders’ part. He claimed that he ordered guards posted to prevent the burning of homes, but that the close structures made of flammable materials like boards and shingles, caused the fires. Though repentant, he justified it through love of country and duty to his King and blamed the burning on the rebels and their attempt to sever “the empire.”<sup>165</sup>

A remarkable letter survives in Sir Henry Clinton’s papers written by Samuel Holden Parsons, a Brigadier General in the Continental Army. Weeks after the raids, Parsons responded to a June 18 letter he had received from Tryon. Parsons gave a most acerbic and sardonic response, calling Tryon’s raids “a master’s vengeance” on peaceful, although rebellious, women,

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<sup>162</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Deposition of Captain Stephen Betts, July 26, 1779.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *New York Gazette*. July 12, 1779.

<sup>165</sup> William Tryon to Henry Clinton, July 20, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 64, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.



boys, and girls, and “defenseless towns of Connecticut.”<sup>166</sup> Parsons ridiculed Tryon’s dishonorable behavior of attacking women, the elderly and young, mocking this conduct by a “civilized nation.”<sup>167</sup> Parsons portrayed Tryon’s cowardly and quick departure from Norwalk and his retreat to Samford once more rebels arrived as saving himself.<sup>168</sup>

With Norwalk, the 1779 raids concluded, but American privateers continued to pursue British supplies. Rebel press about the raids was unflattering. An anonymous contributor to the *Boston Evening Post* depicted the raids on Connecticut and the British in the worst of terms. Calling the war “DEPREDATORY,” the article accused the British of burning towns, butchering civilians, and brutality against the “defenseless matron and virgin.”<sup>169</sup> Attacking British leadership disparagingly, the author labeled their actions as a “most horrid tale to leave as a legacy to posterity.”<sup>170</sup> The author compared King George and his counselors, Lord Bute and Lord North, to “the vilest of monsters, murderers and rapists.” Henry Clinton and Tryon were called “Myrmidons who glut themselves with blood!”<sup>171</sup> The article ended with the patriotic plea, “Rouse ye AMERICANS, to arms!”<sup>172</sup> This graphic and derogatory depiction in the press was not uncommon. Holger Hoock recognized the value in revolutionary print media representing the British as cruel and exhibiting a pattern of undue violence. The propaganda helped the American cause.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Samuel H. Parsons to William Tryon, September 8, 1779, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 67, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> CIVIS, *Boston Evening Post*, July 23, 1779, 1.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Hoock, *Scars of Independence*, 267-68. For another view on propaganda in revolutionary print, see Russ Castronovo, *Propaganda 1776: Secrets, Leaks, and Revolutionary Communication in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

The devastation of the 1779 summer raids on Connecticut's privateering ports cannot be understated. On July 12, Brigadier General John Glover reported on the Connecticut seaport towns to George Washington. Going to assist the militia, Glover observed the charred remains of churches, houses, barns, and stores at Fairfield. He recorded approximately seventy houses and two churches destroyed at Norwalk. Glover represented the British behavior as barbaric.<sup>174</sup> He specifically wrote of treatment towards civilians being "without a parallel & is shocking to human nature; particularly so against the female sex without distinction of age & character."<sup>175</sup> Glover refused to put into words what the women endured because "modesty forbids my mentioning the particulars."<sup>176</sup> Describing the damage in far-reaching terms, he wrote of the whole country's distress, but succinctly described what happened as "towns burnt, property desolated & such scores of cruelty exhibited as would disgrace the annals of the savages of the wilderness."<sup>177</sup>

The brutal nature of the Connecticut coastal attacks invited indignation and condemnation from Congress. Many revolutionaries called for revenge. In his report of the Connecticut raids to Congress on July 13, Washington urged that it was "high time to retaliate by destroying some of their towns."<sup>178</sup> This prompted a Congressional resolve to approve burning and destroying towns in Great Britain and the West Indies.<sup>179</sup> Delegate Thomas McKean wrote his wife of British acts of cruelty including "murdering old men, ravishing women & little girls, burning houses with the

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<sup>174</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, John Glover to George Washington, July 12, 1779.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates*, Marine Committee to Benjamin Franklin, July 19, 1779, 13:263, fn. 1.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

inhabitants in them, burning the barns with the grains in them, cutting down all fruits, etc., etc.”<sup>180</sup> Of the British monarchy and leadership, Congressional delegate Nathaniel Peabody wrote of their “diabolical efforts to subjugate the good people of these states to the despotic domination of a dupe to an ignominious tyrant whose tender mercies are cruelty” by decimating “defenseless towns.”<sup>181</sup> Henry Laurens called for the executions of British commanding officers by hanging or other capital punishment.<sup>182</sup>

The British hit Connecticut’s privateering ports and civilians in a number of days as Patrick Ferguson had predicted. The ferocity of those raids exposed the imperial power to global criticism. James Duane believed that Britain’s actions “will tarnish the glory of the British nation and render them odious to all Europe.”<sup>183</sup> The violence did not have the desired effect of disabling the American privateering effort, however. Writing to Stephen Sayre, Francis Lewis thought that harming unarmed civilians would “have a contrary effect to what they expected, for by these cruelties the people are become so exasperated that they will retaliate with the utmost rigor.”<sup>184</sup>

## Conclusion

The practice of privateering consumed the British military and government throughout the first four years of the war. Many British leaders, officials, and rank wanted to target New England colonies and the communities on Connecticut’s shores. This set into motion the 1779

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., Thomas McKean to Sarah McKean, July 20, 1779, 13:237, fn. 3.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., Nathaniel Peabody to Meschech Weare, July 20, 1779, 13:270-71.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., Henry Laurens, Proposed Resolve, July 19, 1779, 328. Holger Hoock also discovered evidence of Congressional calls for retaliation in 1778 after the attack on privateering hub Egg Harbor, New Jersey, and the “Baylor Massacre” of sleeping men, *Scars of Independence*, 268.

<sup>183</sup> Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates*, James Duane to Mrs. Duane, July 21, 1779, 13:333.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., Francis Lewis to Stephen Sayre, August 10, 1779, 13:351-53.

summer campaign on Connecticut's coast and resulted in excessive violence and damage to the privateering ports of New Haven, Fairfield, and Norwalk. This included the killing of the elderly, sexual assault of women, and the destruction of countless homes.

Even after the shocking raids, Connecticut privateers never slowed down. In July 1780, Sir Guy Carleton appreciated the magnitude of Connecticut's significance to the practice of privateering. It was best to aim at Connecticut because the colony sits between "the two most frequented and most important channels."<sup>185</sup> Carleton argued for more ascents on New England to "throw that country into the utmost confusion," and change minds about pursuing privateering.<sup>186</sup> He took keen notice of New London, commenting that the "coast of Connecticut may be visited to great advantage, particularly New London and Norwich twelve miles higher up that river, two very mischievous places."<sup>187</sup> Carleton failed to explicitly blame the mischief on privateering, but there can be no doubt as to what he was referring—privateering is New London's main contribution to the American war effort. In another year, Britain strikes New London. The aggression at New Haven, Fairfield, and Norwalk is matched at New London, and is articulated in equally unsettling individual accounts.

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<sup>185</sup> Sir Guy Carleton, "Thoughts on an Expedition Against the French Fleet at Rhode Island, July 24, 1780, Roll 23, 2930(2)-2930(8), Sir Guy Carleton Papers, David Library of the American Revolution.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### “THAT THORN IN OUR SIDES”: NEW LONDON<sup>1</sup>

Following the raids on New Haven, Fairfield, and Norwalk, two summers passed before British forces attacked the Connecticut coast again. Before that fateful day in 1781, American privateers never slowed. Connecticut privateers stayed active after the 1779 raids. Daniel Scovell commanded the *Beaver* out of New London early in 1780 but was soon taken prisoner. Governor Trumbull exchanged Scovell and Captain Samuel Smedley for two British prisoners that April. Scovell took command of the privateer, *Right & Justice*, in July. In March 1781, Scovell commanded the *Deane* taking five prizes into New London harbor over the course of four months. Governor Trumbull received another twenty-four privateer commissions that spring from the Continental Congress.<sup>2</sup> This unrelenting privateering activity kept the British engaged and kept New London on high alert.

New London and its harbor provided a promising setting for maritime industry. The location and natural assets placed the coastal community in the perfect position to pursue commercial and fishing interests—and privateering. The Thames River formed a deep, unobstructed, and open harbor which lay directly open to Long Island Sound where ships enter at any time of the tide. Five fathoms deep and three miles long, the harbor rarely froze over. It

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<sup>1</sup> Sir George Collier to George Germain, June 15, 1779, George Germain Sackville Papers, Box/Vol. 9, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>2</sup> John A. McManemin, PhD., *Captains of the Privateers*, (Spring Lake, NJ: Ho-Ho-Kus Publishing Co., 1985), 94-96; Paul H. Smith, et al., eds, *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789* 24 Vols. (Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1921), <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwdglink.html>, Charles Thomson to Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., February 1, 1781, 16:659.

presented the preeminent privateering port and became Connecticut's largest and most valuable one and an important naval station for the Continentals on the east coast.<sup>3</sup>

The privateering threat to British trade and their military supply effort persisted and British leaders never wavered on their desire to target Connecticut privateering ports, especially New London. Commander Henry Clinton decided against striking a small French unit at Rhode Island or ordering troops to assist Cornwallis at Yorktown. Instead, he sent former American General Benedict Arnold to New London. Arnold's defection added to the shock of the assault. He went from war hero of Lake Champlain and Saratoga, and trusted general of George Washington, to Brigadier General in the British army.<sup>4</sup> From Connecticut, Arnold commanded the operation with knowledge and acquaintance of the place, leading to an extraordinary amount of violence and destruction. Accounts of war veterans, both immediately after the raid and decades later, lay bare the physical and emotional consequences of the raid.

