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Informal Alliance: Royal Navy And U.s. Navy Co-Operation Against Republican France During The Quasi-War And Wars Of The French Revolution

Jon Paul Eclov

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INFORMAL ALLIANCE: ROYAL NAVY AND U.S. NAVY CO-OPERATION
AGAINST REPUBLICAN FRANCE DURING THE QUASI-WAR
AND WARS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

by

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This thesis, submitted by Jon Paul Eclov in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.



James D. Mochoruk, Ph.D.

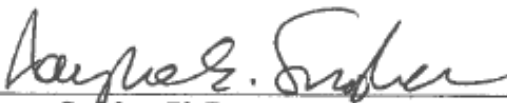


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Jon Paul Eclov
July 16, 2013

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For Theresa, who was patient

ABSTRACT

The Quasi-War was an undeclared conflict fought between the young United States of America and the French Republic at sea during the years 1798-1801. It began when the French mounted a *guerre de course* against the significant American blue-water merchant marine in response to America concluding Jay's Treaty with Great Britain. At the time, the U.S. had no navy whatsoever with which to combat these French corsairs primarily operating from bases in the West Indies. Seeing there was little hope of immediately ending the matter diplomatically after the infamous XYZ Affair, President John Adams convinced a normally divided Congress to build a small but effective navy.

However, the Americans were lacking in needed resources and ordnance to construct and arm a fleet which could keep the sea in the distant Caribbean, which became the primary theatre of war. Fortunately, Great Britain, America's great trading partner, and ironically her former enemy in the Revolutionary War, was also at war with France in the Wars of the French Revolution. This thesis examines the informal naval alliance which formed between the two former enemies during the Quasi-War. It argues that the British were instrumental in providing the material aid which allowed John Adams to build his new navy, and that the U.S. Navy was in many ways modeled after Britain's venerable Royal Navy. It also examines the informal naval cooperation which developed between serving units of the two fleets in the West Indies. This impromptu relationship would be tested by ongoing disputes between the United States, namely

impressment of American seamen, and British seizure of technically neutral, American merchantmen trading to England's non-French enemies in the islands. Despite these stressors, it would last to the end of the Quasi-War. The work also examines U.S./British naval involvement with Toussaint l'Ouverture on St. Domingue, now known as Haiti.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1798 the United States went to war with France. There was no declaration of war by either side. The war, lasting until 1801, was fought nearly entirely at sea and in the Caribbean. Stranger yet, the U.S. fought against France, its ally in the American Revolutionary War, and alongside Great Britain, its enemy in that same war. This conflict, known to history as the Quasi-War, or Undeclared War, was one of the side shows of the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) which erupted as the crowned heads of Europe reacted to events of the French Revolution, especially, the 1792 deposition and then 1793 regicide of King Louis XVI of France and subsequent execution of his Queen, Marie Antoinette. Although Prussia and Austria had actually gone to war against Revolutionary France in 1792, it was only following the execution of the French royal couple that England prepared for war by issuing the necessary orders to bring the Royal Navy to wartime strength. But the French had not waited for a British declaration of war; they had declared war upon their old foe first. As the years of war ground on, Great Britain and France would remain the only two constant belligerents, splitting Europe into two camps. Even across the Atlantic, the United States reluctantly found itself stuck between the two of them. In 1778, during the darkest days of the American Revolutionary War, France had befriended the infant nation, offering military and financial aid given with the *quid pro quo* of binding itself to that country in a

perpetual treaty of mutual amity and alliance. As to Great Britain, after the Peace of Paris she had resumed her role as America's greatest trading partner.

The Washington Administration sought to steer a neutral course between the French and British *Scylla* and *Charybdis*, but the course became ever more treacherous. Finally, friction caused by British commerce restrictions and the consequent seizures of neutral American merchantmen trading to the French, remaining border disputes over British North America, and British sponsored Indian trouble in the western Ohio Territory forced the Administration to treat with the British whatever the consequences. The result was Jay's Treaty of 1794 ratified in 1796, which left the French feeling betrayed by their "perfidious" ally. The Gallic response was to attack American shipping throughout the world and so teach the Americans the cost of spurning former friends. The Yankee merchant marine was especially vulnerable to such a *guerre de course*. It was already the second largest in the world after that of Great Britain. It had grown fat carrying the cargoes of both the British and French during the war. And most significantly, U.S. merchantmen sailed unarmed and unprotected by any navy whatsoever. Even a minor sea power, let alone one like France, possessed of the world's second largest navy and numerous privateers, could menace it. While the French battle fleet, courtesy of the Royal Navy, remained primarily bottled up in its bases at Brest, Rochefort and Toulon, French corsairs operated in ports throughout the globe, preying on Britain's world-wide commerce. Now the attention of these corsairs turned to American merchantmen as well. Worse, one of the French privateer fleet's chief theaters of operations was also one of the primary American trading zones, the West Indies. Operating out of Guadeloupe and St. Domingue, these private warriors jumped upon the

rich, unarmed American cargo ships plying those waters. The Windward Passage, the primary highway out of the Caribbean, leading between St. Domingue and Cuba, proved especially dangerous for American bottoms. But this danger of French spoliation did not end as ships left the tropics. Corsairs also operated off the U.S. coast with Americans utterly unable to cope with the threat directly outside their harbors.

Britain viewed this French move against the United States as a godsend. The war against Revolutionary France was a disaster. British arms and money had produced little in the way of victories, on land or sea—including the Glorious First of June—but had cost the nation dearly in men and treasure. Her feckless continental allies remained more interested in their own local territorial gains at British taxpayer expense—the government of William Pitt was bankrolling them—rather than pursuing any coherent campaign against the French Republic. Expeditions to seize French possessions in the West Indies had left British Armies utterly decimated by fever. Now the young, energetic and highly effective General Napoleon Bonaparte stood poised on the French coast with his *Armée d'Angleterre*, waiting to invade the island nation and the Royal Navy, the only effective fighting force keeping these would be invaders at bay, in 1797 had suffered a mutiny of the entire fleet anchored at Spithead. This prospect terrified the British government. Although, the issue for the sailors was not loyalty to the Crown, but wages—there had been no raise for common tars since the Interregnum—it presented real doubt as to the reliability of Britain's wooden walls. When another, more radical mutiny reared up at the Nore anchorage at the mouth of the Thames, the prospect became even graver. These Nore sailors, in order to enforce their demands, actually blocked the delivery of London's coal and food supply serviced by Thames shipping. And when the North Sea squadron,

standing guard against the enemy Dutch fleet ready to come out at the Texel, sailed instead to join the Nore Mutiny, the country panicked. Although the Navy was able to crush this mutiny and amicably settled the Spithead pay dispute, the situation had had its effects upon the British economy and people. The Bank of England, short of specie, had been forced to stop payments to the country and corresponding banks due to the fear of a French landing fueling a run on them. England appeared on the verge of financial collapse as well as invasion.

It was in this context that the French, playing what appeared to be a winning hand, blundered in their treatment of the United States. Instead of knuckling under to French depredations, the Americans chose to fight. They assembled a navy of their own in record time and chased the French corsairs from the U.S. coast. Next they sent that fleet to hunt French privateers in Caribbean waters, near their island bases. The British government took one look at this situation and said thank you very much. It became the aim of Pitt's Administration to immediately take advantage of this French bungling and befriend the Americans in any way it could, short of direct meddling in American domestic affairs. They had already witnessed the clumsy French attempts to do so in the early 1790s, which had only earned the French Republic the contempt of much of the American public. The British would offer their former subjects naval vessels, stores and ordnance, small arms, saltpeter from India for gunpowder, copper for warship bottoms, and even half-pay Royal Navy officers not then in a sea command or "on the beach," as the saying went. The British minister to Philadelphia, Sir Robert Liston, received instructions to take any reasonable steps to promote friendship with and hopefully the assistance of the Americans against their common enemy, the French.

This thesis, in four substantive chapters, will examine the relationship which consequently developed between the United States and Great Britain, former enemies, in that hot house of war. The author will argue that these two nations formed an informal alliance to fight their mutual foe, the French, at sea. This quasi-entente took two forms. First, the British aided the young Republic in establishing its navy. Second, the line officers and men of the two fleets serving in the Caribbean, the primary theatre of operations for the Americans, worked out an informal understanding which often saw them acting like formal allies. This operational quasi-alliance at sea lasted until the Americans ceased hostilities, despite significant stress placed upon it by deep-seated disputes between the two countries, at times made worse by the actions of one of the British station Admirals.

Chapter II, “Between *Scylla* and *Charybdis*,” will provide needed background material but also offer insight into how the relationship changed between the United States, Great Britain, and France during the choppy fifteen years leading from the Treaty of Paris in 1783 to the beginning of the American Quasi War with France in May 1798, such that roles reversed. France became the *de facto* enemy of the United States while Britain, an informal ally, in the undeclared war at sea—undeclared for the Americans that is—which resulted. It lays out the argument that which side made a friend, and which a foe out of the United States was a function of how the governing elites, especially the diplomats, in Britain and France, respectively, perceived the problems posed by American neutrality during the Wars of the French Revolution and, consequently, undertook radically different strategies to deal with them.

Chapter III, ‘To Found a Fleet,’ scrutinizes how the naval relationship between the two countries began. It explores the critical role Britain played in bringing the new American fleet into existence. From the outset of the war, Great Britain intentionally provided America *essential* material aid that helped establish the new United States Navy. Most importantly, the British Government generously allowed the Americans to import from England the critical copper plates and fasteners without which fashioning any kind of modern fleet would have been impossible. American industry was not yet up to manufacturing them. The British also sold, and even on one occasion, gifted the United States desperately needed ordnance—supplying over the course of the war perhaps half of that used at sea—to arm her men of war and shore installations. Additionally, the island kingdom, perhaps unwittingly, hugely influenced the developing American naval culture. The infant U.S. Navy adopted the Royal Navy as a kind of informal blue print upon which it modeled its new sea service; American commodores and captains came almost to act as protégés of the Royal Navy. Chapter III argues that but for this vital British assistance, both direct and indirect, the small but highly effective American fleet that the newly minted Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert, committed nearly in full to combat the French in the Caribbean, would have remained only a dream.

Chapter IV, “Operations,” continues the story of the blossoming naval cooperation between the two maritime powers begun in chapter III. This chapter makes the case that after formally providing material assistance to the United States to establish the American navy, the British began an *informal* naval cooperation with the Americans, predominantly in the West Indies Theatre. This took the form of allowing the American navy use of British island ports, convoying each other’s merchantmen, sharing signals,

and even patrolling together. But all of this cooperation would remain informal, instituted largely by the serving commanders at sea. The Admiralty and the Navy Department in London and Philadelphia, respectively, would largely stay outside of the equation. The chapter concludes that this “quasi-alliance,” as one scholar styled it, while it never became the *de jure* agreement craved by London, was never the less very much a practical reality on the various West Indies stations and certainly significant to the way the serving captains of both sides conducted their war against the French. Among other things, it was a major early step towards reconciliation between Britain and her former colonies following the American Revolution. Bradford Perkins has dubbed this period that of the “First Rapprochement,” as opposed to the “Great” one, which occurred roughly a century later in the 1890s.

Chapter V, “The Relationship Tested,” illustrates how this informal alliance between the two navies, from the beginning, came under stress from various forces threatening to cleave them apart. Some were rooted in venerable disputes between the two nations, problems which appeared intractable because of the very institutional structures of one, or both. Some might be chalked up to human frailty: the history of personal animus existing between two neighboring station commanders, one from each service, blind racial or ethnic prejudice and fear, the bitter memories of their last war, or simple greed. This study by design focuses upon the day to day contacts between the ships and men of the two navies during the entire period of the Quasi War as recorded in the ships’ logs, journals, and letters to tell the story of the operational side of this improvised naval entente from its “honeymoon” through its “tough times.” And these documents, especially in the latter stages of the conflict, from time to time did reveal

tensions which American naval officers and men felt and voiced about their informal allies in the Royal Navy. These might stem from perceived slights, honest misunderstandings, or sheer bloody-mindedness at the hands of the British naval officers. Never the less, I have found it was most often not so much what sailors, their officers, captains, admirals, or administrators, might *say* in such letters which was the most telling as to the true state of affairs, but what they *did*. Chapter five establishes that despite these pressures threatening to cast them asunder, at the end of the Quasi-War the two navies continued to function much as they had during the fighting. The relationship remained a reality.

The main primary documents utilized in this study come from those collected and printed in the 1930s by the United States Navy Department as the seven volume, some 3,500 page, *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War between the United States and France: Naval Operations (Quasi-War)*.¹ This collection received funding during the Roosevelt Administration, presumably the brainchild of a naval enthusiast president who sought to achieve two goals: to increase access to naval records previously scattered in archives throughout the United States and Britain and, secondly, at a time when he could justify expending the funds, to provide work for “starving” historians as with so many other New Deal initiatives. One of the by-products of this project was to provide researchers with a window into the day to day encounters between warships of both fleets, primarily in the chief theatre of operations of the Quasi-War, the Caribbean Sea. The resulting set of documents is styled as an operational collection, meaning it is

¹ United States Navy Department (U.S.N.), Office of Naval Records and Library, *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War between the United States and France*, 7 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935-38).

primarily concerned with the everyday functioning of the relevant American warships at sea and in port. Records often appear as mundane as the various tacks and maneuvers ships took, or as major as ship to ship actions against the enemy. Sightings of any strange sail are recorded, and the result of any chase which followed, and whether it proved to be friend or foe. It is quite possible that the researchers who unearthed the documents, or the editors who collated this collection, might have missed critical information, but it would appear doubtful, in light of the importance they placed upon the actions taken by the various American vessels which were relatively few on station. Consequently, it is hard to imagine that these scholars missed much. With this caveat I present my arguments and conclusions to the reader.

No study should begin without some treatment of the relevant historiography. However, very little history has been done on the undeclared naval war fought for nearly three years between the French Republic and the United States from 1798 to 1801. And practically nothing has been written about any naval relationship which developed between the new American Navy and the Royal Navy fighting the same foe in the same tropical waters. Certainly no scholar so far has undertaken any major study of the topic. Perhaps the first non- contemporary work of naval history focusing upon this naval war at all was Gardner Allen's *Our Naval War with France*,² which Professor Michael A. Palmer described as one preoccupied with ". . . some of the most stirring exploits in the history of the navy . . ." ³ He decried it as containing "only a sprinkling of strategy, and

² Gardiner W. Allen, *Our Naval War with France* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909).

³ Michael A. Palmer, *Stoddert's War: Naval Operations During the Quasi-War with France, 1798-1801* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), ix-x.

no operational analysis.”⁴ It was a kind of naval history “potboiler” published in the wake of the round the world tour of Teddy Roosevelt’s Great White Fleet, a time of heightened public enthusiasm for all things navy.⁵ This was still in the time of Alfred Thayer Mahan’s *Sea Power* series⁶ when American naval proponents were trying to sustain Congressional recognition of the American need for a big battle fleet.⁷ Palmer’s assessment of the work is largely correct and it is virtually silent upon American Navy co-operation with the Royal Navy—the one tiny exception being a fleeting mention of the two services’ sharing of recognition signals.⁸ Allen’s omission of this early British/American naval *rapprochement* came despite having been written during the years of the “Great *Rapprochement*” of the 1890s to 1914, as Bradford Perkins dubbed the substantial warming of diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and the United States during that period in his eponymous work on that subject.⁹ Perhaps that is because *Our Naval War with France* is largely a chronicle of ship to ship actions and little more.

⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

⁵ The Great White Fleet circumnavigated the entire world in 1907-9. It was comprised of sixteen modern, but pre-dreadnought battleships of the U.S.N. Atlantic fleet painted white. President Theodore Roosevelt ordered the fleet to cruise around the world on a good will tour. It would show the American flag with twenty stops on six continents. Department of the Navy—Naval History and Heritage Command, “The Great White Fleet,” in Naval History and Command [website online]; available from <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq42-1.htm>; internet; most recently accessed 19 June 2012.

⁶ A. T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History: 1660-1783*, twelfth ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943), 219-220; *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire: 1793-1812*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1898); reprint, (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968); *The Life of Nelson, the Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1897); *Sea Power in Its Relations to the War of 1812*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1905).

⁷ N. A. M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea: A Naval History of Britain: 660-1649*, Norton paperback ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), xxiii-xxiv.

⁸ Allen, 67.

⁹ Bradford Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895-1914* (New York: Atheneum, 1968).

In contrast, Professor Palmer's own work, *Stoddert's War*, a study concentrating upon American naval operations in the Quasi-War gives some, though relatively minor, treatment to the cooperation between the two forces. He mentions it in his preface, subtitled as "Unrattling History," where he very correctly observed the following:

American naval operations of the Quasi-War cannot be understood in isolation. When the ships of the United States Navy made landfall in the Caribbean, they entered a European theater where the war had been underway since 1793. The Royal Navy deployed four to five times more men-of-war in the West Indies than the Americans. British ships chased and fought the same French cruisers and privateers. Both navies escorted each other's merchantmen. American warships operated from British bases. And most importantly, as this study demonstrates, British policies and shifts in deployment within the Antilles had dramatic effects on American operations.¹⁰

Palmer acknowledges the initial material aid provided by Whitehall to assist building the American fleet, but what is most significant to him about it is that this formal aid never gave birth to a *de jure* naval agreement between diplomats in Philadelphia and London, or even a formal protocol between the British Admiralty and the American Navy Department. There would be no joint operations directed from the Admirals in Whitehall, nor Mr. Stoddert in Philadelphia. There would be no formal strategy between the powers to combat the French *guerre de course*.¹¹ Palmer's study never went on to explore—as this thesis will—what if any spontaneous relationship might have existed on station between serving British and American units and how important it might have been to the actual war effort at sea. This is understandable. Such an investigation would have been beyond the focus of his work: a study of U.S. naval operations during that war. As Palmer relates in his preface, operational studies are by definition concerned with

¹⁰ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, x.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 74, 77-79.

strategy and planning at the highest level;¹² they are not necessarily as interested in conditions “on the water” so to speak. And Palmer’s was not, at least as related to regular contacts with the Royal Navy.

Palmer again wrote of the American and British navies during the Quasi-War in an article specifically tuned to the relationship between them entitled: “Anglo-American Naval Cooperation, 1798-1801.”¹³ In this seven page article Palmer once more acknowledged the part the British played in assisting the founding of the U.S. Navy and the operational cooperation and support they did supply in the Caribbean. However, Palmer also reiterated his point that the relationship between the two countries never would blossom into an official alliance. He further added that the services would not even “cooperate as closely as might have been expected.”¹⁴ “Anglo-American Naval Cooperation” was not an in-depth product, but a brief overview of the relationship between the navies in which Palmer finally presented the point that because of a return to British seizures of American merchant shipping in the Caribbean, and continued Royal Navy impressment of American seamen, the naval relationship had deteriorated by 1801 to the point that the two countries were headed for war.

Bradford Perkins, while not a naval scholar, in two chapters of his work, *The First Rapprochement*, argued that the naval relationship which did develop between the United States and Great Britain during the Quasi-War with France was a critical part, if not the most obvious manifestation, of a remarkable softening of relations between the two

¹² Ibid., x.

¹³ Michael A. Palmer, “Anglo-American Naval Cooperation, 1798-1801,” *Naval History* 4, no. 22 (1990): 14-20.

¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

former enemies during those years.¹⁵ While acknowledging the Adams Administration's desire to, if at all possible, adhere to former President George Washington's credo to avoid European entanglements,¹⁶ Perkins thought that the informal contacts he chronicled, even at the highest levels of both governments, were also significant, and the goodwill garnered outlasted the Adams presidency and Pitt's government which fell in February 1801.¹⁷ Some of the relational afterglow between the powers remained even into Jefferson's Administration, at least until 1804-05.¹⁸ Peace with France through the Treaty of Mortefontaine did not necessarily mean the automatic breakdown of relations with Great Britain or presage the War of 1812. Perkins concluded that issues which inevitably caused friction between England and America such as R.N. pressing of U.S. merchant and naval tars and the seizure of American trading ships attempting neutral shipping voyages did not return until sometime after Britain's war with France resumed in 1803.¹⁹ In truth, he pointed out that the seizure of American merchantmen, really did not hit its stride until after the 1805 British Admiralty Court decision of the *Essex* reversed the eminent admiralty jurist William Scott's *Polly* decision of 1800, which had sanctioned the doctrine of broken voyages for neutrals.²⁰ Without this doctrine favoring neutral American shipping, U.S. merchant vessel seizures would again increase and with them

¹⁵ Bradford Perkins, *The First Rapprochement: England and the United States 1795-1805* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), chap. 8-9 passim.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112-15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 8-9, 10 passim.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 170-71.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 88-89, 177-79. The doctrine of a broken voyage had allowed American neutral shippers a loophole for transshipment of goods in their neutral bottoms originally received from a nation or possession at war with Britain if the shipper off loaded the goods in an American (neutral) port, paid duties upon them, and then reshipped them as nominally American (neutral) owned goods. The *Polly* decision had made it the duty of the party seeking condemnation of the goods (captor) to prove intentional subterfuge to violate the prohibition against re-exporting those goods to Britain or elsewhere as part of a *continuous* voyage. *Ibid.*, 86-89.

heightened tensions between the two nations.²¹ Inconveniently, this roughly also coincided with the sunset of the economic provisions of Jay's treaty which were never renewed.²²

Again the pressures upon the Royal Navy during the first decade of the nineteenth century were tremendous as Britain now alone bore the brunt of a Napoleonic Continental trade embargo and the Emperor's military might in Spain. These later pressures Perkins would argue, led to the War of 1812.²³ But as the Quasi-War was winding down, so was the last of the Wars of the French Revolution. By 1802, England and the French Republic had signed and ratified the Treaty of Amiens, which kept peace for one year. So during that time, the R.N. could demobilize, releasing sailors from their ships and sating its tremendous need to press them into the fleet. The necessity of seizing Yankee ships trading to French possessions also temporarily vanished. Consequently, the major sources of diplomatic tensions between the United States and England lessened during Jefferson's first term in office.²⁴ Certainly, Perkins's conclusions differ strikingly from those Palmer reached in *Stoddert's War*, and "Anglo-American Naval Cooperation."

As mentioned above, no scholar has to date mounted a major study specifically exploring the relationship which existed between the American and British navies during the years of the Quasi-War. This thesis represents an attempt to remedy this situation. As described above, both Palmer and Perkins referenced the Anglo-American naval entente as part of their studies focusing on other, often related topics, and Palmer's brief article,

²¹ Ibid., 179.

²² Ibid., 182.

²³ Ibid., 181.

²⁴ Ibid., 171.

“Anglo-American Naval Cooperation” was intended as a mere sketch of the topic. In contrast, that naval relationship *is* the focus of this thesis. As a byproduct of exploring that naval relationship, the work also demonstrates how critical the Royal Navy was to the development of the fledgling U.S. Navy. This vital British contribution to the founding of the American fleet, both material and cultural, is most often forgotten, or glossed over. It is the building of Joshua Humphrey’s “Six Frigates,” and the exploits of Thomas Truxtun which have come to dominate the narrative, as if these occurred in a vacuum.²⁵

Additionally, this work brings a fresh approach to largely the same sources Palmer and Perkins utilized in their research concerning the naval war, especially Dudley Knox’s collection, *Quasi-War*: namely looking for the frequency and nature of the contacts made between the ships and men of the two navies on station. This study is less concerned with command decisions made in the two capitals by distant officials than was Professor Palmer. In the days when message transmissions were painfully slow, and hence even the concept of command was much looser than we are used to in our world of instant communication, orders to station commanders, and their orders to their ship captains, were more in the way of *suggestions*. Their decisions would not and could not be instantly countermanded. This author submits that what the actors actually *did* at sea was of more significance to the carrying out of the war than what distant admiralty lords or navy secretaries had *ordered* them to do. Scrutinizing documents for those sometimes very minor, routine contacts between serving officers and men of the two navies aboard

²⁵ Ian Toll’s book on the founding of the U.S. Navy is even entitled: *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

their ships at sea provides powerful insight into what was actually occurring on station rather than what simply examining orders might produce.

Finally, while the historiography relating to the relationship between the U.S. and Royal Navies in the Caribbean is certainly sparse, Palmer's and Perkins's work do set up key questions this work has promised to examine and attempt to answer: namely whether the budding Anglo-American informal naval alliance was significant within the context of its times, and whether it remained functional even as the United States Navy ceased hostilities against the French in February 1801. Of course, this study presents the argument that the answer was definitely affirmative to both.

CHAPTER II
BETWEEN *SCYLLA* AND *CHARYBDIS*

Britain showed little interest in the new United States formed from its thirteen Atlantic Seaboard colonies in the first decade following independence. Although the Americans sent an accredited minister, John Adams, to the Court of St. James's in 1785, His Majesty's Government failed to reciprocate.¹ There would be no British Minister to the U.S. until 1791.² Likewise, any formal commercial connection between the two nations vanished with America's colonial status. There was no commercial treaty whatsoever between them. Britain refused to open its West Indies possessions to American merchantmen.³ The influential Earl of Sheffield, not a subscriber to the new economic free trade philosophy espoused in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, released in 1776,⁴ in his *Observations on the Commerce of the American States*, published in 1783, thoroughly adhered to the older mercantile creed and feared competition from a new source, the United States. In Lord Sheffield's view, the U.S. had wanted its independence; then fine, it had its independence, and like every other foreign nation, should be kept locked outside the Imperial trading system established by the

¹ Neglected and ignored by His Majesty's Government, Adams returned home to the U.S., leaving the post vacant. Samuel Flagg Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, 5th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), 70; David McCullough, *John Adams*, 1st Touchstone ed. (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2002), 318, 323, 328-29, 333-36.

² Bemis, *Diplomatic History*, 91.

³ Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), 22-24.

⁴ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* vol. 3, bk. IV (London: Charles Knight, 1836).

venerable Navigation Laws. Furthermore, Sheffield argued that the American States were so dependent upon their commerce with Britain that they would still continue doing business with her merchants with or without a commercial treaty and even at the distinct tariff disadvantage of now being shut outside the mercantilist wall of the Navigation Acts.⁵ However, William Pitt, the young First Lord of the Treasury, was a believer in Smith's new gospel of free trade. Pitt sought to bring in a bill to foster a much more open commerce with the United States. However, Parliament sided with Sheffield and Pitt's legislation failed.⁶ And with that the American states began their disastrous decade in the economic wilderness.

To be fair to Lord Sheffield and the British Government, there were sound reasons not to have free trade with the American states. With whom should such a treaty be enacted? Each state separately conducted foreign and domestic trading policy. The merchants of the United States, as Sheffield quite correctly observed, lived in a state of economic chaos, where the national government had no powers to coerce the states or their citizens to do anything.⁷ Consequently, the American Confederation Government had no regular power of taxation, and, hence, no steady income, essentially subsisting upon "voluntary" contributions from the state governments to conduct its business as needed.⁸ As the British government agents observed, this national government had already demonstrated its powerlessness to get the various states to enforce the debt repayment provisions of the Treaty of Paris, which had granted their independence.

⁵ John Lord Sheffield, *Observations on the Commerce of the American States*, new, much enlarged ed. (London: J. Debrett, 1784).

⁶ Bemis, *Diplomatic History*, 69.

⁷ Sheffield, 193-207.

⁸ Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993; Oxford University Press paperback, 1995), 101.

Hence, American debtors ignored British creditors' pre-independence debts.⁹

Furthermore, some in London circles anticipated that this weak American confederation would spin apart and the several states beg to be returned to the Empire. Shays' Rebellion in Western Massachusetts, brought on by financial instability during the mid 1780s, certainly provided evidence in support of this view.¹⁰

The ratification of the new federal constitution in 1788¹¹ meant the end of most of this self inflicted economic chaos for the United States. The new American Federal Government now had the power through the United States Congress to bind the several states in the realm of national finance and taxation, as well as interstate and foreign commerce.¹² The Constitution conferred the executive authority to enforce the economic legislation enacted by Congress upon the Office of the President.¹³ Foreign relations were no longer the province of the several states but that of the central government, although the role of the president and congress as to dictating foreign policy might yet be the subject of debate.¹⁴ Congress soon lost no time contemplating the use of this new economic policy muscle. Early Congressional debates concerned whether it should enact retaliatory and discriminatory measures aimed specifically at British imports. The idea was to give back to Britain what she had been dishing out to the U.S. for the previous ten

⁹ Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, 9-11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹¹ Elkins and McKittrick, 32.

¹² U.S. Constitution, art. 1, sec. 8, cl. 1-3 and 5; sec. 9, cl. 5 and 6; sec. 10, cl. 1-3.

¹³ U.S. Constitution, art. 2, sec. 3.

¹⁴ The power to make treaties, appoint ambassadors and ministers, and receive same lay with the president. But all appointments and treaty ratifications were subject to the advice and consent of the senate, in the case of treaties, approval by two thirds of those senators present. U.S. Constitution, art. 2, sec. 2, cl. 2 and sec. 3. The power to make war lay with the congress, but the president was made commander in chief of the armed forces. Art. 1, sec. 8, cl. 11, and art. 2, sec. 2, cl. 1. Even the U.S. House of Representatives tried to get into the act regarding Jay's Treaty, James Madison arguing that the House should be involved by withholding necessary funds. After ratification by the Senate, Madison fought a rear guard action to deny any appropriations to execute the treaty. Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000; Vintage Books, 2002), 137-39.

years and perhaps bring her to the bargaining table to consider an Anglo-American trade agreement.¹⁵ No such legislation emerged from this early congress,¹⁶ but it produced one salutary effect for Anglo-American relations. It woke British government circles to the threat that America's new federal institutions now might be able to mount a credible retaliatory trade threat.¹⁷ His Majesty's Government now saw reason to open formal diplomatic relations with the United States by sending a Minister Plenipotentiary, George Hammond, to Philadelphia.¹⁸ In his "particular instructions" to Hammond then assuming his American appointment, His Majesty's new foreign minister, William Wyndham, Baron Grenville, specifically directed that the diplomat keep abreast of, and find ways to discourage Congressional action on discriminatory trade legislation impacting British imports to the U.S.¹⁹ Prior to this, Britain had made do with the surreptitious intelligence gathering of George Beckwith, a British confidential agent, who had no official credentials to the American government, but had his own clandestine sources deep within it, one in fact at cabinet rank, the Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton.²⁰

The French Revolution begun in 1789 was to radically alter the existing American/British relationship. The revolution originally enjoyed universal approbation in America, and support in Britain, at least among the Whigs. The hope in both countries

¹⁵ Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, 38-40.

¹⁶ Congress did enact tariff and tonnage duties on imports but the final product gave advantages only to American, or partly American, owned ships. All foreign ships paid at the same rate whether or not the U.S. had a commercial treaty with them. Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 41-43.

¹⁸ Bemis, *Diplomatic History*, 91. The U.S. had reciprocated by sending Thomas Pinckney as the first American minister to the Court of St. James's since John Adams had vacated the post in 1788. Ibid., 70, 91. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson had vowed not to have the U.S. send another minister to Great Britain until His Majesty's Government had sent a diplomatic representative to Philadelphia. Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, 94-95.

¹⁹ William, Lord Grenville, "Particular Instructions to Hammond" in *Instructions to the British Ministers to the United States: 1791-1812* ed. Bernard Mayo (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), 10-11.

²⁰ Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, 41-43, 45-48.

was that the French experience would be moderate, relatively bloodless and introduce to Europe another constitutional government.²¹ But by 1792 things were already careening out of control. The Prussian King and Austrian Emperor, watching from Berlin and Vienna, became more and more alarmed, threatening invasion on behalf of the “besieged” Louis XVI. Finally, as a preemptive measure, France declared war upon Austria in April 1792. Prussia soon joined Austria and invaded France. Meanwhile, Britons followed events from across the channel as the Paris mob raised its head again, and effectively deposed Louis XVI in August 1792. The newly elected Constitutional Convention abolished the monarchy and declared the French Republic on 22 September. During the autumn of 1792 the French Republican Army forced the Austrians back into the Austrian Netherlands and then followed with an invasion of their own, occupying that region. The British, who considered the independence of the Low Countries essential to their commercial survival, began to mobilize the Royal Navy to wartime strength. The French preempted a British declaration of war with one of their own.²² And with that the two main actors of the Wars of the French Revolution and later Napoleonic Wars were joined in combat.

Britain and France would remain at war for some twenty years, except for the brief one year Peace of Amiens (1802-1803). It is true that they had remained at war on and off since 1689, through King William’s War (1689-1697), The War of the Spanish

²¹ McCullough, 416-18; Clive Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars, 1793-1815* (Totowa, N.J.: Bowman and Littlefield, 1979), 13-14.

²² Emsley, 13-18; Arthur Herman, *To Rule the Waves: How the British Navy Shaped the Modern World* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004; Harper Perennial, 2005), 330-31; R. R. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1941; Princeton paperback, 1970), 21.

Succession (1701-1713), King George's War (1744-1748), The Seven Years War (1756-1763), and the American War (1778-1783). Each of these conflicts, except perhaps the first two had been solely over colonies, or trading rights.²³ But in this new revolutionary war, the French Revolutionaries believed their Republic itself was threatened by all of Europe.²⁴ The original war aim of the Allies was not to gain colonies or dynastic territories, it was purely and simply regime change. They sought to fundamentally change the government of France back to absolutist monarchy, by restoring the Bourbons at gunpoint.²⁵ It was not hard to imagine what the lot of the revolutionaries themselves would be if France lost this war. They had killed thousands of suspected reactionary enemies of the Revolution, many without any trial. With all Europe against them, the Jacobins in power at the time rallied the entire population to war, the men, the women, and the children. In a declaration of this new sense of nationhood they proclaimed:

The young men shall go to battle; the married men shall make arms and transport provisions; the women shall make tents and uniforms, and shall serve in hospitals; the children shall make old clothes into bandages; the old men shall go out into the public squares to boost the soldiers' courage and to preach the unity of the republic and the hatred of kings.²⁶

For the first time in European history, a whole nation's people would be mobilized.²⁷ Additionally, this was now a war of ideas, the radical republicanism of the French versus the absolute and constitutional monarchism of the Allies. The French would be fighting for their ideals of "*liberte, egalite, fraternite,*" while the Allies rallied

²³ Herman, 331-32. King William's War, also called in Europe the Nine years War or the War of the League of Augsburg, and the War of the Spanish Succession were to some extent over the religion of England in that they involved an attempt by Louis XIV of France to put a co-religionist Catholic Pretender upon the Protestant English Throne who harbored hopes of returning heretic England back to the Catholic fold.

²⁴ R. R. Palmer, 5.

²⁵ Emsley, 2-3.

²⁶ Decree of the *levee en masse* in *Le Moniteur*, 25 August 1793, quoted in Emsley, 3.

²⁷ Herman, 336-37; Emsley, 2-3.

around monarchy, aristocracy and true Christian religion. When the new French Revolutionary Armies, buoyed in battle by a fervor not seen since the wars of religion of well more than a century before, bested the professional troops of the Prussians and Austrians, hurling them back into the Habsburg Netherlands and the Bavarian border, they did not stop there but marched into Holland and overthrew the existing United Provinces, replacing it with the Batavian Republic, a puppet government controlled from Paris.²⁸ During the course of the war, French Revolutionary arms overran northern Italy and sought to capture Egypt from the Ottomans.²⁹ It seemed like all the world was turned upside down and the old orders trembled at the potential of utter social upheaval.

William Pitt, now Prime Minister, for some ten years, despite early rhetoric decrying Jacobin France as posing a threat to the Kingdom's very existence,³⁰ determined to fight this new war, much as his father had the Seven Years War some forty years before. He and his colleague, the Scot, Henry Dundas, saw the key to hitting France as destroying the income from her remaining colonies, the lucrative sugar islands of the Caribbean. They hoped that by wresting these islands away from the French Republic, they could bankrupt it, or perhaps simply add to Britain's share of the sugar, and coffee trade by absorbing them into her Empire.³¹ St. Domingue, the western two fifths of Hispaniola, was the most productive sugar producer in the islands, perhaps producing more than all the British islands combined, including Jamaica, and controlling a foreign

²⁸ Herman, 342; Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France 1797-1801* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 40, 140.

²⁹ Herman, 342, 352-56.

³⁰ Pitt, on the day France had declared war on England, had described the war to Parliament as "not a contest for acquisition of territory. It is a contest for the security, tranquility, and the very existence of Great Britain, connected with every established government and every country in Europe." W. Pitt, *Orations on the French War* (London: Dent, n.d.), 37, quoted in Herman, 332.

³¹ Emsley, 22-23.

trade as great as that of the United States in the late 1780s.³² Britain dispatched Admiral Sir John Jervis with a military taskforce to capture as many of the French Lesser Antilles as possible. They bowled over opposition in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and the other islands, like ten pins.³³ The invasion of St. Domingue even showed promise. The British overran the port cities of Jeremie, Mole St. Nicholas, Leogane, and Port au Prince (then called Port Republicain). The British Army was able to advance inland and lay hold of perhaps a third of the French section of the island.³⁴

However, the British were soon to discover that this was not William Pitt the Elder's war. First of all, St. Domingue was in turmoil before the British even got there. The lofty ideals of the Revolution in 1791 had touched off a maelstrom amongst the free Mulatto and black slave populations which vastly outnumbered the white planters and tiny *petits blancs*. The slaves had revolted and refused to be returned to slavery. Led by former slave Toussaint L'Ouverture, they fought both, the planters and the advancing British, slowly gaining the upper hand. A Republican French expedition sent out from France and led by Victor Hugues regained Guadeloupe from the British, causing a panic in the British Lesser Antilles and the recall of British forces from St. Domingue to protect the remaining islands. This weakened His Majesty's troops in Hispaniola. But it was not force of arms that ultimately gave the advantage; it was disease. Yellow fever savaged the British troops as it had so many times before when the British had attempted

³² Perkins, *First Rapprochement*, 106; Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar, and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987), 6.

³³ Duffy, 59-97.

³⁴ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 151-52; Duffy, 98.

invasions against French and Spanish possessions in the West Indies and Spanish Main.³⁵ Cartagena in present day Colombia some fifty years earlier had been a graveyard for the British in the War of Jenkins Ear, when disease had decimated a large amphibious force led by Admiral Vernon against the city, leading to his disgrace.³⁶ So it was to be again. British fever deaths mounted into the thousands.³⁷ Michael Duffy estimated that by 1801 there were 64,250 to 69,250 British dead from all causes in the West Indies.³⁸

If that were not all, Pitt had totally misread how the French viewed the conflict. They were not after colonial gains or trade advantages as they had been so many times before. They did not dream of the return of British North America, or expanding their sugar island holdings. They were in a life and death struggle on the Continent of Europe, and they were winning. They had already expanded the borders of France to an extent, of which Louis XIV had only dreamed. By 1797, the now ruling Directory had ordered their most promising young general, Napoleon Bonaparte, to prepare for an invasion of England itself. His army, now styled the *Armee d'Angleterre* was massing on the English Channel, awaiting an opportune time to cross and export the Revolution to the "Nation of Shopkeepers."³⁹ During the winter of 1796-97, another French Army led by General Hoche had been preparing to invade Ireland and aid Wolfe Tone's rebel Society of United Irishmen.⁴⁰

To add to Pitt's difficulties, all was not well within Britain's primary defense force against invasion. The Royal Navy, which had stood stalwart for a century against French

³⁵ Duffy, 26-27, 98-100, 104; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 152.

³⁶ Herman, 264.

³⁷ Duffy, 134-35. 334-35.

³⁸ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 152.

³⁹ Emsley, 65; Herman, 352.

⁴⁰ Emsley, 56-57; Herman, 343-44.

invasion threats⁴¹ now mutinied at its primary anchorage at Spithead and at the Nore. On Easter Sunday 1797 when Admiral Lord Bridport ordered the fleet to sea, with one signal, three cheers from the crew of the flagship, H.M.S. *Queen Charlotte*, answering ship's companies from Battleships and frigates throughout the fleet, refused to make sail. They struck their sails in defiance of their officers. No one was intentionally harmed. In time, "bumptious" officers were put ashore. Sympathetic ones remained aboard. For there was sympathy amongst much of the officer corps for the ratings' primary demand: an increase in wages. Royal Navy tars had not received a pay increase since the days of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector in the 1650s.⁴² Inflation had sapped their earnings which even then were in practice mainly tendered when a ship was "paid off," meaning decommissioned. In wartime this would not happen unless a vessel's refitting was so extensive that the ship required docking for a lengthy period. Hence, payment could be infrequent.⁴³ Demands for a pay increase had been addressed to the outgoing fleet commander, Admiral Richard Lord Howe, known affectionately in the fleet as "Black Dick." He had forwarded them on to the Admiralty Office where the Lords Commissioners had ignored them until they realized demands had also been sent on to

⁴¹ Louis X IV and Louis XV had both had invasion designs upon England, but whole scale regime change was never part of it, except to return the Catholic Stuarts to the English and Scottish thrones in the case of Louis XIV. Louis XV sought to use an invasion of England to wrest possessions in the New World from his mercantile rivals and to drive them out of India.

⁴² Conrad Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester, England: University Press, 1913), 3-85; G. E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobree, *The Floating Republic: An Account of the Mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797*, reprint ed. (London: Geoffrey Bles, March 1935; reprint, October 1935), 3-106; Nelson himself had admired the mutineers at Spithead. N. A. M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain: 1649-1815*, (London: Allen Lane, 2004; New York: W. W. Norton paperback, 2006), 450.

⁴³ Daniel A. Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), 196, 210; N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: William Collins, 1986; New York: W. W. Norton & Company paperback, 1996), 130; Rodger, *Command*, 446.

influential members of Parliament. By the time the First Lord of the Admiralty, George, Earl Spencer realized something was up in the fleet at Spithead and warned incoming commander, Admiral Bridport, it was too late. The sailors' plan already was in motion. The Admiralty ordering the fleet to sea to head off trouble was the signal to mutiny.⁴⁴

Now there was only one thing for it. That was to negotiate a settlement before the French fleet might learn of the strike and come out with Napoleon's army in tow. The strikers, by now savvy to governmental procedures and useless promises, demanded that Parliament be involved. They would not withdraw the strike until Parliament had enacted their demanded raise, and, the King had given the Royal Assent. When delays sowed deserved suspicion amongst the ratings that they had been betrayed, the mutiny resumed. The Admiralty brought back "Black Dick," himself, to help with the negotiations. An accord was struck granting an agreed pay raise, the promise that the most disagreeable officers would be re-assigned, and the hated purser's pound abolished.⁴⁵ Parliament eventually enacted the measures, and the Crown gave the Royal Assent. The strike over, the fleet put to sea from Spithead. The Great Mutiny had been remarkably free of violence. The fear of disloyalty had also been misplaced for the tars had declared that at any sign of the French coming out, they would have made sail and fought.⁴⁶

However, the mutiny at the Nore was another matter. Whereas the mutiny at Spithead had proceeded under the well ordered management of a committee of delegates

⁴⁴ Rodger, *Command*, 445-46.

⁴⁵ Emsley, 59. The "purser's pound" was a tradition in the Royal Navy whereby the purser, who handled the men's provisions at sea, was allowed to legally short them the rations owed them by regulations. Theoretically, this was to allow pursers to account for normal wastage of foodstuffs for which all pursers were held personally accountable. Hence, on a purser's scale a ration of a pound of peas weighed fourteen ounces, cheese, nine ounces, and butter, twelve ounces. Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy*, 155; Rodger, *Wooden World*, 93. The men greatly resented what they regarded as a fraud upon them.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 446-47.

from each of the capital ships, that at the Nore had broken out afterward in May without organization, or well conceived demands. In many ways the more radical Nore mutiny—the mutineers had actually attacked the Articles of War, the very organizational structure of the Navy—had been the most dangerous and frightening for the nation. It was joined by units of the North Sea Fleet which had been standing in readiness to face the Dutch, now French puppets, believed to be preparing their fleet at the Texel to come out to fight, in all likelihood to cover Napoleon’s proposed invasion. The mutineers also at one point effected a blockade of the Thames and Medway Estuaries, which had the potential to starve and freeze London. The capital city relied heavily upon the river for both its food and coal shipments.⁴⁷ In contrast to the amicable resolution at Spithead, the mutiny at the Nore was suppressed. Its chief, Richard Parker, was hanged from the yard arm of H.M.S. *Sandwich*. With the mutiny crushed, the North Seas Fleet then put to sea and mauled the Dutch at the Battle of Camperdown that autumn.⁴⁸

If invasion threats and mutinies in the fleet were not enough, Britain faced severe economic woes. The Pitt government had been bankrolling the Allies on the Continent for some time as well as mounting the very costly operations in the Caribbean, mostly on tick. Consequently, with the huge gold payments going out to maintain Allied armies, there was little enough specie left in the country for domestic needs. News of General Hoche’s invasion force headed for Ireland to aid Tone’s rebel United Irishmen and then subsequent word of another led by Colonel William Tate and his *Legion Noire*, largely an army of conscripted criminals, landing on the remote northwest coast of Wales, touched off a run on the Bank of England. Fears of invasion and a massive loan request from the

⁴⁷ Gill, 165-258; Manwaring and Dobree, 121-261.

⁴⁸ Gill, 251-252; Manwaring and Dobree, 243; Rodger, *Command*, 456.

Irish government in consequence of Hoche's appearance at Bantry Bay had deeply threatened the Bank's specie holdings. Britons throughout the kingdom had begun to withdraw gold from their banks in the shires. The 25 February edition of the *Extraordinary Gazette* reported the news that had reached the Admiralty the day before that Tate's troops had landed in Wales. Crowds descended on the Bank to demand their holdings in coin. By 26 February, the Privy Council had issued orders in council for the movement of the Bank to a paper note standard for its gold holdings.⁴⁹ Never mind that Tate's invasion was a complete bust because the Welsh had failed to rally to his colors—British troops rounded up his men within three days of their landing⁵⁰—or that Hoche's force never had set foot upon Irish soil because the weather had been so foul that an amphibious landing was impossible, or that his ships had limped back to France driven by dirty weather,⁵¹ the damage was done. The nation was on tenterhooks. And so it would remain for the British people during the *annus horribilis* that was 1797.

For American mariners the new war meant one thing, the chance for huge profits. The French, whose West Indies possessions had to some extent been open for American trading vessels before the conflict, had now flung open the gates. American merchants sent cargos of food, lumber, and other staples to immediately take advantage of the new opportunities. The French were eager to have neutral bottoms carry their supplies. They did not have enough ships themselves and were under blockade in Europe. Besides, the neutrals selling their own produce and manufactures of these kinds were believed to be immune to seizure under international law. These items were not contraband of war, not

⁴⁹ Emsley, 56-58.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵¹ Herman, 343-44.

weaponry, munitions, or products associated with the paraphernalia of war.

Unfortunately, the British read contraband of war differently to conclude, anything which might be used to support enemy combatants, including corn and other foodstuffs.⁵²

Hence, American merchantmen laden with such cargoes were subject to capture by British men of war and privateers as good prizes. This was the position His Majesty's Privy Councilors had taken in their Order-in-Council issued 6 November 1793. Sadly, American merchants and their skippers had not seen this Order-in-Council which only became public in December 1793.⁵³ By then unsuspecting American vessels heavily laden with foodstuffs intended to provision the French sugar islands were already on station in the Caribbean as were British privateers and men of war already armed with this knowledge. The Jonathans sailed unwittingly into a trap. The British privateers and men of war found rich, slow, unarmed, unsuspecting prizes by the score. By 1 March 1794, British flagged corsairs and men of war had seized more than 250 Yankee vessels and had escorted them into port. There the ships and cargoes had rotted while their crews had languished pending adjudication. Local Admiralty courts in the islands condemned 150 of them.⁵⁴ The Americans were utterly guileless at the time, trading with non-forged manifests and destination papers. This would not be so later.

These seizures set off an uproar when news of them reached the United States. There were stories of mistreatment of American crews and passengers, of Americans confined in "fever-ridden prison hulks" in steamy island anchorages.⁵⁵ Americans had

⁵² Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, 154-59. Grain to the English is called corn; what Americans call corn is called maize

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 158-59.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

learned of many cases where vessels had never been heading to French ports in the first place, and were laden only with American owned cargoes, but never the less, suffered capture. As these spoliations continued, the public mood only soured toward England.⁵⁶ Even those who were Anglophiles, such as Alexander Hamilton, were outraged. The British Minister, Hammond, saw his hard work towards keeping the young Republic neutral despite French sympathy and support being undone.⁵⁷ Something had to be done as the popular mind drifted toward the hitherto unthinkable alternative of war.

