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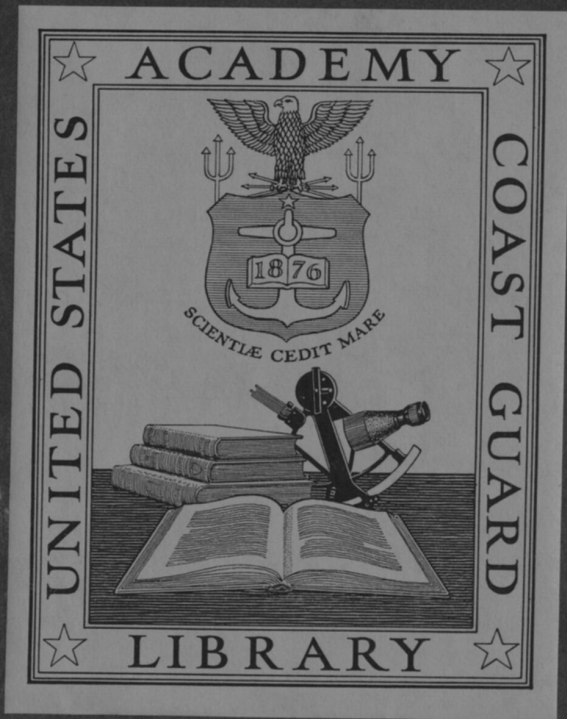
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The Revenue Cutters  
in the Quasi-War with France

By Lieut. (j.g.) R. W. Daly.

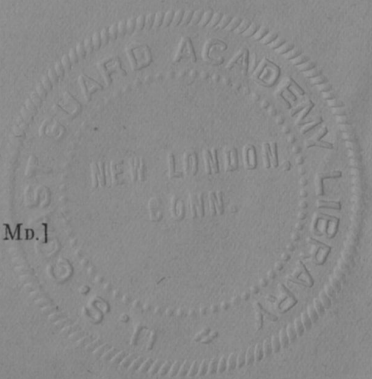


# THE REVENUE CUTTERS IN THE QUASI-WAR WITH FRANCE

By

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# THE REVENUE CUTTERS IN THE QUASI-WAR WITH FRANCE

By LIEUTENANT (J.G.) R. W. DALY, U. S. Coast Guard Reserve

IN 1798, the United States drifted into an undeclared war with the Republic of France. The necessity to fight found us ill-prepared. Such naval vessels as we possessed were under the authority of the War Department, while their number and condition reflected the thrift rather than the vision of Congress. Troubles with the Barbary States had induced our legislators to provide a meager establishment of frigates and sloops to protect our commerce, but the seeming composition of our differences with Algiers had legally terminated the construction of these vessels. However, some ships, such as the *Constellation*, were near completion, and Navy-conscious statesmen were able to persuade their fellows that it would be the better part of economy to finish them. Thus, in the early days of our history, the Revenue Cutters of the Treasury Department composed a significant force.<sup>1</sup>

Established under Hamilton in 1790, the service had eight vessels of sufficient size to be considered capable of offensive operations, and these were transferred to the Navy for war duty, thus setting a precedent which was to be observed whenever the United States fought at sea. During the Quasi-War, the cutters comprised about 15 per cent of our armed maritime force, and captured at least 16 hostile vessels, out of the 92 taken, besides restoring many American ships to their owners.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Rise of American Naval Power*, by Harold and Margaret Sprout, Princeton University Press, 1939, pp. 25-49. *Our Navy and the Barbary Corsairs*, by Gardner W. Allen, Houghton Mifflin & Co., Boston, 1905, pp. 13-87. Cf., also, Allen's *Our Naval War With France*, passim.

<sup>2</sup> *Quasi-War With France*, documents, edited by

With isolated incidents abroad, the war was confined to the West Indies, where both parties were most vulnerable. Martinique was in British possession from 1793 until the Peace of Paris, 1802,<sup>3</sup> and Basse Terre Roads became the main base for the United States Fleet. The privateers out of Guadeloupe gave the most trouble, some 60 to 80 craft operating from that island.<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Stoddert, our first Secretary of the Navy, believed that depredations upon our commerce would cease if our ships could capture two or three thousand French seamen, and was, for that reason, opposed to wholesale exchange of prisoners.<sup>5</sup>

It was a cruising war. The Navy had orders to grant convoy to American merchantmen in the area, but not to employ their whole force for that purpose. In general, the merchantmen were to be convoyed clear of the West Indies, and then left to themselves, unless some naval vessel was returning to the United States, when convoy would be afforded for the remainder of the voyage.<sup>6</sup> Stoddert was emphatic that naval craft sail individually, writing to one commander,

Although I have already said so much on the subject, I cannot conclude without again at-

Captain Dudley W. Knox, U.S.N., in seven volumes, Washington, 364-73. Totalling guns for relative strength, regular naval vessels had a total of 881 guns, and the cutters, 152, a rough 15 per cent (VII, 364-73). Using James' system of determining regular strength by computing total broadside weight of metal, the cutter strength would be less than 15 per cent.

