

**THE WOODEN WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN:  
NAVAL MUTINIES IN THE AGE OF ATLANTIC REVOLUTION**

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Mutinies tore like wildfire through the wooden warships of the revolutionary era. While *sans-culottes* across Europe laid siege to the nobility and slaves put the torch to plantation islands overseas, out on the oceans naval seamen by the tens of thousands turned their guns on the quarterdeck, formed committees, elected delegates, and overthrew the absolute rule of captains. Never before or since have there been as many mutinies on both sides of the front, as well as among many of the neutral powers, as during the French Revolutionary Wars. This dissertation, based on research in British, Danish, Dutch, French, Swedish, and US archives, traces the development of the mutinous Atlantic from the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 to its crescendo in 1797.

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## PREFACE

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Michelle Horton reminded me that not everything that matters happened two hundred years ago, though sometimes I still find that difficult to believe. She put up with a lot, especially when the writing took on a somewhat frenzied character during these last few months. I have many dinners to cook and a huge debt of gratitude and love to repay. I can't wait to begin. I have also badly neglected Mr. H and Mr. C, the world's most charming cats. I hope eventually to be forgiven.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

*General, your tank  
is a powerful vehicle  
it smashes down forests  
& crushes a hundred men.  
But it has one defect:  
it needs a driver.*

*General, your bomber is powerful  
it flies faster than a storm  
& carries more than an elephant.  
But it has one defect:  
it needs a mechanic.*

*General, man is very useful.  
He can fly & he can kill.  
But he has one defect:  
He can think.*

-- Bertolt Brecht<sup>1</sup>

The Battle of Camperdown on October 11, 1797 was one of the hardest fought victories the British Royal Navy won during the French Revolutionary Wars. In most major engagements, the British out-killed their enemies by a vast margin – from the First of June 1794 to the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, by a proportion of about six to one – but against the Dutch at Camperdown the

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<sup>1</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Poems, 1913-1956* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 289.

losses were more evenly balanced.<sup>2</sup> Unlike French and Spanish gun crews who aimed for the masts and rigging in the hope of immobilizing enemy ships, the Dutch adopted the British tactic of pounding the enemy's hull with broadsides until there no longer were enough men left standing to return fire. The two sides battered each at other at close range for about three hours, until finally the Dutch were forced to surrender. Most of their sixteen ships were damaged beyond repair, their hulls shot through multiple times, masts and rigging destroyed. Some were on fire; three ships would eventually sink. Of the 7,157 men who sailed into battle, 620 now lay weltering in each other's gore across the blood-soaked decks, another 520 were already dead. They had sold their lives dearly. The British, who had entered the fight with 8,221 men, overall suffered 228 men dead and 812 wounded, many of them invalids for life. On some of the ships, those most closely engaged in the battle, the carnage was staggering. The *Ardent* alone, which had locked yardarms with the Dutch flagship *Vrijheid*, received 98 shots into her hull, lost 41 men dead and 108 wounded. The *Belliqueux*, counted 25 dead and 88 wounded.<sup>3</sup>

The savage violence with which both sides had fought was received with much relief by naval and government officials in both Britain and the Batavian Republic. In the months leading up to the battle large-scale unrest had torn through both navies, leaving fears that those called upon to kill and die might refuse orders and turn on their own officers instead. In May, a British spy reported that the French "have so little confidence in the Dutch sailors and officers that they have shipped on board of every Dutch ship of the line such a number of French troops as they

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Nicolson, *Men of Honour: Trafalgar and the Making of an English Hero* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), 20.

<sup>3</sup> William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain, from the Declaration of War by France, in February 1793; to the Accession of George IV, in January 1820* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1822), 2:75-89.

think sufficient to maintain discipline and enforce Patriotism.”<sup>4</sup> But this might not have been the wisest solution, for five months later, just before the battle, a group of French soldiers on the *Hector* were discovered as they plotted the assassination of the ship’s commander.<sup>5</sup> On the fleet’s flagship, the *Vrijheid*, a sailor was executed two days later for murdering a soldier. He was sorry, he said before dying, for there were two more he would have liked to kill. On the *Wassenaar*, Gerrit Jan Nuvest, A. Franssen, and Jan Thyssen threatened to murder Lieutenant Preckels, who had sexually assaulted several men, including Nuvest whom he had tried to anally rape. On the *Kortenaar*, counter-revolutionary agitators were discovered with orange ribbons in their possessions, signifying loyalty to the deposed Stadtholder William of Orange, who from his exile in Kew had called upon his troops to aid the British war effort against the revolutionary Batavian regime.<sup>6</sup> In itself, none of this would have been overly worrisome had not a whole Dutch squadron surrendered to the British at Saldanha Bay little over a year before. The ships’ commanders, surrounded on both land and sea by British forces, had unanimously agreed that if they ordered their men to prepare for battle, they would have been as likely “to shoot and kill their own officers as fire on the enemy.”<sup>7</sup> The vast majority of the mutinous Dutch seamen had

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<sup>4</sup> Letter, John Mitchell, Hamburg, 19 May 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4172.

<sup>5</sup> Letter, Vice-Admiral Raders to the Committee for Naval Affairs, Texel, 9 October 1797, Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, nummer toegang 2.01.29.01, inventarisesnummer 237.

<sup>6</sup> Report, Vice-Admiral de Winter, 4 October 1797, NA (NL), Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 236; Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 1127.

<sup>7</sup> Conclusions of the council of war, 16 August 1796, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221; see section 4.2 below.

afterwards joined the British navy, and some even ended up in the fleet that fought at Camperdown a year later.<sup>8</sup>

The disciplinary problems in the Dutch fleet hardly served to reassure the British officer corps, for their own tars were even worse behaved than their counterparts across the North Sea. Ten of the sixteen ships that sailed into battle at Camperdown, including both the *Ardent* and the *Belliqueux*, had participated in the great fleet mutinies that rocked the home command of the Royal Navy for two months earlier that year. From Cork in the west to Yarmouth in the east, over 100 ships containing over 30,000 men had run up the red flag of mutiny, scores of officers had been thrown off their ships, ship and fleet committees were formed, and at the Nore anchorage, where the mutiny peaked in late May, the seamen had even elected a president and proclaimed “the floating republic.” When the government took an intransigent stance, some of the mutineers suggested taking the ships to sea under their own direction and handing them over to the French, but in the end the mutiny collapsed under the threat of bombardment with red-hot shot from shore.<sup>9</sup> In the chaos that ensued, a significant number of the mutineers took off, some headed for the Batavian Republic, and a few ended up in the Texel fleet going out to meet the British a few month’s later.<sup>10</sup>

At Camperdown, mutineers from both navies fought on both sides. This, we must presume, was not as uncommon as it might at first seem. The revolutionary 1790s were the Atlantic’s great age of mutiny, a period of lower deck insurrectionism unrivalled in extent,

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<sup>8</sup> Letter, Capt. Lieut. Ruijsch to Vice-Admiral de Winter, 12 July 1797, NA (NL), Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 236.

<sup>9</sup> See sections 5.1 below.

<sup>10</sup> “Extract from a letter from Gravesend, 26 July 1797, forwarded to Evan Nepean,” TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4173; Report, Vice-Admiral de Winter, 4 October 1797, NA (NL), Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 236.

intensity, and political sophistication until the great revolts at Kronstadt and Wilhelmshaven during the era of communist revolution 120 years later. In the French, Batavian, and British navies alone, which together form the primary focus of this study, there were well over 150 single-ship revolts, as well as half a dozen fleet mutinies that lasted from a few days to several months, and involved between 3,000 and 30,000 men each time. By the end of the 1790s, between one-third and one-half of all 450 ships and 200,000 men mobilized across these three fleets had probably experienced and participated in at least one mutiny, many of them in several, and some even on ships in different navies.<sup>11</sup>

It is in fact impossible to know exactly how many mutinies occurred during the 1790s, and difficult even to guess. Since mutinies were considered by the upper echelons of eighteenth-century naval administrations as failures of command on the ground (that is, on the water), many captains confronted by a work stoppage or illegal assembly below deck chose to deal with it informally, either by giving in to the mutineers' demands or punishing the ringleaders without recourse to official judicial proceedings, thereby leaving no official administrative record that could hurt their future career. Jonathan Neale, the foremost historian of mutinies in the Royal Navy during this period, has suggested that the actual number of mutinous events may have been five to twenty times higher than those for which there is archival evidence, but that of course is only an educated guess.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes there is mention of mutinies in other types of sources, in letters, autobiographies, or personal journals, like that of naval surgeon John Tapson who vividly described the ongoing conflicts between captain and crew on the HMS *Africaine* in the summer

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<sup>11</sup> The numbers of men and ships are approximate, but based on figures in N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 608, 639.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Neale, "Forecastle and Quarterdeck: Protest, Discipline and Mutiny in the Royal Navy, 1793-1814" (Ph.D. diss., University of Warwick, 1990), 25.

of 1810.<sup>13</sup> These kinds of sources are often qualitatively rich, but unfortunately do not lend themselves to a quantitative study.

A related problem has to do with the way in which different navies recorded mutinous events, and the extent to which these records have survived. In the case of Britain's Royal Navy, blessed with a highly efficient and dedicated corps of bureaucrats, one can be reasonably sure that every mutiny that resulted in a court martial was systematically logged, and even in the few cases where the minutes of a trial have gone missing, the names of the accused, the charge, and the verdict are recorded in the "Digest of the Admiralty Records of Trials by Court-Martial, from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1755 to 1<sup>st</sup> January 1806."<sup>14</sup> The situation is dramatically different in the Batavian and French navies, whose administrative structures underwent extensive and sometimes chaotic reorganization during the period covered by this study. This resulted in highly inconsistent record-keeping. Some mutinies, especially in the Batavian navy, led to major investigations with hundreds of interrogation records, scores of reports, and dozens of trial minutes, while others merely received an off-handed mention in some internal memorandum. It is possible that more records once existed, but they have since been lost. A fire in the Dutch Department of the Navy in 1844 did extensive damage to its archives, though no one knows which documents actually were destroyed.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> John Tapson, Journal, 25 April 1806 – 14 December 1814, Hubert S. Smith Naval Collection, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan; for the difficulties and possibilities of using memoirs written long after the events described, see Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 85-194; see also Hester Blum, *The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum American Sea Narrative* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Digest of the Admiralty Records of Trials by Court-Martial, from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1755 to 1<sup>st</sup> January 1806, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 12/21-26.

<sup>15</sup> J.C. de Jonge luckily wrote the first edition of his massive *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen* before the fire, but unfortunately he had little interest in mutinies. J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, 5 vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Haarlem: A.C. Kruseman, 1858-62).

Having to rely primarily on official naval records also creates a problem of definition. Articles of War and naval penal codes defined mutiny in such vague terms that nearly every unauthorized action, whether committed by an individual or a group, could be construed as mutiny, and it always depended on the particular context whether it would be prosecuted as such.<sup>16</sup> In the French navy, for instance, mutineers could overnight become republican heroes in the rapidly shifting politics of the revolution.<sup>17</sup> But the problem is no less acute in the other navies. A conviction for mutiny usually carried a mandatory death sentence, and commanders did not always consider that a necessary or productive punishment. By the same token, when officers felt their authority was under threat, during periods of general lower deck unrest, for example, acts which more properly would fall under the category of individual disobedience or drunkenness were frequently treated as mutiny in order to enable exemplary and harsh punishments. In order to circumvent these problems, this study therefore uses a more flexible definition of mutiny, including all collective oppositional acts planned or carried out by sailors on the lower deck.