This seaborne commerce was not the only arena where resentment of the British was growing. Westerners, meaning settlers to the new Ohio territory, were concerned with the failure of the British to withdraw their frontier forts and trading posts. The settlers, with some cause, believed these posts, and the British who manned them, were the source of much of the Indian unrest in what would be now termed the Old Northwest. Two American armies sent to pacify belligerent tribes in the territory had suffered utter routs at the hands of the Indians. The British in the area were believed to be feeding the resentment by encouraging tribal confederations to hold to a settlement line creating an Indian buffer territory between the U.S, and the new British colony of Upper Canada.⁵⁸ American Commissioners sent to treat with the Indians had had to suffer a safe conduct from the new governor of Upper Canada, Simcoe, and rely upon British officers to transport and guard them in the wilderness. These official “minders” were there, as far as Simcoe was concerned to “guide” the negotiations along paths favorable to British North

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 199-200.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 109-112.

American interests⁵⁹—keeping the Americans boxed in behind the Appalachian Mountains and so posing no threat to British North America by any realistic notions of expansion to the Pacific. They intended to nip American dreams of manifest destiny in the bud.⁶⁰ Simcoe viewed with suspicion a new American army now readying in Ohio. Unlike the two earlier ones, this one was put together with some forethought.⁶¹ Its commander, General “Mad” Anthony Wayne, a hero of the Revolutionary War, had taken the time to see that his army received ample equipment, and was well trained and disciplined before setting out to meet an enemy. Wayne was also known to be a very able field commander. To Simcoe, an army such as Wayne’s posed a threat not just to the Indians in the Ohio Territory, but to British Canada itself. He had convinced himself that Wayne’s actual objective was the British fort at Detroit. The intent to simply treat or war only with the Indians was a smokescreen. Simcoe then refortified the old stronghold on the Miami River and moved there much of the Detroit garrison. This in itself was a provocative move towards the Americans, effectively re-establishing a military base well inside American territory as defined by the Treaty of Paris, especially when put in the context of having refused to abandon its border posts on the American side of the frontier for the last eleven years.⁶² Taken together, the British seizures of American merchantmen in the West Indies and the border troubles in the Old Northwest made for a tense

⁵⁹ Ibid., 162-68.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 109-110.

⁶¹ Col. Harmor’s campaign of 1790 had failed. General St. Clair’s expedition had followed in 1791. It had resulted in a Braddock-like mauling some ninety miles north of Fort Washington (modern Cincinnati). Ibid., 112-13.

⁶² Ibid., 174-79. As it turned out, Simcoe was badly mistaken. Wayne had no designs on Detroit. Simcoe’s moving his garrison to the fort on the Maumee, could easily have led to war between Great Britain and the United States when the forces confronted each other outside of the fort’s walls following Wayne’s utter rout of the Indians at Fallen Timbers on 20 August 1794. Fortunately, John Jay was already at sea when this occurred or the peace mission may have been scrapped.

diplomatic situation between the two nations. They were drifting towards war in the spring of 1794.

However, the United States and Great Britain did manage to avoid an untimely war in 1794. President George Washington determined to try and resolve the problem with diplomacy. He dispatched the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, John Jay, as a special minister plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James's with the brief of concluding a treaty with England that would resolve a critical list of disputes including vacating the border posts, opening trade with Britain's West Indian possessions, and gaining compensation for seizures of the American merchant marine carrying food, lumber and other supplies to the French as neutrals.⁶³ Jay arrived in London and talks got under way with Lord Grenville, Britain's foreign minister and one of His Majesty's Secretaries of State. Historians have opined as to how Grenville flattered Jay and got the best of him in the eventual bargain.⁶⁴ But the truth was that no one wanted war, that it was absolutely imperative that the United States compel Britain to evacuate its sovereign territory in the Northwest, that American merchants receive compensation for the captures, and that American bottoms gain some certain access to Britain's West Indies trading system. All three objectives were obtained from the document now termed Jay's Treaty signed 19 November 1794, but not fully ratified and effective until 1796.⁶⁵ Additionally, a commission was set up to resolve the ambiguous St. Croix boundary issue left by the 1783 Treaty of Paris, and commissions to resolve the claims of British

⁶³ Elkins and McKittrick, 397-98.

⁶⁴ Samuel Flagg Bemis was one of these historians. Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, 205-06. Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick and Joseph Ellis in their respective works have argued that the treaty, largely the brainchild of Hamilton, reflected a far reaching vision that the United States' economic future be tied to Britain's economic star and not that of France. Elkins and McKittrick, 396-400; Ellis, 136-37.

⁶⁵ Elkins and McKittrick, 410-12.

creditors against American citizens predating the War of Independence. The treaty was silent as to future seizures of American merchantmen under the British interpretation of contraband goods, effectively leaving the rule of 1756 in place, and also to the Royal Navy's forced conscription of American seamen into its fleets. As Jay had to realize, these were truly non-negotiable for Britain at that time considering that its main weapon against France was the Royal Navy with its blockade strategy, and its overriding hunger for seamen which in wartime it had no realistic chance to sate without the naval press. He took what he could get, and returned to America.

However, upon returning home with the treaty, Jay was an instant villain. To many, he had sold out the honor of the young republic and toadied up to their former oppressor. He was pilloried in the popular press and burned in effigy from one end of the nation to the other when word of the treaty's provisions became known. Washington himself had presented it in secret to the Senate for that body's approval, arguably hoping to head off the resulting tumult—that would be the interpretation given to it by the Republican press. Approval in the Senate was no guaranteed proposition either. But pass it did by the narrowest of margins and Washington signed it. And despite a rearguard action fought by James Madison in the House of Representatives trying to withhold funds for the treaty's execution, it became the law of the land.⁶⁶

But ordinary Americans were not the only ones unhappy with Jay's Treaty. When word had reached Paris through the medium of the London newspapers, the new French Republican Government, the Directory, felt distinctly betrayed. Since the beginning of the war with England, the government of Revolutionary France had been disappointed

⁶⁶ Ellis, 137-38; Elkins and McKittrick, 417-26.

with the response of the United States to its sister republic's predicament. The United States had declared a strict policy of neutrality despite its obligation to guarantee protection to France's West Indies possessions under the 1778 Franco-American treaty of alliance.⁶⁷ Recognizing that the Americans had no naval armament to do so, the new French minister sent to the American republic in 1793, Citizen Edmond Genet, never the less had expected to be able to establish French privateer bases in American ports. As soon as he had landed in Charleston, he had set about issuing French privateer charters to Americans wishing to fit out privateers to harass British shipping. He also expected to empower French consuls resident in American ports to exercise French Admiralty jurisdiction over prizes brought into those ports by French corsairs.

Before the U.S. Federal Government was aware of his intentions, some of Genet's privateers already had put to sea and even returned with British prizes in tow. Upon learning what Citizen Genet was up to, the Washington Administration had objected strenuously and directed Genet to halt issuing privateer charters to any Americans intending to outfit privateers from an American flagged seaport. Genet had bitterly resented the American cabinet's position which he believed violated the spirit, if not the letter, of the 1778 treaty between the then Kingdom of France and the United States. He refused to stop and attempted to appeal directly to the American people as against their elected officials. An ugly situation had resulted when federal marshals had arrested American sailors who had enlisted upon a Genet corsair. Then there was the case of the British ship, *Little Sarah*, captured as a prize by the French national frigate *Embuscade*

⁶⁷ President, Proclamation, "Proclamation of President Washington," 22 April 1793, in Greg H. Williams, *The French Assault on American Shipping, 1793-1813: A History and Comprehensive Record of Merchant Marine Losses* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 482-83.

and interned by French officials at Philadelphia pending rearming as a French privateer in defiance of Washington's directive forbidding such actions. Confronted by Pennsylvania State officials acting under Governor Mifflin's orders, Genet had threatened to sail regardless. The French Minister upbraided first the Pennsylvania Secretary of State, and the next day, U.S. Secretary of State Jefferson for standing in the way. Mifflin, Treasury Secretary Hamilton, and Secretary of War Knox, then proposed setting up canon on Mud Island to bar the vessel, now renamed *Little Democrat*, from clearing the harbor. In the end, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, despite being a Francophile, at Washington's behest, sent word to France requesting that Paris recall the minister. The *Jacobin* Committee for Public Safety, led by Robespierre, was only too happy to oblige, requesting the Americans to arrest the *Girondin* Genet, and send him back to France in chains. Instead, the minister's credentials simply were withdrawn, and he requested and received asylum in America, having no doubts as to what would have awaited him upon his return to a *Montagnard* dominated Paris.⁶⁸

With Genet gone, Philadelphia's immediate relations with the French Government did improve superficially as the new minister, Fauchet sought to avoid the errors of his predecessor, even to the point of cultivating key Anglophile Federalists to the dismay of the French Republic's Democratic-Republican friends in Congress.⁶⁹ He also avoided meddling in domestic politics as Genet had, declining to join in early 1794 the battle raging in Congress led by James Madison himself, leader of the Democratic-Republicans in the House of Representatives, to establish a system of protective tariffs –an American

⁶⁸ Bemis, *Diplomatic History*, 97-98; Elkins and Mckittrick, 335-373.

⁶⁹ Albert Hall Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality: Franco-American Diplomacy During the Federalist Era* (Knoxville, Tenn.: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 155.

Navigation Act—and thereby wrench the United States from the economic orbit of France’s deadliest enemy, Great Britain. Whether his aid would have assisted Madison’s goal, is uncertain, but without it, the measure failed in the Senate by the tie-breaking vote of Vice-President Adams.⁷⁰ Fauchet also failed to get to first base in negotiating a new Franco-American commercial treaty per his instructions from the new Jacobin Committee of Public Safety. And the chief negotiator for the Washington Administration was the new Secretary of State, Edmund Randolph—Jefferson having retired to Monticello—the only member of the cabinet left reasonably sympathetic to France.⁷¹ Put in perspective, these failures had occurred at what would have seemed an auspicious juncture to be pleading the French Republic’s case. The United States was even then verging upon war with Great Britain over the border problems in the Ohio Territory and British seizures of American shipping in the West Indies. Finally, he was especially concerned when President Washington appointed the Chief Justice of the United States, John Jay, as a special envoy to London to resolve the disputes with England—he suspected Jay’s instructions included negotiating a commercial treaty—but he failed or purposely did not warn his colleague, Leblanc, then heading back to France, of his suspicions.⁷² Could a better managed diplomatic campaign have tipped the scales for France, by ensuring anti-British protectionism, or by whipping up the Ohio Frontier standoff into a hot war, or perhaps by heading off or foiling Jay’s mission? Perhaps it could have. But astute observers might not have bet against Jay’s mission to avert war with England in 1794 whoever France had stationed in America.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 142-43, 148, 155-56.

⁷¹ Ibid., 126-27, 168-69.

⁷² Ibid., 165, 169-71.

For there were deeper issues complicating the Franco-American relationship suggested Frenchmen who had been resident in the United States. The ex-Bishop of Autun, the now out of favor diplomat, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, had remarked during his exile in the United States that America was “English.” Talleyrand had lived in the home of Aaron Burr in New York and worked as a financial trader and speculator. While there he had made some shrewd observations about which he had later written. What struck him very much was how “English” the United States was in spite of itself. Its citizens might express pro-Gallic sentiments, but these were really surface veneer.⁷³ Reading from a paper he presented at the National Institute in Paris in 1797 he told his audience: “In every part of America through which I travelled, I have not found a single Englishman who did not feel himself an American, not a single Frenchman who did not find himself a stranger.”⁷⁴ The truth was that America was virtually tuned to Britain in everything that really mattered and shaped American thought and being. The American language was English. Works of fiction read in America were most often English novels. The American theatre was dominated by the English stage, including travelling thespians out from England performing revivals of earlier Drury Lane hits.⁷⁵ Tastes for English goods dominated; French goods simply did not sell as well. American consumers preferred to purchase products they were familiar with and trusted. Similarly, merchants preferred to do business with those with whom they were familiar, especially if the credit there was longer as well. And British merchants were in a position to extend

⁷³ Perkins, 1.

⁷⁴ Charles Maurice Talleyrand, *Memoir Concerning the Commercial Relations of the United States with England* (Boston: Thomas B. Wait, 1809), 104, quoted in DeConde, 42.

⁷⁵ Perkins, 7-9.

much longer credit than the French.⁷⁶ And the leader of the Federalist Party, that which held most of the portfolios in Washington's cabinet and controlled the Senate, knew this. Alexander Hamilton, who had been repelled by the late excesses of the French Revolution like so many of his English "cousins" across the Pond, had believed America's future lay tied up with British commerce and his economic scheme now also dictated the young republic's foreign policy goals. Maintaining peace with England was *paramount* for Hamilton's Federalists. Their government's only real source of revenue derived from tariffs on the brisk trade with the former mother country. And without a reliable revenue stream, without the resulting sound credit, there would return the economic chaos and social instability of the Confederation Government, which had threatened to spin the several states apart into disunion where they would be ripe for the plucking by any interested power, perhaps even England and France themselves. The issue for Hamilton was independence.⁷⁷

Rumors of a new treaty between Britain and America, signed in November 1794, had reached Paris in December 1794, but no one, let alone the American Minister to the Convention, knew its actual provisions. The text of the treaty had only arrived at the American seat of government 7 March 1795. By orders of Washington, only Secretary of State Randolph had access to its text until it would be given to the Senate to be convened 8 June to consider approval.⁷⁸ Therefore, the new French Minister to Philadelphia, Pierre-Auguste Adet—Fauchet had just been recalled—had received no instructions from his government on how to deal with it before leaving Paris. He had only

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-11; Elkins and McKittrick, 383-87; Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, 28-29.

⁷⁷ Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, 38, 189, 270.

⁷⁸ Elkins and McKittrick, 415, 417.

suspicious echoed by Fauchet who had not yet left Philadelphia that the treaty bode ill for French interests. Never the less, Adet undertook efforts to defeat the unpopular treaty's ratification in the U.S. Senate which proved unsuccessful.⁷⁹ Senators who were already friends of France, or who simply disliked what they viewed as the servile tone of the treaty, or who might be persuaded by the lobbying of the French diplomat, could simply not muster the one third plus one minority needed to deny ratification. Instead, voting had proceeded entirely upon party lines: twenty Federalists for, ten Democratic-Republicans against. After Adet had purchased a copy of the treaty from Virginia Senator Stevens T. Mason and given it to *Aurora* editor Benjamin Franklin Bache, who had printed and distributed it, the minister attempted to bring public pressure upon Washington not to complete ratification by withholding his signature. By this time, as mentioned previously, the country was aflame against the treaty as large segments of the public urged the President not to sign. Elkins and Mckitrick in the *Age of Federalism* argue that Washington finally had recognized the "sinister", invisible hand of the French Government behind opposition to the treaty, trying to drive a wedge between Britain and America for its own purposes, even to provoke war. Hence, in the end, he had decided to buck public sentiment and delay ratification no more.⁸⁰

As a result there were unpleasant rumblings issuing from the Directory during the winter and spring of 1796 following the treaty's proclamation. Lord Grenville in London detected them through his intelligence sources on the Continent and relayed these apprehensions to the new British Minister in Philadelphia, Robert Liston, in a dispatch

⁷⁹ Bowman has argued that Adet actually undertook a plan to bribe Senators to vote against the treaty. Bowman, 201-03.

⁸⁰ Elkins and McKitrick, 417-27.

dated 18 March 1796. The warning sent to Liston indicated that a new French Minister, Monsieur Fontaine, would present a note to the American Government that the new treaty made between Great Britain and the U.S.A. abrogated the latter's 1778 treaty with France and demanding within fifteen days an answer to French complaints based upon the treaty. To add gravity to the demands, the message would be coordinated with the appearance of a French naval squadron off the American coast. Lord Grenville directed Mr. Liston that if the French openly acted upon these threats, to inform the Washington Administration that His Majesty's Government would be "ready to enter into such engagements with the United States as may appear best calculated to repel an aggression of this nature and make common Cause against an Attack which can be dictated by no other motive than by a desire, to prevent the Establishment of a good understanding between Great Britain and the United States...."⁸¹ In the event, the Directory did not send Monsieur Fontaine to America and never sent such a message to Philadelphia. The new U.S. Minister to Paris, James Monroe, had urged the French against such a drastic move and, instead, privately intimated that they await the presidential election of 1796 to remove Washington and repair the rift.⁸² The French had taken Monroe's advice and attempted through Monsieur Adet's offices—he had not left the United States after all—to influence the outcome of the election. When in September 1796 Washington had decided not to run, the French had thrown their influence behind the Democratic-Republican candidate, Thomas Jefferson. When the people instead elected another Federalist, albeit, one like

⁸¹ William, Lord Grenville to Robert Liston, 18 March 1796, in *Instructions*, 113-14.

⁸² *Instructions*, 114 fn 28; Samuel Flagg Bemis, "Washington's Farewell Address: A Foreign Policy of Independence," *The American Historical Review* 39, no. 2 (Jan. 1934): 255-59.

Washington not believing in party faction, the Directory again altered their approach.⁸³ They now elected to *openly* commence a *guerre de course*, a war upon seagoing commerce, with the United States.

In reality, the French had already begun a limited war upon America's neutral commerce back when the conflict had begun against America's chief trading partner, England. The French Revolutionary Government had issued decrees in 1793 countenancing the seizure of foodstuffs and enemy owned goods—read British—en route to enemy ports.⁸⁴ This had affected American provision ships selling to the British and recently British-conquered French possessions in the West Indies, though on a much smaller scale than the British depredations upon French-bound cargoes of the same time. Just as the British had modified their positions against neutral shipping, the French had relaxed theirs, or excepted American merchantmen carrying non-contraband goods wherever bound.⁸⁵ But, as the Jay Treaty had become a reality, promising American *rapprochement* with Great Britain, the rumblings from Paris had produced evidence of what was to come. In July 1796 the Directory had issued an ambiguous decree directing that hence forth French naval and privateer vessels would treat neutral shipping as the neutrals would suffer Britain to treat them. What this mysterious *arête* actually meant no one really knew. It would, of course, be impossible for French warships and privateers, let alone, French colonial prize courts to know what British Admiralty courts were then doing to neutral shipping. As some commentators have opined, what it really did was give *carte blanche* to those commanders and courts who so desired to exercise wide

⁸³ Bemis, "Farewell Address," 255-59.

⁸⁴ 1st French Republic: "Decree of the French National Convention," 9 May 1793, in Williams, 483.

⁸⁵ Elkins and McKittrick, 538.

jurisdiction to seize neutral, especially American shipping, in the West Indies.⁸⁶ Some like Victor Hugues, the infamous Jacobin governor of Guadeloupe, sometimes known as “the Colonial Robespierre,”⁸⁷ issued their own decrees against American commerce. On 1 August 1796, Hugues had directed that all neutral vessels transporting contraband were subject to seizure wherever they were sailing. On 1 February 1797, he had followed up with a decree subjecting neutral vessels sailing to any of the former French West Indies colonies now held by the British.⁸⁸ In London, Rufus King, the U.S. Minister to the Court of St. James’s, had written to Alexander Hamilton, observing of French conduct:

France will harass and waste our commerce, regardless of justice. She makes our treaty with England the pretence. Had we no treaty her conduct would have been the same. She has recently required of Hamburg and Bremen to suspend and prohibit all commerce with EnglandThe demand has likewise been repeated at Copenhagen⁸⁹

As the March 1797 inauguration of the president-elect, John Adams, approached, the French position toward American commerce became even more strident. On 2 March the Directory issued a decree declaring that any American ship not having on board a document called the *role d’équipage*, a list of the crew and their specific nationalities in the proper form prescribed by Treaty of Amity and Commerce of 1778—the model document was alleged to be attached to the treaty—was to be considered a good prize. No American ship carried such a list. In nearly twenty years of commerce under the treaty,

⁸⁶ 1st French Republic, “Executive Directory Decree of 14 *Messidor*, year 4, 2 July 1796, in Williams, 484; Elkins and McKittrick, 537-38; Michael A. Palmer, 4.

⁸⁷ Michael A. Palmer, 75.

⁸⁸ 1st French Republic, Windward Islands, “Decree of Victor Hugues,” 1 August, 1796, and “Decree of Victor Hugues of 13 *Pluviose*, year 5,” in Williams, 484.

⁸⁹ Rufus King to Alexander Hamilton, 8 March 1797, in Rufus King, *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King: Comprising His Letters, Private and Official; His Public Documents and His Speeches*, Charles R. King, M.D. grandson and ed., vol. 2 1795-1799 (New York, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1895), 154, available from Hathi Trust, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?u=1&num=154&seq=11&view=image&size=100&id=nyp.33433082380480>; Internet; most recently accessed 12 March 2012.

the French had never required one. With no advance notice, all American merchantmen were liable to seizure under this *arête*. It also provided that American tars captured serving aboard an enemy man of war or privateer were to be regarded and punished as pirates, whether serving voluntarily or pressed.⁹⁰ The Government of Metropolitan France now appeared to have adopted the more radical position of its West Indies colonies.

Thus, when John Adams became president on 4 March 1797, he inherited a foreign relations mess regarding the French Republic. Washington, his august predecessor, left office successfully having steered the young republic between the Scylla and Charybdis of warring Britain and France for nearly his entire second term. Now it would be Adams's turn at the helm. Adams later described in a letter to his wife Abigail how Washington's countenance fairly beamed as he stood on the dais watching Adams taking the oath of office. He wrote: "Me thought I heard him think, 'Ay! I am fairly out and you are fairly in! See which of us will be the happiest!'"⁹¹ Adams naturally subscribed to Washington's credo of avoiding war with either of the belligerent powers. The United States, after all, had treaties with both and traded with both. But at each turn the French appeared to be escalating the crisis. The French had recalled their minister, M. Adet, during the autumn of 1796 and had sent no replacement.⁹² Adams would soon learn of the French Directory's *arête* issued two days before he assumed office, vastly widening the scope of seizures of American merchant shipping. A reconvened Congress would soon

⁹⁰ 1st French Republic, "Decree of the Executive Directory, 12th Ventose, 5th year," 2 March 1797, in *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* 2:30-32, available from <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage>; Internet; most recently accessed 12 March 2012; Elkins and McKittrick, 552; Michael A. Palmer, 5.

⁹¹ John Adams to Abigail Adams, 5 March 1797, quoted in McCullough, 469.

⁹² Elkins and McKittrick, 538.

request a report from the State Department as to the status of French depredations committed against American seafarers. Timothy Pickering, Adams's holdover Secretary of State from the Washington Administration, would in June deliver a catalogue of woe carried out by French corsairs against unarmed U.S. trading vessels since 1 October 1796. Additionally there would be listed embargoes of American vessels in Metropolitan French seaports, shipments of supplies delivered to French planters and merchants in the West Indies but left unpaid for, accounts of tortures perpetrated against Yankee skippers to force false admissions of destination so as to seize a vessel, and other outrages.⁹³ Additionally, word would arrive from France in mid-March that the Directory had denied recognition to the new U.S. Minister to Paris, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney by officially ignoring him for weeks, and finally sending a minor functionary to direct him and his family to leave the country. Requesting this directive in writing the family waited weeks before it arrived and they left for Amsterdam. The functionary had specifically told Pinckney that the French Republic would not accept an American minister until the American Republic resolved its disputes with France. This treatment was completely outside the norm of diplomatic custom and a tremendous insult to the United States.⁹⁴

Before learning of these latest outrages, even before his inauguration Adams had weighed his options. He could ask Congress to enact an embargo or for a declaration of war. He might even have the request for war prevail—his Federalist Party had its war hawks—but a substantial portion of the nation would not be with him at this juncture,

⁹³ Department of State, *Report of the Secretary of State respecting the depredations committed on the commerce of the United States, since the 1st of October, 1796*, in *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* 2:28-65, available from <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage>; Internet: most recently accessed 12 March 2012.

⁹⁴ Elkins and McKittrick, 510, 550-51.

would yet be sympathetic to France. Going to war as divided as the nation would be might be courting disaster, as the United States would later discover in 1812. The other option he considered was the obvious precedent that Washington set when presented with a roughly analogous situation in 1794 with England. Washington had elected to send a special peace mission to England. It had been a last ditch step to stave off dreaded war. Despite the many insults to the American Flag, Adams was determined to give diplomacy one more try by dispatching his own peace delegation to France to hopefully work out a Gallic Jay's Treaty.⁹⁵

There were very sound reasons to do so. Rufus King had detailed some of these in a letter to Secretary Pickering dated 19 April. King recounted how the war was going very badly for France's opponents. Russia with its new Tsar Paul was indifferent to the war as was Prussia, unless it concerned the Partition of Poland. England, bankroller of the alliance, King noted, was financially stretched to the limit, her Royal Navy now hobbled by mutiny, and her people war weary and despairing. Austria, he described as exhausted and suing for terms.⁹⁶ It was not an auspicious time to go to war against France. Even Hamilton, who detested everything the French Revolution now stood for, had agreed. Writing to King, he had advocated a peace mission to France, but also believed it prudent for the United States to arm while negotiating.⁹⁷ Perhaps this last reason was dispositive for Federalists in the government and Democratic-Republicans in opposition. The U.S. really had no armed forces. Its regular army was miniscule by the standards of Europe's

⁹⁵ Ibid., 538-39; DeConde, 17-19.

⁹⁶ Rufus King to Timothy Pickering, 19 April 1797, in King, 2:172-75.

⁹⁷ Alexander Hamilton to Rufus King, 8 April 1797, in King, 2:167-68.

smallest states and it had no navy whatsoever. To seriously arm, it would take time. Negotiations whether they failed or not, would buy time.

In the end, President Adams decided on three peace commissioners: Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, John Marshall, and Elbridge Gerry. Pinckney, an eminent but moderate Federalist, was still in Europe after his original rejection by the French as the American Minister to the Republic. John Marshall, the youngest of the three, was a reliable Federalist of ability. In January 1801 Adams would appoint him Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. He would effectively lay the foundation of Constitutional jurisprudence for the thirty some years he held the post. Elbridge Gerry rounded out the commission. He was of Democratic- Republican sympathies, but also a Massachusetts man, and an old friend of John Adams.⁹⁸ Marshall sailed from Philadelphia 20 July 1797 and Gerry from Boston on 23 July. Marshall landed in Holland where he joined Pinckney, and travelled together to Paris. Gerry arrived in the French Capital a few days later.⁹⁹

On 8 October the three American diplomats briefly met unofficially at his home with the Directory's new foreign minister, none other than Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord. Talleyrand was a laicized, former Catholic Bishop and moderate revolutionary who had escaped the Reign of Terror in exile, first in England and then America.¹⁰⁰ However, there would never be an official acknowledgement of the envoys' arrival or acceptance of their credentials. The diplomatic farce that followed would enter history as the "XYZ Affair." Talleyrand kept the Americans waiting for weeks for their

⁹⁸ Elkins and McKittrick, 555-56, 558-60, 732.

⁹⁹ DeConde, 35, 45-46.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 41-42, 46; Elkins and McKittrick, 561-62.

official reception. Instead they were to be visited by four men and later a woman, the men sometimes in tandem, claiming to be “agents” of Talleyrand, and subsequently known as W, X, Y, and Z in the official dispatches presented to the U.S. Congress. These “agents” made it clear that the price of negotiating with M. Talleyrand was a *doceur* of 1.2 million *livres* (approximately \$250,000), plus the offer of a \$6 million loan from the United States to the French Republic. Without the payment and loan, there could be no official diplomacy between the Americans and the French Government. The agents also indicated that the Directory wanted the U.S. commissioners to disavow a 19 May 1797 speech President Adams had given to Congress which the Directors deemed bellicose. The attitude of the Americans was predictable: outrage. It was not because of payment; the United States was already paying the Dey of Algiers for peace as part of a signed treaty. It was the idea that Americans had to pay a price to be officially received by the French at all. They judged this just another insult piled upon those previously heaped upon American shipping, and the rude earlier treatment of Pinckney.¹⁰¹ When pressed by one of these agents for an answer to the demand for money, Pinckney is said to have exclaimed: “It is no, no, not a sixpence.”¹⁰² Then the envoys were threatened with war if no money was forthcoming.

This series of contacts, and some informally by Gerry with Talleyrand himself, dragged on through the autumn and into winter. It did not help the mood of the commissioners that while these ‘meetings’ were ongoing with the agents they received word that on 17 October Napoleon had forced the Austrians to capitulate at Campo Formio in Italy. The military threats of the agents seemed all the more real. Marshall, for

¹⁰¹ DeConde, 46-57.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 49.

one, presumed an invasion of Britain was now imminent.¹⁰³ In January 1798 the delegates presented a document to the Directory outlining the depredations committed upon American shipping and citizens along with a defense of the 1794 treaty reached with Britain. This proved to no avail, because in the interval, the Directory had issued a decree that settled the issue for the commissioners. On 18 January it had declared that American ships carrying any British produced articles, no matter their owner or where bound, even to French ports, were deemed to be a good prize, including the entire cargo, and the vessel itself.¹⁰⁴ This *arête* went beyond the bounds of any international law of the time as the British foreign Minister, Lord Grenville, recognized when he heard of the Directory's message to the French legislative bodies preceding the decree. He said as much in a letter to his minister in Philadelphia, Liston, predicting that any resulting action would directly lead to hostilities between the United States and France. Grenville then directed Liston to be prepared to offer assistance to the American Government.¹⁰⁵ The *arête* was, for all intents and purposes, a declaration of war at sea.

Even before the actual decree had issued from the Directory ordering seizure and condemnation of any neutral shipping containing any goods of English origin aboard, Lord Grenville himself had offered Rufus King, the American Minister in London, any assistance he could render, including holding up the regular transatlantic packet ship for any urgent dispatches King might want to send on to his government in America.¹⁰⁶ His Majesty's Government had been following the deterioration of the French-American relationship with interest. Lord Grenville had first offered the possibility of aid to the

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 53; 1st French Republic, "Executive Directory Decree," 18 January 1798, in Williams, 484.

¹⁰⁵ William, Lord Grenville to Robert Liston, 15 January 1798, in *Instructions*, 148-49.

¹⁰⁶ William, Lord Grenville to Rufus King, 13 January 1798, in King 2:270-71.

United States back in 1796 when intelligence sources had warned him the French were about to issue an ultimatum backed by the appearance of a menacing French naval squadron off the American coast. That threat had not of course materialized at that time. Never the less, the offer had made an impression upon Americans, at least those living in or trading with Britain, that former enemies might become fast friends in the face of French aggression. When French depredations had worsened during 1796 and 1797, American traders in Britain had sought permission to join the regular British convoys travelling down the English Channel and past the Western Approaches toward the Americas. King had at that time told Grenville that the decision to request aid from another government was for him, the United States Minister, to make—not private citizens. It was a matter of foreign policy to be decided by the American Government in Philadelphia.¹⁰⁷ The proud republic was trying to avoid the appearance of being a dependent or of assuming an obligation to a foreign power which later might prove a liability. But King had not ruled out the idea should the situation later change to warrant it. King simply had not then felt it was the time.¹⁰⁸ Now, in light of the Directory's new policy of general seizure of neutral—read American—shipping, the time had arrived. He now promptly wrote to Pickering apprising him of the huge change in the situation, and that circumstances dictated that he must act without prior instructions, and so would be requesting that the Spring American shipping leaving Britain would be held up until

¹⁰⁷ Rufus King to Timothy Pickering, 12 March 1797, in King, 2:152-53.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

escorted with the regular British spring convoys departing England.¹⁰⁹ He also promptly wrote Grenville to accept the offer.¹¹⁰

Meanwhile, no official word had arrived from America's peace mission to the French until a packet of dispatches, most being in cipher, including Pinckney's, arrived in Philadelphia from Paris on 4 March 1798. Only the message not written in code could be read immediately. Dated 8 January, it conveyed the commissioners' opinion that they believed the mission was hopeless as there was no prospect of being officially received by the French Government.¹¹¹ The president on 5 March passed on to congress the envoys' message that the peace delegation had failed to resolve the disputes with France because the Directory denied them official recognition. Adams simply informed the legislators that now they would need to take action to protect the nation's merchant marine.¹¹² Deciding upon a specific course of action would need to await the decoding of the remaining dispatches.

It took days to decode the XYZ dispatches which related the whole prolonged and tortured process of humiliation the American peace delegates had endured in Paris.¹¹³ Also arriving 12 March 1798 was a letter from Mr. King in London with an enclosed encrypted letter from Pinckney dated 27 December 1797 that very simply related how the French through their foreign minister, M. Talleyrand, had refused repeatedly to formally receive the American envoys unless "tribute under the disguise of a loan or other disguise" plus a "private *douceur* of fifty thousand pounds Sterling" be paid. Pinckney

¹⁰⁹ Rufus King to Timothy Pickering, 14 January 1798, in King, 2:271-72.

¹¹⁰ Rufus King to William, Lord Grenville, 15 January 1798, in King, 2:272-73.

¹¹¹ DeConde, 66.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 67.

further advised that Marshall had drafted a statement factually outlining the American grievances which the American ministers intended to present directly to the French. With the unlikely prospect of a settlement, he related that it was their intention to request their passports back.¹¹⁴ After the Adams Government had deciphered the dispatches, the president had wrestled with which course to take. Should he ask Congress for a declaration of war as was his first impulse? He vacillated between that alternative and some course perhaps short of war, aware that American sentiment had favored peace despite the huge French spoliation of American shipping.¹¹⁵ In the end, the president took the latter path, addressing Congress on 19 March with a message declaring that a state of limited hostilities now existed between France and the United States. He called for defense measures including the protection of merchant shipping and harbors and the manufacture of munitions. Adams also revoked the executive order through which President Washington had forbidden the arming of merchantmen, so as to maintain neutrality.¹¹⁶

Instantly, the Democratic-Republican opposition in the House of Representatives was incredulous as to the actual content of the envoys' dispatches. The opposition press led by Benjamin Bache's *Aurora* was wildly critical of Adams's message to Congress, declaring that the president was scheming to join Britain in the conflict against France without a congressional declaration of war. Republicans clamored for the release of the

¹¹⁴ Rufus King, to Timothy Pickering, 6 January 1798, in Timothy Pickering, *Timothy Pickering Papers*, ed. Frederick S Allis and Roy Bartolomei (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1966), microform 2:6; Charles Cotesworth Pinckney to Rufus King, 27 December 1797, in Pickering, *Papers*, 2:6a-7a.

¹¹⁵ In fact former Federalist Senator George Cabot of Massachusetts had disgustedly described in a letter written to Rufus King in London how citizens were lukewarm to proposals for national defense or to protect American shipping from further depredations from French corsairs. George Cabot to Rufus King, 21 March 1798, in King, 2:290-92.

¹¹⁶ DeConde, 69-70.

XYZ Dispatches, certain that they would reveal that France *was* still open to negotiation and Adams's Federalists wanted this fact suppressed to facilitate war.¹¹⁷ In the words of the *Aurora*, Adams was "afraid to tell."¹¹⁸ House Republicans on 2 April called for the President to release the actual dispatches without any redacting. House Federalists had originally moved their release to Congress but allowing the executive branch a national security "blue pencil" clause. However, some Federalists gleefully joined the Republicans in calling for the release of the entire text of the dispatches, equally confident that the documents would be damning for the pro-French cause.¹¹⁹ The vote to release the dispatches easily carried in the House. The next day, the Administration dutifully complied; House members listened shocked at how shabbily the Directory had treated their envoys. The Republicans were "struck dumb," as Abigail Adams observed, realizing they had been outfoxed.¹²⁰ The content indicated the French had harbored no serious intentions of receiving or treating with the American delegation. It became apparent that Revolutionary France was "shaking down" its former ally like it might with any other small European country in its way, or which could be bullied. The fates of Holland, Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden came to mind.

When the Senate agreed with the House that the texts of the XYZ dispatches be published for Congressional use, it was not long before the public had access to them.¹²¹ The result was a maelstrom of anger toward anything French. People tore down French Tricolors or cockades wherever they might find one. Patriotic songs with new verses rang

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹¹⁸ McCullough, 496.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 497.

¹²⁰ Abigail Adams to Cotton Tufts, 25 May 1798, *Adams Papers*, (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, n.d.), quoted in McCullough, 497.

¹²¹ DeConde, 72-73.

out in meeting places up and down the country. On the sinister side, an anti-French mob broke up the private home of Benjamin Bache because of the anti-government and pro-French sympathies exhibited in his newspaper, *Aurora*.¹²² In this atmosphere, the President's proposals to enlarge the army, and, most importantly, to establish a navy succeeded where before the publication of the XYZ dispatches the Republicans in Congress largely had been able to forestall such efforts.¹²³ Only a bill to push along the construction of the first three of the six frigates provided for in the Naval Act of 1794 had managed to become law.¹²⁴ Now all six frigates would be rushed to completion. Congress would pass an act establishing an independent Department of the Navy and authorize the purchase or construction of vessels and the recruitment of officers and sailors to man them.¹²⁵ In May one of these warships, an ex-East Indiaman, the U.S.S. *Ganges*, would be on patrol off the coast of the United States seeking French corsairs.¹²⁶ In England, Rufus King would soon receive approval from His Majesty's Government to purchase naval stores, arms, and munitions in that country to aid in establishment of that infant U.S. Navy.¹²⁷ The Quasi-War had begun.

With hostilities against France finally reached, albeit limited ones, the United States had come full circle between the two powers who, as history would show, were enduring the last conflict of their Second Hundred Years War. It had been an eventful fifteen years. When the American War of Independence had concluded in 1783 with the Treaty of Paris, autocratic France had been America's sole ally in the world. The young

¹²² *Ibid.*, 74-79; McCullough, 498-501.

¹²³ Elkins and McKittrick, 589-90.

¹²⁴ Michael A. Palmer, 5.

¹²⁵ Elkins and McKittrick, 589-90.

¹²⁶ Michael A. Palmer, 19-20.

¹²⁷ William, Lord Grenville to Robert Liston, 8 June 1798, in *Instructions*, 155-56.

Republic was diplomatically mortgaged up to its eyeballs to the French Crown in perpetuity. As the 1778 Treaty of Amity and Alliance provided, the U.S. bore the obligation to guarantee the security of France's American possessions, meaning her sugar islands in the West Indies. Britain, the ex-enemy, the mother country, had largely forsaken her ungrateful American progeny, leaving it without a trade agreement and even without a formal diplomatic mission. But economic ties and habits are hard to break. And so it was with the merchants and customers on both sides of the Atlantic; the hugely profitable trade between the United States and Great Britain simply resumed, however, at a distinct disadvantage to the Americans who were largely closed out of the British Caribbean trade. Never the less, by 1791 fear of American protectionism had convinced Britain's Foreign Office belatedly to send a minister to her late colonies and open dialogue.

The war which began in 1793 between Revolutionary France and England threw ordinary diplomacy into chaos. It thrust the United States between its historical ally and its chief trading partner then locked in mortal combat with each other. This conflict of sympathies sharply divided the young nation into the partisans of England and those of France, with only rancor between them. Each side had demonized the other. The Francophiles, largely the Democratic-Republicans of Jefferson and Madison, saw Republican France as Europe's savior, ready to spread the joys of liberty, equality, and fraternity throughout a continent ruled by despots: never mind that she had executed some 40,000 of her citizens, many without trial or via kangaroo courts, and was bludgeoning small nations, whether governed as republics or constitutional monarchies, to do her bidding. The Anglophiles, the Federalists, saw France as the atheistic anti-

Christ, ready to enslave Continental Europe, then Britain, and then America, and ready to demolish justice and the rule of law. In the minds of High Federalists such as Secretary of State Pickering, or Massachusetts Senator George Cabot, only Great Britain stood before this juggernaut, shielding the United States. Each side saw the other as betrayers of the American Revolution and hated them virulently for it. Yet at the same time, both sides, for the most part, wished to keep faith with Washington's parting words of wisdom to avoid European entanglements. Whoever their favorites were in the death match across the sea, they did not wish to join them in the ring.

So how did it come to limited hostilities with France and, as we shall see in the next chapter, an informal naval alliance with England? After all, Britain started with more handicaps in the game. She had no alliance with the U.S. She had an ongoing border dispute feeding a vicious Indian War in the Ohio Territory on Upper Canada's American border. And to boot, she had privateers and Royal Navy men of war rampantly seizing American merchantmen in the West Indies. The most telling answer to the question is that on the whole, the British diplomats involved exhibited far greater skill in analyzing the situation and demonstrating a willingness to work out practical solutions than their French counterparts. Of course, luck always played into it as well: Adams winning the 1796 election over Jefferson was a prime example of this—but the French had bungled that one too by clumsily trying to influence the result.

When Washington sent his emissary, John Jay, to London in 1794, he was well received by Lord Grenville, Britain's Foreign Minister. Both Jay and Grenville knew it was in their interests to come to some solution of the disputes and avoid war. Grenville intuitively understood that on a foundational level the U.S had to have the British border

posts off its territory. It was a matter of pride to the young republic, and also a practical necessity—the presence of the posts kept the local Native American Tribes hopeful and determined to continue their armed resistance to American settlement. He also understood that the border posts standing on American sovereign territory posed a distinct threat to the integrity of Upper Canada. As long as the United States had an excuse to continue sending well trained, equipped, and led armies such as Wayne's Legion of the United States into the region, Canadian security would be at risk. This fear had distinctly guided the mind of Lieutenant Governor Simcoe when he had moved his garrison out of Detroit and into the fort on the Maumee. The United States already possessed perhaps the largest and wealthiest population in North America. It was likely to grow and remain *the* power to be reckoned with on the continent. It was best for His Majesty's Government to recognize this fact and attempt to reach an accommodation. The other disputes arising out of debts and claims from the American War could be solved by arbitration. Opening the British Caribbean to the American provision trade only stood to benefit Britain's food poor sugar islands and not siphon off shipping badly needed for the war effort. At the same time Jay gave way on the bitter dispute over impressment of American seamen into the Royal Navy. In a critical struggle with France, Grenville could never in any way impede the Navy's recruitment, forced or otherwise, of its most precious resource: able seamen. Jay had understood also that Britain would never give in on the re-export trade in American bottoms whether concerning British manufactured goods from Britain or West Indies produce from America. Both sides had taken a practical, non-ideological view towards the negotiations. While decried in

America, the treaty laid the groundwork for further trade and friendship and in the short run, and most importantly, averted war.

In contrast, the French reaction to Jay's Treaty had been irrational and petulant. Refusing to see the treaty with England as a necessary settlement by the American Republic to evade the plague of war, it mistakenly took the treaty to *be* an alliance when it was clearly not. Whether it was official French Government action which drove the French depredations upon U.S. commerce, or whether the Directory's official pronouncements simply echoed conditions already rampant in the West Indies due to the greed of local privateers, colonial admiralty courts, and island governors, as some scholars have argued,¹²⁸ is moot. The Directory and the privateer interests in the French Legislative Councils *acted* as if these policies emanated from Paris. French diplomats and government officials apparently little understood the American situation, or overestimated the sympathies of their proponents in America and their abilities to influence domestic American events. By attacking American commerce they won few friends. But they did elicit an American response: the same one the British had received in 1794, an offer to fairly treat and resolve the conflict. Instead, even a diplomat of Talleyrand's

¹²⁸ Elkins and McKittrick made this argument in *The Age of Federalism*. They have also argued that perhaps the reason for the erratic and often incomprehensible diplomatic behavior demonstrated by the Directory toward the United States resulted from fundamental indifference. The impotent United States was just not that important compared to the pressing matters of life and death confronting the Directors daily. They point out that French historians of the period have utterly disregarded the role of the United States in French affairs. When the Directory did take notice of Americans, it was "simply to toy with them." The oafish character of the Directors, themselves also played into the mix. They were men unschooled, or again indifferent, to the niceties of diplomacy and took a heavy handed approach to relations with other nations, especially to the lesser states of Europe. The United States to them was just another of these. Elkins and McKittrick, 509-511, 567-68, 648-49. I would argue that this can be contrasted to the British response to the United States which was often self-preoccupied, but not at the same level as the French. This was not to do with some kind of moral superiority but greater interest. The Americans were one of Britain's greatest, if not her greatest, trading partner and so directly linked to her national wealth. The United States with its burgeoning North American population also had tremendous strategic significance to the security of Canada. For Britons, it was simply harder to ignore.

experience, who had himself lived and worked for two years in their country when in exile there, utterly failed to comprehend how to deal with the Americans, or grasp the strategic significance of their country. Even in 1797 America was not like Holland, or one of the Scandinavian Kingdoms, which would directly fear French military power. It sat behind the wide moat of the Atlantic Ocean, now patrolled by the British battle fleet. Furthermore, it was very strategically placed. As Talleyrand himself, once recognized of Americans: “[T]he nation that hangs onto their friendship will be the last to retain colonies in the New World.”¹²⁹ Americans would never respond to being rudely snubbed and bullied. And they did not. The peace commissioners sent by Adams to Paris returned home to America—to a hero’s welcome, in the case of Marshall.¹³⁰ The Quasi-War was a direct result of a massive French diplomatic failure. And it had long term unintended consequences. It spawned the United States Navy. As we shall discuss in the next chapter, it also fostered an informal naval understanding, or even alliance, between two nations formerly certain enemies. Additionally, it perhaps reinforced the subtle decision taken with Jay’s Treaty, to bet on Britain and not France to be the world’s next economic hegemon and eventually become America’s closest ally.

¹²⁹ Emile Dard, *Napoleon et Talleyrand* (Paris: u.k., 1935), 37, 680 quoted in Elkins and McKittrick, 680; 1st French Republic, “Report to the Consuls of the Republic,” 30 November 1799, Archives Etrangères, Correspondence Politique, Etats-Unis 51, 260-62vo quoted in Elkins and McKittrick, 680.

¹³⁰ DeConde, 92-93.

CHAPTER III

TO FOUND A FLEET

In April 1798 Congress voted to increase the size of the United States Navy by authorizing up to twelve vessels of a maximum of twenty-two guns each to be bought or built. The navy already had six frigates, originally ordered under the Navy Act of 1794, in various states of completion. Shipyards in Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore had launched and were hurriedly finishing three of them. Yards in New York, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Norfolk, Virginia would soon begin, and rush to conclusion work upon the other three.¹ The need was urgent. The young republic was then facing its first major international military crisis as an independent nation. Its only “ally,” the Republic of France, had just issued an *arête* or decree effectively declaring war on America’s world-wide commerce. The American President, John Adams, had asked Congress for the means to protect that commerce and the territorial integrity of the United States, meaning the effective creation of a navy and a huge expansion to the tiny standing army. Since the wind up of the Continental Navy following the end of the War of Independence—Congress had sold off the last warship, the frigate *Alliance*, in 1785—there had been no national fleet whatsoever,² besides the Treasury Department’s pocket-

¹ Gardiner W. Allen, *Our Naval War with France* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), 55-57.

² Ian W. Toll, *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy*, Norton paperback ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006; reprint, 2008), 18.

sized flotilla of revenue cutters, built to enforce in coastal waters the tariff duties fueling Alexander Hamilton's vision of national credit.³

The task was daunting. The young United States already had a coastline longer than any one of old Europe's kingdoms. And daily the ships of America's merchant marine left the maritime havens of Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, but also the tiny harbors scattered all along the Atlantic Seaboard, for ports around the globe. Additionally, a booming coastal trade spread commerce domestically from Georgia to Massachusetts's Maine District. America's population still lived hard by the sea, despite pretensions of internal expansion. Scholars have estimated that already America's merchant navy was second only to Great Britain's⁴ and perhaps the more aggressive in searching out new markets, the Stars and Stripes having become nearly omnipresent on the world's sea lanes.

Of course, up until 1775 this growth had occurred under the protection of the British Royal Navy. After that, until 1798, American seaborne commerce had moved entirely at the sufferance of the world's maritime powers, including the Barbary Pirates, who had menaced American shipping in 1785 and 1794. But the crisis facing American merchantmen in April 1798 was on a wholly different scale. There had been some 5000 American merchantmen sailing the world in 1797 and French cruisers had taken in excess of 300, some 6 percent of the total fleet. The effect upon commerce was especially evident in the rising insurance rates for merchant voyages. In 1796 these had ranged around 6 percent of the cargo value. In 1797 this rate rose to anything between 15 and 25

³ Allen, 42; Michael A. Palmer, *Stoddert's War: Naval Operations During the Quasi-War with France, 1798-1801* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 15.