<sup>3</sup> "Les Colonies Francaises," by J. Rambosson, Paris, Ch. Delagrave et Cie., 1868, p. 362.

<sup>4</sup> *Quasi-War*, I, 336.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 199.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 378.

tempting to impress upon your mind the disadvantages of suffering our vessels to cruise in company. Cruising in Squadrons for small privateers seems of all means the best to avoid capturing them. It teaches the Commanders of the small vessels a reliance on force—not their own, for their protection. It is enough to make them Cowards. It prevents all means of knowing who are brave among them—because none are exposed to danger.<sup>7</sup>

And again, he said,

Our whole Commerce can be best protected by employing our Public Armed Ships in cruising—especially the fast Sailors—while we are convoying in one place, we are attacked in another.<sup>8</sup>

We subscribed, therefore, to the French concept of a *guerre de course*, rather than to fleet action, which was, in view of our dismal equipment, denied us.

The United States and Great Britain more or less co-operated to meet this mutual threat to their trade, and American naval ships indiscriminately protected those of British or American registry. The Royal Navy and ours even had a system of private recognition signals, with adaptations to cover all conditions of meeting.<sup>9</sup>

In this war, the *Eagle* and the *Pickering* were very successful, and their records are worth investigating as representative of the best among the small American cruisers; the record of the *General Greene*, however, was perhaps more typical. The three together will give an insight into the manner in which the war was carried on.

It is to be remembered that these vessels lost their peace-time character as revenue cutters, being lost in the effort of the nation to create a Navy.

### The "Eagle"

Built at Philadelphia in 1798, she was a 187-ton brig with a 58-foot keel, 20-foot beam, and a 9-foot hold, manned by a

crew of 70. She was armed with fourteen 6-pounders, and was commanded by Hugh G. Campbell up to November, 1800, and by M. Simmones Bunbury from that date until the end of the war.<sup>10</sup>

The *Eagle* was a lucky ship, between March 2, 1799 and August 22, 1800, capturing five Frenchmen, retaking seven Americans, and assisting in the capturing or retaking of ten other French or American vessels.<sup>11</sup>

In August, 1798, the *Eagle* being ready to receive her guns, Captain Campbell was ordered to recruit men and store provisions, preparatory to joining Captain Murray of the *Montezuma*, 20, at Norfolk for a cruise to the West Indian station.<sup>12</sup> Dissatisfied with his equipment and delayed by a yellow-fever epidemic then in Philadelphia, Campbell attempted to comply with these instructions but was unable to do so, causing Stoddert to complain that he wanted energy.<sup>13</sup> On October 13, Stoddert very bluntly reprimanded Campbell for failure to make the rendezvous, and sent him alternate orders to protect the Georgia coast in event that Murray sailed before the *Eagle* reached Norfolk.<sup>14</sup> In a sense, it was perhaps fortunate for the Secretary of the Navy that Campbell's enforced delay prevented him from going at once to the West Indies, because in November, Stoddert found occasion to write consolingly to the worried Governor of Georgia, who was alarmed about the possibility of "piratical incursions" into his state, that

Capt. Campbell in the Revenue Cutter *Eagle* of 14 guns, a well armed vessel, has been ordered to make the Coasts of Georgia, the particular object of his protection.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 366. *The History of American Sailing Ships*, by Howard I. Chapelle, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1935, p. 182.

<sup>11</sup> *Quasi-War*, VI, 276a.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 323, 430, 433.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 481, 483.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 528.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 49.

<sup>7</sup> *Quasi-War*, V, 379, IV, 378, *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 385.

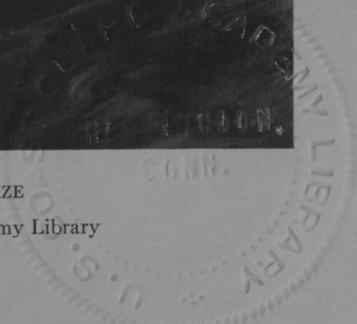
<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 68-9.



*Courtesy Lieutenant (j.g.) R. W. Daly, U. S. Coast Guard Reserve*

THE CUTTER PICKERING CAPTURING A FRENCH PRIZE

Photograph of mural on north wall of the Coast Guard Academy Library



The protection did not last long, however, for the next month Campbell was ordered to quit Savannah and go down to Prince Rupert's Bay, where he would place himself under the direction of Captain John Barry of the 44-gun frigate *United States*.<sup>16</sup> En route, Campbell retook from a mutinous crew the schooner *Eliza*, out of Philadelphia bound for St. Thomas. Putting the mutineers in chains, Campbell transferred them to a homeward bound naval vessel; they were eventually convicted and hanged.<sup>17</sup> Before reporting to Barry, he also rescued the sloop *Lark* from her French prize crew.<sup>18</sup> Early in the evening of March 14, he fell in with the American Squadron, among which was the *Pickering*, a cutter identical to the *Eagle* except in armament, and accompanied them to Prince Rupert's Bay.<sup>19</sup>