Mutinies took several different forms, and they could be both spontaneous explosions of discontent or highly organized revolts. The rarest form of all was the one usually thought of as archetypal, and epitomized by the *Bounty* mutiny in 1789.<sup>18</sup> During the French Revolutionary

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<sup>16</sup> This is related to the problem of “enforcement waves” that historians of early modern crime have often grappled with. See, for example, Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, and E.P. Thompson, eds, *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Allen Lane, 1975); E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977); and John Rule and Roger Wells, eds, *Crime, Protest, and Popular Politics in Southern England, 1740-1850* (London: Hambledon, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> For the case of the *Embuscade* in 1791, see section 3.5 below.

<sup>18</sup> The literature on the *Bounty* is vast. For a recent book-length overview, see Donald Maxton, *The Mutiny on H.M.S. Bounty: A Guide to Nonfiction, Fiction, Poetry, Films, Articles, and Music* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2008).



Wars there were in fact only nine instances in which mutineers permanently seized power onboard their ships, and in only six of these did they run away with it to an enemy port, once in the Dutch navy, and five times in the British navy.<sup>19</sup> If seamen wanted to quit the service without permission, desertion was a much easier and far less risky option than mutiny, which was not only difficult to organize but also carried the death penalty if it all went wrong. Deserters, in contrast, usually received only a flogging if they were caught. Collective action therefore generally aimed at improving the conditions of service rather than quitting it entirely. Most mutinies, and probably the overwhelming majority of those for which there is no archival evidence, were spontaneous reactions to a particular order the crew opposed. Very frequently, for instance, crews refused to participate when ordered on deck to witness the punishment of one of their shipmates. In such cases, the crew might assemble below deck or on the forecastle and issue a collective demand, or they might riot instead.<sup>20</sup> This type of spontaneous mutiny was usually short-lived, but in rare cases it evolved into a broader revolt against the conditions onboard ship.<sup>21</sup> Generally, however, mutinies triggered by fundamental, long-standing grievances, such as the denial of shore leave, the poor quality of provisions, or the behavior of certain officers, were pre-planned and highly organized affairs. Such mutinies took a variety of forms, including

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<sup>19</sup> French mutineers stationed in the West Indies three times took control of their ships, but only to sail it back home to France. See sections 3.3 and 3.5 below. For the Dutch *Jason*, see section 4.2, and for the British *Hermione* section 5.3.

<sup>20</sup> Some shipboard riots degenerated into largescale violence directed against both officers and fellow crew members. They share some characteristics with riots in other "total institutions," such as prisons. See, for a comparison, Jack A. Goldstone and Bert Useem, "Prison Riots as Microrevolutions: An Extension of State-Centered Theories of Revolution," *American Journal of Sociology* 104, no. 4 (1999): 985-1029; for ships as "total institutions," see Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961); Vilhelm Aubert, *The Hidden Society* (Totowa, NJ: Bedminster, 1965); for a critique of the ship as a "total institution," see Heide Gerstenberger, "Men Apart: The Concept of "Total Institution" and the Analysis of Seafaring," *International Journal of Maritime History* 8, no. 1 (1996): 173-182.

<sup>21</sup> For the British *Defiance* mutiny, which began as a riot but turned into a two-day armed stand-off, see section 4.3.

collective petitions, selective disobedience to orders (for example, refusing to weigh anchor), all-out strikes, and even armed stand-offs that could last for several days, and in a few instances several weeks.

Despite the noticeable surge of lower deck unrest across navies during the French Revolutionary Wars, mutinies hardly figure at all in most naval histories of the period.<sup>22</sup> Such studies as do exist, moreover, often reproduce the eighteenth-century ruling class assumption that if the lower orders revolt the “fault” invariably lies in a failure to govern them properly.<sup>23</sup> In William S. Cormack’s otherwise brilliant study *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789-1794*, common seamen, for instance, appear almost disobedient and rebellious by nature, and the bulk of the book therefore concentrates on the intra-ruling class conflicts that destroyed the system of naval governance from above.<sup>24</sup> British naval historians, most prominently N.A.M. Rodger, usually assume the opposite, namely that the lower deck was

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<sup>22</sup> Several general histories of mutiny exist, but these tend to be chronologically stretched over long periods of time. See, for example, Jane Hathaway, *Rebellion, repression, reinvention: mutiny in comparative perspective* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001); Christopher Bell, *Naval mutinies of the twentieth century: an international perspective* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); Leonard F. Guttridge, *Mutiny: A History of Naval Insurrection* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1992); Lawrence James, *Mutiny in the British and Commonwealth Forces, 1797-1956* (London: Buchan & Enright, 1987); Richard Woodman, *A Brief History of Mutiny* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2005). More general work on why enlisted personnel revolt tends to be based on twentieth-century infantry men. See, for example, Elihu Rose, “The Anatomy of Mutiny,” *Armed Forces and Society* 8, no. 4 (1982): 561-574; Joel E. Hamby, “The Mutiny Wagon Wheel: A Leadership Model for Mutiny in Combat,” *Armed Forces and Society* 28, no. 4 (2002): 575-600; David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005). See also, for a sociological approach, Cornelis L. Lammers, “Strikes and Mutinies: A Comparative Study of Organizational Conflicts between Rulers and Ruled,” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, no. 14 (1969): 558-572.

<sup>23</sup> Only the French and British mutinies have a literature. Not a single historian has studied mutinies in the Dutch and Batavian navy, though a small amount of work has been done on the ships of the paramilitary Dutch East India Company. Jaap R. Bruijn and Els van Eyck van Heslinga, eds, *Muiterij: Oproer en Berechting op Schepen van de VOC* (Haarlem: De Boer Maritiem, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> William S. Cormack, *Revolution and political conflict in the French Navy, 1789-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). The literature on French naval mutinies during the revolution is closely tied up with the fiercely partisan historiography on the revolution in general. For more details, see the introduction to chapter 3.

fundamentally loyal and well-behaved, and in cases of single-ship mutiny they have therefore concentrated very strongly on the failures of individual commanders, like Captain William Bligh of the *Bounty* and *Director*, or Captain Hugh Pigot of the *Hermione*.<sup>25</sup> In the case of the 1797 fleet mutinies, which involved over 100 ships and therefore hardly can be treated as an individual failure of command, most recent historians have instead insisted that it was far less serious than it might at first appear, that the mutinies in no way indicated general disaffection, and that all talk of republics and the rights of man was just provocative bluster or the work of outside agitators and thus does not reflect the attitudes and beliefs of common seamen.<sup>26</sup>

There is reason to doubt such conclusions, for we do not actually know very much about the men below deck on late eighteenth-century warships, and least of all about their intellectual life. Despite the immense number of naval history books that keep rolling off the presses, especially in Britain, once one subtracts hagiographies of individual commanders like Admiral Nelson (see, for instance, Andrew Lambert's *Nelson: Britannia's God of War*) or heavily nationalistic celebrations of martial prowess (Roy and Leslie Adkins' *The War for All the Oceans* is a good representative of the genre), only a much smaller number of serious book-length studies of eighteenth-century navies remains.<sup>27</sup> Of these, it is literally possible to count the

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<sup>25</sup> Rodger, *Command*, 442-453; Gavin Kennedy, *Captain Bligh: The Man and his Mutinies* (London: Duckworth, 1989); Dudley Pope, *The Black Ship* (London: Owl Books, 1963).

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the literature on the 1797 fleet mutinies, and the critiques that social historians especially have levelled against it, see the introduction to chapter 5.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Lambert, *Nelson: Britannia's God of War* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004); Roy Adkins and Leslie Adkins, *The War for All the Oceans: From Nelson at the Nile to Napoleon at Waterloo* (New York: Viking, 2007); for a devastating depiction of the characteristically British hero-worship that surrounds Nelson, see Barry Unsworth's novel *Losing Nelson* (London: Penguin, 1999).

ones dealing extensively with the social history of the lower deck on one hand.<sup>28</sup> Naval history continues to be written with both feet firmly planted on the quarterdeck.

This top-down, great man approach to the history of seafaring has been challenged by maritime social historians. Following Jesse Lemisch's ground-breaking study of merchant seamen in the American Revolution four decades ago, a substantial body of literature has emerged that allows us to appreciate the broad variety of seafaring experience in the Atlantic trades.<sup>29</sup> The work of Marcus Rediker, in particular, has been important in replacing the infantilized, a-political, and sterile image of jolly Jack Tar with a rich understanding of the radically egalitarian and politically sophisticated culture of deep-sea sailors. Since warship crews

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<sup>28</sup> Though technically covering only the period of the Seven Years War and, as are most naval histories, rather in love with the service, N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986) is the most thorough social history of the British navy. Dudley Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987) is a useful and popular synthesis. For a social history of the Danish navy, heavily influenced by Rodger's approach, see Erik K. Borring, "Livet Ombord: Danske Orlogstogter til Vestindien, 1755-1807." (Ph.D. diss., University of Copenhagen, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 25, no. 3 (1968): 371-407; Jesse Lemisch, "Listening to the 'Inarticulate': William Widger's Dream and the Loyalties of American Revolutionary Seamen in British Prisons," *Journal of Social History* 3, no. 1 (1969): 1-29; Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Alain Cabantous, *Dix Mille Marins Face à l'Océan: Les populations maritimes de Dunkerque au Havre aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (vers 1660-1794)* (Paris: Publisud, 1991); Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Alain Cabantous, *Les citoyens du large: Les identités maritimes en France (XVIIe-XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Aubier, 1995); Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling, eds, *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Jesse Lemisch, *Jack Tar vs John Bull: The Role of New York's Seamen in Precipitating the Revolution* (New York: Garland, 1997); Pablo E. Pérez-Mallaína, *Spain's Men of the Sea: Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004); Paul Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Mickaël Augeron and Mathias Tranchant, eds, *La Violence et la Mer dans l'espace atlantique (XIIe-XIXe siècle)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004); Daniel Vickers (with Vince Walsh), *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Emma Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and their Captive Cargoes, 1730-1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London: John Murray, 2007); Christopher Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause: Atlantic Commerce and the Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

were drawn from across the maritime industries, it is unfortunate that naval historians have largely failed to take note of such work.<sup>30</sup>

Isaac Land's recent monograph *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor* is an exception, but despite incorporating many of the advances of maritime social history, he reproduces one of the most problematic weaknesses it shares with naval history in failing to account adequately for the cosmopolitan nature of life at sea.<sup>31</sup> Even while acknowledging that crews in most of the deep-sea industries were usually composed of men from many different world regions, the majority of both maritime and naval historians never allow that insight to alter their basic national and imperial frameworks of analysis. They continue writing about the "British" navy, the "American" fisheries, the "French" merchant marine, or the "Dutch" East Indies fleet, even though a substantial proportion of the men who worked on all of these ships routinely drifted between different flags and various industries throughout their careers at sea.<sup>32</sup> To fully shift the perspective below deck therefore also requires a transcendence of inherited, nationally defined units of analysis.