⁴ Toll, 15.

percent. Export values dropped from \$61 Million to \$51 Million and imports fell from \$81 Million to \$75 Million—the latter meaning a significant loss of income to the Federal Government which lived on the tariffs levied upon imports.⁵ The French *guerre de course* was a disaster for both the merchant and the Federal Treasury. Something had to be done swiftly. To Federalists in Congress and to President Adams, the obvious solution, beyond allowing merchantmen to arm themselves, was that America must again acquire a navy and get it to sea immediately, a truly herculean task.

Initially, this intimidating administrative feat came under the brief of the Secretary of War. While the new constitution provided the Federal Government the power to raise armies and navies, it did not specify the administration of those armed services. That was Congress's job to sort out. And originally, Congress placed the new United States Navy under the leadership of the Secretary of War, James McHenry. Sadly McHenry had all he could handle administering the United States Army.⁶ Consequently, he neglected the “second child,” the navy. The three frigates being built in Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore had suffered significant delays, frustrating the captains placed in charge of building the ships they would subsequently command and also Congress itself. It enacted a bill establishing a separate Department of the Navy which President Adams signed into law on 30 April 1798.⁷ A Maryland-born Federalist with mercantile ties to Georgetown, Benjamin Stoddert, became the first Secretary of the United States Navy. He was not President Adams's first choice—that had been former Massachusetts

⁵ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

Senator George Cabot who turned down the appointment⁸—but it would prove an inspired one. It would be Stoddert's duty to form and shape this infant United States Navy. His tenure would lay the foundation for the institution much as Washington had done for the Presidency. He would establish the precedents of professional administration that would guide the navy well into the nineteenth century.

But the United States would not establish this naval fighting force on its own and in a vacuum. America's mother country, Great Britain, its recent foe in the war for independence, had been watching the deterioration in relations between the two allies, France and the United States, since the Anglo-American treaty of 1794 (Jay's Treaty) had begun a sort of rapprochement between the American and British Governments. The preceding chapter of this work has described and analyzed this three partner minuet between France, England, and the United States which resulted in undeclared hostilities between the allies of the American War, the U.S. and France, and something like a mutual appreciation of shared interests between the U.S. and Great Britain. This chapter begins the story of how this nascent rapprochement solidified into an informal naval understanding or even alliance between the two countries who, for some three years, shared a common enemy. It would originate in the form of concrete British assistance in establishing the new American fleet, especially the copper and ordnance which a modern eighteenth century navy required. But Britain also indirectly acted as midwife to the birth of an American naval culture largely modeled on her own. This chapter will make the case that this naval relationship merits more than the scant attention which scholars have paid it. It was surely the most concrete embodiment of the warming of relations between

⁸ Ibid., 8-9.

the two countries following Jay's Treaty as outlined by Bradford Perkins in his work, *The First Rapprochement*.⁹ Nothing like it would exist between these two maritime powers for well over a century.

The problem which confronted the new Secretary of the Navy was one of classic naval administration: how to assemble a navy? Again, it was to be from scratch because the United States possessed not one man of war of any size. Also there was no actual naval establishment: no dry docks, no navy yards, scarcely a cannon foundry, and no tradition of naval administration. This was in sharp contrast with the long tenure of the Navy Board in England, which dated from 1546. The competing navies of Europe's kingdoms would have nothing like this venerable body for hundreds of years, if ever.¹⁰ No other country had so formalized its naval governance and it showed in the Board's ability to construct and service a fleet of hundreds of ships of all varieties with all the bases to maintain them and also supply the fundamental creature necessities of its sailors, including bakeries, breweries, packing plants for salted meats and the first naval hospitals.¹¹ Some of these sites predated the Navy Board itself. The Portsmouth Dockyard had held a working dry dock before the sixteenth century.¹² It was Stoddert's

⁹ Bradford Perkins, *The First Rapprochement: England and the United States 1795-1805* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955).

¹⁰ M. Oppenheim, *A History of the Administration of the Royal Navy and of Merchant Shipping in Relation to the Navy: From MDIX to MDCLX, With an Introduction Treating of the Preceding Period* (London: John Lane, 1896), 99; N. A. M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea; A Naval History of Britain: 660-1649*, Norton paperback ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999; HarperCollins Publishers, Ltd., 1997), 224-27; Arthur Herman, *To Rule the Waves: How the British Navy Shaped the Modern World* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 41.

¹¹ Daniel A. Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), 30-31, 49-52, 54-57, 432-41; Roger Morris, *The Royal Dockyards during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1983), 11-73, 120-26, 127-89.

¹² David Loades, *The Tudor Navy: An Administrative, Political and Military History* (Aldershot, Hants., England: Scolar Press, 1992), 38-42; Oppenheim, 39; Loades disputes Oppenheim's conclusion that this really was a dry dock.

job to leapfrog this lack of naval facilities and tradition so as to supply the ships, men and money required to bring the new American Navy into being.

Modern scholars who have studied the history of naval administration during the Classic Age of Fighting Sail have analyzed its basic issues as being functional in nature. It was the mid twentieth century historians John Ehrman and Daniel Baugh, who had pioneered an analytical scheme for examining how navies worked and what they did in their studies of the Royal Navy during the Nine Year's War and the Wars of Jenkins' Ear and the Austrian Succession.¹³ Comprehending Ehrman and Baugh's method of dissecting naval institutions is fundamental to understanding the task which confronted the United States Navy Department in May 1798. In *The Navy in the War of William III*, and *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole*, Ehrman and Baugh, respectively, would study the Service by systematically examining its separated parts, in short, a dissection. Without explicitly stating it, they had effectively simplified the essential issues of naval administrative analysis to three: ships, men and money. Their analysis reduced to these three points because its primary concern was how did the organization *operate*? How did the separate components of the King's Navy work independently and together? They asked: how did the R.N. build and maintain its ships? This question necessarily included researching the dock facilities, dockworkers, the procurement of supplies and naval stores, to say nothing of timber for hulls and masts. The issue of men mandated consideration of manning the fleet, which involved how the navy recruited, provided wages, victuals, medical care, and clothing, among others. The issue of money was the catchall but meant the finance and taxation which made it all

¹³ John Ehrman, *The Navy in the War of William III: 1689-1697: Its State and Direction* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1953); Baugh, *Naval Administration*.

possible. When the money was missing, the rest of the organism ground to a halt. Of course, this analytical method would prove applicable to any fleet during the Classic Age of Fighting Sail.

Even before Benjamin Stoddert could take up his new position as Navy Secretary, the Navy Department faced the first of these fundamental administrative issues: finding ships right quick. Of course three large frigates were then being readied for sea, already having been launched pursuant to legislation the previous year which had accelerated their construction. Additionally, in July 1798 Congress would finally authorize the construction of the three remaining large frigates originally ordered under the Navy Act of 1794 to combat the Algerine pirates.¹⁴ But as to the measures enacted in April 1798 which had authorized the procurement of an additional twelve vessels of at least twenty guns, three options lay immediately open to the Navy: purchase of warships, a crash building program, or both. The purchase option was problematic as large, ready-made men of war were not then generally available on any cognizable market.¹⁵ Men-of-war were expensive specialty ships, speedy but heavily built floating gun platforms. They did not have the broad beam necessary for efficiently carrying cargo.¹⁶ Warships came in six ratings based upon the amount of guns mounted aboard them, starting with first rates with 100 or more guns, down to sixth rates with twenty.¹⁷

But the real difference in these specialty men of war was whether the ships were cruisers or line of battle ships. The latter, also called ships of the line were the warship

¹⁴ Gardner, 55-57.

¹⁵ Palmer, 20.

¹⁶ Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy: The Ships, Men and Organization: 1793-1800* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1989; Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press paperback, 1989), 35, 38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

that had created the Classic Age of Sail navy. The ship of the line was very simply a ship powerful enough to stand in the battle line during combat at sea. Only the largest ships, built to take the battering of cannon throwing thirty-two pound cast iron balls at under 200 yards, and dish out the same to the enemy, could sail there. These were the first, second and third rates, again ranked by the number of guns carried and arrayed to fire “broadside” through gun ports pierced through the hull above the waterline.¹⁸

Considering the cost and the complicated, time-consuming assembly required—it often took years—there would be no way that the United States could construct battleships in anything like the time needed here. Building and fitting out such warships took patience somewhat akin to laying down fine vintages in a respectable wine cellar. When in 1799, Stoddert finally convinced Congress that the United States should even build its own battleships, the best that he could do was lay the necessary foundations. The secretary had begun gathering and seasoning the massive timbers the navy would need, including the purchase of two of Georgia’s wooded Sea Islands to supply the critical live oak. He also acquired land for the service’s first navy yards in which to assemble them.¹⁹ But the war would end before construction of even one 74 could begin. In the event, the U.S. Navy would not again take up the commission to build ships of the line until the War of 1812. Even then, when the wood was already available thanks to Stoddert’s foresight, no American liner would be ready for battle until after the Treaty of Ghent ended the hostilities.²⁰

¹⁸ Ehrman, 9, 30-31, Lavery, 43.

¹⁹ Palmer, 126-27.

²⁰ Lavery, 288.

Thankfully for the United States, the Royal Navy was already inadvertently on the job protecting the United States coastline from the French Republic's powerful battle fleet. The Royal Navy's blockade of the major French naval bases at Brest, Rochefort and Toulon provided an invaluable, if unintended, service to the American Republic by keeping the eighty-three French ships of the line trapped in port.²¹ Hence it was unlikely, though not impossible, that a squadron of French battleships might elude the blockade in a fog or storm and cross the Atlantic to menace the New World. After all, French warships had escaped to convoy a huge food shipment from the United States headed to a Metropolitan France fearing famine in 1794²² and again when a small French relief expedition under Victor Hugues had retaken Guadeloupe.²³ This was why some Federalists would harbor real fears of a French breakout until Nelson's crushing victory at the Nile in early August 1798 had relieved their concerns—that is, once it had become known in November.²⁴

If no French battleships were likely to menace the American coast, the question became: what manner of warship *should* the U.S. Navy prepare to meet? It was known that frigates could more easily run the British blockade of the French coast than ships of the line, and from time to time did. They were known to call and sometimes remain based

²¹ *Ibid.*, 278-79. Some of the French First Rates carried 120 guns.

²² R. R. Palmer, 342-50; The R.N. caught up with the covering fleet mid-Atlantic and mauled it in a battle known as the Glorious First of June. Ironically the food transports escaped. Rodger, *Command*, 429-30.

²³ Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar, and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987), 115-26.

²⁴ DeConde, 84-86; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993; Oxford University Press paperback, 1995), 615; Even an old warhorse such as General Henry Knox had not been immune and warned President Adams of the possibility of a French invasion from the West Indies landing black soldiers in the American South to foment a slave rebellion. Henry Knox, Boston to Adams, 26 June 1798, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:140.

at Guadeloupe for extended periods.²⁵ French frigates in the New World required at the very least that the American Navy be able to meet such a threat, another reason that the naval measures taken in 1797 had hurried three of the famous six frigates to completion. *United States*, *Constellation*, and *Constitution* would put to sea during the summer of 1798.²⁶ The other three, *President*, *Congress*, and *Chesapeake*, would not be ready for nearly another two years, despite the rush.²⁷ Certainly, more frigates would help the cause. Merchants of the seaport cities saw the situation that way. In Boston, New York, Salem, Philadelphia, and Charleston, merchants banded together to take out subscriptions to build frigates which they then offered to the navy. Formal committees from these towns received pledges from the various trading houses, raising thousands of dollars in very short order. They then designed and ordered the ships assembled in the shipyards of their various cities. Recognizing this spontaneous service, Congress enacted legislation to both accept these ships for the navy and to pay back the committees in shares subscribed at an interest rate of six percent. As a result, in the first two years of the Quasi-War these various committees would build the frigates *Boston*, *New York*, *Essex*, *Philadelphia*, and *John Adams*.²⁸ The Navy itself also constructed the frigates, *General Greene* and *Adams*. All of these would be commissioned and serve at sea before the war ended.²⁹

²⁵ The French national frigates *Le Volontaire*, *L'Insurgente*, and *La Vengeance*, all ran the British blockade in departing France to the West Indies and would sortie from Guadeloupe at times. All would engage U.S. Navy warships during the course of the war. *Constellation's* battles with *L'Insurgente* and *La Vengeance* became the stuff of legend. The French national corvette (a small frigate), *Le Berceau*, later fought the subscription frigate, U.S.S. *Boston*; *Boston*, Captain George Little, captured her. Stoddert, 70-71, 98-103, 185-88, 218-19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 25, 35-38, 46-47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 202-06, 212-213, 214, 225.

²⁸ Frederick C. Leiner, "The Subscription Warships of 1798," *The American Neptune* 46, no. 3 (1986): 141-58.

²⁹ George F. Emmons, U.S.N., *Statistical History of the Navy of the United States: The Navy of the United States, from the Commencement, 1775-1853: With a Brief History of Each Vessel's Service and Fate as*

While these frigates ensured that the United States Navy would be able to maintain a theatre preponderance of naval might, the greatest menace facing American shipping came not in the form of French navy ships, but of privateers. In the New World the primary base of these private warships was Guadeloupe in the West Indies. French merchants in Guadeloupe could no longer carry on trade in the usual fashion and so instead turned to the time honored “profession” of legalized piracy against enemy shipping under the aegis of a government-issued privateer commission.³⁰ Arming their vessels with as few as one canon, or as many as twenty, for large vessels with wealthy owners, these skippers put to sea to raid British and now American shipping. Some privateers were just under the size of a small frigate or sloop of war.³¹ Others might only be barges sporting a single gun but manned with a large crew armed to the teeth with muskets, pistols, and swords. These shallow draft vessels were often rowed using sweeps or oars, allowing them to dart out from hidden anchorages in creeks or small rivers when merchantmen appeared and were especially effective in light winds or dead calms.³² Any vessel captured by corsairs as a good prize would have a prize crew placed aboard to sail her into a French or Spanish port to be “libeled” for adjudication and sale on behalf of the

Appears upon Record (Washington D.C.: Gideon & Co., 1853), 6-9; Palmer, 118; Leiner, “Subscription Warships,” 152 n.137, 157.

³⁰ Patrick Crowhurst, *The French War on Trade: Privateering 1793-1815* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1989), 5-7; Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 76-77, 79; Elkins and McKittrick, 648-49, 652-53; H. J. K. Jenkins, “The Heyday of French Privateering from Guadeloupe, 1796-98,” *The Mariner’s Mirror* 64, no. 8 (1978): 246-47.

³¹ Jenkins, “Guadeloupe Privateering,” 247-48; Palmer, 79, 204. An example of a large privateer the size of a sloop of war would be Robert Surcouf’s, *La Confiance*, 20. Surcouf, from St. Malo, was one of the most successful of any of the French corsairs and could afford such an expensive, powerfully armed vessel, although during the Quasi-War his raiding exploits were usually performed in the Indian Ocean. Captain Preble in the frigate, U.S.S. *Essex*, on his cruise to the East Indies twice pursued *La Confiance*, but both times she escaped the heavier warship using sweeps in unreliable winds. *Ibid.*, 208. Palmer writes in *Stoddert’s War*, that Surcouf had been warned that the *Essex* was in the Sunda Strait and decided to seek quarry elsewhere. *Ibid.*

³² Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 165-66.

captors.³³ The French or Spanish authorities might jail the unfortunate crews of these vessels as prisoners of an undeclared war, or simply leave them to fend for themselves destitute in an unfriendly port.³⁴ Either could have tragic results for these seamen, who during the “sickly season” might succumb and die in these West Indies havens so rife with mosquito borne disease.

To combat these privateers the United States needed to put armed naval vessels to sea which could outgun the Gallic privateers. Small vessels of meager draft, carrying twenty guns, or even less, could be very effective against such tiny seagoing corsairs and barges.³⁵ And from the administrative side, these vessels were relatively cheap and quick to build; they could even be converted from purchased merchantmen.³⁶ In the first few months of the Quasi-War the U.S. Navy would readily turn to this latter alternative. Within days of the approval to do so, and before Stoddert would even assume his position as Secretary, merchant firms would sell the nation merchantmen for navy use which would be hurriedly pierced for guns and armed with available cannon. The East Indiaman, *Ganges*, fitted for twenty-four guns would be one of these, and was the first commissioned U.S. warship to serve at sea in May 1798. Her captain would be Richard Dale, a hero of the Revolutionary War. Other vessels rushed to sea would include the purchased *Montezuma* and *Delaware*.³⁷ The U.S. would also employ some of the tiny

³³ Jenkins, “Guadeloupe Privateering,” 246.

³⁴ Pickering to Hon. Samuel Sewell, Committee of Commerce and Manufactures, 27 December 1797, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:20-21.

³⁵ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 79.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-21; Daughan, 319.

³⁷ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 20-21, 24.

revenue cutters of the United States Treasury Department. These would be seconded to the navy, some for the duration of the war.³⁸

But whether building frigates, sloops of war, or converting small merchantmen and schooners into warships, the project required significant resources and access to naval stores. While the United States was yet heavily wooded and had a long tradition of ship building since early colonial times, building warships could present technical problems not so easily solved in 1790's America. One resource necessary for serious warship construction was not available in the country. That was the copper plating and bolts and spikes needed to sheath the wooden bottoms of men of war. The world's leading naval power, Great Britain, had for some years sheathed its ships in copper, and it had become standard practice in the navies of all the powers.³⁹ The primary reason in northern waters was speed and maneuverability. Coppering prevented or minimized the growth of barnacles on the hulls of seagoing vessels, diminishing drag and yielding as much as a decisive one knot improvement in speed over fouled warships in battle.⁴⁰ And the longer opposing ships had been at sea, the more pronounced this advantage became for the copper-sheathed ones.⁴¹

But in tropical waters, a coppered hull was not merely a matter of an advantage in battle, but of a ship's very survival. Shipworm, *teredo navalis*, a wood devouring mollusk native to the warm seas, in a matter of months could render unsheathed hulls veritable

³⁸ Emmons, 6-7.

³⁹ Maurer Maurer, "Coppered Bottoms for the Royal Navy: A Factor in the Maritime War of 1778-1783," *Military Affairs* 14, no. 2 (summer 1950): 57-61; J. R. Harris, "Copper and Shipping in the Eighteenth Century," *The Economic History Review*, n.s., 19, no. 3 (1966): 550.

⁴⁰ Maurer, "Royal Navy," 57-59; N. A. M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain: 1649-1815*, Norton paperback ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006, 2004), 344.

⁴¹ N. A. M. Rodger, *The Insatiable Earl: A Life of John Montagu, Fourth Earl of Sandwich*, 1st American ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 295-97.

honeycombs, utterly unseaworthy.⁴² The R.N. had found no other effective remedy to the worm; sheathing with treated wood had proved ineffective and had always required frequent docking to replace or repair the sheathing.⁴³ At significant cost in ships and treasure, the Royal Navy had also learned that only copper spikes and fasteners could fix the copper plates to a ship's hull without threatening that vessel's structural integrity; cheaper, easy-to-produce, iron fasteners simply corroded in the presence of seawater and copper.⁴⁴ Great Britain, with its technologically advanced industrial base, then proceeded to so sheathe its massive fleet, rendering all others obsolete.⁴⁵ The copper-bottomed Royal Navy had become the gold standard in naval architecture that all other sea services would need to copy.

This British lesson was certainly not lost upon American naval architects and planners. Because the new American navy would be tiny in European terms, it could not afford the luxury of laying up numbers of its vessels in port for any careening that copper plating could eliminate. In the event, copper sheathing would prove even more critical to the success or failure of any American naval deployments in the Quasi-War since the fleet's primary theatre of operations would be the West Indies, the very place so bedeviled by the shipworms. And the U.S. had no dock facilities on station. To be effective it was clear that the United States Navy would need to utilize copper sheathing for *all* of its warships. But coppering its fleet would pose a distinct challenge to the

⁴² Maurer, "Royal Navy," 57; Duncan Crewe, *Yellow Jack and the Worm: British Naval Administration in the West Indies, 1739-1748* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 213-15;

⁴³ Crewe, 213-15.

⁴⁴ Rodger, *Insatiable Earl*, 294-98. Ships coppered using iron spikes and fasteners were believed to have been lost because of this corrosion; they simply fell apart. The case of the Royal George was the worst; she sank at her Spithead mooring. Rodger, *Command*, 375.

⁴⁵ Rodger, *Insatiable Earl*, 298.

young republic. America's nascent metallurgical industries did not yet possess the technical ability to produce the requisite copper sheets and bolts. Besides the mining and smelting of the essential ore, manufacture of these copper fasteners and plates demanded mastery of the rolling and drawing technology necessary to fabricate them. Producing even the copper fasteners, for example, would prove beyond the technical ability of every firm but that of Paul Revere, the famed patriot and coppersmith of Boston. Following the original order of the six frigates he had set about developing the techniques required to draw copper into spikes and bolts suitable for coppering warships. Consequently, he had supplied some of the copper bolts and spikes used during the mid 1790s to plate the Boston-built frigate, *Constitution* and some which would later be used to sheath the *Congress*, constructed in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. But even the Revere works would not be able to provide the rolled copper sheets used to plate these or any other men of war until after the Quasi-War. Consequently, in the years leading up to the Quasi-War, the Secretary of War had ordered that *all* the plates required, and a sizable supply of spikes and bolts, be imported from England.⁴⁶ Now in 1798 the question again became how would the U.S. Navy obtain these vital components for its warships? Could the Americans once again turn to Britain to supply sufficient copper to meet their needs when this time they would be seeking to plate not merely three, or even six frigates, but a small fleet?

⁴⁶ Maurer Maurer, "Coppered Bottoms for the United States Navy, 1794-1803," *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* 71 (June 1945): 696-698; Elbridge Henry Goss, *The Life of Colonel Paul Revere*, vol. 2 (Boston: Joseph George Cupples, bookseller, 1891), 543-549, 556-561, available from Google Books, <http://play.google.com/books/reader?id=FksSAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en>; Internet; most recently accessed 24 April 2012; see footnote 9.

In 1798 Great Britain was still the world's largest producer of the requisite copper plates and bolts, having pioneered the technology in the first place.⁴⁷ But England was known to jealously guard resources so necessary to its precious Royal Navy. Ministers in Whitehall knew that the realm's very survival hung on the ability of its Senior Service to keep the sea.⁴⁸ The 1797-98 invasion threats to both Great Britain and Ireland had certainly driven home this reality. The Navy Board was constantly worrying over its critical supplies of naval stores. Britain's very pre-occupation with the Baltic region stemmed not from an appreciation of Swedish, Norwegian, Russian and Lithuanian culture, but from the simple fact that these countries helped to meet the Royal Navy's vast requirements for masts, spars, tar, and hemp.⁴⁹ Copper plates, spikes, and bolts were at least as vital as these. Would His Majesty's Government allow its own suppliers to divert any of their vital inventories to the upstart American navy at this critical juncture and in the needed quantities? Surprisingly the answer in the summer of 1798 was yes.

Of course, even as early as 1797, Lord Grenville had been eyeing the deepening fissure in Franco-American relations. He had alerted Rufus King when his intelligence sources had indicated that the French might dispatch a naval squadron to awe the Americans back into line with Paris's vision of American interests. He had suggested that Britain would be very interested in lending the Americans critical military and especially naval support to ward off this threat. Now in late spring of 1798, Grenville explicitly suggested that Britain and the United States cement their community of interest against Jacobin France with tangible naval assistance. On 8 June, he wrote his minister in

⁴⁷ Maurer, "Royal Navy," 58; Rodger, *Command*, 375.

⁴⁸ Roger Morriss, *The Royal Dockyards during Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1983), 73-74.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Philadelphia, Robert Liston, that Liston should advise the Adams Administration that King's requests on behalf of his government to purchase "Naval and warlike Stores" in England "[would] not be refused him."⁵⁰ Chief among these requests would be the necessary copper plates and bolts to continue the American naval buildup.⁵¹ Shipments would continue through early 1799.⁵² In fact, all the ships built for the United States Navy before or during the war, including the ships built by the merchants' committees, would use British copper plate despite the Navy Department's financial support for an infant naval copper industry.⁵³ The merchants' frigate, U.S.S. *Boston*, launched in the city whose name she bore, was the first to have all of its copper sheathe *fastening* components

⁵⁰ Grenville to Liston, 8 June 1798, in *Instructions*, 155.

⁵¹ Rufus King to Lord Grenville, 14 July 1798, in *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King: Comprising His Letters, Private and Official; His Public Documents and His Speeches*, Charles R. King, M.D. grandson and ed., vol. 2 1795-1799 (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), 367, available from Hathi Trust,

<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?u=1&num=154&seq=11&view=image&size=100&id=nyp.33433082380480>; Internet; most recently accessed 23 April 2012. These were not the first American copper imports for warships. It was true that the United States had earlier procured enough copper for the three frigates building under the 1794 naval act and the three more authorized but not begun. These purchases had been arranged by the then U.S. Minister to the Court of St. James's, Thomas Pinckney. Department of the Treasury, Register's Office, *Abstract of Moneys (sic) Paid for Copper, and other Articles Imported, and for Sail cloth and Other Articles of Domestic Manufacture*, by Joseph Nourse, Register, 6 March 1798, in *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* 1:43; War Department, *Progress in Providing Materials and Building Frigates*, by Timothy Pickering, 12 December 1795, *ibid.*, 1:17-19 and *Frigates and Galleys*, 29 January 1798, *Ibid.* 1:21; also see sources in footnote 6.

⁵² King to Pickering, 1 March 1799, in *King* 2:546; Fawkner, W. to King, 26 February 1799, in *King* 2:547.

⁵³ Stoddert's Navy Department would contract domestically for copper bolts, spikes and plates in May and August of 1799, respectively, with the firms of John Ross and Benjamin Henfrey of Philadelphia and Jacob Mark and Nicholas Roosevelt of New York. But as it turned out, neither firm, as of 1801, could produce copper plate and Henfrey's copper fasteners had proved below standard and non-usable. Benjamin Stoddert to John Ross and Benjamin Henfrey, 16 May 1799, in United States Navy Department (U.S.N.), Office of Naval Records and Library, *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War between the United States and France*. vol. 3, *Naval Operations from April 1799 to July 1799* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935-38), 194; *Articles of Agreement between Jacob Mark and Nicholas I. Roosevelt of New York, N.Y. and the Secretary of the Navy (Benjamin Stoddert), for purchase of copper bolts, sheathing, nails, spikes, and other articles of copper*, [23 August 1799], U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 4:118-19; Stoddert to Roosevelt, 18 January 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 5:100-01; Congress, House, *Naval Establishment, and its Expenses*, 6th Cong., 2d sess., 15 January 1801, by Benjamin Stoddert, in *ASP: Naval Affairs* 1:74; Maurer, "United States Navy," 697-98; Michael A. Palmer, 121.

made in America.⁵⁴ Paul Revere's firm had managed to fabricate enough of them to complete the *Boston* by March 1799. But again, the manufacture of the plates themselves was yet beyond the capabilities of Revere's works. Only after having received government subsidies to help import the very expensive rolling equipment from England would Revere produce plates of sufficient quality to service the American fleet as it went to war with the Barbary States in 1801.⁵⁵ This was indeed vindication for the policy of developing American suppliers of naval stores. And also very timely, because by 1799 British exports of copper plates and bolts had ceased due to an eventual perceived shortage in the Royal Navy's own supply of copper sheathing materials.⁵⁶ As Grenville had originally intimated, and the Americans understood, the U.S. Navy would only receive shipments of the vital copper plates and fasteners if the needs of the Royal Navy allowed.⁵⁷ Fortunately, by that time the U.S. Navy had stockpiled enough imported copper plate to get it through the rest of the war.⁵⁸ But as to copper to supplement its dwindling supplies of British imported bolts and spikes, the Navy scrounged whatever it could find, even at times resorting to using clippings from the U.S. Mint.⁵⁹

It is no exaggeration to state that the British willingness to liberally supply copper in the first year of the war had made the American naval build up possible. Without it, America would have been unable to go to sea with any ships other than the three original frigates as supplemented by the three finished much later in the war. The

⁵⁴ "The Launch," *Massachusetts Mercury*, 21 May 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 3:223-24; Michael A. Palmer, 120-21.

⁵⁵ Goss, 556-63.

⁵⁶ Fawkner to King, 26 February 1799, in *King* 2:547.

⁵⁷ Grenville to Liston, 8 June 1798, in *Instructions*, 155.

⁵⁸ Michael A. Palmer, 121.

⁵⁹ Stoddert to Superintendent of the Mint, 10 August 1798, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:290.

effective operations that the nascent American navy was able to carry out against the French corsairs in the enemy's home waters throughout the West Indies—begun even as early as the first summer of the war—would have been entirely impossible.

But in 1798 the infant U.S. Navy experienced another critical shortage: naval armament. The United States had an insufficient supply of cannon to arm both naval vessels and shore installations.⁶⁰ Additionally, the President had rescinded the executive order which had forbidden the arming of merchantmen except those sailing to the East Indies. East Indiamen had been reasonably expected to encounter pirates on such voyages and so had been allowed to arm against that eventuality.⁶¹ Now many merchant owners and skippers heading to Europe or the West Indies were mounting cannon to help resist enemy privateers.⁶² Worse, American foundries were not up to meeting this vastly increased demand. The government had placed orders with domestic iron works in 1794 in hopes of augmenting its meager supplies. The results had been dismal. Half of the cannon cast had proved defective. *None*, of the ordered naval carronades, the new light, short-barreled guns designed to fire heavy balls short distances had seen delivery. These carronades, or “smashers,” named for Carron, Scotland where the British had developed them, represented the latest innovation in naval ordnance. At least one American foundry had imported the technology from Britain to cast and bore the new weapons, but, obviously, as of 1798 actual production left much to be desired.⁶³

⁶⁰ Michael A. Palmer, 32-33.

⁶¹ William Bingham, Philadelphia to King, 2 April 1798, in King 2:298; Department of the Treasury, Secretary of the Treasury, *Circular to the Collector of the Customs* (8 April 1797), by Oliver Wolcott, Jr., in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:4-5.

⁶² Pickering to King, 2 April 1798, in King 2:297.

⁶³ Michael A. Palmer, 32-33.

Part of the problem of quickly arming naval vessels lay with the tremendous size of the batteries carried aboard men of war. It has been said that a single 74 gun, third rate ship of the line carried more powerful artillery aboard her than did Napoleon's entire army at Austerlitz.⁶⁴ Even small brigs and sloops of war might carry 14 to 18 long guns or carronades,⁶⁵ while Frigates might be rated for as few as 28 guns with 9 pounders in their primary battery⁶⁶ or range as large as the new American 44s, the *United States* and *Constitution*, boasting 24-pounders on their gun decks. By the summer of 1798, Congress had already authorized raising eighteen ships of twenty guns or more, including three more of the original big frigates originally planned in 1794 to combat the Algerines. And of course, none of these calculations accounted for naval armament of the merchants' frigates mentioned above.

In short, the United States needed huge supplies of great guns and lacked the domestic capacity to produce them, at least in a hurry. The need was so urgent that Captains John Barry and Thomas Truxton, commanders of the frigates *United States* 44, and *Constellation* 36, respectively, had found that to arm their ships they would have to scrounge 24-pounders and 12-pounders from state-owned harbor fortifications, or wherever else they could lay hold of them.⁶⁷ Secretary of State Pickering in Philadelphia directed Rufus King in London to advise Yankee merchant captains to procure cannon for their vessels in England, if they could, because of the acute shortage in America.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Nicholas Blake, *Steering to Glory: A Day in the Life of a Ship of the Line* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2005), 8.

⁶⁵ Lavery, 52-55.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 49-52.

⁶⁷ U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:51; Michael A. Palmer, 32-34. These captains had to use their own personnel to locate cannon and then obtain permission from the jurisdiction in charge of them to remove them to their ships.

⁶⁸ Pickering to King, 2 April 1798, in King 2:297.

The burning question remained: where could the United States Government turn to meet such a desperate need of ordnance? Again the obvious answer was to obtain the weapons in England, then the greatest industrial power on earth and, thankfully, also the arch enemy of France.

During the summer of 1798 Mr. King in London had received instructions from his government to place an order on behalf of Secretary of the Treasury, Oliver Wolcott for both naval and military ordnance. King wrote to Grenville 16 August requesting permission to procure 24, 18, 12, 9, 6, and 4 pounders, as much as £6,000 would buy. He also placed a £4,000 order for artillery for the United States Army and harbor defenses. King informed the British foreign minister that he had taken the liberty to communicate his needs to the Birmingham ironmongers and had received assurances that they could meet the increased demand.⁶⁹ Grenville was not slow to respond, telling King that same day that he would take all necessary steps to facilitate the American order.⁷⁰ As a practical matter, Treasury Secretary Oliver Wolcott had deposited the required funds with the international banking firm of Barings so either the manufacturers directly, or His Majesty's Ordnance Office from the Tower of London, could supply the great guns.⁷¹

Along with the cannon order had come one for small arms as well. The U.S. government had also directed that Mr. King requisition 25,000 muskets in England.⁷² Muskets were essential for the arming of the new American Provisional Army under the titular command of George Washington, but also were required to equip the marines to be

⁶⁹ King to Grenville, 16 August 1798, in King 2:391.

⁷⁰ King to Pickering, 17 August 1798, in King 2:392.

⁷¹ King to Oliver Wolcott, 17 September 1798, in King 2:416; Ralph W. Hidy, *The House of Baring in American Trade and Finance: English Merchant Bankers at Work: 1763-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 32.

⁷² King to Grenville, 16 August 1798, in King 2:391.

stationed upon every U.S. Navy vessel. However, American authorities would discover that it would prove much more problematic for suppliers to fill musket orders than those for cannon. King wrote to Secretary Wolcott on 17 September 1798 informing him that Barings would keep him abreast of the cannon order King had placed, but that he had as of yet received no answer from the British Government as to the small arms sought. In fact, King apprised Wolcott that he was looking elsewhere for guns; he had the U.S. Consul stationed in Hamburg, Mr. Pitcairn, trying to locate them there. Apparently, Pitcairn was able to scrounge 4,000 of the prized British muskets in the former *Hansa* city, and also 18,000 German made guns, if wanted. They would be sent by merchantman with the regular Royal Navy convoy leaving Hamburg for England and then one leaving England for America.⁷³

On 6 October 1798, King wrote Wolcott informing him that it was unlikely that the U.S. would be able to meet its small arms needs in England. King indicated he had spoken to General Ross then in charge of ordinance at the Tower of London in the absence of Lord Cornwallis. Ross, King discovered, was not unsympathetic to American needs. He had intimated that the British would certainly share what they had with the American Government should it come to declared war with France. In the meantime, Ross had also offered to assist America with the proving of any German arms purchased on the Continent, presumably at the Tower or the Woolwich Arsenal, if the guns would be shipped through London. Ross had also indicated that although it now seemed to him that a Franco-American rupture was unlikely, upon his return from business in Scotland

⁷³ King to Wolcott, 17 September 1798, in King 2:416.

in some three weeks, he would arrange to supply 5000 muskets from the Tower.⁷⁴ This was no mean offer in light of the existing British obligations already undertaken to supply guns to both the Ottomans and Portuguese, both of whom were now directly threatened by French or Spanish forces. This was to say nothing of the British Army's needs, especially in light of the invasion threat to Great Britain herself. When Ross did return from Scotland he explained these pre-existing commitments to King, adding that under the circumstances, the most that the arsenal could presently spare were 2000 or 3000 muskets, but that he would arrange the sale of a further 500 every month from the Tower at the same price that His Majesty's Ordnance had purchased them.⁷⁵

When during the summer of 1798 Rufus King had approached the British Government about importing saltpeter, the critical oxidizing component in gunpowder, from the East India Company in Calcutta to the U.S., he again had found a sympathetic ear. The United States at the time had no significant domestic sources of saltpeter and had relied on relatively cheap imports from the Subcontinent in order to manufacture the explosive.⁷⁶ King had received a directive from President Adams himself to render all assistance to any American merchant seeking to import to the United States any "military stores." In this case, a Mr. Derby of Salem, Massachusetts intended to send a small vessel to purchase 130 tons of saltpeter in Calcutta for direct export to the United States.⁷⁷ King perceived the sensitivity of the request. The material was absolutely fundamental to maintaining any war effort and could not be allowed to fall into the hands of enemies

⁷⁴ King to Wolcott, 6 October 1798, in King 2:441-42.

⁷⁵ King to Pickering, 5 November 1798, in King 2:457. Napoleon's army was still in the Levant, believed headed through Palestine towards Turkey.

⁷⁶ David Cressy, *Saltpeter: The Mother of Gunpowder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 166.

⁷⁷ King to Henry Dundas, London, 16 August 1798, in King 2:390.

such as the French or Spanish to be used against Great Britain. The *de facto* rulers of Bengal holding the monopoly on saltpeter production just happened to be the English East India Company (EEIC). And the Honourable Company itself jealously guarded its saltpeter supply from perceived European rivals. Hence, it would take the good offices of His Majesty's Government to assure the EEIC that sales to Americans, hitherto *de jure* allies of the French Republic, would not amount to aiding the enemy.

The same day King had written to Grenville concerning the order for cannon and muskets, he had taken the logical step of writing to the influential M.P., Henry Dundas, to secure His Majesty's support for the purchase of the essential gunpowder ingredient.⁷⁸ Besides being a good friend and ally of Prime Minister William Pitt, Dundas sat in the British Cabinet as both War Secretary and head of the Board of Control. Thus, he was the Crown's minister who, along with Pitt, was chiefly responsible for British war policy during the Wars of the French Revolution.⁷⁹ Additionally, Dundas, as President of the Board of Control, occupied a unique position from which to exert influence over the EEIC. He was the government officer charged with supervision of the semi-independent joint stock company, and in effect, of British Indian policy.⁸⁰ In writing to Dundas, King stressed the importance of procuring the saltpeter in light of the *actual* hostilities America was now embroiled in against Britain's chief foe, France.

Furthermore, King reminded Dundas of the assistance the minister had earlier rendered in a previous case that summer when Boston merchant Adam Babcock had

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Duffy, 5, 24-25; Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 194-95.

⁸⁰ Wolpert, , 194-95. John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company*, 1st American ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1994), 390-91, 394.

sought to import 500 tons of saltpeter to the United States from Bengal.⁸¹ In the instance of Mr. Babcock, while King had pursued the blessing of His Majesty's Government in London for the sale, Secretary of State Pickering had written to the British Minister in Philadelphia, Robert Liston, for his assistance on that end, namely a letter to the Governor General in Calcutta, enlisting the Governor's permission to consummate the sale, and the request for Babcock's ship, the *Martha* to join a British convoy, at least as far as the Cape of Good Hope, so as to safeguard the critical shipment.⁸² Again, as he had done previously for Babcock, Dundas was happy to be of assistance with the EEIC in the case of Derby's petition to export saltpeter to America. In his 18 August reply to King, Dundas wrote:

...I can have no hesitation in contributing to afford every possible facility to the Government of the United States, which my influence with the East India Company can tend to Procure, and I shall instantly forward your application to the Court of Directors, who I flatter myself will feel no hesitation in complying with your wish.⁸³

With Dundas's support, the EEIC Court of Directors was quick to grant Derby's request. And what is more revealing is that the exportation of that most essential compound necessary for the manufacture of eighteenth century munitions had the blessing of those at the very highest level of British war policy. Again, access to saltpeter was absolutely critical for modern war making because at that time gunpowder was the only known explosive and the necessary propellant for firearms and artillery. In allowing the U.S. access to its Indian supplies of saltpeter, Britain was again providing essential

⁸¹ King to Dundas, 16 August 1798, in King 2:390.

⁸² Pickering to Robert Liston, Philadelphia, 22 June 1798, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:129-30.

⁸³ Dundas to King, 18 August 1798, in King 2:396.

military support to the young republic as the latter prepared to battle their mutual enemy on the high seas.

By the summer of 1798 the British Government was supplying essentials without which the American naval build up would have been a pipe dream: canon, muskets, saltpeter to make the gunpowder to fire them, and the essential copper needed to shield warship bottoms from the worm and barnacle. But it was true that Britain was doing well out of the bargain. Her merchants were selling their naval stores and military wares to willing buyers for a profit. But there was at least one instance during that summer of feverish arms deals when neither His Majesty's manufacturers nor Government pursued gain in providing military aid against the French threat. This was the matter of the Halifax cannon. During that summer, ambitious and impatient captains were "liberating" great guns from wherever they could find them because of the dire shortage of naval ordnance to arm their new men of war. More often than not, these weapons came from the nation's forts and harbor defenses as described earlier in this chapter. This practice was leaving these important defense establishments with a compromised or non-existent capacity to protect the nation's coastline.

The residents of Charleston, South Carolina were acutely cognizant of this situation. The set of French 24's which had once graced their defenses were gone. The British had seized them as the spoils of war when Charleston fell to them in the War of Independence, later removing the guns to Halifax, Nova Scotia when they eventually evacuated the city. There was a certain irony to this scenario. The guns had been prizes of war long before the War of Independence. The British, in the Seven Years' War, had removed the guns from the captured French battleship, *Foudroyant*, and given them to

South Carolina for the defense of Charleston.⁸⁴ The Secretary of State, Pickering, had learned that the guns were not in use in Halifax because they fired a *French* 24 pound ball, which in English measure made them roughly 27 pounders.⁸⁵ Hence, as a non-standard British caliber, they could not use ammunition supplied from His Majesty's Ordnance, rendering the guns next to useless for the British Army just as they originally had been for the Royal Navy when removed from *Foudroyant*.⁸⁶ To the Americans desperate for cannon, non-British caliber was no impediment to their use. If nothing else, if returned to Charleston, the military authorities would either use them while the original cannonballs lasted, or eventually have the correct caliber projectiles cast somewhere in the U.S.

In light of the above information, Secretary of State Pickering wrote to the British Minister, Robert Liston, in Philadelphia and also Rufus King in London to directly deal with His Majesty's Government regarding use of the guns.⁸⁷ Liston caught the urgency of Pickering's proposal when he wrote Grenville that in the "present perilous state of the coasts of the U.S...[the American Government wished]...to *beg* or *borrow* or *buy* these guns, for to be once more transported to Charleston."⁸⁸ In the meantime, while Liston's dispatch made its way across the Atlantic to London, the minister, as he had promised

⁸⁴ Pickering, Trenton, NJ to Benjamin Stoddert, Navy Department, Trenton, NJ, 6 October 1798, *Quasi-War* 1:499.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*; The French pound of the time was 8.33 percent heavier than an American or English pound which would place them at roughly 26 lbs. Michael A. Palmer, 188. But contemporary sources calculated them at 27 to 27 1/2 lbs. Pickering to Stoddert, 6 October 1798, in *Quasi-War* 1:499; Liston to Grenville, 12 June 1798, in Robert Liston, gen. ed. Richard Simmons *The Liston Papers: 1796-1800* (East Ardsley, Wakefield, England: Microform Academic Publishers, 1990), microform 1:99-100.

⁸⁶ The *Foudroyant* 80, captured by H.M.S. *Monmouth* 64, off Cartagena in the Mediterranean, soon entered the Royal Navy as H.M.S. *Foudroyant* after a refit and receiving standard British ordnance. Rodger, *Command*, 274, 336, 338-40; Herman, 346-48. Her French guns were, however, at the time apparently deemed suitable for colonial armament; Liston to Grenville, 12 June 1798, in Liston 2:99-100.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*; King to Grenville, 26 August 1798, in King 2:401-02.

⁸⁸ Liston to Grenville, 12 June 1798, in Liston 2:100.

Pickering, took the liberty of writing to the Governor of Nova Scotia, Sir John Wentworth, and His Royal Highness, Prince Edward, commanding the Halifax garrison, seeking approval of a loan of the cannon to the United States. Prince Edward responded that while he could not present the guns as a gift—he lacked authority to do so—he would be willing to loan them, on condition that American forces remove and transport them to Charleston and that upon the request of His Majesty, the United States saw to their immediate and safe return.⁸⁹ Pickering then conveyed Prince Edward’s offer to the President. Secretary of War McHenry, on behalf of the Administration, issued an acceptance of the terms to Secretary Pickering who made arrangements with the Navy Department to collect the French guns.⁹⁰ Secretary of the Navy Stoddert then dispatched Captain James Sever of the U.S.S. *Herald* to Halifax to see that the guns were safely shipped to Charleston.⁹¹ The loan was in essence a *fait accompli* by the time the British Cabinet’s approval arrived from London. The Home Secretary, His Grace, the Duke of Portland, himself, had signed off on the loan of the French 24s per Rufus King’s request through Lord Grenville.⁹²

But there was one more twist in the saga of the ex-*Foudroyant*, French 24s. Following the ceremonial transfer of the guns to the American officers sent to Halifax and the weapons’ transport to Charleston, Secretary of State Pickering soon wondered if the loan of the cannon might be made permanent.⁹³ This inquiry made its way to London

⁸⁹ Pickering to Stoddert, 6 October 1798, in *Quasi-War* 1:499.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 1:499-500; James McHenry, Trenton, NJ to Pickering, 4 October 1798, in *Quasi-War* 1:490.

⁹¹ Stoddert to James Sever, U.S.N., U.S.S. *Herald*, 6 October 1798, in *Quasi-War* 1:500-01.

⁹² King to Pickering, 7 September 1798, in King 2:411; Grenville to Liston, 20 October 1798, in *Instructions*, 162-63; William Cavendish-Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland, to Grenville, 3 September 1798, in Liston 1:63-64.

⁹³ Perkins, *First Rapprochement*, 95.

where His Majesty's Ministers must have seen a diplomatic coup to be made from guns of no value to their own armed forces, but of great value to the desperately arming United States. Lord Grenville in January 1799 directed Liston in Philadelphia to return to the Americans the written engagement they had entered to give back the 24s upon the request of the British Government, transforming the loan into an outright gift.⁹⁴ In April 1799 Liston returned the loan document to Pickering along with a note in which he described the act as "a testimony of friendship towards the United States."⁹⁵ And indeed, the gift had its desired effect upon the Americans. In his reply to Mr. Liston, Secretary Pickering noted the pleasure and thanks President Adams had expressed upon learning of the gesture. The President regarded "the present of the cannon... 'as a testimony of the friendship of His Britannic Majesty to the United States'" and specially desired Liston to transmit to London the President's thanks on behalf of the American Government.⁹⁶ In the end, the French 24s never fired a shot in anger during the duration of the war.⁹⁷ But the loan/gift of those guns certainly had made a positive impression upon official Philadelphia. As Pickering had noted to President Adams in September 1798, Britain's providing access to the guns was significant "not so much for their intrinsic value (though that...[was]...not inconsiderable) as that they...[were]...ready for immediate service; & that we want[ed] them."⁹⁸

In retrospect, the ordnance that the Pitt Government provided the United States, whether by sale or grant, was absolutely critical to the American war effort against

⁹⁴ Grenville to Liston, 19 January 1799, in *Instructions*, 168.

⁹⁵ Liston to Pickering, 10 April 1799, in King 3:10-11.

⁹⁶ Quoting John Adams in Pickering to Liston, 1 May 1799, in King 3:11.

⁹⁷ Perkins, *First Rapprochement*, 95.

⁹⁸ Pickering to Adams, 14 September 1798, quoted in, *Ibid.*

France. Professor Michael A. Palmer, in his study of the American naval campaign in that conflict, *Stoddert's War*, has noted:

Probably between 300 and 400 cannon and carronades were imported for the United States Navy from Great Britain between 1797 and 1801. Considering that the navy at its peak strength in 1800 carried 900 guns, at least one third, and perhaps as many as one-half of the naval guns in use were British.⁹⁹

Upon this fact alone the case can be made that the British were an indispensable partner in the Adams Administration's crash program to build or buy a fleet in 1798. The case becomes stronger when one credits the British Government's role in the American acquisition of the critical copper sheathing materials so necessary for a late eighteenth century naval vessel to function effectively. And the argument becomes even more cogent upon recognition of the part the British in those days had played in the U.S. importation of saltpeter, the essential ingredient in gunpowder then also difficult to find in America. Considering the naval administrative triumvirate of ships, men, and money, without key British assistance, the United States would have found the challenge nearly insurmountable with respect to the first issue: ships. Thanks to Alexander Hamilton's system of tariffs and credit, the new Federal Government had the requisite money. As to sailors, the American merchant marine was truly a "nursery of seamen," such that finding crews for the American fleet would not pose the kind of vexing problem continually faced by the Royal Navy.¹⁰⁰ While wages would remain significantly higher in their

⁹⁹ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 34.