After a week, Campbell left the bay for a cruise in company with the *United States*, *Constitution*, 44, Captain Samuel Nicholson, and *Merrimac*, 24, Captain Moses Brown.<sup>20</sup> Within a few days, Campbell had recaptured another sloop, and on April 5, after a chase, made a prize of the sloop *Bonpere*. This privateer was manned by 52 men, mostly negroes, and armed with six guns, all but two 4-pounders being thrown overboard during the pursuit. The sloop was ultimately sold in Georgia to the government for a trifle more than \$2,000, and converted into a revenue cutter assigned to that state.<sup>21</sup>

By the middle of the month, Campbell had returned to the bay and been sent with Nicholson to see a fleet of 33 merchantmen safely out of the danger zone. He was primarily occupied in chasing any stranger who might have hostile intentions, but apparently encountered no

trouble.<sup>22</sup> Early in May, in the new squadron rendezvous of Basse Terre Road, Campbell was assigned with Lieutenant Speake of the *Richmond*, 18, to patrol to windward of Barbuda and Antigua. This duty was highlighted by May 15, when Speake and Campbell retook the ship *Nancy* and the brig *Mahitable*.<sup>23</sup>

May 20, 1799, the Navy Department incorporated the *Pickering*, *Scammel*, and *Eagle* in the regular establishment, and returned the *Diligence* and *General Greene* to the Treasury Department. Strictly speaking, of course, the subsequent activities of the *Eagle* were naval, but the ship, crew, and officers were of the Revenue Cutter Service.<sup>24</sup> Late in July, Campbell was commissioned a Master Commandant in the Navy.<sup>25</sup>

May 29, in company with the *Baltimore*, 20, Captain Samuel Barron, the *Eagle* took the *Siren*, of 4 guns and 36 men, in the words of Captain Thomas Tingey, then commanding the squadron, "a very small French privateer."<sup>26</sup> On the same day, falling in with the *United States*, the *Eagle* assisted in retaking the sloop *Hudson*.<sup>27</sup>

In mid-June, the *Eagle* and *Richmond* left St. Kitts with another convoy, which they escorted as far as the Bermudas before slanting off for Hampton Roads, where they stayed a short time before returning to Basse Terre by the 25th.<sup>28</sup> A delay in the receipt of orders mistakenly sent them back to Norfolk. They arrived on July 2, and Stoddert directed them to prepare for immediate return.<sup>29</sup> Campbell, however, needed officers, and asked for them. The Secretary of the Navy, possibly influenced by Campbell's record as a light ship commander, had changed his opinion of

<sup>16</sup> *Quasi-War* II, 81.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 222, 339. (This is one of the Coast Guard's present duties—suppression of mutiny at sea.)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 276a.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 463-4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 496.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 523; VI, 276a, 563-4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 64-6, 73, 77.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 276a.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 220.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 555.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 327.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 276a; III, 327.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 129, 327.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 454.

him, and wrote a very cordial reply, concluding, in a form close to apology, "I fix on the 25th Inst for your sailing but if you sail sooner it will be a new proof that I did you an injustice last year in supposing you might have got sooner to sea. . . ." <sup>30</sup>

Campbell's preparations were interrupted on the 18th by a hurried request from Stoddert to hunt for a French privateer of 16 guns which was reported to have stopped an American schooner off Little Egg Harbor. The alarm was without foundation, <sup>31</sup> and may have been one of the causes for Campbell's failure to give the Secretary the "new proof" desired. Be that as it may, Campbell was sent his orders on August 8 to depart for Guadeloupe within twelve hours. He carried dispatches for Tingey. <sup>32</sup>

He was returning none too soon to the station. Harassed, Tingey was pleading with Stoddert to send him experienced officers like "Barron, Bainbridge and Campbell." <sup>33</sup>

Early in September, the *Eagle* was with the *Delaware*, 20, Captain Thomas Baker, when the French sloop *Reynold* passed into American hands. <sup>34</sup> At this time, the privateers were also using Puerto Rico, but the greatest number continued to come from Guadeloupe. Tingey had done his part to win the war, and Captain Richard Morris was instructed to ready the *Adams*, 28, and take command. <sup>35</sup>

September 19, Campbell recaptured the American brig *North Carolina*, and October 2 he was in company with Tingey's *Ganges* when the French schooner *Esperance* struck her colors. <sup>36</sup> A midshipman, John Kiddall, summarized the cruise of the *Eagle* up to November 20:

The first island we put into after leaving the

*Delaware* was St. Kitts. Shortly after we cruized to windward and have had the good fortune of retaking one American brig, which was in tow of a French Schooner privateer, which we drove ashore, but after beating some time, got off and run for cover of a Fort. We have likewise taken two French vessels, one a sloop laden with sugar and molasses, the other a Letter of Marque laden with sugar and coffee, bound to France. . . . When we captured the last mentioned the *Ganges* was in company with us . . . the American brig I brought into St. Kitts. We are now bound out as convoy for some American vessels. <sup>37</sup>