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<sup>3</sup> D. Hamilton Hurd, *History of New London County, Connecticut, with Biographical Sketches of many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men*, (Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co, 1882), <https://archive.org/details/cu31924028841951>, 12-13, 27; Frances Manwaring Caulkins, *History of New London Connecticut: From the First Survey of the Coast in 1612 to 1860*, (New London: H.D. Utley, 1895) Caulkins, *History of New London*, <https://archive.org/details/historyofnewlond00caul>, 42-43, 229; John Warner Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections, Containing a General Collection of Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, etc. Related to the History & Antiquities of every town in Connecticut, with Geographical Descriptions*, (New Haven: Durrie & Peck and J.W. Barber, 1837), 273; "An Account of the Burning of New London on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, 1781, From the Connecticut Gazette of Friday, September 7<sup>th</sup>" in *Battle of Groton Heights*, (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1881), ed. Charles Allyn, 13-15, 17; The burgeoning industry offered bigger profit, but it also had its downsides. Expanding economic influence at the turn of the eighteenth century meant that business professionals controlled the colony as Puritan influence waned. One historical commentator portrayed the ill-effects of the development on New London as a "train of comers and goers, its compact busy street." Caulkins, *History of New London*, 246. An inundation of outsiders made it "easy to raise a mob here; easy to get up a feast, a frolick, or a fracas." Ibid. Progress changed New London from a "quiet inland town" to a place with "more coarseness, ignorance and vice." Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Eric D. Lehman, *Homegrown Terror: Benedict Arnold and the Burning of New London* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), xiii, 28-30, 68-72.

By 1781, the French had officially entered the war. Their arrival into the conflict, combined with the threat of American privateers, worried the British immensely. Two months before New London's raid, Sir George Beckwith wrote to Commander Henry Clinton that French assistance and privateering posed big challenges. Beckwith reiterated the power that American privateers held. He posited that the practice kept seditious spirits alive, but without it, passion for the rebellion would dissipate. Beckwith placed privateering on the same level as losing in battle. He opined that defeating privateering would contribute as much towards restoring peace "as the most bloody defeats."<sup>5</sup>

Even as the British pivoted the war to a southern campaign, New England never drifted from their minds. Britain believed that cutting New England off from the rest of the colonies would end the war. New London not only served as a privateering menace, it provided a barrier to Connecticut's interior. Cognizant of the implications of an invasion, Governor Trumbull reminded Congress's president two months before the British raid on New London that an attack on New London "would be very detrimental to the others as well as this state."<sup>6</sup> Trumbull knew that danger to Connecticut loomed as long as its coastal communities were easily accessible to the British. The British believed that New London, just a few hours cruise from New York, could be easily taken or easy to retreat from if necessary. Further, as a premier privateer port, stores and provisions abounded. Indeed, during the raid on September 6, the merchant ship *Hannah*, a

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<sup>5</sup> Sir George Beckwith to Sir Henry Clinton, July 4, 1781, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 162, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>6</sup> *Papers of the Continental Congress*, Trumbull to the President of the Continental Congress, April 17, 1781, 2:194-95, Pub #M24, Item Number 66, Roll number 80. For Britain's turn to a southern campaign, see Jim Biecuch, "The Southern Theater: Britain's Last Chance for Victory," in *Theaters of the American Revolution: Northern, Middle, Southern, Western, Naval*, eds., James Kirby Martin and David L. Preston (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2017), 89-137.

recent capture by local privateers, and the estimated cargo worth \$400,000, lay in New London's harbor.<sup>7</sup>

It is not surprising then that even with a strong, French naval presence off the Atlantic coast, Britain prioritized its assault on New London. Two days before the raid, Commander Clinton ignored a small group of French and American militia near Rhode Island and ordered a fleet of nineteen war ships to New London. He proposed that newly minted Brigadier General Benedict Arnold go to New London to "give to the enemy every annoyance," and "bring off or destroy the privateers, and naval and other stores collected" there.<sup>8</sup> From the Commander-in-chief down the line, compliments (or concealed scorn) for New London spanned military department and rank. A British Quartermaster called New London "a remarkable place for privateers."<sup>9</sup> Commodore George Collier, the naval commander in the 1779 raids, decried New London as a busy privateering harbor and "a famous receptacle," thought to cause a great amount of injury to British trade "as much as any harbor in America."<sup>10</sup> New London's privateering prominence made a raid extremely likely.

Always on edge hearing rumors of pending raids, New Londoners expected an attack and became the most heavily fortified port on Connecticut's coast. Two forts guarded New London:

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<sup>7</sup> Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections*, 273.

<sup>8</sup> Sir Henry Clinton to George Germain, September 4, 1781, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 173, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>9</sup> David Gene Wilson, "Benedict Arnold's Last Raid: New London, Connecticut, September 6, 1781," (Master's thesis, Southern Connecticut State University, Spring 1994), 26, citing to *The Diary of Frederick Mackenzie, Giving a Daily Narrative of his Military Service as an Officer of the Regiment of Royal Welsh Fusiliers During the Years 1775-1781 in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), Vol. II, 610.

<sup>10</sup> Ithiel Town, ed., *A Detail of Some Particular Services Performed in America, During the Years 1776, 1777, 1778, and 1779*, (New York, 1835), <https://archive.org/details/detailofsome00town>, 96.



Fort Trumbull on the west or New London side of the Thames River, and Fort Griswold on the opposite side in the town of Groton. Even so, New London typically maintained only two military companies. Colonel William Ledyard, whose upcoming dramatically depicted death places high in the narrative, presided over both New London and Groton forces.<sup>11</sup>

The assault on New London stunned as did the man who led it. Some insist this raid was the most brutal of all the raids on the Connecticut privateering ports. Benedict Arnold's involvement proved particularly audacious and advantageous. A Norwich native, he grew up and lived near New London. A successful New Haven merchant and druggist, he participated in Connecticut privateering in the early years of the war. In 1777, Arnold wrote to well-established Connecticut privateer, Nathaniel Shaw, eager to buy a 1/8<sup>th</sup> or 1/16<sup>th</sup> interest in one of Shaw's ships.<sup>12</sup> One month before the pivotal battle at Yorktown, now British Brigadier General Arnold "knew full well when he gave the order for destruction, that the ships, wharves, and warehouses of his former friend, Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., would be destroyed."<sup>13</sup>

An ironic twist of Arnold leading the raid against New London is his presence at the British assault on Danbury, Connecticut in 1777. William Tryon led that attack, burning the town and all the stores which included clothing and equipment for the Continental Army. Arnold rode with the Connecticut militia, almost being killed when Arnold's horse was shot from under

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<sup>11</sup> Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections*, 273; "An Account of the Burning of New London on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, 1781, From the Connecticut Gazette of Friday, September 7<sup>th</sup>" in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 13-15, 17; Smith, et al., eds, *Letters of Delegates*, Charles Thomson to Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., February 1, 1781, 16:659.

<sup>12</sup> Albert E. Van Dusen, *Connecticut*, (New York: Random House, 1961), 168; Charles L. Cutler, "Connecticut's Revolutionary Press," in *Connecticut Bicentennial Series* Vol. 14 (Chester, Ct: Pequot Press, 1975), 49; Ernest E. Rogers, *Connecticut's Naval Office at New London During the War of the American Revolution*, (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 1933), 120-21.

<sup>13</sup> Rogers, *Connecticut's Naval Office at New London*, 120.

him.<sup>14</sup> Also present at the assault on Danbury was long-suffering Joseph Plumb Martin who recorded his tortuous years in the Continental Army. Martin portrayed Danbury's aftermath as "the town had been laid in ashes, a number of the inhabited murdered and cast into their burning houses, because they presumed to defend their persons and property."<sup>15</sup>

Arnold's acquaintance with New London means that he likely knew of the practice of privateers announcing their arrival into port with prizes by sounding a three-shot alarm, a detail that became an essential part of New London's raid.<sup>16</sup> Numerous accounts of New London's raid gave noteworthy attention to this detail and the fact that the British used that knowledge to their benefit. Arnold's mission was two-fold for Clinton: to draw George Washington out and away

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<sup>14</sup> Wilson, "Benedict Arnold's Last Raid", 37-38; Frederic Gregory Mather, *Refugees of 1776 from Long Island to Connecticut*, (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1913), 225.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Plumb Martin, *Memoir of a Revolutionary Soldier: The Narrative of Joseph Plumb Martin* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2006), 36. For other edited versions of Martin's memoir, see James Kirby Martin, ed., *Ordinary Courage: The Revolutionary War Adventures of Joseph Plumb Martin* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013) and George F. Scheer, ed., *Private Yankee Doodle: The Diary of Joseph Plumb Martin*, (New York: Eastern Acorn Press, 1962). During the Danbury raid, William Wheeler worked in his father's garden when the enemy arrived at Ridgefield nearby. Wheeler detailed that Arnold readied the town, gathered men who constructed a breastwork where Arnold and 250 men endured a steady fire from the British troops for fifteen minutes. William Wheeler, "A Journal for the Town of Fairfield," in *Black Rock, Seaport of Old Fairfield Connecticut, 1644-1870*, ed. Cornelia Penfield Lathrop (New Haven: The Tuttle, Morehouse, and Taylor Co., 1930), 27. When "the flank guards came round the corner," Arnold rode his horse to the front line, rallying the men to fight "until his horse was shot dead under him." Ibid., 28. A British soldier approached Arnold, who reportedly while falling to the ground, aimed his gun yelling "Damn you, Take that!" shooting the enemy down. Ibid. The British burned nineteen houses and twenty-two barns and storehouses. Frederic Gregory Mather surmised that Danbury might not have burned if not for an American firing from a house, at which point the British turned around and burned the town. Mather, *The Refugees of 1776*, 225. This assumption is not as speculative as it might sound. The situation repeated itself in the summer of 1779.