¹⁰⁰ The U.S. merchant navy grew during the war years from 10,000 in 1792 to perhaps 70,000 at its apogee before embargo and war took a bite out of the figure by 1812. Toll, 371. Assuming thirty ships at peak strength, and 200 sailors per ship, we may liberally assume an American fleet of some 6000 U.S.N. tars having been recruited from that proportionately large pool. The British, on the other hand, with their immense fleet, had mobilized from 10,000 R.N. tars in 1792 before the war, to 140,000 in 1812, *Ibid.*, but had recruited from a population of seamen in no way approaching a sufficient number before the war from which to do so and still maintain their essential merchant marine. It was sheer desperation in filling out its vast numbers of crews which drove the British to utilize the cudgel of the naval press. Daniel A. Baugh,

merchant navy while the war lasted,¹⁰¹ the Americans would never have to resort to the hated institution of the naval press to fill out their warships' compliments.¹⁰² They paid better than their British counterparts,¹⁰³ and utilized only one year enlistments,¹⁰⁴ instead of the policy of indefinite length of service—usually for the duration of the war—employed in Whitehall. But to have a navy, a nation needed all three legs of the naval administrative stool: ships, men and money. Without British aid with the first of these, possessing the other two legs would not have been relevant considering the time frame with which the Adams Administration had to contend.

And so with British help the United States Navy had become a reality. American warships were soon on patrol off the American coast, including in late June the frigate U.S.S. *Constellation*.¹⁰⁵ This vessel and her captain, Thomas Truxtun, would become icons of the young republic's new sea service during the Quasi-War. Although Truxtun, who had been a privateer skipper in the War of Independence, had never served in the Continental Navy as had men such as John Barry of the *United States*, and Samuel Nicholson of the *Constitution*, it was to be his influence more than that of the other captains that would establish the traditions of the new service.¹⁰⁶ It was Truxtun who had established a book of naval signals for the service and written a critical book on

"The Eighteenth Century Navy as A National Institution, 1690-1815," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Royal Navy*, ed. J. R. Hill and Bryan Ranft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 133-39; Rodger, *Command*, 496-99.

¹⁰¹ Toll, 94.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 272.

¹⁰⁴ Captain Thomas Tingey, U.S.N., Philadelphia to Lieutenant Archibald McElroy, U.S.N., U.S.S. *Ganges*, 5 November 1798, in *Quasi-War* 2:7-8; Toll, 94.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-26.

¹⁰⁶ Barry had famously commanded the frigate, *Alliance*, in the Continental Navy. Toll, 56-57. Nicholson had successfully commanded the frigate, *Deane*, during the Revolutionary War but at the end of his service had been court-martialed but acquitted. Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 44-45.

navigation. Truxtun had mastered the exquisitely complicated technique of taking lunars to find longitude, an essential skill as the Americans could not yet afford the luxury of sea-going chronometers.¹⁰⁷ And it was Truxtun more than any other who created the fighting tradition of the new service with his famous victories against the French Navy frigates *L'Insurgente* and *La Vengeance*.¹⁰⁸ In consequence, by the end of the war, Stoddert had virtually made Truxtun a *de-facto* admiral and commander in chief of the new service.¹⁰⁹ To Stoddert, he represented the acme of professionalism.

Ironic, however, was the influence that his old Revolutionary War enemy, the Royal Navy, would exercise over so much of what Captain Truxtun established for the young U.S. Fleet. And for him and the American naval officer corps which emulated him, the R.N. remained their guiding light. It was as if the British Senior Service were acting as an unofficial mentor to this very junior one. This chapter has already discussed how the British greatly assisted in the founding of the American fleet itself, making the ships possible, but there was also a distinct but indirect British hand in the development of one

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 25; Thomas Truxtun, *Instruction, Signals, and Explanations, Offered for the United States Fleet* (Baltimore: John Hayes, 1797); Chronometers were yet too expensive for even the R.N. to equip each warship with one. Consequently, navigators relied upon Mayer's lunar tables which required them to perform sophisticated mathematical calculations, or simply used the ancient, primitive, often dangerous, and aptly named "dead reckoning" method.

¹⁰⁸ Toll, 115-20; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 185-87. Some have called *Constellation's* battle against *La Vengeance* a draw as both frigates were severely damaged following the action and limped away into the night. However, it was subsequently learned that the French frigate nearly foundered on her way to Curacao; she had been holed so badly by *Constellation's* gunnery. Toll, 134-35. After the war, Truxtun later learned that the Frenchman had struck his colors two times but this fact had been hidden in the night and she had stolen away. Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 187 n.7.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 211-12. Stoddert to Truxtun, 16 April 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 5:421. While Secretary Stoddert had promoted a bill in Congress to establish the formal rank of Admiral in the U.S. Navy, the bill had suffered defeat. Ibid. There would be no rank higher than the unofficial "commodore"—essentially a flag captain—in the American Navy until the Civil War. Department of the Navy—Naval History and Heritage Command—Traditions . . . of the Naval Service, "The Origin of Ranks and Rank Insignia Now Used by the United States Armed Forces: Officers: Admiral," in Naval History and Command [website online]; available from <http://www.history.navy.mil/trivia/triv4-51.htm>; internet; most recently accessed 20 July 2012.

of the other legs of the naval administrative stool: the men. This was not in providing them. The British desperately *needed* tars for their own fleet and had routinely illegally impressed Americans into it. In June 1798 they had even actually proposed that America supply them sailors in exchange for the R.N. supplying the U.S. Navy with ships and officers, an offer ignored by Philadelphia.¹¹⁰ Instead, the Royal Navy's contribution would be to supply, perhaps inadvertently, the model the American navy would emulate. The United States Navy at its inception was in so many ways fashioned as a mirror image of the Royal Navy. Its basic rank structure followed that employed in that institution. The Americans had also adopted the British Service's conception of: naval discipline, a marine corps, warship armament, basic fighting style, and even fundamental administrative organization.

This was not surprising. The Royal Navy for a century had been simply the best in the world. While people might debate the sailing qualities of its warships, there was no question that the seamanship of its officers and men, their gunnery, their organization, and aggressive tactics were without parallel. Its dockyards were the best, the largest industrial plants of their day.¹¹¹ From top to bottom the Royal Navy stood for professionalism in a world of amateurs. No one bought commissions in the King's Navy as they did in the British Army.¹¹² Officers earned their commissions in Britain's Senior Service. To command a warship in the British Navy, one had to be an "able" seaman

¹¹⁰ William, Lord Grenville to Robert Liston, 8 June 1798, in *Instructions to the British Ministers to the United States: 1791-1812* ed. Bernard Mayo (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), 156.

¹¹¹ Roger Morris, *The Royal Dockyards during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1983), vi.

¹¹² N. A. M. Rodger, "Honour and Duty at Sea, 1660-1815," *Historical Research* 75, no. 190 (November 2002): 427.

first, that is to be sufficiently skilled to reef, furl and steer like the best tar in the fleet. But the captain also needed to have the competence to perform complex navigational calculations like a mathematician, and be able to manage the complicated structure of a sailing vessel as a capitalist would his factory. In essence, R.N. captains were a unique breed in the eighteenth century world, professionals expected to act the gentleman. They were professionals first—survival in the extremely dangerous environment at sea demanded that—but then secondarily, in order to assume command in that traditional eighteenth-century world, they needed qualities that would have been familiar to a landed squire, the easy sure-footedness to rule their “wooden world” at sea with a firm hand, but in the case of the best of them, a Nelson or a Collingwood, yet remain a father figure to their men. Naturally, their rank would require that they be prepared to stand to arms as fearless warrior chiefs on their quarterdecks, largely alone, strikingly obvious in their gold-epauleted, blue coats and white breeches, and quite unprotected from enemy sharpshooters.¹¹³ Consequently, when this professional Royal Navy went into battle against the French, its officers and men *knew* they would win before the battle began; they were the best. A century of victories in the Second Hundred Years’ war had proved it.¹¹⁴ And those who knew how a navy worked also recognized the excellence of the administrative

¹¹³ Ibid., 428-432, 440, 446.

¹¹⁴ Time and again in that long eighteenth century the Royal Navy had bested the French Service in sea battles. Following the debacle at Beachy Head in the Nine Years’ War, in the 1690s, the British had garnered victory laurels at Barfleur, Finisterre, and Quiberon Bay. Following some missteps in the American War, such as at the Battle of the Chesapeake which had barred Admiral Graves’ relief expedition from lifting the American/French siege of Yorktown and leading to American independence, the Royal Navy had recovered with George Brydges Rodney’s demolition of the French fleet at Les Saintes in 1782. In the Wars of the French Revolution, a British squadron had mauled a French squadron at the Glorious First of June in 1794, a Spanish one at the Battle of Cape St. Vincent, and the Dutch at Camperdown, both in 1797.

structure behind the fighting sailors, both on land and at sea, busy feeding, equipping, and arming them. It was this standard that Truxtun, and the U.S. Navy sought to replicate.

This emulation of the Royal Navy, of course, had begun well before Captain Truxtun and his fellow American captains had ever assumed command of their vessels. Even during the time the navy was under the direction of the War Department, Britain's fleet had been the model to follow. As 1797 moved forward with no apparent lessening of the tensions with France, it had become very apparent that the frigates being launched would soon need to go into commission. In short order each lieutenant would need to open a rendezvous to recruit his ship's crew. Captains would then be able to assume command of their vessels and the ships put to sea. Shipboard organization would need to become a reality. The new service would need uniforms. It would need regulations to rationalize the daily routines of the hundreds of souls sharing the same small space afloat and so maintain good order. Good order on board a ship at sea was not just a matter of decorum; it was a matter of survival. A ship's company either pulled together or perished. Hence the symbols of good order, were the trappings of uniforms, of the boatswain piping a captain on board, of the ship's bell signaling the watch changes, the steady presence of the captain on the quarterdeck, plus a myriad of other small ceremonies and procedures which promoted if nothing else the semblance of good order. And, of course, there was the ceremony of punishment for violation of those rules and traditions executed publicly before the assembled ship's company. Where did an overworked secretary of war turn to provide an instant naval culture? The answer was simple: model as much as was possible after the British. Copy the best, the finest form of flattery.

And that was what Secretary of War McHenry had done in 1797. In regulations issued 24 August 1797, he had specified that the uniforms worn by the officers of this infant sea service would closely resemble those of the Royal Navy. A U.S. Navy captain would appear in a familiar blue coat with a standing collar, light lapels and gold or yellow buttons, light vest, breeches and socks and a gold epaulette upon each shoulder. Lieutenants would be similarly attired but only wear one epaulette, with this placed upon the right shoulder. The sailing master would wear a simple blue coat with blue facings, light vest, but blue breeches.¹¹⁵ In comparison with the U.S. Navy uniform prescribed by McHenry, the Royal Navy dress uniform adopted before 1795 would be very similar except that the light lapels, breeches and vests would be white instead of the American buff. As to epaulets, just adopted in 1795 by the British themselves, senior captains in the R.N. would wear a gold one on each shoulder. Captains of less than three years service in that fleet would only wear one on the right shoulder while lieutenants would not wear any. With the 1795 Royal Navy uniform changes, coat lapels had also become blue.¹¹⁶ Thus the American naval uniform adopted in 1797 was very much a combination of the pre 1795 and post 1795 Royal Navy uniforms.¹¹⁷

McHenry also turned to the Royal Navy for the American navy's basic law, the Articles of War. These were the fundamental regulations established to govern all life aboard the new, soon to be commissioned warships. Congress swiftly passed the articles,

¹¹⁵ War Department, *Uniform for the Navy of the United States of America*, 24 August 1797, by James McHenry, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:10-11.

¹¹⁶ Lavery, 104.

¹¹⁷ The choice of the blue coat for the U.S.N. is significant. The Royal Navy had obviously chosen blue, which in the eighteenth century was a color associated with the professions and hence the middle class. Red was a color utilized by the officers of both the British Army and French Navy, each dominated by the upper crust of their respective countries. N. A. M. Rodger, "Honour," 433. Instead of choosing the aristocratic red of their "ally," the French Navy, the Americans chose to follow the British with *professional* blue.

which the War Secretary had borrowed from the regulations adopted by the Continental Congress in 1775 for the new Continental Navy.¹¹⁸ These were the work of John Adams, then Secretary of the Committee of Marine for Congress, and had borrowed heavily from the Royal Navy's venerable Articles of War, last amended in 1749.¹¹⁹ The American articles, founded upon the British ones, would be the regulations used to govern conduct and establish good order on United States ships into 1799.¹²⁰ When Truxtun had put to sea in *Constellation* on her shake-down cruise in June 1798, he had employed the same basic disciplinary system utilized in the King's fleet.

It would not be long before Captain Truxtun would need to enforce the newly enacted U.S. Navy Articles of War aboard *Constellation*. While cruising off the U.S. coast Truxtun received intelligence from the Navy Department that there were crew members planning mutiny. Apparently Truxtun's officers had been watching the likely plotters and they were put off the ship at Norfolk in irons. But Truxtun did read the Articles of War to the crew, explaining that mutiny was an extremely serious crime, especially when it involved taking a ship at sea. In his address to *Constellation's* crew concerning the Articles of War on 2 July 1798, the captain had alluded to the recent mutinous tarnish upon the Royal Navy's luster.¹²¹ The Spithead and Nore mutinies were already notorious. Of course the Spithead affair had been of the traditional sort: at anchor over a venerable sailors' grievance, pay, with little bloodshed and so forgivable by a

¹¹⁸ *An Act Providing a Naval Armament, Statutes at Large* 1, Ch. 7, sec. 8, 525 (1797) in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:8; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 14; Michael Edmund Schlitz, "Benjamin Stoddert and Naval Command during the Quasi-War with France" (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1958), 114-15.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹²¹ Thomas Truxtun, "Thomas Truxtun Concerning Certain Mutinous Assemblies on Board U. S. Frigate *Constellation*", in U.S.N., 1:156-58; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 26.

nation indebted to its “jolly” tars. But the vicious *Hermione* mutiny of the previous year—an R.N. crew driven to the breaking point by a sadistic frigate captain had taken their ship on the high seas in the Caribbean’s Mona Passage—stood out as something beyond the pale. Somehow, the Royal Navy’s system of on-board order, successful for so many years—mutinies at sea were virtually unknown in the British Sea Service—had gone quite wrong. *Hermione*’s crew had butchered nearly all her officers with tomahawks and thrown them overboard. The hated Captain Pigot they had hurled through the stern gallery windows and then sailed to the Spanish Main to offer His Majesty’s ship to the enemy.¹²² While the *Hermione* mutineers had a legitimate grievance worthy of sympathy—Pigot was perhaps the cruelest commander in Royal Navy annals¹²³—their stooping to murder and treason certainly was not. Even the *Bounty*’s mutineers had put Captain Bligh and loyal crew members off their ship in a boat with provisions.¹²⁴ Obviously, the *Hermione* affair had proven a shock to a man like Truxtun who had held the Royal Navy, its professionalism, and governance institutions in such high esteem. That these same institutions, normally celebrated as synonymous with good order at sea, could so publicly and tragically fail must have sent a tremor of fear through the young American navy which saw itself as a Royal Navy protégé. Truxtun could only have felt these emotions all the more when he learned that one of the mutineers he had put off the ship at Norfolk had been one of the *Hermione*’s murderous crewmen, seeking to suborn his own crew.¹²⁵

Whatever doubts the recent British mutinies might have seeded in American naval minds, it was this British system of shipboard order that Truxtun and his fellow U.S.N.

¹²² Dudley Pope, *The Black Ship* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 154-87

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 11, 145.

¹²⁴ Herman, 327.

¹²⁵ Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 26

commanders now sought to impose upon American jack tars used to the laxness of their merchant fleet. If any American sailor had thought that life in a Yankee man of war would be easier than aboard one of His Majesty's warships, he soon learned better. The American navy drank deeply from the cup of Britain's naval traditions. Corporal punishment for violations of the ship's regulations was standard. The flogging of violators by petty officers before the assembled ship's company was just as American as it was British. Twelve or more lashes upon the offending tar's bare back was not infrequent for drunkenness, inattentiveness to duty, brawling, and especially theft, despised perhaps above all by men living cheek by jowl at sea.¹²⁶ N. A. M. Rodger, that great scholar of Royal Navy history, has noted that the British practice of "starting" sailors—hitting them with a rope end or small cane—when they did not attend lively enough, was still a part of life in the American service, long after Britain's Senior Service had barred it.¹²⁷ It is interesting to recall that Secretary of the Navy Stoddert in 1799 had given five of his most illustrious captains, of course including Truxtun, the chance to revise the 1797 Articles of War, again rooted in the 1749 British Articles. And Congress quickly enacted their work product for the new navy. What did these venerable men of the sea come up with? Not surprisingly, it was basically the same document, only ordered somewhat differently.¹²⁸ The Royal Navy's sea regulations lived on in the Yankee fleet.

¹²⁶ N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, Norton paperback ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 221-29. In the R.N., theft could garner 200 to 500 lashes following a court-martial; *Command*, 493.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 492-93.

¹²⁸ Schlitz, 116-17. Stoddert finally drafted another code enacted in April 1800, which Stoddert claimed only initiated some procedural and prize money changes. Schlitz argues the code changes were significant. *Ibid.* As Rodger implies in *Command*, there were few practical changes at sea as flogging and starting continued in the U.S. fleet. *Command*, 493.

So much of life aboard an American warship in those years would have been indistinguishable from life aboard a British one. The United States Navy did not try to reinvent the wheel as to food, and other accommodations for officers and crew. The diet was basically the same,¹²⁹ as were the officers' uniforms—mentioned earlier—the slops or clothing issued to the ratings,¹³⁰ and even the grog.¹³¹ The British had made a fine science of naval success at sea and the Americans so familiar with it sought largely to duplicate it. The Royal Navy routinely became the standard by which the nation's naval commanders judged their progress. Not much later in the war, when the theatre of operations changed from the coast of the United States to the Caribbean, Captains such as Truxtun and Alexander Murray would look up to the British Captains and Admirals they frequently met with something approaching reverence.¹³² If American vessels sortied

¹²⁹ A comparison of the basic weekly diets laid out in His Majesty's regulations and those provided by Act of Congress show how similar they were. Both were based upon salt pork and beef, cheese, butter or oil and peas. The daily rations of these were pretty much the same for both services but the particular weekly schedule differed some. The Americans substituted beans instead of peas occasionally and still used salted fish, which the R.N. had phased out by this time. Both used rice. The Americans were more niggardly as to beer, with only one quart allocated per day as compared with the British gallon—this in reality on board British men of war translated to taken at will. Janet Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy: The True Story of Food at Sea in the Georgian Era* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2004), 9-11; Stanley J. Adamiak, "The Development of American Naval Logistics, 1794-1842" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1994), 57-58. Adamiak has noted that the American cooking stoves were imported from Britain and Janet Macdonald who has written about the Royal Navy diet of Nelson's day has surmised that the American cooking style and use of messes was likely the same as that employed in the R.N. due to so many former British tars in the American service. Adamiak, 22-23; Macdonald, 142-43. While all navies used salted meats and dried vegetables as Macdonald points out, there were peculiar differences in the French and Spanish navies, including the French use of mustard seed, etc., Spanish use of lentils and chili spices, and heavy French use of red wines and brandy as opposed to the British and American use of beer and grog. Also the British and American diet seemed to follow a similar schedule while the French ration amounts did not vary daily. *Ibid.*, 9-11, 140-43, 145-49.

¹³⁰ Adamiak, 62; Lavery, 204.

¹³¹ A. J. Pack, *Nelson's Blood: The Story of Naval Rum* (Havant, Hampshire, UK: Kenneth Mason, 1982), 17, 24; Macdonald, 142.

¹³² Capt. Thomas Truxtun, U.S.N., to Capt. Richard Matson, R.N., 19 January 1799, in U.S.N. *Quasi-War* 2:260-61; Extract from Truxtun to Stoddert, 12 February 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:209-10; Extracts from Capt. Alexander Murray, U.S.N., to Stoddert, 1 January 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 2:235-37; Capt. Thomas Tingey U.S.N., U.S.S. *Ganges* to Sir Hyde Parker R.N., 5 January 1799, in *Ibid.*, 2:212-13; Murray to Stoddert, 3 January 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:31-33; Murray to Stoddert, 12 January 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:68; Murray to David Clarkson, U.S. Agent, St. Kitts, Between 17 and 22 January 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:89-90; Murray to

with their British counterparts, Yankee commanders took pains for their ships to look sharp and their crews to respond smartly to orders; nothing was to appear lubberly within sight of the Royal Navy Ensign.¹³³ And when sailing in consort with a British frigate, the American captain nearly always strove to demonstrate the superior speed and sailing qualities of his Yankee-built man of war.¹³⁴ While Secretary Stoddert himself might sometimes exhibit frustration with what he took to be British indifference to American naval interests,¹³⁵ he never the less continued to use the Royal Navy as his gauge as to whether his captains were lollygagging in getting their vessels to sea. When one of his skippers, Captain Moses Tryon of the *Connecticut*, had complained that his ship was yet undermanned, Stoddert had told him to get to sea when he was within thirty of his stated complement. The navy secretary irritably told Tryon that a British man of war of his ship's size might expect to put to sea with perhaps two thirds of the complainant's full crew.¹³⁶ Stoddert also on at least one occasion asked one of his captains, Richard

Stoddert, 17 January 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:90. This tendency became even more pronounced when American naval skippers left the hemisphere. Murray's accounts of his meetings with British officers in Lisbon and with Admiral Duckworth, R.N. in Gibraltar and U.S.N. Captain Edward Preble's description of encounters with Admiral Curtis, R.N. and his officers at Table Bay, Cape of Good Hope are both fawning in tone. Alexander Murray U.S.N. to Stoddert, 16 September 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 4:191; Murray to Stoddert, 26 September 1799, in *Ibid.* 4:229-30; Edward Preble, U.S.N., Extract from "Journal of Edward Preble," 12 March 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 5:298; Preble to Stoddert, 13 March 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:299-300; Preble, "Journal Extract," 24 March 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:345; Preble to Stoddert, 25 March 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:346; Preble to Capt. James Sever, U.S.N., 25 March 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:347.

¹³³ Murray to Officers of the Wardroom, U.S.S. *Insurgente*, 7 February 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:200.

¹³⁴ James Pity, U.S.N., U.S.S. *Constitution*, extract from "Journal of James Pity," 3 March 1799, in *Ibid.* 2:419; Capt. George Little, U.S.N., "Letter to the Editor, 16 September 1799, *New Hampshire Gazette* (Portsmouth, NH), 6 November 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 5:191-92; Murray to Stoddert, 26 September 1799, in *Ibid.* 5:229; Murray to Stoddert, 5 October 1799, in *Ibid.* 5:256-57; Extract from letter, Capt. Moses Tryon, U.S.N., to Gentleman in Middletown, CT, 10 January 1800, in *Ibid.* 4:577; Preble to Stoddert, 10 May 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:498; Rufus Low, U.S.N., "Journal of Sailing Master Rufus Low of U.S. Frigate *Essex*." 10 May 1800, in *Ibid.* 5:499.

¹³⁵ Stoddert to John Adams, 25 August 1798, in *Ibid.* 1:336.

¹³⁶ Stoddert to Captain Moses Tryon, U.S.N., 1 October 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 4:242. He made a similar irascible statement to Captain George Little of U.S.S. *Boston* when Little excused himself as unable to get to sea until fully manned. Stoddert intoned: "British Vessels (sic) of equal force with the *Boston*

Valentine Morris, to inquire of Royal Navy officers their opinions on the proper guns for the U.S. Navy.¹³⁷

The Americans borrowed even their fighting style from the Royal Navy. Despite having received the critical aid of famous French Admirals such as De Grasse in their War of Independence,¹³⁸ American naval commanders did not choose to copy French naval tactics. In combat, captains such as Truxtun, instead chose the methods of their former enemy. Emulating the British Admiralty, the American naval establishment, despite possessing a fleet of perhaps thirty vessels at its peak, encouraged U.S. Navy captains to aggressively seek battle instead of preserving their precious ships. Stoddert had only disgust for skippers who sailed too often together instead of singly. The Secretary expected them to give battle to any vessel of similar or lesser size without compunction. He expected valor, if not success, from his commanders.¹³⁹ There would be no Admiral Byngs¹⁴⁰ in *his* fleet. And on the whole that is what he got. Truxtun perhaps best personified this relentless pugnacity in his battles against the French national frigates *L'Insurgente* and *La Vengeance*. In both cases it was the American who ruthlessly pursued his French quarry. Chasing *Insurgente* in February 1799, Truxtun crowded on all

often cruize (sic) with fewer men than you now have—" Stoddert to George Little, U.S.N., 13 July 1799, in *Ibid.* 3:498.

¹³⁷ Stoddert to Richard Valentine Morris, U.S.N., 4 August 1798, in *Ibid.* 1:271.

¹³⁸ The Comte de Grasse, defeated the Royal Navy squadron under Rear Admiral Graves at the Battle of the Chesapeake, preventing the relief of General Lord Cornwallis's army at Yorktown. Rodger, *Command*, 351-52.

¹³⁹ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 183-84; Stoddert to Truxtun, 11 November 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 4:377-79.

¹⁴⁰ Vice-Admiral Hon. John Byng is infamous in Royal Navy annals. Byng was court-martialed, convicted, and shot not for cowardice, but for "failing to do his utmost to take or destroy the enemy's ships" at the Battle of Port Mahon in the Seven Years War. It was this incident which is said to have produced Voltaire's catty observation that the British shot an admiral now and then "in order to encourage the others." Herman, 281. But there is a certain truth in Voltaire's remark. For the commanders who followed in the R.N. tended to attack with a calculated recklessness. Hawke, for example, would risk wrecking his own ships on the rocks rather than avoid bringing the enemy to close action at Quiberon Bay later in the Seven Years War. *Ibid.*, 287-91.

canvas even in the face of a sudden squall at the risk of losing a mast, reminiscent of Hawke's reckless pursuit of the French fleet into an anchorage during a gale at Quiberon Bay. Instead it was *Insurgente* which lost her topmast.¹⁴¹ Against *La Vengeance* Truxtun forced battle with a much heavier 50 gun frigate which desperately sought to elude the more lightly armed *Constellation* 36. In each battle it was superior American gunnery which won the day, executed in the British manner by firing into the enemy hull instead of at the opponent's rigging, the French tactic.¹⁴² While *Constellation* certainly carried heavier guns than *Insurgente*— at that time 24 pounders to the Frenchman's 12 pounders—against *La Vengeance*, the French ship with 50 guns wielded the greater weight of metal.¹⁴³ But just as in so many British sea battles, it was not the individual weight of guns which made the difference, but rate of fire. Later analysis would show that *Constellation* was able to fire at least two if not more broadsides for each one fired by *La Vengeance*.¹⁴⁴ And the result to the French ship was devastating. She was hulled so badly that after skulking away from *Constellation* in the night she barely limped her way to Curaçao on the point of foundering; she grounded outside the harbor rather than risk sinking upon her approach.¹⁴⁵ Many years later during the War of 1812 the similarity of tactics used against each other in expert fashion by the British and Americans would produce deadly results:¹⁴⁶ the most famous being the fairly evenly matched single ship action between H.M.S. *Shannon* and U.S.S. *Chesapeake* which produced so many

¹⁴¹ Toll, 114-17. See footnote 140 as to Quiberon Bay.

¹⁴² Toll, 117-19, 131-35.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 117, 119, 135.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 134-35.

¹⁴⁶ The expert handling and especially the excellent gunnery of the heavier U.S.S. *Constitution* in her single ship duels with H.M.S. *Guerriere* and H.M.S. *Java* proved so deadly to the crews and hulls of the British frigates that neither ship was salvageable. *United States* similarly overpowered H.M.S. *Macedonian* in her single ship action, but *Macedonian* was saved to later join the American navy. Toll, 347-80.

casualties on both sides, including both captains.¹⁴⁷ In so many ways the Royal Navy truly was the mentor of the infant American service, whether intended or not.

As noted earlier, historian Bradford Perkins in *The First Rapprochement* has described a softening of relations in the 1790s between the United States and Great Britain which had begun in earnest following the conclusion of Jay's Treaty in 1794. It had been the Gallic over-reaction to said treaty, namely a non-declared *guerre de course* against the United States, which had driven the two commercial partners much closer together. The facts credit Perkin's observation that it was the informal naval alliance between them, itself a direct result of this French war on American trade, which had clearly represented the high tide of this new cordiality between these "cousins" The British had offered material military aid to their former rebellious colonies, especially in helping the young nation build and organize its new navy. With British help, the young republic had established a small, but entirely modern and effective naval fleet. The British had provided essential copper plate and fasteners for warship bottoms so that the Americans could have the best technology to increase the sailing performance and sea-keeping qualities of their men of war, both of which were so necessary to maintaining a credible naval presence in the critical Caribbean sector of operations. John Bull had supplied perhaps as much as half of the naval ordnance utilized in the American fleet in its struggle against France as well as small arms. The Americans had also received access to saltpeter from British India. It is abundantly clear that without this British

¹⁴⁷ James Lawrence, commanding *Chesapeake*, whose last conscious words to his crew became the U.S. Navy's motto, "Don't give up the ship," bled to death in the days following his frigate's capture. The victorious British captain, Phillip Broke, had been severely wounded with his skull cut open. Although he would survive his wounds, Broke would never again command a vessel at sea in the Royal Navy. *Ibid.*, 404-17.

administrative aid, the effective U.S. Navy which served during the Quasi-War would have been a pipe dream. Most of this assistance had to do with obtaining, maintaining, or basing ships, the first leg of the naval administrative stool needed to found or keep a navy in the age of sail.

Perhaps just as importantly, the Royal Navy had served as the very model upon which the impressionable Yanks had chosen to mold their new sea service. The U.S. Navy had borrowed its naval culture from His Majesty's Navy, including the seamen's diet, the uniforms, the regulations, and even the style of combat. All of this Philadelphia had copied whole scale from Britain's Senior Service, whether by design, as this author suggests—the Royal Navy was what they knew and clearly the most successful model they could follow—or done subconsciously because it was all they knew.¹⁴⁸ Never the less, the Royal Navy's societal norms were so instrumental in laying down the institutional structure aboard ship throughout the small American fleet that an officer such as Captain Alexander Murray, U.S.N., during a cross-Atlantic tour which took him to Britain's great Mediterranean sentinel fortress, Gibraltar, could observe in a letter to Stoddert :

I may have trespass'd upon you, in this detail, but it appears me to be sound policy to cultivate & draw the cords of Friendship, as close as possible, & have little doubt but your sentiments will accord with mine, in this instance, for certainly no nation in the World hath it so much in their power, to assist & foster us in our Naval infancy.¹⁴⁹

Murray could have added that they already had.

¹⁴⁸ Here Talleyrand's observation based upon his time in the U.S., referenced in the last chapter, comes to mind: that since the Americans of the 1790s were essentially English, they would be predisposed to creating a navy in the "English" Royal Navy's image.

¹⁴⁹ Alexander Murray U.S.N., Gibraltar, to Stoddert, 26 September 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 4:230.

CHAPTER IV

OPERATIONS

In 1798 the British had provided vital material aid to the Americans in establishing their new fleet. With their government's blessing, British firms had sold the young republic the copper to plate the bottoms of its warships' and much of the ordnance used to arm them. Indeed, the Royal Navy's perhaps inadvertent influence upon the naval culture of the American sea service was also evident. The stamp of the R.N. was visible in the uniforms the U.S. Navy chiefs chose for their officers, the food that the men ate, the regulations enforced aboard ship, and the aggressive tactical style they intended to employ in battle. And soon this brand new naval force would put to sea to combat the French. Almost from the beginning of its time at sea, the U.S. Navy would recognize that it was not alone in its fight against the French *guerre de course*. When Navy Secretary Stoddert began dispatching his small force to the West Indies to catch the French corsairs as they left their island bases, the Americans would routinely fall in with Royal Navy warships patrolling the same waters.

This chapter is about the informal operational relationship which grew between the two navies during the period of the Quasi-War, as they both fought their separate wars against their common foe. There would be no diplomatic treaty, not even a written understanding between the Admiralty in London and the Navy Department in Philadelphia. But never the less, practical men sharing a common burden found ways to

unofficially cooperate to aid each other. The new American navy secretary discovered that the British island governors in the West Indies were happy to allow his squadrons to base themselves there. British companies in the islands were very pleased to help supply food, and naval stores to the American warships. British jails were only too glad to accept the prisoners of war the Americans boarded there. While there was no treaty or other obligation to do so, the Admiralty in London sanctioned American merchantmen joining the Royal Navy's regular convoys to and from the New World or the West Indies. The Americans followed suit, accepting British trading vessels into their more informal convoys.

There would also be operational cooperation between serving units of the two navies in the Caribbean Theatre. The skippers of the various frigates and sloops of war of the U.S. Navy exchanged signals, intelligence, sailed in concert, and even pursued enemy ships together with His Majesty's warships. But none of this would be at the direction of Philadelphia/Washington or London, nor even the local British station admirals or American commodores. It was entirely a creature of the line officers of both services serving at sea who found ways to cooperate to their mutual benefit. It was they who would forge their own British-American naval "quasi-alliance."

As soon as ships of the new United States Navy became ready for commission, the nation's navy chiefs ordered them to sea. Again, by the end of May 1798, even before the new Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert, had assumed his post, U.S.S. *Ganges*, the ex-East Indiaman, had made her way from Philadelphia down the Delaware to sea. She had begun patrolling the American coastline from Cape Henry to Long Island in search of French armed ships "hovering" off the coast with predatory intent.

Constellation was the next warship American warship deployed. She sailed from Baltimore down the Chesapeake Bay and entered the Atlantic 23 June 1798 to guard the coastline from Cape Henry south to the St. Marys. By 6 July, a third man of war, the converted packet, *Delaware*, 20, under the command of Stephen Decatur, Sr., had also put to sea from Philadelphia, to join *Ganges* on patrol. Within a day, *Delaware* pounced upon the first Frenchman, *La Croyable*, caught lurking off the U.S. coastline.¹ Decatur brought this prize into the Delaware River, heading for the capital, when she passed the new U.S.S. *United States*, 44, dropping down river toward the open Ocean. But before either vessel could reach its intended destination, a pilot boat intercepted each with new orders from the Secretary of the Navy. Both ships were to proceed to sea forthwith, but remain off the Delaware Capes awaiting further orders pending anticipated Congressional legislation. When they finally did receive their orders issued 11 July, the heavy frigate and the sloop of war together were to make for the Caribbean and show the flag in tropical waters.²

On 9 July 1798, President John Adams had signed an act of Congress which significantly altered the very limited rules of engagement under which *Ganges*, *Constellation* and *Delaware* had patrolled. No longer would American armed ships be handcuffed by the requirement that French vessels had to be caught in the act of attacking American shipping within American territorial waters, or lurking with intent to do so

¹ President Adams had issued instructions to U.S.N. skippers 28 May 1798 based upon an Act of Congress enacted 8 May 1798 that they were directed to “seize, take and bring into any Port of the United States . . . any armed Vessel sailing under Authority or Pretence of Authority from the Republic of France, which shall have committed, or which shall be found hovering on the Coasts of the United States, for the purpose of committing Depredations on the Vessels belonging to citizens thereof . . .” U.S. President, “Instructions to commanders of armed vessels, 28 May 1798,” in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:88. The instructions also directed recaptures of American ships already captured by the French. Ibid.

² Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 35-36; Stoddert to Capt. John Barry, U.S.N., 11 July 1798, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:189-91; Stoddert to Capt. Stephen Decatur, Sr., U.S.N., 11 July 1798, in Ibid. 1:192-93.

before they could take action. Now Congress authorized American warships to attack French armed vessels on the high seas whenever and wherever they found them.³ With that authorization it now made sense for Secretary Stoddert to experiment with another strategy rather than simply directing his ships to cruise the American coastline, which in a month had provided very few encounters with the enemy. Knowing he did not have the ships to convoy the huge number of American merchant vessels heading out to trade world-wide, the navy secretary had concluded that it might make sense to send American men of war to the West Indies where many of the French privateers were based and catch them as they sortied out. Stoddert only planned a short, two month expedition to test the waters, so to speak. His instructions to Commodore John Barry, commanding *United States*—one of the genuine naval heroes of the Continental Navy in the Revolutionary War—involved sailing in company with the *Delaware* to Nantucket to rendezvous with another merchantman the navy had converted to a sloop of war, U.S.S. *Herald*, 18, proceed to Boston, and there connect with a revenue cutter seconded to the navy from the treasury department. This squadron, under Barry's command would then make sail for the West Indies.⁴ In the event, *Herald* and the cutter, *Pickering*, were unable to join the squadron and so Commodore Barry decided to set out with just the original two ships.⁵ In his instructions to Barry, Stoddert directed the ships to cruise between Barbados and the Lesser Antilles where the Secretary assumed the bulk of the French corsairs would be

³ *An Act further to Protect the Commerce of the United States, Statutes at Large* 1, Ch. 68, sec. 1, 578-79 (1798). On 10 July 1798, Stoddert issued new rules of engagement to his naval commanders consistent with this new Congressional Act. Department of the Navy, *Instructions of Secretary Stoddert, 10 July 1798, to commanders of United States armed vessels*, by Benjamin Stoddert, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:187.

⁴ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 35-36; Stoddert to Barry, 11 July 1798, in *Quasi-War* 1:189-91.

⁵ The *Herald* and the cutter, *Pickering*, were not ready for sea and Barry concluded that waiting for them would seriously delay the mission. Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 38.

lurking. Barry was to make a pass on the south side of Puerto Rico and then attempt to free an American merchantman taken as a prize by the French and brought to San Juan for adjudication. He was also to drop a diplomatic note from Secretary of State Pickering with the Spanish governor on the island. Hopefully, the voyage would produce prizes and show the French that the new American navy could project power to the very home sailing grounds of their corsairs. The navy secretary anticipated the ships would be back in the United States in late August or early September.⁶

Stoddert would later express his disappointment in the achievements of this first foray into the West Indies. The *United States*, one of the world's mightiest frigates, had brought back just two prizes and failed to call at San Juan or cruise around Porto Rico. Barry had elected to patrol west of the Windward and Leeward Islands instead of windward of them as Stoddert had specified. The Secretary also believed Barry had shown poor judgment in the deployment of his cruising consort, *Delaware*. All of this very much frustrated the Secretary. For the rest of the war, Stoddert would regard Commodore Barry as an under-achieving squadron commander. However, despite Stoddert's disappointment, Barry would continue to hold flag rank due to his standing as the navy's senior captain.⁷ The secretary, unable to withhold squadron command from the fleet's greatest surviving naval hero of the Revolutionary War, would simply have to stomach Barry's weaknesses for the time being. Eventually, he would find assignments for the "old man," such as providing a naval escort to France for the diplomats President

⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁷ Ibid., 41-44.

Adams would send to negotiate an end to the Quasi-War, effectively removing him from squadron command.⁸

Still, this lackluster first mission to the Caribbean did provide some important operational lessons to the young navy. The first was the reminder that the republic's sea service was not the only force patrolling American and Caribbean waters. The Royal Navy was also on duty with much the same mission as the American navy, namely to protect British and friendly commerce from French corsairs and national warships. Quickly the two forces learned that they would need to co-exist and perhaps cooperate against their common foe in the same theatres of operations. The first of these lessons in necessary practical operational cooperation came during Commodore Barry's outward journey southeast toward Bermuda in the mid-Atlantic. This was before the squadron would pick up the west bound trades that would carry it to the West Indies. The lookout on the U.S.S. *United States* spied a large sail in the distance. Barry then ordered sails set to chase the strange ship, which also made no attempt to elude the American vessels. The big American frigate's skipper next utilized a frequently employed *ruse de guerre* in the age of sail: flying false national colors. Barry directed his crew to run up the French Tricolor. The chase also showed a French flag. As the ships grew closer it became obvious that both were large frigates trying to maneuver to gain advantage over the other. *United States* now stood at the ready for battle, her guns manned. The opposing frigate similarly appeared ready. Once the distance closed, Barry then ran up the Stars and Stripes. Suddenly the French ensign also came down on the other man of war, replaced

⁸ Ibid., 221; Stoddert to Barry, 21 October 1799, in *Quasi-War* 4:304; Stoddert to Stephen Higginson & Company, 29 October 1800, in *Quasi-War* 6:514. To Higginson, Stoddert had confessed he had difficulty determining "what to do with" him.

instantly with the ensign of His Majesty's Royal Navy. The two vessels then "spoke" each other. The approaching frigate was H.M.S. *Thetis* commanded by Captain Alexander Cochrane. The two ships from friendly naval services had nearly exchanged deadly broadsides. Captain Cochrane sent a boat for Commodore Barry. Barry, on board *Thetis* explained his mission to his British counterpart, and Cochrane foreseeing similar near exchanges of friendly fire in the "crowded" waters of the West Indies provided the American with a copy of the British private signals used by R.N. men of war in that theatre.⁹

As Barry was outward bound for the Caribbean, it would be some time before word of the near tragedy between H.M.S. *Thetis* and U.S.S. *United States* would reach official circles. But unbeknownst to Barry and Cochrane, who had solved their near disaster by an informal exchange of signals, British and American naval administrators on shore had already anticipated the problem and had been working on a mutual solution through official diplomatic channels. Navy Secretary Stoddert and Secretary of State Pickering, working with the British Minister to Philadelphia, Liston, and Admiral Vandeput, the Royal Navy Commander of the North American Station based at Halifax, had begun exchanging proposed sets of recognition signals for use by their respective fleets during operations upon the high seas. In the end, it would be Admiral Vandeput's signals which the two shore administrations chose to use for their ships at sea.¹⁰ This marked the first specific instance of official operational cooperation between the two navies in the Quasi-War or otherwise. From that time on, each American naval

⁹ Ibid., 38; Lt. John Mallowny, U.S.N., Extract from "Journal of Lieutenant John Mallowny, U.S. Frigate *United States*," 1 August 1798, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:265.

¹⁰ Ibid., 77; Stoddert to Pickering, 20 July 1798, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:227; Pickering to Stoddert, 23 July 1798, in *ibid.* 1:235.

commander would have a copy of those signals aboard before setting out on patrol off the United States or in the Caribbean.¹¹ In theatre, the various American captains also provided them to Royal Navy commanders they encountered who were not yet privy to them.¹² As the war progressed, the signaling intercourse between the two navies became common enough that the various captains sometimes came to know the private identifying signals for the other service's warships in a particular patrolling sector.¹³

The significance of the exchange of signals was considerable. Being able to identify a ship at distance did not just save vessels from friendly fire; it also saved them from wasting immense amounts of time. The job of patrolling for enemy raiders largely involved sailing in the merchant sea lanes until sighting a strange sail and then giving chase. Pursuing a "chase", as the quarry was called in those days, might take hours, even days. It could pull a naval vessel well off station only to find upon closing that the chase

¹¹ Truxtun and Phillips, the next skippers Stoddert sent out to the Caribbean, specifically carried with them Vandeput's R.N./U.S.N. recognition signals agreed upon by both services. Stoddert to Truxtun, 10 August 1798, in *ibid.* 1:288; Stoddert to Capt. Isaac Phillips, U.S.N., 10 August 1798, in *ibid.* 1:289. Capt. Sam Nicholson of U.S.S. *Constitution*, sent out to patrol the American coast did likewise. Stoddert to Capt. Samuel Nicholson, U.S.N., 13 August 1798, in *Ibid.* 1:295-96. And so it would continue. *Ibid.* vol. 1-7 *passim*.

¹² Captain Murray, U.S.N., then of the *Montezuma*, found a ship which made for *Montezuma* and would not answer the British private signals. Upon speaking the ship, Murray found it to be H.M. Sloop *Diligence*. *Diligence* had not possessed the signals. Murray then supplied them to her officers. Murray to Stoddert, 18 March 1799, in *ibid.* 2:483. Truxtun in March 1799, spoke a R.N. frigate, *Padrie*, (*Perdrix*) which also did not yet have the British/American private recognition signals. Truxtun promptly rectified the situation, supplying Captain Foy (Fahie) with the signals. Truxtun, extract from "Truxtun's Journal." (22 March 1799) in *ibid.* 2:502.

¹³ For example, Truxtun exchanged with Captain Matson of H.M. Sloop *Cyane*, private ship identifying signals to be used after use of the general private British or American signals. These would help local opposite numbers name their particular ship without having to heave to speak the other ship. Truxtun to Capt. Richard Mattson, R.N., 19 January 1799, in *ibid.* 2:260-61. On a later occasion, Truxtun's *Constellation* and H.M.S. *Lapwing*, frigate, identified each other by their own unique private signals after using the general British private signals—first recognizing each other as friendly vessels—for that day. Thomas Truxtun, extract from "Thomas Truxtun's Journal, U.S. Frigate *Constellation*," (12 March 1799), in *ibid.* 2:449.

was a friendly warship on a similar hunting mission.¹⁴ Armed with the British/American naval recognition signals navy skippers could break off a chase at a distance, or decide to close and “speak” the ship. As it turned out, speaking the ships of one’s counterparts on station could serve a number of uses. First, it built a sense of shared identity with what came to be seen as a brother service. Captains, who normally dined alone in their cabins in both services, greatly appreciated the fellowship of men inhabiting the same lonely world of command.¹⁵ Hospitality as a basis to build understanding and operational cooperation could not be overrated. After *United States* and *Thetis* had nearly come to blows, the captains had exchanged courtesies with Commodore Barry joining Captain Cochrane aboard his ship, while later that evening, Barry had entertained Cochrane and his officers aboard the American frigate.¹⁶

The second lesson learned from Barry’s first cruise in the West Indies was logistical. Stoddert originally had directed that Barry’s squadron be back in an American port after approximately two months’ cruising time. Of course, the Secretary had given

¹⁴ The experience of Capt. John Barry in the *United States* on his first cruise in Caribbean waters reveals how easily a ship could be pulled out of its intended patrolling grounds. Under orders to cruise to windward (east) of the Lesser Antilles, he had spotted a sail to leeward and given chase along with consort, *Delaware* for some ten hours under full sail. Finally catching the chase, a French privateer, which *United States* took as a prize, Barry now found himself well leeward (west) of his cruising ground. With the wind’s prevailing direction he was quite unable to make a practical beat to windward and resume his patrol. Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 39; Mulloony, extracts from “Journal,” (22, 23 August 1798), in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:327, 331. Even during convoy duty, a warship could be pulled from its merchantmen charges while pursuing a threatening corsair, only to find hours later that the vessel was a friendly man of war. In June 1799, USRC Brig *Pickering* pursued just such a potential menace for over eight hours only to discover that the quarry was H.M. Cutter *Cygnat*, 14. J. Ingraham, extracts from “Log Book of J. Ingraham, U.S.R.C. Brig *Pickering*,” (6, 7 June 1799), in *ibid.* 3:312, 316.

¹⁵ Dudley Pope, *Life in Nelson’s Navy* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1981), 63; Macdonald, 126-27; Lavery, 108-09.

¹⁶ Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 38; Mulloony, extract from “Journal,” in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:265.

the commodore latitude to remain longer should circumstances require it.¹⁷ When Barry returned home on time, in Stoddert's eyes having accomplished so little, the navy secretary was astonished that the Commodore had not determined to remain longer and so achieve more of his mission. But Barry had not believed he really had possessed that option. A significant portion of his provisions were inedible due to spoilage, leaving him little choice but to return. The United States had no bases in the West Indies and had made no provision to obtain comestibles in theatre.¹⁸ The distance to the West Indies from the mid-Atlantic states of the U.S. is deceptively great. In the days before steam or diesel power freed mariners from the oceans' currents and wind patterns, the sea lanes were very well defined. From the northern United States it was several thousand miles and much farther to the Antilles in sailing time than from England. Hence one could not merely pop back to the American coast to re-provision and swiftly re-appear on station. If a skipper could not obtain necessary food supplies in theatre, the only option was the hastiest return possible, ending the mission.

Barry's voyage brought home to Secretary Stoddert the point that he would have to solve this issue of re-supply if he hoped to have his cruisers remain in their patrolling "grounds" for longer periods, a condition precedent to making his strategy of taking the war to the corsairs' backyard practical. Otherwise, too much time would be spent coming and going from the Caribbean.¹⁹ Even the largest of the U.S. Navy's frigates such as *Constitution* or *United States* could just fit six months supplies in their hulls packed with

¹⁷ Stoddert to Barry, 11 July 1798, in *ibid.* 190-91; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 36.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 41; Stoddert to Tench Francis, Purveyor, 22 September 1798, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:438.