Under the prize system of the old Navy, Campbell began to make a small fortune. December 5 he retook the brig *George* and on January 2, 1800, the brig *Polly*. The 10th of that month, the *Adams* and the *Eagle* captured the French schooner *Fougeuse* of 70 men and 2 guns, as well as recovering the American schooner *Aphia*. <sup>38</sup> These brought the total captures of Morris's command to 17 ships. <sup>39</sup> February 1, alone, the *Eagle* took the schooner *Benevolence*, <sup>40</sup> and a few days later was seriously mauled. "The brig *Eagle* . . . chased two French privateers, but finding their force double his own, did not think prudent to engage, but continued his course; after receiving a number of shot from them." <sup>41</sup> On March 1, Campbell seized the American schooner *Three Friends*, and on April 1, overpowered the French schooner *Favorite*. <sup>42</sup>

By May, although seriously in need of sails, the *Eagle* picked up the tiny schooner *La Magdelaine* of 15 tons and 4 men. <sup>43</sup> On the 7th, the prize crew aboard the American sloop *Ann*, Master Reuben Barnes, surrendered to the cutter's guns, as did the Frenchmen aboard the schooner *Hope*, three days later. <sup>44</sup> Towards the latter part

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 432.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 276a. *Record of Ship Movements*, U. S. Coast Guard, Washington, 1935, in two volumes. Vol. I, p. 95.

<sup>39</sup> *Quasi-War*, V, 103.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 276a.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 227.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 276a.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 411, 469.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 276a.

<sup>30</sup> *Quasi-War*, III, 493.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 512-3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 47, 215.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 133-4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 276a.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 170-1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 276a.



of June, Campbell had a brush with a privateer off St. Bartholomews, which had three prizes, two English brigs and a Yankee sloop, in company. The privateer managed to escape after cutting the *Eagle's* sails and rigging to pieces, but Campbell had the doubtful consolation of forcing the prize crews to run their vessels aground.<sup>45</sup>

The cruise continued to be profitable. On June 25, Campbell, damages repaired, captured the French schooner *Dolphin*, and on August 22 another schooner, *La Tourterelle*.<sup>46</sup> This was the last of his triumphs. His battered ship urgently needed refitting in the States. "The *Eagle* will want Coppering, her bottom being in a Miserable Condition, half her Copper being off."<sup>47</sup> So, homeward bound by September 3, he was in the harbor of St. Thomas, together with Captain John Rodgers of the *Maryland*, 20, and a gathering convoy of 52 Americans, waiting for a hurricane to cease. The southerly gales slackened off after a week and the ships sailed.<sup>48</sup>

September 28, Campbell arrived at Newcastle, where the *Eagle* was to be overhauled for another hitch in the Indies.<sup>49</sup> For his valuable services, Campbell was promoted to the command of the 28-gun frigate *General Greene* in November, and, ultimately, Lieutenant M. Simmones Bunbury was assigned the *Eagle*.<sup>50</sup> The difficulty with the French was nearing its solution, and Bunbury's instructions were less militant than those which had originally been given Campbell in the years previous. Speaking of the operations of French privateers, Stoddert directed Bunbury that,

If they continue, you must capture in your turn; but if they cease to molest our vessels, you will so

conduct yourself, as to evince the sincerity of our pacific dispositions towards them.<sup>51</sup>

Bunbury didn't have a chance for glory. His cruise in the Indies was without notable event. While the *Eagle* was at sea, Stoddert secured Congressional passage of the Peace Establishment Act, which created a permanent list of ships and officers. Campbell was retained as a Captain, but his old ship was not.<sup>52</sup> Arriving at Baltimore in June, 1801, she was sold for \$10,600.<sup>53</sup>

#### The "General Greene"

A 98-ton sloop built at Philadelphia in 1797, she had a far less spectacular career than the *Eagle*. With a crew of 34 men to handle her ten 4-pounders, she joined the Navy in the summer of 1798.<sup>54</sup> On July 14, Captain George Price, U.S.R.C.S., reported that he would be ready for sea as soon as he had obtained a full complement.<sup>55</sup> A few days later, he received orders to cruise between Cape Henry and Long Island in company with the *Ganges*, 24, Captain Richard Dale, and the cutter *Governor Jay*, 14, Captain John W. Leonard, U.S.R.C.S., the ships to be under Dale's command.<sup>56</sup>

By the end of the month, Price was on the station, cruising alone, inasmuch as neither ship had joined him. In the meantime, the *Baltimore*, 20, Captain Isaac Phillips, had instructions to replace the *Ganges*, which was to go on convoy duty to the West Indies with Captain Thomas Truxtun, never having reached the station to which she had been first ordered. In the interim, Captain Nicholson and the *Constitution* were to assume the responsibility.<sup>57</sup> The cutters, however, apparently had full responsibility for the protection

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 58.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 134-5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 241, 307.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 367.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 210.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 221.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 256.