This problem is not just restricted to the history of seafaring. Most self-identified Atlantic historians, many of them trained in colonial and imperial history, have made little effort to revisit their basic analytical concepts. Nationally-defined, territorially-bounded empires still reign

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<sup>30</sup> It is equally unfortunate that social historians have abandoned warship crews to the neglectful care of naval historians. Resistance to naval service among deep-sea sailors is an exception. See T.J.A. Le Goff, "Les gens de mer devant le système de classes (1755-1763): résistance ou passivité?" *Revue du Nord* 1 (1986): 463-479; Denver Alexander Brunsmann, "The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2004); Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval impressment and its opponents in Georgian Britain* (London: Continuum, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Dutch historians have studied maritime labor migration extensively, but they too have neglected the navy, often in favor of the VOC. See, for example, Jan Lucassen, "A multinational and its labor force: the Dutch East India Company, 1595-1795," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 66 (2004): 12-39.

supreme in most studies of the Atlantic world.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the most troubling consequence of this failure to transcend national history is the reaffirmation of the Atlantic as a European space, even though the majority of people who crossed it were Africans whose migratory patterns were determined by the structures of the international economy rather than by European claims to imperial sovereignty. It is therefore no coincidence that some of the most important work in genuine Atlantic history has come from historians of the African diaspora, and from those scholars who have been inspired by them. Julius Scott, for instance, has introduced the notions of “masterlessness” and “crisscrossing of empires” as important conceptual tools for thinking about the hegemonic rifts necessarily opening up along the front lines of competing empires, and the ways in which the Atlantic proletariat, through its mobility, was in a unique position to exploit them. Unique, because unlike the administrators of empire who were spatially tied to their areas of sovereignty, the proletariat created autonomous networks, crisscrossing imperial borders, playing off one master against another, denying hegemony to each one, and thereby achieving, at least temporarily, masterlessness.<sup>34</sup> But this only describes one, negative reality in the lives and

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<sup>33</sup> David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic world, 1500-1800* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic history: concept and contours* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Cécile Vidal, “The Reluctance of French Historians to Address Atlantic History,” *Southern Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2006): 153-189; J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); James Epstein et al., “AHR Forum: Entangled Empires in the Atlantic World,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007): 710-800; Eliga Gould and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, “AHR Exchange,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 5 (2007): 1415-1432; Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault, eds., *Soundings in Atlantic history: latent structures and intellectual currents, 1500-1830* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Reappraisal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Julius S. Scott, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1986); Julius S. Scott, “Crisscrossing Empires: Ships, Sailors, and Resistance in the Lesser Antilles in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, ed. Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), 128-143; see also Ira Berlin, “From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd series, 53, no. 2 (1996): 251-288; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

struggles of Atlantic commoners. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, influenced by autonomist conceptualizations of class composition and decomposition, have borne witness to a tradition of revolt in which a multiracial, Atlantic proletariat – a motley crew – repeatedly made itself into a class in struggle, confronting and attacking their masters, before inevitably being crushed, but always, always, reemerging elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

Linebaugh and Rediker emphasized strongly the role of sailors in their recovery of the hidden history of the revolutionary Atlantic, and for good reason. Not only were they repeatedly at the forefront of struggles, they were more mobile and cosmopolitan than any other large group of workers. A concentrated focus on their struggles across navies during the 1790s therefore suggests itself for deepening our understanding of the networks that made the age of revolution an international phenomenon. Inspired by the revolutionary upheavals of 1989, and to some degree by the “discovery” of the Haitian Revolution in the aftermath of the bicentennial commemorations of the French Revolution the same year, historians in recent years have returned to the study of the hemispheric age of revolution that was first pioneered by C.L.R. James, R.R. Palmer, and Jacques Godechot over fifty years ago.<sup>36</sup> Much of this new work,

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000). For an overview of autonomist thought, see Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class composition and struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1980); R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); Jacques Godechot, *La grande nation: L'expansion révolutionnaire de la France dans le monde de 1789 à 1799*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Aubier, 1983); Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy, eds., *Women and Politics in the Age of Democratic Revolution* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Lester D. Langley, *The Americas in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Jack D. Greene et al., “AHR Forum: Revolutions in the Americas,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (2000): 92-152; David Geggus, ed., *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Jean-Marie Constant, ed.,

however, remains comparative, focuses on the spread of ideas, or emphasizes the movements of a small group of elite revolutionaries. But every idea and every transatlantic revolutionary – Tom Paine, the Marquis de Lafayette, Thomas Jefferson, Wolfe Tone, Olaudah Equiano, or Simón Bolívar – spent many weeks and even months aboard ship as they sailed between Europe, Africa, and America. The details of their encounters with common seamen from around the Atlantic world are lost to history, but as I suggest in the conclusion there is much evidence of fruitful exchange between landed radicals and seaborne insurrectionists.

Chapter 2, following the introduction, introduces “the wooden world” and the men who worked within its walls, their social and geographic origin, the many roads by which they came aboard ship, their day-to-day living conditions, and the tactics they developed to improve them. These remained fairly limited and predominantly defensive in nature until the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, which was accompanied by a complete collapse of the structures of authority of the *Royale*.

Chapter 3 focuses on the struggles of French seamen between 1789-1793, stationed both at home and in the colonies. As the revolution gathered force, and as seamen carried their experiences of insurrection back and forth between Toulon, St. Domingue, Brest, and Martinique, their confidence and their political sophistication grew, and by 1793 they had come

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*Révoltes et Révolutions en Amérique et en Europe (1773-1802)* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2005); Robin Blackburn, “Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd series, 53, no. 4 (2006): 643-674; Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); Annie Jourdan, *La Révolution batave entre la France et l'Amérique (1795-1806)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008); Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).



to assume that the doctrine of popular sovereignty gave every crew the right to veto their captain's decisions.

The outbreak of the war at sea that year put a brake on the gathering force of mutiny in France, but the impulse spread to other fleets as the mobilization for war suddenly intensified the horrific hardships of the lower deck. Chapter 4 takes three of these navies in turn. First, the neutral Swedish navy in which there was not a single mutiny, but seamen instead expressed resistance through desertion, alcoholism, and even suicide. Second, the French-allied Batavian service, whose entry into the war in 1795 was accompanied by an explosion of large-scale treasonous unrest below deck. Finally, the British navy, which during the first four years of the war saw the steady growth of a mutinous movement that became more determined, more militant, and more politically radical with every passing year.

Despite a series of major single-ship mutinies, the British lower deck was defeated and their leaders executed. In reaction, mutineers in the home command planned a fleet-wide strike for the early summer of 1797, which is the subject of the first two sections of chapter 5. It was both the greatest victory and the most painful defeat of the decade. Over 30,000 seamen took control their ships, developed radically democratic institutions of self-government, and put forward a detailed and sophisticated program of political change that, if implemented, would have reconstructed the Royal Navy as a republican force. But the mutiny was crushed, and a reign of terror descended upon the navy. The lower deck answered violence with violence, and treason. In September 1797 mutineers on the *Hermione* murdered ten of their officers before handing the ship over to the enemy in Spanish South America. Most of them were never caught. Their story is the focus of the second half of chapter 5.

The wave of naval mutiny that had steadily gathered force since 1789 peaked and crashed in the violence of 1797. The chronological narrative therefore ends with the aftermath of the *Hermione* mutiny. A conclusion assessing the legacy and limitations of the mutinous Atlantic follows.

## 2.0 THE WOODEN WORLD

Europe's battle fleets had long been preparing for the war that finally came in 1793. For well over a century, Britain and France had been locked in a fierce struggle for global maritime supremacy, which eventually, in step with the constantly rising importance of transoceanic commerce, dragged every European state with overseas interests or aspirations into its murderous orbit. Between 1760 and 1790, Britain's navy, secure in its vast superiority, grew only by a comparatively modest 26 percent, but both France and Spain nearly doubled their fleets during the same period, as did the Dutch Republic. The Russian navy, divided into a Baltic and Black Sea command, more than tripled its total size. Even minor powers, like Sweden, Denmark-Norway, Portugal, Malta, Venice, and Naples, stretched their resources, sometimes beyond breaking point, to participate in the feverish naval arms race that rapidly militarized all the world's shipping lanes.<sup>1</sup>

In total, Europe's battle-fleets entered the final showdown of their sailing navies in 1793 with approximately 600 line-of-battle ships, slightly fewer frigates, and almost 2,000 smaller vessels, including brigs, schooners, gun-boats, galleys, fire-ships, and more. In total, they packed around 60,000 guns – around ten times the number of moveable artillery pieces then in use by the continent's land armies – and they required around 350,000 seamen to operate them, almost all the skilled manpower available in the north Atlantic.<sup>2</sup> Already by the 1780s, the French and

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Glede, *Navies and Nations: Warships, Navies and State Building in Europe and America, 1500-1860* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993), 2:311.

<sup>2</sup> Martine Acerra and Jean Meyer, *Marines et Révolution* (Rennes: Éditions Ouest-France, 1988), 58.

British war-fleets both had manpower needs that were equivalent to all domestically available supply, which meant they would had to strip all non-military shipping of its workers if they were to man all of their warships.<sup>3</sup> The Dutch navy barely managed to scrape together two-thirds of its manpower requirements for the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War in 1780-84, and Sweden suffered acute shortages of men during its war with Russia between 1788 and 1790.<sup>4</sup> The 1793 outbreak of war intensified the manpower crisis still further, and European navies responded by expanding their coercive recruitment systems to include groups previously safe from non-voluntary service at sea, and by allowing the proportion of foreign-born seamen on board their ships to expand. By the late 1790s, often as many as half the men onboard, and sometimes substantially more, were foreign-born.

Greater numbers of forced workers, as well as more men without any reason to be loyal to the country under whose flag they sailed, drove up desertion rates to previously unimaginable heights, which in turn seemed to necessitate even tighter regimentation and ever more spectacular acts of punitive violence in order to impose discipline on the lower deck. This chapter traces that dynamic of coercion, repression, and renewed, if careful and defensive, resistance. Following an overview of Europe's varied coercive recruitment systems, the chapter moves on to consider the nature of life and labor in the wooden world, before finishing with a brief discussion of the difficulties that prevented the lower deck from developing collective and offensive strategies of resistance, at least until 1789.

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Meyer, "Forces navales et puissances économiques," in *Seamen in society / Gens de mer en société*, ed. Paul Adam (Perthes: Commission internationale d'histoire maritime, 1980), 78.

<sup>4</sup> Otto Emil Lybeck, *Svenska Flottans Historia, Andra Bandet, Tredje Perioden: Från Frihetstidens Slut till Freden i Kiel* (Malmö: A.-B. Allhems, 1945), 420; Jaap R. Briuijn, *The Dutch Navy of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 195-6.

## 2.1 MOBILIZING MANPOWER

Late eighteenth-century Atlantic Europe is estimated to have been home to around 300,000 to 400,000 skilled seafarers.<sup>5</sup> The British Isles, with 100-150,000 men, had the largest concentration, followed by France, Spain, and the United Provinces, each with around 60,000, and Denmark-Norway with approximately 40,000.<sup>6</sup> These were the men who made up the basic pool of naval manpower. Since no major state could afford to maintain a permanently armed fleet, they were mobilized and released as the rhythms of imperial warfare dictated. Whenever peace broke out, hundreds of warships were laid up, and tens of thousands were released onto the maritime labor market. Conversely, when armed conflict again was imminent, European admiralties activated their recruitment systems, and tens of thousands were rapidly sucked back into warwork.