<sup>16</sup> "An Account of the Burning of New London," in *Battle of Groton Heights*, ed. Allyn, 17, fn. 2; "Narrative of Avery Downer, M.D.," in *The Battle of Groton Heights: A Story of the Storming of Fort Griswold, and the Burning of New London, on the Sixth of September, 1781*, ed. Rev. N.H. Burnham, (New London, CT: Bingham Paper Box Co., 1903), 28.

from heading toward Cornwallis; and to hit New London, “a leading shipping and privateering center.”<sup>17</sup> With about 1,700 men and thirty-two ships, the British arrived in Long Island Sound on September 6, 1781. They entered New London harbor at nine o’clock the next morning.<sup>18</sup>

Arnold and the British covered their entrance by deceiving the townspeople with a three-gun salute. Rufus Avery had charge of a cannon on the west side in Fort Griswold the night before the assault. The fleet had not yet appeared, and a feeling of complacency set in. That changed when Avery looked in the harbor at eight o’clock in the morning and felt a “shock of consternation and a thrill of dread of apprehension,” when he saw the enemy fleet.<sup>19</sup> Avery and others hurried to prepare, loading guns with powder. The men moved to alert the town with a two-gun alarm. The British, however, knew to fire a third shot to signal a privateer’s success. Avery recognized that the “enemy understood our distress signal was two regular guns, and they fired a third, which broke our alarm, and caused it to signify, good news or a prize.”<sup>20</sup> Militiamen and troops were therefore slow in coming. Delayed from learning of the threat earlier, Colonel

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<sup>17</sup> Albert E. Van Dusen, *Connecticut*, (New York: Random House, 1961), 168.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; Wilson, “Benedict Arnold’s Last Raid,” 14-18. Several sources contend that raiding New London was designed to dissuade Washington from moving to Virginia. David Gene Wilson identified many of those sources as including Mather, *The Refugees of 1776*, Paul David Nelson, *William Tryon and the Course of Empire*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), Benson J. Lossing’s *The Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1851-52), 2 Vols. and Richard Buel, Jr., *Dear Liberty: Connecticut’s Mobilization in the Revolutionary War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1980). Ibid., 14-16. Wilson challenged these interpretations arguing that Clinton wrote after the war, wanting to control the narrative and his legacy. Wilson reasoned instead that New London was a “predatory” raid. Ibid., 18. The evidence in this study supports that conclusion.

<sup>19</sup> “Narrative of Rufus Avery,” in *Eyewitnesses of the Same Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort, The Massacre that Followed, and the Sacking and Burning of New London, September 6, 1781, by the British Forces Under the Command of Traitor Benedict Arnold*, eds. Rufus Avery and Stephen Hempstead, (Connecticut: Clerk’s Office of the District Court, 1846), 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 18.

Ledyard sent word from both forts, calling for surrounding militia to come to their aid. The third shot, however, did the trick as few came. Avery called Arnold a traitor for using the prize salute against his own people.<sup>21</sup>

The British employed the same two-landing approach at New London that was successful in 1779. Around nine a.m. on September 6, the enemy with two divisions of approximately 800 men each landed—one close to the lighthouse at New London, and the other across the harbor at Groton. Those near the lighthouse marched along the main road being attacked along the way. The sporadic shots from Continentals enraged the British. The enemy set fire to stores on the beach and to houses at Mill Cove. The flames spread to ships at the wharfs. Arnold reported that as he led his men into New London, they encountered only a small group of rebels with one cannon. The rebels promptly deserted Fort Trumbull as the British arrived. Patriots tried to sail privateers and other vessels upriver but was prevented by either not enough wind or too much tide. The British stayed until four p.m. when rebels forced them to retreat.<sup>22</sup> By then, the “most valuable part of town” had been reduced to rubble.<sup>23</sup>

Prior to their withdrawal, the British captured New London’s two forts, Forts Trumbull and Griswold. Stephen Hempstead, a distinguished serviceman who participated in several key moments in the war, survived both fort attacks. A native New Londoner, Hempstead enlisted at the age of twenty-one, served under naval captain and privateer Nathaniel Saltonstall, fought at

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> “An Account of the Burning of New London” in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*; “An Account of B. Gen. Arnold’s Expedition to New-London,” in the *Rivington’s Gazette Extraordinary*, September 19, 1781, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 174, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>23</sup> “An Account of B. Gen. Arnold’s Expedition to New-London,” in the *Rivington’s Gazette Extraordinary*, September 19, 1781, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 174, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

Bunker Hill, and witnessed Boston's retaking. Reenlisting a second time, Hempstead became a sergeant in Captain Nathan Hale's unit in New York and suffered broken ribs by gunshot during the Harlem Heights battle. He also attempted to scuttle the British war ship, the *Asia*, on the Hudson. Though unsuccessful in disabling the *Asia*, Washington praised his efforts and Hempstead was awarded an extra forty dollars to his pay for his service. After all this, he joined the Connecticut state military.<sup>24</sup>

Hempstead's previous superior, Nathaniel Saltonstall, was a noted New London privateer. Saltonstall captained Nathaniel Shaw's privateer, the *General Putnam*, on its second voyage in March 1779. Saltonstall also led a group of 100 volunteers who spontaneously gathered during New London's raid and proceeded to split into two groups on either side of a road, and fire at incoming British troops from behind stone walls. The loss of the vessels at New London left many unemployed including Saltonstall. After the war, he retired from the sea and moved to Ohio where he died in 1807 at the age of 80.<sup>25</sup>

The resistance at Fort Trumbull quickly fell. The design of the fort and the number of its defenders explains its swift defeat. The fort stood as a "mere breast-work or water battery, open

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<sup>24</sup> "Biographical Sketch of Stephen Hempstead" in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 58-59.

<sup>25</sup> Rogers, *Connecticut's Naval Office at New London*, 55-56; "The Experience of Jonathan Brooks, at New London, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, 1781," in Allyn *Battle of Groton Heights*, 55-58, 76; McManemin PhD., *Captains of the Privateers*, 93. Saltonstall captained small trading vessels owned by Nathaniel Shaw before the war. Once war broke out, he obtained command over the garrison at one of the forts. A seaman, Saltonstall got back on the water, serving as first lieutenant on one of Shaw's privateers, the *General Putnam*, during its first cruise in 1778. McManemin, PhD., *Captains of the Privateers*, 82-91. The *General Putnam* is the same ship that Arnold requested an interest in. Saltonstall sailed in March 1779 with instructions from Shaw that, "You are to go on board our ship *Putnam*, armed and fitted, in a warlike manner for a cruise against the enemies of the independent States of America." Ibid., 89. Before docking at Boston, the *General Putnam* captured six prizes, two of which Saltonstall brought into New London. Ibid.

from behind.”<sup>26</sup> The British came upon Hempstead and the twenty-three other men from that side. Hempstead and the others disabled the cannon, and hastily retreated in three boats over to Fort Griswold. They barely made it across to the fort on the other side. The enemy followed closely, but their shots missed their target, and they captured only one boat and six rebels. The other escapees, possibly including privateer Saltonstall, made it to the other side and were enthusiastically greeted by the Fort Griswold protectors.<sup>27</sup>

With Fort Trumbull in British hands, Arnold’s attention turned to Fort Griswold. From an elevated view overlooking New London, Arnold realized that Fort Griswold was “much more formidable” than previously thought.<sup>28</sup> Watching from across the harbor, Arnold determined that privateers could easily flee unless the British took the fort. He ordered over to Lieutenant Colonel Eyre to attack the fort as soon as possible. Arnold’s concerns came true when those privateers, grounded earlier, fled upriver when wind power returned. Arnold’s attempts to fire on the ships with a six-pound cannon from Fort Trumbull failed to stop them. The *Royal Rivington Gazette* confirmed that five or six privateers in New London harbor attempted to escape, “but

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<sup>26</sup> “Narrative of Stephen Hempstead” in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 44.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>28</sup> “An Account of the Burning of New London” in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 19-20; “An Account of B. Gen. Arnold’s Expedition” in *Rivington’s Gazette Extraordinary*, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 174. Hempstead’s description of Fort Griswold shows the stark difference from Fort Trumbull: “The fort was an oblong square, with bastions at opposite angles, its longest side fronting the river in a northwest and southeast direction. Its walls were of stone and were ten or twelve feet high on the lower side, and surrounded by a ditch. On the walls were pickets, projecting over twelve feet; above this was a parapet with ebrasures, and within a platform for the cannon, and a step to mount upon to shoot over the parapet with small arms. In the southwest bastion was a flag-staff, and in the side, near the opposite angle, was the gate, in front of which was a triangular breastwork to protect the gate; and to the right of this was a redoubt, with a three-pounder in it, which was about 120 yards from the gate.” “Narrative of Stephen Hempstead” in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 48.

before the rebels had an opportunity of getting their valuable vessels out, General Arnold made it necessary for them to look out for their personal safety.”<sup>29</sup>

The British easily dispatched Fort Trumbull, but the battle at Fort Griswold was intense. British troops sent a flag of truce with a demand for surrender. If the rebels refused, the enemy would storm the fort. With 150-160 men to Britain’s 500-600, a “council of war” consisting of Colonel Ledyard’s officers and friends agreed to capitulate, but the Colonel overruled them. He responded instead with a defiant refusal.<sup>30</sup> The British sent back an ominous message that if forced to attack, they would put forth a full and unrelenting effort, “that is, what they did not kill by ball they shall put to death by bayonet!”<sup>31</sup> Undeterred, Ledyard replied that they would not submit and that he would “let the consequences be what they would.”<sup>32</sup> Of this incident, Rufus Avery recalled a brow-raising detail. He claimed that when the British soldiers arrived with their white flag waving two hundred yards away, the rebels fired shots that hit right in front of the enemy bringing them to a stand-still. The British set off for the fort again, moving “with great rapidity.”<sup>33</sup> First, marching in one column, they divided into two as they walked closer. Those columns “rushed furiously and simultaneously to the assault of the southwest bastion and the opposite sides.”<sup>34</sup> Throughout, the spirit of revolution endured. Stephen Hempstead recalled a

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<sup>29</sup> “An Account of the Burning of New London” in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 19-20; “An Account of B. Gen. Arnold’s Expedition” in *Rivington’s Gazette Extraordinary*, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 174, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan; “From Rivington’s Royal Gazette” in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> Narrative of Stephen Hempstead” in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 44. “Narrative of Rufus Avery,” in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Narrative of Rufus Avery,” in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> “Narrative of Stephen Hempstead” in Avery and Hempstead, *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort*, 45.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

bullet shooting through the rope used to hoist the flag. The flag fell to the ground, but defenders promptly remounted it.<sup>35</sup>