¹⁹ Palmer, 84.

men, and the instruments of war.²⁰ *Constellation*, because of her lesser size and narrower profile, could only stow a four months' stock of food and other necessaries.²¹ For the sloops of war and even smaller cutters Stoddert intended to use in the Antilles, addressing the issue would be even more critical; they could pack much less in their holds.²²

So Stoddert found himself again facing an administrative puzzle, but this time connected with two of the three classic issues simultaneously: ships and men. He needed logistical bases for ships to rendezvous, undergo minor repairs and replenish needed naval stores. He also needed a system of either bases or supply ships to keep his men fed and watered. The question was how to do it. The United States owned no real estate outside the sixteen states and the territories between the Mississippi and the Atlantic. It could try to persuade neutral powers in the Caribbean region to allow use of their islands. Sweden and Denmark, possessing colonies at St. Bartholomew's, and St Thomas, respectively, would qualify. But while they would certainly welcome American warships as visitors, as neutral powers they might be loathe to proffer too much succor to combatants, even unofficial ones, especially if the foe was the powerful French Republic. Spain, with extensive holdings in the Greater Antilles, and the Netherlands, with its islands in the Lesser Antilles, were each allied with France against Britain, but both were technically at peace with the United States. Never the less, using Spanish or Dutch ports might prove ticklish, as the French often worked from Spanish island strongholds and Holland was a virtual satellite of the French. Then, of course, there were the British possessions in the Caribbean, which included an extensive list of islands in the Lesser

²⁰ Truxtun to Stoddert, 27 October 1798, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:568; Adamiak, 61.

²¹ *Ibid.*; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 29; Truxtun to Stoddert, 16 August, 1 November 1798, in U.S.N., 1:300-02, 2:3.

²² Adamiak, 61.

Antilles, plus Jamaica. Although relations between the U.S. and Great Britain were cordial, Stoddert initially believed Britain would not welcome American warships into its West Indian ports.²³

In the end, Stoddert would solve this puzzle with the tacit assistance of the British Colonial Governors in Basse Terre, St. Kitts and Martinique. The Navy Secretary made arrangements to store supplies with local island firms recommended to him by his merchant contacts in Philadelphia upon whom he relied for so much of his island intelligence. At Basse Terre he chose the firm of Denniston & McLauchlan, and at Martinique, Frazer Urquhart & Co.²⁴ In addition, he obtained from the State Department authority to use American Consuls in a pinch as navy agents. This was necessary to finesse the tricky situation in Spanish Havana. To allow America to utilize Havana to re-provision her navy ships so as to attack the vessels of Spain's ally might have seemed problematical for any Spanish governor. But the governor also knew that Cuban planters desperately needed American foodstuffs to feed their large slave populations. Accordingly, the U.S. Government had made it easier for His Excellency to turn a blind eye to these extra-diplomatic duties of procuring, and storing food supplies and naval stores by keeping the navy agent role utterly unofficial. Thereby, both governments could maintain, for the benefit of the French, the fiction that Daniel Hawley and his successors at Havana, Joseph Yznardi and John Morton, only ever acted in their capacity as the American Consul, a diplomatic office solely intended to serve American merchant

²³ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 86; Stoddert to Frazer Urquhart & Co., Dominica, 16 January 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 2:251-52; Stoddert to Denniston & McLauchlan, St. Kitts, 17 January 1799, in *ibid.* 2:252; Stoddert to Barry, 1 February 1799, in *ibid.* 2:299.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 86; Stoddert to Frazer Urquhart & Co., Dominica, 16 January 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 2:251-52; Stoddert to Denniston & McLauchlan, St. Kitts, 17 January 1799, in *ibid.* 2:252.

interests. Eventually the navy and state departments would translate this system to the colonies of other French allies, such as the Dutch, at Curaçao.²⁵

At Basse Terre, St. Kitts, and Prince Rupert's Bay, Martinique, the Americans would happily discover such subterfuge was unnecessary. As it turned out, Stoddert's apprehension that the British would try to block the use of their islands for the supply of friendly warships proved utterly misplaced. The British were happy to have the Americans based in their islands, spending money with local merchants, and if nothing else, providing extra security for their island bases and the trading vessels coming and going from them.²⁶ This was a time when there was a reasonable fear that the French might attempt some further adventurism in the islands as they had four years earlier when Victor Hugues had evaded the British blockade of the French coast and, with a small squadron of warships carrying troops, recaptured Guadeloupe from the British.²⁷ Therefore the U.S. Navy was able to formally employ naval agents in these ports and forswear the need for the Consuls to perform naval supply tasks. At Basse Terre it was Commodore Truxtun himself who informally appointed a local acquaintance, Clarkson, as resident navy agent. Secretary Stoddert acquiesced in this appointment even though it had been made outside proper channels.²⁸ Later, when the war progressed and the United States, Great Britain and the black rebel general Toussaint L'Ouverture—he then held

²⁵ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 86.

²⁶ Truxtun was graciously received at Basse Terre, St. Kitts by Governor Thomson himself, and offered the Governor's assistance in aid of his mission based there. *Ibid.*, 95; Truxtun, extract from "Journal," in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 2:257.

²⁷ Such scares were very real. In 1800, French privateers from Guadeloupe had tried to take Curacao, only to be driven off by a combined U.S.N./R.N. force. The Governor of Martinique would write to Commodore Barry hoping for potential assistance in the spring of 1801 against an anticipated Guadeloupe based assault upon his island. In the event, the war was over for the Americans so Barry could not provide military assistance, but the attack never came.

²⁸ Truxtun to Stoddert, 17 January 1799, in *ibid.* 2:258-59; Stoddert to David M. Clarkson, St. Kitts, 16 April 1799, in *ibid.* 3:57; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 95.

most of the former French colony of St. Domingue—formed an agreement opening to British and American commerce two of the island’s ports controlled by Toussaint, the U.S. Navy began using one of these, Cap Francois, as the base for its Windward Passage station, along with the additional excellent watering harbor of St. Nicholas Mole. In fact this station came to be known as the Cap Francois or St. Domingue Station and its ships would later be tasked to protect merchants going to and from the two main trading ports controlled by Toussaint, namely Cap Francois and Port Republicain (Port au Prince) and interdicting those attempting to trade with Toussaint’s rival general, Andre Rigaud, who still professed allegiance to the Directory in Paris. At le Cap, Toussaint encouraged an official U.S. Navy presence and so Secretary Stoddert, as early as March 1799, had appointed his friend, Nathan Levy, to assume the role of navy agent, freeing new Consul General Dr. Edward Stevens from those tasks.²⁹

During the winter of 1798-99, while he had pondered solutions to these supply conundrums, the Navy Secretary had decided to commit nearly the entire American Navy to the Caribbean region. Stoddert believed that he now had the intelligence he needed to effectively deploy his ships into several squadrons.³⁰ The smallest of these he sent to cover the Havana trade consisting of the cutters *General Greene* 10 and *Governor Jay* 14, and the sloop of war, *Delaware* 20, all under the flag command of Stephen Decatur, Sr. in the latter vessel.³¹ Adjacent to this command, he placed U.S.S. *Ganges* 24, the ex-Indiaman, now under the command of Captain Thomas Tingey, to patrol the heavily used Windward Passage between Cuba and Hispaniola. Stoddert had intended two other

²⁹ Ibid., 120; Truxtun to Nathan Levy, Cape Francois, 30 March 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 2:533; Stoddert to Capt. Thomas Tingey, U.S.N., 16 March 1799, in *ibid.* 2:479-80.

³⁰ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 57-60, 79.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

vessels to accompany *Ganges* but other difficulties interfered with their actually arriving on station. When they finally did get there in the spring, Tingey had returned to the United States.³²

To the Lesser Antilles, the Secretary sent the strongest squadrons. He decided to divide this command in two with a northern and southern division. The northern command or Leeward Islands and Porto Rico command, based at the British island of St. Christopher's—commonly known as St. Kitts—would be under Commodore Truxtun in *Constellation* 36, and also employ the sloops of war *Richmond* 18, and *Baltimore* 20, and the cutter *Virginia* 14.³³ To the south in the Windward Islands, based at Martinique, a formerly French colony now held by the British, would be the most powerful squadron formed around the two 44s, *United States* and *Constitution* with Commodore Barry flying his flag in the former. Under Barry's flag command besides the other big frigate would be the sloops of war *George Washington*, 24, a large but dull sailing converted merchantman, *Portsmouth* 24, *Merrimack* 24, and *Herald* 18, also a very slow ship, and the cutters *Pickering* 14, *Scammell* 14, *Eagle* 14, and *Diligence* 12. Their patrolling area would include everything from St. Kitts south to the Spanish Main. Overall command for the entire navy based in the West Indies would devolve upon the most senior officer, Commodore Barry.³⁴

One final grouping of ships, acting as a sort of free agent, but coming under Truxtun's St. Kitts command, had been intended to include the three men of war under

³² *Ibid.*, 81

³³ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

Commodore Alexander Murray.³⁵ Flying his flag in the converted merchantman, *Montezuma* 20, Murray had set out at the end of October 1798 in command of the sloop of war, *Norfolk* 18, and the schooner, *Retaliation* 14.³⁶ However, during November, he had lost *Retaliation* in action to two large, French frigates, *l'Insurgente*, 36, and *le Volontaire* 40.³⁷ Now a lone wolf, Murray was free to cruise the Lesser Antilles wherever he thought provided the best hunting.³⁸ This was the station grouping for much of the winter 1798-99 cruising season. In many respects it would remain the organizational structure for squadrons and their bases throughout the rest of the Quasi-War.

During the course of the war, necessity dictated increased American use of British facilities. As the U.S. Navy continued to capture French privateers and some French Navy ships, it took into custody scores of prisoners of war, which implied the duty to care for them until they could be exchanged. Vessels of war with space and provisions aboard sufficient only for their own crews, could not act as floating jails. One expedient station commanders sought was to board these prisoners in British jails on the base islands. Again, the British were only too happy to so employ their local lock ups; it brought in ready cash.³⁹ At one point, the use of British jails for these prisoners had become so great, that Stoddert had seriously remonstrated against the practice to his favorite captain, Truxtun, announcing that four months of boarding prisoners at St. Kitts alone—where food was very dear—had overrun by several times Congress's entire budget dedicated to

³⁵ Ibid., 83.

³⁶ Ibid., 67. *Retaliation*, had been the French privateer, *La Croyable*, captured by Decatur's *Delaware* in the opening weeks of the war and taken into the U.S. Navy.

³⁷ Ibid., 69-71. Ironically, *l'Insurgente* would later fall victim to Truxtun and the *Constellation*, and join the U.S. Navy.

³⁸ Ibid., 67.

³⁹ Truxtun to Robert Thomson, Commander in Chief, H.B.M. Islands, 12 February 1799, in *ibid.* 2:245; Truxtun, extract from "Journal," in *ibid.* 2:351; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 102-03. Truxtun, himself had brought in 380 prisoners just from the capture of *l'Insurgente*. Ibid.

prisoner care for that same period.⁴⁰ Since President Adams himself objected to prisoners being returned to Guadeloupe without formal exchange because he believed it just put privateer tars back into employment raiding British and American shipping,⁴¹ the administration was in a tough spot. Clearly, it did not want the navy to continue using jails on St Kitts, Martinique or Antigua, unless there was *no* alternative. In the event, Secretary Stoddert's solution to the difficulty was simple; he directed that *all* navy ships travelling back to the United States were now obliged to transport home with them any un-exchanged prisoners.⁴² American jails, in a land of bountiful food supplies were much cheaper. Never the less, in a pinch, the theatre availability of British jails had proved extremely valuable to the young republic's sea service.

There were also times when U.S. Navy skippers sought to use the Royal Navy's dockyard facilities in the Antilles. As mentioned earlier, the navy's men of war routinely carried small supplies of lumber, naval stores, spars and cordage, for the ship's carpenter, sailing master, and crew to perform repairs of rigging, planking, and any number of minor wear and tear defects to a vessel caused by enemy action or by Mother Nature. However, when a warship had suffered severe damage, such as a dismasting, or a holing below the water line, the ship required a dockyard. Again, the United States had no such facilities on station, but the British did at English Harbour, Antigua, and Port Royal, Jamaica. While not true dockyards in the sense that none possessed graving docks or floating docks to remove a ship from the water, Antigua had a careening pier allowing

⁴⁰ Apparently, the St. Kitts lockup on Truxtun's station was the worst abused. Stoddert to Truxtun, 30 July, 4 October 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 6:199, 431; Stoddert to Thomas T. Gantt, appointed Navy Agent at St. Kitts, 4 October 1800, in *ibid.* 6:432.

⁴¹ John Adams to Stoddert, 5 August 1799, in *ibid.* 4:29.

⁴² Stoddert to Truxtun, 30 July, 4 October 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 6:199, 431; Stoddert to Thomas T. Gantt, 4 October 1800, in *ibid.* 6:432.

bottom repairs, and both had naval stores and artificers to repair or replace masts, spars and rigging.⁴³ Captain Alexander Murray, then commanding U.S.S. *Insurgente*, sought to use the dockyard at English Harbour to replace a rotten, unsound mast. He wrote to the Royal Navy's new Leeward Island Station commander, Admiral Lord Hugh Seymour, asking permission to use His Majesty's dockyard at Antigua. The text of the letter illustrates the reverence with which American naval officers held Royal Navy flag officers.⁴⁴ While waiting for the Admiral's response—he was elsewhere on duty—Murray hobnobbed with his R.N. counterparts, again cementing the personal relationships that made informal naval co-operation flourish. Once the Admiral had approved aiding the stricken Yankee frigate, the Americans were able to procure and install a mast from the stores available there. Glowing with praise for the dockyard and His Majesty's officers present at English Harbour, Murray departed in *Insurgente*.⁴⁵ Within the first twelve hours at sea, the American Captain suffered from a severe case of buyer's remorse with respect to his brand new mast. The mast had already failed. Inspection revealed that it had massive structural defects including a number of large knotholes that someone had puttied over. The U.S. Navy had paid full price for a mast in the islands and been given a "lemon" by English dockyard personnel.⁴⁶ The whole exchange revealed that perhaps there were limits to any kind of naval co-operation between informal allies fighting the same foe. Naval stores, especially masts and spars,

⁴³ Morriss, 4; Lavery, 236, 239.

⁴⁴ Murray to Vice Admiral Lord Hugh Seymour, 2 January 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 5:28.

⁴⁵ Murray to Stoddert, 12, 17 January 1800, in *ibid.* 5:68, 90; Murray to David M. Clarkson, Navy Agent, St. Kitts, 17, 20 January 1800, in *ibid.* 5:89-90.

⁴⁶ Murray to Chester Fitch, Director British Arsenal at Antigua, 24 January 1800, in *ibid.* 5:125. Murray believed the dockyard's chief artificers had to have known about the deception. *Ibid.*

were very dear in the islands, having been imported.⁴⁷ They were urgently needed to service the eighty to ninety Royal Navy warships stationed there. While a sea service Admiral sympathetic to the Americans like Lord Hugh Seymour might accede to expending precious mast timber upon the Yankee navy, dockyard personnel in the British West Indies might not agree with him. They answered to the Navy Board in London, the body charged with the care of His Majesty's warships. Whether these personnel were registering resentment at being asked to provide the Yanks with a mast, or merely making them the target of a practical joke, is unclear. But Captain Murray received the message loud and clear: American warships would not be able to count on the British Caribbean dockyards for anything more than moral support.

Truxtun himself would soon learn the same lesson when after his engagement with *La Vengeance* 50, he had limped into Port Royal similarly seeking spare masts or spars to help repair the severe damage. *Constellation's* mast situation had been so bad after the action that Truxtun had not dared to beat back to Antigua for repairs, instead sailing to windward to Jamaica.⁴⁸ When he finally made Port Royal, accompanied, ironically by the injured *Insurgente* following its Antigua experience, Truxtun would learn that apparently there were no masts to be had for *his* vessel. The dockyard did not even pretend to have the necessary spars, etc. to furnish an American frigate, even one

⁴⁷ Since the inception of the island dockyards, naval stores had been imported from England, or British North America in the case of mast timber. Rodger, *Command*, 302-04.

⁴⁸ Truxtun, extract from "Journal," 2 February 1800, in *ibid.* 5:160-61; Truxtun to Stoddert, 3 February 1800, in *ibid.* 5:159.

having performed such famous service against the enemy's frigates.⁴⁹ At any rate, *Constellation* eventually made the American coastline with an utter jury rig.⁵⁰

Another, and arguably far more important, sign of this mutual Anglo-American naval assistance during the years of the Quasi-War was the tacit agreement for their respective navies to convoy each other's merchant vessels. On the British side this had begun informally before the U.S. Navy had put even one ship in blue water. As previously described, the Royal Navy regularly operated convoys from the major English ports or anchorages per an organized sailing schedule. In early 1798 Rufus King had asked and been given permission for American merchantmen in England to join the spring convoy to America. This was especially critical going to or leaving England because the English Channel was a prime hunting ground for French corsairs operating from St. Malo, or Dunkirk, among other ports. Ships were not generally safe until well out at sea beyond the Western Approaches—sometimes even as far south as the latitude of Gibraltar—on an outbound leg and acquired the danger again upon entering them on an inbound leg.⁵¹ Hence, the British Admiralty allowed American ships to gather at the designated assembly points and provided them with the regular written convoy instructions.⁵² The Yankee merchant captains then had to suppress their natural independence and desire to be the first into home port—this usually meant the best prices

⁴⁹ Extract from letter, Truxtun to Stoddert, 12 February 1800, in *ibid.* 5:209-10; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 190.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Crowhurst, *French War on Trade*, 66; *idem*, *The Defence of British Trade, 1689-1815* (Folkestone, England: Dawson, 1977), 76-77.

⁵² Lavery, 307-08.

for goods—and instead conform to naval convoy discipline, travelling in formation no faster than the flotilla’s slowest vessel.⁵³

On the North American Station, even before receiving any instruction from the Admiralty or any other Whitehall office, Admiral Vandeput had put into effect orders directing R.N. warships on convoy duty to specifically accept American merchantman to England, and then the West Indies.⁵⁴ And the American merchant marine did utilize this vital trans-Atlantic and trans-Caribbean service. American merchantmen use of British convoys sailing from England to the New World also appears to have been common. The correspondence of Rufus King contains references to various American trading ships sailing in various R.N. organized convoys. The letters of Elias VanderHorst, the American Consul resident in Bristol, to King suggest that only armed, fast ships, “flyers,” risked the journey un-escorted.⁵⁵ After 1798, convoys were mandatory for British merchantmen trading abroad unless specifically exempted as were the speedy flyers and packets. Consequently, marine insurers typically issued their policies with the specific understanding that the ship was to travel in a formal convoy. Failure to do so voided the coverage. The underwriters based out of New Lloyd’s Coffee House in London, who insured the bulk of the voyages from the American ports to Britain, or vice versa, most often sold their insurance with this proviso.⁵⁶

Of course, the American navy was in no position to provide a regularly scheduled convoy service, be it to England, the Mediterranean, the Baltic, or the West or East

⁵³ Ibid., 307-10; Perkins, *First Rapprochement*, 97.

⁵⁴ Ibid.; Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 77.

⁵⁵ Elias VanderHorst, U.S. Consul, Bristol to King, (presumably), 7 August 1798, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:277; VanderHorst to King, 20 August 1798, 1 July 1799, in *ibid.* 1:323, 3:450.

⁵⁶ Crowhurst, *Defense of British Trade*, 90-103. Liverpool insurers also had a fair amount of this trade. *Ibid.*

Indies. At peak, the Americans only had roughly thirty men of war in the fleet.⁵⁷ They just did not have the ships to guard America's world-wide commerce. Secretary Stoddert had early in the war expressed to the president his firm conviction that the best way to protect that wide roving American merchant shipping was to hunt the privateers in their home waters before they could lose themselves in the sea lanes and wreak havoc.⁵⁸ Hence, Stoddert's priority was to have American warships on station in the Caribbean preying upon the predators. As mentioned previously, the navy secretary preferred his men of war to cruise alone, if possible, in order to cast as fine a net as was possible to snare French privateers. But he did acknowledge the perspective of the powerful merchant lobby in Congress, which believed the convoy of their own vessels should take precedence. Therefore, he encouraged U.S. Navy commanders to provide escorts for American merchantman whenever consistent with their general cruising duties.⁵⁹

And they did so conscientiously. In general, whenever an American Navy vessel was homeward bound, station commanders or the individual captains, looked to shepherd groups of merchantmen back to the American coastline. In the case of the St. Kitts-based squadron, during his tenure, Commodore Truxtun directed his captains to call at the various prominent ports of the Leeward Isles, and sometimes even farther afield, to provide notice that a convoy would be available from a particular assembly point such as

⁵⁷ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 240-41.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 56; Stoddert to Adams, 30 July, 25 August 1798 in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 1:256, 336.

⁵⁹ Even as early as August 1798, he had sent Truxtun commanding *Constellation* and *Baltimore*, to Havana to escort home to the U.S. a convoy of some 100 merchantmen stranded there due to corsairs lurking in the vicinity just waiting for the Americans to leave. President Adams himself had received the merchants' petition for a naval escort to convoy them back. Adams to Stoddert, 18 August 1798 in *ibid.* 1:319; Stoddert to Adams, 25 August 1798, in *ibid.* 1:336. Stoddert also did not scold Truxtun for also guiding a merchant flotilla on the journey from Norfolk to Cuba; the trading vessels had appeared *sua sponte* at Norfolk once word of his destination had gotten out, giving Truxtun really no way to refuse them. Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 57-59.

Basse Terre Roads, or Prince Rupert's Bay. Trading vessels would often accompany the navy ship bringing news of the impending convoy back to its proposed, general point of departure. The navy warship would gather a group of ships heading through one of the island passages and escort them until reaching some latitude deemed safe for the flotilla to continue on to the American coast or wherever else bound. The navy ship would then return to its squadron's rendezvous to await the commodore's further orders.⁶⁰

It was in no way unusual to find several English commercial bottoms among a group of Yankee traders with a U.S. Navy escort heading between or out of the islands.⁶¹ On one of these American convoy gathering excursions Captain Truxtun recorded in his journal instances of encountering his British counterparts assembling their annual spring convoy to England, with some 300 ships, minded not by just one or two small men of war, but by two ships of the line, H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* 98, and H.M.S. *Vengeance* 74, plus a bevy of frigates. The pennant of Vice-Admiral Harvey, commander of the Leeward Islands Station, flew from *Prince of Wales's* mast head, indicating the Admiral himself was escorting this immensely valuable agglomeration of merchant ships.⁶² Not since the loss of the Smyrna Convoy in the Nine Years War had the Royal Navy allowed such a

⁶⁰ Truxtun to Captain Samuel Barron, U.S.N., 20 January 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 2:266; Truxtun to American Masters of Vessels at Antigua, 20 January 1799, in *ibid.* 2:266-67; Truxtun to Captain Thomas Williams, U.S.N., 20 January 1799, in *ibid.* 2:267; Truxtun to Murray, 20 January 1799, in *ibid.*; Truxtun to Barry, 21 January 1799, in *ibid.* 2:269-70.

⁶¹ Truxtun to Captain Thomas Williams, U.S.N., 5 February 1799, in *ibid.* 2:311-12; John MULLOWNY, extract from "Journal of Lieutenant John MULLOWNY, U.S.N., 12 February 1799, in *ibid.* 2:347; James PITY, extracts from "Journal of James PITY, U.S.S. *Constitution*," 13, 27 April 1799, in *ibid.* 3:44, 103; J. INGRAHAM, extracts from "Log Book of J. INGRAHAM, U.S.S.R.C. Brig *Pickering*," 18 April, 18, 22, 23, 28 & 30 May, 1 June 1799, in *ibid.* 3:65, 209-10, 233, 243-44, 271, 284, 292; Moses BROWN, extracts from "Journal of U.S.S. *Merrimack*, 22 & 24 July, 19 August 1799, in *ibid.* 3:527-28, 538, 4:100; Captain John RODGERS, U.S.N., to Stoddert, 20 September 1800, in *ibid.* 6:366. Sometimes an American warship's captain directed American merchantmen to take an available R.N. convoy instead to free the U.S.N. vessel to patrol. Captain Thomas TINGEY, U.S.N., to Stoddert, 29 June 1799, in *ibid.* 3:425-26.

⁶² Truxtun, extracts from "Journal," 30 April and 2 May 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 3:113-14, 122.

huge, rich *flota* to continue unguarded to its destination.⁶³ And among those 300 traders bound to England could be found the ubiquitous Yankee bottoms.⁶⁴ Each nation knew the critical import of its seaborne commerce to itself and its essential trading partners. Hence, although there was no formal treaty of alliance between England and America, there was the recognition that some kind of naval cooperation between them would be necessary to counter the French *guerre de course*. Each power extending access to its convoys to the other was certain evidence of this.

Then there was the general cruising each navy undertook to patrol for the French seagoing marauders. The Royal Navy and U.S. Navy each organized their *own* ongoing high seas interdiction missions. As Professor Palmer notes in *Stoddert's War*, despite the nearly identical object of their efforts there would never be any *official* joint operations or strategic planning, with perhaps one exception. The two naval administrations, the Navy Department in Philadelphia—later Washington—and the Admiralty in London, never had a formal agreement to share intelligence or deploy assets in concert with each other.⁶⁵ But informally it did happen in theatre, as often occurs when practical military men share a common goal. And the individual captains of the respective navies were practical men, who valued economy of effort. Use of the system of private signals became commonplace between the two services from their introduction in 1798 through to the

⁶³ Rodger, *Command*, 153-54.

⁶⁴ In this case, the American convoy also brought to the staging point at St. Kitts from other islands had been abandoned by its sole escort, U.S.S. *Portsmouth*, to travel with the hugely powerful British convoy clear of the danger zone in the Antilles. Truxtun, however, displeased with his captain's conduct in leaving the convoy to British protection, dispatched another American warship, *Virginia*, to travel with them, perhaps just to protect American pride. Truxtun, extracts from "Journal," 30 April and 2 May 1799, in *ibid.* 3:113-14, 122.

⁶⁵ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 77-78.

American cessation of hostilities with the French in early February 1801.⁶⁶ With this came, the common practice of speaking each other's ships and sharing the local intelligence between brother officers serving in the same sector. For example, when Commodore Truxtun had first arrived to effectively establish the St. Kitts station in the winter of 1799, he quickly made contact with a Royal Navy frigate which *Constellation* had been set to chase until private British signals identified her as friendly. She was H.M.S. *Concorde*, Captain Barton, commanding. Truxtun had signaled his desire to speak the frigate and the British ship then had sent a lieutenant in a boat with Captain Barton's compliments to ask the American commodore his wishes. Truxtun had explained to the British officer that he was new on station, and that he desired to know the sector's news, namely how the enemy was operating in that area. His Royal Navy counterpart was happy to relate through the lieutenant what he knew about local French warship strength. After exchanging each other's respective night signals, the two ships went their separate ways.⁶⁷ This kind of encounter would occur throughout the war.⁶⁸

There would also be numerous accounts during the Quasi-War of U.S. Navy and Royal Navy men of war sailing in concert, or even conducting joint chases of suspected

⁶⁶ American cessation of hostilities against Gallic ships was an informal enterprise. Individual American navy commanders learned of the Treaty of Mortefontaine from the French, rather than from Washington. Murray, now in *Constellation*, learned of it at Guadeloupe. He sailed to St Kitts, and then throughout the Caribbean, spreading the message. He also disseminated French orders received from the governor of Guadeloupe revoking French privateer charters against American ships. Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 226-27.

⁶⁷ Truxtun, extract from "Journal," 15 January 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 2:240.

⁶⁸ Murray to Stoddert, 23 November 1798, 1 January, 18 March, 5 October 1799, 3 February 1801, in *ibid.* 2:40, 235, 482-83, 4:256-57, 7:113; Truxtun to Captain Richard Matson, R.N., H.M.S. *Cyane*, 19 January 1799, in *ibid.* 260-61 (Truxtun tenders of aid); Tingey to Stoddert, 27 January 1799, in *ibid.* 2:283-84; Captain Silas Talbot, U.S.N., extracts from "Journal of U.S. Frigate *Constitution*," 1 October 1799, 29 January 1800, in *ibid.* 4:245, 5:150; Captain Edward Preble, U.S.N., U.S.S. *Essex*, to Stoddert, 13 March 1800, in *ibid.* 5:299. These are only entries where explicit mention is made of the exchange of information. It is to be expected that officers of the respective navies provided useful local intelligence virtually every time they spoke each other's ships and certainly when one took the trouble to send a boat to the other.

French armed vessels.⁶⁹ Of course none of these joint cruises were directed from the British Admiralty, or the U.S. Navy Department. Neither did the British station Admirals or station commanding American commodores formally direct such action. It was just the natural outgrowth of commanders frequently speaking each other's ships and exchanging intelligence as described above. The encounters between Captain Nicholson's *Constitution* and the Royal Navy frigate, *Santa Margareta* during early March 1799 are illustrative. On 2 March, at 6:30 P.M. *Constitution's* lookout had spied a "strange sail" and had given chase. This other vessel had responded by "standing towards" the American. Nicholson had ordered his ship cleared for action. There had been no exchange of signals. Fortunately, the two frigates had chanced to speak each other before opening fire.⁷⁰ The American warship sent a boat across to the British frigate requesting the "night Private Signals" to avoid further instances of friendly fire. The two men of war had remained in proximity through the night such that *Santa Margareta's* captain was able to send a boat to "pay his respects to Captain Nicholson." When the two frigates finally left each other, they had been sailing in concert for some sixteen hours. The

⁶⁹ Extract from Captain George Little, U.S.N., to the editor of *New Hampshire Gazette*, 16 September 1799, in *ibid.* 4:191-92; William Smith, U.S. Consul, Lisbon, to Pickering, 22 September 1799, in *ibid.* 4:216; Murray to Stoddert, 26 September 1799, in *ibid.* 4:229-30; Captain Moses Tryon, U.S.N., commanding U.S.S. *Connecticut*, 10 January 1800, in *ibid.* 4:577; Murray to Stoddert, 3 January 1800, in *ibid.* 5:32; Commander Joseph Baker, R.N., extract from "Log of H.M.S. *Calypso*," 27 March 1800, in *ibid.* 5:354; Preble, extract from "Journal," 28 March 1800, in *ibid.* 5:356; Preble to Stoddert, 10 May 1800, in *ibid.* 5:498; Rufus Low, U.S.N., Sailing Master, U.S.S. *Essex*, extracts from "Journal of sailing Master Rufus Low," 10 & 11 May 1800, in *ibid.* 499, 506; Lieutenant Thomas Wilkey, U.S.N., U.S.S. *Philadelphia*, extract from "Log Book of Lt. Thomas Wilkey," 14 June, 3 & 4 July, 27 December 1800, in *ibid.* 6:49, 112, 113, 7:50; extracts from "Journal of U.S. Brig *Augusta*, Lieutenant Archibald McElroy, U.S.N., commanding," 31 August, 1 September 1800, in *ibid.* 6:308, 311; William D. Robinson to Stoddert, 19 December 1800, in *ibid.* 6:337-40 (referring to 10 September 1800 Curaçao incident involving joint action by U.S.S. *Merrimack*, U.S.S. *Patapsco*, and H.M.S. *Nereide*); extracts from "Log Book of U.S.S. *President*, Truxtun, U.S.N., commanding," 7 October, 24 December 1800, in *ibid.* 6:443, 7:46.

⁷⁰ Pity, extracts from "Journal," 2 & 3 March 1799, in *ibid.* 2:419. If there were any doubt as to the nationality of a strange ship and given the opportunity to do so, commanders would usually hail a ship before opening fire.

journal kept by James Pity of the *Constitution* indicates that *Santa Margareta* had spent those sixteen hours trying every way possible to “out sail us, being sensible of Inability tak’d (sic) to the Northward and Shortened Sail.”⁷¹ One week later, *Constitution* similarly gave chase to a distant sail, but upon answering the vessel’s private signal discovered she was none other than the *Santa Margareta*.⁷² The two frigates would then sail together until at least the next day. Mr. Pity’s journal and that of the American sloop of war *Merrimack*, reveals that the two frigates were still sailing in company when *Merrimack* signaled and then spoke them early the next afternoon.⁷³

In May 1800, *Constitution*, by then under the command of Captain Silas Talbot, similarly would keep encountering the frigate H.M.S. *Alarm* while on patrol on the St. Domingue station. The first of these contacts had nearly foiled Talbot’s plan to cut out the French privateer, *Sandwich*, then taking on cargo in the harbor of Puerto Plata, east of Cap-Français. Around midnight on 11 May, *Alarm* had intercepted and fired upon *Constitution*’s tender, *Sally*, on her way to enter the Spanish anchorage where *Sandwich* remained moored. Sending a boat to the *Sally*, the British lieutenant boarding her was chagrined to find that she was not the expected French prize, but a “Trojan Horse” loaded with American naval tars, officers and marines hidden below deck waiting to board and subdue the unsuspecting corsair in Puerto Plata. First Lieutenant Hull, commanding the raid, had left the Royal Navy lieutenant even more crestfallen to learn that the Americans were after the same prize, the *Sandwich*, sought by Captain Rolles of the *Alarm*. But Rolles’s officer had the good grace to wish the Americans good luck and not further

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Pity, extract from “Journal,” 10 March 1799, in *ibid.* 2:442.

⁷³ Pity, extract from “Journal,” 11 March 1799, in *ibid.* 2:446; extract from “Journal of the U.S. Ship *Merrimack*, Captain Moses Brown, U.S.N., commanding,” 11 March 1799, in *ibid.*

impede their mission, which should it succeed would certainly not have enriched Alarm's ship's company, but never the less would have furthered the common cause of defeating the French.⁷⁴ *Constitution* herself encountered *Alarm* during the night of 11 May, and again at daybreak 12 May.⁷⁵ On 23 May, *Alarm* appeared again, this time chasing *Constitution's* tender, *Amphitheatre*. The big American warship then identified the British frigate and came up to sail in company with her and *Amphitheatre*.⁷⁶ Three days later, with *Constitution*, now sailing alone—Captain Talbot had ordered the tender to work separately again for a while—her lookouts had spotted inshore a ship they supposed, but never confirmed, as *Alarm*.⁷⁷ The British ship's rig and her patrolling habits had become that familiar to the *Constitutions*. Her presence had become a regular feature on station, an informal cruising partner just as *Santa Margareta* had been the previous year.

Even though there was no formal integrated command between their respective naval hierarchies, the two forces deployed in a manner which complemented the other's strategic efforts. In early 1798 the Royal Navy had concentrated its ships in the Leeward Islands Station based at English Harbor, Antigua under Admiral Harvey. At that time Harvey had under his command some fifty-nine to seventy-one warships.⁷⁸ As the year progressed the Royal Navy began to shift its strength west to the Jamaica Station, under

⁷⁴ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 175-79; extract from Talbot to Stoddert, 12 May 1800 in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 5:503-04; "Account of the Expedition of U.S. Frigate *Constitution*, in Harbour of Porto Plata," in *ibid.* 5:504-05; extract from "Journal of *Constitution*," 12 May 1800, in *ibid.* 5:09.

⁷⁵ Isaac Hull, "Journal of Lt. Isaac Hull, U.S.N., of U.S. Frigate *Constitution*, 12 May 1800, in *ibid.* 5:508-09.

⁷⁶ Isaac Hull, extract from "Journal of Lt. Isaac Hull, U.S.N., of U.S. Frigate *Constitution*, 23 May 1800, in *ibid.* 5:553-54.

⁷⁷ Hull, extract from "Journal," 26 May 1800, in *ibid.* 5:566.

⁷⁸ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 240.

Admiral Hyde Parker at Port Royal.⁷⁹ This was largely due to the deteriorating situation on St. Domingue, where both the rebels and mosquito borne sickness had decimated the British Army. There, British acting general, Maitland, negotiating with General Toussaint L'Ouverture, had finally concluded a strategic withdrawal from the colony. This British evacuation from St. Domingue eventually included even abandoning the Royal Navy's highly prized deep water harbor at Mole St. Nicholas, which commanded the Windward Passage.⁸⁰ The British had greatly feared that the slaves revolting on St. Domingue might export similar unrest to Jamaica. They suspected that Toussaint planned on invading Britain's richest colony in the Sugar Islands where Jamaica's Governor, Lord Balcarres, recently had had his hands full dealing with the rebellious Maroons, escaped former slaves, in the upland interior of the island. But St. Domingue terrified a number of societies in the Americas, chief among them the planters of America's southern coast who similarly recoiled at the prospect of the St. Domingue uprising infecting their own slave population.⁸¹

So, while the British fell back upon Jamaica, so to speak, the United States Navy began to establish a presence in the Lesser Antilles which, as it grew, in many ways helped to offset the British withdrawal. America's squadrons had the practical effect of reinforcing Royal Navy units remaining on the eastern station. By early 1799, the Americans had sixteen warships patrolling against the Guadeloupe based raiders and also conducting limited convoys protecting both British and American merchant shipping

⁷⁹ Ibid., 78, 240.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 78, 151-54.

⁸¹ Ibid., 155; Elkins and McKittrick, 654-55, 657-58; Charles Callan Tansill, *The United States and Santo Domingo, 1798-1873: A Chapter in Caribbean Diplomacy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), 43; A. P. Kup, "Alexander Lindsey, 6th Earl of Balcarres, Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica 1794-1801," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 57 (1974-75): 327-65.

from French depredations.⁸² Both Admiral Harvey and his successor, Admiral Lord Hugh Seymour, welcomed the American presence in their sector.⁸³ In the early days of American involvement Harvey had been eager to know the American terms of engagement with the mutual French enemy and had been gratified to learn that American men of war would not just aid in catching the raiders, or convoying merchantmen sailing under either flag, but also in the recapture of British, as well as American bottoms taken as prizes by the French.⁸⁴ Though barred from getting directly involved in Britain's war with the Gallic Republic, and allowed to only attack armed French vessels, the U.S. Navy's policy on recaptures, largely formed by Commodore Truxtun himself, took the bellicose view that any vessel flying the French Tricolor—this would even include an English merchant ship just taken as a French prize moments earlier—having so much as “jack knives on board” would qualify as a French armed ship subject to seizure on the high seas.⁸⁵ Very adroitly the U.S. Navy had side-stepped very limiting terms of engagement by taking a very broad interpretation of the language used.

This same reading of the Congressional Act granting authority to attack any armed French ship gave American naval commanders the latitude to repel any French corsair attacking a British ship in an American-led convoy. The raider would present a clear danger to every ship in the convoy, whether it flew the Stars and Stripes or the Union flag. After all, any convoyed English merchantman upon capture would instantly become a French armed vessel posing an immediate threat to the remaining flotilla

⁸² Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 241.

⁸³ Extracts from Murray to Stoddert, 1 January 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 2:235; Murray to Stoddert, 12 January 1800, in *ibid.* 5:68.

⁸⁴ Truxtun to John Gay, U.S. Agent, Martinica (Martinique), 15 February 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 2:357-58.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*; Truxtun to Captain Thomas Williams, U.S.N., 5 February 1799, in *ibid.* 2:312.

members. Hence, an informal doctrine of mutual aid developed between British and American forces in the Caribbean rendering them “quasi allies.” It is instructive to note that even at the end of American hostilities against the French, British Lesser Antilles Commander-in-Chief, Robert Thomson, facing the threat of invaders believed to be sailing from Guadeloupe sought Commodore Barry’s help for the defense of St. Kitts and Antigua.⁸⁶ That Thomson still thought to invoke the spirit of mutual aid against French aggression which had dominated British and American relations in the West Indies throughout the conflict says much about the persistence of the sentiment. Therefore, although there was no *formal* coordination of strategic operations between London and Philadelphia in the Caribbean, the *de facto* result was much the same as if there had been. The fighting sailors of both navies on duty in the islands had worked out a practical informal cooperation which greatly aided each service in its own efforts against the French.

While the naval understanding between the two powers remained principally something worked out by the units at sea, the St. Domingue station provided the one case during the Quasi-War where the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy had a formal basis for cooperation. This concerned enforcing the tenets of the agreement reached between Great Britain, the United States and Toussaint l’Ouverture regarding the opening of ports controlled by Toussaint to American and British merchant bottoms. This would also encompass the suppression of trade to territory controlled by Toussaint’s rival general, Rigaud, an agent of the Directory in Paris. Besides containing illegal trade to Rigaud’s coastal bases, the two naval forces would by necessity need to eliminate Rigaud’s

⁸⁶ Robert Thomson, Commander-in Chief, British Forces, H. B. M. Islands, West Indies to presumably Barry, 21 March 1801, in *ibid.* 7:152.

shallow water privateer fleet. At the time, this small force was conducting a savage war upon British and American trade in those waters, besides threatening the limited coastal commerce allowed under the tripartite agreement, which Toussaint's supporters conducted in order to maintain his troops.⁸⁷ The record would later show that the tiny American navy did indeed honor its obligations under this compact, but His Majesty's navy arguably did not. Instead, the Royal Navy's history of enforcement was spotty at best and more accurately exhibited outright hostility to it. The next chapter will discuss how and why execution of this *actual* brief directing joint enforcement of the tripartite agreement, a policy adopted by both Philadelphia and Whitehall, so often fell so far short of its intended goal.

Thus, while it is true that the United States and Britain never formed a formal naval alliance during America's Quasi-War with France, the two nations did indeed cooperate operationally in their war at sea against their common foe: the French. When Benjamin Stoddert, America's navy secretary, ordered his tiny fleet to the Caribbean to hunt the French privateers near their island lairs, the British had allowed the Yankee men of war use of their ports as bases to rendezvous, water, and replenish food and naval stores. In this way the British continued to support the young American sea service with critical administrative aid serving both its ships and men. Chapter two has described how the British had previously supplied the critical copper and ordnance to build the American warships and indirectly provided the Americans with a ready-made naval culture to adopt. Whereas the earlier administrative aid had been of a foundational rather than operational nature, this new assistance in the Caribbean would be operational.

⁸⁷ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 151-82.

But there would be vital cooperation at sea as well. The British had granted American merchantmen access to the Royal Navy's convoy system, a privilege granted to no other nation not bound to Britain by a formal defense pact during the Great French Wars.⁸⁸ And the Americans had reciprocated where possible. Then there was the collaboration which had developed between the serving units of the Royal Navy and U.S. Navy in the most critical theater of the war, at least for the Americans: the Caribbean. The commanders of the individual ships, beginning with utilizing a system of shared signals, had learned to exchange local intelligence, cruise together, and occasionally even pursue the enemy in concert. None of this, of course, they did at the direction of their respective naval establishments in Whitehall and Philadelphia. Even the local British station admirals and American commodores had not ordered such concerted action. It had been the product of practical seamen, solving a common problem. To such men, it had simply made sense and they had acted without recourse to their superiors. While such an outcome might be more difficult to comprehend for twenty-first century minds used to a different culture of command and control born of instant communications, in eighteenth century terms it was entirely logical. The commander of a warship in the classic age of sail, was on his own once out of sight of the admiral's or commodore's flagship. As stated previously, Admiralty or Navy Department directives, or even those of the local admirals and commodores, became more in the nature of suggestions subject to interpretation in the light of the practical realities skippers faced on station. A command-based study such as Professor Palmer's fine book, *Stoddert's War*, this author would argue might lose sight of this fact when examining the activities of local naval operations.

⁸⁸ Perkins, *First Rapprochement*, 98.

In *Stoddert's War*, Dr. Palmer downplayed the importance of the local informal naval cooperation that did flourish between the U.S. Navy and R.N. units on station precisely because it never became the formal operational policy of the respective naval establishments in London and Philadelphia/Washington. However this study has demonstrated that quite to the contrary, it was this local cooperation which defined much of how these navies *actually* fought the war. For the British and American serving units in theatre, this informal collaboration was a fact of life. It amounted to a naval “quasi-alliance.”

CHAPTER V

THE RELATIONSHIP TESTED

During the years of America's Quasi-War with France, the United States and Great Britain had forged an informal naval alliance to face the Gallic threat to their commerce, especially in the Caribbean. Britain had assisted the U.S. in building its fleet, most importantly by supplying the critical copper plates and fasteners so necessary to maintain an effective fighting force in late eighteenth-century naval combat, and, of course, also by providing the lion's share of American naval ordnance. To this nascent American fleet they had also added operational aid, namely access to critical British ports in the Antilles to serve as American bases for minor repairs, provisioning, strategic rendezvous, and maintaining French prisoners.

Additionally, the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy had informally cooperated on station by opening each other's convoys to the other nation's merchant vessels, trading intelligence on the enemy and on occasion even patrolling together. The preceding chapter has discussed all of this in some detail. What it did not discuss was how this informal naval cooperation between the mother country and its former colony, fashioned so soon after the two had fought America's bloody war of independence, was fragile from the first. Institutional forces which had nearly plunged the two nations into war in 1794, Royal Navy impressment of American sailors and British seizure of Yankee merchantmen, continued to dog this new naval rapprochement between them.

This chapter will tell the story of how those institutional stressors affected that naval relationship, especially as exacerbated by the loose nature of naval command in the eighteenth century. The personalities of the individual commanders counted for much in this era before instantaneous communication at sea. As argued in the previous chapter, the informal operational relationship between the serving units of the American and British navies had formed in the Caribbean precisely because of the practical independence the captains enjoyed once at sea. Station Admirals and commodores of the two services in the West Indies, themselves thousands of miles from their respective superiors in London and Philadelphia, also effectively wielded command without any immediate supervision.

As this chapter will demonstrate, the attitudes of a particular admiral, such as Sir Hyde Parker, were often more significant to the actual policy followed on station than whatever directives might arrive from Whitehall. Hyde Parker's unsympathetic position with respect to the impressment of American tars into his Jamaican squadron, much more rigid than that exhibited by the Admiralty in London, and the rapacious attitude exhibited by the cruisers in his squadron in seizing American merchantmen would prove especially trying to the Anglo-American relationship. But it would be Sir Hyde's personal animosity directed at the joint British/American diplomatic initiative towards Toussaint l'Ouverture and the St. Dominguan Revolution—this was the one situation where their two governments *expected* the U.S. Navy and Royal Navy to cooperate—which arguably would most stress Anglo-American amity. The American squadron on station would embrace the joint mission, Parker's would not.

Additionally, there were always human character flaws to complicate the existing institutional issues: personal hatreds, individual greed, racism and general bloody-mindedness. As the war went on, in letters home, whether to colleagues, or to government functionaries in the United States, serving naval officers in the Caribbean came to express real or perceived tensions with their informal British allies. Despite these negative forces and the American hand wringing they sometimes produced, perceptions which had the potential to sever the relationship, this chapter will argue that the informal naval understanding did not in fact fail, but persevered to the end of the Quasi-War. Contrary to what Professor Palmer has concluded, namely that the Anglo-American quasi-alliance was on the rocks by the end of America's conflict with France, this chapter will show that it was entirely functional. American and British warships continued to share intelligence and cruise together against the French. American men of war still used British ports as bases, and cooperated with their hosts as they had earlier.

There had appeared to be a kind of honeymoon existing between the United States and Great Britain during the summer and early autumn of 1798 as the former struggled to assemble its navy with the latter's help to fight their common enemy, the French. As discussed in previous chapters, the British were busy supplying the Americans with copper, guns and saltpeter, and offering them even ships and officers. American Federalist patriots talked of more formal connections between the two countries and cheered any news of a British or allied gain in the war against the French in Europe. Meetings between officers and crews of His Majesty's warships and their few American counterparts then at sea were full of *bon-accord*. But the issues which had caused grief to the Anglo-American relationship ever since Britain joined the Continental war against the

French had not dissipated. They continued to simmer, submerged beneath the apparent surface calm of friendship. British privateers and navy warships still seized American trading vessels as prizes, especially in the West Indies. Secondly, the Royal Navy had not halted the impressment of Yankee sailors from the many American merchant vessels who visited British ports, in England, the West Indies, or even on the high seas. What made these problems so intractable was that each side's position with respect to the seizures and impressment were so much entwined within its national institutions or consciousness.