The failure to develop a specialized workforce meant that the ability to wage war at sea hinged on the efficiency of the mechanism by which manpower was shifted between the civilian and military sectors. Since demand and supply tended to move in counter-cyclical directions – that is to say, many seafarers were drawn to naval service in peacetime, whereas the merchant

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<sup>5</sup> Meyer, “Forces navales,” 79.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Palmer and David M. Williams, “British Sailors, 1775-1870,” in *“Those Emblems of Hell”? European Sailors and the Maritime Labour Market 1570-1870 (Research in Maritime History, No. 13)*, eds Paul C. van Royen, Jaap R. Bruijn and Jan Lucassen (St. John’s, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 1997), 102; N.A.M. Rodger, “La mobilisation navale au XVIIIe siècle,” in *État, Marine et Société: Hommage à Jean Meyer*, eds Martine Acerra, Jean-Pierre Pousson, Michel Vergé-Franceschi and André Zysberg (Paris: Presse de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1995), 369; T. J. A. Le Goff, “The Labour Market for Sailors in France,” in van Royen et al, 300; Meyer, “Forces navales,” 78; Jaap R. Bruijn and Els S. van Eyck van Heslinga, “Seamen’s Employment in the Netherlands (c. 1600 to c. 1800),” *Mariner’s Mirror* 70, no. 1 (1984), 10; Gustav Sætra, “The International Labour Market for Seamen, 1600-1900: Norway and Norwegian Participation,” in van Royen et al, 183; Hans Chr. Johansen, “Danish Sailors, 1570-1870,” in van Royen et al, 242; Henning F. Kiær, “Flådens Mandskap, Nyboder,” in *Flåden Gennem 450 År. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, ed. R. Steen Steensen (Copenhagen: Martins Forlag, 1970), 248.

fleet attracted them during wartime – this was largely a question of how best to capture and coerce men into service. European navies developed three basic solutions: conscription, impressment, and crimping.

France, Spain, and Denmark-Norway relied predominantly on systems of conscription. Every maritime worker in these countries had to register his name with local state officials, and in return for a number of benefits was ordered to be ready for service whenever called up. Frequency of actual service differed from country to country. In France registered men served every few years for twelve months, while in Denmark-Norway conscripts were only mobilized in times of acute crisis to supplement the small permanent force that was stationed in Copenhagen.<sup>7</sup>

Britain several times attempted the establishment of such a register, but its mariners refused cooperation, and so the navy continued to rely on the more haphazard, yet astonishingly efficient system of impressment: whenever war threatened, the admiralty issued warrants, and his Majesty's press gangs came sweeping through port towns and roadsteads, forcefully abducting as many men as they could get their hands on, and then distributing them to whatever ship stood in need of manpower.<sup>8</sup>

In the United Provinces, the navy outsourced recruitment. Crimps, commonly known as *zielverkoopers* (sellers-of-souls), preyed on the destitute and desperate, offered them an advance

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<sup>7</sup> Alain Cabantous, *La Vergue et les Fers: Mutins et déserteurs dans la marine de l'ancienne France (XVIIe-XVIIIe s.)* (Paris: Tallandier, 1984), 82-4; Carla Rahn Phillips, "The Labour Market for Sailors in Spain, 1570-1870," in van Royen et al, 343; Axel Nørilit, "Tvangsudskrivning og Presning af Mandskap til Flaaden og Defensionen (1800-07)," *Historiske Meddelelser om København* 3, no. 5 (1942-3), 353-82; Kiær, "Flådens Mandskab," 246-52; Lars Otto Berg, "The Swedish Navy, 1780-1820," in *Between Imperial Eagles: Sweden's Armed Forces during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1780-1820*, ed. Fred Sandstedt (Stockholm: Armémuseet, 2000), 101-4.

<sup>8</sup> J. S. Bromley, ed., *The Manning of the Royal Navy: Selected Public Pamphlets, 1693-1873* (Greenwich: Navy Records Society, 1976), xiii-xlvi; J. R. Hutchinson, *The Press Gang Afloat and Ashore* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1914).

on room and board, and then forced them into the first available warship. The navy then paid the man's wages to the crimp until all his accumulated debts had been cleared. If this system failed to bring in enough manpower, the government sometimes resorted to embargoing all outgoing shipping, a crude but devastatingly effective mechanism for quickly swelling the pool of unemployed and easily recruited workers in the port towns.<sup>9</sup>

The near-permanent cycle of warfare that commenced in the 1750s put considerable pressure on these manning systems. War not only increased the demand for seamen, it also killed them by the tens of thousands. Peacetime seafaring itself already had exceptionally high mortality rates. Alain Cabantous has found that between 1737 and 1790, twenty-five percent of all Dunkirk seamen died while in their twenties, a proportion broadly equivalent to that of Salem, Massachusetts in the late eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Certain trades, of course, were far more dangerous than others. Workers in local trading and fishing industries only had marginally higher death rates than their shorebound colleagues, but slave ship sailors customarily lost 20 to 25 percent of their fellow crewmen on a single voyage.<sup>11</sup> But navies were the biggest killers. Between 1774 and 1780, the British navy lost .7 percent of all its seamen in combat, and 10.5 percent to disease – nearly 20,000 men.<sup>12</sup> The numbers grew worse: during the French

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<sup>9</sup> J.R. Bruijn, "Seamen in Dutch Ports, c. 1700-1914," *Mariner's Mirror* 65, no. 4 (1979), 331-2; C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 74; Karel Davids, "Maritime Labour in the Netherlands, 1570-1870," in van Royen et al, 64.

<sup>10</sup> Alain Cabantous, "Les gens de mer et la mort: l'exemple de l'amirauté de Dunkerque au XVIIIe siècle," in Adam, 109; Daniel Vickers (with Vince Walsh), *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 108.

<sup>11</sup> Emma Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and their Captive Cargoes, 1730-1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 183-4; Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London: John Murray, 2007), 244.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Kemp, *The British Sailor: A Social History of the Lower Deck* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1970), 139.

Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars almost 90,000 Royal Navy seamen died, up to 24,000 alone in the Caribbean theater between 1793 and 1801.<sup>13</sup> In France, the administrative and financial collapse of the old navy took an immense human toll: over 8,000 men died when typhus tore through Brest in 1793-4, and this was not the only time or place an epidemic raged out of control.<sup>14</sup> Several thousand more died in the notoriously lethal British prison hulks.<sup>15</sup>

Most governments preferred their own country's mariners to man the navy, but by the late eighteenth century that no longer was a viable option. Some provincial ports were ravaged so thoroughly by naval recruiters that they had practically come to a standstill. Seaman William Richardson remembered the huge cost his home town of Shields was made to bear: "My brother and I went on shore, but found Shields not that merry place we had hitherto known it; every one looked gloomy and sad on account of nearly all the young men being pressed and taken away; [...]."<sup>16</sup> This was in 1795, a mere two years into a war that was to last for twenty more.

One way out of this crisis, adopted especially by the British and Dutch navies, was to recruit foreign-born workers in ever larger numbers. On the *Hermione*, in most respects an ordinary British frigate, only fifty percent of the crew came from England, twenty percent from within the Empire, another twenty percent from Ireland, and ten percent from eleven different

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<sup>13</sup> Dudley Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1981), 131; Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar, and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 334.

<sup>14</sup> Etienne Taillemite, *Histoire ignorée de la Marine française* (Paris: Perrin, 2003), 284.

<sup>15</sup> T.J.A. Le Goff, "L'impact des prises effectuées par les Anglais sur la capacité en hommes de la marine française au XVIIIe siècle," in *Les Marines de Guerre Européennes XVII-XVIIIe Siècles*, eds Martine Acerra, José Merino, and Jean Meyer (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1985), 103; Carl Roos, *Prisonen: Danske og Norske Krigsfanger i England, 1807-1814* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1953), 17-19.

<sup>16</sup> Spencer Childers, ed., *A Mariner of England: An Account of the Career of William Richardson from Cabin Boy in the Merchant Service to Warrant Officer in the Royal Navy, as told by himself* (London: John Murray, 1908), 121.



countries around the Atlantic rim.<sup>17</sup> Such a distribution appears to have become common in the late eighteenth-century British navy, but it was nothing compared to the role foreign-born workers played in the Dutch service.<sup>18</sup> In 1799, for example, Captain van Grootenray of the *Kortenaar* complained that he was unable to communicate with his crew, for almost all of them were fresh recruits from eastern Europe. Worse still, their efforts at Dutch language acquisition had apparently ceased with the word *sold* (wages), but that, van Grootenray reported, they repeated over and over again.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the *Kortenaar* was an extreme case, but indications are that proportions of foreign-born crewmen on Dutch warships of up to 70 percent were not unusual at the time.<sup>20</sup>

It was nothing new for the Dutch to recruit migratory labor from the North and Baltic Sea regions to work in their deep-sea industries, and the navy utilized these centuries-old networks to the fullest.<sup>21</sup> This went so far that, even while fighting a war against Britain, there were recruiters doing the rounds in London's sailortown, busily sending men to Amsterdam by way of the Dutch

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<sup>17</sup> *Hermione* muster book, April to July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/12011; *Adventure* muster book, January to February 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/12931; *Success* muster book, December 1796 to September 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/14745.

<sup>18</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, "Shipboard Life in the Old Navy: The Decline of the Old Order?" in *The North Sea: Twelve Essays on the Social History of Maritime Labour*, eds Lewis R. Fischer, Harald Hamre, Poul Holm, and Jaap R. Bruijn (Stavanger: Stavanger Maritime Museum / The Association of North Sea Societies, 1992), 29-30.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Captain van Grootenray to Admiral de Winter, 14 July 1799, NA (NL), Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 236.

<sup>20</sup> Davids, "Maritime Labour," 50.

<sup>21</sup> Jan Lucassen, "The International Maritime Labour Market (Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries)," in van Royen et al, 11-23. It is interesting to note that when the commander of the Swedish archipelagean fleet Mikäl Amkarsvärd denounced the practices of a local recruiter he used the German translation of the Dutch word for crimp: *Seelenverkäufer*. Quoted in Lybeck, *Svenska Flottans Historia*, 420.

embassy in Hamburg.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the Dutch East India Company had a longstanding tradition of recruiting manpower from deep within the rural heartlands of the Holy Roman Empire, and the eighteenth-century navy drew heavily on these sources as well.<sup>23</sup> Finally, there seems to have been an increase in the number of south, south-east Asian and African-descended seamen on board Dutch warships.<sup>24</sup>

In the British navy, too, there was a rise in the number of “Black Jacks” and lascars, but the bulk of foreign-born labor power here came from the north Atlantic region. Americans had always been important, and they continued to be pressed with impunity even after independence.<sup>25</sup> Their numbers were dwarfed, however, by the tens of thousands harvested in Ireland: if, as Rodger plausibly suggests, a proportion of 25 to 30 percent had become common on most British warships in the late 1790s, then somewhere around 30,000 Irishmen were serving in the Royal Navy at any one time.<sup>26</sup>

France largely avoided this trend towards increasing the number of foreign-born men in the navy and in 1795 even fixed an upper limit of twenty percent foreigners on any one ship.<sup>27</sup> In order to expand the pool of recruits, the French navy chose to make new social groups targets for

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<sup>22</sup> Extract from a letter from Gravesend, forwarded to Evan Nepean, 26 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4173; Interrogation of Peter Strouck, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 239.