Nathaniel Saltonstall was not the only privateer present at the New London raid. Privateer Captain Elias H. Halsey, whom Rufus Avery described as having “had long practiced on board as a privateer, and manifested his skill at this time,” manned an 18-pound cannon and two bags of grape shot against the enemy.<sup>36</sup> Captain Charles Bulkeley, who had escaped from Fortune prison in Gosport, England, commanded a New London privateer at the time of the burning. Captain John Deshon, who assisted Nathaniel Shaw with privateering commissions, rounded up volunteers to fight during the raid.<sup>37</sup>

Rebels, which included enslaved people, started strong, killing British commander Major Montgomery. The enslaved’s experience in the American Revolution began being written in the historiography with Benjamin Quarles’ *The Negro in the American Revolution* in 1961. Quarles celebrated African Americans’ willingness to join the American fight. In 2012, using evidence that Blacks appealed for revolutionary war pensions, received land grants, and infiltrated British troops at Yorktown as spies, Edward Countrymen contended that the enslaved helped transform the revolutionary period in one way or another, either through self-liberation, leaving the United States altogether, or fighting for or against the Americans. Alan Gilbert argued further that black participation in the war on both sides was key to ending slavery. When hundreds and thousands

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.; “Narrative of Stephen Hempstead” in Avery and Hempstead, *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort*, 44-45.

<sup>36</sup> “Rufus Avery’s Narrative of the Battle at Fort Griswold” in Rev. Burnham, *The Battle of Groton Heights*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Rogers, *Connecticut’s Naval Office at New London*, 127-28, 58; “Narrative of John Hempstead” in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 62.



were held in slavery at the time of the war, it is inconceivable that they could not have had some impact on the war.<sup>38</sup>

Alongside their owners, two enslaved men defended Fort Griswold from the British: Lambo Latham and Jordan Freeman. Several sources attribute Jordan Freeman as either killing, or assisting in killing, British Major Montgomery with a spear. A September 21, 1781 issue of the *Connecticut Gazette* named New London's dead including the two African Americans, something which was almost never officially acknowledged or recorded. After the list of white deceased, the article identified Lambo Latham and Jordan Freeman under the heading "NEGROES."<sup>39</sup> In his later account of the raid, George Middleton corroborated that Montgomery was killed by "spears in the hands of Captain Shapley and a black man named

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<sup>38</sup> Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961); Edward Countrymen, *Enjoy the Same Liberty: Black Americans and the Revolutionary Era*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), ix, 55; Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War of Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). While the enslaved men in this story volunteered on the day of the raid, in the heat of the moment, there were Black enlisted troops on the American side. These include a biracial division who helped Washington and his troops escape from Brooklyn Heights, New York in 1776, the "Black Regiment" of Rhode Island sent to fight against Cornwallis at Yorktown, and the "Bucks of America," a Black unit who was presented with a flag by Continental Congress President, John Hancock. In the process of researching for her book, Judith L. Van Buskirk found 500 African American pension files for the revolutionary war. *Standing in their Own Light: African American Patriots in the American Revolution*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017). For other monographs on how enslaved peoples affected the Revolution and the revolutionary era, see Douglas R. Edgerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Robert G. Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> "An Account of B. Gen. Arnold's Expedition to New-London," in *Rivington's Gazette Extraordinary*, September 19, 1781, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 174, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan. Mention of enslaved men as casualties in the newspaper report is remarkable considering that "they almost never appeared on newspaper lists of those fallen in battle." Van Buskirk, *Standing in their Own Light*, 5.

Jordan Freeman.”<sup>40</sup> In his history of the raid, Charles Allyn wrote that “Montgomery was killed by a powerful negro named Jordan Freeman.”<sup>41</sup> Latham and Freeman are permanently recognized as part of the deceased defenders of the fort, but listed separately from the whites at the bottom of a stone commemoration.<sup>42</sup> It is hard to know what motivated Latham and Freeman to fight to their deaths alongside the men who owned them, but these facts of the raid add to the historiography of the enslaved’s experience and contribution in the American Revolution.<sup>43</sup>

After killing Montgomery, the rebels refocused on the invaders scaling the fort. Stephen Hempstead was shot during the chaos. As he raised his gun, a bullet struck just above the right ear, grazing his skull and nicking his veins “which bled profusely.”<sup>44</sup> He tied a handkerchief around the wound and battled on. Hempstead detected a redcoat breaking in through a picket near him. Fellow fighters were watching the combat across from them, unaware of the coming

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<sup>40</sup> “Narrative of George Middleton,” in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 91.

<sup>41</sup> Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 23, 102, fn.1.

<sup>42</sup> David O. White, “Connecticut’s Black Soldiers 1775-1783” in *Connecticut Bicentennial Series*, (Chester, CT: Pequot Press, 1973), Vol. 4, 29.

<sup>43</sup> According to David Gene Wilson’s research, Freeman accompanied his owner, the leader, Colonel Ledyard, and Latham’s owner was Captain William Latham. Captain Latham originally instructed Lambo to stay and watch after his wife and children, but instead, Lambo grabbed a musket and went to fight. Wilson, “Benedict Arnold’s Last Raid,” 123-124, citing to William C. Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 138-139, and Robert E. Greene, *Black Courage, 1775-1783*. (Washington, D.C.: D.A.R., 1984), 76; see also Edward Countrymen, *Enjoy the Same Liberty*, 33-34. In the tradition of blacks fighting in the war, an enslaved man, Ned, fought at Danbury in 1777. Ned “joined whites at the house of Major Daniel Starr and fought with them against the British as they moved.” White, “Connecticut’s Black Soldiers 1775-1783,” 28. Depositions taken later record that after breaking the resistance, the British ordered the defenders killed and the house set afire. A first officer ran Ned through with his sword, and when Ned tried to rise and shoot him, the officer cut off his head. Ned’s owner later petitioned for the value of the loss of property. Royal R. Hinman, ed., *Historical Collection, from official files, records, etc. of the Part Sustained by Connecticut, During the War of the Revolution*, (Hartford: E. Gleason, 1842), 601-02; White, “Connecticut’s Black Soldiers 1775-1783,” 28.

<sup>44</sup> “Narrative of Stephen Hempstead” in *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort*, eds. Avery and Hempstead, 51.

danger. Hempstead cried out to them, “the enemy are breaking in behind you.”<sup>45</sup> As he raised his pike against an intruder, Hempstead was shot again in his left arm at the elbow and dropped his pike. He picked it up with his other hand and continued to fight. Nevertheless, the enemy soon overtook him and the others.<sup>46</sup>

The British made good on their earlier warning of no mercy. Overpowered and driven from the breastwork into the fort, the rebels’ fate became fixed. As the enemy climbed the parapets like “madmen,” the massacre began.<sup>47</sup> When the fort was breached, Colonel Ledyard ordered his men to stop firing, throw down their arms, and relinquish the fort. The British continued firing as they made their way into the garrison and across the courtyard, shooting at those who had turned to run to the magazine and barracks. The bloodshed escalated. As Rufus Avery described it, the British “swung their hats around,” fired into the fort and “began to massacre with sword and bayonet.”<sup>48</sup> Shots tearing into his clothes, Avery also suffered bayonet strikes to his body. The enemy kept coming as more entered through the gates and into the parade. It was a moment of “indescribable misery!”<sup>49</sup> The rebels “fought and bled and availed nothing.”<sup>50</sup> Avery recalled the ground being “drenched in human gore” as the wounded and dying lay unattended.<sup>51</sup> Even as the defenders comprehended their impending death, it was the “country’s danger [that] caused the most acute anxiety.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> “Narrative of Rufus Avery” and “Narrative of Stephen Hempstead,” in *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort*, eds. Avery and Hempstead, 25.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 25.

Amid the carnage, British officer Beckwith murdered the New London Commander, Colonel Ledyard. After Beckwith called out for the rebel leader, Ledyard stood up and handed his sword to his counterpart. Avery who had left his position near the barracks turned to see Ledyard yield his weapon. Looking away briefly for a moment, when Avery turned back, he saw Ledyard “weltering in his gore!”<sup>53</sup> Avery condemned Ledyard’s killing done during an act of surrender. British troops quickly subdued the Americans; it was over in less than two minutes. All Avery could do was drop to his knees.<sup>54</sup> He recalled a “mad looking fellow” with a bayonet at his side, swearing “by Jesus he would skipper me!”<sup>55</sup> Avery begged for his life as groups of British soldiers, firing, marched in one after another.<sup>56</sup>

At the same time, Stephen Hempstead’s harrowing story worsened. Hempstead turned to find a soldier behind him. The enemy lunged it into Hempstead’s right hip. Injured and lying on the ground, Hempstead saw Ledyard’s body next to him, “having been run through the body with his own sword.”<sup>57</sup> In the meantime, shots rang out for a few more minutes as bayonets were “freely used” on those who were “helplessly wounded or in the agonies of death.”<sup>58</sup>

The violence stopped only after the British became concerned for their self-preservation. The whole British unit would have been killed if not recognizing the “danger of being blown up, by communicating fire to the powder.”<sup>59</sup> Realizing the foolishness of firing into a store of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> “Narrative of Stephen Hempstead” in *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort*, eds., Avery and Hempstead, 48. David Gene Wilson doubts the circumstance of Ledyard’s death claiming that his vest was documented as having two stabs on either side of his chest from a bayonet, not a sword. Wilson, “Benedict Arnold’s Last Raid,” 175-76

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

flammable gunpowder, a British officer yelled “stop firing! Or you will send us all to *Hell* together!”<sup>60</sup> For why the powder did not ignite sooner, Rufus Avery believed it was because “they trod in blood!”<sup>61</sup> The ground was soaked in it as the enemy stepped on the arms, legs, and bodies of the dead. Moaning and “death shrieks” filled the air.<sup>62</sup> Before the surrender, Hempstead estimated six or seven dead and eighteen to twenty wounded; After, eighty-five lay dead, five were mortally or seriously wounded, and forty were taken prisoner to New York.<sup>63</sup>

The British displayed disrespect toward living and dead rebels. They stripped everyone—the deceased, the wounded, and those lucky to survive without injury. Men who could walk were ordered to help those that could not. Rufus Avery and another man labored to carry out “a very, large, heavy man” after their “fasting and violent exercise of the day.”<sup>64</sup> The two prisoners, then ordered to sit, watched over a two-hour period as the enemy brought their casualties and wounded into the fort to a comfortable and shaded place. The patriots sat on the ground as the sun poured down, aggravating wounds, and “causing many to faint and die who might have lived with good care.”<sup>65</sup> Avery ended up in an unenviable spot between two mortally wounded men, so weak that they laid their heads upon his thighs. His only explanation for why some were spared was that the enemy “became tired of human butchery, and so let us live.”<sup>66</sup> After two hours in the sun, the British ordered the prisoners to stand up and move or else they “should be shot dead or

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<sup>60</sup> “Narrative of Rufus Avery” “in *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort*, eds. Avery and Hempstead, 29.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>63</sup> Narrative of Stephen Hempstead” in *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort*, eds. Avery and Hempstead, 49.

