

SHIPS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY NAVY



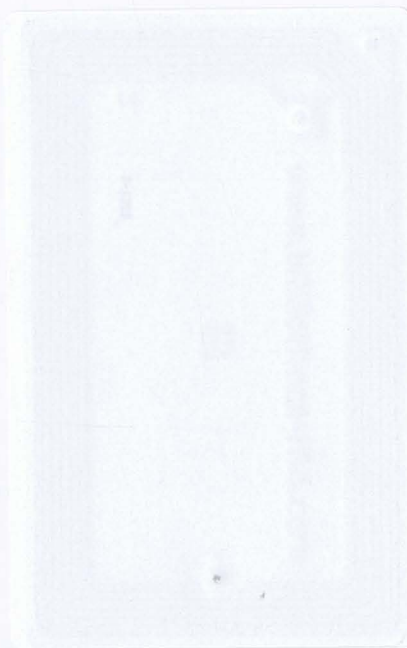
MARK LARDAS

ILLUSTRATED BY TONY BRYAN

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NEW VANGUARD • 161

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AUTHOR’S NOTE

The following abbreviations indicate the sources of the illustrations used in this volume:

- AC – Author’s Collection
 - FDRL – Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library Collection, New York
 - LOC – Library of Congress, Washington, DC
 - NH&HC – United States Navy Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington, DC
 - USNA – United States Naval Academy Collections
- Other sources are listed in full

AUTHOR’S DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my brother Peter, who gave us shelter from Ike, and in whose house work started on this manuscript

EDITOR’S NOTE

For ease of comparison between types, imperial measurements are used almost exclusively throughout this book. The following details will help in converting the imperial measurements into metric:

- 1 mile = 1.6km
- 1lb = 0.45kg
- 1 yard = 0.9m
- 1ft = 0.3m
- 1in = 2.54cm/25.4mm
- 1 gal = 4.5 liters
- 1 ton (US) = 0.9 tonnes

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SHIPS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY NAVY

INTRODUCTION

When a country is born, the process is messy. It is the victors who write history. If an independence movement succeeds, it is a glorious revolution, and those that participated in it are heroes. If it fails, it was an ignominious rebellion, the fomenters traitors and scoundrels. So it was in the American Revolution. It began in an *ad hoc* manner, almost spontaneously.

At first it was simply a way for Britons to demand redress for grievances, an attempt to regain traditional rights. Few started with independence as a goal. But as 1775 dragged into 1776, it became apparent to those in opposition to the established British order that only independence would gain them the autonomy they desired. Thirteen of Britain's colonies on the North American seaboard – from Georgia in the south to Massachusetts in the north (Maine was then part of Massachusetts) – banded together and declared their independence. They declared themselves a new nation, one radically different than any then in existence.

Nations demand navies. Armed ships were already fighting for the American cause. There were privateers – privately owned warships chartered by individual states. There were *ad hoc* collections of warships assembled by soldiers to support their operations, such as George Washington's "Pine Tree Flag" fleet of schooners and cutters. There were state navies, commissioned by individual colonies. None satisfied the dignity owing to a nation: that required a national fleet.

In due course, such a fleet was indeed established. At first it consisted of purchased merchant vessels converted into warships, but these were too weak or too slow to match the Royal Navy at sea. However, by the 1770s the Atlantic colonies were shipbuilding regions, capable of building major warships. The Continental Congress sought to capitalize on that strength, authorizing the construction of true warships – frigates, sloops-of-war, and ultimately, ships-of-the-line.

Much of the authorized construction was never finished, and some projects were never started. The impulse towards having a navy – an expensive option – was transformed from a necessity to a luxury once the United States gained a European continental ally. France had a powerful navy, and following the alliance the United States concentrated its efforts on its army.

John Paul Jones was the greatest American naval hero to emerge from the Wars of American Independence. This period illustration is one of the few contemporary images drawn from life. (AC)



The ships that were built had spotty records. Most were quickly captured, while some were burned to avoid that fate, and by war's end only four ships remained. Yet in that brief period the Continental Navy gave the world several memorable fights. It established the principles that guide the United States Navy to this day. This is the story of those ships.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Shipbuilding in America

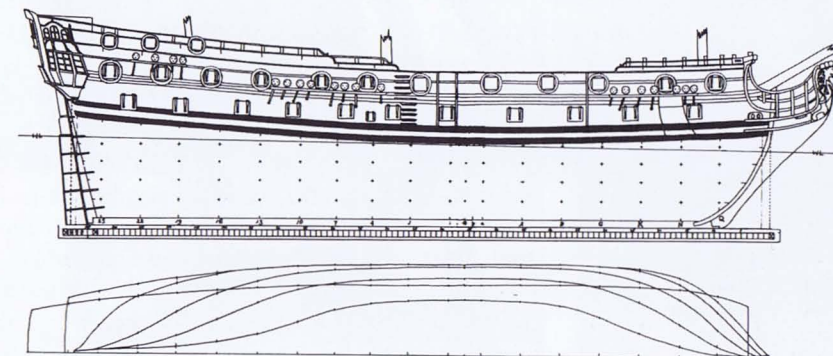
By 1775 shipbuilding was a major industry in the British colonies along the North American seaboard. It had to be. The coasts, rivers, and tidal estuaries of the Atlantic seaboard provided the only real means of quickly transporting large quantities of goods or numbers of people. Wagons drawn by draft animals were inefficient at any distance greater than 30 miles. Consequently, as the American colonies grew, so did their shipyards.

At first, American shipyards turned out small craft – fishing boats, water ferries and coastal vessels. But even as early as the 1690s they were capable of building large merchantmen and warships, including ships built for the Royal Navy. For example, in 1790 the Holland shipyard in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, built HMS *Falkland*, a 44-gun two-decker.

Falkland was a major warship. It was too small to stand in the line-of-battle in a sea fight, but only just. Throughout the first two-thirds of the 18th century 44s would occasionally take a place in the line-of-battle, when necessity dictated. These vessels served as flagships on small, overseas stations, or as convoy escorts. They were the sailing era's equivalent of the armored cruiser.

By the 1770s American shipyards had turned out other major warships. These included *Bedford Galley*, a 34-gun warship built in 1697, and HMS *America*, another 44-gun ship, built in 1748. Both were constructed at Portsmouth. Also in 1748, Boston, Massachusetts, turned out the 24-gun HMS *Boston* – a small frigate, a class of warship then entering service. New York built HMS *Thornton* around 1756, a frigate subsequently used as a troop transport in the 1759 invasion of Quebec. Philadelphia, Baltimore and Charleston were also major shipbuilding centers by the start of the 18th century. They regularly built both large merchantmen and privateers through the start of the American Revolution.

Even by 1700 American ships showed different characteristics than Old World ships. They tended to be larger than their European counterparts. *Boston* of 1748 was rated at 24 guns, had a 118-foot gun deck. *Fox*, a 28-



The 44-gun *Falkland* was one of the first large ships built in the American colonies. Launched in 1695, it served in the Royal Navy for more than half a century. (John F. Millar)

gun frigate built a quarter-century later in Britain, had a gun deck that was 120 feet, six inches. American hulls were also optimized for speed.

There were reasons for American preference for faster ships. Even for coastwise trade, colonials had greater distances to cover. Speed helped. Because the New World was a frontier, piracy was a greater problem than in British waters. The tradition that there was “no peace beyond the line” – that peace treaties effective in European waters had no validity west of the demarcation line of the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas – died late in the 17th century. Colonial merchant vessels had motivations for speed, and colonial privateers a need to go faster than colonial merchant vessels. Additionally, once Britain began imposing tariffs and restricting the goods that could be shipped to their Atlantic colonies, smuggling became profitable, and speed was important in such an enterprise.

Finally, ships built in the Thirteen Colonies merited a reputation for short service lives. Of the major ships built for the Royal Navy between 1690 and 1770, only *Falkland* lasted, not requiring a rebuild for 50 years. The rest were disposed of, rebuilt or converted to support ships within ten years of commissioning. *Boston* and *Thornton* lasted only four years.

There were reasons why colonial ships did not last. One was inexperience in building, especially in seasoning wood. colonial ships were often constructed from green wood, which rotted quickly. Eighteenth century Americans had little incentive to fix the problem. Timber, of a quality European shipwrights could only envy, was plentiful and easy to get at. It was cheaper to replace rotting wood – or a whole ship – than to put in the infrastructure to properly season wood.

At the start of the American Revolution the Colonies had the capability to build ships up to and including ships-of-the-line. While only a single yard

BELOW LEFT

The Continental Navy sloop *Providence* began life as *Katy*, a vessel typical of the numerous merchant and commercial ships built in the American colonies prior to the Revolution. (NH&HC)

BELOW RIGHT

The ship-of-the-line was the ultimate expression of naval power in the 18th century. No nation was considered a serious seagoing power unless they could field numerous ships-of-the-line. (Weems Collection)



The standard British frigates at the start of the Revolution were much like HMS *Pandora*. They mounted between 24 and 32 guns, with a main battery consisting of either 9lb or 12lb guns. (Charles Cozewith)

did actually build a ship-of-the-line, nearly a dozen others certainly could have. More than a score could build frigates and dozens were capable of producing smaller warships. These American hulls were faster and larger than their European counterparts, even if they were unlikely to endure past their first commission without requiring a major rebuild. For a nation born in rebellion, durability was a luxury.

Foreign trends

American shipbuilding had potential – and its own innovations – but the New World still looked to Europe. In 1775 the four first-rate naval powers – Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Spain – were European nations. Of the second-tier naval powers – Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Turkey, and Portugal – all but Turkey thought of themselves as European.

While Britain had the largest navy, France was not far behind. France and Spain led Britain in naval architecture – the design of hull forms – but Britain had a superior naval establishment and more innovative technology. It was British innovations in naval artillery (the British invented the carronade during the 1770s) and underwater protection (coppering ships' bottoms) that allowed Britain to survive the combined alliance of France, Spain and the Netherlands.

When the Wars of American Revolution started, there were four major classes of warships – ships-of-the-line, two-deckers, frigates, and sloops-of-war (or corvettes). All major warships were square-rigged. Some smaller warships used fore-and-aft configurations – lateen, lugger or schooner rigs. While these ships could sail closer to the wind than square-riggers, they were less maneuverable. Most warships, except the smallest, had three masts with square sails. These were referred to as “ship-rigged”. Smaller sloops-of-war had two-mast brig or ketch configurations.

The ship-of-the line was the largest type of warship. It carried two or three full gun decks, with additional, lighter guns in the upper works – the forecabin, quarterdeck,

The French invented the frigate. In the 1770s French frigates were bigger and better than those of the Royal Navy. While the latter navy made great strides during the Revolution, it would be a generation before British frigate design surpassed French. (Weems Collection)



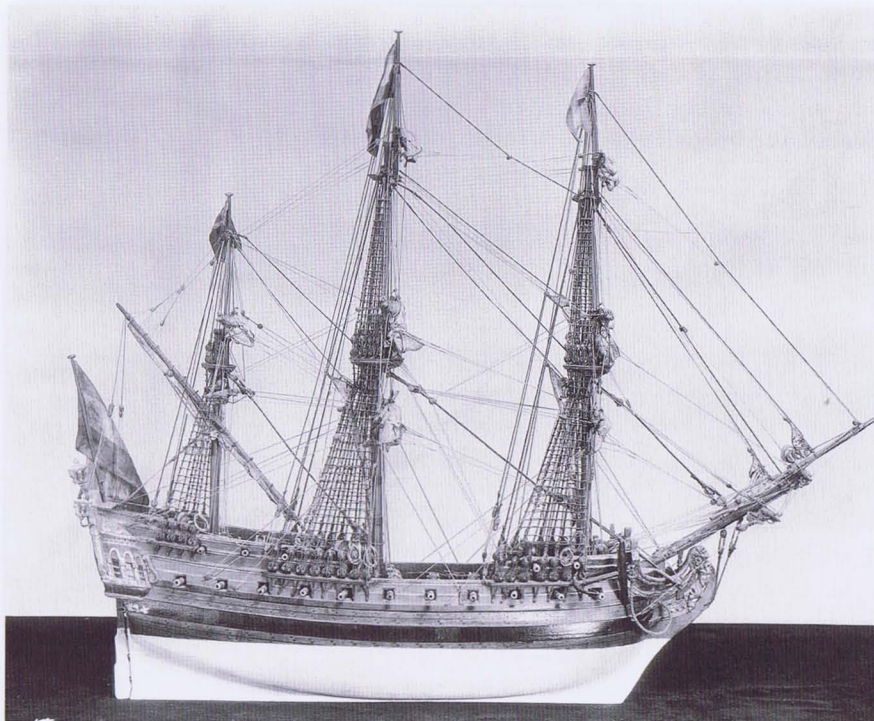
and occasionally, the poop. Two full gun decks were necessary but not sufficient for categorization as a ship-of-the-line. A ship-of-the-line had to be large enough to stand in the line of battle and trade broadsides with its rivals. The main battery had to consist of at least 24lb long guns. By 1775 only ships rated for 64 or more guns were considered ships-of-the-line.

The standard ships-of-the-line in the 1770s were two-deck 74-gun vessels. The class emerged during the Seven Years' War, proving a perfect combination of speed, size, and firepower. The French were experimenting with larger 80-gun two-deck versions, but most ships-of-the-line with 80 or more guns were three-deckers ranging from 84 to 104 guns. Built in relatively small numbers, these vessels served as flagships or "prestige" ships.

Smaller than ships-of-the-line were two-deckers. These also had two full gun decks, but were too light to stand in the line of battle. By the 1770s most two-deckers carried between 40 and 60 guns. Earlier, two-deckers with as few as 34 guns were built. The two-decker originally served as a large cruiser – a ship intended to scout, provide convoy escort, attack enemy merchant ships, and suppress enemy cruisers.

The small size of these ships meant that they could carry two full gun decks by mounting one of them close to the water, where it could not be used in high seas. The high sides required meant these ships were crank – and often slower than the then-new 74-gun ships-of-the-line. By the 1770s two-deckers were being used either as flagships on overseas stations or as heavily-armed cargo vessels – East Indiamen or naval transports.

The two-decker's scouting and commerce-raiding role was now being filled by a new class of warship – the frigate. The warship frigate appeared in the late 1740s, shortly before the start of the Seven Years' War. It was a French innovation, although the Royal Navy exploited the capabilities of the class more quickly and thoroughly than the French did. The frigate had a



The Netherlands had one of the four top-tier navies in the 1770s and 1780s. Dutch ships, including this frigate (c. 1781), tended to have shallower drafts than ships of the other major European continental navies. (USNA)

single gun deck, located on what would be the upper deck of a two-decker, mounting the guns that would previously have been found on a two-decker's lower deck. On a frigate, the lower deck housed the crew.

Not having gunports, a frigate's lower deck could lie closer to the waterline. This allowed the upper deck to be lower in turn. The result was a lower, faster ship which carried a two-decker's lower-battery, quarterdeck and forecastle guns, with the main battery high enough that the guns could be used even in the roughest seas. Frigates were fast and handy. They could beat anything they caught and run from anything that could beat them. During the Continental period, frigates carried between 24 and 38 guns.

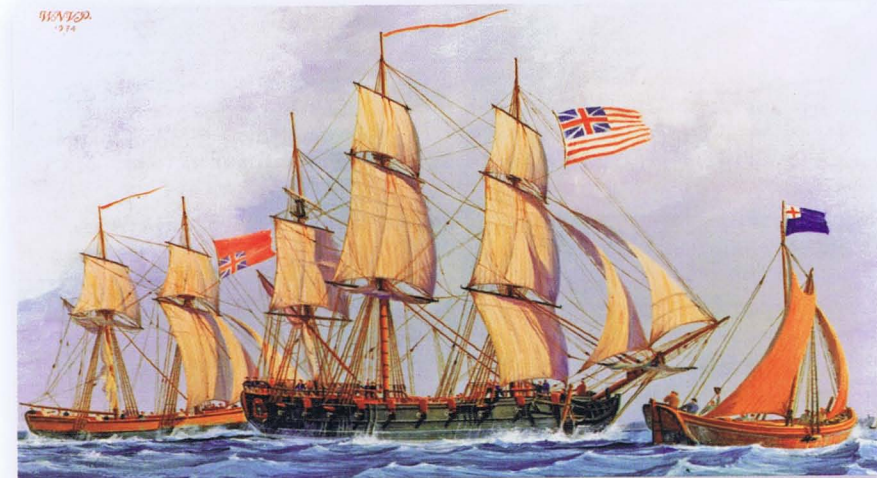
Smaller than the frigate were sloops-of-war. These carried only one deck of guns. Although sloops-of-war may have had forecastles and quarterdecks during the 1770s and 1780s, these were too light to mount guns. A sloop-of-war carried between eight and 22 guns. Larger sloops-of-war were always ship-rigged. The smaller ones used a bewildering assortment of single- and double-mast rigs.