While not even anglophile Federalists ever ignored incidents of British impressment of Americans, or seizure of American merchantmen, it would be an infamous episode in late Autumn 1798 that would jolt both sides awake from their honeymoon slumber and remind them of the deep divisions yet separating the "would be" allies. On 16 November the American sloop of War, *Baltimore*, was escorting a convoy of merchantmen to Havana, Cuba, when a Spanish flagged squadron of heavy warships plus two frigates approached. This flotilla eventually exchanged Spanish colors for British and a frigate signaled by cannon shot to leeward that they were not hostile. Captain Isaac Phillips, commanding the *Baltimore* responded in kind. The British battleships were the *Carnatic* 74, *Thunderer* 74, and *Queen* 98, accompanied by two 32 gun frigates, *Maidstone* and *Greyhound*, all based at Admiral Sir Hyde Parker's Jamaica station. Captain Phillips then stood to speak the *Carnatic*, which flew a commodore's pennant. After coming aboard the battleship at the invitation of Commodore John Loring, R.N., Phillips was taken aback at his reception. Perhaps expecting the friendly exchange which had generally accompanied contact between commanding officers of the American and British navies to date, Phillips found his status in question because he did not have

aboard his ship's U.S. Navy commission, nor his captain's commission—he had needed to leave port before they could reach him from Philadelphia—only his sailing orders from Secretary Stoddert and his copy of the British/American private signals. But far more serious was the “request” he next received from Loring. The Commodore told Phillips that he would be removing from the *Baltimore* all sailors he deemed British because his ship's complement was low. Sometime after Captain Phillips had returned to his ship, he found Loring had sent lieutenants to collect all men without “protections.” Fifty-five of *Baltimore*'s tars accompanied the British officers back to the *Carnatic*. This removed roughly one third of the *Baltimore*'s crew. Later in the day, Loring relented and released all but five of these back to the American sloop of war. The Royal Navy squadron then took its leave.¹

Americans were naturally livid once the case became known. Even Anglophile Federalists in Congress were incensed. Harrison Gray Otis, a staunch Federalist Congressman from Massachusetts, responded with a resolution requesting the president provide the House of Representatives with *any* information he possessed regarding the impressment of U.S. seamen aboard the *Baltimore*.² Captain Phillips himself was dismissed outright from the American service without a hearing because Secretary Stoddert and President Adams believed he should not have relinquished even one man unless he had first struck his colors in the face of overwhelming odds. Instead, they concluded Phillips had acted in a servile manner to the British, a station they could never

¹ George C. Morton, Acting Consul, Havana, Cuba to Timothy Pickering, Secretary of State, 18 November 1798, in U.S.N., Quasi-War, 2:26-27; Truxtun to Stoddert, 27 December 1798, in *ibid.*, 2:28; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 61-63.

² House of Representatives, Harrison Gray Otis, Resolution, 31 December 1798, in Charles W. Upham and Octavius Pickering, *The Life of Timothy Pickering*, v. 3 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1873), 339-40.

countenance.³ Secretary of State Pickering lodged formal diplomatic complaints both with Robert Liston in Philadelphia and to the Foreign Office in London through Rufus King.⁴

The whole affair seemed to capulize the issue of British impressment of Americans. For starters, impressment into the Royal Navy had had a long history of unpopularity in the United States which antedated independence. American tars, like their British counterparts, resented the idea that they could be forced to join anyone's navy, particularly during a war, when wages were many times higher in the merchant marine. The naval press was a hated institution in England, and had been all throughout the Second Hundred Year's War. Nicholas Rogers has written about eighteenth century British societal resistance to the press, often involving violence against regulating officers, their men in the press gangs, and their headquarters, the so-called "rendezvous."⁵ But despite this popular anger directed against the press, it was, and had been, for the better part of a century, a fixture of British naval culture. The Admiralty had found it to be absolutely essential to the Navy's continued effectiveness. The reason was simple. The Royal Navy desperately needed men. It had the ships and usually the money, the two other legs of the naval administrative stool. Despite the largest population of seamen in Europe, if not the world, there were simply not enough of them to man simultaneously in wartime both the globe's largest navy and merchant marine.⁶ The Admiralty had tried to

³ Stoddert to Captain Isaac Phillips, U.S.N., U.S.S. *Baltimore*, 10 January 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 2: 30; Stoddert to Phillips, 20 February 1799, in *ibid.*, 2:32-33.

⁴ Pickering to Robert Liston, 31 December 1798, in *ibid.*, 2:29-30. Pickering to Rufus King, 8 January 1799, in King, 2:505-07.

⁵ Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and its Opponents in Georgian Britain* (London: Continuum, 2007).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

promote within Parliament a nationwide list of seamen from which it could call up men for the fleet in wartime in a rational manner, as the French had done, but failed because the merchant lobby in the national legislature had sufficient power to crush any proposal which might make it more difficult to recruit scarce men for their trading vessels.⁷ Hence, the only tool left to Whitehall to muster crews in wartime when it could not outbid the merchant marine for volunteers was the medieval power of the crown to impress tars into His Majesty's Fleet. Any British man who earned his living "on the water" was liable to immediate conscription if he could be found.⁸ But by the mid to late 1790s, the demands placed upon the Royal Navy had stretched its manpower needs to more than His Majesty's Senior Service could find in British ports and ships. The constant naval blockade of France, the routine convoying of the merchant fleet, and the constant loss of men to sickness and desertion had taxed the national "reserve" beyond its limit.⁹

Perhaps the answer to this British conundrum lay with the vastly-increased rival American merchant fleet. The British came to believe the American merchant navy, second only to their own, relied heavily upon Albion's seamen. They could not believe that the Americans could domestically produce enough jack tars to man this swelling fleet; the Yanks had to be using sailors justly belonging to His Majesty's Navy. Lord Grenville himself expressed this opinion writing from the Foreign Office in London to Phineas Bond, British Consul at Philadelphia:

⁷ Daniel A. Baugh, "The Eighteenth Century Navy as A National Institution, 1690-1815," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Royal Navy*, ed. J. R. Hill and Bryan Ranft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 134-35.

⁸ Rogers, 8; Scott Thomas Jackson, *Impressment and Anglo-American Discord, 1787-1818*, (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1976), 2-3.

⁹ Rodger, *Command*, 496-99; Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and its Opponents in Georgian Britain* (London: Continuum, 2007), 6.

...for altho' (sic) it is probable that American seamen may have been at different times impressed into His Majesty's Service, the number of native American mariners is so small, and the part of the navigation of the United States carried on by British Seamen is so considerable, that instances of such impressments of American Citizens can have but rarely occurred, and certainly cannot be compared in number with the attempts that are daily made by the owners and masters of American Vessels to protect natives of this country under the denomination of Citizens of the United States.¹⁰

The British had always believed they had the right to remove British sailors from foreign ships in their ports, or even on the high seas and had done so. But the American ships posed a unique challenge as to removing Britons from a foreign vessel. On a foreign merchantman, the Brits were easy to spot; they spoke English. On Yankee traders, Englishmen and Americans at this time were very difficult to tell apart. There was no language barrier and, as argued previously, few cultural differences as well. Then there was the British conception of citizenship that blurred the boundary even more. Britain adhered to the theory of indefeasible allegiance which taught that a British subject always remained His Majesty's subject even if he became a naturalized citizen of another country.¹¹ Great Britain originally recognized only natural born Americans. They had eventually expanded this conception to also include those Britons living in the new United States upon its formally recognized independence upon the ratification of the Treaty of Paris in 1783.¹² Englishmen, Scots, or Welshmen naturalized in America, after that, were certainly Americans in British eyes, but subjects of the British Crown first. Hence, Royal Navy captains believed that they were within their legal rights to press these "British" Americans from American vessels, be they merchantmen or even men of

¹⁰ Grenville to Phineas Bond, 19 May 1796, in *Instructions*, 118.

¹¹ Jackson, 3-4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6, 14.

war.¹³ Technically, statute law in England prohibited impressments of any foreigners, of course including natural-born Americans and also those Britons so naturalized at 1783.¹⁴

The problem for Royal Navy captains urgently needing men at sea was how to swiftly make that distinction—that is if they *cared* to follow the law. On the Jamaica station, want of sailors was dire. Desertion and especially disease had decimated Hyde Parker's squadron in those years. As he faced the *Baltimore's* Captain Phillips, Commodore Loring perhaps concluded that he would be safe taking only those tars travelling without American "protections." A protection was a document most often prepared by the local customs agent attesting to the bearer's status as an American citizen. They could be had for the fee of one to five dollars in an American port, or even from an overseas American consul. The trouble with these documents according to Whitehall, and serving officers in the R.N., was that the customs agents and overseas American consuls were none too careful as to what documents or testimony they accepted as proof of American birth or timely naturalization. High ranking Royal Navy officers commonly believed that the only real proof of citizenship demanded by these American functionaries was the one to five dollars.¹⁵ Admiral John Jervis, then commanding in the Mediterranean, was certain that such frauds occurred, and called for vigilance. Admiral George Murray on the North American Station at Halifax also agreed.¹⁶ British tars, they believed, were receiving these fraudulent documents to avoid the press just by paying the asking price, even in their home ports in Britain. Grenville

¹³ Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁴ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵ Ibid., 75-76.

¹⁶ Ibid., 76.

stated as much to Rufus King when he asked that American consuls in England no longer issue protections.¹⁷

While Commodore Loring clearly had not adopted the more radical British position of denying the validity of American protections to the press as might have his own superior, Admiral Sir Hyde Parker, he had definitely stepped into waters much hotter indeed. When Loring announced his intention to press any of Captain Phillips's crew without American protection documents, Phillips simply replied that Americans regarded their *flag* to be the only "protection" necessary for all men aboard an American navy ship.¹⁸ While it angered Americans that Loring had pressed sailors from an American ship on the high seas approaching a foreign port—Americans, at least in 1798, allowed that the British could search an American vessel in a British home port to forcibly induct British nationals into His Majesty's Senior Service—they found it most abominable that he had impressed them from the deck of an American *warship* on the high seas. As galling as was the former, it had been going on since the early days of the French Wars. However, the later, pressing from an American national ship, represented a direct attack upon the American flag. It was surely an insult to American honor, but could be seen in an even worse light as the start of an attempt to re-assert British sovereignty over newly won American independence.

The question the Loring Affair presented for the American Government in Philadelphia was whether Commodore Loring's actions had the approbation of the British Government. If so, it might signify the start of a new attempt to turn back the clock of American independence. The Democratic Republicans certainly would adhere to

¹⁷ Grenville to King, 3 November 1796, in King, 2:119-20.

¹⁸ Morton to Pickering, 18 November 1798, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 2:27.

this interpretation. But official Philadelphia preferred to conclude that the matter was not the product of official British policy at all, but the misguided actions of one officer, albeit one flying a commodore's pennant.¹⁹ The diplomatic rumblings certainly travelled across the Atlantic and induced the Admiralty to commence a detailed investigation into the matter.²⁰ Admiral Sir Hyde Parker, had to respond concerning his subordinate's actions—just another to add to a long line of unhappy contacts with Americans resulting in diplomatic overtures.²¹ In the end, Loring was eventually recalled and put “on the beach” in England.²² His Majesty's Government in an official communication to Rufus King implied that there would be no repeats of the Loring Affair. Americans could be assured that His Majesty would “see with Displeasure (sic) any act which may . . . [be] . . . committed by any officer in his (sic) Majesty's service (sic) in derogation of the attention and respect due to their flag.”²³

There would be an attempt by Captain Edward Hamilton of H.M.S. *Surprise* to take tars from the U.S.S. *Ganges* at sea in the months following the Loring incident while the diplomatic gears were still turning and perhaps before a message could have reached that ship at sea. When Hamilton's lieutenant arriving aboard the *Ganges* to pay his respects made the request to examine the crew for potential “British” seamen, Thomas Tingey, U.S.N., politely responded that he regarded his flag as his men's only and sufficient protection and would forcibly resist any attempt to remove even one man from his ship. Tingey reported that the lieutenant had politely retreated. There were no further

¹⁹ Pickering to Liston, 31 December 1798, in *ibid.*, 2:29.

²⁰ Grenville to King, 21 March 1799, in King, 2:585-86.

²¹ Grenville to Liston, 19 April 1799, in *Instructions*, 173, n. 20.

²² *Ibid.*; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 66.

²³ Grenville to King, 21 March 1799, in King, 2:585-86.

requests for men but a boat did return from the *Surprise*, this time begging medicines urgently needed aboard that ship. This request Tingey honored.²⁴ Tingey became a hero in the American popular press for standing up to the British, even though he later explained that there had been *no* incident whatsoever resulting from the encounter and the two ships had amicably parted.²⁵ Tingey's calm and firm response to the *Surprise's* request for men echoed new official U.S. Navy policy. American commanders were not to give up even one man to a foreign vessel, even one from a "friendly" nation, without resistance, and only after striking their colors in the face of vastly superior force to avoid pointless loss of life.²⁶ As it turned out, there would be no further R.N. attempts to press sailors serving aboard an American man of war for the duration of the Quasi-War. The two nations had drawn at least one bright line both could respect concerning the impressment issue. But the honeymoon was certainly over. The issue of impressment of avowed Americans from Yankee traders on the high seas and refusal to release them upon proof of citizenship would continue to smolder between the two maritime nations.

But the Loring Affair also raised the ire of Americans on another score. Loring's powerful squadron had also seized three of the American merchantmen in the *Baltimore's* convoy en route into Havana. Secretary of State Pickering directed Mr. King in London to raise the issue of this seizure with Lord Grenville. What galled the Secretary was how British naval officers—other times it would be corsairs—had to his mind used pretense to declare as contraband of war what was to him clearly an innocent neutral cargo. In this

²⁴ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 89-90; Captain Thomas Tingey, U.S.N., to Stoddert, 18 February 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 2:368; Thomas Tingey to the Printers of the "Norfolk Herald," concerning the transaction between H.M.S. *Surprise* and U.S.S. *Ganges*, 28 February 1799, in *ibid.*, 2:412.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Stoddert to Commanders of U.S. Vessels of War, 29 December 1798, in *ibid.*, 2:135.

instance it would be six and four penny nails, and osnaburgs, a kind of coarse cloth used to clothe slaves, which would be styled unwrought iron and sail cloth, respectively, so as to declare them “contraband of war” in the prize court, thereby justifying their seizure and libel.²⁷ Worse, an Admiralty court such as Judge Cambauld’s at St. Nicholas Mole, too many times would sustain such findings.²⁸ In fact, the seizure of American trading vessels on the basis that they carried “contraband” cargos of osnaburgs and nails would be recurring themes as the Quasi-War continued.

The issue of British seizures of American shipping also had remained a sore spot between the United States and Great Britain from the start of the war with France. As discussed in Chapter One, the United States and Great Britain had a vastly different view of what constituted legitimate neutral commerce. In 1793 the United States had hoped to profit from the war by selling to both parties whose shipping was occupied with other war related commerce, or in the case of France, susceptible to capture by British corsairs. Instead, between December 1793 and March 1794, the British had seized hundreds of Yankee ships bound to the French West Indies based upon an aggressive interpretation of contraband of war to include even foodstuffs. They later retreated from that stance, but even after Jay’s Treaty continued to adhere to the Rule of 1756 which provided that a nation could not carry on a trade during wartime that they could not have done in peacetime. The British also prohibited neutrals to carry enemy goods in their holds under the guise that it was neutral property.²⁹

²⁷ Pickering to King, 8 January 1799, in Upham and Pickering, 3:340-41.

²⁸ Perkins, *First Rapprochement*, 85.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

The U.S. had built its trading philosophy on the contrary premise that “free ships made free goods,” meaning goods shipped in a neutral vessel were to be considered neutral property. The dream of the new country upon independence had been that new markets such as the French would now be open to a sovereign country no longer bound to Great Britain’s system of Navigation Laws. The Great French wars were facilitating that dream. Many American merchants continued to trade to the French islands—the French had opened said trade to American vessels before the war—and to run the risk of British seizure because carrying so-called contraband goods until Congress outlawed that traffic in June 1798 because of the French *guerre de course* against American world-wide commerce. Hence, with legal American shipping halted to the French West Indies, the British corsairs could only legally prey upon American vessels bound from Spanish colonies such as Cuba, Puerto Rico and eastern Hispaniola carrying Spanish-owned cargo and the Yankee smugglers who defied their own government and continued in the very lucrative trade to French territories. Americans certainly felt hard done by any British interference with the American/Spanish commerce because British merchant shipping all the while had kept up an illicit trade to the Spanish colonies which the Royal Navy conveniently ignored.³⁰ American shipping to the British possessions in the Caribbean was now legal and technically off limits to aggressive British privateers and the Royal Navy because British colonial governors in the Antilles had by specific orders countenanced U.S. trade to their islands; they desperately needed American foodstuffs and raw materials and there was a continual shortage of British bottoms. Consequently

³⁰ Ibid., 84.

the level of seizures by British privateers and men of war did drop off for a time, but certainly did not cease.

During the Anglo-American honeymoon of the summer of 1798, reports of British seizures of American neutral shipping continued even in the Federalist press. Although it sought closer relations with Britain, a nation it saw as a possible shield against French aggression, the American government yet refused to turn a blind eye to the depredations of these English privateers and the Royal Navy. Secretary of State Pickering's letter to Rufus King in London requesting he take up the matter of the Loring impressment of Americans from the Baltimore and also the seizure of the convoy ships was an example of this attitude. While seeking to contend over impressments and the definition of contraband of war, Pickering's letter was at pains to state that the Royal Navy convoyed American merchantmen, R.N. officers were routinely polite to their U.S.N. counterparts, and that one of His Majesty's sloops had rescued the crew of an American trading vessel in peril in American waters.³¹ But after the Loring Affair had effectively ended the honeymoon and the fear of an immediate French invasion of the American coast had vanished with Nelson's victory at the Nile, Americans again became increasingly aware that the British corsairs were often none too picky about what American merchantmen they grabbed on the high seas and brought to British island ports for adjudication. And the Admiralty courts set up to hear the libel cases, especially ones in the British West Indies, were quick to condemn American vessels as legitimate prizes for auction. Some were captured under the theory that their shipping manifests and papers were frauds and they actually carried enemy goods, others under the pretense that legitimate cargos were

³¹ Pickering to King, 8 January 1799, in Upham and Pickering, 3:340-42.

contraband of war. Records of appeals taken from colonial prize courts by American ship owners to the High Court in London reveal that English judges in the capital overturned the vast majority of cases appealed and ordered compensation for the owners. West Indies Admiralty courts were notorious for their rate of rescinded condemnations when appealed to London. The High Court threw out seven condemnations issued at Nevis in one afternoon alone.³² And a ruling from Whitehall dissolved an entire court based at St. Nicholas Mole because General Simcoe commanding in British-held St. Domingue had established it without authority to do so.³³

The truth was that greed drove the prize system. The possibility of rich profits from the sale of such American prizes encouraged privateers to make dubious captures based on highly questionable pretexts or bald frauds.³⁴ While the commanding Admiral on station, and the captain of a successful Royal Navy man of war took the lion's share of the prize money earned when a captured ship was condemned and sold at auction, even the common tars profited substantially, driving the desire for making captures. Admirals like Sir Hyde Parker, commanding the prize-rich Jamaica station, became immensely wealthy.³⁵ Also, the desire for continued fees—colonial admiralty judges were paid a fee for each case heard rather than a salary—encouraged judges in the islands to condemn so that corsairs, free to employ whatever Admiralty court they desired, would continue to frequent theirs.³⁶ And the costs and delays in clearing up such messes at the High Court in London—it could easily take years—were beyond the means of most Yankee shippers.

³² Perkins, *Great Rapprochement*, 82.

³³ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁵ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 61-62; Lavery, 131.

³⁶ Perkins, *First Rapprochement*, 85.

Hence, even staunch, pro-English Federalists such as Secretary of State Pickering responded to the merchants' pleas for some kind of diplomatic relief. Pickering began directing Rufus King, the American minister in London, to address the matter with Lord Grenville. As the undeclared war against France ground on, the Adams Administration took up diplomatic initiatives to alleviate the worst ills of the British prize system. Rufus King took up issues such as trying to settle the definition of contraband of war. There had never been a precise definition, allowing privateer and navy captains wiggle room to cast a wide net and hope that sympathetic prize courts would see things their way.³⁷

At times exacerbating both the impressment and seizure conundrums was the loose institution of command and service loyalty prevalent in the Royal Navy at the time. Command remained largely a creature of a traditional society, based upon personal loyalty to a commander, and ultimately, the king. The concept of institutional loyalty was in its infancy. In many respects, a commander's primary allegiance was to a concept of personal honor rather than to His Majesty's Service as such. Allegiance to the former was a vestige of the ancient warrior tradition of the gentleman, a status any commissioned King's officer in either the navy or army clung to. A personal sense of duty to the Service was in fact a novelty. As traditional Britain transformed into early industrial Britain, the older concept was beginning to give way to a tighter notion of institutional duty and loyalty more resembling the discipline found in today's navies.³⁸ But in the 1790s, officers yet felt an obligation to pursue the furtherance of their personal honor and reject positions which might not favor it. At the same time this sense of personal reputation which they deemed must always be vindicated, was attached to a keen sense of the

³⁷ Ibid., 81, 83.

³⁸ Rodger, "Honour and Duty," 437-38; 439-40.

pursuit of material gain. The Senior Service was seen by the younger sons of impoverished gentry and peers to be an avenue for financial, and hopefully, social advancement. The prize system played principally into this conception of naval service. One hoped to serve the king, but also oneself as much as possible. When mixed with the loose ties to superiors mandated by time and distance in the age before instantaneous communications, the temptations of disregarding orders that one resented for one reason or another became very real indeed.³⁹ The Admiralty in London's primary control over its commanders, especially those of flag rank, was its control of patronage, the disposition of plum—read lucrative—appointments. But once on his distant station, an Admiral was a very independent player. Hence, within wide boundaries, an Admiral's personal take on his orders and mission were controlling. His likes, dislikes, and prejudices could and would, set the tone for what his subordinate captains did with their sea commands once out of sight of the flagship.

And so it would prove with the British station admirals in the Antilles. Their personalities would significantly affect the status of the informal alliance with the American sea service operating in the same waters. Just on the issue of impressment alone, the contrasting American experience with Sir Hyde Parker at Jamaica and Admirals Henry Harvey and Lord Hugh Seymour, who commanded in succession on the Leeward Islands Station is instructive. When Seymour later succeeded Parker at Jamaica, the contrast became even more marked. Parker would take a very rigid position on the release of American pressed seamen. He had an inherent distrust of Yankee sailors, and would choose to ignore virtually any evidence they or their advocates might produce in

³⁹ Ibid.

favor of their liberation from the service, a policy at odds with that of Admirals Harvey and Seymour, and certainly his own subordinate, Rear Admiral Richard Bligh. Parker's practices were even more inflexible than those in use before the Admiralty in London. As this chapter will demonstrate, Parker's hauteur would offend Americans on all levels: local agents working on behalf of seamen, U.S. Navy station commodores, and even diplomats in Philadelphia and London.

The informal naval relationship existing in the Caribbean between the American and British fleets was especially sensitive to the personality quirks of commanders, whether for good or ill. This was because the issues available to drive a wedge between them were not going to go away in the short term. Impressment of Yankee seamen and ship seizures as described above were virtually intractable, as long as the war continued. Nothing would sate the Royal Navy's hunger for men but the ceasing of hostilities with France. The same could be said of the prize system with all its greed driven defects. Although the lot of the neutrals would improve, for a short time at least, with William Scott's *Polly* decision referred to earlier, the statutory reduction of the number of prize courts, and the change to a standing wage for admiralty judges, these reforms to Admiralty jurisdiction would not kick in until after the Quasi-War was over.⁴⁰ So Yankee impressment and merchantman seizures would remain to vex Americans and build up resentment between the officers and men of the U.S. Navy and their R.N. counterparts. They would simply have to be borne. But the bearing of them could be made better or much worse by whoever was in charge at Port Royal, Jamaica or English Harbour, Antigua.

⁴⁰ Perkins, *First Rapprochement*, 86-89.

In late July 1796 Admiral Sir Hyde Parker had been en route to reinforce the squadron blockading the French fleet taking shelter in Cadiz when an Admiralty order redirected him, sending his squadron to reinforce the British West Indies against a perceived imminent French invasion. He would eventually take over command of the lucrative Jamaica station.⁴¹ However, the Admiral was rarely ever to be found at Port Royal. That was not to say he was usually at sea either. Parker preferred to remain at St. Nicholas Mole, the deep water port the British Army had captured from the French on St. Domingue.⁴² There, sitting astride the Windward Passage, his ships could better control the route to and from Jamaica, and most importantly, enemy commerce to and from Spanish Cuba. The significance of the taking of prizes to this command cannot be overstated. Some sources indicate that Parker's force during his years in command made up five percent of the Royal navy's fleet but accounted for approximately thirty-three percent of all its prizes taken. This flag appointment made Parker very rich indeed.⁴³

But the Jamaica station had one Achilles heel: tropical disease. As previously described, it was yellow fever and not the French and Spanish which had decimated British land and sea forces during the 1790s. Consequently, Parker's squadrons were nearly always, significantly under-manned. Sir Hyde was already complaining of his manning problems as "insurmountable" in a 23 December 1796 letter to Lord Spencer—he had just captured two French Corvettes, highly valuable small frigates, which he

⁴¹ George John Spencer, 2nd Earl Spencer, to Sir Hyde Parker, 16 July 1796, Parker to Spencer, 23 August 1796, Parker to Spencer, 22 September 1796, and Parker to Spencer, 7 December 1796, in H. W. Richmond, ed., *Private Papers of George, Second Earl Spencer, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1794-1801*, (London: The Navy Records Society, 1924), 3:228-232, 233-34, 239-40.

⁴² Parker to Spencer, 12 June 1797, in Richmond, *Spencer Papers*, 3:253-54; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 61; Dudley Pope, *The Black Ship* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 18.

⁴³ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 61-62. Parker took one eighth of any prize condemned on his station. *Ibid.* Spain had re-entered the war as an enemy of England and ally of France 6 October 1796. Richmond, *Spencer Papers*, 3:220.

hoped to take into service but for the dearth of seamen.⁴⁴ The Admiralty was generally interested in sending ships and crews back to England once the fear of a French invasion of the West Indies had abated.⁴⁵ Historically, local authorities were generally resistive to attempts to press from the Jamaican merchant vessels; just as in England, the traders needed sailors to man their ships. And these merchants usually had powerful allies in Parliament to put pressure on Whitehall to stymie any such forced recruiting from local vessels. Sir Hyde would simply have to make do. He would have to find his recruits locally. This meant pressing tars from Yankee merchantmen.

Pressing alleged British sailors from Yankee trading vessels had been a persistent problem for the Americans long before Sir Hyde Parker's arrival on the Jamaica station. In fact, from the American perspective, the problem had become so significant, that the Washington Administration pursuant to the Act for the Relief and Protection of Seamen⁴⁶ appointed agents to reside in the British West Indies and Great Britain to act as ombudsmen for the release of Americans unjustly pressed into His Majesty's Fleet. The Administration appointed Captain Silas Talbot, U.S.N. to fulfill this role in the British Antilles.⁴⁷ The suggestion of a foreign agent residing in His Majesty's Caribbean possessions faced disapprobation from Lord Grenville in London. Britain did not tolerate such agencies.⁴⁸ However, before Grenville's letter to Phineas Bond, the British *chargés d'affaires* in Philadelphia, could arrive, Liston had agreed to provide Captain Talbot with

⁴⁴ Parker to Spencer, 23 December 1796, in *Ibid.*, 3:245-46.

⁴⁵ Spencer to Parker, 4 November 1796, in *Ibid.*, 3:236-38.

⁴⁶ *An Act for the Relief and Protection of American Seamen, Statutes at Large* 1, ch. 36, 477-78 (1796). It became law 28 May 1796. *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Scott Thomas Jackson, "Impressment and Anglo-American Discord, 1787-1818" (Ph. D. diss., University of Michigan, 1976), 110.

⁴⁸ Grenville to Bond, 19 May 1796, in *Instructions*, 118-19.

letters of introduction to British governors and officers of His Majesty's Navy in the Islands.⁴⁹ He believed the potential for harm from Talbot's office was minimal but the chance to gain favor with the Americans was significant. At the time, the furor over R.N. Captain Hugh Pigot's "starting" of the American merchant master Jessop in the Caribbean was even souring the minds of England's Federalist friends.⁵⁰ In the end, Liston was not severely taken to task by Lord Grenville for over-stepping his authority. Secretary of State Pickering's re-characterization of the post as itinerant, instead of one based in any specific place, appeared to have temporarily mollified the Foreign Office.⁵¹

Talbot made his way to the Caribbean, arriving in Barbados 2 September 1796 but found no official work for him there. He soon left for Martinique, landing there 28 September.⁵² At Fort Royal, Talbot met Vice-Admiral Sir Hyde Parker, himself having recently arrived in the Leeward Isles on his way to the Jamaica station, and explained the nature of his mission. This initial interview would be a precursor of future discourse with the admiral. Talbot, in his description of the event later sent on to Secretary of State Pickering, found the Admiral "altogether unaccommodating." Sir Hyde informed Captain

⁴⁹ Liston to Grenville, 13 August 1796, in Robert Liston, *The Liston Papers: 1796-1800*, ed. Richard Simmons (East Ardsley, England: Microform Academic Publishers, 1990), microfilm, 1:40, 42-44. Grenville wrote before Liston had arrived to take up his post, but Liston had already been on duty and acted before the letter appeared. Jackson, *Impressment*, 111.

⁵⁰ Liston to Grenville, 13 August 1796, in *Liston Papers*, 1:42-44; Jackson, *Impressment*, 110. Captain Pigot, then captain of the frigate H.M.S. *Success* had collided with Jessop's ship, *Mercury*, and by Jessop's account had him hit with a rope end during the heated exchange between them. Pigot was to become a protégé of Admiral Sir Hyde Parker and later murdered at the hands of his crew during the infamous *Hermione* mutiny in 1797. Pope, 11, 19-34.

⁵¹ Pickering to Silas Talbot, 31 August 1796, in Upham and Pickering, 3:334; Jackson, 113.

⁵² *An Abstract of the Communications from Silas Talbot, 9Esq., Agent in the West Indies for procuring the release of Impressed American seamen* ASPFR 2:141.

Talbot that he would demand “unequivocal proof” of American citizenship before releasing a tar. He would never accept the testimony of any alleged American sailor.⁵³

Fortunately for Talbot, Parker was not in command in the British Lesser Antilles. The Admiral sent him on to see Rear Admiral Henry Harvey, whom Talbot found a breath of fresh air after dealing with Parker. Harvey agreed to cooperate with Talbot, saying he would issue orders that no Americans be impressed and that he was “willing to enter into an inquiry, on the most liberal footing,” to ascertain for release any Americans serving aboard ships under his immediate command. Subsequently, Talbot wrote to Harvey on 4 October, and again on 11 October, requesting permission to search for Americans aboard the R.N. ships at Fort Royal. Here, Harvey believed he had to refer Captain Talbot to the higher-ranking Parker. This, Talbot deemed pointless. Parker had just refused Talbot’s 11 October request to begin an inquiry for impressed Americans on what the Admiral termed “such slight grounds.” Sir Hyde indicated that instead of a general search, that Captain Talbot should specify which sailors he believed to be Americans and reiterated his requirement that all proofs be “incontestable” before he would release a man. Of course Sir Hyde made sure to assure Talbot that per his request “no American seamen should be impressed” and that “due regard should be paid to the protections of all American seamen.”⁵⁴

Talbot left Fort Royal to tour other ports of the Windward and Leeward Islands. He headed west after he became satisfied that Admiral Harvey was indeed keeping his word about searching for and releasing Americans found on His Majesty’s men of war on his station. He then made his way to Port Royal, Jamaica, site of the Royal Navy’s

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

dockyard in the Greater Antilles. It would be at Port Royal that Captain Talbot would have his greatest success in obtaining the release of American seamen already impressed into the British fleet. And it would be on the Jamaica station where Talbot and Sir Hyde would become each other's nemesis.

Talbot's time in Port Royal began very profitably indeed. The Captain found Sir Hyde was not present at the time but at St. Nicholas Mole. His second in command, Rear Admiral Richard Bligh, was on station and Talbot found him to be receptive to entreaties on behalf of impressed American seamen. Bligh's liberal views on impressments of Americans—he had told Talbot that he questioned the legal right of the Royal Navy to press Americans or any neutrals from Yankee ships in the first place⁵⁵—extended to allowing searches of R.N. ships then in port that Talbot believed to include impressed Americans in their ships' companies.⁵⁶ Bligh even sent an aide, Captain Rutherford, along with Talbot to assist him. When Talbot encountered lack of cooperation from captains of the several ships searched—some refused to give up the requested men, while others denied their presence aboard their warships—he found Captain Rutherford and the Admiral helpful in inducing these commanders to change their minds and produce the men. While not all the men brought before Bligh did win their release, Talbot found the Admiral open to the evidence he produced.⁵⁷

However, again Talbot found quite another reception waiting for him when in January 1797 he travelled to St. Nicholas Mole to plead the cause of other alleged Americans believed to be serving aboard men of war under Sir Hyde Parker's

⁵⁵ Jackson, 114.

⁵⁶ *Communications from Talbot*, ASPFR 2:141; Jackson, 114.

⁵⁷ *Communications, from Talbot*, ASPFR 2:141.

command.⁵⁸ Sending the Admiral a list of men put together from his own researches and that of the State Department along with proofs he believed sufficient, he found Parker utterly unsympathetic.⁵⁹ First, he found his communication to the Admiral ignored for a month. Next Talbot discovered that in the meantime ships whose crews included some of the men from his list of alleged, impressed Americans were shortly due to sail back to England.⁶⁰ The Captain sent a very testy note on to Parker, again requesting the release of the listed alleged Americans. Talbot had added that if rebuffed, he meant to adopt “measures that are more or less unfriendly to the British Nation.”⁶¹ Sir Hyde returned with: “in no one instance, have proofs been produced, relative to the names of those you have been pleased to style citizens of America, sufficient to authorize me to discharge the individuals from His Majesty’s service.”⁶² Parker, no doubt responding to the tone of Talbot’s note, imperiously continued that he would forward the record of all previous messages between them to Whitehall, “to His Majesty’s Ministers to whom only, I hold myself accountable for my conduct, whatever may be the consequences.” Parker then declared all communication between himself and the American agent ended.⁶³

On 5 March, Talbot left for Port Royal, having hit a dead end with Parker. The Captain wrote to Secretary Pickering before even leaving St. Nicholas Mole that he now planned to execute a campaign of legal guerilla warfare against the officers of Parker’s command to force the discharge of American seamen.⁶⁴ Talbot had determined to use the

⁵⁸ Ibid; Talbot to Pickering, 21 January 1797, in ASPFR 2:142.

⁵⁹ *Communications from Talbot*, ASPFR 2:141.

⁶⁰ Ibid.; Jackson, 115.

⁶¹ Ibid.; Talbot to Parker, 3 March 1797, quoted in Ibid.

⁶² Parker to Talbot, 3 March 1797, quoted in *Communications from Talbot*, ASPFR 2:141.

⁶³ Jackson, 115; Parker to Talbot, 3 March 1797, quoted in *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Talbot to Pickering, 22 April 1797, in *Communications from Talbot*, ASPFR 2:142.

civil court system in Kingston to obtain writs of *habeas corpus* to compel unsympathetic British naval commanders to disgorge American seamen from their men of war.⁶⁵ In doing so, Talbot had hit upon one of the Achilles heels of the eighteenth century Royal Navy: the long arm of the British civil law. The strange truth of eighteenth century British legal jurisdiction was that once in port, the officers and ratings of Royal Navy warships fell under the purview of the local civil courts. Unhappy officers, or even lowly tars, could engage attorneys and sue their superiors with impunity. They could win awards of damages, or other judgments. In Albion itself, writs of *habeas corpus* were the frequent weapons of those lawyers engaged by sailors' families or employers to free them from the grasp of the impress service. There was a long history in England of public enmity toward royal military authority such that the Admiralty found itself powerless to resist such inroads upon its military jurisdiction.

Talbot, upon arriving on 8 March at Kingston, Jamaica, set about putting his plan in operation. Within days he found there were nine men of war in Port Royal's harbor, including some newly arrived. Among these was the frigate H.M.S. *Hermione*, captained by Admiral Parker's favorite, Captain Hugh Pigot. Talbot had already tried to get Pigot and then Admiral Parker to free five men he had named Americans while *Hermione* lay at St. Nicholas Mole. Talbot obtained writs for the sailors in question aboard *Hermione* and two other vessels, H.M.S. *Renommé*, and H.M.S. *La Tourterelle*, each with one alleged American aboard. Armed with the writs, Captain Pigot and his brother officers produced the sailors before the issuing magistrate, who freed the men despite opposition from His Majesty's Solicitor. From these freed tars, Talbot learned of four more

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Americans aboard *Hermione* and similarly applied for another four writs against Captain Pigot, resulting in the issuing judge releasing those men as well.⁶⁶ After this, word of Talbot's mission reached the "alarmed" commanders of the remaining ships, of whom a number let Talbot know that he would have their cooperation in releasing the men he applied for without recourse to the dreaded writs. With the exception of the captains of *Renommé* and *La Tourterelle*, who would not release men without writs, the remaining captains in port cooperated with Talbot such that he had obtained at Jamaica the release of forty-seven men either with writs or not as of 22 April 1797. Meanwhile, Talbot's assistant agent at Martinique in the Lesser Antilles, Henry Craig, had obtained the freedom of another forty-nine men from vessels under Admiral Harvey's command.⁶⁷ When Talbot wrote Pickering 7 May, he reported he had managed to dislodge another eight Americans from His Majesty's squadron at Jamaica.⁶⁸ At the time it seemed Talbot's main difficulties were maintaining patience with the R.N. officers with whom he dealt—he had told Pickering "many of whom are not the most pleasant nor the most reasonable beings"—and the American sailors he sought to serve who constantly bombarded him with "applications."⁶⁹ This was soon to change.

Admiral Sir Hyde Parker had gone to sea following his last contact with Captain Talbot, sailing among the islands. Word finally came to him of what was afoot in Port Royal. Talbot's successful resort to writs of *habeas corpus* to free "American" sailors incensed and alarmed the Admiral. The captain had found the chink in the Royal Navy's armor. The Admiral's response would resemble the strategy he would employ later with

⁶⁶ Talbot to Pickering, 22 April 1797, in *Communications from Talbot*, ASPFR 2:142-43.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Talbot to Pickering, 7 May 1797, in *Communications from Talbot*, ASPFR 2:143.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

respect to Whitehall policies with which he did not agree. He ordered his officers to simply ignore the civil legal process. In a general order he issued 8 May 1797, Sir Hyde directed them “never in future to discharge any man from the ship you command, in consequence of any writ of *habeas corpus*, till such writ is referred to me (Parker) as Commander-in-chief ...and my orders given in consequence thereof.”⁷⁰ In the order, Sir Hyde lamely observed that the requirement that the commander-in-chief be served with a writ was “a rule observed by all the judges in England.”⁷¹ Sir Hyde justified overriding the writs and the legal process they represented simply because they were “attended with the utmost inconvenience, and disadvantageous to the public service committed to my (Parker’s) care.”⁷² This would have been a novel theory in England indeed. Talbot found that after Parker’s order, even if he could now obtain writs and serve them, no R.N. captain at Jamaica would honor them, and the marshal would claim he was unable to serve the writs of attachment Talbot obtained from the court for failure to obey the originally served writs of *habeas corpus*.⁷³ Talbot wrote Secretary Pickering that in consequence of Parker’s order, Royal Navy officers at Jamaica now fancied themselves above the law and had come into Kingston and impressed Americans in broad daylight.⁷⁴ The message sent home to the secretary of state was that Admiral Parker had subverted the venerable English legal system to the detriment of helpless Americans and with the

⁷⁰ Great Britain, *General Order by Sir Hyde Parker, Vice Admiral of the Red, and Commander in Chief of His Majesty’s ships and vessels employed at and about Jamaica*, given aboard H.M.S. *Queen*, St. Nicholas Mole, St. Domingue, 8 May 1797, enclosure in Talbot to Pickering, 17 October 1797, in APSFR 2:144.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Talbot to Pickering, 4 July 1797, in ASPFR 2:144. Talbot also believed that Parker had seen the Governor of Jamaica who had then visited the chief justice of the island. Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

apparent approval of the authorities in London who tolerated it.⁷⁵ Talbot baldly opined to Pickering “that no more seamen will be discharged during the time that Admiral Sir Hyde Parker may have the command in these seas.”⁷⁶ That December he would write Pickering that “[i]f Sir Hyde should be ordered off from this station, and the command devolve upon Admiral Bligh, I have reason to expect that in such case perfect justice would be done to our representations on the subject in question.”⁷⁷ In contrast to the situation persisting in Jamaica, in October 1797, Talbot had informed Pickering that Mr. Craig in Martinique had continued to have success in convincing Admiral Harvey to release Americans from British warships serving in the Windward and Leeward Isles.⁷⁸

Talbot, frustrated in his mission to free impressed sailors in Jamaica, finally was called home to the United States in the summer of 1798 and resumed his naval career as the French *guerre de course* was threatening American commerce. In 1799-1800 he would command the U.S. Navy squadron on the St. Domingue station where his British opposite number would be Sir Hyde Parker. Talbot’s former post as American agent in the West Indies was not immediately filled. Nearly a year after Talbot’s return, Secretary Pickering resolved to try again. On 4 May 1799, he appointed William Savage, a British subject resident at Jamaica who had also served there as a magistrate.⁷⁹ Savage went to work upon receiving the appointment. Writing to Pickering in September, he then roughly estimated that at least 250 impressed Yankee seamen served in the Jamaica

⁷⁵ Lord Grenville and even the generally sympathetic Liston spoke favorably of Parker’s action. Grenville to Liston, 17 November 1797, in *Instructions*, 142-43; Jackson, 117.

⁷⁶ Talbot to Pickering, 4 July 1797, in ASPFR 2:144.

⁷⁷ Talbot to Pickering, 12 December 1797, in ASPFR 2:145.

⁷⁸ Talbot to Pickering, 17 October 1797, in APSFR 2:144.

⁷⁹ Pickering to William Savage, U.S. Agent at Jamaica, Jamaica, 4 May 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War* 3:133.

squadron.⁸⁰ However, apparently little had changed since Talbot's departure. Despite the agent having himself been a magistrate, Savage observed that "Admiral Parker pays no kind of attention to my applications."⁸¹ He related that he had written to Sir Hyde Parker, who yet commanded in the Greater Antilles, to seek the release of eleven men then at the naval hospital at Jamaica with a negative result, adding that Parker had expressed surprise that Savage would even write the Admiral again in light of the negative response given the agent to a previous application made in July.⁸² Savage did suggest to Pickering another ploy to perhaps prevent impressments of Americans into Parker's fleet: combining the usual protection with an accompanying letter from Robert Liston, the British Minister to Philadelphia.⁸³

But the attitude taken by Sir Hyde Parker in Jamaica concerning the impressment of American seamen was beginning to be a specific focus of diplomatic protest in London. On 7 October 1799, Rufus King under the express orders of President John Adams, lodged a formal complaint with His Majesty's Government citing the conduct of Admiral Parker in categorically denying William Savage's July application to release seamen personally known to an American naval officer, Lieutenant John MULLOWNY, U.S.N., commanding the U.S. Sloop of War, *Montezuma*. The *Montezuma* was then in the harbor at Port Royal from a cruise. MULLOWNY had apparently learned that men with whom he had previously sailed and *knew* to be American citizens had been impressed

⁸⁰ Pickering to Savage, 17 September, 1799, in *ibid.* 4:196.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

aboard H.M.S. *Surprise* and requested the help of newly appointed U.S. Agent Savage.⁸⁴

Admiral Parker's summary rejection of Mr. Savage's request, grounded as it was upon the personal statement of a serving American naval commander, was odious to the Americans as an insult by Parker toward the American service and flag. Mr. King, addressing Lord Grenville, barely containing his fury towards Parker within the allowable bounds of diplomatic language, wrote:

the correspondence between ... [Parker]... and the American agent... establishes the precision of this representation, and at the same time demonstrates the haughty injustice of that officer's proceedings—proceedings the more unaccountable and extraordinary, as they differ from what in similar cases passes before the eyes & under the immediate authority of the Lords Commrs. (sic) of the Admiralty.⁸⁵

Here King was referring to the direct communication that David Lennox had established with Sir Evan Nepean, Secretary to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, to request the release of American mariners impressed in Great Britain. Lennox had been for some time the appointed U.S. Agent in Great Britain under the Act for the Relief and Protection of American Seamen.⁸⁶ King was arguing that Admiral Parker in Jamaica was routinely rejecting the kinds of proofs, and the kind of direct discourse, accepted by their Lordships themselves in the capital. Lennox had by then developed a very sound working relationship with Sir Evan, and had proved very successful in obtaining the release of American jack tars from His Majesty's Senior Service.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ King to Grenville, 7 October 1799, in King, 3:118-19 (King calls him a captain, perhaps out of courtesy). This is the July Application to Parker that Savage had referred to in his 17 September 1799 letter to Pickering.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 119.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Despite the incisive case Rufus King had made damning Admiral Sir Hyde Parker's impressment of American seamen, and how far it diverged from the established practice in London, or for that matter, at Antigua and Martinique, their Lordships of the Admiralty continued to allow Parker the latitude to effectively ignore the applications and proofs supplied by Mr. Savage. The agent was to continue to report his lack of success with Vice Admiral Parker to Secretary Pickering and then Pickering's successor at the State Department, John Marshall.⁸⁸ But it was not just official Washington receiving this negative message about Sir Hyde unjustly pressing Yankee tars. Right along, serving American naval officers with commands in the Caribbean, like Lieutenant Mulloony, had been learning firsthand of this injustice against their countrymen.

In February 1800 while at Port Royal, Captain Alexander Murray, then commanding U.S.S. *Insurgente*, sought to release from H.M.S. *Trent* one Gamble, an American pressed sailor personally known to him. Murray applied directly to Captain Otway, one of Sir Hyde's captains, as a personal favor to a brother naval officer.⁸⁹ The evidence supports the conclusion that Otway spurned Murray's request.⁹⁰ Commodore Truxtun, certainly the most prominent U.S. naval commander in the West Indies, was also aware of Admiral Parker's oppressive use of the naval press against American seamen. While the commodore was in Jamaica attempting to refit *Constellation* after the battle with *La Vengeance*, Mr. Savage kept him apprized of the impressment situation on

⁸⁸ Extracts from letters of William Savage to Secretaries of State Pickering and Marshall, 30 January 1800, 20 February 1800, 21 August 1800, 1 November 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi War*, 6:518-19.

⁸⁹ Murray to Robert Otway R.N., H.M.S. *Trent*, 13 February 1800, in *ibid.*, 5:214.

⁹⁰ There is no known reply to Murray's missive from Captain Otway in the *Quasi-War* collection. But in 1797, Otway, then in command of H.M.S. *Ceres*, had refused to obey a writ of *habeas corpus* Captain Talbot had obtained so as to free twenty alleged Americans aboard Otway's ship. Talbot to Pickering, 4 July 1797, in ASPFR 2:144. There is also no mention in the correspondence of Mr. Savage indicating the coincident release of any Americans at that time.

Sir Hyde's command. Truxtun discussed the issue with Parker during their frequent meetings.⁹¹ However, not even the illustrious commodore, fresh from a famous engagement with the French, could melt Parker's frosty heart. The admiral did not free any American tars during Truxtun's stay at Port Royal.⁹² Finally, Silas Talbot had returned to the Caribbean in October 1799 to command the newly expanded St. Domingue station,⁹³ bringing with him his long memory of personal battles with Sir Hyde over impressments. He was in a position as commander to influence the thinking of many on that station concerning Sir Hyde, especially on that issue. As the war continued, resentment of Sir Hyde's unbending attitude toward impressment of American seamen grew in the U.S. Navy's serving officer corps. This sentiment would prove to be especially corrosive to an informal naval cooperation built upon positive personal relationships between brother officers.

However, the impressment of Yankee tars was but one of Admiral Sir Hyde Parker's policies rankling Americans at home and in the Caribbean during those years. The zealous seizure of American merchantmen by the ships of Parker's Jamaica command was another which caused much consternation. And Hyde Parker's rear guard action against his own government's policy with regard to St. Domingue was still another which vexed Americans in both Philadelphia and the Greater Antilles. While frustration with British cruisers would be a recurring theme for the American maritime community

⁹¹ U.S. Consul, Kingston, Jamaica (Savage) to Pickering, 26 February 1800, in *Ibid.*, 5:248. While the correspondence is styled as that of U.S. Consul, Kingston, Jamaica, it emanated from Savage who sometimes operated like a consul while agent for impressed semen at Jamaica per Pickering's instructions, because Great Britain historically refused entry to consuls in its Caribbean possessions at this time. *See* Pickering to Savage, 4 May 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:133.