<sup>64</sup> Narrative of Rufus Avery” “in *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort*, eds. Avery and Hempstead, 30.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

run through!”<sup>67</sup> As Avery stood, he gently placed the two dying men’s heads on the ground. It was then that he could see the devastation as they marched down to the river to embark for New York. Avery watched helpless as the British set fire to buildings and brought whatever plunder they could carry to the beach. When Avery looked back, “New London was in flames!”<sup>68</sup> His fellow men and women abandoned their homes as the “unburied dead” and their “dying friends” lay all around.<sup>69</sup>

The British disregard for the Americans continued with a shocking event confirmed by both Rufus Avery and Stephen Hempstead. Avery attested to loading up fellow wounded prisoners onto an ammunition wagon. British soldiers steered the cart over to the top of the hill. Twenty redcoats tried to guide the wagon down the very steep hill, but the weight of it was too heavy. The captors let go and jumped out the way. The wagon thrashed down the hill with such speed that “the shafts struck a large, apple tree stump with a most violent crash, hurting the poor dying and wounded men in it, in a most inhumane manner. Some of the wounded fell out and fainted away.”<sup>70</sup> Hempstead remembered being stripped almost naked, put onto an ammunition wagon, and taken to the top of a very steep hill. The wagon was “permitted to run down by itself,” and violently plummeted into an apple tree.<sup>71</sup> Hempstead vividly depicted his experience: “The pain and anguish we all endured in this rapid descent, as the wagon jumped and jostled over rocks and holes, is inconceivable, and the jar in its arrest was like bursting the cords of life asunder and caused us to shriek with almost supernatural force.”<sup>72</sup> Their cries reached the other

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>71</sup> Narrative of Stephen Hempstead” in *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort*, eds. Avery and Hempstead, 50.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

side of the river. All the while, the British burned and ransacked New London as the wounded lay in the wagon before being forced down to the beach to board the enemy's ships. Slain Colonel Ledyard's brother intervened and convinced the captors of the improbability that all prisoners would survive the crossing to New York. The British released thirty-five rebels who were taken to Ebenezer Avery's house.<sup>73</sup>

The ordeal did not end for Hempstead at the Avery house. Redcoats set fire to every room including where the injured were put. The British left and those inside extinguished the flames. Colonial Ledyard's brother persuaded a British sentinel to stand guard over the wounded Americans until the enemy boarded their ships around eleven that night. Hempstead graphically portrayed the sight:

Thirty-five of us were lying on the bare floor, stiff, mangled, and wounded, in every manner, exhausted with pain, fatigue, and loss of blood, without clothes or anything to cover us, trembling with cold and spasms of extreme anguish without fire and light, parched with excruciating thirst, not a wound dressed, nor a soul to administer to our wants, nor an assisting hand to turn us during these long, tedious hours of the night. Nothing but groans and unavailing sighs were heard.<sup>74</sup>

By the time the enemy departed the next morning, two more rebels had died, and many had been deprived of water even though there was an abundant supply of it at the garrison. Colonel Ledyard's niece, Fanny, brought hot chocolate and wine. In such dreadful condition, Hempstead's own wife failed to recognize him. Taken to his house, he discovered it, and every piece of property he owned, burned.<sup>75</sup> Hempstead recovered at his brother's where he "lay eleven months as helpless as a child."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 54.

Another incident reveals a story of sacrifice. On their way out of town, the British poured a line of gunpowder all the way from the fort magazine down to the shoreline. The effect of igniting it was potentially catastrophic. Jonathan Rathbun maintained that an injured man near the line, already “wounded by three strikes of the bayonet in his body, proposed to a wounded man near him, to crawl to this line and saturate the powder with their blood, and thus save the magazine and the fort, and perhaps the lives of some of their comrades, not mortally wounded.”<sup>77</sup> According to Rathbun, this man succeeded in reaching the line, and was “found dead lying on the powder which was completely wet with his blood.”<sup>78</sup>

Rufus Avery survived the massacre and the British treatment immediately after, but his agony continued as prisoner of war. Onboard a British ship, he and other rebels were taken down to the hold where fires were lit and the hatchway closed shut behind them. It was “hot [and] filled with smoke.”<sup>79</sup> Avery feared suffocating to death. Their captors let prisoners take turns to go onto deck for fresh air. The captives waited twenty-four hours for the first meal, which was “hogs brains,” and subsequently went without food or water for three days.<sup>80</sup> After discovering an escape plan, the British moved the rebels to deeper bowels of the hull. One day, without warning, the enemy brought Avery up on deck, tied his hands behind his back so tightly that his “shoulder-bones cracked and almost touched each other.”<sup>81</sup> Led to the side of the ship, Avery jumped and fell into another boat, no free hands to guide or cushion his fall. Moved several times to different ships over several days, the prisoners frequently went without food. Avery expected

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<sup>77</sup> “Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun” in *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun with Accurate Accounts*, eds. Avery and Hempstead, 12.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Narrative of Rufus Avery” “in *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun, with Accurate Accounts of the Capture of Groton Fort*, eds. Avery and Hempstead, 36.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis in original.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



to be quickly executed or to die a slow and painful death. He would not experience either. The British exchanged him to Connecticut privateer, Nathaniel Shaw, and Continental Quartermaster and aide-de-camp to George Washington, Thomas Mifflin.<sup>82</sup>

The eighty-six-year-old mayor of Newark, New York, George Middleton, recorded his time at New London's raid as a twelve-year-old boy. Middleton reassured in his statement that his age and the passage of time did not render his recollection invalid. Rather, he asserted that it is as "vivid as if the event transpired but yesterday."<sup>83</sup> He declared that he could never forget that day as it was "impressed upon the mind amid the booming of cannon and the agonizing shrieks of those who stood on the eminence from the scene of conflict, and saw their husbands, sons, and lovers falling, one by one, before the wasting fire of the enemy."<sup>84</sup> Middleton corroborated how the British could not contain the ammunition wagon filled with Americans, and it collided into an apple tree so suddenly that it threw many of the already wounded men out, killing some in the crash. One man survived it, but as he crawled away, a redcoat knocked him in the head with his gun.<sup>85</sup> Middleton described the gunpowder line incident as a "slow-match on fire to ignite the train for the purpose of blowing up the fort," but that "an American entered the fort and put out the match saving the powder and the fort."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>83</sup> "A Narrative of the Capture of Fort Griswold, and Incidents Connected Therewith, as Related by Mayor George Middleton, of Newark, NY, an Eyewitness of the Scene" in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 89.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., On September 14, 1781, the *Connecticut Gazette*, reporting on the wagon incident said that the British "loaded a wagon with our wounded men, by orders of the officers, and set the wagon off from the top of the hill, which is long and very steep; the wagon went a considerable distance with great force, till it was suddenly stopped by a tree; the shock was so great to those faint and bleeding men that part of them died instantly; their officers ordered their men to fire on the wagon while it was running." "An Account of the Burning of New London," in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 20.

A ten-year-old volunteer in the militia of Colchester, Connecticut, Jonathan Rathbun, witnessed New London's aftermath, retelling it during the "infirmities of old age."<sup>87</sup> His militia unit marched from Colchester the day after the attack. Rathbun recalled over one hundred and thirty "naked chimneys" standing alone among "the smoking ruins of stores and dwelling houses."<sup>88</sup> Little escaped the inferno, except those vessels that ran up the river. As militia from surrounding areas and inhabitants returned to devastation, Rathbun remembered women "walking with consternation and despair depicted in their countenances, leading or carrying in their arms their fatherless and houseless babes."<sup>89</sup> Other residents roamed around remains of houses and followed the carts loaded with their loved ones to gravesites. With the unpleasant task of burying the deceased, Rathbun confronted human loss at ten years old. He recollected "heart rendering scenes where the wife first recognized her husband, the mother her son, the sister her brother, in the body of a mangled soldier, so disfigured with wounds and clotted with blood and dust, as to be scarcely known!"<sup>90</sup> Even though recorded years later, Rathbun insisted that his memory was accurate. As he told his story, he was stirred to remember his feelings of sympathy and love of country.<sup>91</sup>

At eighty-eight years old, Dr. Avery Downer recorded his memories as an assistant surgeon of the eighth regiment in the Connecticut militia. Son of a surgeon, Dr. Downer, first heard the two-gun alarm, then heard the deceiving third shot of the customary greeting by

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<sup>87</sup> "Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun" in *Narrative of Jonathan Rathbun with Accurate Accounts*, eds. Avery and Hempstead, 16.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

Connecticut privateers in the harbor. The third shot tricked the townspeople.<sup>92</sup> Not “until the smoke of New London appeared like a cloud” did they comprehend their future.<sup>93</sup> From fourteen miles away, Downer and his father left for the fort. The two doctors treated the wounded along the way. In town, they found that the British had collected their injured near Ebenezer Avery’s house. Downer, his father, and a man known as Dr. Prentiss, looked after forty wounded men there until the next day. They then entered Fort Trumbull and saw the dead strewn all over the courtyard. Downer noted the enemy’s deferential treatment of their deceased, burying regulars together in a ditch, and giving Major Montgomery more honors, buried alone at the fort’s entrance.<sup>94</sup>

These modes of memorialization recorded long after the fact can be met with both reverence and skepticism. In *Remembering the Revolution: Memory, History, and Nation Making From Independence to Civil War*, a collection of essays that look at how the Revolution was remembered from 1776 to 1865, Caroline Cox addressed the veracity of these types of memories. Cox acknowledged that personal recollections can be unreliable, but historians still seek ways to use them. Scholars suggest that while memory declines for more ordinary occurrences, for more dramatic events, the witness “experiencing an intense emotion around an occasion makes the subsequent memory of it more vivid.”<sup>95</sup> These kinds of emotions and remembrances are exactly

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<sup>92</sup> Avery Downer, M.D., “A Narrative of the Battle on Groton Heights, September 6, 1781,” April 17, 1851, in Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 84. Because of the alarm confusion, after the raid, the new Commander over New London, Samuel McClellan, banned the practice of firing guns for anything except during “hostilities with the enemy.” Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 17, fn.2.