Purchased ships

After the Revolution started, the Colonies, individually and together, needed warships. The Continental Congress authorized the construction of a navy, but in the meantime needed warships immediately. The quickest way to obtain warships was to arm merchant ships. This tactic worked, at least to some degree, because most merchant ships were able to hold the weight of a battery of guns on their decks.

Arming merchant ships allowed the creation of two categories of warship: sloops-of-war and two-deckers. Smaller merchant vessels capable of carrying a battery on their main deck provided a useful source of sloops-of-war. Larger vessels, especially East Indiamen intended to carry cargos to the Orient, were armed as two-deckers. Indeed, due to the dangers on the Indies passage, most East Indiamen were in any case built as auxiliary warships so that they could defend themselves from pirates.

However, neither type of merchantman made entirely satisfactory warships. Merchant vessels' scantlings were lighter than warships', and converted merchantmen were able to take less damage and had to carry lighter guns. The larger merchant conversions, although frequently referred to as frigates, really were not up to the designation. The lower deck of such



Columbus was representative of the purchased warships of the Continental Navy. Ship-rigged, it carried as many guns as a frigate, but lacked the structural integrity of a true warship. (NH&HC)



Boston was one of the smallest frigates built for the Continental Navy. A fast sailer, it was captured only through the misfortune of being trapped in Charleston when the city fell to the British. (NH&HC)

ships was higher than a frigate's. It was too close to the water for guns mounted there to be used even in moderate seas. The upper deck was proportionately higher, which made the ships leewardly, slowing them.

Nevertheless, converting merchant ships did provide a navy. The Continental Congress hastened the creation of this force by purchasing and converting extra merchant craft. It continued the practice throughout the war, whenever it needed warships in a hurry. In November 1775, the Congress authorized the purchase of four ships – *Alfred*, *Columbus*, *Andrew Doria*, and *Cabot*. Along with the sloop

Providence, these vessels formed the core of the Continental Navy's first squadron. While not the only ships purchased for the Continental Navy, they are representative of the purchased warships.

All were relatively small. None had decks longer than 90ft long. *Alfred* and *Columbus*, both ship-rigged, displaced 275 and 270 tons, respectively. *Andrew Doria*, and *Cabot* were brigs, under 200 tons. *Providence* – previously the merchant vessel *Katy* – was only 95 tons. Yet all were fast sailers. *Alfred* and *Columbus* were built in Philadelphia and the rest were likely to have been built in the Colonies.

Despite their small sizes, the ships carried 24 to 28 guns, and the brigs 14 to 18. This required placing guns at every possible gun port, possibly including the bridle ports intended for mooring cables. They were not only overgunned in terms of the number of guns carried, they also carried guns much larger than practical for these vessels. The ships were armed with 9lb long guns, although guns greater than 6-pounders strained their hulls. The Royal Navy purchased a sister of *Alfred*, built in the same yard, but armed it with 4-pounders.

Despite the excessive number and size of the guns carried, these ships would still be hard-pressed in a fight against even a small Royal Navy frigate. The standard British frigate then being built was intended to carry a main

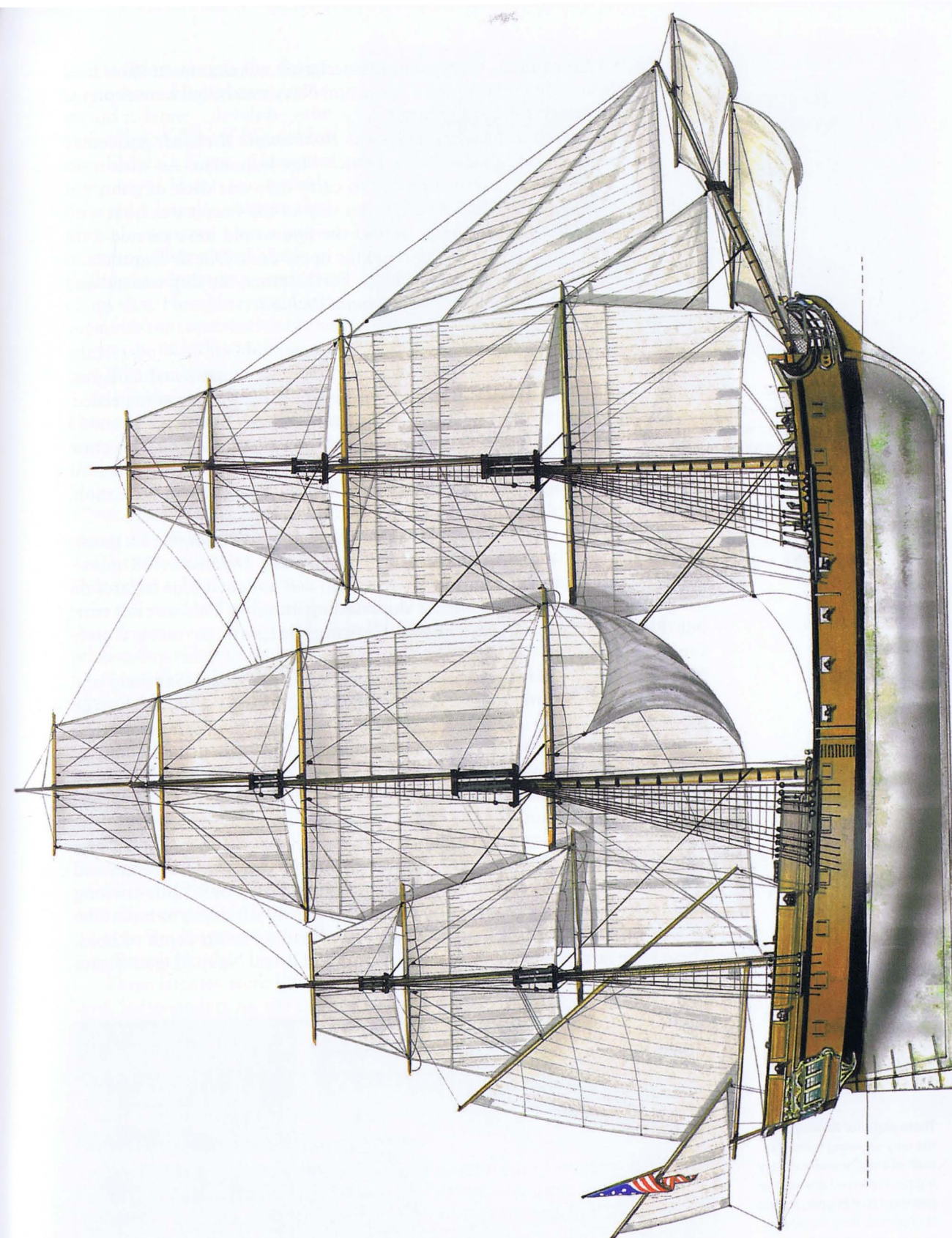
A

HANCOCK

Of all of the ships of the Continental Navy, few had as much impact as *Hancock*. It was never a lucky ship, having the distinction of being the only ship built for the Continental Navy that served in three navies (Continental, British, and French), with its transfer each time attendant on defeat in battle. The ship's hull lines were studied by both the British and French, with the lessons learned incorporated into their future frigate designs.

This plate shows the ship during its brief tenure in the Continental Navy. The small lateen sail on the flagstaff, a feature seen on Continental frigates built in New England, used to balance the ship and ease the helm.

Hancock's builders paid attention to the ship's appearance. The British Admiralty record describing the capture stated that she had a figurehead of "a Man's Head with Yellow Breeches, white Stockings, Blue Coat with Yellow Button Holes, small cocked Hat with a Yellow lace," and "... a Rattle Snake carved on the Stern, ... Stern Black and Yellow, Stern Galleries all Yellow." The figurehead was supposed to have been of John Hancock, whose signature graces the Declaration of Independence. Tradition holds that the Royal Navy kept the figurehead but cut off the right hand, with which Hancock would have signed the document.



battery of 12lb cannon. Overgunning purchased merchantmen shortened their service lives, but none of the Continental Navy's warships were expected to last long enough for this to matter.

Another converted merchantman was *Bonhomme Richard*, previously *Duc de Duras*, when launched as a French East Indiaman. As with most Indiamen, *Duc de Duras* was intended to carry only one deck of guns, but could be fitted with a second. As large as a ship-of-the-line, it was built with lighter scantlings. A comparable ship-of-the-line would have carried 24lb guns on the lower deck and 18lb guns on the upper deck. *Duc de Duras* could only carry 18-pounders and 12-pounders. Furthermore, the ship was old and rotten when it was converted to *Bonhomme Richard*.

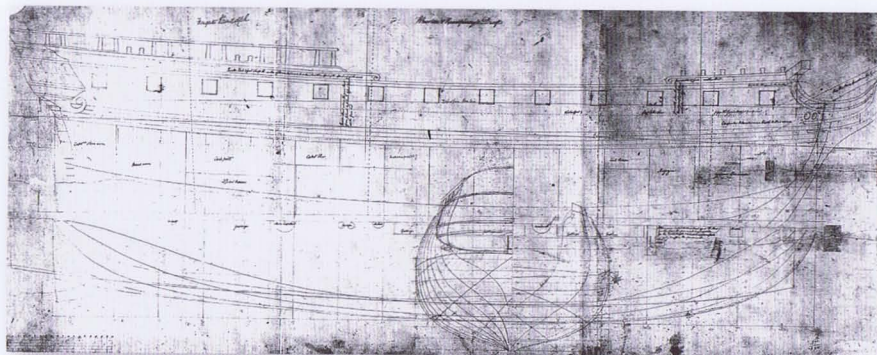
The 13 Frigates

While purchasing ships gave the Colonies a navy, the Continental Congress realized the limitations of the purchased ships. Real warships were needed. On December 13, 1775, the a naval committee recommend construction of 13 frigates – five of 32 guns, five of 28 guns, and three of 24 guns. Construction was to begin in January, 1776, with ships to be completed and fitted out for sea by March. The Continental Congress approved the recommendation, authorizing \$866,666.67 for ship construction and outfitting.

Four frigates were to be built in Pennsylvania: *Randolph* (32 guns), *Washington* (32 guns), *Effingham* (28 guns), and *Delaware* (28 guns). Pennsylvania, with one seaport, Philadelphia, was assigned four frigates on the grounds that it had the biggest shipbuilding industry. This was not true, but Philadelphia was the capitol, allowing Congress to more closely supervise progress.

Hancock (32 guns) and *Boston* (24 guns) were assigned to Salisbury and Newbury, Massachusetts, respectively. *Warren* (32 guns) and *Providence* (28 guns) were given to Providence, Rhode Island. New York was assigned *Congress* (28 guns) and *Montgomery* (24 guns), to be constructed at Poughkeepsie. Portsmouth, New Hampshire, was to build *Raleigh* (32 guns), Chatham, Connecticut, to build *Trumbull* (28 guns), and Baltimore, Maryland, the 28-gun *Virginia*.

All the frigates were to be built to a common set of plans. The 32-gun vessels were to be 132ft 9in long on the berth deck, with a 34½ft beam, and 10½ft depth of hold. The "official" 28-gun frigate had a hull 126ft 4in long on the berth deck, with a beam of 34ft 10in and a 10½ft depth of hold. The 24-gun frigate was 121ft long, 32ft wide, and had a 9ft 9in depth of hold. These were large ships for their rates. A standard Royal Navy 32-gun frigate was typically 11ft shorter.



These plans for *Randolph* are the only surviving builder's draft of any Continental Navy frigate. Preserved among the papers of its designer, Joshua Humphreys, they are now in the US national archives. (NH&HC)

Tradition assigns the design to Joshua Humphreys, who would later develop the *Constitution* class of frigates for the Federal Navy. However, some naval historians, notably Howard Chapelle, dispute this. Several reasons are given, including Humphreys' lack of skill as a draftsman and the claim that Humphreys did not supervise the construction of the frigates built in his Humphreys and Wharton shipyard.



HMS *Minerva*, launched in 1781, was the Royal Navy's first 38-gun frigate intended to carry a main battery of 18lb long guns. The prototype of what became the standard British heavy frigate of the next 35 years, its design was partially motivated by Continental frigates like *Warren*. (USNA)

Nevertheless, the plans were drawn up in Humphreys' shipyard, and Humphreys was the one who presented the plans to Congress. The plans show a family relationship to Humphreys' later frigate designs. The Continental designs were large for their rates, just as Humphreys' Federal Navy frigates were among the largest 36-gun and 44-gun frigates of the 1790s. Two of the Continental 32-gun frigates captured by the British were re-rated as 36-gun frigates by the Royal Navy.

The only ships that followed official plans closely were those built close to Philadelphia. The frigates built in New England could not wait for official plans to be delivered and still meet the March 30 completion deadline. Consequently, these frigates were designed by local shipwrights and bore only an incidental relationship either to each other or to frigates using Humphreys' design.

Hancock, with a 137ft 7in length, 35ft beam and 11ft depth of hold, was larger and longer than the official design and displaced nearly 80 tons more. *Raleigh* was slightly shorter, but deeper than *Randolph*. *Raleigh* was designed by James Hackett, brother of William Hackett, who designed *Essex* in 1798. It was 131ft 5in long by 34ft wide, with an 11ft depth of hold. *Warren*, built by Benjamin Talman, was designed by Sylvester Bowen. It was 132ft long by 34ft 5in wide, with an 11ft depth of hold.

Providence was smaller than the other 28-gun, and *Boston* was considerably smaller than the rest of the 24-gun frigates – 114ft long instead of the prescribed 121ft. Only two 28-gun and two 24-gun frigates were actually completed. *Montgomery*, *Effingham* and *Congress*, as well as the 32-gun *Washington*, were all destroyed on the stocks to stop them falling into British hands.

These frigates were intended to carry a main battery of 12lb long guns with six-pounders on the upper works. A nation in the process of creating itself, the United States had difficulties finding armament for these ships. As a result ships' batteries were often irregular. *Warren* went to sea carrying a mixed battery of 12lb and 18lb guns on its main deck and nine-pounders on its upper works.

Ships authorized in 1776 and 1777

In November 1776 and January 1777 the Continental Congress authorized construction of seven frigates, four sloops-of-war, and three ships-of-the-line. Congress also authorized the construction of two frigates in Europe, *Deane* and *L'Indien*. However, only two of the domestic frigates, two sloops-of-war, and one ship-of-the-line were actually completed. A third frigate, *Bourbon* (28



Alliance was both the most successful frigate of the Continental Navy, and the precursor of the large frigates built by the Federal Navy in the 1790s. This watercolor of *Alliance* was donated to the US Naval Academy in 1860. (NH&HC)

guns), was started but never completed during the war; it was sold, unfinished, after the war ended. A second ship-of-the line was started but later abandoned.

It is not known whether there was any “official” design for the frigates thus authorized. Those actually constructed – the 36-gun *Alliance* and *Confederacy* – were built in New England to local designs. *Alliance* and *Confederacy* represented significant shifts in frigate design. They were large – in excess of 150ft long, a size European designs would not achieve for another generation.

Alliance was one of the best frigates built during the war. An outstanding seaboat and sailer, as well as a sturdy ship, it was a precursor to the frigates built for the Federal Navy two decades later.

While *Alliance* was a standard, albeit large, design, *Confederacy* was quite different. It was shallow and narrow for its length – a throwback to the “galley frigates” of the 17th century. The latter were intended to operate under sweeps as well as under sail, as was *Confederacy*. Equipped with ports for sweeps, *Confederacy* had lighter scantlings than normal to reduce weight. The fineness of the hull limited the amount of stores it could carry. Combined with its light construction, this yielded a ship with limited endurance, in terms of sea time and service life. After the British captured *Confederacy* – renaming it HMS *Confedrate* – they disposed of it within two years.