<sup>23</sup> Roelof van Gelder, *Het Oost-Indisch Avontuur: Duitsers in Dienst van de VOC (1600-1800)* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1997), 53-70; Davids, “Maritime Labour,” 51.

<sup>24</sup> Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy*, 202.

<sup>25</sup> George Selement, “Impressment and the American Merchant Marine, 1782-1812,” *Mariner’s Mirror* 59, no. 4 (1973), 409-18.

<sup>26</sup> Rodger, “Shipboard Life,” 30.

<sup>27</sup> “Arrêté du comité de salut public, concernant l’enrôlement des marins étrangers. Du 25 Prairial an III [13 June 1795],” *Recueil des lois relatives à la marine et aux colonies, Vol. V* (Paris: L’imprimerie de la république, Year VI [1797-8]), 337-40.

coerced recruitment instead.<sup>28</sup> The officially defined area where maritime workers may be found – i.e. men subject to conscription – was extended far up the riverine systems, and the number of potential recruits was swelled still further by including economic sectors that only had very indirect connections to the sea.<sup>29</sup> In Britain, the Quota Acts had a similar effect. Each county, whether maritime or not, was required to send a certain number of men for service in the fleet. Approximately 30,000 came, many of them landsmen who had never set foot on a ship before.<sup>30</sup>

This increased reliance on landsmen was part of a long-term trend in the eighteenth-century maritime industries. By the 1780s, more than half of all registered seamen in France were first generation mariners, and in the deep-sea trades their proportion was higher still.<sup>31</sup> This was a consequence of technical changes, foremost to the arrangement of the rigging on ocean-going vessels, which had devalued the skills and experience of seamen, and instead put an increased premium on their muscle power. The number of able seamen on board transatlantic merchantmen consequently declined by as much as 33 to 50 percent in the middle years of the century, and in their place came cheap, unskilled workers without much or any experience of the sea.<sup>32</sup> Work processes were increasingly standardized throughout the industry, and that

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<sup>28</sup> The French also increased their effective naval strength by forcing the so-called sister republics into military alliances. The Batavian navy, for instance, was required to make a number warships permanently available for combined actions with the French. Thea Roodhuyzen, *In Woelig Vaarwater: Marineofficieren in de Jaren 1779-1802* (Amsterdam: De Bataafse Leeuw, 1998), 136.

<sup>29</sup> “Décret sur les classes des gens de mer, 31 Décembre 1790,” *Recueil des lois relatives à la marine et aux colonies, Vol. I* (Paris: L’imprimerie de la république, Year V [1796-7]), 219-27.

<sup>30</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 443-4; Clive Emsley, *North Riding Naval Recruits: The Quota Acts and the Quota Men, 1795-1797* (Northallerton: North Yorkshire County Record Office, 1978), 16-21.

<sup>31</sup> T.J.A. Le Goff, “Les origines sociales des gens de mer français au XVIIIe siècle,” in *La France d’Ancien Régime: Études réunies en l’honneur de Pierre Goubert* (Toulouse: Privat, 1984), 367-80.

<sup>32</sup> T.J.A. Le Goff, “Offre et productivité de la main d’œuvre dans les armements français au 18ème siècle,” in Adam, 104-5; Rodger, “Shipboard Life,” 30.

depreciated the value of the seamen's craft skills still further.<sup>33</sup> Another set of changes, among them the removal of armaments from merchantmen following the defeat of Atlantic piracy, caused average crew sizes in relation to tonnage to shrink: the organic composition of capital in the deep-sea industries was rising.<sup>34</sup>

On warships, the situation was slightly different. While average crew sizes shrunk on merchantmen, navies crammed more and more guns into their ships, and therefore required evermore men to fight its battles. In the late seventeenth-century, a ship of the line had a crew of approximately 500 men; hundred years later crews of 750 were common, and up to 900 far from unheard of.<sup>35</sup> Since few of these men were needed to sail the ship, and the skills necessary for firing the guns were easily learned, navies had no difficulty absorbing and training large numbers of landsmen. There was, of course, an upper limit. Commander Evertsen found nearly eighty German and Polish landsmen amongst his crew of 120 when he assumed his position on the *Scipio* in the summer of 1797. To put to sea, Evertsen estimated, he needed around sixteen more seamen, plus a handful of petty officers.<sup>36</sup> That still would have left him with nearly sixty percent landsmen, a figure far higher than was considered desirable in the British navy. There, it seems, the proportion of landsmen and boys was kept below twenty-five percent. At the same time, it was only considered necessary to have another twenty-five percent experienced and able

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<sup>33</sup> Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 83.

<sup>34</sup> Richard W. Unger, "Regulation and Organization of Seamen in the Netherlands and Germany before the Industrial Revolution," in Adam, 67-8; Le Goff, "Offre," 104-5.

<sup>35</sup> Meyer, "Forces navales," 80.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from C. G. Evertsen to the committee for naval affairs, 30 July 1797, NA (NL), Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 236.

seamen on board, while the remaining fifty percent could safely be made up of low-skilled common ratings, often recent landsmen themselves.<sup>37</sup>

The largest group of new recruits that washed onto warships in the 1790s were the sons of the European peasantry.<sup>38</sup> Massive population growth, coupled with the enclosure of common land, the monetization of rural social relations, and the commercialization of agricultural production, brought forth a vast landless surplus population, highly mobile, and desperate for work and sustenance.<sup>39</sup> Europe's roads were clogged with men and women seeking a living, and while most of these roads led into the rapidly expanding slums of the cities, there were others that led to the coast. There is a striking correlation, for instance, between the astonishing numbers of landless peasants in Bohemia in the last quarter of the eighteenth century – estimated at 40 to 60 percent of the total population – and the substantial presence of Bohemians in the Dutch navy at the same time.<sup>40</sup> This is, of course, merely suggestive, but similar developments can be observed in Ireland where peasants flooded into the British navy and rural France where they filled the lower decks of their own country's fleet.<sup>41</sup>

Many new seafarers also came from Europe's urban centers where capitalist deregulation, together with the imposition of the wage-form, smashed the moral economy of the guild system

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<sup>37</sup> J. S. Bromley, "The British Navy and its Seamen: Notes for an unwritten history," in Adam, 40; Larry Neal, "The Cost of Impressment during the Seven Years War," *Mariner's Mirror* 64, no. 1 (1978), 25.

<sup>38</sup> Davids, "Maritime Labour," 62-5; Le Goff, "The Labour Market," 300-1.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Rheinheimer, *Arme, Bettler und Vaganten: Überleben in der Not, 1450-1850* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2000), 14-54.

<sup>40</sup> Arnošt Klíma, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Bohemia," *Past and Present* 85 (1979), 54; for the number of Bohemians in the Dutch navy, see various muster books in NA (NL), Departement van Marine: Monsterrollen, 1795-1810, 2.01.30.

<sup>41</sup> R. B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 3-49; Olwen H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 11-127.

and released artisans, journeymen, laborers, and low-level intellectual workers into market freedom by the hundreds of thousands.<sup>42</sup> Wartime recession drove them into unemployment and to the brink of starvation. They were easy targets for naval recruiters.

The largest group on board European warships, however, remained the men who were born and bred to the sea.<sup>43</sup> But these came from two relatively distinct sectors. One was made up of the men of the deep-sea trades who sailed out across the world's oceans to carry back capital and commodities to Europe's major port cities. These were the proletarianized mariners whose dreary lives were essentialized into the well-known stereotype of Jack Tar: deracinated, spendthrift, and impulsive. Their working conditions had been steadily deteriorating since the late middle ages and by the late eighteenth century co-ownership of the cargo had been replaced with straightforward wage payments and limited collective decision-making with the almost boundless powers of the captain.<sup>44</sup> In the other sector, however, that of local fishing and short-distance merchant shipping, the patriarchal relations of old regime rural Europe still prevailed. Crews were small, hierarchies flat, cargo ownership shared, and the powers of the captain limited both by custom and the force of communal disapproval in the home port, usually a small town or village where most of the crewmen lived with their families.<sup>45</sup> Movement between these two sectors was limited, but it appears that an increasing number of men shifted from the shallow to the deep-sea trades in the later eighteenth century. Long years of naval service, with its socially

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 402-441.

<sup>43</sup> Le Goff, "Les origines sociales," 368.

<sup>44</sup> Unger, "Regulation," 66-8.

<sup>45</sup> Ulrich Welke, *Der Kapitän: Die Erfindung einer Herrschaftsform* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1997), 14-24.

corrosive and individualizing effects, often made this move one of permanent proletarianization. Many old seafarers struggled to reintegrate into landed society when the wars drew to a close.<sup>46</sup>

## 2.2 LIFE AND DEATH IN THE WOODEN WORLD

Whatever their life may have been before – experienced mariner, landless peasant, or unemployed artisan – new naval recruits found themselves in a profoundly alien environment. Only very rarely in the eighteenth century did hundreds of men work together in one place, let alone at a single machine as they did on board of a warship. Few people had experience with industrial labor discipline, and most barely accepted that the clock might have anything to do with when they ought to be working.<sup>47</sup> But coming into a warship, new recruits suddenly found themselves in a miniature mass society, physically isolated for long periods of time, with extraordinary levels of internal stratification, complex organizational structures, twenty-four hour work cycles, constant, close surveillance, and a terroristic justice system. This regime shock proletarianized tens of thousands.

While a vast number of finely graded social distinctions separated an admiral from the lowliest seaman, shipboard society basically consisted of only four groups. On top were the commissioned officers, the inhabitants of the quarterdeck, who under the leadership of the ship's commander enjoyed virtually unlimited powers on board. They were of mixed competence and usually drawn from the prosperous middle classes or the aristocracy, although in post-

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, C.S. Forester, ed., *The Adventures of John Wetherell* (London: Michael Joseph, 1954).

<sup>47</sup> E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," in *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: New Press, 1993), 352-403.

revolutionary France and the Netherlands where most of the old officer corps was judged politically unreliable they were sometimes drafted from the ranks.<sup>48</sup> Below the commissioned officer corps came the warrant and petty officers, largely specialist seamen and trained craftsmen, such as caulkers, coopers, carpenters, gunners, and sailmakers. These were career navy men who had slowly built up their position through years of service. Socially, most of them belonged to the lower deck, but thanks to their experience, skill, and strategic position within shipboard society, they generally were treated with respect by the commissioned officer corps. The same could not be said about the largest group on board, the common seamen. These were at best seen as dumb instruments of the officers' will, at worst as unruly, drunken saboteurs. They were usually divided into two or three ranks, depending on their experience and training, and though some advanced up into the petty officer corps, shipboard social mobility was very limited once a man had become a *loup de mer* (sea wolf), or as he was less poetically known in the British navy, an able seaman. The fourth and final group on board were the marines, the onboard police force that protected the quarterdeck. These were generally of proletarian and often foreign origin, unskilled, and widely disrespected by all others on board. Their basic task was to stand guard and look menacing.<sup>49</sup>

Most ships at sea operated a two-watch system: the crew, excepting the shipboard artisan classes, were divided into two identical groups that came on and off duty every four hours. Within both watches, the men were assigned to a part of the ship, reflecting their predominant

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<sup>48</sup> William S. Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 109; Roodhuyzen, *In Woelig Vaarwater*, 123.