<sup>93</sup> Avery Downer, M.D., “A Narrative of the Battle on Groton Heights, September 6, 1781,” April 17, 1851, in *Battle of Groton Heights*, Allyn, 84.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>95</sup> Caroline Cox “Public Memories, Private Lives: The First Greatest Generation Remembers the Revolutionary War” in *Remembering the Revolution: Memory, History, and Nation Making From Independence to Civil War*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press,

how George Middleton, Jonathan Rathbun, and Dr. Downer style their accounts. Cox recommended factoring later acquired values and beliefs in assessing the recollection and looking for other ways to substantiate the same evidence. Cox argued that the elderly can sometimes aggrandize a memory, but they can also gain more objectivity over the years. All of these issues should be considered and should not necessarily serve to discount the later recorded memorialization itself.<sup>96</sup>

Sara J. Purcell looked at memorials of the American Revolution. She argued that sermons, papers, songs, monuments, public commemorations, and the “military memory” of the American Revolution, helped define a national identity, and characterized American nationalism, political culture, and values for the next 200 years.<sup>97</sup> However, these shared experiences downplayed the violence to bring the country together. The military and civilian accounts of the Connecticut raids, and the explicit depictions of violence are different forms of commemoration, and are just as important as “sanitized, sentimentalized images of the Revolutionary War.”<sup>98</sup> The descriptions of the New London raid capture how the individuals experienced the violence exacted on those living in privateering ports and add to the historiography of navigating the American Revolution.

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2013), eds., Michael A. McDonnell, Clare Coubould, Frances M. Clarke, and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, 113.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. In the 1820s, with revolutionaries’ passing, the Revolution began being portrayed in print media commemorations, a top-down approach. These images and remembrances need comparing to “alternative stories” of the Revolution often memorialized not in print, but in individual statements or by word of mouth, a bottom-up approach. McDonnell, ed., *Remembering the Revolution* 2-3. For the seminal book on revolutionary memory, see Michael Kammen, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1978).

<sup>97</sup> Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

News of the raid quickly circulated. Three days after, Jedediah Huntington informed his brother, Ebenezer, that the British burned New London.<sup>99</sup> On July 11, Congress learned what happened there. John Witherspoon noted being “alarmed this morning with an account that Arnold had burned New London.”<sup>100</sup> In a letter to John Hadder, a Boston merchant with business interests in New London, Ephraim Miner described the damage. He wrote that the “whole of the buildings of every kind is said in ashes except some parts of the wharf.”<sup>101</sup> Homes from “the Widow Potter’s to N[athaniel] Shaw’s stone house with the church and storehouses are all in ashes.”<sup>102</sup> On September 15, Thomas McKean advised General Washington that New London’s two forts fell, the British burned New London’s stores and ships, save for three or four houses and a few privateers that had escaped, and all fort defenders were killed but eleven men.<sup>103</sup> Except for those few who manned the privateers that escaped, it is highly likely that privateers died.

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<sup>99</sup> *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society, Correspondence of the Brothers Joshua and Jedediah Huntington during the Period of the American Revolution*, (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1923), Jedediah Huntington to Ebenezer Huntington, September, 9, 1781, Vol. 20, 450.

<sup>100</sup> Smith, et al., eds, *Letters of Delegates*, John Witherspoon to William Livingston, September 11, 1781, 18:45-47.

<sup>101</sup> Ephraim Miner to John Hadder, September 11, 1781, New London Town Papers, 1674-1925, Box 1, Folder: “Burning New London Letter Ephraim Miner to John Hadder? Merchant, Boston, September 11, 1781,” New London County Historical Society.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Smith, et al., eds, *Letters of Delegates*, Thomas McKean to George Washington, September 15, 1781, 18:45-46. In the same letter, McKean warned Washington that intelligence of Clinton’s plans were “not derived through any official or authentic channel.” However, McKean believed it revealed preparations of Clinton intending to backup Cornwallis at Yorktown. So, he passed along to Washington that Cornwallis dispatched vessels to Clinton after the French fleet appeared in the Chesapeake. McKean understood that between “thirty and forty large transports lay at New York on Tuesday ready to sail, and more were getting ready—Sir Henry Clinton is said to be going with them. Their destination unknown but conjectured to be either for Virginia or Delaware Bay.” Clinton never went to aid Cornwallis.

On the same day as McKean's letter, Governor Trumbull wrote to Washington, in which he referred to the assault on New London as a "massacre."<sup>104</sup> Trumbull estimated that at Fort Trumbull the British numbered one to two thousand leading to the quick abandonment of an "indefensible" Fort Trumbull.<sup>105</sup> At Fort Griswold, there was a closer match: 150 defenders versus 600-800 Britons. Trumbull repeated the sensational story of Colonel Ledyard's surrender and murder by his own weapon and indicated that the British massacred up to seventy Americans.<sup>106</sup>

Benedict Arnold's involvement grows even more infamous with a long-lost obituary of Mrs. Ann Hinman Kellogg of Fairfield, daughter of privateer Captain Elisha Hinman.<sup>107</sup> David Casey found the obituary and felt it such an important discovery that he forwarded it to the Utica Daily Press for publishing in 1896. The notice disclosed that Mrs. Kellogg's mother remained in New London during the attack while Captain Hinman worked at sea. Astonishingly, it revealed that privateer Captain Hinman and his wife knew Benedict Arnold well, and even entertained him at their home. Mrs. Hinman watched the raid from her doorway as the British entered the town. When Arnold recognized her, he directed her to point out her property to be spared. Hoping to help others, she also pointed out neighbors' homes. She became so outraged by what

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<sup>104</sup> Governor Trumbull to George Washington, September 15, 1781, in *Battle of Groton Heights*, Allyn, 163.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

<sup>107</sup> Born in 1734, Hinman had a long maritime career beginning on ships headed to Europe and the West Indies at fourteen years old. During the Revolution, Hinman started out in the Continental navy. Captured and imprisoned in England in 1778, Hinman escaped to France and returned to America. He avoided a court martial over the loss of the ship he commanded at the time of his capture. Hinman captained privateers for the rest of the war. He declined a commission in the nation's navy in 1794 on account of his age. *Records and Papers of the New London County Historical Society*, (New London: New London County Historical Society, 1893), Part IV, Vol. 1, 66-67.

she saw that she pulled out a musket, pointed it at Arnold's back, and pulled the trigger. Either the musket misfired or failed to fire. Arnold turned around when he heard the noise. Having the foresight or instinct to drop the gun, Mrs. Hinman told him it was just the breaking of a chair. The announcement asserted that Arnold remained there, watching the battle at Fort Griswold across the harbor.<sup>108</sup>

In the days and weeks after the raid the *Connecticut Gazette* reported on the valor, the destruction, and the British version of the battle. The British story differs greatly from the American testimonials. On September 7, the paper praised the 150 Fort Griswold defenders for having done "all that men of spirit and bravery in such a situation could do" against so many, and estimated over one hundred families lost their homes and all that they owned.<sup>109</sup> Three weeks later on September 21, the paper reprinted an article by Loyalist paper *Rivington's Royal Gazette* with a forewarning to its American readers: "The following is inserted with a view of convincing our readers what infamous falsehoods our enemies are capable of publishing to the world."<sup>110</sup> According to *Rivington's*, the British burst into the fort where the rebels "were compelled to beg mercy," and the Britons spared them.<sup>111</sup> The report claimed to not know of the number of casualties, the injured, or prisoners, but maintained that the British successfully demolished the town of Groton and described the stores, magazines, and privateers at New

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<sup>108</sup> David Casey to the Editor of the Utica Daily Press, February 12, 1896, New London County Historical Society. Per Mr. Casey's letter, the episode is represented in a painting by Daniel Huntington. The painting, circa 1853-56, remains on display at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum in New London. The painting and a video about it can be viewed online at <https://www.lymanallyn.org/?s=huntington+abigail+hinman>, accessed September 24, 2020. The incident is questionable based on Arnold's report to Clinton.

<sup>109</sup> "An Account of the Burning of New London" in *Battle of Groton Heights*, Allyn, 19.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., *Rivington's Royal Gazette*, 94.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 96.

London, “reduced to ashes.”<sup>112</sup> The *Connecticut Gazette* disputed this, reporting instead that the “privateers took their stores on board and went up the river safely.”<sup>113</sup> In rationalizing New London’s destruction, the *Rivington’s* writer disparaged New London as “the most detestable nest of pirates on the continent.”<sup>114</sup> These articles confirm the British contempt for New London as a privateering port and the justification for the violence committed there.