All the American-designed frigates proved to be fast sailing ships and well-designed craft. While the wartime records of these ships were generally dismal, they were influential. The Royal Navy studied the Continental frigates it took, incorporating the best features into future construction. The Royal Navy had

B

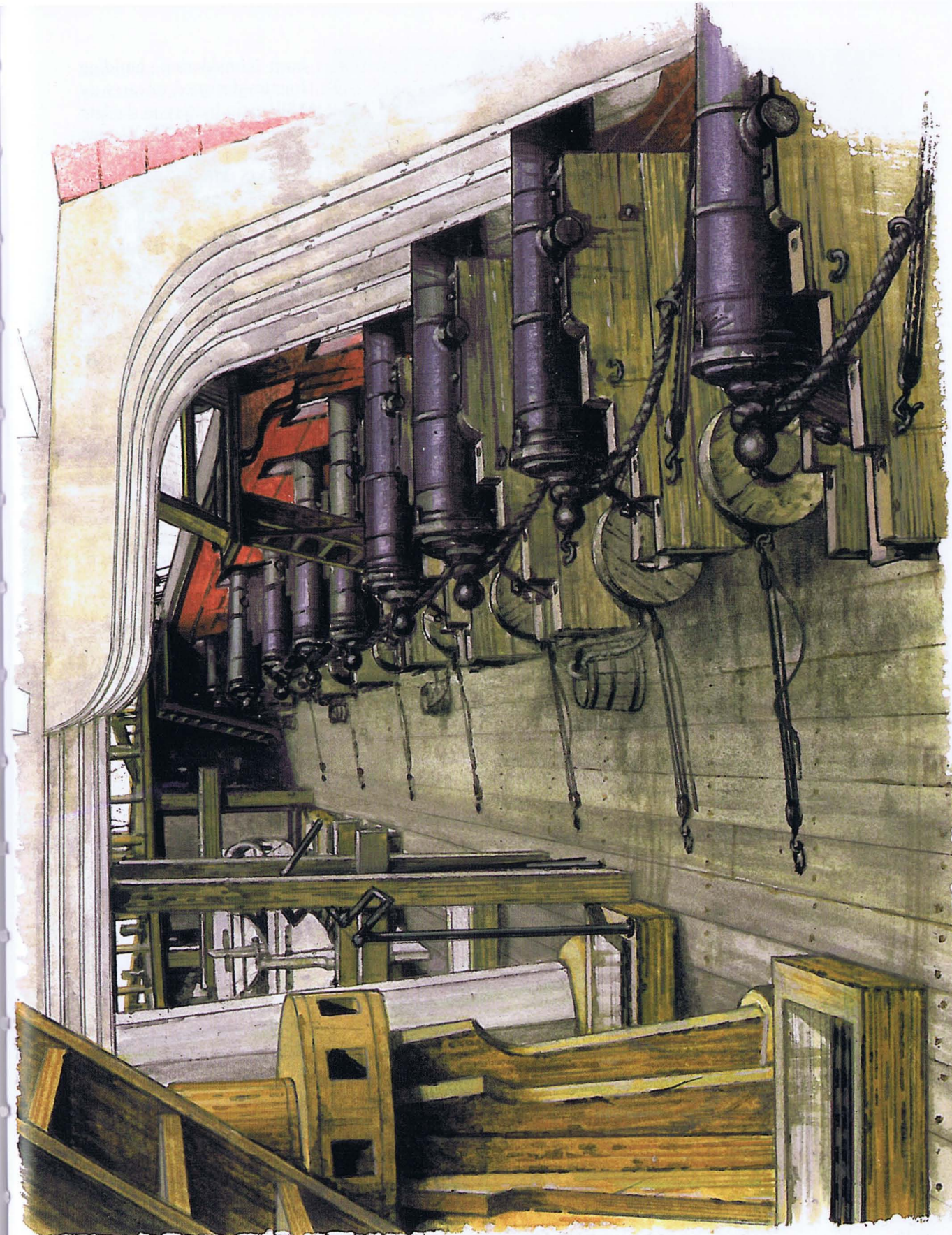
GUN DECK OF THE WARREN

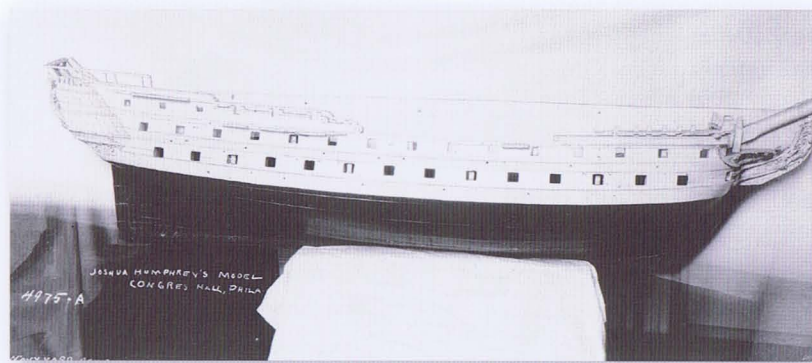
One problem faced by the Continental Navy was finding guns for its ships. Lighter guns – 4lb through 9lb long guns – were commonly available because piracy was still a problem in many corners of the world and many merchant ships of the period were armed. Heavier guns were harder to come by – even the popular 12lb long gun. Continental Navy ships often languished in port due to the difficulty of arming them or – once France became an American ally – sailed with incomplete armament, hoping to fill out their batteries after arrival in Europe.

Warren’s builders solved the problem by using a mixed main battery. With only 16 of the required twenty-eight 12lb long guns available, they substituted 18lb guns to make up the balance – six 18-pounders per broadside, mounted in the waist of the ship. This expedient gave *Warren* a heavier broadside than it would otherwise have had. However, maintaining two different sizes of gun complicated serving the guns in battle. They required different ammunition, and putting an 18-pounder’s charge in a 12lb gun could cause unpleasant surprises.

Nevertheless, these 18-pounders did prove disquieting to the Royal Navy. Reports of Yankee frigates armed with 18lb guns and rumors that the French were planning to build similarly armed frigates led the Admiralty to develop a new standard heavy frigate for the Royal Navy – the 38-gun HMS *Minerva*, launched in 1778, and armed with an 18lb battery on the gun deck.

In 1776, the upper or gun deck of a frigate really was the highest complete deck. *Warren*’s waist was open, lacking even narrow gangways connecting forecabin and quarterdeck. Such configurations appeared in the late 1770s and early 1780s. By the century’s end the gangways were enlarged to the point where they formed part of a single flush upper work, linking quarterdeck and forecabin in the spar deck seen on *Constitution*.





A model built by Joshua Humphreys, showing the intended design for the 74-gun ships-of-the-line authorized by the Continental Congress in 1777. The only ship-of-the-line completed, *America*, differed from this design. (Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, PA)

been considering building frigates designed to carry an 18lb main battery in the late 1770s. Analysis of Warren influenced the development of HMS *Minerva*, a frigate designed to carry 38 guns with an 18lb main battery. The design would remain the standard British frigate for the next 35 years.

There was also an official design for US ships-of-the-line. Joshua Humphreys was credited with drafting the lines of the 74s. Chapelle again believes there was another designer – the same man who designed *Randolph*. Humphreys is credited with building a design model of a 74-gun ship at this period, which apparently represents a modification of the plans drafted.

As designed, the American ship-of-the-line was a big vessel. With a length on the gun deck of 180ft it was 10ft longer than the British 74-gun ships-of-the-line then being built. It had an extreme beam of 49ft 8in. This was the same width as British “large” 74s (intended to carry 24lb long guns on the upper deck), and some 2ft wider than British “common” 74s, with 18lb upper-deck long guns. If they had been completed as designed they would have been formidable ships.

However, only one ship-of-the-line was completed. The vessel authorized for Philadelphia was never even started. Materials were collected for the Boston ship-of-the-line, but construction was abandoned at an early stage, possibly before the keel was laid. Only the ship built at the Hackett yard in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, would be launched, and completed near the war’s end. Since the ship was unnecessary and expensive to maintain post-war, the Continental Congress immediately presented it to their main ally, France.

The single ship-of-the-line that was completed, *America*, represented yet another modification of the official plan, being both wider and deeper than the intended design. It was the largest ship built in the Colonies to that date. However, *America* proved unsatisfactory. It was too lightly built to carry a the battery of a true ship-of-the-line: 32-pounders on the lower deck and 18- or 24-pounders on the upper deck. Instead, *America* was equipped with 18-pounders and 12-pounders, respectively. It was also constructed from timbers of questionable quality. Ordinarily, a ship-of-the-line lasted 30 to 40 years; *America* was condemned within five years of its 1783 launch, and broken up.

The United States could obtain any number of sloops-of-war by converting merchant craft, yet commissioning purpose-built small sloops-of-war still made sense. The latter made better warships than converted merchantmen, since they could carry heavier guns and absorb more damage. The two sloops-of-war completed were *Ranger*, built in 1777 at the Hackett yard in Portsmouth, and *Saratoga*, completed in 1779 at the Humphreys yard in Philadelphia.

Ranger, like most warships built at the Hackett yard, was a large ship. At 116ft long it was 2ft longer than the frigate *Boston*. Commanded by John Paul Jones, *Ranger* best demonstrated the utility of building sloops-of-war. It fought HMS *Drake*, a sister ship of *Alfred* that was built in the same yard. *Ranger* proved a better sailer than its opponent, and comfortably carried a

broadside weight of metal that was 50 percent heavier. Built with thicker scantlings than a merchantman, it could absorb more damage as well.

Saratoga was a more conventional sloop-of-war. Ship-rigged, it was much smaller than *Ranger* – it had only a 68ft keel and half the displacement, at 150 tons. Yet *Saratoga* carried a heavier battery than *Ranger* – 16 nine-pounders and two 4lb long guns to *Ranger*’s 18 six-pounders. However, these features may have been a reflection of the available guns rather than the capabilities of the two ships themselves.

After 1778, no further ship construction was authorized. France’s entry into the war as an American ally reduced the need for an American navy – the French Navy could substitute. Additionally, financial pressures affected naval readiness. Money woes stalled construction of ships unfinished by 1778, as with *Bourbon* and *America*.

OPERATIONAL HISTORY

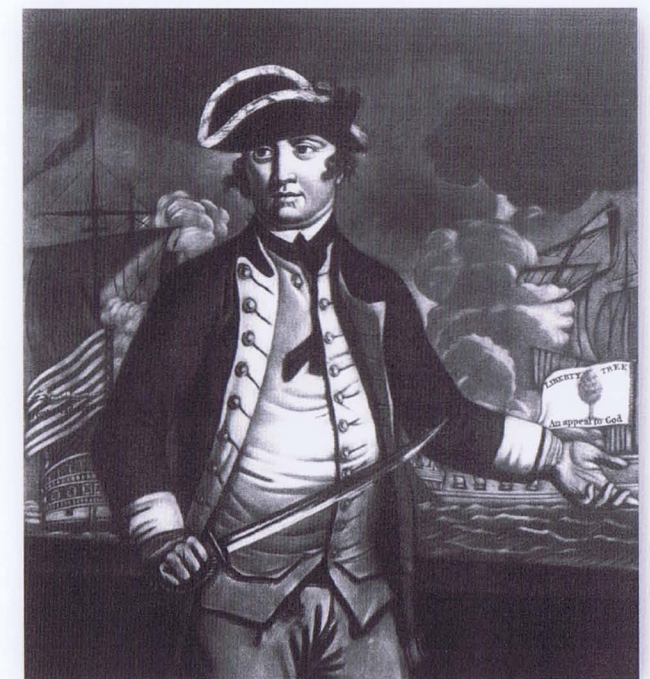
Building a navy

The first American warships commissioned in the American Revolution predated the Continental Navy. George Washington had been given a general’s commission and, in July 1774, command of the forces besieging the British garrison in Boston. Short of everything except problems, he decided that two of these problems – his lack of supplies and the British surfeit of the same – could best be solved using a naval force. He obtained and armed small sloops and schooners, manning them with soldiers recruited from American seaport communities.

The experiment proved a success. Washington’s squadron of five warships was soon bringing in British prizes. Many of the vessels taken as they approached Boston were carrying supplies for the British garrison, and Washington was soon feeding, clothing and arming the Continental Army using material from these captures. Before the squadron was disbanded in 1777, it contributed to the capture of Boston and also served to train many Continental Navy officers, including John Manley.

The colonies in rebellion were doing likewise. Starting with Rhode Island in June 1775 and Massachusetts in August, they began commissioning ships for state navies. Eventually, eleven of the 13 colonies had such navies. Only New Jersey and Delaware abstained. Some states, like Georgia, commissioned only small forces. Others, like South Carolina and Massachusetts, established state navies that rivaled the Continental Navy in size and strength.

Initially these ships were purchased merchantmen, usually small sloops or schooners, such as the Rhode Island Navy’s 12-gun sloop *Providence*, which was later transferred to the Continental Navy. Soon individual states were authorizing construction of warships up to frigate size. South Carolina even purchased the 40-gun *L’Indien* from France, renaming it *South Carolina*.



Esek Hopkins was appointed the senior captain and first commodore of the Continental Navy. Initially successful, he was eventually relieved of his command in March 1777 due to his seeming inability to get his ship to sea. He is shown here at the outset of the New Providence raid. Notice the rattlesnake and pine tree flags in the background. (LOC)

Alfred was the first flagship of the Continental Navy. It is shown here at Philadelphia in December 1775. (NH&HC)



By October 1775 it was becoming apparent that the Colonies needed a national navy. On October 13, 1775, the Continental Congress authorized the purchase of two small warships, to be fitted out to search for British transports. By the end of 1775, the Congress authorized the purchase of six additional ships, including the five discussed in the section on purchased warships.

Congress also authorized construction of 13 frigates, and set about organizing a navy. On November 2, Congress began developing an officer corps. Esek Hopkins, brother of one of the naval commissioners and an old, experienced merchant captain, was named senior captain on November 5. Four other captains and 13 lieutenants were commissioned. The captains' list included Dudley Saltonstall, Abraham Whipple, Nicholas Biddle, and John Hopkins. Senior lieutenant on the list was the then-unknown John Paul Jones. Some of these men became famous; others notorious.

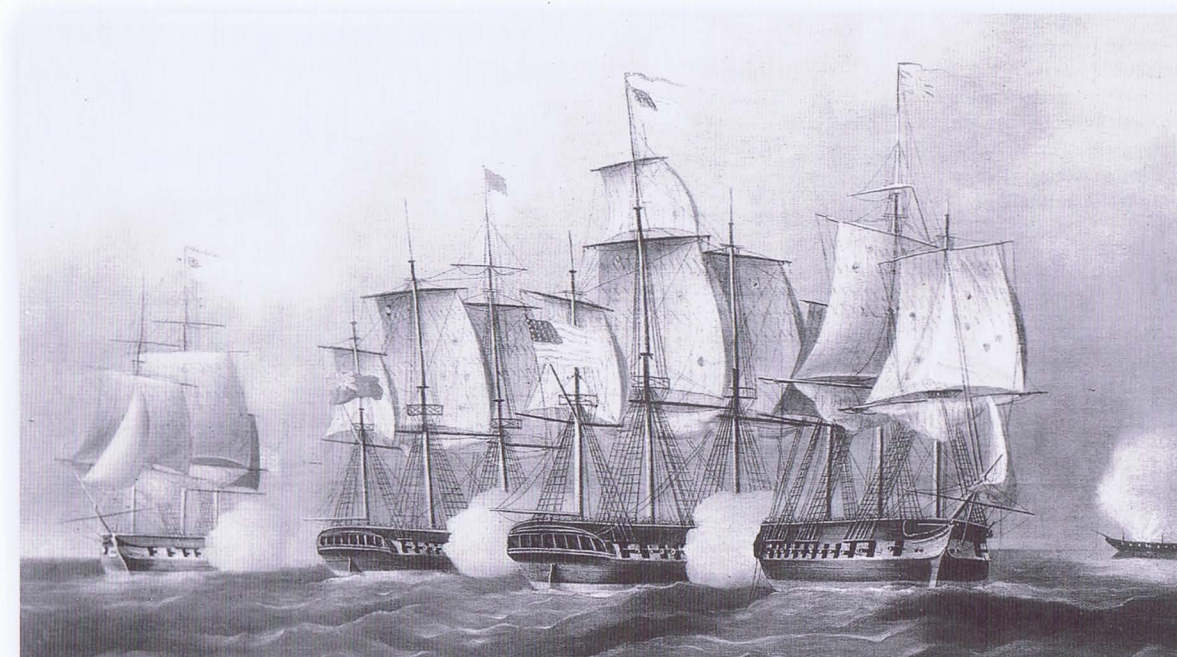
On November 10, Congress created the Marine Corps, and by the end of November it issued a set of regulations governing the Navy. Drawn up by John Adams of Massachusetts, these rules borrowed heavily from Royal Navy regulations. By New Year's Day, 1776, the United States – not yet an independent nation – had a navy.

Early years

The year 1776 proved to be the year of the purchased warship. It had to be. Construction of the authorized ships proceeded slowly. Even after launch, shortages of supplies and weapons delayed completion. Even once ships were fitted out, finding a crew delayed commissioning. Of the 13 frigates authorized, just two were commissioned before year's end, entering service in December.

In January 1777 Hopkins received orders to raid New Providence in the Bahamas. The objective was to seize gunpowder stored at forts there – a commodity the Revolutionary cause needed. At that time the eight ships of the Continental Navy were icebound in Philadelphia harbor, but by February 17 the flotilla departed.

The raid was a partial success. On March 3, the American force successfully landed on New Providence, and took a major fort guarding the harbor, including a sizable number of guns. However, most of the powder had been spirited inland before capture, foiling that objective. After loading whatever stores they had captured, Hopkins' fleet departed, sailing back to the mainland on March 17. By April they reached the New England coast.