<sup>45</sup> *Quasi-War*, VI, 73.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 276a.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 365.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 366.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 391, 430.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 559; VII, 22.

of the coast. In that day of clumsy communications, it is interesting to note that Price had instructions to appear about every ten or twelve days off Cape Henry, flying the Swedish flag; after a day or two, he could expect messages from Philadelphia.<sup>58</sup> Another cutter, the *Virginia*, 14, Captain Francis Bright, covered the waters from Cape Henry south to Florida. In August, Nicholson's little flotilla was transferred to this territory.<sup>59</sup>

After this cruising, the *General Greene* put into Chester for refitting, and in October got new sailing orders.<sup>60</sup> Reinforced by ten marines in addition to her crew, she was sent to New York to rendezvous with the *Governor Jay*. The cutters were to escort the supply ship *America* to the West Indies,<sup>61</sup> the *America* being burdened with 10 tons of ship bread, and 100 barrels each of beef and pork. Arriving at New York in December, and receiving aboard ample supplies of gunpowder, Price was sent orders to sail early in January, 1799.<sup>62</sup>

February 8, in the Gulf of Florida, the two cutters and their charge, together with four smaller merchantmen which they had taken under protection en route, welcomed the arrival of Stephen Decatur, Sr., in the 20-gun *Delaware*, because, at the time, a powerful 44-gun British frigate, the *Solebay*, was firing at them to bring to for boarding and examination. All hands at quarters, Decatur stoutly maintained that orders or no orders, Captain Rowiod of the *Solebay* couldn't trifle with American national ships, and offered to fight if the Englishman persisted in an attempt to dishonor the American flag. Rowiod was reluctant to breach amicable relations and to attack the inferior *Delaware*, assisted as she would be by two cutters, and the little fleet grandly sailed on for Havana.<sup>63</sup>

At this station, the *General Greene* shepherded American merchantmen to and from Cuba, without encountering any Frenchman until March 6. Towards midnight, lying in company with the *Delaware* off Morro Castle, the cutter challenged a strange sail, which surrendered on the fourth shot hurled at her. Price discovered that he had taken the French privateer *Marsouin* of Cape Francois, a schooner pierced for 12 guns, but only carrying one brass 9-pounder, a crew of 26 men, and a cargo of 70 barrels of meat. The prize was worth about \$4,000, and was sold for that, despite her captain's attempt to establish a character as a merchantman because his privateer's commission had expired.<sup>64</sup>

In May, the frigate *General Greene*, Captain Christopher R. Perry, was sent to relieve Decatur, who was to decide whether or not the cutters were worth retaining on the war duty.<sup>65</sup> Apparently, Decatur decided that the cutter *General Greene* was not suited to the Caribbean work, because Price arrived at Philadelphia about the middle of the month,<sup>66</sup> and on the 20th, Stoddert returned the cutter to the Treasury Department, because her 98 tons made her "too small to be useful in the Navy."<sup>67</sup> She finished the war, serving on the Atlantic coast.<sup>68</sup>

Price, however, was commissioned a naval lieutenant in July, and in September was given command of a naval schooner at Baltimore.<sup>69</sup>

### The "Pickering"

The cutter *Pickering* was identical to the *Eagle*, differing only in having 4- instead of 6-pounder guns. She captured 5 Frenchmen, besides numerous American victims of the privateers. Built at New-

<sup>58</sup> *Quasi-War*, I, 272, 275.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 292, 295-6.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 538.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 95-6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 200, 203-4.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 322.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 421-3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 149.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 176.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 220.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 252.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 345.

buryport, Massachusetts, she was commanded by Captain Jonathan Chapman to January, 1799, Lieutenant Edward Preble (of Tripoli fame) to June, 1799, and by Master-Commandant Benjamin Hillar to the end of her service.<sup>70</sup>

Placed under the Navy's authority in a circular order of July, 1798, the *Pickering* sailed from Boston on August 22, in company with the *Herald*, 18, Captain James Sever.<sup>71</sup> Writing to Stoddert, Stephen Higginson, Navy Agent at Boston, remarked, "The Cutter also is well appointed, with good Officers & a good crew. Capt. Chapman is not inferior to any man in the Navy, many think to excell, & his officers are very good."<sup>72</sup> The two ships beat uneventfully up and down the coast from Boston to Newport, speaking incoming or outgoing merchantmen, and an occasional British man-o'-war, such as the *St. Albins*, 64.<sup>73</sup> Putting finally into Newport, October 24, Captain Chapman discovered a Navy commission awaiting him, and in recommending Hillar to succeed him, summarized the previous months. "This cruise has been very unpleasant attended with much stormy weather, in which the *Pickering* has sustained some damage."<sup>74</sup>

This, certainly, was not a very brilliant beginning.