Congress again sought to sanction the British for the attack on privateering port New London. Excoriating Britain’s conduct, several proposals recommended capital punishment and executions. James Varnum condemned “the barbarity of British insolence and cruelty,” and felt that it was time to “burn officers in return for the conflagration of defenseless villages.”<sup>115</sup> Delegate Arthur Middleton drafted resolves denouncing Britain’s behavior at New London as

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 97, fn.1.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. Benedict Arnold minimized, and failed to detail, the massacre. He claimed that he did everything “in his power to prevent the destruction of the town” blaming most of the demolition on gunpowder stored on the *Hannah* in the harbor which blew up and spread to other buildings. “An Account of B. Gen. Arnold’s Expedition” in *Rivington’s Gazette Extraordinary*, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 174, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan; *Rivington’s Gazette Extraordinary*, Benedict Arnold to Sir Henry Clinton, September 8, 1781, and Sir Henry Clinton to Lord Germain, September 12, 1781, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 174, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan; General Orders, September 17, 1781, Henry Clinton papers, Box/Vol. 174, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan. Commander Clinton assured that “the town was unavoidably burnt, occasioned by the explosion of great quantities of gunpowder which happened to be in the storehouses that were set fire to.” Sir Henry Clinton to George Germain, September 12, 1781, Henry Clinton Papers, Box/Vol. 174, William J. Clements Library, University of Michigan. Clinton’s attitude toward these types of assaults evolved. His view changed from worrying of alienating or inciting the rebels to rousing fear and “every apprehension.” Ibid. Ultimately, the attack failed to distract Washington. In his *Battle of Groton Heights*, Allyn attributed the destruction to a “few worthless vagrants of the town,” referencing Francis Manwaring Caulkin’s *History of New London*. Reviewing Caulkin’s work, it contains the statement as credited, but not the context. However, surrounding this statement are pages dedicated to the British raid, and within them, numerous descriptions of homes being put to fire. Chapter XXXII, 545-72.

<sup>115</sup> Smith, et al., eds, *Letters of Delegates*, James M. Varnum to Nathaniel Greene, September 17, 1781, 18:51-52.



being against the “laws of war” and ways of “civilized nations.”<sup>116</sup> Middleton believed that Britain’s scorched earth strategy came from a “decreasing hope of subjugating these states.”<sup>117</sup> Therefore, he demanded the imprisonment of redcoats, and that they “answer with their lives.”<sup>118</sup> John Matthews proposed killing all persons in arms against the United States and burning British towns.<sup>119</sup> After debate, Congress created a manifesto ordering Washington to retaliate in kind.<sup>120</sup>

### Conclusion

Connecticut’s privateering ports of New Haven, Fairfield, Norwalk, and New London incurred considerable damage and devastation due to the raids during the American Revolution. The extent of it grew with each one. In New Haven, the British caused more than £24,893 in damages. Fairfield residents lost ninety-seven houses, sixty-seven barns, forty-eight stores, two meeting houses, one church, one courthouse, and two schoolhouses. At Norwalk, 130 houses, eighty-seven barns, twenty-two stores, seventeen shops, four mills, five vessels, one church, and one meeting house burned totaling an estimated £8,500 damage to 105 persons. In New London’s ruins lay sixty-five homes, thirty-one stores and warehouses, eighteen shops, twenty barns, nine public buildings, and approximately one dozen ships and fifty cannon.<sup>121</sup> Over forty

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., Arthur Middleton’s Draft Resolves, September ?, 1781, 18:89. For another view on the brutality of the raid on New London, see Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin, “Target New London: Benedict Arnold’s Raid, Just War, and ‘Homegrown Terror’ Reconsidered,” *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (January 2019), 67-95.

<sup>117</sup> Smith, et al., eds, *Letters of Delegates*, Arthur Middleton’s Draft Resolves, September ?, 1781, 18:89.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., fn.1.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Jackson Kuhl, *Samuel Smedley, Connecticut Privateer* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 79; *Papers of the Continental Congress*, S.H. Parsons, Return of Buildings Burnt at Fairfield, July 9, 1779; Samuel H. Parsons, Destroyed at Norwalk by Gen. Tryon, July 11, 1779; Van Dusen, *Connecticut*, 168-69.

widows and children survived, but without estates and “nothing left but the clothing upon their backs.”<sup>122</sup>

War wreaks havoc on property, and it brings physical infirmity and long roads to recovery. Stephen Hempstead’s hip wound left him incredibly weak and partially disabled to such a degree that prevented him from traveling. His elbow remained stiff at the joint and rendered him unable to lift his hand up to his head or perform any substantial work. Daniel Stanton received twenty-one wounds to the head, body, and limbs by gunshot and bayonet. He fully recuperated except where a shot between the ankle and heel of his foot, exited at the big toe. That wound immobilized his heel, and for his war service and injury, Stanton received six pounds per year.<sup>123</sup>

The British efforts in the raid on New London failed to translate to a strategic victory. Clinton hoped that an attack on the privateering port of New London would bring Washington out

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<sup>122</sup> Van Dusen, *Connecticut*, 169. Flames not only ravaged rebel homes. Years later, loyalists petitioned Britain for reimbursement for their raid losses. From a house carpenter and joiner, to a tide surveyor, to a gentleman whose character witnesses included loyalist son of Benjamin Franklin Governor William Franklin, and well-known redcoat spy Captain Beverly Robinson, all sought compensation. For records of these loyalist claims, see the Papers and Records of the American Loyalist Claims Commission in the Great Britain Audit Office and the American Loyalist Claims of the Great Britain Treasury. Colonel Beverly Robinson commanded a British regiment called the Loyal Americans during the New London raid. The Loyal Americans were tenants of Colonel Robinson’s land in New York. A friend of Washington prior to the war, Robinson became a trusted advisor to Clinton and a confidant of Arnold during his decision to defect. Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin, “A Traitor’s Epiphany: Benedict Arnold in Virginia and His Quest for Reconciliation,” *The Virginia Magazine for History and Biography*, Vol. 125, No. 4, 2017, 324; Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 98.

<sup>123</sup> Allyn, *Battle of Groton Heights*, 130, 133. The New London narratives consist of military accounts. However, pages in the *Papers of the Continental Congress* are dedicated to listing the names of civilians affected, revealing the extent of the damage. In her history of New London, Frances Manwaring Caulkins includes brief personal stories of civilians, comprising of women and children fleeing town, a father hurrying to bury his child’s coffin who had died the day before, and others staying behind to watch over sick family members hoping to obtain sympathy from the invaders. Caulkins, *History of New London Connecticut*, Ch. XXXII, 545-72.

in the open in the northeast. Instead of sending troops to Cornwallis in Virginia, Clinton gave Arnold five regiments for the New London raid. In the end, Washington and his troops went to Yorktown as the French navy lay in the Chesapeake Bay. With Washington on one side and the French navy on the other, Cornwallis surrendered Yorktown on October 19, 1781, one month after New London.<sup>124</sup>

Victory at Yorktown sounded the war's death knell. What might have happened if the troops at New London aided Cornwallis? Some in the Continental Congress questioned the recklessness of these very actions. According to North Carolina's delegates, the British descent on Connecticut established "proof, at once, of the predatory designs of the enemy, and of the imbecility which prevents them from carrying on operations of greater vigor, and more competent to their design of conquest."<sup>125</sup>

With the New London raid, Connecticut's direct impact from the Revolutionary War was largely over. From children, to women, to blacks, to the elderly, and to rebel fighters, no one was immune to the physical and psychological damage that war inflicts. The importance of compiling the documentation of these events, not just through official or formal declarations or commemorations, but also through the personal words of ordinary people remains a critical piece of historiography. It is also crucial to examine how opposing sides interpret and understand the same, devastating incidents. This dissertation does that and establishes the difference that privateers made for the Americans in the fight for independence. The consequence, however, was a bloody and violent story told by those living in, and protecting, privateer communities.

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<sup>124</sup> Wilson, "Benedict Arnold's Last Raid," 129, 174.

<sup>125</sup> Smith, et al., eds, *Letters of Delegates*, The North Carolina Delegates to the Governor of North Carolina, July 15, 1779, 4:318.

## CONCLUSION

The people of Connecticut still suffered six years after the British raid on New London. Representatives of New Haven, Fairfield, Norwalk, and New London joined a petition for compensation to the raid victims at a General Assembly meeting in May 1787. This was the third time these communities had asked for reparation since the raids. The injured parties waited for four more years when after a commission determined the amount of damage from the attacks, the Connecticut Assembly granted land, known as the “Western Reserve” or the “Firelands” to victims. This tract of land consisted of 500,000 acres of uncultivated terrain from the western part of Pennsylvania to Lake Erie. Individuals received close to three and one-third acres for every pound of damage they claimed. Many grantees did not live to see that day. Their heirs, and those victims still living, refused to move from Connecticut to the wilderness. Most opted to sell their portion at a fraction of its value to speculators who ultimately recouped the full worth.<sup>1</sup>

Destruction of Connecticut’s privateering communities took years to repair as town organizers worked to raise funds and rebuild. For example, Fairfield leaders exchanged its agricultural surplus for lumber and building materials instead of disbursing the excess crops amongst the residents. The state gave 1,000 pounds amassed from confiscated loyalists’ estates to the Prime Society and Green’s Farm Society organizations for rebuilding efforts. The process of financing and restoring, however, was mostly left to individuals. Between Reverend Eliot

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<sup>1</sup> “General Assembly, May Session, A.D., 1793,” in *Battle of Groton Heights*, (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1881), ed. Charles Allyn, 147; see also Fairfield Area Papers, 1779-1890s, Box 1: Black Rock to Revolutionary War, MS #53; Firelands Papers folder, Fairfield Museum & History Center; *Historical Collection, from Official Records, Files, etc. of the Part Sustained by Connecticut, During the War of the Revolution*, compiled by Royal R. Hinman, Secretary of State, (Hartford: E. Gleason, 1842), 626-27; Thomas J. Farnham, *Fairfield, the Biography of a Community, 1639-2000*, (West Kennebunk, MA: Phoenix Publishing, 1988), 94.

soliciting friends and relatives in Boston, and his parishioners shifting through the rubble for nails and iron to sell, it took seven years to recreate a meetinghouse for church services. The Anglican church took an additional three years to rebuild. Connecticut's General Assembly held a lottery in 1791 to construct a permanent courthouse and jail, housed in a temporary structure since the attack. School classes were held in a "makeshift town house" until 1795 when the Assembly established a school district that constructed a schoolhouse.<sup>2</sup>

Aside from the challenges of restoring physical structures, residents struggled to find employment and harbored lingering resentment toward the British and those who helped them in the war. Mariners unable to work due to the devastation to ports and privateers, were relegated to plundering on Long Island. Town resolutions placed a bounty on William Tryon's head and called for the ouster of loyalists who worked with the British.<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation corrects the record and strengthens the view that privateering had a significant impact in the American Revolution. The combination of a variety of narratives establishes the weight of American privateering. Within American military and political establishments, the evidence is that colonists started privateering, and the practice grew, before the government's official sanction of it in March 1776. Colonies used privateers to support their security and trade interests, and Commander George Washington instituted privateering activities, without the Congress' knowledge, to acquire supplies to fight the British. This early practice was successful in that it caused great concern for British military and political officials.