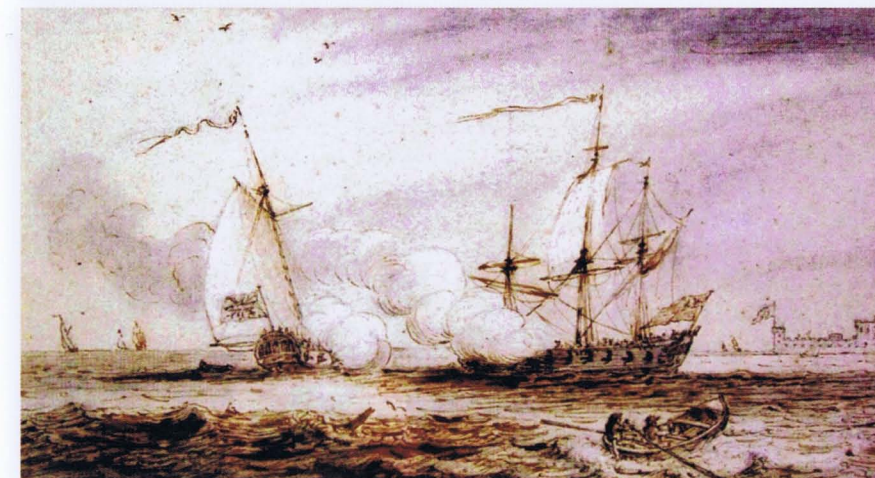


They cruised in search of British ships, and on April 4 captured the six-gun schooner HMS *Hawk* off Rhode Island.

On April 6, the flotilla fell in with HMS *Glasgow*, a 20-gun sloop-of-war. The battle that followed highlighted all the weaknesses of the Continental Navy. Despite a clear superiority – *Alfred* alone outgunned *Glasgow*, and had *Andrew Doria*, *Cabot*, *Columbus* and three sloops in company – *Glasgow* escaped. The flotilla's attack was completely uncoordinated. Several American captains held back. The sloops got in the way of the aggressive ship commanders, keeping them from reaching *Glasgow*. Ships within range withdrew after taking minor casualties. The Continental Navy was still just a collection of armed ships – not a navy.

The flotilla arrived in New London, Connecticut, on April 8. Except for a few day cruises in April it never sailed again as a unit. Individual ships were sent out cruising, with any success dependent upon the captain. *Providence*, under the newly-promoted John Paul Jones, conducted an aggressive cruise

The battle in which *Hancock* and *Fox* were captured by the British, as depicted by British maritime artist Thomas Buttersworth. Buttersworth served in the Royal Navy between 1795 and 1800, and examination of this painting reveals anachronisms showing that Buttersworth painted what he knew. The ships look closer in appearance to those of 1817 than 1777. (NH&HC)



One of the major strategic aims of the Continental Navy in 1776 was to deny supplies to the British Army in America. Here, the Continental Navy ships *Alfred* and *Providence* capture the British transport HMS *Mellish*. (FDRL)

A raid on New Providence in the Bahamas to seize gunpowder was the first major action of the Continental Navy. American forces can be seen landing, with ships of Esek Hopkins' squadron in the background. (NH&HC)



against the Newfoundland fishery. *Alfred* under Nicholas Biddle (and later Jones) also had successful cruises. However, despite numerous successes against British merchant vessels, even the successful cruises were little different from privateering. Furthermore, since privateering paid better, the Continental Navy experienced difficulties recruiting crews. Yet 1776 was a productive year. The navy had gained experience, and more importantly, learned which officers were good and bad. Men like Jones, Biddle, and Manley would play an important role in future events.

By year's end, the Continental Navy's popularity was high. Without losing a single ship, it had captured 60 vessels. Congress authorized more construction, and purchased six more ships – three brigs and three sloops. It also sent representatives to Europe, seeking to purchase or build warships in European yards.

This European venture achieved mixed success. The American commissioners in Europe failed in a bid to purchase or borrow eight ships-of-the-line from France. The French, still neutral but with one eye to the future, insisted that every French ship would be needed in any war against Britain. However, the commissioners did succeed in having a 32-gun frigate, *Deane*, built at Nantes, purchased the 28-gun *Queen of France*, and made arrangements for the Dutch to build a 40-gun ship, *L'Indien*, for the United States. However, British diplomatic pressure forced *L'Indien*'s transfer to France, which eventually sold it to the South Carolina Navy.

By January 1777, the first new frigates were in commission. *Randolph* sailed for the first time in February, but this fruitless cruise ended in Charleston in March. There the ship remained until August, recruiting a crew. After another short cruise during which *Randolph* took a privateer and three other ships, it returned to Charleston, remaining there for the rest of the year.

In May, *Hancock*, under John Manley, and *Boston*, commanded by Hector McNeill, sailed together from Boston, accompanied by nine privateers. Once at sea, the privateers scattered on individual cruises. *Boston* and *Hancock* encountered a British convoy, then on June 7 fell in with HMS *Fox*, a 28-gun frigate, which they took after a one-hour battle.

This good start was soon erased. In July, the three frigates encountered three British warships – the 44-gun HMS *Rainbow*, the 32-gun HMS *Flora*, and the ten-gun brig HMS *Victor*. As a group the Yankee force was a match

for the British, but *Boston* fled, followed by *Fox*. *Flora* and *Victor* pursued and recaptured *Fox*. Manley, on *Hancock*, believing *Rainbow* to be a 64, also fled, but was overtaken by *Rainbow* after a long stern chase, and surrendered. McNeill was later court-martialed, and suspended from service.

Raleigh, whose commissioning had been delayed due to a search for guns, sailed for France in August. In company with *Alfred*, it found a British convoy. However, a stout defense by the escort, the 20-gun *Druid*, drove off the Americans.

In October, the British moved against Philadelphia, the American capital. The enemy expedition proved disastrous to the Continental Navy. *Delaware* was captured at the onset of the invasion. *Andrew Doria* and five other small warships were trapped in the Delaware River and burned to prevent capture. The unfinished hulls of *Washington* and *Effingham* were towed up the Delaware and sunk near Bordentown, New Jersey.

Other losses in 1777 included *Cabot*, taken by HMS *Milford* (32 guns) in March; *Reprisal*, lost at sea in October; and *Montgomery* and *Congress*, the two New York frigates, which were burned on the stocks in October when British forces advanced towards their building yard.

At the end of 1777 the Continental Navy had nine frigates, three ship-rigged sloops-of-war, and four smaller ships. The sloops-of-war included the 18-gun *Ranger*, authorized in 1776 and ready for sea by November 1777. More importantly for the navy, the US gained a powerful European ally in 1778. The American victory at Saratoga had convinced France that the Americans had staying power. France had been providing covert aid to the United States and agreed to enter the war as an active participant, effective February 5, 1778. The war had changed from a local insurrection to a global conflict.

The French alliance

Raleigh and *Alfred*, which had sailed to France in 1777, left from there together on December 29, 1777. In the mid-Atlantic *en route* to the West Indies they encountered British merchantmen escorted by HMS *Ariadne* (20 guns) and HMS *Ceres* (16 guns). In a mismanaged action, *Alfred* tackled *Ariadne* without waiting for *Raleigh*, then fled but was quickly captured. *Raleigh* also fled after witnessing *Alfred*'s capture, despite having a heavier broadside than both British ships. *Raleigh*'s captain was later relieved of his command.

Meanwhile, *Randolph* sailed for the West Indies as part of a flotilla containing a South Carolina Navy ship and three South Carolina privateers.



The French Navy off Newport, Rhode Island, in 1778. The entry of France as an American ally transformed the Revolution into a global war, which reduced the need for a Continental Navy. The French fleet provided the seapower badly needed by the United States. (LOC)

On March 7, 1778, near Barbados, the flotilla encountered the 64-gun HMS *Yarmouth*. *Yarmouth* ran down the Yankee ships by nightfall. *Randolph*, commanded by Nicholas Biddle, attacked, ineffectually supported by only one of its companions which accidentally fired into *Randolph*, wounding Biddle. Biddle's furious attack took *Yarmouth* aback, but as *Randolph* attempted to wear around *Yarmouth*'s stern, the American ship exploded. Only four of its crew survived. The rest of the American squadron scattered.

On March 31, *Virginia*, commanded by James Nicholson, joined the ranks of former Continental ships. Sailing from Annapolis, Maryland, where *Virginia* had been blockaded for nearly a year, the ship promptly ran onto a shoal. Found still aground the next morning by two British warships, it was forced to surrender, and later taken into the Royal Navy as a 32-gun frigate.

Better luck attended the Continental Navy in European waters. *Ranger*, commanded by John Paul Jones, reached France in December 1777. After refitting, Jones left Brest on April 10, 1778. In just 28 days, he conducted a cruise that made his reputation. Sailing into the Irish Sea, Jones captured several merchant vessels, led two raids on British soil, and fought and captured the 20-gun HMS *Drake*. While the victory over *Drake* was minor, the two raids resulted in panic in Britain and a reallocation of military resources to prevent future raids.

Back in the United States, *Washington* and *Effingham* had been refloated during the spring of 1778, and were being refitted under the command of Thomas Read and John Barry. They were trapped, with the British between the American frigates and the sea. When the British pushed up the Delaware, the frigates were stripped of their crews who were sent under Barry's command to harass the British. Barry had some success, but the British forced their way upriver, and on May 7 both frigates were burned to prevent their capture.

C THE DEATH OF RANDOLPH

No Continental Navy warship had a more spectacular end than *Randolph*. Accompanying a flotilla of warships from the South Carolina Navy, the force encountered the 64-gun HMS *Yarmouth* while cruising in the Caribbean. By dusk, it was apparent that the rebel ships could not flee the ship-of-the-line. *Randolph*'s captain, Nicholas Biddle, decided that the best defense was a good offense, and went on the attack.

Yarmouth's captain had probably expected the flotilla to scatter, as had happened in previous encounters between American flotillas and British ships. Frigates did not typically challenge ships-of-the-line, even small 64s. Also, by the time battle was joined it was sunset, and night-time actions were always more challenging due to the lack of illumination.

Thus, *Randolph*'s response caught *Yarmouth* by surprise. This was compounded by the fury with which *Randolph* attacked. According to both American and British observers, *Randolph* maintained an extremely high rate of fire. The Americans' gunnery soon told – *Yarmouth* quickly lost its bowsprit and fore topmast.

However, just at its point of triumph, *Randolph* suddenly exploded. American tradition holds that a British shot from one of *Yarmouth*'s 24-pounders penetrated *Randolph*'s magazine. However, it is more likely that the magazine was accidentally touched off by *Randolph*'s own crew. There are many ways for an inexperienced crew – in battle for the first time, and at night – to create a spark, carry a light into the wrong place, or simply spill gunpowder while handling it and create an inadvertent powder trail to the magazine.

American accounts claim that *Randolph* was on the verge of capturing *Yarmouth*. That question will forever go unanswered. However, the chances of *Randolph* actually taking *Yarmouth* would still have been virtually nonexistent, due to the disparity in size between the two combatants, unless the rest of the American ships had joined in – something they showed no inclination to do.





ABOVE LEFT
Randolph exploding during its battle with HMS Yarmouth. Debris from *Randolph* landed on Yarmouth. (AC)

ABOVE RIGHT
While the material effects of *Ranger*'s cruise in the Irish Sea were minor, the psychological effect was dramatic. One illustration of its impact was this English cartoon depicting John Paul Jones as a pirate. (LOC)



Barry was sent to Boston, where he took command of *Raleigh* on May 30. The aggressive Barry suffered the delays usual to outfitting a Continental Navy ship, finally sailing on September 25. The next day *Raleigh* encountered the British warships HMS *Experiment*, a 50-gun two-decker, and HMS *Unicorn*, a 22-gun sloop-of-war. A 60-hour chase ensued which ended with *Raleigh* trapped against the Maine coast. After an eight-hour night-time battle, Barry ran *Raleigh* aground and took its crew ashore to prevent capture. The British pulled the American frigate off the rocks before Barry could send a crew back to burn it. Barry and his crew walked back to Boston.

Boston had sailed for France in February and arrived on March 31, carrying a diplomatic contingent including John Adams. After refitting, *Boston* made some short European cruises during which it captured a few ships. It was joined in June by the frigate *Providence*, which had slipped through the British blockade of Narragansett Bay. On August 22, the two frigates, along with *Ranger*, now commanded by Thomas Simpson, sailed to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. (Jones had been detached from *Ranger* and promised *L'Indien*.)

By the end of 1778, the Continental Navy was down to six frigates, two sloops-of-war, and one sloop. Two new frigates would appear in 1779, as well as a few more purchased ships, but the arrival of a French fleet in American waters in the summer of 1778 reduced the need for the Continental Navy.

The new year, 1779, opened with a series of minor cruises by the frigates in American waters. They captured a number of British merchant vessels, without loss to the Continental Navy. However, the navy was finding it increasingly difficult to recruit sailors, mainly due to competition with privateers.

In July an expedition consisting of *Warren*, the sloop *Providence*, the Continental brig *Diligent* (captured from the British earlier in 1779, and purchased as a warship), three ships from the Massachusetts Navy, one from

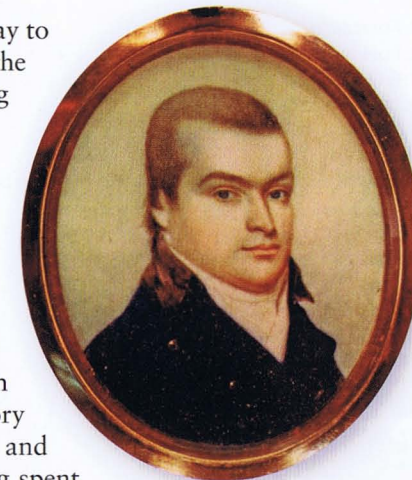
New Hampshire's navy, and 12 privateers was sent to Penobscot Bay to capture a British base. Arriving July 25, the American fleet under the indecisive command of Dudley Saltonstall spent several days sparring with three small British warships, before settling in for a siege.

While the Americans dithered, the Royal Navy took action, sending a 64-gun ship-of-the-line, three large frigates, and three sloops-of-war. The American flotilla trapped in Penobscot Bay was captured by the British or destroyed by the Americans to prevent capture. *Warren*, *Providence*, and *Diligent* were burned.

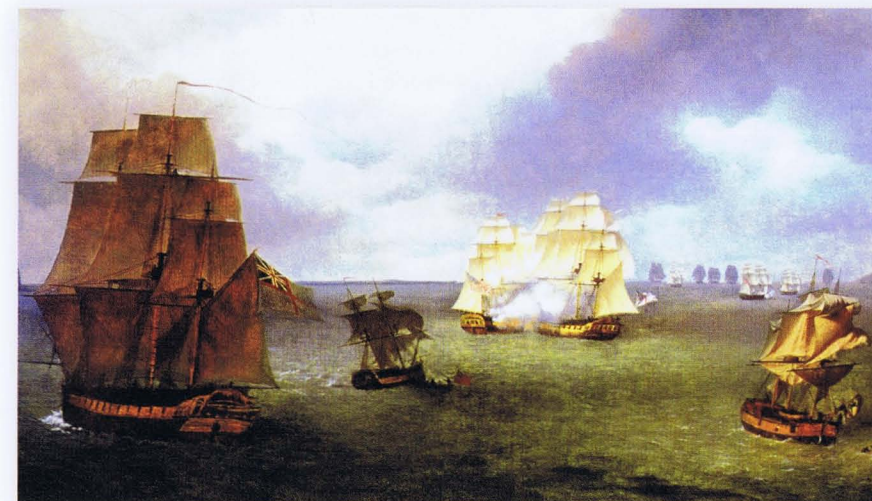
Across the Atlantic, John Paul Jones took a squadron to sea from France on August 14, 1779. This consisted of *Bonhomme Richard*, *Alliance*, *Pallas*, *Cerf*, *Vengeance*, and two French privateers. *Bonhomme Richard* was Jones' poor reward for victory over *Drake*. A superannuated East Indiaman, it was slow, crank, and decrepit. Jones had never received the promised *L'Indien*. Having spent almost a year ashore by the time he was offered *Bonhomme Richard*, Jones accepted. *Alliance* was a fine new American frigate which sailed to France in January 1779. It was commanded by Pierre Landais – a former French naval officer, given command of *Alliance* as a mark of gratitude for the French alliance. However, Landais was decidedly eccentric, possibly even insane. The final three vessels were French warships "loaned" to the United States. While flagged as American warships, they had French officers and crews.

The cruise proved as important as Jones' 1778 *Ranger* expedition, and as frustrating as it was important. The privateers left almost immediately, the American-flagged French warships came and went as they pleased, and Landais, with *Alliance*, proved mutinously insubordinate. Regardless, Jones sailed around the British Isles into the North Sea, capturing ships along the way. On September 21, off Flamborough Head, they encountered a British Baltic convoy escorted by HMS *Serapis* (44 guns) and HMS *Countess of Scarborough* (22 guns).