On November 4, the ships again put to sea in response to orders to go to Boston,<sup>75</sup> where Lieutenant Edward Preble, "said to be a valuable man," took over the *Pickering* in accordance with the privilege of choice between the two granted him by Stoddert.<sup>76</sup> Equipping the *Pickering* to join Barry, Preble received word to depart in the middle of January, 1799.<sup>77</sup> His orders contained what may today seem to

have been a curious injunction.

Being at peace with all other Nations, we should endeavour to cultivate, and preserve it, by practising the duties of Civility, and Friendship;—Should you meet with any American Vessel, captured by the Vessels of any nation at war; except the French or should you see any such vessels in the act of capturing an American vessel;—you cannot recapture in the one case;—nor can you lawfully interfere to prevent such capture in the other;—It must be presumed that the courts of such nation will render justice.<sup>78</sup>

It would seem that our government was mindful of our British bedfellows.

February 13, Preble left Nantasket Roads with the *Herald*, now commanded by Lieutenant Charles C. Russell, and a storeship destined for Barry's squadron.<sup>79</sup> The voyage was peaceful, according to the logbook of the *Pickering's* sailing master, James Ingraham, who recorded legs of 60 to 163 miles, while the cutter kept a mile or so in the van of the other ships, busying her raw crew with the decks and rigging or great gun and small arms drill. The routine apparently caused John Thompson, seaman, to forget himself; after a reading of the Articles of War, he was "punished with 12 lashes for disobedience of orders and Insolent behaviour [sic] to the Master."<sup>80</sup> Making a landfall of Dominica at noon, March 13, the *Pickering* next day reported to Barry, after first suspiciously going to quarters upon sighting the squadron. Having only a few days' stores left and no base, Barry welcomed the addition to his force.<sup>81</sup>

Preble spent his first day in Prince Ruperts Bay with the cutter careened, while his crew "blackd the bends, and scrubb'd the Bottom down to the copper."<sup>82</sup> March 18, the *George Washington*, 24, Captain Patrick Fletcher, which had recently arrived, started out with the *Pickering* to

<sup>70</sup> *Quasi-War*, VII, 369.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 328; VII, 368.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 329.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 340 *passim* to 576.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 576.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 500; II, 6.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 66, 110.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 219.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 250.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 306, 346-7.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 440.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 306 *passim* to 474.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 473.

take a group of merchantmen clear of the Indies. They looked in at Montserrat Roads for more Americans, and anchored the following morning in Basse Terre Roads, alongside the *Constellation*, 36, and her prize, the 36-gun *Insurgente*.<sup>83</sup> For a short time protected by the *Constellation*, the convoy sailed two days later. Hillar was occupied with pursuing strange sails, which usually proved to be flying the Stars and Stripes. After leading the merchantmen into relatively safe waters, the *Constellation* turned back, leaving Fletcher and Preble to take them farther to Latitude 27° N., where they were dispersed on March 27, Fletcher continuing on to Newport, while Preble headed back to Barry.<sup>84</sup>

Making a landfall of Antigua on April 14, Preble spoke a British man-o'-war, and three days later dropped anchor with the squadron in Prince Ruperts Bay. While watering—the cutter daily expended about 60 out of her 3,000-gallon capacity—Preble watched the *Constitution* and cutter *Eagle* take out a convoy. Leaving the Bay on the 20th, the *Pickering* cruised northwards, and while chasing a pair of ships past the southwest point of Guadeloupe, was saluted by three shots from a fort, one shot singing past the cutter's forefoot. Hoisting his colors, Preble fired back, and stood for Basse Terre. An hour later, he was fired on again by the defenses of Fort Royal, and thriftily returned a single shot, disappointed that the batteries kept him from investigating a pair of ships within their range. Towards dawn, he approached what he thought was the *George Washington*, and was surprised to find himself confronting a British ship-of-the-line whose captain truculently resented being challenged by a 14-gun brig. Preble prudently ran for Montserrat Roads where he found Fletcher, who had likewise encountered the two-decker.<sup>85</sup>

The next day, Preble discovered that the cutter's foremast was sprung some 14 feet above deck, but was able to bring her out of the Roads by the 26th. On the 29th, he intimidated a brig with three shots, and found that she was the *Fair American* out of New York with a prize crew of two Frenchmen and seven negroes aboard; she had been taken the previous day by three French letters of marque. On May 1, Preble fired seven shots to halt what he at first thought was a sloop, but which proved to be an 80-ton schooner whose foremast and boom had gone by the board in a gale. She was the *Francis* out of Fredericksburg, and a victim to a handful of Frenchmen. Undoubtedly, Preble was disappointed that her master had not been kept aboard but sent in a cartel to Guadeloupe, because her master had been his brother Joshua.<sup>86</sup>