British anxiety about American privateers had a multifaceted effect. Britain's military personnel, political officers, and business community complained about American privateering

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<sup>2</sup> Farnham, *Fairfield, the Biography of a Community*, 94-96.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

hurting British trade and British attempts to supply their troops. The British redesigned war ships and modified naval movements, sometimes keeping their ships docked until American privateers left the area. British merchants suffered extensive losses and rising insurance rates as a result of the actions of American privateers. British officials approved, and enacted, a “scorched-earth” strategy against privateering ports. This policy played out against coastal communities beginning with assaults on Machias, Falmouth, and Egg Harbor, and continued with raids on New Haven, Fairfield, Norwalk, and New London.

Additional evidence of the effect that privateering had on the American Revolution are the thousands of seamen that served on privateers, which impaired the development of a Continental navy. Rebel leaders including President of the Continental Congress, John Hancock, Commander-in-chief, George Washington, and Congressional delegate and diplomat in Paris, Benjamin Franklin, heard protests that privateering enticed men away from naval service. Commodore Esek Hopkins and Captain John Paul Jones blamed the inability to fully staff naval ships on the allure of privateering. Privateers’ advertisements described work on a privateer as a “cruise” to make “fortunes.” Revolutionaries such as John Bradford and Samuel Cooper expressed concerns at what such a “little” navy the Americans had. As late as 1778, Washington still relied on privateers, and implored the governors of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts to continue their colony’s privateering activities.

Through first-hand accounts, journals, testimonials, diaries, and letters, this dissertation exposes the unbridled destruction of property and indiscriminatory violence against privateering refuges and the residents living there. Communities were wrecked—homes were leveled; churches, schools, and governmental offices were damaged; and industry was interrupted when stores and ships were destroyed. Women were sexually assaulted, terrorized, and robbed. The

elderly and the disabled were attacked and killed. Rebel fighters were massacred after surrendering. Families were left widowed, fatherless, and homeless.

This study also establishes that military history and the Northeastern colonies remain valuable to the historiography. After the British shifted their war strategy to the Southern colonies, New England and Connecticut never strayed from British concern. Privateering forced Britain to watch, and send troops into, Connecticut privateering nests. Further, British command, notwithstanding claimed indignation of it, accepted their men's actions, the treatment of soldiers and civilians alike, and the devastation of towns. Connecticut's privateering communities suffered for their successes. From 1775, when Admiral Graves directed British Captains to destroy privateers and their bases, to September of 1781 when Commander Clinton ordered the attack on New London, Connecticut's privateering activities produced favorable results for the Americans. These operations resulted in British raids on the Connecticut coast and altered the lives of those who fought, and those who found themselves caught in the crosshairs.

Privateers proved their value in the American Revolution and the United States called on privateers once more in the War of 1812. Thirty years after independence, the U.S. found itself battling Great Britain again. The U.S. navy developed since the first war, but not enough. The American government supplemented its sea power another time with privateers. Edgar S. Maclay wrote that at the beginning of the War of 1812, in June, the American navy had seventeen vessels that could carry four hundred and forty-two arms and 5,000 sailors, but that only eight ships were in service. Without a single privateer to start with, Maclay claimed that sixty-five privateers were readied by July 15. By mid-October, New York had produced twenty-six

privateers. Maclay concluded that by the end of the war, the Americans had commissioned 550 privateers.<sup>4</sup>

When Alfred Thayer Mahan's *Sea Power in its Relation to War of 1812* was published in 1905, Mahan still had a dim view of privateering but acknowledged its value in the second war against Great Britain. Mahan contended that the U.S. "flooded the seas with privateers" from 1812-1814, and referred to the U.S. navy at the beginning of the war as "tiny" and consisting of "a body of several frigates, with one or two sloops of war."<sup>5</sup> Mahan recognized privateers made "increasing number and value of prizes as the war went on," but called them a "minor offensive operation."<sup>6</sup> Similar to his conclusions in *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, Mahan maintained his assessment that privateers did not have a conclusive effect on the war or were "decisive of great issues."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Edwin S. Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015050936635&view=1up&seq=559&skin=2021>, 225-26, 506.

<sup>5</sup> Captain A.T. Mahan, *Sea Power in its Relation to War of 1812* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1905), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo1.ark:/13960/t49p3m38c&view=1up&seq=15&skin=2021>, Vol. 1, 288; 298.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 398; Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*, 400. Other scholars have rejected the effectiveness of American privateers in the War of 1812. In a 2012 interview Andrew Lambert asserted that American privateers could not do "serious damage to British shipping." Lambert called privateering an "ineffective" war strategy which never overcame "a major sea power." Donald A. Yerxa, "The Naval War of 1812: An Interview with Andrew Lambert" in *Historically Speaking* 13, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), No. 4, September 2012, p. 11-12. Faye M. Kert agreed with Lambert that on balance, a robust British blockade had more of an impact on the outcome of the war than any damage an American navy or privateer inflicted. Even so, Kert located over 600 active privateers. Faye M. Kert, *Privateering: Patriots and Profits in the War of 1812* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 8, 37. For other perspectives on the War of 1812, see Jon Latimer, *1812*; Brian Arthur, *How Britain Won the War of 1812: The Royal Navy's Blockades of the United States, 1812-15* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2011); Stephen Budiansky, *Perilous Fight: America's Intrepid War with Britain on the High Seas, 1812-1815* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011); John A. McManemin, *Privateers of the War of 1812* (Spring Lake, NJ: privately printed, 1992);



One privateer in the War of 1812 was George Coggeshall. Distressed by privateers being cast as “a mercenary set of desperadoes, only bent on enriching themselves with the spoils of their adversaries, possessing little honor and less patriotism,” Coggeshall worked to rehabilitate this reputation in *A History of American Privateers and Letters of Marque*.<sup>8</sup> Coggeshall drew from his personal experience and research into British and American records, including newspapers and ships’ logs. He contended that at the start of the war, when Britain’s Royal Navy had at least 800 operational ships at its disposal, the United States’ navy consisted of just seven functioning frigates, with twelve or fifteen other vessels idle in dockyards for various reasons such as unseaworthiness. In contrast, a New York newspaper article dated one month after the U.S. declared war reported that the Americans would have around 100 privateers within two months, the total likely to double shortly after. The quality of American privateers in this second war troubled the British press just as it did in the American Revolution.<sup>9</sup> One London editorial cautioned against a war even though “America cannot certainly pretend to wage a maritime war with us.”<sup>10</sup> Yes, the Americans had no navy in comparison to Britain, but they had “nearly 100,000 as good seaman as any in the world, all of whom would be actively deployed against our trade on every part of the ocean.”<sup>11</sup> The commentary ended by admonishing Britain to remember what the American privateers “did in the latter part of the American war.”<sup>12</sup>

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John Philips Cranwell and William Bowers Crane, *Men of Marque: A History of Private Armed Vessels Out of Baltimore During the War of 1812* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1940); and Edgar S. Maclay, *A History of American Privateers* (New York: D. Appleton, 1899).

<sup>8</sup> George Coggeshall, *A History of American Privateers and Letters of Marque* (New York: C. T. Evans, 1856), xlvi.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., xlv, xlix, 36-37.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

The practice of privateering essentially ended for most of the world with the close of the Crimean War in 1856. Written by France and Great Britain, the Paris Declaration Respecting Maritime Law concluded that war on April 16, 1856, and officially announced, that “Privateering is and remains abolished.”<sup>13</sup> Forty-four European powers signed the Declaration that year, two more in 1857, and the last two in 1858. Nations that did not participate were Spain, Mexico, Venezuela, and the United States.<sup>14</sup>

The Confederacy tried to use privateers against the Union in the American Civil War, but the practice never seriously impacted the war’s outcome. By June 1861, Confederate privateers consisting of modest-sized slavers, fishing schooners, cutters, and tugs, brought approximately twenty prizes into the port of New Orleans. The limited number of vessels at the Confederacy’s disposal and the Union’s successful commercial blockade, however, prevented a more robust privateering operation.<sup>15</sup> With the conclusion of this war in 1865 and the Paris Declaration, privately owned and armed vessels which helped Britain and other European countries enter the modern era, and aided the United States in its quest for independence, vanished from warfare.

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<sup>13</sup> Francis Stark “The Abolition of Privateering and the Declaration of Paris” in *Studies in History, Economics and Public Law*, edited by the Faculty of Political Science of Columbia University 8, No. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1897), 29.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. For extensive analysis of the U.S.’s failure to join the Declaration, see Stark, “The Abolition of Privateering and the Declaration of Paris.” For more recent scholarship on the end of privateering, see Jan Martin Jemnitzer, *Power, Law, and the End of Privateering* (London: The Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Henning Hillmann and Christina Gathman, “Overseas Trade and the Decline of Privateering,” *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Sept. 2011), 730-61.

<sup>15</sup> Maclay, *A History of American Privateers*, 503-07.

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