Jones in *Bonhomme Richard* still had *Alliance* and *Pallas* in company. *Bonhomme Richard* went straight for *Serapis*. *Pallas* swept down on *Countess of Scarborough* and took it after a long fight. *Alliance* remained disengaged, cruising between the convoy and the battling *Bonhomme Richard* and *Serapis*.



John Barry was a major figure in both the Continental and later the Federal navies of the United States. Shown here in his Continental Navy uniform, Barry commanded *Effingham*, *Raleigh*, and *Alliance* during the Revolution. (NH&HC)



The privateer *Hyder Ally*, commanded by Joshua Barney, fought and captured the British sloop HMS *General Monk* on April 8, 1782. The prize was purchased into the Continental navy as *General Washington*, with Barney given command. (USNA)

1. Forecastle
2. Fore mast
3. Galley smokestack
4. Belfrey and forecastle bulwark
5. Ship's boats (on skids)
6. Gangway
7. Quarterdeck breastwork and watchkeeping bell
8. Mainmast
9. Mainmast fiferail
10. Quarterdeck
11. 8-pound gun
12. Mizzen mast
13. Chicken coops (on poop)
14. Poop
15. Flagstaff
16. Stern lantern
17. Stern gallery
18. Great cabin (captain's cabin)
19. Wardroom
20. Quarter galleries
21. Gun room
22. Rudder
23. Mizzen mast step
24. After ladder
25. Breadroom
26. Capstan
27. Upper deck
28. Orlop
29. Gun deck
30. Passageway down
31. Hold
32. Pumps
33. 12-pound gun
34. Galley
35. Bower anchor
36. Cathead
37. Bowsprit

D **BONHOMME RICHARD**

Dimensions: LBP: 178ft, breadth: 39ft, draft: 18ft 7in

Displacement: 900 tons

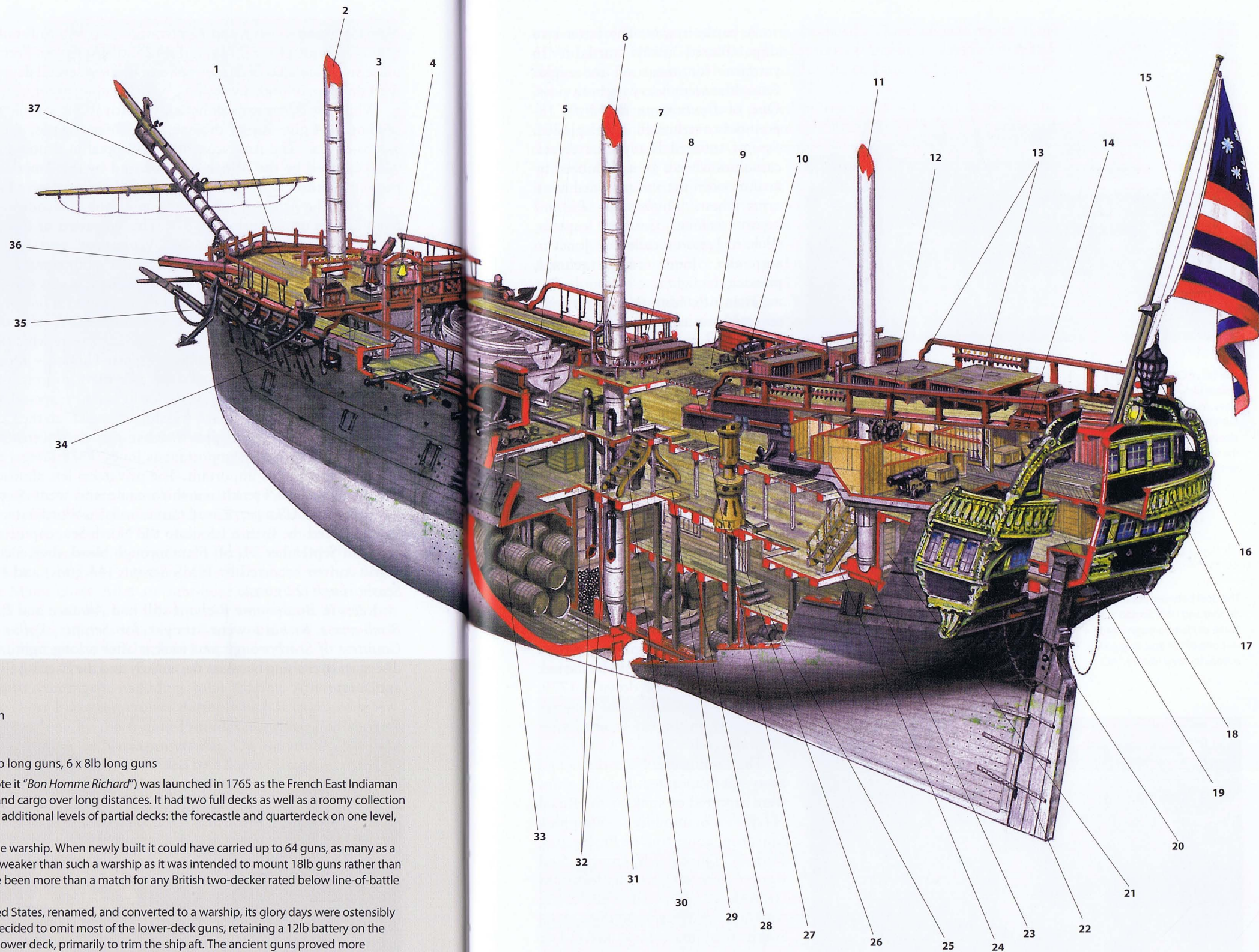
Complement: Approximately 250

Armament (intended): 6 x 18lb long guns, 28 x 12lb long guns, 6 x 8lb long guns

The *Bonhomme Richard* (John Paul Jones always wrote it "*Bon Homme Richard*") was launched in 1765 as the French East Indiaman *Duc de Duras*, and was intended to carry both guns and cargo over long distances. It had two full decks as well as a roomy collection of orlop platforms. Above the upper deck it had two additional levels of partial decks: the forecastle and quarterdeck on one level, and a poop above the quarterdeck.

A vessel like *Duc de Duras* could become a formidable warship. When newly built it could have carried up to 64 guns, as many as a small ship-of-the-line. However, it would have been weaker than such a warship as it was intended to mount 18lb guns rather than the 24-pounders of a 64. Nevertheless, it would have been more than a match for any British two-decker rated below line-of-battle status.

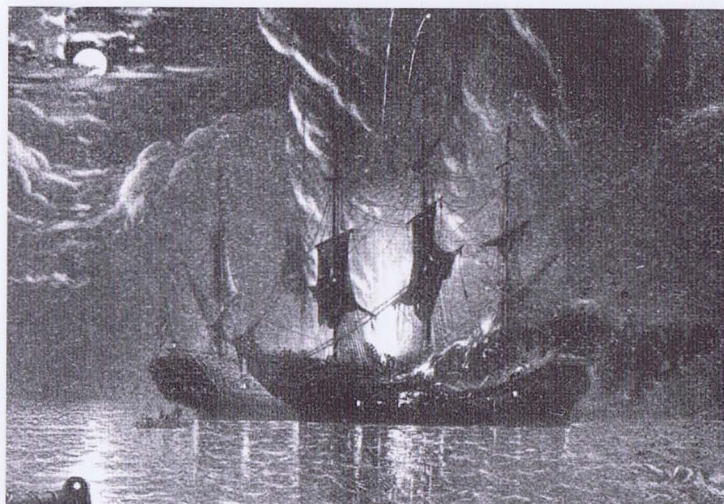
However, at the time the ship was given to the United States, renamed, and converted to a warship, its glory days were ostensibly long past. The hull was old and worn. Jones wisely decided to omit most of the lower-deck guns, retaining a 12lb battery on the upper deck. Six 18lb guns were mounted aft on the lower deck, primarily to trim the ship aft. The ancient guns proved more hazardous to their owners than their enemies. One exploded during battle, causing extensive damage and demoralizing the crew. Little was known about the appearance of *Bonhomme Richard* until the 1980s, when the noted maritime historian Jean Boudroit pieced this together after meticulous research using original sources, merging plans for the *Duc de Duras* with descriptions of the conversion. Only then, two centuries after *Bonhomme Richard* sank, was the mystery of its appearance solved.





The fall of Charleston was a severe blow to the Continental Navy. In addition to three Continental frigates and the sloop-of-war *Ranger*, much of the South Carolina Navy was lost. (AC)

The duel between *Bonhomme Richard* and HMS *Serapis* at the Battle of Flamborough Head was one of the epic single-ship actions in naval history. (AC)



A battle it was. The latter two ships blazed away yardarm to yardarm for most of the night. Casualties were heavy on both sides. One of *Bonhomme Richard*'s 18-pounders overheated and exploded. *Serapis* suffered heavy quarterdeck casualties when a grenade lobbed by an American marine exploded in an arms chest. *Bonhomme Richard* began sinking. *Serapis*' captain, Richard Pearson, called on Jones to surrender. Jones curtly refused, pressing the fight.

Then *Alliance* intervened – firing several broadsides into *Bonhomme Richard*. Landais hoped to sink *Bonhomme Richard*, and then take

Serapis himself. Jones continued fighting. Pearson, unaware of Landais' target, surrendered *Serapis* to Jones. *Bonhomme Richard* sank that night, after Jones had transferred his survivors to *Serapis*. Jones took *Serapis* into the neutral Dutch island of Texel, where it was interned. The convoy escaped the Americans due to its escorts' stout defense, and Pearson was afterwards knighted. Jones was given *Alliance*, but Landais stole it, sailing it to America.

The Battle of Flamborough Head proved to be the high point for the Continental Navy during the American Revolution. By cementing first French, then Dutch and Spanish intervention in the war, it obviated the necessity for an independent American navy. The United States' maritime needs could be served by its European allies.

No further construction was authorized after 1777, and construction of previously authorized ships slowed. By 1778, with three exceptions, all of the ships previously authorized that would be completed had not only been laid down, but had been launched. Only the ship-of-the-line *America*, laid down in May 1777, still awaited completion. Just two other ships would be started, the frigate *Bourbon* and the sloop-of-war *Saratoga*, both laid down in 1779.

Of these, *Bourbon* would languish unfinished on the stocks until after the war's end.

The Continental Navy did not go away – it evaporated. Existing ships were captured or sunk by the Royal Navy. Commodore Whipple's squadron, consisting of *Providence*, *Boston*, *Queen of France*, and *Ranger*, was sent to Charleston in December, 1779. All four, along with many privateers and ships of the South Carolina Navy, were lost when the British took Charleston that spring. In 1781, *Trumbull*, *Confederacy*, and *Saratoga* were lost. The frigates were captured while

cruising and *Saratoga* sank in a storm. Ironically, *Trumbull* was captured by HMS *Isis* and HMS *General Monk*, both former American warships that had themselves been previously captured. By the end of 1781 the Continental Navy consisted of only two frigates.

Yet American victory was gained by seapower – French seapower. In 1781, a French fleet sent to North America succeeded in blockading a British army trapped in Yorktown. On September 5, 1781, a great battle was fought off the mouth of the Chesapeake. It ended indecisively, but allowed the French to continue their blockade of Yorktown, the British in Yorktown, the last field force available to Britain, surrendered, effectively ending the land phase of the American War of Independence.

Peace negotiations dragged on for two more years, however, and the naval war continued until peace was signed in 1783. The Continental Navy gained two sloops-of-war via purchase in 1782 – *General Washington* (formerly *General Monk*), and *Duc du Lauzan*. While these saw some action, they were obtained primarily to give the Continental Navy a means of transporting negotiators to and from Europe.

Aftermath

The war's end removed any immediate need for a United States Navy – not that there was much of the Continental Navy left by that point. Only the frigates *Alliance* and *Deane* and sloops-of-war *General Washington* and *Duc du Lauzan* were still in commission. A frigate, *Bourbon*, and the ship-of-the-line *America* were awaiting completion. The United States had gained its independence, but was deeply in debt. Keeping warships in commission was expensive, but the new nation could not even afford the lesser expense of maintaining the hulls in reserve.

Consequently, the remaining ships were disposed of. *America* was given to the French, *Bourbon* was launched in 1783 to clear the building ways and immediately sold, and *Deane*, *General Washington* and *Duc du Lauzan* were sold soon after. Finally, in 1785 *Alliance* was sold and the navy dissolved.

The officers, too, scattered. Some returned home. Most returned to prewar careers in the merchant service. A few, having acquired a taste for naval rather than mercantile service, became mercenaries. Joshua Barney,



Matthew Parke, the marine lieutenant aboard *Alliance* in 1780, made this painting of *Alliance* entering Boston harbor. It is one of the few contemporary images of ships of the Continental Navy. The watercolor is now at the US Naval Academy. (NH&HC)

Hancock ended its days in the French Navy, under the name *Iris*. By 1790 it was a powder hulk in the French naval base of Toulon, which is shown here. (LOC)



bored with peace, provided his services to Revolutionary France, at one point commanding a ship-of-the-line before returning to the United States when that nation reconstituted its navy. John Paul Jones served briefly as an admiral in the Imperial Russian Navy, then went to France. He too sought a position as an officer in the navy of Revolutionary France, but died before serving.

Britain likewise disposed of all the prizes it had taken from the Continental Navy by 1783, following a peace settlement with its European foes. Only *Hancock*, renamed *Iris*, remained as part of the French Navy. By the time the French Revolution initiated a new round of naval conflict only three ships of the Continental Navy were still afloat – *Delaware* and *Alliance* in merchant service, and *Iris* as a powder hulk in the French Mediterranean naval base of Toulon.

In 1793 *Iris* had a last brush with history. Toulon had been taken by Royalist forces, then occupied by the British and Spanish. However, a Republican artillery officer, one Napoleon Bonaparte, forced these intruders out of the port. Set afire during the evacuation of Toulon, *Iris* exploded,

E

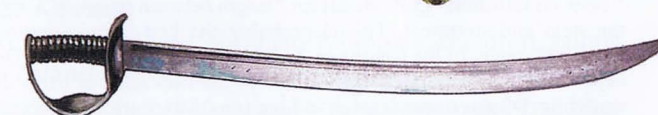
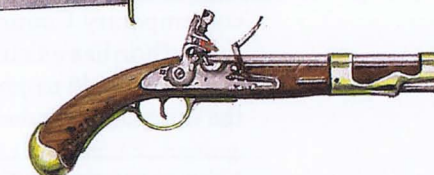
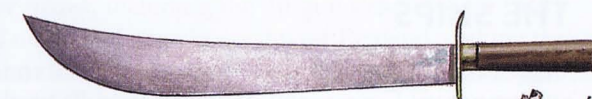
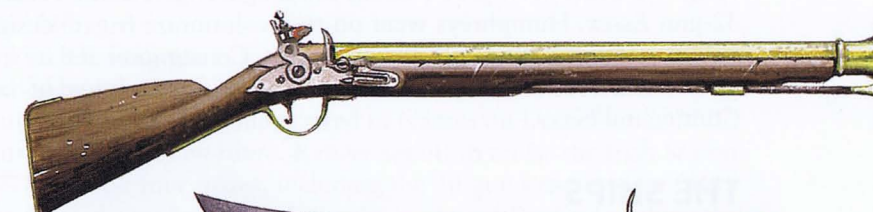
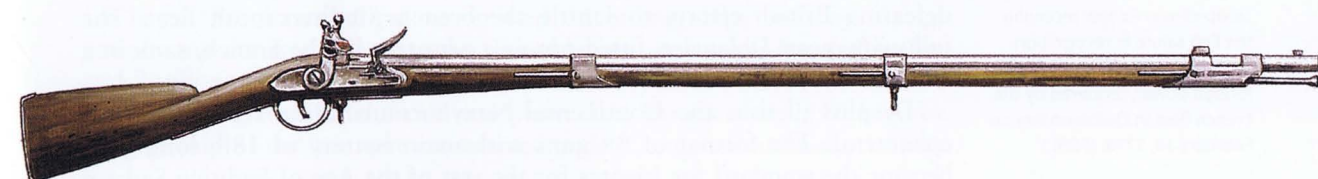
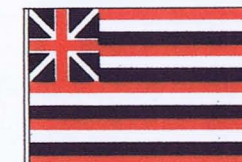
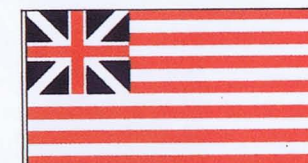
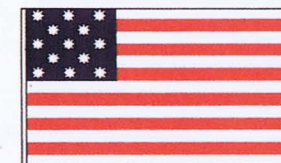
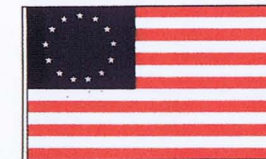
FLAGS AND WEAPONS