May 6, the cutter's mainmast was sprung, obliging Preble to put into St. Pierre to fish it. From this port on the northwest side of British-held Martinique, Joseph Ingraham was dispatched in the cartel *Union* to carry 15 French prisoners to General Desfourneaux in exchange for any Americans at Guadeloupe, one of whom should have been Joshua Preble. Ingraham returned with 11 unfortunates, who were all he could find upon being invited to look in the streets and taverns for his compatriots, and he was chagrined not to have been able to get a receipt for his human cargo, since the French General had felt it would have been an admission of a state of war which everyone was anxious to disbelieve. At the same time, Preble corresponded with Capitaine de Frigate P. Moreau, who had been his friend prior to the hostilities, but couldn't receive any better information on his brother's whereabouts than that Joshua had gone to St. Bartholomews, indicating, presumably, that he was free.<sup>87</sup>

At sea again, Preble looked in at various

<sup>83</sup> *Quasi-War*, II, 486-7.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 499-500, 503 *passim* to 531.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 47, 64-5, 83.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 88-9, 99, 108, 116.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 147, 164.

ports to advertise a convoy which he and Fletcher would take north. This group of 65 left St. Thomas on May 25, and was to have remained intact to Latitude 34° N., but broke up in heavy weather on June 9. On the 12th, the cutter was at Sandy Hook.<sup>88</sup>

During this cruise, she had recaptured two Americans, hailed or stopped 14 ships, including four British men-o'-war, and chased a score of strangers.<sup>89</sup>

Preble was promoted to Captain, and Hillar, his first Lieutenant, was given the *Pickering*. In sending Hillar instructions to go down to Guadeloupe, Stoddert wrote,

I shall desire him [the senior officer on the station] to afford you every opportunity to distinguish yourself Officers and crew,—and not to employ a vessel so well calculated for cruising to advantage, in the more unprofitable business of convoying our Merchant Vessels.<sup>90</sup>

Stoddert's policy has already been mentioned, but he added an injunction that indicated the United States was beginning to feel its strength. In addition to being civil to representatives of all nations, Hillar was sternly reminded "that on no account you suffer the American flag to be dishonored."<sup>91</sup>

With dispatches for Tingey, Hillar sailed June 27.<sup>92</sup> Ingraham's logbook is missing as a source of information about this cruise, for he had somehow been made our chargé d'affaires in Tripoli.<sup>93</sup> On July 15, a few days after reporting, Hillar was sent with the *Ganges* and *Merrimac* on a patrol, and in their company recaptured the 57-ton schooner *John*, which was sent with a midshipman to St. Kitts.<sup>94</sup> During August, he cruised with the two ships, and on the 22d took a small convoy a day's

sail north of St. Thomas, before taking over a beat to windward of Anguilla, where he could expect to find small privateers. By the month's end, Hillar was back at St. Bartholomews, his troublesome mainmast sprung again.<sup>95</sup>

In September, prize money began to come his way. On the 16th, he seized the *Atalanta*, a schooner laden with sugar, which was sold at St. Kitts for about £2,500. Towards the end of the month, before being relieved by Morris, Tingey decided to disperse his little squadron for the best possible protection to our shipping, and assigned the *Pickering* and *Delaware* to guard the passage from St. Bartholomews to windward of Nevis.<sup>96</sup> On this duty, the *Pickering* assisted in the capture of the brig *Henrich*, and recaptured, by herself, the brig *Brothers*.<sup>97</sup>

*The Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser* of December 9, 1799, is the sole source for a description of another action:

On Saturday last arrived the schooner *Gull*, captain Brightman, from Anguilla, who has favored us with the particulars of the following important victory.

About the 18th ult. [October] off Point Petre, a battle was fought between the United States brig *Pickering*, of 14 guns, four pounders and 70 men, and the French privateer schooner *L'Egypte Conquise*, of 18 guns, 14 nines and 4 sixes, and 250 men; in which after an engagement which lasted nine hours, the Frenchman struck and was carried into St. Kitts.

Captain Brightman, with many other Americans, had been previously captured by the above privateer; and it appears that she was one of the best vessels belonging to the French in the West Indies. She was completely fitted out and double manned, on purpose to take the *Pickering*; but not being able to stand the fire of American cannon, she was obliged to strike to a force not much more than one third her equal in number.

The *Pickering*, a few days before, had a running fight with a French lugger; and capt. B. informs us, that she would have taken her if the *Pickering* had not sprung her masts in the chase.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>88</sup> *Quasi-War*, III, 174, 225 *passim* to 257; 301, 321.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 633.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 252, 341.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 380.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 385, 500.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 231.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 93, 473.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 44 *passim* to 83; 97, 120, 136-8.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 195, 225-6.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 563.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 295.

In November, Truxtun in the *Constellation* relieved Morris, and was emphatically directed to abandon the squadron cruising system. Results, insofar as the *Pickering* was concerned, began to be apparent the following month. On the 7th, Hillar took *La Voltigeuse*, a schooner of 10 guns and 64 men.<sup>99</sup> "It was expected that this privateer would have engaged the *Pickering*, as she shewed 14 ports; but on the *Pickering* firing a shot athwart her forefoot, and giving three cheers, the French colors came down."<sup>100</sup> Ingraham suddenly reappears as the Lieutenant who boarded the prize, having been relieved of his job at Tripoli, for which he had little liking.<sup>100</sup>

Twenty days later, Hillar wrote a letter to Stoddert that, although in no sense as cryptic or gallant as Perry's message on an occasion of larger moment, nonetheless indicates the character of a Revenue Marine officer.