<sup>49</sup> Seamen sometimes referred to empty bottles as marine officers, indicating just how useful they thought them. Pierce Egan, *Grose's Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, Revised and Corrected, With the Addition of Numerous Slang Phrases, Collected from Tried Authorities* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1823), no pagination.



area of labor. The highest skilled men were sent up into the tops, where they spent long hours in wind and weather bending, loosing, and furling sails. When a man grew too old for the tops, he usually migrated to the forecastle, where duties included handling the front-most set of sails and the anchor. Less experienced seamen and landsmen were ordered either into the waist or the afterguard, where they pulled the heavy ropes and braces that lifted and lowered the major yards and sails of the ship, looked after the livestock, and pumped bilge water. In addition to a watch and a part of the ship, each man also had a number of stations which clearly defined his exact duty for a large number of standard maneuvers, such as mooring and unmooring, weighing, tacking and wearing, lowering and squaring yards, and so forth. In battle, nearly the entire crew was assigned to the gundeck, each man again fulfilling a clearly defined role at a specific gun.<sup>50</sup>

From about mid-century onwards, some navies introduced divisions and squads to facilitate social control on their larger vessels. Under this system, the crew was broken up into small groups of men and put under the immediate supervision of an officer who was held responsible for their good behavior, cleanliness, and general seaman-like development.<sup>51</sup> The Swedish navy went one step further towards individualized surveillance, issuing each man with a *förhållningsbok* (behavior book), in which was recorded his experience, training, rating, and disciplinary history. He was expected to carry it with him throughout his naval career and always present it to a new commander upon first mustering.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> John Harland, *Seamanship in the Age of Sail* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 91-4; Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy: The Ships, Men and Organization, 1793-1815* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989), 194-9.

<sup>51</sup> G.J. Marcus, *Heart of Oak: A Survey of British Sea Power in the Georgian Era* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 117.

<sup>52</sup> Lybeck, *Svenska Flottans Historia*, 434.

Yet despite these innovations, the primary mechanism for social control remained the unceasing rounds of never-ending labor on board.<sup>53</sup> The day's work on a typical battleship began at four in the morning, when one of the two watches was ordered to commence holy-stoning the deck, one of the most odious activities on board:

Here the men suffer from being obliged to kneel down on the wetted deck, and a gravelly sort of sand strewed over it. To perform this work, they kneel with their bare knees, rubbing the deck with a stone and the sand, the grit of which is often very injurious.<sup>54</sup>

This continued for three and a half hours until breakfast, after which the other watch was set to holy-stoning for four hours. The crew detested this incessant cleaning of the decks, especially in the winter months – one new recruit was even driven to thoughts of desertion after only a single day of it – but captains nevertheless continued to order it, because there quite simply was little else for the crew to do.<sup>55</sup> A warship had up to ten times as many men onboard as most merchantmen of similar size, and that meant that in nearly all situations except for battle they were excessively overcrewed. This was a problem:

For a sailor to have a moment's leisure is, by many officers, dreaded more than a pestilence. As the real duties of the ship can never occupy the time of half the men

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<sup>53</sup> The following examples are drawn mostly from the British navy, by far the most thoroughly studied. Indications are that other navies operated similar regimes, but much work on the social history of everyday life on board remains to be done.

<sup>54</sup> William Robinson, *Jack Nastyface: Memoirs of an English Seaman* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1973), 32.

<sup>55</sup> A British Seaman, *Life On Board a Man-of-War* (Glasgow, 1829), 28-9.

employed, the captain has recourse to his invention to find seamen work; for so conscious are the officers that the seamen cannot reflect without being sensible that they have been unmeritedly punished, that they have received almost unlimited injury, that they are fearful reflection should make them compare their situation with the rest of their countrymen, with what they themselves once were, and that this reflection should rouse them to vengeance for oppression.<sup>56</sup>

As the majority of the men were impressed, conscripted, or crimped, there was plenty of disgruntlement on the lower deck, and the threat of open disaffection never far. And so they were kept busy with make-work like holy-stoning or endless drills at small arms or the great guns, both of which the men found only marginally less objectionable.<sup>57</sup>

Dinner was served between noon and one, after which one of the watches went back on duty, usually attending to various necessary maintenance work, or more drilling, while the other watch was given leisure-time until supper at four. Two half-watches of two hours length followed, making sure that the order of on-duty off-duty was reversed for the following twenty-four hour period. Finally, between eight and nine, the hammocks were ordered down and the men of one watch sent to sleep. The watches changed at midnight and again at four in the morning, when the first watch of the day began scrubbing the decks again.<sup>58</sup>

Except for a few hours of eating, drinking, and yarning in the late afternoon, seamen's daily lives were thus mostly consumed by disagreeable tasks, or by mind-numbing boredom.

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<sup>56</sup> Lieut. Thomas Hodgskin, RN, *An Essay on Naval Discipline* (London, 1813), 44.

<sup>57</sup> Herman Melville, *White-Jacket, or The World in a Man-of-War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 66-7.

<sup>58</sup> Robinson, *Nastyface*, 31-8; Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 200-3.

When writing his autobiography, Samuel Leech vividly remembered the many lonely hours he had spent on duty as a topman:

Often have I stood two hours, and, sometimes, when my shipmates have forgotten to relieve me, four long, tedious hours, on the royal yard, or the top-gallant yard, without a man to converse with. Here, overcome with fatigue and want of sleep, I have fallen into a dreamy, dozy state, from which I was roused by a lee lurch of the ship.

The only thing worse than this boredom, he concluded, was “to be compelled to stand on these crazy elevations, when half dead with sea-sickness.”<sup>59</sup>

Even these discomforts, however, were nothing when compared to “the King of Terrors,” those short bursts of intense violence that ruptured the tedium of everyday life and left men traumatized, wounded, and dead.<sup>60</sup> When battle commenced, the ships’ gundecks became an inferno: broadsides were unleashed with eardrum-bursting roars, the smoke and fire from dozens of great guns saturating the air. When cannonballs struck the hull of a ship, wooden splinters the size of men’s thighs tore loose on the inside, severing arms and legs, smashing skulls, and cutting torsos in two as they slashed and hurtled their way across the tightly packed deck. If the battle lasted for several hours, the gundeck took on the look of a “slaughterhouse”: scores of men

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<sup>59</sup> Leech also noted that “some suppose that sailors are never sea-sick after the first time they go to sea. This is a mistake.” Samuel Leech, *A Voice From the Main Deck: Being a Record of the Thirty Years Adventures of Samuel Leech* (London: Chatham, 1999), 141-2.

<sup>60</sup> Leech, *Voice*, 77.

dead and dying, heaps of unrecognizable human flesh piled high, blood streaming out the scuppers and into the sea.<sup>61</sup> Down in the hold, the ship's doctor tried to salvage what he could:

The stifled groans, the figures of the surgeon and his mates, their bare arms and faces smeared with blood, the dead and dying all round, some in the last agonies of death, and others screaming under the amputating knife, formed a horrid scene of misery, and made a hideous contrast to the “pomp, pride, and circumstance of glorious war.”<sup>62</sup>

Brian Lavery has estimated that serious mental illness was seven times more common on warships than in society at large, and though it may very well be true that drunken seamen more often knocked their heads against wooden beams than did the rest of the population, it seems likely that post-traumatic stress disorder also played a role in the making of “naval lunatics.”<sup>63</sup>

The maintenance of discipline on board warships was never an easy matter. Naval theorists found comfort in thinking of shipboard society with its hundreds of tightly organized workers as “a great machine,” operated but by a single human agent, the captain.<sup>64</sup> Seamen, in this vision, were nothing more than “a wheel, a band, or a crank, all moving with wonderful regularity and precision.”<sup>65</sup> Reality, of course, was rather different, and instead of the

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<sup>61</sup> John Nicol, *The Life and Adventures of John Nicol, Mariner* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 174; Moreau de Jonnès, *Adventures in the Revolution and under the Consulate* (London: Peter Davies, 1929), 66.

<sup>62</sup> A British Seaman, *Life*, 142.

<sup>63</sup> Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 215; “Report on treatment of naval lunatics at Hoxton and Bedlam 1812-1813,” TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 105/28.

<sup>64</sup> A Captain in the Royal Navy, *Observations and Instructions for the Use of the Commissioned, the Junior, and other Officers of the Royal Navy* (London, 1804), 36.

<sup>65</sup> Leech, *Voice*, 22.

interlocking wheels of discipline imagined by the theorists, “one universal system of terror” prevailed on most ships.<sup>66</sup> The men were either unwilling or unable to function like cogs in a machine, they made mistakes, they were slow, they grumbled and complained. Orders, therefore, were frequently accompanied by the “flesh carpenters” – the boatswain and his mates – liberally beating the crew with their rattan canes and ropes’ ends to speed up execution.<sup>67</sup>

If seamen actually committed a breach of the ship’s many rules, the most common punishment in most navies was flogging with the cat-o’-nine-tails, a whip with nine separate two-foot-long cords, each reinforced with several knots. The legal maximum amount of lashes the captain could order without a court martial varied from navy to navy (in the British navy it was 12, and in the Danish navy 27), but with a little creativity violations could be broken down into many constituent parts, and each punished with that number of lashes.<sup>68</sup> The frequency of these floggings varied from ship to ship, but the average appears to have been approximately once every ten to fifteen days.

The articles of war required that serious violations, ranging from derelictions of duty via “buggery” to mutiny, be tried by courts martial, and these had, depending on the navy, a terrifying arsenal of punishments available to them: solitary confinement, hard labor, pillorying, ducking, branding, pulling out of tongues, severing of hands, keel-hauling, running the gauntlet, flogging round the fleet, hanging, gibbeting, drowning, decapitation, decimation, arquebusing,

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<sup>66</sup> Hodgskin, *Essay*, ix.

<sup>67</sup> A British Seaman, *Life*, 35.

<sup>68</sup> Erik K. Borring, “Livet Ombord: Danske Orlogstogter til Vestindien, 1755-1807” (Ph.D., University of Copenhagen, 1998), 39-43; Pope, *Life*, 62.

and breaking on the wheel.<sup>69</sup> There were several more. It is not clear, however, how frequently the more outrageous of these punishments were actually ordered, but at least in the British navy, hangings and floggings round the fleet with up to 800 lashes were quite common, as was ducking and hard labor in the Dutch navy.<sup>70</sup>

Generally, punishments were carefully orchestrated public events, with mandatory attendance to maximize the spectacular impact of terror. When a man was flogged through the fleet, for instance, he was taken in a boat from ship to ship, and given a certain number of lashes next to each. After a few dozen with the cat-o'-nine-tails, "the lacerated back looks inhuman; it resembles roasted meat burnt nearly black before a scorching fire."<sup>71</sup> Another eye witness described it as resembling "so much putrified liver."<sup>72</sup> Still, the lashes kept falling, and often the victim was beaten within an inch of his life. Survivors were left severely traumatized:

Like the scar, that time may heal, but not remove, the flogged man forgets not that he has been degraded; the whip, when it scarred the flesh, went farther: it wounded the spirit; it struck the *man*; it begat a sense of degradation he must carry with him to the grave. We had many such on board our frigate; their laugh sounded empty, and sometimes their look

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<sup>69</sup> William Falconer, *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine*. Fifth edition, corrected. (London, 1784), no pagination; Lybeck, *Svenska Flottans Historia*, 436; G. Bent Pürschel, "Træk af Flådens Retsvæsen," in Steensen, 308-17; "Décret concernant le code pénal maritime (16, 19 et 21 Août 1790)," in *Recueil, Vol. I*, 122-40; Robinson, *Nastyface*, 138-151.