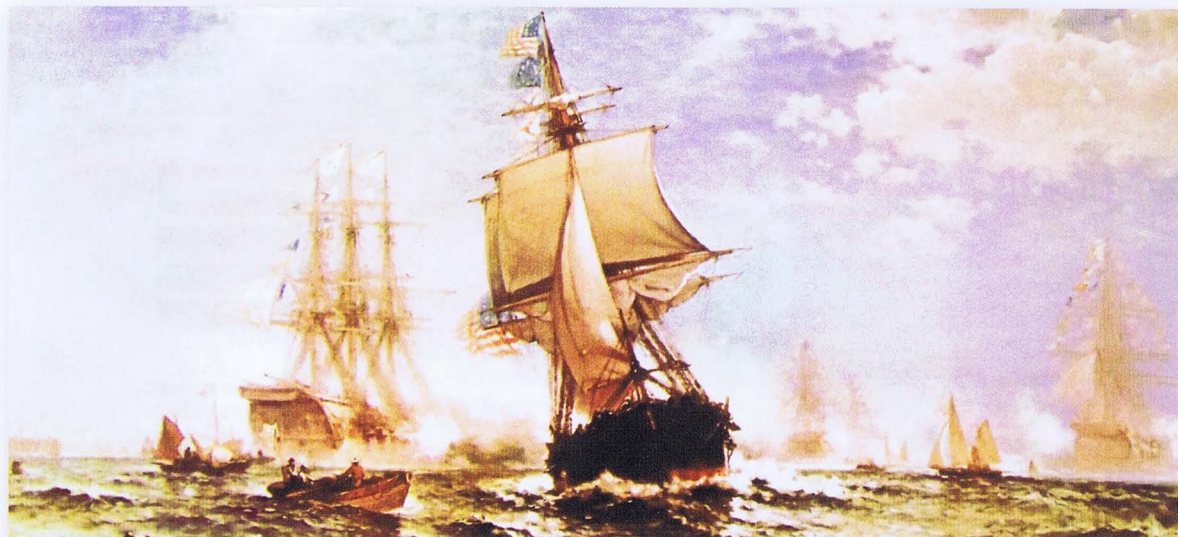
The United States had two “official” national ensigns during the war: the Grand Union Flag, and the version of the Stars and Stripes known as the “Betsy Ross” flag. Both had a gridiron pattern of alternating red and white stripes running horizontally, but different jacks (the portion of the flag in the upper inner quarter). The Grand Union flag retained the British flag (“Union Jack”) as at the time of the former’s adoption the Colonies had not yet decided on independence. Following the Declaration of Independence, the Union Jack was replaced by a jack having 13 stars representing the states of the new nation. In the Betsy Ross flag, eventually adopted as the official version of the national standard, the stars have five points each and are set into a circle.

American naval forces were already at sea even before Congress authorized the Grand Union Flag, and adopted *ad hoc* ensigns. The “Pine Tree Flag,” with a green pine on a white banner and the legend “An Appeal To Heaven,” was flown by the ships of George Washington’s Continental Army in 1775–77. State navies frequently used Rattlesnake flags featuring a rattlesnake, coiled or stretched, on a variety of backgrounds, accompanied by the legend “Don’t Tread On Me.” The variant shown here, with a background of red and white stripes, was adopted as the present-day United States Navy jack during the “War on Terror” of the 2000s.

Variant flags flourished, generally in cases where the “official” description proved too vague. Esek Hopkins’ squadron flew a variant of the Grand Union Flag with red, white and blue stripes on its New Providence expedition. Similar variation could be seen with the Stars and Stripes, once adopted. *Alliance* flew a version with seven white stripes and six red, while *Bonhomme Richard* used one with red, white, and blue stripes. Ships based in home waters used different combinations of stars, most commonly a 4 x 4 square of stars in the middle of a 3 x 3 set.

Shown below the flags are a collection of small arms used aboard Continental ships during the period. This was a mixture of British and French weaponry.





Sloop-of-war *Ranger* receiving the first salute in recognition of the Stars and Stripes from a foreign power, rendered by the French fleet in Quiberon Bay on February 14, 1778. (FDRL)

defeating British efforts to scuttle the French Mediterranean fleet. The following year, *Delaware*, fitted out as a privateer by the French, sank in a storm. *Alliance* foundered in 1800.

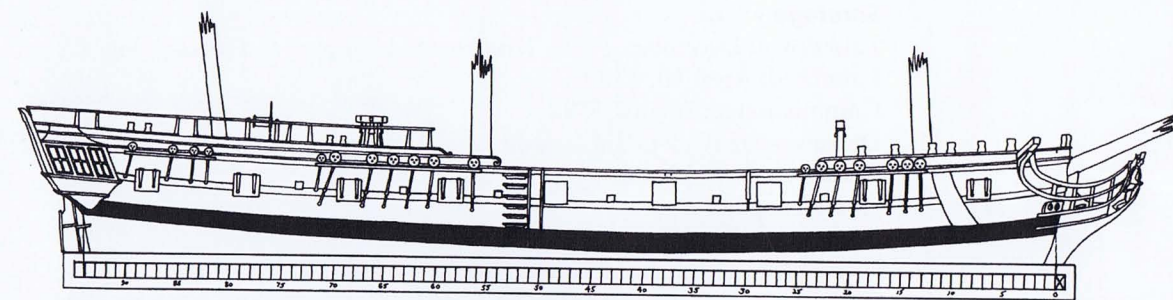
Despite all this, the Continental Navy's contribution was not purely ephemeral. The format of 38 guns with main battery of 18lb long guns became the standard for frigates for the rest of the Age of Fighting Sail – a change prompted by Continental frigates such as *Warren* and *Alliance*. Many Continental Navy officers, including John Barry, Joshua Barney, Stephen Decatur Senior and Edward Preble became officers in the new United States Navy when it was reconstituted in 1798.

William Hackett and Joshua Humphreys, who first designed frigates for the Continental Navy, incorporated the lessons they learned into future designs. Hackett later produced the finest light frigate of the Federal Navy, the 32-gun *Essex*. Humphreys went on to revolutionize frigate design yet again with the 24lb, 44-gun super-heavy concept. *Constitution* and its sisters *United States* and *President* were the fruits of the experience of building the Continental Navy.

THE SHIPS*

Units are in English measure – feet, inches, tons and pounds – reflecting contemporary Continental Navy practice. Where information is unavailable the author has calculated values from available information. A best effort has been made to provide accurate information. The lack of uniformity in the shipbuilding industry – especially during the Revolution, with its attendant

* Note on statistics: "LBP" stands for "length between parallels" – typically, the distance between the stem and sternpost. This is probably the best approximation of the waterline length. "Breadth" refers to the maximum breadth or width of the ship. "Depth of hold" measures the depth of the hold between the bottom of the ship and the berth deck. "Draft" is the loaded waterline. Displacement is given in long tons. Dates are as accurate as possible; when they are unknown a best guess is given. Values are extracted from numerous sources, including *The Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* (DANFS), Chapelle's *The History of the American Sailing Navy*, Millar's *American Ships of the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods*, and Caney's *Sailing Warships of the United States Navy*. DANFS is the primary source, unless modified by additional information.



confusion for American shipbuilding – means that values given are best-guess approximations. Often, the most accurate information that exists is for the ships captured by the Royal Navy, since prizes were surveyed before being purchased. The armament listed for ships is often speculative, especially for those ships that were never commissioned.

Only ships whose construction was authorized by statute of the Continental Congress, constructed in American yards, and actually launched are listed. Purchased ships are omitted, including ships built by foreign nations and donated or sold to the United States, such as the *South Carolina* and *Bonhomme Richard*. Technical information on the *Bonhomme Richard* appears in the text for the cutaway plate. Two sloops-of-war, 16 frigates, and one ship-of-the-line were constructed under Congressional authorization.

Sloops-of-war

Ranger

Laid down: January, 1777, Hackett yard, Portsmouth, NH

Launched: May 10, 1777

Commissioned: November, 1777

Dimensions: LBP: 116ft, breadth: 29ft, depth of hold: 13ft 6in, draft: 12ft

Displacement: 308 tons

Complement: 140

Armament: 18 x 6lb long guns

Commanded by John Paul Jones, *Ranger* sailed to France on November 1, 1777, carrying dispatches. The ship arrived in Nantes on December 2, 1777, having captured two prizes *en route*. *Ranger* set off to cruise the Irish Sea on April 10, 1778. It took four prizes, including the 20-gun sloop-of-war HMS *Drake*. Jones also led a raid on Whitehaven in northwest England, spiking the guns of the fortress guarding the port and burning ships in harbor. He also raided the estate of the Earl of Selkirk.

After Jones returned to Brest on May 10, command shifted to Thomas Simpson, Jones' first lieutenant. In company with the frigates *Providence* and *Boston*, *Ranger* set off from Brest for the United States on August 10, 1778. The ships arrived in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on October 15, having taken three prizes in the Atlantic.

Ranger became part of Commodore Abraham Whipple's squadron, sailing on two cruises in the Atlantic in the spring and summer of 1779, during which 18 prizes were taken. *Ranger* then sailed for Charleston on November 23, 1779, arriving on December 23. Trapped in Charleston, *Ranger* was captured by the British when they took the town on May 11, 1780. She was taken into the Royal Navy as HMS *Halifax*, but sold out on October 1781 and then broken up.

The 18-gun ship-sloop *Saratoga* was the last – and smallest – warship constructed for the Continental Navy to see action. It was another ship whose design was attributed to Joshua Humphreys. (John F. Millar)

Saratoga

Laid down: December, 1779, Wharton & Humphreys, Philadelphia, PA

Launched: April 10, 1780

Commissioned: August 1780

Dimensions: LBP: 94ft 2in, breadth: 25ft 4in, depth of hold: 13ft 6in, draft: 12ft

Displacement: 150 tons

Complement: 86

Armament: 16 x 9lb long guns, 2 x 4lb long guns.

Saratoga sailed from Philadelphia on August 13, 1780, commanded by Captain John Young. The sloop was to escort *Mercury*, a brig carrying American diplomats to Europe. However, *Saratoga* was inadequately ballasted and could not maintain a full press of sail without risk of capsizing, so could not keep up with *Mercury*, which proceeded to France independently.

Saratoga then spent two weeks cruising before returning to Chester, Pennsylvania, to reballast. During that period it fought the brig HMS *Keppel* and captured a British merchantman. After adding ballast, *Saratoga* spent six months cruising off the North American coast and in the Caribbean, taking six additional British merchant vessels and two privateers. She also recaptured two American vessels, including one escorted by a British ship-of-the-line.

Saratoga was lost at sea on March 15, 1781, when she foundered in a squall near Cap François, off Haiti.

Frigates

Randolph

Laid down: December, 1775, Wharton & Humphreys, Philadelphia, PA

Launched: July 10, 1776

Commissioned: October 1776

Dimensions: LBP: 132ft 9in, breadth: 34ft 6in, depth of hold: 10ft 6in, draft: 18ft

Displacement: 798 tons

Complement: 180

F

RANGER vs HMS DRAKE

When John Paul Jones first spied HMS *Drake* it must have felt like old home week. *Drake* was an almost identical sister ship to *Alfred*, a Continental Navy ship on which Jones had served as a lieutenant and which Jones had briefly commanded before being given *Ranger*. The battle between the two proved an instructive lesson in the advantages purpose-built warships held over converted merchantmen, even when the two ships were virtually identical in size.

Although *Ranger* had two guns fewer than *Drake*, its broadside was nearly twice as great as it could comfortably mount 6lb guns, while the *Drake*'s lighter scantlings could safely accommodate only four-pounders without straining the hull. Furthermore, *Ranger*'s heavier scantlings could absorb more damage. Each 6lb ball that struck *Drake* did twice to three times the damage of the 4lb shot that hit *Ranger*.

Drake's captain attempted to compensate by carrying a much larger crew, finding a number of local volunteers for just this battle. They could have swamped *Ranger* in any boarding action, but Jones' ship also had more robust masts, spars, and rigging. This gave Jones the speed needed to set the range at which the battle was fought. Jones first raked *Drake*, then stood off and battered his opponent at a range close enough for his superior artillery to count but far enough off for musketry to be ineffective. After an hour spent exchanging broadsides, *Drake*, badly damaged with 42 dead out of a crew of 190, finally struck. In contrast, *Ranger* suffered only two dead and six wounded.

This plate shows the battle near its opening. Three broadsides had already been exchanged when *Ranger* sailed across *Drake*'s bow and delivered a raking broadside. Even at this early stage of the battle, *Drake* was showing damage.





Nicholas Biddle, one of the most aggressive and competent early officers of the Continental Navy, was lost when his command, the frigate *Randolph* exploded while fighting the 64-gun HMS *Yarmouth*. (AC)

Armament: 24 x 12lb long guns, 10 x 6lb long guns

Randolph, a 32-gun frigate, was closest to the "official" draft, primarily because its construction was superintended by Joshua Humphreys, who created the designs for the Continental Congress. It was the first frigate laid down and commissioned. However, fully manning the ship proved difficult. It did not sail until January, 13, 1777, with part of its crew consisting of captured British sailors who had been imprisoned in Philadelphia. It was commanded by Captain Nicholas Biddle.

On its maiden voyage *Randolph* sprang its mast, was swept by disease that killed many of its crew, and suffered a mutiny led by the British members of its crew who were not eager to fight for American independence. The mutiny was suppressed, and Biddle put into Charleston for repairs.

Randolph next sailed in July.

Randolph continued to operate out of Charleston. After two relatively uneventful cruises in which three prizes were taken, *Randolph* sailed for the Caribbean in February 1778, accompanied by a small squadron of American privateers and South Carolina warships. On March 7, off Barbados, the squadron encountered HMS *Yarmouth*, a 64-gun ship-of-the-line. Biddle chose to fight the British warship and a night-time action ensued. However, after a 20-minute exchange, *Randolph*'s magazine exploded, destroying the frigate.

Hancock

Laid down: 1776, Greenleaf & Cross, Newburyport, MA

Launched: July 10, 1776

Commissioned: May 1777

Dimensions: LBP: 136ft 7in, breadth: 35ft 6in, depth of hold: 11ft, draft: 15ft 2in

Displacement: 762.5 tons

Complement: 290

Armament: 24 x 12lb long guns, 10 x 6lb long guns

Hancock proved to be one of the longest-lived Continental Navy frigates, albeit most of its service was in other navies. Its career with the Continental Navy was brief. *Hancock* left Boston on May 21, 1777, in company with the 24-gun frigate *Boston*. In June the two ships captured the 28-gun frigate HMS *Fox*, which was incorporated into the Continental Navy. A month later the three frigates encountered HMS *Flora*, a frigate, and HMS *Rainbow*, a two-decker. Both *Hancock* and *Fox* were captured in the ensuing battle.

Hancock, renamed HMS *Iris*, then served as a 32-gun frigate in the Royal Navy. It was a popular command. Its captors called it "the finest and fastest frigate in the world." In 1780 *Iris* fought a single-ship duel with the French frigate *Hermione*, and was on the verge of capturing it when another French frigate came along; *Iris* escaped. Later, in August 1781, *Iris* along with *General Monk* encountered and took the American frigate *Trumbull*.

In 1781, *Iris* was trapped by the French fleet off the Chesapeake and captured. *Iris* served in the French Navy for the rest of the Revolutionary War, and proved as popular with its new owners as it had with the British. Laid up after the war ended, *Iris* was converted into a powder hulk at Toulon. The British and their allies captured Toulon at the opening of the French Revolutionary Wars. When Toulon was evacuated in December 1793, the

British gave the Spanish the task of destroying the storeships. Instead of merely sinking *Iris*, the Spanish burned it and *Iris* exploded, destroying several nearby vessels.

Warren

Laid down: January, 1776, Talman yard, Providence, RI

Launched: May 15, 1776

Commissioned: December 1776

Dimensions: LBP: 132ft 1in, breadth: 34ft 5½in, depth of hold: 11ft, draft: 17ft

Displacement: 710 tons

Complement: 180

Armament: 12 x 18lb long guns, 14 x 12lb long guns, 8 x 9lb long guns

Command of *Warren* was given to Commodore Esek Hopkins in December 1776, but, despite orders to take *Warren* to sea, Hopkins delayed departure for so long that Congress finally relieved him of his post. *Warren* started its first cruise on March 8, 1778. It took two prizes in two weeks, then went to Boston, not sailing again until autumn. *Warren* next sailed in March 1779. In company with *Queen of France* and *Ranger*, it fell in with a British convoy. The Americans took seven prizes carrying supplies for the British Army.

Warren returned to Boston with the prizes. Command was transferred to Dudley Saltonstall. In July 1779 *Warren* served as flagship for an American fleet of 19 warships and 20 transports sent to capture a British base in Penobscot Bay. Instead, American indecisiveness led to most of the force, including *Warren*, being trapped by a British squadron sent to relieve the base. *Warren* was burned by its crew in mid-August to prevent capture by the British.