*Pickering*, at sea, 27th Dec. '99

SIR, Having this day fell in with, and captured a French privateer of 10 guns and 61 men, an occasion offering to inform you of the same, I pray you to excuse my not being so particular as I otherwise should be.

I have the honor to remain, Sir, Your most obedient servant.<sup>101</sup>

Between August and December, the *Pickering* recaptured four other merchantmen; two Americans, an Englishman and a Dane.<sup>102</sup>

Early in December, the cutter as a cartel carried French prisoners to Guadeloupe, and secured the release of a hundred Americans.<sup>103</sup> Having fallen in with the *Insurgente*, 36, now commanded by Captain Alexander Murray as a vessel in the Navy, Hillar cruised with the frigate for a few days. They stopped outside of Pointe a Pitre, port of the island of Grande Terre, where a French frigate of 50 guns and a

corvette of 20 had lately arrived. Finding them "snug under the fortifications," the Americans couldn't do anything to the potentially dangerous pair, but left them to the careful vigilance of British warships from St. Kitts, since the English were equally if not more anxious than the Americans to destroy the strong French craft. When the *Insurgente* and *Pickering* met the 24-gun *Connecticut*, Hillar went his way.<sup>104</sup>

The cutter was lying at anchor in Basse Terre Roads when Truxtun brought the *Constellation* in, January 21, 1800. Hillar was then sent out with another convoy of two-score merchantmen, and on February 2, recaptured the *Portland*, bringing her total prizes to 17, including the French schooner privateer *Fly*.<sup>105</sup>

April 24, Hillar took his last ship, *l'Active*, a privateer of 12 guns and 62 men, and shortly afterwards was ordered to Boston for repairs, where he arrived May 17, after successfully bringing 70 more merchantmen out of the Indies. The repairs were to be made as quickly as possible, for, according to Stoddert, "The *Pickering* is so useful a Vessel—and Hillar is so clever a fellow that I am anxious she should get out again without delay."<sup>106</sup>

A situation arising similar to that of 1898, when part of the fleet was immobilized because of possible Spanish raids, Hillar's orders were changed on June 2. He was to cruise along the coast, among other things, to "Shew yourself at Charleston just to let it be known that you are on the Coast."<sup>107</sup> Leaving on the 10th, Hillar made the cruise of showing the flag without incident other than damage to spars and sails, and on July 25, he was relieved of the detail and ordered to the West Indies, where, he was informed, "your presence is too essential."<sup>108</sup> He was to

<sup>99</sup> *Quasi-War*, IV, 377-9, 500-1.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 137.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 571.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 589.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 530.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 31.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 132, 137, 145, 212.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 374, 512, 528, 565.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 4.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 59, 179.

wait only to act as protector of the store-ship *Florida* out of Philadelphia with supplies for the squadron.<sup>109</sup>

The *Pickering* sailed in August and never reached St. Kitts. Overdue, she was first feared lost, and then, at last, given up.<sup>110</sup> As the *Naval Chronicle* summarized it,

The *Pickering*, Hillar, having returned to the United States, and made a short cruise on the

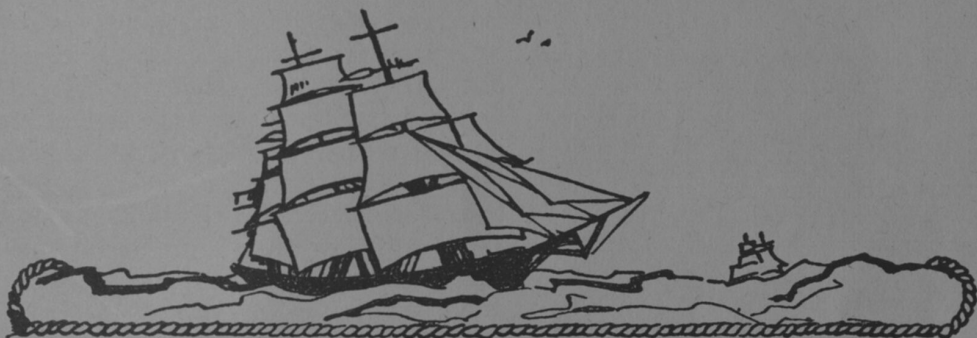
<sup>109</sup> *Quasi-War*, VI, 219, 226, 257.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 120.

coast, was directed (15th August) to proceed to Guadeloupe, and cruise in that neighborhood, until she should fall in with the commanding officer. She proceeded on this service, but was lost, it is supposed, in the same gale with the *Insurgente*—the equinoctial gale of September, 1800. All the crew in this case, as in that of the *Insurgente*, perished.<sup>111</sup>

The *Pickering*, her officers and men, half Revenue Cutter, half Navy, should have a place in the traditions of both services.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 415.



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