<sup>70</sup> For the British navy, see "Digest of the Admiralty Records of Trials by Court-Martial, From the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1755 to 1<sup>st</sup> January 1806," TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 12/24; for the Dutch navy, see various trial records in NA (NL), Hoge Krijgsraad en Zeekrijgsraden, 1607-1794, 1.01.45; and NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11.

<sup>71</sup> Leech, *Voice*, 28.

<sup>72</sup> Robinson, *Nastyface*, 141.

became suddenly vacant in the midst of hilarity. IT WAS THE WHIP ENTERING THE SOUL ANEW.<sup>73</sup>

If the sentence called for several hundred lashes, the victim often died halfway through. But the full sentence could be carried out regardless, and the man's comrades were then forced to watch as his dead body continued to be mutilated:

Our captain ordered the doctor to feel his pulse, and found that the man was dead. Our boatswain's mate was then told to give him fifty lashes; "but," says the Captain, "lay them lightly on his back." He might as well have said put them lightly on his *bones*, for I could not see any flesh on him, from his neck to his waist. After this he was carried to two other ships, and received fifty lashes at each, and then carried to low water mark, and there buried in the mud.<sup>74</sup>

These spectacles were not meant to instill respect for the service; they were calculated acts of terror designed to cow the lower orders into obedience.

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<sup>73</sup> Leech, *Voice*, 60.

<sup>74</sup> Joshua Davis, *A Narrative of Joshua Davis, an American Citizen, who was Pressed and Served On Board Six Ships of the British Navy* (Boston, 1811), 68.



## 2.3 LOWER DECK RESISTANCE

Combat was considered a great opportunity for “a poor fellow [...] of squaring yards with some of his tyrants.”<sup>75</sup> In the chaos of an engagement, it was easy to swing around with the musket, take aim, and “sweep the quarterdeck of the quality.”<sup>76</sup> It is impossible to know how many such “fraggings” actually occurred, but mention thereof is frequent enough to conclude that it was not completely unknown.<sup>77</sup> More common, however, was less lethal violence against individual officers. The ship environment itself offered many possibilities – a tackle dropped from aloft or an iron shot rolled across the deck at night smashed plenty of bones – but most often men out for this type of vengeance appear to have waited for an opportunity to jump their victim on land, preferably as he left a tavern late at night, too befuddled to identify his attackers or make much resistance.<sup>78</sup> Such individual or small group violence against officers nevertheless was rare. The risks involved were simply too great.

For the same reason, naval seamen hardly ever mutinied in response to unsatisfactory conditions, and when they did it tended to take the form of a relatively short-lived and spontaneous commotion or riot.<sup>79</sup> Anything else, whether a strike or a seizure of power onboard,

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<sup>75</sup> British Seaman, *Life*, 128.

<sup>76</sup> Court martial against men from the *Diomedé*, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5347; Sir Robert Steele, KNT. K.C.S., Deputy Lieutenant of Dorset, *The Marine Officer, or, Sketches of Service* (London: Henry Colburn, 1840), 142-3, 205-6.

<sup>77</sup> “Fragging,” i.e. killing officers by throwing fragmentation grenades into their fox-holes, was coined during the Vietnam War. By 1972, there had been at least 551 separate instances. See David Cortwright, *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), 43-47.

<sup>78</sup> Davis, *Narrative*, 71; John C. Dann, ed., *The Nagle Journal: A Diary of the Life of Jacob Nagle, Sailor, from the Year 1775 to 1841* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 76.

<sup>79</sup> In his study of mutinies across all of France’s maritime industries between 1706 and 1788, Alain Cabantous only found five that occurred on warships. Arthur Gilbert likewise only discovered eleven instances of

was too difficult and dangerous to organize. Unlike most civilian vessels, which usually had small crews and relatively flat hierarchies, warships contained hundreds of men organized in a complex division of labor. To get all of them united in one common cause, or at least to feel confident that a majority would join in an insurrection, was a daunting and nerve-racking prospect for any group of potential mutineers. Surveillance was intense, and even if one could evade the watchful eyes of the quarterdeck, it still only took a single snitch to betray a conspiracy to the officers corps. Would-be mutineers therefore had to tread with extreme caution, for even discussing shared grievances, never mind planning to do something about them, legally constituted a mutiny, which was punishable by public torture and death. Then there was the rising itself, which would have to be carried out with lightning speed and overwhelming force in order to neutralize the detachment of marines or soldiers onboard, whose primary function was to prevent precisely such disorderly behavior.<sup>80</sup> It is not a coincidence that the most famous mutiny of them all, on the *Bounty* in 1789, occurred on a ship without marines (their space had been allocated to the breadfruit tree saplings the ship was supposed to carry from the South Pacific to the slave plantation islands of the Caribbean).<sup>81</sup>

As Greg Dening has pointed out, the presence of marines was both a physical and symbolic barrier that separated quarterdeck from forecabin.<sup>82</sup> They were a constant reminder to

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“large-scale mutinous acts” in the Royal Navy in the forty years between 1756 and 1796. Cabantous, *La Vergue et les Fers*, 13; Arthur N. Gilbert, “The Nature of Mutiny in the British Navy in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Naval History: The Sixth Symposium of the US Naval Academy*, ed. by Daniel M. Masterson (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1987), 113.

<sup>80</sup> For a discussion of the disincentives to mutiny in the navy, see Cabantous, *La Vergue et les Fers*, 22-25.

<sup>81</sup> William Bligh and Edward Christian, *The Bounty Mutiny* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 11-12.

<sup>82</sup> Greg Dening, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 83.

the crew that onboard a warship they lived under military discipline, devoid of rights and completely at the mercy of their officers. This contrasted strongly to the egalitarian traditions that had evolved over the centuries to regulate the relations between men working together at sea. In order to limit individual risk, medieval deep-sea shipping ventures had often been cooperative undertakings with shared ownership and therefore shared decision-making when matters of great import were at stake, major course changes or questions that concerned the safety of the ship, for instance. The captain was *primus inter pares*, the first among equals, no more, no less. Over time these customary regulations were fixed in variety of law codes, most famously in the twelfth-century Rolls of Oléron. In some cases, the codification of the egalitarian, even democratic nature of deep-sea shipping was taken to great lengths. German Sea Regulations of 1614, for instance, determined that a captain could only move against mutineers if two common seamen agreed with him. If he had no such support, he was not considered to have a mutiny at his hands, but simply to have been out-voted by the crew.<sup>83</sup>

Such regulations did not survive the professionalization of naval warfare in the second half of the seventeenth century. Under the strictly hierarchical and viciously brutal Articles of War that came to govern most navies, seamen were stripped of all customary rights and made completely dependent on their captain's will. The strictly hierarchical order and tight regimentation of life that emerged onboard warships was in fact so successful in crushing the spirit lower deck self-activity that the navy developed into a kind of a reform school for disobedient men from the merchant service, where the egalitarian traditions of the sea lived on, at least in the customary expectations of its workforce. It became a common practice for

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<sup>83</sup> Edda Frankot, "Medieval Maritime Law from Oléron to Wisby: Jurisdictions in the Law of the Sea," in *Communities in European History: Representations, Jurisdictions, Conflicts*, ed. by Juan Pan-Montojo and Frederik Pedersen (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2007), 152; Unger, "Regulation," 66-73; Welke, *Der Kapitän*, 29.

merchant captains to ask their naval counterparts to press particularly unruly individuals, and sometimes they received a properly socialized and well-behaved man in exchange.<sup>84</sup>

This is not to say that warships were ruled by brute force alone. Commanders had an interest in a happy crew and often encouraged their men to come forward with any concerns and complaints they might have, and it was by no means unheard of that he should see them redressed if he thought them reasonable and justified. If complaints did not meet that standard, however, or if he simply had a bad day, he might instead consider his discontented crew to be in a state of mutiny and order those responsible punished to the fullest extent of the law, including public torture and death.<sup>85</sup>

Rather than taking such a risk, either by petitioning or outright mutiny, most men who found a particular situation grow intolerable preferred simply to run away instead. It was the mariner's traditional response. Since most of his long-standing social bonds were severed when recruiters forced him into a ship that sailed halfway around the world, leaping overboard and making a run for it when opportunity offered came easy. And judging from the numbers of men who ran, there was no shortage of such opportunities. According to Admiral Nelson's calculations, some 42,000 British seamen took "French leave" between 1793 and 1802, a figure that is all the more impressive when recalling that the overall strength of the service in 1800 was just under 120,000.<sup>86</sup> On some ships, the lower deck apparently had a revolving door: on the

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<sup>84</sup> G.V. Scammell, "Mutiny in British Ships, c. 1500-1750," in *Négoce, Ports et Océans XVIe-Xxe Siècles: Mélanges Offerts à Paul Butel*, ed. by Silvia Marzagalli and Hubert Bonin (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2000), 352; Rediker, *Deep Blue Sea*, 225-226.

<sup>85</sup> Scammell, "Mutiny," 348.

<sup>86</sup> Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seaman, 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970), 265.

*Hermione* frigate, with a regular complement of approximately 180 men, there were 129 desertions between 1793 and 1797.<sup>87</sup>

In the French and Dutch navies, the situation was even more extreme, in part because the British blockade kept their fleets bottled up in port for long periods of time, thus giving their seamen plenty of opportunities to desert. The Dutch navy had already been hemorrhaging seamen since in the early 1780s, but with the combined French invasion and revolution of 1795, desertion became a mass phenomenon. On many warships, the entire lower deck simply walked away, while on others only skeleton crews remained. On the *Staaten Generaal*, with a regular complement of 550, only 122 men were left on board; on the *Delft*, with 350 men, only ten; on the *Castor*, with 270 men, only 22; on the *Maasnymph*, with 75 men, only 29. And so the list continued.<sup>88</sup> Throughout 1796, the navy slowly rebuilt manpower levels, but by the following year desertions once again were rampant. Men kept running in vast numbers until Batavian naval power finally collapsed with the Texel surrender of 1799.<sup>89</sup>

French seamen were just as footloose, especially during the counter-revolutionary years of the late 1790s. Thousands deserted to the interior, rejoined their families, or linked up with brigand bands.<sup>90</sup> Mass desertions in Brest grew to such proportions that the commune periodically felt compelled to close the city's gates in order to prevent anyone from leaving

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<sup>87</sup> *Hermione* muster book, April to July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/12011.

<sup>88</sup> Various court martial cases for desertion, NA (NL), Hoge Krijgersraad en Zeekrijgsraden, 1607-1794, 1.01.45, inv. nr. 377; List of ships still in service, February 1795, report of the ships lying at Flushing, 8 March 1795, and general report on the ships belonging to the central division, 15 March 1795, NA (NL), Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 227.

<sup>89</sup> Roodhuyzen, *In Woelig Vaarwater*, 138-65.