⁹² This was the same time period that Murray was in Jamaica. *Constellation* and *Insurgente* had travelled there together.

⁹³ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 164.

during the Quasi-War as mentioned earlier in the chapter, it was Hyde Parker's squadron which remained a lightning rod for official American criticism. The information filtering through American diplomatic channels to Rufus King in London frequently cited the Admiral by name when it came time to complain to His Majesty's Government of British seizures of American commerce in the West Indies. In October 1799, King would inform Lord Grenville of seizures of American shipping resulting from an alleged misunderstanding by the Admiral's officers that the newly opened American commerce to St. Domingue was legal under the three party political/commercial agreement between the United States, Great Britain and Toussaint l'Ouverture.⁹⁴ In November 1799, he would complain to Grenville that not only British privateers, but Sir Hyde's men of war "have together fallen upon our navigation, and a large portion of our ships engaged in the Trade (sic) between the U.S. & the Spanish colonies (sic) have been seized & the cargoes condemned..." and that the pretext for taking the vessels as prizes would again be the that the American merchantmen carried everyday merchandise such as bar iron nails deemed contraband of war.⁹⁵ In a 2 December 1799 letter to Secretary Pickering, King described that in a November audience with Lord Grenville, he had again laid before the Foreign Minister the "depredations" committed upon American shipping in the West Indies by R.N. warships.⁹⁶ But most galling to the American Minister was the "countenance & encouragement they had received from the Commander in chief (sic) Sir H. Parker."⁹⁷

⁹⁴ King to Pickering, 14 October 1799, in King, 3:132.

⁹⁵ King to Grenville, 18 November 1799, in King, 3:149.

⁹⁶ King to Pickering, 2 December 1799, in King 3:153.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

The serving officers in the U.S. Navy's St. Domingue squadron shared the frustration of the officials in Philadelphia and London as to the British seizures of American merchantmen. Captain Alexander Murray succeeded Silas Talbot as commodore of the St. Domingue station on 17 July 1800, returning to the Caribbean in command of U.S.S. *Constellation*.⁹⁸ Murray had been known to hold Royal Navy officers in the highest esteem as discussed in previous chapters. On his earlier visit to Jamaica mentioned above, he had directed his officers and men to be on their best behavior when dealing with the King's Navy. But after two weeks on station, he was already sufficiently frustrated with his British opposite numbers operating from Port Royal and their oppression of American commerce that he had written Secretary Stoddert:

I think Sir that we have no Enemy (sic) so much to be shunned in this quarter as the British, for they blockade all the passages, & fair, or foul, let few of our Vessels (sic) pass them, if they have Cargoes of Value, (sic) and send them for Jamaica, where the venality of the Admiralty Court gives no quarter, how long we are to bear with these aggravations (sic), I leave to wiser heads than mine to determine, but I confess I think we stand upon very critical grounds with them; but as Admiral Parker is now gone home, let us hope for a favorable change of measures—⁹⁹

It was obvious in American minds that Parker had been responsible for the rapacious attitude that British men of war and cruisers had demonstrated towards their commerce on the Jamaica station. Whether the view was expressed in London by Rufus King, or serving sea officers in the Caribbean like Murray, the man behind the excessive captures was always Sir Hyde Parker. Once *he* was gone, things were bound to improve.

⁹⁸ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 180.

⁹⁹ Murray to Stoddert, 31 July 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 6:211.

Americans, with good reason, had developed a consistently negative expectation of Sir Hyde's behavior. This was in contrast to the expectations Americans had for the other British admirals they dealt with in the Caribbean or elsewhere. The positive relationship forged in 1796 between Captain Talbot, then the U.S. agent for impressed seamen in the West Indies, and Admiral Harvey, continued with Mr. Craig, Talbot's assistant in the Lesser Antilles, and eventually the U.S.N. station commodore at St Kitts. When there were incidents on the station such as Captain Mattson's order directing the starting of an American merchant captain, Giles, in May 1799, Commodore Truxtun, and Secretary of State Pickering, were willing to trust Admiral Harvey's handling of the matter, including crediting his captain's account of the affair over the testimony of the American skipper.¹⁰⁰ The positive rapport built up over what was perceived to be consistently fair treatment from the admiral helped convince them to give Captain Matson the benefit of the doubt, a far cry from the hubbub resulting from Captain Pigot's starting of Captain Jessup described earlier on Parker's Jamaica command. The matter of H.M.S. *Latona*, serving on the Halifax station, which accidentally fired upon an American trading vessel, had a similar conclusion. The positive relationship commanding Admiral Vandeput had cultivated with Americans had to have helped the Secretary of

¹⁰⁰ Captain Matson alleged that the American merchant master was drunk, abusive, and would not leave Matson's ship during an interview over convoy signals. Truxtun to Pickering, 7 May 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:135-36; Truxtun to Vice-Admiral Harvey, R.N., 5 May 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:137; Harvey to Truxtun, 5 May 1799, in *ibid.*; Captain Richard Matson, R.N., to Truxtun, 6 May 1799; in *ibid.*, 3:138; Truxtun to Matson, 6 May 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:138-39; President John Adams to Pickering, 4 August 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:139; Pickering to Adams, 16 August 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:139-40; Pickering to Ebenezer Giles, 13 August 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:140-41.

State more easily accept the explanation for the accident of Frank Sotheron, *Latona's* captain, and let the matter drop.¹⁰¹

But it was Vice Admiral Sir Hyde Parker's sabotage of Whitehall's policy toward General Toussaint l'Ouverture on St. Domingue which frustrated the one area where there was *supposed* to be official cooperation between the United States Navy and the Royal Navy in the Quasi-War. Some discussion of British, and then American, involvement in St. Domingue is necessary to fully comprehend what mischief Parker's hostility would make for what was designed as a collaborative effort of both London and Philadelphia to contain the revolutionary virus raging in that nominally French colony, but at the same time commercially benefit from the situation. As discussed in chapter one, the British experience in St. Domingue had been a disaster after some initial success. Disease had decimated the British Army; tens of thousands of soldiers had died of yellow fever. And the cost of maintaining the army and civil establishment in British occupied territories was astronomical. The government had spent millions of pounds there. In January 1797 alone, His Majesty's Government would incur expenses of £700,000.¹⁰² By late 1796, Britain's economy was teetering on the brink of collapse due to the cost of the war.¹⁰³ February 1797 saw the Bank of England itself forced to suspend species payments under the crush of obligations and bank runs fueled by invasion panic. There were simply

¹⁰¹ Pickering to Vlack & Company, Baltimore, MD, 15 June 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:342; Pickering to Liston, 15 June 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:342-43; John Marshall, *Royal Navy Biography: or Memoirs of All the Flag Officers, Superannuated Rear-Admirals, Retired Captains, Post-Captains, and Commanders, Whose Names Appeared on Admiralty List of Sea Officers at the Commencement of the Present Year, or Who Have since Been Promoted: Illustrated by a Series of Historical and Explanatory Notes, Which Will be Found to Contain an Account of All the Naval Actions, and Other Important Events, From the Commencement of the Late Reign, in 1760, to the Present Period, with Copious Addenda*, vol. 1, part 2 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1823), 503.

¹⁰² Charles Callan Tansill, *The United States and Santo Domingo, 1798-1873: A Chapter in Caribbean Diplomacy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1938), 22.

¹⁰³ Duffy, 295-98.

no resources to continue conducting the war on such a scale in St. Domingue or anywhere.

Consequently, the British cabinet had demanded a new policy of retrenchment on St. Domingue, dispatching in November 1796, a new military governor, Lieutenant General John Graves Simcoe, with the specific brief of pulling British forces back to Mole St. Nicholas and limiting all costs to £300,000 per annum.¹⁰⁴ After Simcoe had returned to England in August 1797, having both failed miserably to live within this budget or withdraw as directed, the responsibility of carrying out this policy had devolved upon his aide, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Maitland.¹⁰⁵ Ministers in Whitehall had previously determined to withdraw British forces to the Mole St. Nicholas; they now added the southern port of Jeremie, reflecting Maitland's views. This, they believed, would contain costs but still help secure Jamaica from a feared invasion from St. Domingue.¹⁰⁶ Arriving in March 1798, Maitland had carried out the directed evacuations by 10 May.¹⁰⁷ By July, in a letter to British War Secretary, Henry Dundas, Maitland was questioning whether even maintaining a minimal presence with these coastal ports could be done within the budget established by the government in London.¹⁰⁸ Maitland soon concluded that the answer was no; his best chance of success was to abandon St. Domingue altogether with the least loss of life and treasure possible. To accomplish this, Maitland opened negotiations with General Toussaint l'Ouverture, whom he cannily

¹⁰⁴ Tansill, 22.

¹⁰⁵ Major General Nesbit was supposed to assume command but became ill on the way out, leaving Maitland, Simcoe's former aide who had impressed ministers with his views on retrenchment and been sent out as Nesbitt's advance man, to assume command. Duffy, 303-05.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Tansill, 25-27.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 27-28.

perceived as the most powerful of the three island warlords arrayed against him, forging an agreement with Toussaint, allowing British forces to depart unmolested in exchange for the exclusive surrender of these strong points to the General's forces and the General's pledge not to invade Jamaica or the other British West Indies holdings. Also comprehended was that British traders could help provision Toussaint in exchange for island produce.¹⁰⁹ After concluding arrangements for the removal of British forces, Maitland returned to England to personally explain his new policy in Whitehall that had exceeded even that of the ministers.¹¹⁰

In early December 1798, after Maitland arrived back in Britain, Rufus King in London became aware of newspapers in England reporting upon a new British policy in St Domingue that he feared might pose dangers for American trade in the Caribbean and had written to Lord Grenville enquiring about it.¹¹¹ Grenville had referred King to British War Secretary, Dundas, who showed him a copy of Maitland's "treaty" with Toussaint, which the British Government had chosen to ratify.¹¹² King soon wrote to Mr. Dundas pointing out certain American fears that the agreement would allow St. Domingue to continue to act as a base for French privateers preying upon American commerce in the Caribbean and also promote the jealousy of American merchants by providing British traders with an effective monopoly to those areas controlled by Toussaint. King proposed that in the interests of amity with the United States the British Government consider amending the agreement to require Toussaint to suppress privateers operating from his territory against British *and* American merchantmen and also to allow American

¹⁰⁹ Duffy, 307-09.

¹¹⁰ Tansill, 30.

¹¹¹ King to Grenville, 1 December 1798, in King, 2:474.

¹¹² King to Pickering, 7 December 1798, in *ibid.*, 2:476-77.

commerce to help provision Toussaint's part of the island.¹¹³ Dundas responded the next day, 9 December 1798, that he would advise the British representative to be sent out to implement the agreement with Gen. Toussaint, Colonel Grant, that he propose an article mandating Gen. Toussaint bar privateers sailing against American trade from territory he controlled; British ratification of the treaty would be conditioned upon Toussaint assenting to this item.¹¹⁴ This communication began a dialogue between Mr. King and the British cabinet as to the merits of developing a joint Anglo-American policy as to St. Domingue, regarding both trade and the protection of British and American territories from any adventurism from that island.¹¹⁵ Talks quickly went far enough that His Majesty's Government soon decided to send Gen. Maitland himself to Philadelphia as a specially accredited emissary to aid Mr. Liston in direct negotiations with the American Government on the subject. The expectation of the British Cabinet was that after concluding a convention with the Adams Administration, Gen. Maitland would then proceed to St. Domingue where he would present the deal to Toussaint l'Ouverture.¹¹⁶

And so Maitland sailed for the United States, his mission carrying the hopes of the inner circle of the British Government for an agreement above all securing Jamaica from the evil influences posed by the St. Dominguan revolution, but also for establishing a unity of purpose with the Americans in a critical realm of New World relations. Just as the Jay Treaty five years before had tacitly recognized the critical role the Americans would now play with respect to the security of British North America, His Majesty's

¹¹³ King to Dundas, 8 December 1798, in *ibid.*, 2:483-85.

¹¹⁴ Dundas to King, 9 December 1798, in *ibid.*, 2:486.

¹¹⁵ Grenville to King, 9 January 1799, in *ibid.*, 2:504-05 (letter and attached minute were annexed to the following letter); King to Pickering, 10 January 1799, in *ibid.*, 2:499-503.

¹¹⁶ King to Pickering, 16 January 1799, in *ibid.*, 2:511-12.

Government now acknowledged with the Maitland Mission that the Americans would have such a similar part to play regarding the British West Indies. And the recent turn of events in Europe had made finding common ground with the Americans even more important. Coalition Armies in Italy had just suffered crushing defeats. The French Republic was now in virtual control of that Peninsula, deflating British hopes that other Coalition Armies might take the initiative on the Continent. Rufus King had spelled this out in a private letter to Gen. Maitland before the latter had left for Philadelphia.¹¹⁷

Maitland arrived at the American capital on 2 April 1799. He quickly found he had to abandon the written proposal—this had specified the creation of an Anglo-American trading company which would have exclusive trading rights to St. Domingue and that America would provide produce and Britain manufactured goods—that Lord Grenville had sent with him as the template for any agreement he might reach with the Americans.¹¹⁸ He discovered that the Americans had already begun direct negotiations with Toussaint who had sent his emissary, Joseph Bunel, to Philadelphia the previous December.¹¹⁹ As a result of those talks, Dr. Edward Stevens, the newly appointed Consul General to St. Domingue was already en route to meet with Toussaint at Cap Français.¹²⁰ Also Congress had already enacted, and President Adams signed, legislation authorizing the chief executive to lift the trade embargo to French territories where the trade would be safe. Couched in vague terms, it was apparent this legislation was meant to open trade

¹¹⁷ King to Thomas Maitland, London, 27 January 1799, in *ibid.*, 2:530.

¹¹⁸ Tansill, 41-43, 47-48. Grenville's proposed agreement that went with Maitland was contained in the "minute" attached to the 9 January 1799 letter Grenville had sent to King referenced above. *See* King, 2:504-05.

¹¹⁹ Gordon S. Brown, *Toussaint's Clause: the Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 136-37; DeConde, 135; Tansill, 47-48.

¹²⁰ Stoddert to Captain Thomas Tingey, U.S.N., U.S.S. *Ganges*, 16 March 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 2:479-80; DeConde, 136-37.

to St. Domingue and was known as “Toussaint’s Clause.”¹²¹ General Maitland also learned that Secretary of State Pickering was a very able negotiator. As a result, he and Robert Liston, the British resident minister, concluded that there was no alternative but to improvise as best they could an accord that accommodated both British and American views without negatively impacting the shared goals of containing the security threat posed by the Revolution in St. Domingue and opening the colony for British and American commerce.¹²² These apparently diametrically opposed ends of quarantining the island and yet opening it for business, they would achieve by again exacting a solemn pledge from Toussaint not to harass British and American shipping, nor to invade or somehow foment slave rebellion in the British Antilles or the American South. Additionally, Toussaint would need to agree to limit, and all commerce would be limited, to British or American shipping calling at the ports of Cap Français or Port Au Prince. From there these vessels could, by special passport issued by the American and British consuls residing at those ports, proceed to the coasting trade. Consequently, under the British/American proposal, Toussaint would neither be allowed to maintain a deepwater merchant marine, nor a navy. Instead, the Anglo-American merchant navies would have the monopoly of his trade and for seaborne security he would be obliged to rely upon the Royal Navy and U.S. Navy patrolling his coastline.¹²³ Thus it was that both the Americans and British had concluded that acting in concert as to St. Domingue was more

¹²¹ Brown, 138, 143.

¹²² Maitland to Dundas, 20 April 1799, in Tansill, 55.

¹²³ Tansill, 54, n. 82.

important than standing upon their separate principles. Indeed, President Adams would from time to time give voice to this exact sentiment.¹²⁴

General Maitland arrived off of Cap Français in the sloop of war, H.M.S. *Camilla*, on 14 May 1799, wasting no time contacting Dr. Stevens. Stevens met Maitland aboard *Camilla*, where Maitland told him of the joint Anglo-American proposal for relations between the two powers and General Toussaint l'Ouverture.¹²⁵ Discussions with the St. Dominguan general proceeded quickly after that. By 23 May, Maitland wrote Secretary Pickering that negotiations with Toussaint were far enough along to discuss the actual dates for opening the ports at Cap Français and Port Au Prince. Under the final version of the agreement, Le Cap and Port Au Prince would open to British and American merchantmen on 1 August 1799.¹²⁶

Though the agreement reached with Toussaint was for the most part that proposed jointly by the British and Americans, there were some minor adjustments made to respond to altered conditions in St. Domingue upon which Toussaint had insisted. These included authorization for Toussaint to arm “*batiment d’etat*,” or small coasting vessels to protect that trade against the corsairs of his old rival, Rigaud.¹²⁷ With the Directory’s blessing, Rigaud had now commenced a civil war against his nominal leader; the bloody War of the Knives had begun.¹²⁸ Consequently, both Maitland and Stevens

¹²⁴ Adams to Stoddert, 7 June 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 3:313; Adams to Pickering, 29 June and 2 July 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:424 and 3:453. This was also the view that William Pitt and his ministers had expressed to Rufus King before Maitland had left on his mission to America. King to Pickering, 10 January 1799, in King, 2:502.

¹²⁵ Maitland, H.M.S. *Camilla*, off Cap Français to Stevens, Cap Français, 14 May 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 3:183-84.

¹²⁶ Maitland, *Camilla* off Gonaives, St. Domingue to Pickering, 23 May 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:235.

¹²⁷ Stevens, Cap Français to Captain Christopher R. Perry, U.S.N., 11 October 1799, in *ibid.*, 4:279.

¹²⁸ Stevens, L’Arcahaye, St. Domingue, to Pickering, 24 June 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:389; Philippe R. Girard, “Black Talleyrand: Toussaint Louverture’s Diplomacy,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 66, no.

had seen the wisdom of this measure allowing Toussaint his *batiment d'etat*, with the proviso that none of these small ships operate further than five leagues from the St. Dominguan coast, present no threat to British and American ships and only sail under the passport of Stevens and the British agent.¹²⁹ Thus, for the British and Americans, the coming of this civil war with Rigaud had added an unwritten provision to the tri-party agreement: namely that the two powers would need to support Toussaint in this struggle. Stevens in a letter to Pickering had sized up what a Rigaud triumph would mean to American interests in St. Domingue: the end of any commercial accord and by implication a likely export of the island's revolution to the slave holding regions of the British West Indies and the American South.¹³⁰ Indeed, as early as 23 May 1799, Stevens had supplied Maitland with intelligence he had received from Toussaint of a plot Rigaud had already put in motion at the behest of the Directory to raise a slave rebellion in Jamaica in anticipation of invasion. Rigaud, per this information, was already raising troops.¹³¹ Stevens was later able to provide the British, including Maitland, and especially Lord Balcarres, the Governor of Jamaica, with written plans detailing the invasion plot obtained from Toussaint. Forewarned, Jamaican authorities were able to catch Rigaud's operatives on that island.¹³²

1 (January 2009): 102. Before taking his forced leave at Toussaint's instigation, the Directory's agent Hedouville had branded Toussaint a traitor and directed Rigaud to disavow any allegiance to him. *Ibid.*, 99. Stevens believed that Rigaud was the Directory's tool and receiving support from it through their current agent on the island, Roume. Stevens, to Pickering, 24 June 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi- War*, 3:390.

¹²⁹ Stevens to Perry, 11 October 1799, in *ibid.*, 4:279.

¹³⁰ Stevens, L'Arcahay, St. Domingue, to Pickering, 24 June 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:392. Stevens was already aware of an order from the Directory to French authorities in St. Domingue to invade the American South and Jamaica. Stevens, Gonaives to Maitland, *Camilla*, 23 May 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:235.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 3:235-36.

¹³² Girard, "Black Talleyrand," 104-06.

With the date set and the accord in place, it was essential that all the players be on the same page, especially the navies of the two powers. The Royal Navy and the United States Navy were obliged to police the agreement, protecting the American and British merchantmen seeking to trade with Toussaint's St. Domingue from French corsairs and, with the latest turn of events, suppress any of Rigaud's naval forces caught attacking Toussaint's coasters. It was apparent that the tripartite agreement would be dead in the water without the crucial cooperation of Sir Hyde Parker and his large Jamaica based squadron. As nominal enemy territory, Sir Hyde's warships had placed St. Domingue under blockade and were, of course, profiting from the lucrative prizes often seized in those waters. Now, the tripartite agreement would necessitate the conditional lifting of that blockade, at least for British and American deepwater traders and Toussaint's *batiment d'etat*. Accordingly, General Maitland had travelled to Jamaica to put the Admiral in the frame so that he could issue the appropriate orders to his captains at sea.¹³³ Dr. Stevens could see to squaring the much smaller United States Navy via the commander on station and Navy Secretary Stoddert in Philadelphia.

The trouble with this eminently reasonable course forward was that Sir Hyde Parker had reached his own opinions as to the merits of the Anglo-American agreement with Toussaint and, for that matter, General Maitland's original treaty with Toussaint calling for the British evacuation of all of St. Domingue. And these opinions were in no way favorable. He had especially been affronted by the order requiring him to withdraw his squadron from St. Nicholas Mole, his unit's strategic advanced-base, controlling the

¹³³ Maitland, *Camilla*, to Stevens, 23 May 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 3:238.

Windward Passage and the approaches to Jamaica.¹³⁴ From that location, Parker's cruisers had the windward advantage of vessels returning to or arriving from Europe or the United States. In August 1798, Sir Hyde had begun a series of carping letters to the First Lord of the Admiralty, George, Earl Spencer, who as the civil head of the Admiralty Board sat as a minister in Pitt's cabinet. Parker desperately sought to convince the Earl to get His Majesty's Government to execute a full stop on the issue of withdrawal from the Mole and completely disavow any secret treaty with Toussaint l'Ouverture.¹³⁵ The Admiral personally felt a deep sense of injury to his honor in that he was asked to deal with Thomas Maitland as an equal, or worse yet as a subordinate, for Maitland, was not a real general at all, but a mere brevetted lieutenant-colonel.¹³⁶ Parker could not stomach the fact that Maitland had taken his evacuation decision without consulting him, as a true Vice-Admiral and the senior commander of all British naval forces in the Caribbean. He was appalled that the cabinet in London would deign to listen to such a trumped up nobody as Maitland, as opposed to himself, an officer of high rank and long term of service. He felt the decision to evacuate the Mole was suicidal for Jamaican security. He, of course, did not mention the direct negative effect the evacuation might pose to his ability to continue securing lucrative prizes from the Mole.¹³⁷ That fact, however, had not

¹³⁴ Parker to George, Earl Spencer, 10 August 1798, in H.W. Richmond ed., *Private Papers of George, Second Earl Spencer: First Lord of the Admiralty: 1794-1801* (Navy Records Society, 1924), 3:266-67;

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*; Parker to Spencer, 29 October 1798, in *ibid.*, 3:269-70; Parker to Spencer, 19 May 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:275-76; Parker to Spencer, 14 July 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:279-80; Parker to Spencer, 8 December 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:282-83; Parker to Spencer, 24 February 1800, in *ibid.*, 3:283-84.

¹³⁶ Parker to Spencer, 30 January 1798, in *ibid.*, 3:260.

¹³⁷ Parker to Spencer, 10 August 1798, in *ibid.*, 3:266-67; Parker to Spencer, 29 October 1798, in *ibid.*, 3:269-70. The truth of the matter was that Maitland was in fact very well connected. His brother was the Earl of Lauderdale, and Maitland himself was acquainted with Robert Liston, British minister to Philadelphia, knew *His Royal Highness*, the Duke of York, Commander in Chief of the British Army, and most importantly, had the ear of his fellow Scot, Henry Dundas, Pitt's right hand man. King to Pickering, 25 January 1799, in King, 2:524; Duffy, 303.

been lost on the First Lord in London.¹³⁸ Finally, as to the Anglo-American compact with Toussaint, Sir Hyde was aghast that Maitland was proposing to link His Majesty's Government with a black renegade like Toussaint, and with the Americans to boot.¹³⁹

Parker's letters to Earl Spencer reveal how out of sync he was with the British cabinet's thinking. After Maitland's first agreement with Toussaint, the First Lord had patiently replied to Sir Hyde's letters attacking Maitland's withdrawal from St. Domingue.¹⁴⁰ But by January 1799, he had firmly replied that the Brigadier's St. Domingue policy had "met with the approbation of his (sic) Majesty's confidential servants. . . ."¹⁴¹ It had, of course, saved Whitehall perhaps as much as one million pounds per annum. And Lord Spencer's January reply to Admiral Parker was also penned during the time frame when the cabinet and Rufus King were discussing joint British/American action with respect to Toussaint l'Ouverture. Trying to attach the Americans more closely with Britain in its fight with the French, however accomplished, was yet an important diplomatic goal for Pitt's beleaguered government. Indeed, writing to Parker on 4 August 1799 Lord Spencer had confessed that since General Maitland's recent return to England, he had not yet been apprized of the latest information concerning the new treaty with Toussaint—the Americans were never mentioned as the unsigned parties to the document—but suggested to Parker that if His Majesty's Government approved it, as they had General Maitland's previous diplomatic foray on St. Domingue, the Admiral would need to find a way to overcome his personal objections

¹³⁸ Spencer would later remark to Sir Hyde that events might necessitate recalling him from the Jamaica station "on which I have been much pleased to find you have derived so much advantage in point of prize money." Spencer to Parker, 10 April 1800, (marked private) in *ibid.*, 3:285.

¹³⁹ Parker to Spencer, 19 May 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:275.

¹⁴⁰ Spencer to Parker, 2 December 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:271;

¹⁴¹ Spencer to Parker, 2 January 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:272.

and embrace it.¹⁴² But instead of taking a hint from Spencer's letters, the Admiral had continued to verbally assail the new British St Domingue policy with Toussaint which now encompassed the United States.¹⁴³

Writing letters to London damning the policy was one thing. But Sir Hyde's opposition to the tri-party treaty would become overt. After initially issuing the orders to his captains to tolerate the new commerce with St. Domingue comprehended by the tri-party agreement,¹⁴⁴ as well as reluctantly sanctioning an early shipment of supplies sent to aid Toussaint in his struggle with Rigaud,¹⁴⁵ Admiral Parker appeared to have begun his own rear guard action to frustrate the treaty. While Toussaint's forces had suffered severe shortages of food, clothing and munitions due to the American embargo and British blockade, Rigaud in the south of the French colony had prospered from an illegal trade with surrounding islands and South America.¹⁴⁶ Maitland had informed Sir Hyde, when he had gone to visit him in May 1799, that the Jamaica squadron would need to halt the illicit commerce sustaining Rigaud.¹⁴⁷ Some of these supplies were even coming from Jamaica, which Rigaud had vowed to invade.¹⁴⁸ Maitland had written Sir Hyde once more on 20 June 1799, asking the Admiral to impose the "strictest blockade" upon Rigaud's ports.¹⁴⁹ But apparently the Royal Navy was still not getting the job done, because on 7 August 1799 Toussaint felt the need to directly appeal to President Adams

¹⁴² Spencer to Parker, 4 August 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:280-81.

¹⁴³ Parker to Spencer, 8 December, 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:282-83; Parker to Spencer, 24 February 1800, in *ibid.*, 3:283-84.

¹⁴⁴ Girard, "Black Talleyrand," 103.

¹⁴⁵ Parker to Spencer, 14 July 1799, 279.

¹⁴⁶ Stevens to Pickering, 24 June 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 3:389-93; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 157-58.

¹⁴⁷ Maitland to Stevens, 23 May 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 3:238.

¹⁴⁸ Stevens to Pickering, 24 June 1799, in *ibid.*, 3:389; Girard, "Black Talleyrand," 101, 103.

¹⁴⁹ Tansill, 67, n.111.

to order the U.S. Navy to commence its own blockade of the south.¹⁵⁰ But this was not due to lack of ships on station. Stevens would later remark that British men of war were common on the south coast of Hispaniola.¹⁵¹ Professor Palmer in *Stoddert's War* summed up the situation: "Despite the continual reinforcement of his squadron, which had grown to forty-three ships by October, the admiral (Sir Hyde Parker) had chosen not to comply."¹⁵²

But Parker's men did more than just fail to enforce the blockade of Rigaud's southern ports. His squadron had begun to take action against the Dominguan coasters operating under the passports executed by Dr. Stevens and the various British agents based in the colony. While Dr. Stevens could write in August to Secretary Pickering that the Admiral's cruisers were dealing with the American merchantmen coming to the designated ports of Le Cap and Port Au Prince with discretion per the passport rules agreed with Gen. Maitland,¹⁵³ at least one American naval captain patrolling on the St. Domingue station by November 1799 had noticed a decidedly different attitude these British cruisers were now evidencing towards the St. Dominguan coasting fleet. Captain George Little of the frigate, U.S.S. *Boston*, wrote Stevens on 12 November that he had stopped a schooner sailing with what appeared to be Stevens's protection heading into the port of Jeremie in the Bight of Leogane. Uncertain whether it was really Steven's passport, he had put an American prize crew aboard and sent the vessel to Le Cap where the document could be safely verified. He had added that there had been a British cruiser

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁵¹ Stevens to Pickering, 9 December 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 4:506.

¹⁵² Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 160.

¹⁵³ Stevens to Pickering, 16 August 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 4:85.

in sight at that moment which, unless he acted first, he did not doubt would have immediately seized the schooner and sent her to Port Royal for condemnation.¹⁵⁴

Some eight days later, Captain Little sent a boat in for supplies at Le Cap, bearing a letter for Dr. Stevens. Little wanted some clarification from the Consul concerning the status of the French-flagged ships bearing his (Steven's) passports because he was aware the British cruisers in the region were seizing all French-flagged ships whether or not they had the requisite passports. He wanted to know if there had been some change in official policy authorizing such seizures.¹⁵⁵ In fact, there had been no such change. A French flag at the mast head in the vicinity of St. Domingue did not necessarily denote an enemy ship. Toussaint's vessels, his "*batiment d'etat*," being still nominally French—Toussaint had not formally severed his ties with the French Republic—flew the French flag but sailed with the Anglo-American countersigned passports per the tri-party accord. And there were now more of these vessels on the water. Because of the circumstances of Toussaint needing supplies transported by sea in his war with Rigaud, he had been forced to expand his fleet to include larger, requisitioned French vessels. Indeed some of these had been armed to protect his defenseless transports from Rigaud's marauding barges in the Bight of Leogane. Stevens and the resident British agents had acceded to these alterations to the original terms of the Maitland/Toussaint accord in light of the fluid war conditions;¹⁵⁶ their goal was to keep Toussaint's cause alive and, with it, the accord itself.

¹⁵⁴ Captain George Little, U.S.N., U.S.S. *Boston*, to Stevens, 12 November 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 4:382.

¹⁵⁵ Little to Stevens, 20 November 1799, in *ibid.*, 4:430.

¹⁵⁶ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 159-60; Stevens to Captain Christopher R. Perry, U.S.N., 11 October 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 4:279-80. Stevens also tolerated these armed vessels of Toussaint's because they had helped convoy Anglo-American commerce in the dangerous Bight in the absence of Royal Navy and U.S. Navy men of war. *Ibid.*

However, the unsympathetic Admiral Parker apparently took no such liberal view of these changing circumstances. Captain Little in his letter requesting clarification from Dr. Stevens was very specific as to who had authorized British men of war to seize all French-flagged ships. He wrote: "I will inform you that the British cruisers have now orders from admiral (sic) Parker to take all vessels that wear a french (sic) Flag even should they have yours and Gen. Maitland's (sic) passports (sic) on board. . . ." ¹⁵⁷ And Little could report that these ships had not hesitated to carry out the admiral's order. He wrote Stevens: "I would inform you that there are two or three British Cruisers (sic) on the Coast to the leeward which have made great depredations on the Coasting (sic) vessels they have taken and plundered everyone they have met with. . . ." ¹⁵⁸ Little was in a position to know what he was talking about as he had undoubtedly spoken some of these ships. He could name the sloop of war that had threatened the French- flagged schooner that he had sent into Cap Français the week before as the *Diligence*. ¹⁵⁹ Little also mentioned that he had recently convoyed one of Toussaint's French-flagged troop transports into Mole St Nicholas which was afterward bound for the Bight of Leogane where, he opined, it would have been fair game, not just for Rigaud's barges, but also for British private or public men of war. ¹⁶⁰

Unfortunately for Toussaint's cause, this British seizure situation was shortly to become even nastier. In November 1799, the General had gained the upper hand in the War of the Knives and had invaded the southern province, Rigaud's base. Critical to the invasion's success was the reduction of the port city of Jacmel through which much of

¹⁵⁷ Little to Stevens, 20 November 1799, in *ibid.*, 4:430.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 430-31.

Rigaud's seaborne supplies came. Toussaint sent his army overland through the rough terrain, but his baggage and artillery he sent by sea in six requisitioned, French, armed ships, at least four of which were larger than his usual *batiment d'etat*.¹⁶¹ Before sending off these vessels, Toussaint had made sure they carried the appropriate passports, "fully expressing their destination and object," and in this case issued by the British agent at Port Au Prince, Hugh Cathcart, and countersigned by Dr. Stevens.¹⁶² Obviously the Anglo-American authorities in charge of regulating the tri-party accord on St. Domingue had understood the significance of the mission to Jacmel and signed off upon it. Unfortunately, Sir Hyde Parker had not. On 24 November, the six vessels encountered a frigate of the Jamaica squadron, H.M.S. *Solebay*, commanded by Captain Stephen Poyntz, off of Cape Tiburon. The *Solebay* managed to capture four of them and sent them as prizes to Jamaica. There the Admiralty court condemned them.¹⁶³

Toussaint was livid when the news reached him. Robert Ritchie, the American consul at Port Au Prince, wrote Secretary Pickering that he had personally spoken with the General who had "express[ed] himself warmly on the subject."¹⁶⁴ Toussaint was frustrated with good reason. His siege of Jacmel required artillery. He immediately sent to Port Royal to see if he could have his vessels and weaponry released; the result was negative. Lord Balcarres offered an indemnity for the ships and guns, but it was the ships and guns that Toussaint required.¹⁶⁵ Yet it was not just Toussaint and his commanders

¹⁶¹ Robert Ritchie, U.S. Consul, Port Republicain (Port Au Prince) to Pickering, 19 December 1799, in *ibid.*, 4:555; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 159-60.

¹⁶² Ritchie to Pickering, 19 December 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 4:555.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 160-61.

¹⁶⁴ Ritchie to Pickering, 19 December 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 4:555.

¹⁶⁵ Stevens to Pickering, 27 December, 1799, in *ibid.*, 4:571; Pickering to King, 7 March 1800, in *ibid.*, 5:281-82.

who were incensed with the British over this seizure. The American diplomats who had forged this accord with Toussaint were also frustrated with their British partner. Dr. Stevens, writing Pickering, opined that the move would “inevitably prolong the war” and that if Toussaint’s pleas for return of the vessels, equipment intact, did not swiftly occur, and British seizures of his ships continued, “the consequences . . . [were] evident—a rupture between him and them.”¹⁶⁶ Pickering writing to Rufus King in London, did not bandy words: “This bad policy of the British (ascribable to individual rapacity—perhaps to insidious views, that the two Chiefs may destroy each other,) I fear may prove injurious to the commerce of the United States.”¹⁶⁷ But the Americans did not just complain among themselves about this perceived British perfidy, they took up the matter with their British counterparts. Pickering sought an interview with Robert Liston in Philadelphia, where he expressed his ire at the move, and that it might prove fatal to the deal with Toussaint. Liston, in turn, wrote his chief, Lord Grenville, in Whitehall about the “warm” American response to the matter and that it was the American view that the seizures could be ‘attended with serious consequences’ and “in all probability occasion a rupture.”¹⁶⁸ Once more Hyde Parker’s name had appeared in a diplomatic dispatch involving events angering the Americans. Liston mentioned that a “part of the squadron “under the command of Admiral Sir Hyde Parker,” had carried out the seizure of Toussaint’s ships “on pretense that they were of a longer size than was permitted by the convention entered into between Genl. Toussaint and General Maitland.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Stevens to Pickering, 27 December, 1799, in *ibid.*, 4:571.

¹⁶⁷ Pickering to King, 7 March 1800, in *ibid.*, 5:281-82.

¹⁶⁸ Liston to Grenville, 6 February 1800, in Robert Liston, ed. Richard Simmons *The Liston Papers: 1796-1800* (East Ardsley, Wakefield, England: Microform Academic Publishers, 1990), microform 2:19-20.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

The tenor of Liston's communiqué to Lord Grenville hinted at what must have now become obvious to His Majesty's Ministers in London: Admiral Parker, and to a lesser extent, Lord Balcarres, the two men entrusted with successfully carrying out the British Cabinet's St. Dominguan policy, the second Maitland-Toussaint convention informally acceded to by the United States Government, were instead actively working to undermine it. The chief tenet of the Cabinet's new direction toward the nominally French colony was that the security of Jamaica and the other British slave owning islands now rested upon Toussaint's promise not to export his revolution to those possessions, as well as the Southern United States. To realize this benefit, Toussaint necessarily had to prevail against Rigaud; ergo His Majesty's Government needed to prop up the General. Sir Hyde's private foreign policy instead actively sought to prolong the war in the hope that the two generals, Rigaud and Toussaint, would destroy each other and consequently provide no threat to Jamaica. Perhaps, Sir Hyde had hoped that the cabinet would then reverse course and occupy St. Domingue once more. This risky conception counted on disorder in the island not producing some worse result such as a Rigaud triumph in the War of the Knives, or a now hostile Toussaint prevailing and bent on revenge against the British, or some alienated victor of the chaos who could not be anticipated. At any rate, Parker's was a policy antagonistic toward the United States and its desire to re-open a lucrative St. Dominguan commerce as Secretary Pickering had perceived.

In fact, in a December 1799 letter to his superior at the Admiralty, Lord Spencer, written to justify his squadron's seizure of Toussaint's tiny flotilla, Sir Hyde had actually

admitted his goal of securing Jamaica by prolonging the War of the Knives.¹⁷⁰ Sir Hyde wrote of the seizure:

It therefore becomes politic for the security of this Island (sic) that that contest be prolonged: for as long as Rigaud and Toussaint are carrying on the contest, no great danger can be appreciated from either, as to the projected plan against Jamaica.¹⁷¹

In the same letter Sir Hyde had meant to implicate Toussaint in the recent clandestine plan to invade Jamaica, by mentioning the intelligence gained by the confession of one of the French spies recently caught in Jamaica, Saspertas. Saspertas, reported Parker, had told Jamaican authorities that Toussaint had agreed to provide troops for that invasion. This information, Parker argued, clearly vindicated the seizure of the St. Dominguan general's ships which "were part of the plan against this Island (sic) (Jamaica), than as portended against Rigaud . . ."¹⁷² This was entirely disingenuous by the admiral in light of the fact that Toussaint had originally reported the plot to British and American officials.¹⁷³ And as Professor Palmer has recognized, the admiral had "contradicted his own presumption of cooperation between the two rebels (Toussaint and Rigaud)" in confessing his strategy of prolonging the war between them.¹⁷⁴

Lord Spencer did not reply to Sir Hyde's dispatch until 10 April 1800. While on the surface the Admiralty backed Parker's action in seizing Toussaint's ships and their subsequent condemnation, it was plain that the cabinet, at the same time, had not been amused. Lord Spencer informed Parker that he was likely to be recalled from the most

¹⁷⁰ Parker to Spencer, 8 December 1799, in Richmond, *Spencer Papers*, 3:282-83.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 282-83.

¹⁷³ Girard, "Black Talleyrand," 106.

¹⁷⁴ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 161.

lucrative flag posting in the Royal Navy.¹⁷⁵ Although the First Lord of the Admiralty would be the mouthpiece for the action, the movement of key naval personnel in those days was generally the prerogative of the inner circle of the cabinet, the very group which had given its blessing to both of Maitland's initiatives regarding Toussaint l'Ouverture.¹⁷⁶ It is quite possible that Sir Hyde's name had come up one too many times in diplomatic dispatches connected with actions which did not reflect well upon him. He, or his officers, had been the subject of complaints from the American government, almost from the beginning of his service in Jamaica. Even British diplomats like Liston had questioned his actions at times. He had set a tone on that station which had offended personnel ranging from American agents stationed in the islands, such as Talbot or Savage, to Anglophile naval officers like Captain Alexander Murray U.S.N., to the American Minister to Britain, Rufus King, and even the Secretary of State himself, Timothy Pickering. While the British government tolerated a certain amount of autonomy with respect to British foreign naval postings in the eighteenth century due to the practical reality of slow communications, there were limits. And with his blatant disregard of the Maitland-Toussaint-Stevens convention, Parker had exceeded them. As discussed previously, the only real power the Admiralty had over its flag officers on distant stations was that of recall. Recall from such a plum appointment as Jamaica could only be read as a significant demotion. And Spencer rubbed Parker's nose in it by specifically reminding the admiral that he had reaped much prize money from his

¹⁷⁵ Spencer to Parker, 10 April 1800, in Richmond, *Spencer Papers*, 3:284-85. Why the Admiralty sanctioned the seizures is somewhat mysterious. Professor Palmer has suggested that perhaps it was because Captain Poyntz, who had captured Toussaint's ships and stood to financially gain from their condemnation, was Lord Spencer's nephew. Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 161.

¹⁷⁶ Rodger, *Command*, 426, 434-35, 468-71; Lavery, 21.

Jamaican service.¹⁷⁷ Spencer's 11 May 1800 letter, transferring Vice Admiral Parker home and delivered to him by Lord Hugh Seymour, his successor, had assured the admiral that he was not being sacked, but merely being given "a change of service."¹⁷⁸

But the First Lord could not also resist writing:

[T]hrough in the course of your command a few circumstances have occurred in which I could have wished you to act differently from what you did . . . I can, however, assure you that it is not on that account that this arrangement is made.¹⁷⁹

Sir Hyde's next appointment would prove a shock to his system. After a hiatus in England, the Admiralty would assign him as commander of the Royal Navy fleet being sent to the icy Baltic to punish the Danes at Copenhagen for their policy of armed neutrality. While Parker would remain the nominal commander of the expedition, there was no question but that the real commander was his second officer: Admiral Horatio, Lord Nelson, the victor of the Nile.¹⁸⁰ The Admiralty would later recall Parker in disgrace from that mission for his lackluster leadership; Nelson would return as the lionized victor of the Battle of Copenhagen.¹⁸¹

However, during the Autumn of 1799 and Winter of 1799-1800, Admiral Parker yet remained in command on the Jamaican station. The newly expanded St. Domingue squadron of the U.S. Navy was then trying to determine how it would best fulfill its part in enforcing the Maitland-Toussaint-Stevens convention. In October 1799, Captain Silas Talbot had returned to the Caribbean in command of the U.S.S. *Constitution* as the

¹⁷⁷ Spencer to Parker, 10 April 1800, in Richmond, *Spencer Papers*, 3:285; Spencer to Parker, 11 May 1800, in *ibid.*, 3:286.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Rodger, *Command*, 468-69.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 469-71.

station commodore based at Cap Français.¹⁸² Ironically, it would be Talbot's brief to jointly enforce the tri-party accord with his British opposite number, his old nemesis, Admiral Sir Hyde Parker. Since May 1799, Dr. Stevens had implored the U.S. Government to send the U.S. Navy to patrol the southern coast of St. Domingue to help blockade Rigaud's southern ports.¹⁸³ Of course, Maitland had done the same with the Royal Navy's Jamaican squadron. But as it slowly became evident to American proponents of the tri-party accord such as Stevens and Pickering, that Sir Hyde Parker would not direct his captains to undertake this burden, the realization grew among them that the American St. Domingue Squadron's role in enforcing the tri-party accord would have to change. After the *Solebay's* seizure of Toussaint's vessels bound for Jacmel, Dr. Stevens certainly had begun to suspect that in actuality the involvement of the Jamaican authorities, meaning Lord Balcarres and Admiral Parker, towards Toussaint's survival would be malignant, boding ill for American interests in that colony.¹⁸⁴ The American consul general eventually perceived that it would be up to the U.S. Navy to pick up the slack in dealing with Rigaud, and also even to run scrimmage for Toussaint as against a Royal Navy bent on seizing the general's ships and otherwise disrupting operations against his southern rival. He and Commodore Talbot would come to share this understanding and then develop a close working relationship on this point which allowed them to effectively marshal the tiny American squadron to greatly aid Toussaint in defeating Rigaud.

¹⁸² Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 164.

¹⁸³ Stevens to Pickering, 24 June 1799, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 3:392.

¹⁸⁴ Stevens to Pickering, 27 December, 1799, in *ibid.*, 4:571. Again, Pickering in Philadelphia understood this and wished to authorize even extra-legal methods to save his St. Domingue policy. Pickering to King, 7 March 1800, in *ibid.*, 5:281-82; Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 158.

In January 1800, Commodore Talbot decided to send Captain Christopher Perry, the father of War of 1812 naval hero Oliver Hazard Perry, on a mission to circumnavigate Hispaniola in the frigate, U.S.S. *General Greene*, “paying more particular attention to the South (sic) side of the Island (sic).”¹⁸⁵ The Commodore wrote: “The number of American vessels trading to Rigaud’s part of the island has become very considerable (sic) You will therefore endeavor to intercept them as much as possible”¹⁸⁶ Hence, Talbot had directed Perry in the *General Greene* to perform the duty Hyde Parker’s cruisers had steadfastly refrained from doing and which Toussaint’s forces still investing Jacmel so desperately needed: a patrol of the southern coast of St. Domingue. Perry took this duty very seriously. His one frigate, cruising off Jacmel, mounted a very effective blockade of that port, cutting off the stream of supplies that had allowed Rigaud’s forces to endure the siege.¹⁸⁷ The cruise of Perry’s lone frigate put proof to the notion that Admiral Parker’s men of war had simply not tried to stem the flow of illicit supplies to Rigaud.

But Perry was to do even more. He would soon exceed his Commodore’s orders and directly take part in Toussaint’s struggle on land. With Perry’s blockade weakening the port’s resistance, Toussaint was soon planning a final assault upon Jacmel’s defenses. However, the general still lacked the artillery needed to finish the job thanks to the *Solebay’s* untimely seizure of his artillery the preceding November. Meeting with Captain Perry, Toussaint requested that perhaps the *General Greene* might sortie inshore and supply the missing artillery barrage with its naval battery. The American captain

¹⁸⁵ Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 118; Silas Talbot to Captain Christopher Raymond Perry, U.S.N., 18 January 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 94.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Extract from a letter from an officer aboard the U.S.S. *General Greene*,” 14 April 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 5:250; Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 162.

agreed and with that the United States through the U.S. Navy frigate began its often unfortunate history of direct gunboat intervention in Haitian affairs. The town's three forts soon surrendered following thirty to forty minutes of furious fire from the *General Greene's* 12 pounders.¹⁸⁸ Toussaint's forces then took the city.¹⁸⁹

Perry's military intervention at Jacmel on behalf of Toussaint's forces would be the most direct but certainly not the last for Talbot's St. Domingue squadron. Toussaint's effusive praise for Commodore Talbot in dispatching the *General Greene* to the waters off Jacmel and especially for Captain Perry's timely involvement was soon followed by additional requests for American naval assistance as Hyde Parker's cruisers continued their campaign of seizures of French flagged vessels.¹⁹⁰ Toussaint was understandably skittish about sending urgently needed food and medical supplies by armed ship to his troops in Jacmel after the *Solebay* affair and asked that Stevens propose to Commodore Talbot that Toussaint's armed supply ships proceed under the American flag to avoid British capture. Toussaint even specifically mentioned using the subterfuge that the vessels were meant to supply the U.S. Navy brig, *Augusta*, now on patrol off Jacmel.¹⁹¹ Stevens wrote to Talbot that he deemed it "*impracticable*" to flag Toussaint's transports as American, but fully understood that something had to be done to avoid their capture.¹⁹²

Commodore Talbot responded in a manner not unlike a co-conspirator with Stevens and Toussaint in a stratagem to defraud the British. He was not outraged that

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 118, 162; "Extract," 14 April 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 5:250-51.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.; Palmer *Stoddert's War*, 162.