Raleigh

Laid down: March 21, 1776, Hackett, Hill & Paul, Portsmouth, NH

Launched: May 21, 1776

Commissioned: August 1777

Dimensions: LBP: 131ft 5in, breadth: 34ft, depth of hold: 11ft, draft: 15ft 2in

Displacement: 697 tons

Complement: 180

Armament: 26 x 12lb long guns, 6 x 6lb long guns

Due to outfitting difficulties, *Raleigh* did not sail for the first time until nearly 18 months after launch. In company with *Alfred* (24 guns), *Raleigh* sailed to France to complete its battery, due to shortages of artillery in the Colonies. *En route*, the American ship ran across a British convoy. *Raleigh* damaged one of the escorts, HMS *Druid* (20 guns), but was driven off by the other escorts.

After refitting at Lorient, *Raleigh*, in company with *Alfred*, cruised off Africa and in the Caribbean. In March 1778 they encountered two British warships. *Raleigh* fled before the inferior force, leaving *Alfred* to be captured. When *Raleigh* arrived in Boston, the captain was removed and replaced by John Barry. Barry sailed from Boston in September 1778, but was caught by the blockading squadron, HMS *Unicorn* and HMS *Experiment*. Barry deliberately ran *Raleigh* aground to prevent capture of ship and crew, but the British refloated *Raleigh* the next day.



Hancock served only briefly in the Continental Navy, yet had a long career overall, mainly in the French Navy. It is shown here as it appeared when in the Continental Navy. (NH&HC)



Raleigh, a model of which is shown here, had to go to France to complete its battery due to shortages in the Colonies. Initially, it was commanded by an over-timid captain, then, when given to John Barry, it was almost immediately captured. (FDRL)

Taken into the Royal Navy as a 32-gun frigate, HMS *Raleigh* participated in the British expedition to Charleston in 1780. *Raleigh* was decommissioned by the Royal Navy in June 1781 and sold in July 1783.

Trumbull

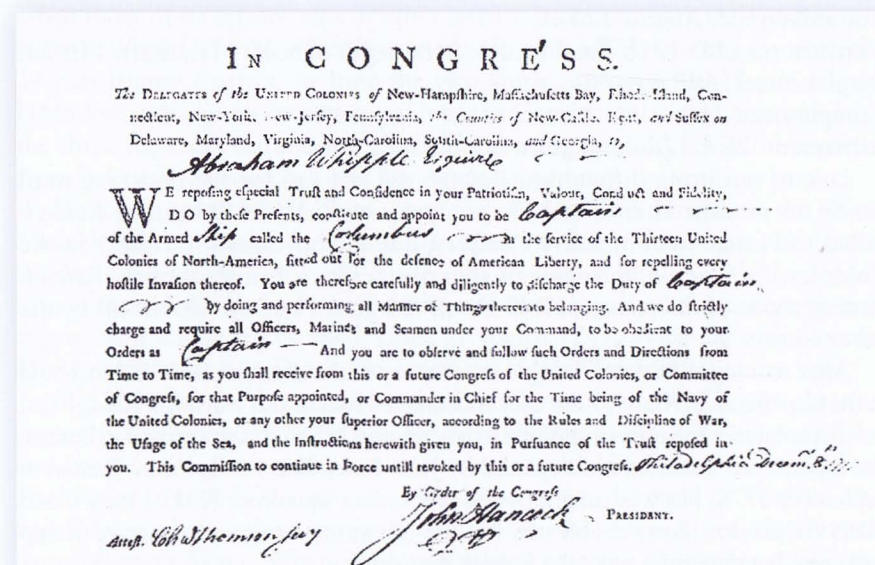
Laid down: 1776, Cotton yard, Portland, CT
 Launched: May 9, 1776
 Commissioned: 1780
 Dimensions: LBP: 126ft 3in, breadth: 34ft 4in, depth of hold: 10ft 5½in, draft: 17ft
 Displacement: 682 tons
 Complement: 199
 Armament: 24 x 12lb long guns, 6 x 6lb long guns

After *Trumbull* was launched it was found to draw too much water to cross the sandbar at the mouth of the Connecticut River. *Trumbull* finally got over the bar in late 1779 after the captain tied empty water casks to the hull to float the ship higher. Taken to New London, Connecticut, the ship was fitted out and command was given to James Nicholson. He succeeded in getting it to sea in May 1780. In August 1780, while escorting an American convoy, *Trumbull* was caught in a storm, and lost its main and fore topmasts. While making repairs it was found by HMS *Isis* and HMS *General Monk*, both former American ships serving in the Royal Navy. Captured after a short but fierce fight, *Trumbull* was towed to New York by *Isis*, sold, then broken up.

Providence

Laid down: 1776, Bowers yard, Providence, RI
 Launched: May 18, 1776
 Commissioned: December 1776

Abraham Whipple's Continental Navy commission. Whipple rose to the rank of commodore in the Continental Navy, and was the last captain of the frigate *Providence*. (NH&HC)



Dimensions: LBP: 124ft 4in, breadth: 33ft 10in, depth of hold: 10ft 8in, draft: 15ft 6in
 Displacement: 632 tons
 Complement: 220

Armament: 26 x 12lb long guns, 10 x 6lb long guns
Providence spent its first year blockaded in port, finally sailing to France under the command of Abraham Whipple on April 30, 1778. After spending the summer in France, *Providence*, with *Boston* and *Ranger*, sailed for Boston on August 22, 1778, capturing three ships *en route*.

In Boston the three ships, along with the purchased frigate *Queen of France*, formed a small squadron cruising northern waters in 1779. In July *Providence*, *Queen of France* and *Ranger* fell in with a British Jamaica convoy of 150 sail in a thick fog off Newfoundland. They captured eleven prizes valued at more than £1 million by sending boat crews to take possession of the unsuspecting merchant ships.

In November 1779, *Providence* was sent to Charleston, and when the British invaded in 1780 *Providence* was trapped in the harbor. Captured when Charleston fell, on May 12, 1780, it was bought into the Royal Navy under its original name. In March 1784 HMS *Providence* was sold.

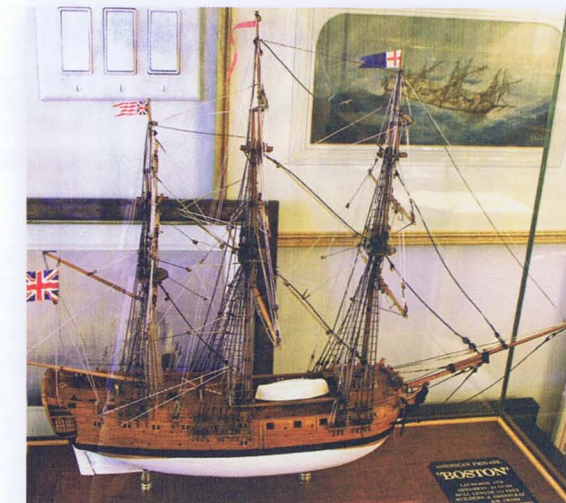
Boston

Laid down: 1776, Cross yard, Newburyport, MA
 Launched: June 3, 1776
 Commissioned: Spring 1777
 Dimensions: LBP: 114ft 3in, breadth: 32ft, depth of hold: 10ft 3in, draft: 12ft 6in
 Displacement: 514 tons
 Complement: Approximately 180
 Armament: 5 x 12lb long guns, 19 x 9lb long guns, 2 x 6lb long guns, 4 x 4lb long guns

Boston made its maiden cruise with *Hancock*, sailing on May 21, 1777. On June 7 the two frigates captured the British 28-gun frigate HMS *Fox*. Commissioning the prize, the cruise continued until the American squadron encountered three British warships in July. *Fox* was retaken, *Hancock* captured, and *Boston* escaped.

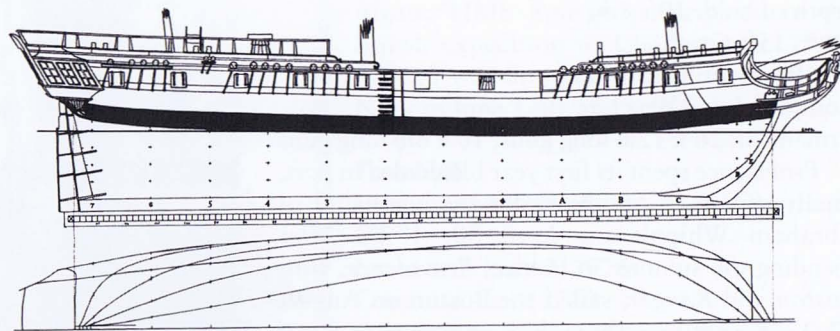
Boston next sailed on February 15, 1778, taking John Adams (newly appointed Commissioner to France) to Bordeaux, capturing a prize *en route*. After a European cruise in which she took four prizes, *Boston* returned to America with *Providence* and *Ranger*, arriving in October 1778. In summer 1779 *Boston*, along with *Deane* and *Confederacy*, patrolled the waters between Long Island and Cape Hatteras. In two cruises *Boston* helped capture nine prizes including five British privateers.

Boston sailed for Charleston in November 1779 to strengthen the port's defenses against the British. When the British besieged Charleston, *Boston* was trapped. Surrendered with the city, on May 11, 1780, *Boston* was taken into the Royal Navy as HMS *Charleston*. She then served in American waters until sold out in 1783.



This model of *Boston* shows characteristic features of frigates built in the 1770s. Note the open waist, without even gangways along the bulwarks. (Weems Collection)

The 24-gun frigate *Delaware* was one of the longest-lived ships of the Continental Navy, serving after the war as a whaler and sealer, before being converted to a privateer in 1794. (John F. Millar)



Delaware

Laid down: 1776, Coates yard, Philadelphia, PA

Launched: July 12, 1776

Commissioned: March 1777

Dimensions: LBP: 119ft, breadth: 32ft 11in, depth of hold: 9ft 9in, draft: 16ft 6in

Displacement: 514 tons

Complement: 220

Armament: 22 x 12lb long guns, 6 x 6lb long guns

After commissioning, *Delaware* formed part of a force guarding the naval approaches to Philadelphia. The British took the city on September 26, 1777. The next day, *Delaware* formed part of a force attempting to bombard fortifications being erected by the British, but *Delaware* ran aground and was forced to surrender.

The vessel then served in the Royal Navy until 1784, capturing the 20-gun privateer *Oliver Cromwell* in 1779. After the war, it was bought, renamed *United States*, and used for whaling and sealing, then sold to a French owner, renamed *Le Dauphin*, and used for whaling. In 1794 it was sold to another French owner and fitted out as privateer. It sailed for Port-de-Paix, France, in 1795 but disappeared. It was believed sunk in a hurricane.

Washington

Laid down: 1776, Eyre yard, Philadelphia, PA

Launched: August 7, 1776

Commissioned: Never

Dimensions: LBP: 132ft 9in, breadth: 34ft 6in, depth of hold: 10ft 6in, draft: 18ft

Displacement: 700 tons

Complement: Unknown

Armament (intended): 26 x 12lb long guns, 10 x 6lb long guns

A near sister to *Randolph*, *Washington* was the second 32-gun frigate built at Philadelphia. Although it was launched in August, 1776, outfitting lagged due to persistent equipment and funding shortages. When the British captured Philadelphia in September 1777, the frigate was still incomplete. *Washington* was moved up the Delaware River, then stripped, and sunk near Bordentown, New Jersey, to prevent its capture. Refloated by American forces in early 1778, *Washington* was used as a barracks ship, but was burned in May 1778 when a British raid moved up the Delaware.

Virginia

Laid down: 1776, Wells yard, Baltimore, MD

Launched: August 12, 1776

Commissioned: 1777

Dimensions: LBP: 126ft 4in, breadth: 34ft 10in, depth of hold: 10ft 5½in, draft: 17ft

Displacement: 682 tons

Complement: Approximately 200

Armament: 24 x 12lb long guns, 6 x 4lb long guns

Commissioned in spring 1777, and commanded by Captain James Nicholson, *Virginia* spent more than a year blockaded in Chesapeake Bay. Nicholson attempted to run the blockade seven times. The first six times he was forced back to port. On the seventh, in March 1778, the ship ran aground on the Middle Ground, opposite Hampton, Virginia. The anchor snapped off before the ship could work free. The crew then broke into the spirit room and got drunk. In that crippled state, *Virginia* was found and captured on April 1 by HMS *Emerald*.

Taken into the Royal Navy as HMS *Virginia*, and rated as a 32-gun frigate, the vessel served in American waters for the rest of the Revolution. It participated in both the British relief of Penobscot in 1779 and the capture of Charleston in 1780. It was taken out of commission in England in 1782, and broken up as unsound.

Montgomery

Laid down: July 3, 1776, Lancaster Burling yard, Poughkeepsie, NY

Launched: November 4, 1776

Commissioned: Never

Dimensions (probable): LBP: 119ft, breadth: 32ft 11in, depth of hold: 9ft 9in, draft: 16ft 6in

Displacement: 514 tons

Complement: 200

Armament (intended): 24 x 12lb long guns, 6 x 6lb long guns

Montgomery was one of two frigates authorized to be built in New York, but was never completed. Shortly after the ship's launch the British captured New York City, blocking access to the sea. The British sent an expedition up the Hudson River in the fall of 1777. To prevent capture, the unfinished *Montgomery*, along with *Congress*, was burned October 7, 1777.

Congress

Laid down: 1776, Lancaster Burling yard, Poughkeepsie, N.Y

Launched: 1776

Commissioned: Never

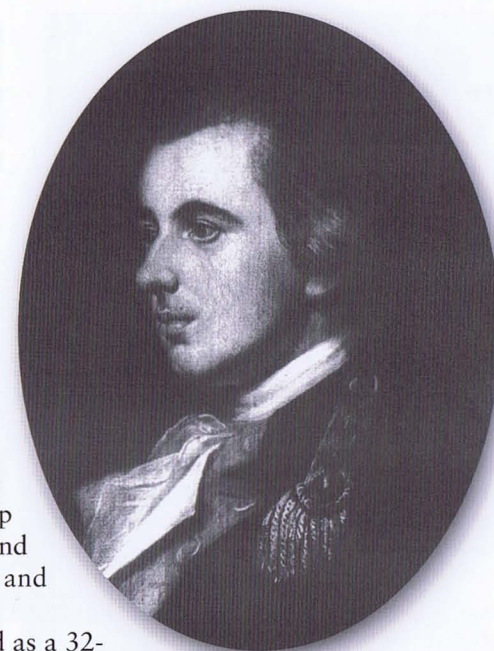
Dimensions: LBP: 126ft, breadth: 34ft 10in, depth of hold: 10ft 6in, draft 17ft

Displacement: 682 tons

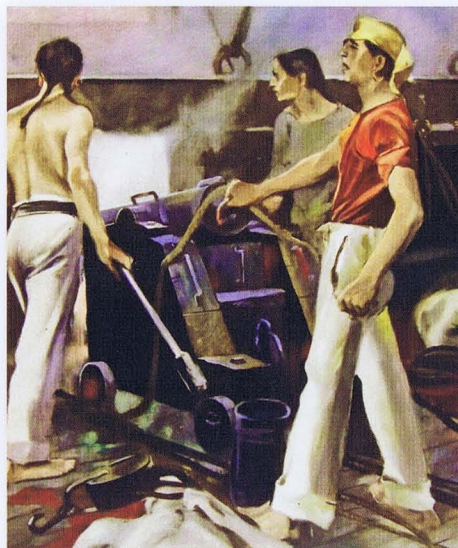
Complement: 200

Armament (intended): 24 x 12lb long guns, 6 x 6lb long guns

The second frigate authorized in New York, *Congress* was never completed. It was burned on October 7, 1777, along with *Montgomery*, to prevent capture by the British. The statistics given are speculative due to limited information.



Joshua Barney was one of the Continental Navy's best officers, but due to the lack of ships he spent much of the war commanding privateers, and was never promoted to captain. When he commanded *George Washington* it was as lieutenant-commanding. (LOC)



The Colonies had a large pool of sailors, such as these, on which to draw to man its ships. However, privateers and merchant vessels offered better pay than the Continental Navy. Thus, despite the abundance of potential recruits, Continental Navy ships found it difficult to find sufficient crews after 1777. (FDRL)

Effingham

Laid down: 1776, Grice yard, Philadelphia, PA

Launched: November 31, 1776

Commissioned: Never

Dimensions: LBP: 126ft 3in, breadth: 34ft 4in, depth of hold: 10ft 5½in, draft: 17ft

Displacement: 682 tons

Complement: Approximately 200

Armament (intended): 24 x 12lb long guns, 6 x 6lb long guns

Effingham was the second of two 28-gun frigates authorized to be built at Philadelphia. Like *Washington*, *Effingham* was incomplete when the British captured Philadelphia. It, too was moved upriver to Bordentown and sunk. It was refloated in spring 1778, but burned along with *Washington* on May 7, 1778, to prevent capture by the British.

Alliance

Laid down: 1777, Hackett yard, Portsmouth, NH

Launched: April 28, 1778

Commissioned: 1778

Dimensions: LBP: 151ft, breadth: 36ft, depth of hold: 12ft 6in, draft 16ft 6in

Displacement: 900 tons

Complement: 300

Armament: 28 x 12lb long guns, 8 x 9lb long guns

The ship was named *Alliance* to celebrate France's entry into the war, with command given to Pierre Landais, formerly an officer in the French Navy. *Alliance* departed Boston in January, 1779, taking Lafayette to seek greater military support from France. After arriving, *Alliance* joined John Paul Jones' squadron and participated in the cruise around the British Isles. Landais proved mutinously insubordinate. At the height of the battle between *Bonhomme Richard* and HMS *Serapis*, *Alliance* fired several broadsides into *Bonhomme Richard*.

G

CONFEDERACY

Confederacy represented one of the more unusual shipbuilding experiments in the Continental Navy. It was anachronistic, showing characteristics both well ahead of and well before the times in which it appeared.

Confederacy hearkened back to a type popular around the start of the 18th century but long since obsolete by the 1770s: the galley frigate. The term described not a true frigate, but a large single-decked warship light enough to be propelled by sweeps in light winds. These ships had two major drawbacks which had led to their disappearance by the 1720s. Due to the light scantlings needed to make them light enough to row, they were weak ships that wore out quickly. They also required a fine, shallow hull, which limited storage capacity and therefore endurance.

Confederacy did indeed have both of these problems. Yet it also formed a stepping-stone to the large flush-deck frigates that the Federal Navy would build two decades later. *Confederacy* was the longest frigate built for the Continental Navy in the American Revolution. Despite its light construction, at 36 guns it carried a heavier battery than any other Continental frigate except *Alliance* and perhaps *Warren*.

The contradictions of its design became apparent while it was in British service after being captured. While fast, the frigate proved to have short legs, requiring frequent visits to port to reprovision. The hull also proved to have sufficient strength for the stresses imparted by standard sea service. However, HMS *Confederate*, as it had been renamed, was sold out of the Royal Navy almost as soon as peace was declared.



Alliance was present at the Battle of Flamborough Head, but its participation was a mixed blessing to John Paul Jones, as this ship (as shown in this contemporary print) fired several broadsides into *Bonhomme Richard*. (LOC)



Following the battle Landais was relieved of his command, but after *Alliance* arrived in Lorient, Landais rejoined the ship, and in June 1780 convinced the crew to return to the United States under his command. However, his bizarre behavior during the return voyage led his officers to forcibly relieve him of command. Following investigations and trials of all involved, *Alliance* was reassigned to John Barry, who commanded *Alliance* for the rest of its career in the Continental Navy.

The combination of a fast, powerful frigate and an aggressive, competent commander kept *Alliance* from sharing the fate of its other American-built counterparts. Despite numerous battles against British warships, including battles against superior forces, Barry kept *Alliance* in American hands until the war's end, capturing numerous prizes.

Due to the indebtedness of the United States, *Alliance* was sold in 1785; it was then used as an East Indiaman for many years, before running aground at the mouth of the Delaware.

Confederacy

Laid down: 1777, Huntington yard, Thames River, CT

Launched: November 8, 1778

Commissioned: April 1779

Dimensions: LBP: 154ft 9in, breadth: 37ft, depth of hold: 12ft 6in, draft: 14ft

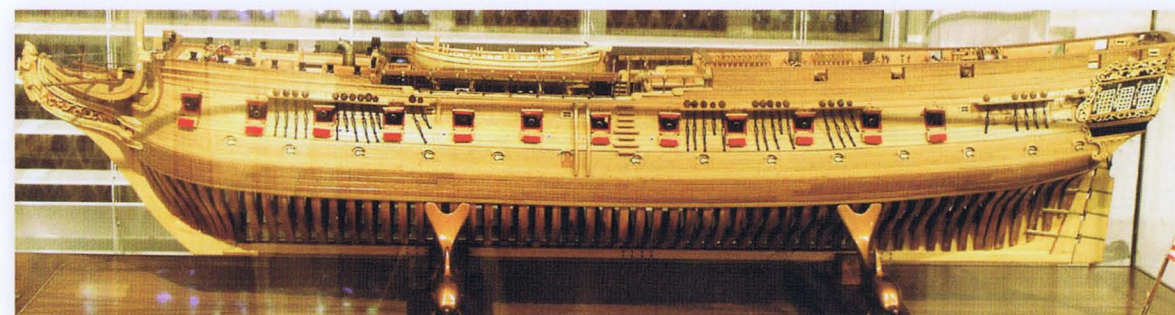
Displacement: 971 tons

Complement: 260

Armament: 28 x 12lb long guns, 8 x 6lb long guns

From May to August 1779 *Confederacy* patrolled the Atlantic coast, often in company with *Deane* or *Boston*. In September 1779, *Confederacy* embarked John Jay, the United States ambassador to Spain, to take him to his post. However, on that voyage *Confederacy* was dismasted by a November hurricane and put into Martinique for repairs, at which point Jay left the ship. *Confederacy* then sailed to Philadelphia for a refit.

Thereafter the vessel escorted West Indies convoys. While homeward bound with a convoy from the West Indies, *Confederacy* was found and overtaken by the 44-gun HMS *Roebuck* and the 32-gun frigate HMS *Orpheus*. *Confederacy* surrendered without firing a shot. Taken into the Royal Navy as HMS *Confederate*, the ship was broken up in March 1782.



Bourbon

Laid down: 1779, Cotton yard, Portland, CT

Launched: July 31, 1783

Commissioned: Never

Dimensions: Unknown; possibly: LBP: 126ft, breadth: 34ft, depth of hold: 10ft 6in, draft: 17ft

Displacement: 680 tons

Complement: 200

Armament (intended): 22 x 12lb long guns, 6 x 6lb long guns

Little is known of *Bourbon*, the last frigate authorized by the Continental Congress, beyond the launch date and the fact that it was to carry 28 guns. The dimensions given are speculative – based on the 28-gun *Trumbull*, built earlier at the Cotton shipyard.

Construction of the ship was slowed by funding problems, and the war ended before construction was completed. *Bourbon* was launched to clear the building slip and sold at auction in September, 1783. Its subsequent fate is unknown.

Ships-of-the-line

America

Laid down: May 1777, Hackett yard, Portsmouth, NH

Launched: November 5, 1782

Commissioned: Never

Dimensions: LBP: 180ft 9in, breadth: 50ft 6in, depth of hold: 23ft, draft: 24ft

Displacement: 1,982 tons

Complement: Approximately 500

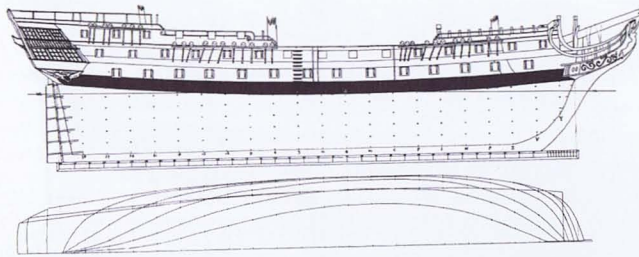
Armament (intended): 30 x 18lb long guns, 32 x 12lb long guns, 14 x 9lb long guns

The only authorized 74-gun ship-of-the-line actually constructed, *America* was built by the Hackett brothers. The design was altered from the "official" draft, resulting in a slightly longer ship. John Paul Jones oversaw construction.

Building lagged behind due to a combination of financial shortfalls and British attempts to destroy the ship while under construction. By the time *America* was approaching completion in 1782, an American pilot ran a French ship-of-the-line aground entering Boston. By then the US no longer had need of ships-of-the-line, so a bankrupt Continental government gave *America* to France to replace the lost warship.

However, the French discovered the gift was a white elephant – crank, poorly built, and incapable of deploying its lower battery even in moderate seas. After it crossed the Atlantic the French laid it up in Brest. In 1786, *America* was surveyed, found to be totally rotten, and ordered broken up.

Confederacy was built as a galley-frigate, which could operate under sweeps in calm winds. However, the compromises required for this yielded a shallow-draft, weakly built ship. This model by Ron Roberti is now in the Houston Maritime Museum. (AC)



The 74-gun *America* was the only ship-of-the-line built by the Continental Navy, and the only ship-of-the-line completed in the United States until the end of the War of 1812. (John F. Millar)

GLOSSARY

Carronade: A short-barreled smoothbore gun that can throw a much heavier ball than a traditional long gun whose barrel weighs the same. A 12lb carronade weighed less than a 4lb long gun, but fired a ball weighing three times as much. However, it threw its shot a shorter distance than an equivalent long gun.

Crank: A ship that was leewardly (see below) due to high sides. Two-deckers and East Indiamen were often crank due to their high bulwarks.

Fore-and-aft sails: Triangular and trapezoidal sails that were rigged parallel to the length of the ship. Sails set on stays were called staysails if on stays supporting the masts, or jibsails if on the jib stays. The sail set on a gaff and boom attached behind the mizzenmast was called the gaff, spanker or spencer sail, depending on the navy, period and rig. Fore-and-aft sails were used to help steer the ship and when beating into the wind.

Forecastle: A raised platform at the front of the ship generally used to manage the anchors and foremast and to provide protection from a head sea.

Frigate: During this period, a sailing warship with one full gun deck and additional guns mounted on the forecastle and/or quarterdeck.

Gun deck: Deck on a frigate or sloop-of-war carrying the main battery of guns; the highest full deck on a single-decked warship during this period. A ship-of-the-line or two-decker would have more than one gun deck. These were identified by their position – if there are three gun decks, upper, lower or middle.

East Indiaman: A large merchant vessel, typically built with two full decks and intended for carrying cargoes from Europe or America to the East Indies. East Indiamen typically carried guns on one of their two decks, using the other for passengers or cargo, but were capable of being fitted with two full gun decks as well as carrying guns on the upper works.

Leewardly: Said of a ship that tended to crab sideways to the leeward, or downwind, direction instead of moving straight ahead. This could have various causes, by including too much freeboard, the ship heeling over too much, or the keel being poorly designed.

Orlop: A set of platforms below the berth deck but above the bottom of the ship, used to carry supplies and house personnel (generally warrant officers).

Privateer: A privately-owned warship carrying letters of marque and reprisal issued by a government that allowed it to capture ships of a nation hostile to that government. Privateers were paid a portion of the value of any ships they took as prizes, with the money split between the privateer's owners, crew, and officers.

Quarterdeck: A partial deck above the main or gun deck from which the navigation and operation of the ship was managed. Generally the quarterdeck starts between the mainmast and the mizzen mast.

Rake: To fire a broadside down the length of the opposing warship, either from the stern or bow. Raking shot caused much more damage because it went the length rather than the breadth of a ship.

Ship-of-the-line: A ship-rigged warship with at least two full gun decks and additional guns on the quarterdeck and forecastle that was strong enough to stand in the line of battle. Ships-of-the-line mounted 64 to 140 guns.

Ship-rigged: A ship with at least three masts, all carrying square sails, is said to be ship-rigged.

Sloop-of-war: A warship with guns mounted only on the gun deck. Three-masted sloops-of-war were often called ship-sloops, and two-masted sloops-of-war were often called brig-sloops.

Squaresail: Four-sided sails, occasionally square but more often trapezoidal, set on spars perpendicular to the length of the ship. American frigates generally mounted five, and sometimes six, sails on their masts. From lowest to highest were the course, topsail, topgallant, royal, skysail, and moonsail or hope-in-heaven – the name of the sixth sail varied widely.

Studding (or stun) sails: Sails mounted outboard the square sails to add more sail area during light and moderate winds.

Two-decker: A ship-rigged warship with two full gun-decks and additional guns on the quarterdeck and forecastle that is too weak to stand in the line of battle. These 44- to 56-gun warships were miniature ships-of-the-line useful for convoy duty and as flagships. They were often confused with frigates because they mounted a similar number of guns.

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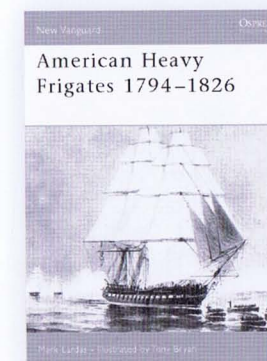
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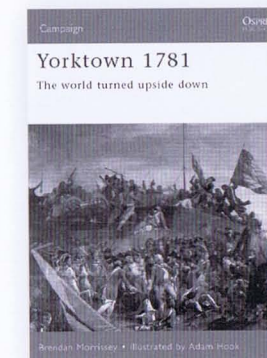
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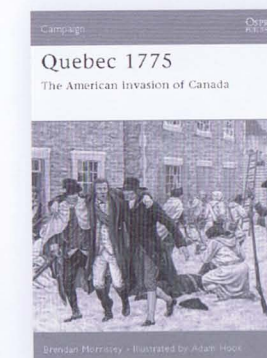
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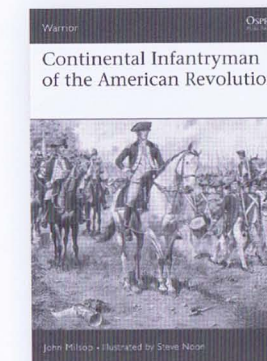
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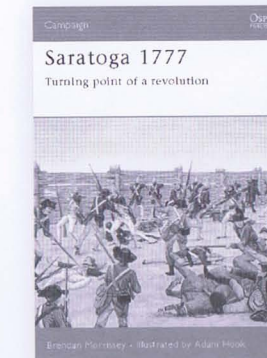
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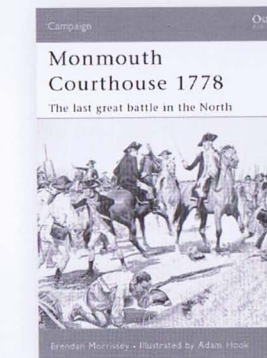
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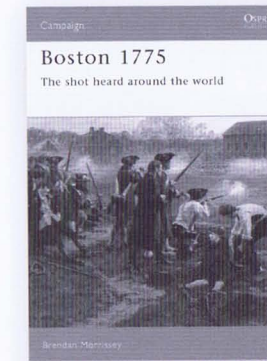
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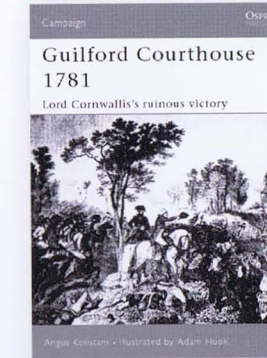
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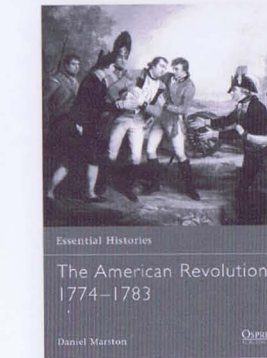
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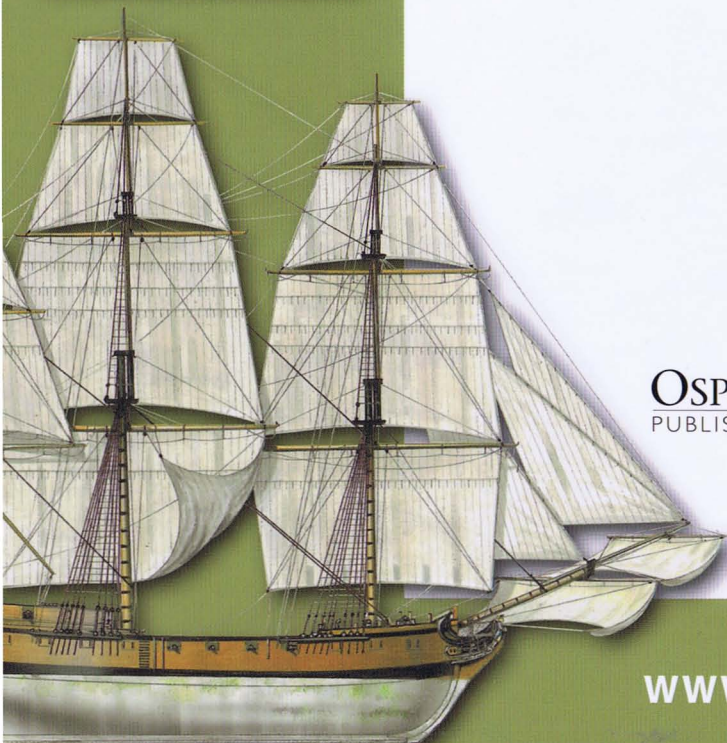
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