¹⁹⁰ Toussaint L'Ouverture, General in Chief of the Army of Santo Domingo to Stevens, 25 Ventose Year 8 of the French Republic Indivisible [16 March 1800], in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 5:309-10; Toussaint L'Ouverture to Stevens, 30 Ventose, Year 8 [21 March 1800], in *ibid.*, 5:336-37.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Stevens to Talbot, 26 March 1800, in *ibid.*, 5:349-50.

Toussaint wanted to fraudulently flag his vessels as American ones, but was chiefly concerned on a practical basis that the plan would not work because the Royal Navy cruisers or British privateers would see through the disguise of a cargo obviously inconsistent in amount and nature as to what would be wanted aboard the *Augusta*. Instead he invited both Toussaint and Stevens out to the *Constitution* to discuss his alternative proposal of instead “capturing” the French flagged ships and putting aboard them American prize crews. The *Constitution* herself would then escort these “prizes” into Jacmel.¹⁹³ The Commodore was sure no R.N. man of war would challenge “American” prizes escorted by a U.S. Navy super frigate. What is striking about this exchange of letters is that Talbot had no qualms whatsoever about defrauding his informal allies in the Jamaican squadron. It was as if he relished the idea of putting one over on his old sparring mate Sir Hyde Parker, for whom certainly there was no love lost. As far as Talbot was concerned, the British under Hyde Parker’s command had become just another obstacle to overcome in achieving his mission. In the event, however, Commodore Talbot would never consummate his plan to convoy the “prizes” to Jacmel because he had become concerned with reports that the French Navy had sent out to the region some frigates from Metropolitan France. He could not spare his super frigate from the center of his command at Le Cap faced with such a potential threat.¹⁹⁴ Presumably, that time Toussaint’s *batiment d’etat* sailed only with the requisite passports and hoped

¹⁹³ Talbot to Stevens, 28 March 1800, in *ibid.*, 5:355.

¹⁹⁴ Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 163.

for the best.¹⁹⁵ However, the Commodore later went so far as to order the U.S.S. *Herald* to take on board provisions bound for Toussaint's army at Jacmel.¹⁹⁶

The significance of Sir Hyde Parker's personal impression upon British Government policy in the Caribbean during the tenure of his service there cannot be overstated. He had especially imposed his personality upon those matters directly impacting relations with Americans, whether it was the impressments of American seamen into his squadron, the seizure of Yankee merchantmen, or the joint undertaking between the United States Government and His Majesty's Government towards Toussaint l'Ouverture on St. Domingue. The personal animus he engendered from serving U.S. Navy officers, even Anglophilic ones such as Alexander Murray, is instructive.

But only after Sir Hyde's recall and subsequent replacement with Lord Hugh Seymour did the full measure of that influence become apparent. Admiral Seymour arrived from the Windward and Leeward Islands station with a positive reputation as regards working well with Americans.¹⁹⁷ On that station he had replaced Admiral Henry Harvey, a station commander who himself had earned the esteem of American agents and naval officers. Many eagerly anticipated Lord Hugh's arrival on station and expected he would set a markedly different tone than had Sir Hyde. William Savage, the American agent for seamen at Jamaica was one of these. In a letter soon after the change in command had issued, he had expressed to the American Secretary of State that he hoped that the change of admiral would herald a turn for the better. He voiced his belief that he could present his case for relief of impressed Americans in the Jamaica squadron and

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Talbot to Lieutenant Charles C. Russell, U.S.N., 15 July 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 6:153.

¹⁹⁷ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 201.

Lord Hugh would actually listen to him and consider his evidence, a marked change from Sir Hyde's tendency toward perfunctory rejection of his arguments.¹⁹⁸ By 1 November 1800, Mr. Savage could already write:

The conduct of the navy here, so far as respects the impressing of and detaining of American seamen, is widely different on the score of humanity, from what was pursued during the administration of Admiral Parker.¹⁹⁹

Naval officers also stated their hope that the new station admiral would take a more reasoned approach with his officers toward seizure of Yankee merchant vessels.²⁰⁰

Yet, it was Lord Hugh's flexibility and willingness to work with unhappy parties towards solutions which earned him his positive reputation with Americans. Whether he in the end chose their side or not, those approaching him with a grievance felt they had been properly heard. And the admiral was not afraid to come down upon abuses by some of his officers still attuned to the earlier regime of Sir Hyde. The case of the Curaçao incident with Captain Frederick Watkins of the frigate, H.M.S. *Nereide* was illustrative. It involved a French attempt to seize the Dutch island of Curaçao in the southern Caribbean from July to September of 1800. Landing 23 July, a French vanguard of 500 men had had insufficient numbers to successfully attack. The French had sent a second force and together with the first invaded on 5 September, besieging the capital of Willemstad. The American consul present, Benjamin Hammell Phillips, perceived that American lives and property interests were greatly endangered as open warfare had broken out between the Dutch citizens bolstered by resident American merchants and seamen, and the 1,500 French irregulars seeking to control Willemstad. Fearing the worst, Phillips had sent for

¹⁹⁸ Extracts from letters from William Savage, U.S. Agent at Jamaica, concerning impressments of American Seamen, 21 August 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:518-19.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1 November 1800, 6:519.

²⁰⁰ Murray to Stoddert, 31 July 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 6:211.

help from the American naval squadron based at St. Kitts. On 15 September, Acting Commodore George Cross had dispatched the sloops of war, *Patapsco* and *Merrimack* to aid the embattled Americans on Curaçao.²⁰¹

As events at Willemstad deteriorated, a likely savior had appeared on 10 September in the guise of Captain Frederick Watkins of the frigate, H.M.S. *Nereide*, 36. The Dutch governor soon sought help from the potent Royal Navy force now off Willemstad. Going on board *Nereide* to meet with Watkins, he negotiated a surrender to the British—the Dutch island was technically an enemy of Britain, being a colony of the puppet Batavian Republic—to gain the aid of the frigate’s guns. But to the governor’s chagrin, Watkins would not take his ship into the tight harbor to shell the French guns and drive the enemy from their positions, or land his marines to relieve the citizens.²⁰²

All seemed lost until on 22 September *Patapsco* and *Merrimack* made a timely appearance. The two U.S. navy captains commanding these warships quickly sized up the situation and in violation of the letter of their terms of engagement with the French, sent *Patapsco* into the narrow harbor under steady French bombardment. The American warship gave much better than she got and within two hours had forced the French to flee their forward positions. The next day *Patapsco* landed U.S. Marines to bolster the Dutch burghers and Americans already under arms. The French had had enough and stole away that night. With the harbor safe, Watkins now deemed it appropriate for H.M.S. *Nereide* to enter the harbor. Watkins then effected the surrender of the island and established himself as military governor. He requested that the two American sloops of war make a

²⁰¹ Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 196-201; William D. Robinson to Stoddert, 19 December 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 6:337-41.

²⁰² Ibid.

reconnaissance to windward to search for a feared return of the French with reinforcements. When the U.S. Navy warships returned, they found that “Governor” Watkins had detained the Yankee trading vessels in the harbor on various pretexts, threatened at least one of their captains with a flogging, seized Consul Phillips’s own coin entrusted to Watkins for safe keeping aboard *Nereide* during the troubles, and demanded the fast sailing schooners of two of the American captains to use as his personal dispatch boats.²⁰³

The Curaçao incident, at least for American naval officers, realistically could be called the nadir of Anglo-American relations during the entire Quasi-War. It aroused feelings of outraged injustice in maritime Americans of all stripes. The Yanks had done the heroic heavy lifting and the Brits had received all the credit. Captain Watkins conveniently failed to mention the role of the *Merrimack* and *Patapsco* in his dispatches.²⁰⁴ To this day British naval histories of the Great French Wars in the West Indies, if they cover the surrender of Curaçao at all, utterly ignore the role of the American sloops of war in altering a dire military situation and snatching victory from certain defeat.²⁰⁵ But then the rapacious Captain Watkins had sent the trusting American naval officers on what proved to be a wild goose chase, while *he* “seized” the American property they had come to defend. They felt utterly had. Naval officers such as Commodore Thomas Truxtun, newly arrived back on the St. Kitts station in the brand new super frigate, U.S.S. *President*, was perhaps the most vocal. He called Watkins’s

²⁰³ Ibid.; John Marshall, Washington, D.C. to King, 18 January 1801, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 7:98.

²⁰⁴ Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 201.

²⁰⁵ See for example Michael Duffy’s account of the battle in *Soldiers, Sugar, and Seapower*. The American sloops of war are never mentioned whatsoever. Duffy, 318.

seizures of American property on the island as “conduct preceeding (sic) from a weak, and inconsiderate mind”²⁰⁶ He later wrote of the incident to Secretary Stoddert:

I must again repeat Sir, that I have been much mortified at the Management (sic) of the Curracoa (sic) business, & hurt at the Sneers (sic) and horse laughs of some [space] here, at our Giving (sic) an Island (sic) to a nation, whoe’s (sic) Officers (sic) instantly set traps to get hold of all our property, that came into its Ports (sic): that Protection (sic) might have been given our citizens without suffering a change of Government (sic) at Curracoa (sic), no one in my opinion acquainted with the circumstances can doubt.²⁰⁷

Watkins’s outrages had seemed too much to bear. But there would be some hope regarding the worst of them because the Admiral in Jamaica was not pleased either.²⁰⁸ On 23 October 1800, roughly a month after the battle at Curaçao, Admiral Lord Hugh Seymour arrived from Jamaica to assume command on the island. With him came American hopes that he might address the worst of Watkins’s perceived excesses.²⁰⁹ Those situations within his immediate power to remedy, he did. The admiral restored to Consul Benjamin Hammell Phillips the money that Watkins had inexplicably seized from him.²¹⁰ As for Watkins, in February 1801 he was returned to England and put “on the beach” until 1808.²¹¹ When he did again see employment in the Royal Navy, it resulted in him being dismissed from command following a court martial.²¹²

²⁰⁶ Truxtun to William Patterson, Merchant, Baltimore, MD, 28 October 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 6:509.

²⁰⁷ Truxtun to Stoddert, 5 December 1800, in *ibid.*, 7:11.

²⁰⁸ Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 201.

²⁰⁹ Benjamin Hammel Phillips, U.S. Consul at Curaçao to John Marshall, Secretary of State, 25 October 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 6:501.

²¹⁰ William D. Robinson to Stoddert, 19 December 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:337.

²¹¹ Palmer, *Stoddert’s War*, 201.

²¹² John Marshall, *Royal Navy Biography: Or the Memoirs of the Services of all the Flag-Officers, Superannuated Rear-Admirals, Retired-Captains, Post-Captains, and Commanders :whose Names Appeared on the Admiralty list of Sea-Officers at the Commencement of the Year 1823, or who have since been Promoted . . .*, (London: 1824, digital reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2:12.

There were claims for salvage for some of the American vessels that had been at Curaçao, and for others, condemnation as prizes for carrying the osnaburgs, the coarse cloth, conveniently styled contraband of war. These had to proceed via Admiralty jurisdiction. But Admiral Seymour never the less did entertain the complaints of those who quite rightly felt wronged under the circumstances.²¹³ That sympathetic tone and willingness to try to redress perceived wrongs against Americans allegedly committed by the Royal Navy's Jamaica squadron did diffuse some of the tension that had built during Sir Hyde Parker's tenure. It even seemed to soften the attitude of American diplomats with respect to Captain Watkins's Curaçao outrages. Perhaps the knowledge that Admiral Seymour had taken prompt action in theatre convinced Secretary of State John Marshall in Washington and Rufus King in London, not to immediately file a formal complaint with His Majesty's Government over the ship seizures and salvage demands but rather to mention the matter informally and trust British Admiralty jurisdiction to handle these claims fairly.²¹⁴ Clearly, a change of personality in the commander on the Jamaican station had been monumental in repairing some of the damage done over the years by Sir Hyde Parker's rigid stances. If Sir Hyde had yet remained at Port Royal during and following the Curaçao incident, the situation between the two naval services might well have become incendiary.

But in fact, the situation did not become incendiary. American and British warships in the West Indies continued to speak each other, and cruise in company much as they had since the U.S. Navy first made its appearance in those waters in 1798.

²¹³ Joseph Foulke & the Captains of U.S. Merchant Ships, approx. ,25 October 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 6:499-500.

²¹⁴ John Marshall, Washington, D.C. to King, 18 January 1801, in *ibid.*, 7:98.

Commodore Truxtun's operations at sea during the fall of 1800, after learning of the debacle at Curaçao, are instructive. Truxtun, who had been a very pro-British officer, would perhaps, register some of the most pointed opinions against the conduct of Captain Watkins on that island. Yet the operational stance he continued to take toward Royal Navy warships and their commanders demonstrated that it was business as usual.

While at St. Kitts on 2 October 1800 the Commodore began a routine dispatch to Secretary Stoddert, discussing operations in the region and how if the British really have taken Curraçao, he would not have to spare any of his warships to protect commerce in that region. However, the text of the dispatch indicates that the arrival of the *Merrimack* and *Patapsco* had interrupted his writing. The text next indicates that Truxtun had just received and digested the series of dispatches marked "Curraçao (sic) papers" from Captain Moses Brown of the *Merrimack*. Truxtun next launched into a diatribe against Captain Watkins and his seizures of American merchantmen, committed "under frivolous pretenses . . . after the services of our ships of War (sic) in dislodging the french (sic) from their strong holds . . ." ²¹⁵ Only five days later, Turxtun was at sea, patrolling in the vicinity of Dominica in his new super frigate, *President*, and giving chase to an unknown vessel at night, ready for action, with "Battle Lanterns (sic)" lit, only to find her a brig sailing out of the British possession of Martinique. At daybreak, only hours after this near battle, and presumably after his blood had been up, Truxtun encountered and spoke H.M.S. *Hornet*. The *President's* log matter-of-factly records the event with no editorial comment except that Truxtun had taken the time to enter the name of Hornet's Captain,

²¹⁵ Truxtun to Stoddert, 2 October 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:423-24.

Dash. Also spoken and apparently sailing in concert with *Hornet*, was the U.S.S. *John Adams*. Truxtun had not bothered to record the name of the American frigate's captain.²¹⁶

Commodore Truxtun continued to smolder all Autumn 1800 about the Curaçao episode even as he remained the St. Kitts station chief. In October he had railed against Watkins to Baltimore merchant William Patterson—Watkins had appropriated Patterson's schooner as a dispatch boat²¹⁷—and in December written his letter to Stoddert confessing that he was still “much mortified” by the affair.²¹⁸ Yet when in port, the Commodore continued to maintain a civil, professional relationship with the British Governor on St. Kitts concerning French prisoners—this included even Rigaud, captured by an American warship²¹⁹—and legal disputes over prize jurisdiction.²²⁰ While at sea and in port the *President* routinely encountered Royal Navy men of war without the slightest recorded difficulty. Among these warships were: H.M.S. *Regulus* on 11 October 1800 (spoke her at midnight)²²¹; H.M.S. *Southampton*, Captain Harvey, commanding, on 25 October 1800 (moored and sailed),²²² 8 December 1800 (moored),²²³ 24 December 1800 (gave chase in company),²²⁴ 31 December 1800-7 January 1801 (moored),²²⁵ 9

²¹⁶ Log Extract, U.S.S. *President*, 7 October 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:443.

²¹⁷ Truxtun to William Patterson, Merchant, Baltimore, MD, 28 October 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:509.

²¹⁸ Truxtun to Stoddert, 5 December 1800, in *ibid.*, 7:11.

²¹⁹ Truxtun to Honorable Robert Thomson, H.B.M. Governor of the Islands of St Christopher, and Commander-in- Chief of the Leeward Islands, 23 October 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:493-94; Letter Extract from Lieutenant Charles Stewart, U.S.N., 3 October 1800, in *ibid.*, 422-23.

²²⁰ Thomson to Truxtun, 3 October 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:435-36. This also involved the admiralty court judge for St Kitts, John Garnett and Mr. Wardenhough, Solicitor General. John Garnett, Judge of the Court of Admiralty, Basseterre, St Christopher (St. Kitts) to Thomson, 3 October 1800, in *Ibid.*, 6:426; Opinion of Solicitor General of St. Kitts, respecting re-capture of Portuguese prize *Gloria da Mar* (sic) to Garnett, 3 October 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:436-39.

²²¹ Log Extract, U.S.S. *President*, Saturday, 11 October 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:456.

²²² *Ibid.*, 25 October 1800, 6:505.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 8 December 1800, 7:21.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 December 1800, 7:46.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 31 December 1800-7 January 1801, 7:59.

January 1801 (signaled),²²⁶ 16-18 January 1801 (moored);²²⁷ H.M.S. *Hornet*, Captain Dash (Nash), commanding, on 7 October 1800 (spoke), 8 December 1800 (moored),²²⁸ 18-25 January 1801 (moored);²²⁹ H.M. Schooner *Gipsey* on 21 December 1800 (spoke);²³⁰ H.M.S. *Andromeda* on 12 January 1801 (signaled);²³¹ and an unidentified Royal Navy warship on 13 January 1800 (spoke or signaled).²³²

Alexander Murray was another American naval officer who had begun the war in awe of the Royal Navy but whose opinion had indeed soured by the war's end. Likely this was partially due to his being foisted with a bad mast at the dockyard at Antigua when captain of the U.S.S. *Insurgente*. But his experiences with the Jamaican squadron soon after Admiral Sir Hyde Parker's departure had apparently finished the job. Never the less, while from time to time airing his newly acquired anti-British opinions home to his superior, Stoddert, in the American capital—he would snipe at them into late February 1801²³³—he ever appeared to maintain cordial relations with individual Royal Navy Captains. In August 1800, now commanding *Constellation*, Murray wrote to Stoddert bragging about his apparent connection with the captain of His Majesty's Frigate, "*Lowestaffe*" (H.M.S. *Lowestoffe*). He maintained that it was critical that *he* should consequently escort a particularly valuable convoy because he had "but lately prevailed upon the Commander of the *Lowestaffe* Frigate to let our Vessels (sic) pass unmolested that were in Company (sic) with me, & hope to have the Same Courtesy (sic)

²²⁶ Ibid., 9 January 1801, 7:78.

²²⁷ Ibid., 16-18 January 1801, 7:94.

²²⁸ Ibid., 8 December 1800, 7:21.

²²⁹ Ibid., 18-25 January 1801, 7:94.

²³⁰ Ibid., 21 December 1800, 7:41.

²³¹ Ibid., 12 January 1801, 7:85.

²³² Ibid., 13 January 1801, 7:85.

²³³ Murray to Stoddert, 22 February 1801, in *ibid.*, 7:127.

paid to me now”²³⁴ In October 1800, Murray again wrote Stoddert in a similar vein about his return from Havana to the United States:

I came off the next day with the convoy, and soon fell in with the *Thunderer* British 74 gun ship, having frequently met with the Commander (sic) before he gave us no interruption (sic) but let all pass when I assured him they were under my protection²³⁵

When Murray returned to the Caribbean in *Constellation* on his last cruise, in mid January 1801 he experienced perhaps the only major exchange of gunfire between American and British warships of the entire Quasi-War. Murray described the event to Stoddert in a February 1801 dispatch:

[O]n a dark night . . . passed by a large ship, that fired several shot at us, which we returned, as soon as possible, no signals having been made previous to their fire, but it occurred to me we might be firing at a friend, & made the signal for the night, which they replied (sic) to in part, when we hailed, & found she was the British Frigate (sic) *Magnanime* of 48 guns, fortunately no material damage was done on either side, from her we learnt that the French were still capturing our Vessels²³⁶

Professor Palmer has suggested that this event was a harbinger that Great Britain and the United States were drifting toward war. As Palmer characterized it, Murray had “put a broadside into a British ship on a dark night in late 1800 (sic), displaying no remorse after the event.”²³⁷ This interpretation seems to ignore that soon after firing, it was Murray who thought to raise the night signal and speak the *Magnanime*. Murray also seemed relieved there had been no damage to either side. Finally, he was happy to gain intelligence from his Royal Navy counterpart as American naval commanders had done so many times before during the conflict when re-entering a war zone. More than

²³⁴ Murray to Stoddert, 15 August 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:256.

²³⁵ Murray to Stoddert, 12 October 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:469.

²³⁶ Murray to Stoddert, 3 February 1801, in *ibid.*, 7:113.

²³⁷ Palmer, “Anglo-American Naval Cooperation,” 19.

anything else, this unfortunate encounter demonstrates not that the quasi-alliance was on life support, but that it still lived on even in the bosom of an officer soured on it.

There were certainly to be more contacts between other warships of the two services in the West Indies during the autumn of 1800 and winter of 1800-1801. Captain Stephen Decatur, Sr., the commander who had made the U.S. Navy's first capture back in July 1798, was still a serving officer, but now commander of the big new frigate, U.S.S. *Philadelphia* on the St. Kitts station. The log book of *Philadelphia's* Lieutenant Thomas Wilkey revealed that on her cruises on that station during this period, her captain or crew would speak (H.M. Sloops of War, *Surinam* and *Cyane*),²³⁸ signal (unidentified "British Ship of War," and H.M. Brig *Busy*),²³⁹ and anchor (H.M.S *Southampton* and *Hornet*)²⁴⁰ with her Royal Navy counterparts. Royal Navy captains on occasion were entertained on board (Captains of H.M. Sloops of War *Daphne* and *Cyane*, (Matson)),²⁴¹ and the ship chased in company with a Royal Navy frigate, H.M.S. *Tamar*.²⁴² The U.S. Sloop of War *Ganges*, which had been the American navy's first commissioned warship back in May 1798, was also one of the very last to remain on station in the Caribbean. The journal kept by her commanding officer, Lieutenant John Mulloony, documents routine professional contacts with Royal Navy vessels well into May 1801, including: speaking (H.M.S. *Tamar* in company with H.M. Sloop of War *Daphne*, and the battleship, H.M.S.

²³⁸ Log Book Extract of Thomas Wilkey, U.S.N., of U.S. Frigate *Philadelphia*, Captain Stephen Decatur, Sr. commanding (hereinafter Wilkey), Monday, 17 November 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 6:536 for *Surinam*; *ibid.*, Friday, 2 January 1801, 7:68 for *Cyane*.

²³⁹ Wilkey, Sunday, 7 December 1800, in *ibid.*, 7:19 for unidentified ship of war; *ibid.*, 18 January 1801, 7:99 for *Busy*.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Monday, 8 December 1800, 7:21; Log Extract , U.S.S. *President*, Saturday, 8 December 1800, in *ibid.*, 7:21.

²⁴¹ Wilkey, Tuesday, 23 December 1800, in *ibid.*, 7:44.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, Saturday, 27 December 1800, 7:50.

Cumberland in company with battleships H.M.S. *Sans Pareil* and *Carnatic*),²⁴³ and signaling warships (unidentified R.N. warship).²⁴⁴ None of these recorded personal conflicts or unprofessional behavior. Lieutenant Mulloony might have had cause to resent the British. Sir Hyde Parker had haughtily snubbed his plea to free sailors from impressments in the Jamaica squadron whom he personally knew to be Americans—they had served with him previously. But nothing of that kind exists in the record. What does exist paints a picture of the informal naval alliance much the same as before, even unto May 1801. Only the number of American warships had dwindled.

In the months after the Curaçao incident, rumors had begun to circulate in America concerning a hoped for peace treaty between the French Republic and the United States ending the Quasi-War.²⁴⁵ President Adams had dispatched two peace commissioners, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Oliver Ellsworth, and former North Carolina Governor, William R. Davie, to France in the U.S.S. *United States*, sailing 3 November 1799. Back channel diplomatic contacts with the French through U.S. Minister to the Netherlands, William Vans Murray—he eventually became the third of the three peace commissioners—had convinced Adams that the French Government would now be willing to receive envoys from the United States with the respect due to them as representatives of a “great, powerful, free, and independent nation.”²⁴⁶ But the mission was star-crossed from the beginning. Bad weather had nearly wrecked the *United States* and had landed Ellsworth and Davie in La Corunna. From

²⁴³ Journal Extract of Lieutenant John Mulloony, U.S.N., commanding U.S.S. *Ganges* (hereinafter Mulloony), Tuesday, 24 February 1801, in *ibid.*, 7:129 for *Tamar*; *ibid.*, Monday, 11 May 1801, 7:225 for *Cumberland*.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Thursday, 14 May 1801, 7:226.

²⁴⁵ Palmer, 222.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 137; DeConde, 158-59, 216; Perkins, *First Rapprochement*, 121.

Spain they had had to travel overland some 900 miles in winter and did not arrive in Paris to join Vans Murray until 2 March 1800.²⁴⁷ But the negotiations in Paris had dragged on through the summer with no word of a treaty.²⁴⁸ Finally, the American peace commissioners and the new First Consul of the French Republic, Napoleon Bonaparte, had reached an accommodation, executing the Convention of Mortefontaine on 3 October 1800.²⁴⁹ However, the document would not reach America for some months.²⁵⁰

The U.S. Navy Secretary would not officially learn of it until 13 December 1800; word immediately went out to ships yet in American waters to remain in port. Although President Adams had submitted the treaty to the Senate for ratification 15 December 1800, the document remained unapproved when on 30 December Stoddert could wait no longer and dispatched Captain Alexander Murray in the *Constellation* to the Caribbean with specific instructions to call at St. Kitts with the news of the treaty for Captain Truxtun and Commodore Barry. In light of the accord, American warships were now only to convoy merchant vessels and cease hostilities against French armed ships unless they or their convoys were attacked.²⁵¹ While cruising in the West Indies, Murray learned of an official French declaration ordering French privateers and national ships to seize the *guerre de course* against American shipping and bravely chose to verify it by sailing to Guadeloupe. There, on 29 January 1801, by invitation of the island government, he sailed into port where he officially confirmed that French authorities had ended operations

²⁴⁷ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 221-22; DeConde, 224.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 223-53.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 223-24, 256-58.

²⁵⁰ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 225. Ironically, unofficial reports appeared at St. Kitts in British newspapers as early as 23 November 1800 per Truxtun's log entry of that date. Log Extract, U.S.S. *President*, 23 November 1800, in *ibid.*, 6:547.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*; Stoddert to Murray, 30 December 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 7:56.

against American vessels. During February 1801, Murray used his cruise to spread the French peace proclamation throughout the Caribbean.²⁵² While U.S. Navy warships continued to convoy merchant shipping, effectively their war against the French was over. But even as the last days of the Adams Administration approached, American squadrons remained on station in the West Indies, perhaps because the Mortefontaine Treaty yet remained un-ratified. In the event, the Senate would not ratify the treaty until 19 December 1801. However, long before that occurred, the Jefferson administration sent the very aptly named U.S.S. *Herald* to the West Indies to call home the last squadrons. She sailed 4 April 1801 with the glad tidings.²⁵³

And so the Quasi-War came to an end. The informal naval alliance that had begun with Great Britain providing the United States with material aid to build its small fleet of warships and had developed into an operational understanding in the Caribbean between serving officers of both fleets on station, had survived the conflict intact. The relationship had been under stress from the first. The United States and Great Britain were both maritime nations with interests often at odds with the other. Both needed huge numbers of sailors to operate their respective merchant marines and Britain also required vast numbers of able seamen to man its Royal Navy. It could never fill its crews with volunteers and had to resort to the random conscription known as impressment. Because

²⁵² Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 226-27; Murray, *Constellation* at Sea, to Captain Prosper Sergente, commanding French Privateer Lugger *Marrs*, 18 January 1801, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 7:96; Murray to Midshipman R. L. Tilghman, U.S.N., 18 January, 1801, in *ibid.*, 7:97; Murray, *Constellation* off Basseterre, Guadeloupe, to Agents of the Consuls of the French Republic at the Windward Islands, 28 January 1801, in *ibid.*, 7:107-08; Murray, *Constellation* off Port Liberty, Guadeloupe to French Agents, 29 January 1801, in *ibid.*, 7:110; Murray, *Constellation*, St. Kitts to Stoddert, 3 February 1801, in *ibid.*, 112-14; Murray, *Constellation* off Cap Français, to Stoddert, 9 February 1801, in *ibid.*, 7:119; Murray, *Constellation*, Havana to Stoddert, 22 February 1801, in *ibid.*, 7:127.

²⁵³ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 232; Stoddert to Lieutenant Charles C. Russell, U.S.N., Commanding U.S.S. *Herald* 23 March 1801, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 7:153;

Americans were often nearly impossible to distinguish from Britons, the Royal Navy ended up impressing Yankee tars, an injustice which rankled maritime America. And the British themselves believed the Americans were hiding Britons from the press by giving them “protections” and calling them Yanks.

At the same time, Britain’s wartime policies concerning neutral trading rights had led to difficulties between the powers. The United States was making a killing trading with the Caribbean colonies of Britain’s enemies, the Spanish and Dutch. Britain employed her vast navy to seize those merchantmen carrying what they deemed “contraband of war” or enemy property as they had in all their naval wars. She used a system where Royal Navy men of war and privateers could capture neutral, most often, American, trading vessels, and condemn them in local Admiralty courts where the local admiral, the captain of the libeling vessel, and its crew, could all profit from the money raised when the merchant ship was sold as a prize. Even admiralty court judges in the islands had a motive to uphold the libels. These magistrates received a fee for each case heard. Since the captains of the capturing corsairs or R.N. men of war could present their prizes at any Admiralty jurisdiction that they wished, they tended to favor the judges disposed toward condemnation. This led to frequent abuses which might take years to redress in the English appellate courts in London. Even American ships that had in no way offended Britain’s wartime navigation laws never the less suffered condemnation, certainly not endearing that Island nation and its navy to United States commercial interests and the politicians beholden to them. Thus, the institutions of the Royal Navy press and the seizure of neutral American shipping under the prize system had threatened

the amity forming between the two maritime powers and their fleets now fighting the same French foe in the West Indies.

But in the end, it had been the loose nature of naval command in the eighteenth century which had held the key as to how these institutional stressors would impact the American-British naval relationship. The lax institution of eighteenth century naval command, a vestige of the medieval warrior heritage still extant in the British officer class, combined with the practical issues of woefully slow communications to create a level of independence in admirals and commodores on distant stations that would be inconceivable in today's blue water navies. Within parameters that were often far-reaching, they called the shots in places like the Caribbean. This meant that whoever inhabited the seat of command could either palliate or exacerbate the negative factors working upon the British/American informal naval alliance. Admirals like Henry Harvey or Lord Hugh Seymour could, with their positive personalities, smooth over many of the difficulties dividing the two quasi-allies. The good will they engendered made it easier for disgruntled Americans to overlook or endure minor vexations to the relationship. An Admiral like Sir Hyde Parker had had quite the opposite effect. Under his leadership, the Royal Navy's Jamaican Squadron, in many ways, became estranged from its American cousin, the U.S. Navy's St. Domingue station. The admiral had sown the seeds of that estrangement for years even before the Quasi-War had begun by antagonizing its future commander, Commodore Silas Talbot, when Talbot had been the American Agent for Impressed Seamen in the West Indies.

Whitehall had left Parker to largely set his own course with respect to both impressments and the seizures of merchantmen on his station. In each case, his position

had been much harsher than that practiced or condoned by their Lordships of the Admiralty in the home seas and this despite the pointed protests of the American Government. Finally, Parker had ignored the British Cabinet's policies of cooperating with the Americans in an accord with Toussaint l'Ouverture and had struck out with his own policy directly hostile to it by seizing Toussaint's ships bound for the siege of Jacmel. Under the Maitland/Toussaint/Stevens Accord, the Royal Navy and U.S. Navy were to provide security around St. Dominguan waters for American and British trading vessels, but also those of Toussaint. The U.S. Navy successfully carried out this mission; Hyde Parker's Jamaican Squadron did not. Instead of acting to protect Toussaint's commerce, Parker's cruisers persecuted it. And Commodore Talbot found himself working around or even against his British counterparts to fulfill this mission.

When Hyde Parker's antipathy toward his own government's policy on St. Domingue finally brought about his recall to England, his replacement, Lord Hugh Seymour, an admiral already well thought of by Americans in the Lesser Antilles where he had replaced in command the also respected and esteemed Admiral Henry Harvey, set an altogether different tone on the station. He worked hard with the American Agent at Port Royal, William Savage, to see released those impressed Yankee seamen who could reasonably prove their American status. He did what he could to redress the abuses of rapacious, skippers he had inherited from Parker's regime such as Frederick Watkins, who at Curaçao had turned a very successful joint Anglo-American naval operation against the French into the quasi-alliance's ebb tide. Even an Anglophilic officer like Commodore Truxtun had been soured on the British after that. But Seymour's swift action had softened the blow. In the end, for the diplomats in Washington and London

and the navies in the Caribbean, the matter was left to blow over, instead of exploding. Lord Hugh's mitigation of the Curaçao affair had allowed cooler heads like those of John Marshall and Rufus King to prevail, rather than the original angry rhetoric of U.S. captains and commodores in the Antilles. Thus, in the months that followed the Curaçao matter, the Anglo-American naval alliance was able to continue much as it had to the war's end, remaining functional and professional, despite minor, day to day vexations, often the residue of the unresolved disputes yet smoldering between the two nations.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Quasi-War is now a forgotten conflict. If remembered at all by non-historians, it is for the infamous Alien and Sedition Acts promulgated by a Federalist Congress and the Adams Administration. But the war produced so many firsts in American history. The United States Navy had its true birth during the conflict. While there had been a Continental Navy during the War of Independence, it had ended with the war itself. Its last ship, the frigate, *Alliance*, after sale, had lain abandoned on a mud flat in the Delaware River near Philadelphia. The Navy Act of 1794 had authorized the construction of six frigates, but only three were actually begun before the Quasi-War and the work had proceeded at a snail's pace until the troubles with France had rushed their completion. It was the Quasi-War which had given Congress the stomach to build the other three. And the Quasi-War motivated the national legislature to found a separate navy department to administer and direct their operation. The Quasi-War marked the young Republic's first foreign war. The undeclared conflict would be fought entirely at sea, and mostly in the Caribbean. This war would also begin the lengthy involvement of the United States in what was then St. Domingue and would become known as Haiti. Finally, the Quasi-War witnessed the "first rapprochement" between the United States and its former mother country and enemy, Great Britain. Of course, Bradford Perkins

entitled his admirable monograph on the subject of the softening of relations between the two nations during the years 1795-1805, as *The First Rapprochement*.

This thaw in the dealings between the island kingdom and the infant republic, as manifested in the informal naval understanding which developed between them as they both fought the French in the years 1798-1801, has been the topic of this thesis. In doing so, this work has occupied one area of an already sparse historiography. Although, historians have largely ignored the Quasi-War, some history has been done. In the mid-1960s, Professor Alexander DeConde wrote a diplomatic history of the war.

Eponymously titled, it briefly touched upon the naval war. But as mentioned previously, only two authors have dedicated entire works to the subject of the conflict at sea:

Gardner's *Our Naval War with France* and Professor Palmer's *Stoddert's War*. Allen's work, did little more than tell the story of the war as a series of stirring ship to ship actions, pitting the heroic men of the U.S. Navy against the French. Except for one fleeting reference to use of shared signals, there was no mention of contact with the Royal Navy whatsoever. *Stoddert's War*, in contrast, provided what its author termed "unrattling history." Palmer styled his an operational study of the U.S. Navy during the Quasi-War. Necessarily, he wrote of the material aid supplied by the British Government to found the American navy and certainly its dealings with the Royal Navy in the Caribbean, the American service's primary theatre of operations. But his treatment of the subject was brief. The Royal Navy made only cameo appearances in the work.

Bradford Perkins, as described above, studied the warming of relations between Britain and America during the years 1795-1805. *The First Rapprochement* certainly covered the Quasi-War, devoting two chapters to it. In those chapters, Perkins wrote of "a

common action and mutual assistance in the military [naval] field that was not equaled for more than a century.”¹ But Perkins was a student of diplomatic history. Naval cooperation, although the most concrete manifestation of the new, growing connection between the two maritime nations, was but one facet of the story even in the two chapters covering the war. There have been recent popular histories published, describing the founding and early years of the U.S. Navy.² These have covered the years of the Quasi War. Their well-written narratives devote some chapters to re-telling the story surrounding Joshua Humphreys’s building of the Six Frigates, John Adams’s swift assembly of the Federal Navy, and the exploits of Thomas Truxtun and his fellow captains in the West Indies against the French, but ignore the British connection. Only one article has appeared devoted to the U.S. Navy and the Royal Navy in the years of the Quasi-War: Palmer’s, “Anglo American Naval Cooperation, 1798-1801.” This seven page piece was meant only as a brief sketch. In short, no scholar has attempted a major study of this subject; the topic of Royal Navy and U.S. Navy cooperation during the course of the Undeclared War has virtually remained an unplowed field.

The aim of this thesis has been to begin filling in this gap in the naval historiography of the Quasi-War. Or in other words, it has been to begin *creating* a historiography of the British/American naval relationship in that war. But where does one set the plow when beginning to furrow a field others have left essentially untilled? The answer lies with the little that *has* been done already. Hence, the works of Professors Palmer and Perkins have suggested the focus of this study. On one side, Professor Palmer

¹ Perkins, *First Rapprochement*, 95.

² : *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006); George C. Daughan, *If by Sea: The Forging of the American Navy—From the American Revolution to the War of 1812* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

has minimized the significance of the relationship between the navies, because it never blossomed into a formal alliance. He also believed the two services never even cooperated “as closely as might have been expected.”³ On the other, Perkins has concluded that “[o]nly formal allies could have done more for one another than did the United States and England at this time.”⁴ This thesis has set out to answer the question as to whose perception was correct. What was the significance of the naval understanding that did develop between the two countries within the context of its times?

Secondly, Palmer and Perkins differed as to the nature of the relationship between the two navies at the end of the Undeclared War. Palmer was the pessimist, believing that the relationship was heading for a “rupture,” to use the language of the times; the two nations “were drifting, however slowly, toward war.”⁵ Perkins, on the contrary, had concluded that the informal naval entente had survived the conflict and that the cordial relationship between the nations would remain through the early years of Jefferson’s Administration. This thesis has also sought to provide the answer to that question as well. Was the naval quasi-alliance still intact at the war’s close? By answering these two questions, this author hoped to develop some insight into the nature and qualities of the informal alliance, what was working to erode it from the beginning and what if anything helped sustain it.

In attempting to resolve these two questions, this thesis has also utilized a different approach to basically the same primary sources examined by Palmer and Perkins: the *Quasi-War*, the naval document collection assembled by the U.S. Navy

³ Palmer, “Anglo-American Naval Cooperation,” 16.

⁴ Perkins, *First Rapprochement*, 105.

⁵ Palmer, “Anglo-American Naval Cooperation,” 19.

Department during the 1930s. This study is built upon an examination of the day to day contacts between the serving units of the Royal Navy and U.S. Navy in the West Indies during the relevant years, no matter how mundane. The reason for this choice forward was a simple one. It was plain that whatever relationship existed between the two navies was informal. As both Palmer and Perkins acknowledged, there was no treaty or other protocol between the two governments or between the British Admiralty on one side and the U.S. Navy Department on the other, establishing a formal understanding between the two services in the Undeclared War. Therefore, evidence of whatever naval relationship did exist was not likely to be found in the orders emanating from their Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty in London, nor those coming from Secretary Stoddert in Philadelphia. Neither would they come from the station Admirals at Jamaica or the Lesser Antilles, or the commanding American commodores at St. Kitts or Cap Français. Little, if anything, of an informal alliance would be reflected in those formal lines of communication. Instead, evidence of any impromptu arrangement that might exist between the fleets would likely be found between the cracks in the command structures: namely in the records of the various ships and officers serving on station. The ship's logs, journals of officers, and letters written home by officers and men might contain information referencing contacts with brother officers and tars serving in the other navy. As a practical matter, the author did not have access to Admiralty records kept at the Public Record Office in Kew, England nor those contained in the offices of their American counterparts in the United States. But the author *did* have access to the *Quasi-War*, the collection of U.S. Navy documents describing the day to day operations of the service mentioned above and produced in the Roosevelt years as a New Deal project.

Hence, the research grounding this study involved a careful examination of any records in that collection in any way referencing or describing contacts between American ships of war or naval personnel and their British counterparts, no matter how fleeting, seemingly insignificant, or routine. The nature and quality of those everyday contacts would tell the tale, as to what kind of relationship existed on station between the serving units of the two fleets.

The focus to the research involved in this thesis differed substantially to that taken in *Stoddert's War*, which Professor Palmer had based upon his doctoral dissertation. Palmer had called his work an operational history, meaning it was “primarily a study of command.”⁶ He was chiefly concerned with the navy as directed from the top, from its commander, Navy Secretary Stoddert. If his work dealt with local units and captains at sea, it was as to how they carried out the secretary's orders and saw his plans through to success or failure. In Professor Palmer's study, “[t]he central figure is . . . Benjamin Stoddert.”⁷ In contrast, the central figures of this study were the serving officers and men of the two navies as they sought out practical solutions together to fight the French at sea thousands of miles from Philadelphia and London.

This research design has indeed proven fruitful. It has uncovered evidence establishing that the individual commanders of the various men of war of both navies in the Caribbean Theatre of War did develop an informal naval understanding which, on the whole, served them well to the end of that conflict. British and American warships shared coded signals to identify each other as friendly, sailed in concert, and sometimes chased the enemy together. The commanders often entertained their opposite numbers aboard

⁶ Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, x.

⁷ Ibid.

their ships, and shared intelligence on enemy strength, and disposition. Without compunction, they convoyed the other nation's merchantmen. The British governors allowed American men of war to use their islands as bases of operations and to board prisoners of war captured in theatre. The evidence unearthed reflects that to serving officers and even British island governors, the relationship was a practical reality that in general increased the security and effectiveness of both navies, but also shielded British possessions in the West Indies. At least one governor formally had expressed his hope to the local American station commander that the latter would aid in defense of his island.

Occasionally, the informal relationship even benefitted strategic decisions reached by the authorities above. The significant American presence on the "Guadeloupe Station" based at St. Kitts certainly enabled the Royal Navy to remove warships from the Lesser Antilles and send them west for the defense of Jamaica. This friendly American presence aided the security of both the remaining R.N. men of war and merchantmen plying those waters by reducing the effect of privateers and the few French national frigates occasionally sortieing from Guadeloupe.

Certainly, examination of records referencing British/American naval contacts also revealed that as time wore on, Americans were not always pleased with their quasi-allies. Even originally Anglophilic officers, such as Captain Alexander Murray, after he became commodore on the St. Domingue Station, and Thomas Truxtun after the Curaçao incident, expressed disillusion with their British quasi-allies in their letters to Stoddert and others. Never the less, their professional actions indicated that the informal naval alliance was functioning as before. They still shared signals with British warships and spoke them, maintaining cordial relationships with their R.N. counterparts. Their letters

home to Stoddert may have expressed inner misgivings, but their deeds revealed what the real situation was. It was not what they said, so much as what they *did*, which was critical to understanding the status of the informal alliance. While these disgruntled mariners might express frustration and anger towards their British “cousins,” there was no real enthusiasm to pursue conflict at this period of time. This was true even at the highest levels of the American government. Even after frustrations with British policy toward merchantmen seizures, impressment and following evidence of Hyde Parker’s perfidy regarding St. Domingue, President Adams had expressed no desire to join the Scandinavians in their League of Armed Neutrality against Britain; to Adams, the League was folly.⁸ And as the war with France ground to a halt, Secretary Stoddert had expressed his belief that the time was ripe to cement relations with England.⁹

This thesis also has brought to light the significant role that Great Britain played in the founding of the United States Navy. Both Palmer and Perkins had mentioned the copper and ordinance Britain had supplied the U.S. Navy. Without the copper supplied, then impossible to procure in the United States, no American fleet would have been able to keep the sea in the Caribbean’s worm infested waters. Without the cannon, that American fleet would have been weakly armed. This thesis certainly has argued that such British aid with naval administration was, taken in context, the *sine qua non* for the U.S. Navy’s existence in the Quasi-War.

However, this study also has revealed another side of British aid to the foundling American fleet, most likely given unconsciously: the transference of Britain’s naval culture to the U.S. Navy. The Royal Navy had played the part of mentor to the infant

⁸ Adams to John Marshall, 3 October 1800, in U.S.N., *Quasi-War*, 6:426.

⁹ Stoddert to Thomas Fitzsimmons, Philadelphia, 23 February 1801, in *ibid.*, 7:128.

Yankee fleet. The Americans borrowed their diet, uniforms, disciplinary regulations, and even fighting style, whole scale from their R.N. cousins. While Navy Secretary Stoddert might express frustration at Royal Navy attitudes from time to time, it was always to Britain's Senior Service that he turned to set the standards for his young fighting force. In fact, a near reverential attitude towards the King's Navy and its personnel seemed to permeate the young American service. This much was evident in the way U.S. Navy skippers referred to the Royal Navy captains and, especially, the admirals they encountered from time to time at sea. They were ever aware that they, the protégés, had to appear absolutely ship shape and Bristol fashion when in the presence of their ideals. As late as February 1800, Captain Alexander Murray, upon approaching the British navy base at Port Royal, Jamaica had reminded his officers of the wardroom:

Sirs As (sic) we are now about to enter a Port where the eyes of the Multitude. (sic) both in the Private (sic) as well as the Public (sic) line, will be full of scrutiny with regard to the discipline, order & cleanliness of our Ship (sic) & Crew. (sic) as well as to every part of our private deportment. Let us all unite in our exertions to shew (sic) them that we know how to conduct ourselves with that decorum & regularity, that will do credit to the Navy of the United States, for there will be many people at Jamaica who will be very fond of drawing comparisons between us & their own Navy (sic) to our discredit if they can see cause so to do. therefore (sic) let us all be upon our guard & convince them, that tho' (sic) young in our profession, we will not yield to any Nation whatsoever in dignity, honor, or any other accomplishment that stamps the Character (sic) of a Nation (sic).¹⁰

Murray was mortified at somehow being found inadequate in Royal Navy eyes. At the same time, he was vigilant to repel any British slight to the American nation or character.

Perhaps the over sensitivity displayed in Murray's comment was to be expected from a naval officer of a country yet forming its national consciousness. At the time this

¹⁰ Murray to the Officers of the Wardroom, Off Jamaica, 7 February 1800, in *ibid.*, 5:200.

thesis covers, it was debatable as to what the American character amounted. Were Americans essentially still English, as Talleyrand had expressed after spending two years in exile in the United States during the Terror? Or was there already a sense of an American national culture emerging despite the almost smothering effects of omnipresent British influences in the country? The American decision to model the nation's new navy after that of its mother country, England, rather than that of its most recent ally, the French, can be seen as part of this debate. This thesis has argued that the decision was a conscious, logical step in light of the Royal Navy's century of success. Yet, it can be understood instead in another context, that of the tendency of a recent colony to replicate the institutions of its mother country.

The relation of Great Britain to the growth of an American national consciousness in the early days of the republic is a topic recently explored in Sam W. Haynes's *Unfinished Revolution*.¹¹ Britain, Haynes argues, had remained a kind of bogeyman in the early Republic. Americans often felt a compulsion to emulate their mother country and craved her acceptance, yet also suffered from a deep sense of inferiority to her and resented her ubiquitous presence in the life of the nation. Slowly, he maintains, the American response to Britain as a kind of foil created a self-confident, national consciousness which was apparent as the Civil War approached. Is Haynes's analysis relevant to the Anglo-American relationship of the Quasi-War era? Something of this conflicted response to England is already exhibited in Murray's address to his officers cited above. However, *Unfinished Revolution* begins its narrative following the end of the War of 1812, when the memory of Redcoats again on American soil was very fresh. How

¹¹ Sam W. Haynes, *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

the informal Anglo-American naval rapprochement might fit into such a discussion translated to the late Federalist period perhaps merits further work. There is the grist for a subsequent historian's mill.

Finally, this thesis has looked at the informal naval relationship existing in the West Indies during the Undeclared War from the vantage of the largely American naval records contained within the *Quasi-War* collection assembled in the 1930s. As this author expressed in the introduction to this work and earlier in this conclusion, the scope of the research accomplished here has been defined by the parameters of that collection. Again, it is doubtful that the *Quasi-War* editors missed much, if anything at all, when they made their compilation. But the viewpoint contained within its documents is largely the American one. To better understand the nature of the Anglo-American naval relationship, it would be distinctly advantageous to have more of the British perspective. As previously suggested, that would involve examining the Admiralty records maintained by Her Majesty's Public Record Office at Kew in England. No doubt such a document search would necessarily produce further insights and raise additional questions wanting answers. And that is as it should be. This thesis was truly meant only to begin the discussion.

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