<sup>90</sup> Court martial against André Monfroy et al, SHM-V, CC/3/1728, Personnel, Troupes et équipages, Conseils de Guerre, Lorient, 1799; Memorandum on insufficient punishments of naval deserters, SHM-V, CC/3/1471, Personnel, Troupes et équipages, Mémoires sur les jurys militaires etc.

town. It did not help. Deserting seamen simply landed outside of the walls.<sup>91</sup> By 1799, the Atlantic fleet was over 8,000 men short, while the Mediterranean fleet at Toulon was missing a full third of its regular complement.<sup>92</sup> Eventually, the back country harbored so many deserters that the government sent the hated “Colonnnes Mobiles” against them, but even that proved completely ineffectual. Mass desertions continued unabated until the end of the wars.<sup>93</sup>

## 2.4 CONCLUSION

Naval seamen frequently described their lot as slavery, and even though they often made this point only rhetorically, it is not to be dismissed as frivolous.<sup>94</sup> They knew better than most of what they were speaking. Few people traveled as widely as they, and few had as many opportunities for studying the varied systems of coerced labor that could be found around the world. When they thought of their own condition – torn from home, forced onto ships, made to work under threats of savage violence, and having a good chance of dying in service – they realized they shared quite a few experiences with the slaves they encountered in the Americas,

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<sup>91</sup> Letter from Captain D’Auvergne, Prince of Bouillon to Secretary Dundas, Jersey, 31 May 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4172.

<sup>92</sup> Vice-Admiral Morard de Galles to the Minister of the Navy and Colonies, Brest, 14 Nivôse Year VII [3 January 1799], SHM-V, BB/3/153, Service Général, Correspondance, Brest, 1799; Manning levels during Germinal, Year 7 [March-April 1799], SHM-V, BB/3/158, Service Général, Correspondance, Toulon, 1799.

<sup>93</sup> Substance of the last information which has reached me directly from my correspondents in the sea ports, Brest, 20 Floréal Year V [9 May 1797], TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4172.

<sup>94</sup> Isaac Land argues that European-born or -descended seamen invoked slavery primarily to demand what David Roediger in a different context has famously called the “wages of whiteness.” Isaac Land, “Customs of the Sea: Flogging, Empire, and the ‘True British Seaman,’ 1770-1870,” *interventions* 3, no. 2 (2001): 169-185; David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 2007).

on the coast of Atlantic Africa, in the Maghreb, or the Middle East.<sup>95</sup> Others who also knew of what they were speaking agreed with them. Hugh Crow, a slave ship captain, concluded after witnessing a flogging on board the *Lynx* man-of-war that “severity, if not cruelty, [...] must be employed to keep *slaves* in order and subordination, whether they be black or white; and there is not, in my opinion, a shade of difference between them, save in their respective complexions.” Even slaves sometimes thought of seamen as rather similar to themselves. In Kingston in the late 1780s, Crow overheard a black man cursing “the law for floggey negro man and poor woman, and poor buckra sailor, and red-back soldier man.”<sup>96</sup>

Like slaves, naval seamen had precious few opportunities to effectively influence the conditions they worked under, but unlike them, they found it fairly easy to get away from an especially disagreeable situation. And judging by the numbers who deserted during the wars of the 1790s, the conditions that most naval warworkers found themselves in were getting worse. In part, perhaps, the spike in desertions, especially to the interior, was due not to seamen, but to the vastly increased number of forcibly recruited landsmen who found life at sea intolerable and tried to make their way home. But this was often difficult unless they happened to be stationed in home waters. Having lost their wages by running away, they had few resources to sustain themselves for long, and so in most cases economic pressure or predatory recruitment soon

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<sup>95</sup> James R. Durand, *The Life and Adventures of James R. Durand, from the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and One, until the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Sixteen. Written by himself. His first leaving his parents: how he was cast away, and the hardships he underwent; his entering the American service; together with the particulars of his impressment and service on board a British man of war, seven years and 1 month, until 1816* (Bridgeport: Stiles, Nichols & Son, 1817), 31; Childers, *Mariner*, 292-3. It also happened that seamen did become slaves in some of these places: Citoyen notaire Gransville to citoyen ordonnateur Berlin, Tunis, 20 Floréal Year 7 of the Republic [9 May 1799], SHM-V, BB/3/158, Service Général, Correspondance, Toulon, 1799.

<sup>96</sup> Hugh Crow, *Memoirs of the late Captain Hugh Crow of Liverpool; comprising A Narrative of His Life, together with Descriptive Sketches of the Western Coast of Africa; particularly of Bonny; The Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants, the Productions of the Soil, and the Trade of the Country. To which are added, Anecdotes and Observations, illustrative of the Negro Character* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1830), 22.

forced them back into service on the first available ship. Frequently that ship sailed under a foreign flag. The men who ran from the British *Hermione* after the famous mutiny, for instance, variously ended up on Danish, Spanish, American, Dutch, and British merchantmen, in South American coastal shipping, on French privateers, and in American and even British naval vessels.<sup>97</sup>

But it was not only desertions that reached unprecedented levels in the 1790s. Naval mutinies, which had been exceedingly rare for nearly a century, suddenly tore like wildfire through one fleet after another. Not since the mid-seventeenth century, also a time of all-consuming war and revolution, had naval seamen acted with such determination to improve their conditions through collective, offensive action. On hundreds of ships, the lower deck rose up, turned their guns on the quarterdeck, formed committees, elected delegates, and overthrew the absolute rule of captains. The mutinies began, as so much during these years, in revolutionary France. The next chapter is dedicated those early, formative struggles of the mutinous Atlantic.

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<sup>97</sup> John Slenison's declaration, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/397; John Duncan's declaration, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/731; Petition of John Williams, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/1031; Courts martial against men from the *Hermione*, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5343 and 1/5344; various letters relating to unrest on the *Malta*, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/1048; "Extract from Captain Thomas Truxtun's journal, U.S. Frigate *Constellation*, at Hampton Roads, 31 August 1798, Friday" in *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War Between the United States and France* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1935), 1:312, 1:365.



### 3.0 REVOLUTION, 1789-1793

The majority of French naval historians have regarded the revolution as the single greatest catastrophe ever to strike the navy.<sup>1</sup> According to the dominant interpretation, first formulated by Léon Guérin in his *Histoire maritime de France* (1851) and most recently repeated in Etienne Taillemite's *Histoire ignorée de la Marine française* (1988), the revolutionaries inherited and with lightning speed destroyed a first-rate navy at the height of its powers, well-armed with a fleet of modern battleships, efficiently manned, and professionally run by a proud corps of highly trained, battle-hardened officers.<sup>2</sup> And indeed, the French navy was probably never more powerful than on the eve of the revolution. The drubbing it had received at the hands of the British during the Seven Years War had been followed by a decade and a half long rearmament effort that culminated in the fleet's impressive performance during the War for American Independence. Under the belligerent leadership of the *marquis* de Castries, appointed minister of the marine in 1780, the navy accelerated its expansion after the war so that by 1789 it ranked alongside Britain as one of only two naval superpowers in the world. Throughout the decade, the dockyards at Toulon, Rochefort, and Brest were buzzing with the labor of thousands of specialized workers turning out four battleships and four frigates every year, giving France not

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<sup>1</sup> For an authoritative overview of the literature, see William S. Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-12.

<sup>2</sup> Léon Guérin, *Histoire Maritime de France, Tome Cinquième* (Paris: Dufour et Mulat, 1851); Etienne Taillemite, *Histoire ignorée de la Marine française* (Paris: Perrin, 2003).

only one of the youngest but also one of the most modern deep-sea going fleets in the world. At Cherbourg, the construction of an artificial harbor, intended to give the navy a base from which to contest Britain's dominance of *La Manche*, was proceeding apace. Everything was moving ahead to prepare the nation for war on a massive scale.<sup>3</sup>

But France could not afford to actually fight it. The country's costly participation in the American war had pushed the already ailing state into a full-blown financial crisis, and even though funds kept trickling into the navy to keep pace with the international arms race, its expansion and day-to-day operations were largely financed on credit. Constructing a navy, as John Brewer has shown, was the most expensive project an eighteenth-century state could undertake, especially in a country like France that had to rely on vast imports of timber from as far away as Scandinavia and Russia (building a single ship of the line easily consumed a whole forest of trees). In 1789, the navy had run up debts of over 400 million *francs*, leaving it unable to pay the wages of its workers, several thousand dockyard laborers in Brest, Toulon, and Rochefort, and several thousand more seamen onboard the King's ships in both France and overseas. Thus despite the outward appearance of unprecedented strength, according to Martine Acerra and Jean Meyer, the navy's fundamentally unsound financial base caused it to suffer crippling "structural weaknesses" even before the revolution began to take its toll in 1789.<sup>4</sup>

William S. Cormack, in his magnificent study *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy*, has shown that while, on balance, the navy probably would have fared better as an effective fighting force without the revolution, it is also clear that the social and political

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<sup>3</sup> Cormack, *Revolution*, 18-23; Taillemite, *Histoire*, 177-199; Martine Acerra and Jean Meyer, *Marines et Révolution* (Rennes: Editions Ouest-France, 1988), 58.

<sup>4</sup> Acerra and Meyer, *Marines*, 90; John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 29-64.

upheavals between 1789 and 1794 opened up space for change far more fundamental than anything attempted before.<sup>5</sup> In 1786, a series of reforms were implemented, collectively known as the *Code de Castries*, in order to tackle some of the most immediate of the fleet's problems, including a partial overhaul of the recruitment system, reformed wage scales and career advancement patterns, improved provisioning, efforts to promote greater health and cleanliness onboard ship, and, perhaps most remarkably, creating a small opening for commoners to enter into the solidly aristocratic officer corps.<sup>6</sup> It is doubtful whether these reforms, even given more than three years to make a mark, would have made a great deal of difference, since they required both money and aristocratic good will, both of which were in limited supply during the last few years of the old regime. Thus when the new rulers of France undertook to rebuild the navy, what conservative historians have denounced as incompetent or evil-minded political meddling emerges in Cormack's study, following Léon Lévy-Schneider and Norman Hampson, as an honest and serious attempt by the various revolutionary governments to continue with the necessary top to bottom reforms already begun in the mid-1780s. But after 1789, with scores of mutinies crippling the fleet for extended periods of time, the push for reform, and eventually for the revolutionary reconstruction of the navy, came more often than not from the bottom up, not from the top down.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cormack, *Revolution*, 242-302.

<sup>6</sup> Taillemite, *Histoire*, 193-197.

<sup>7</sup> For fanatically, almost hysterically hostile interpretations of the revolutionaries' efforts, see E.H. Jenkins, *A History of the French Navy: From its Beginning to the Present Day* (London: MacDonal and Jane's, 1973), 201-243; Joseph Martray, *La destruction de la marine française par la Révolution* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1988). For positive assessments, see Léon Lévy-Schneider, *Le Coventionnel Jeanbon Saint-André, Membre du Comité de Salut Public, Organisateur de la Marine de la Terreur, 1749-1813*, 2 vols (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1901); Norman Hampson, *La marine de l'an II: mobilisation de la flotte de l'Océan, 1793-1794* (Paris: Libraire Narcel Rivière, 1959).

Most histories of the revolutionary navy have been written with both feet firmly planted on the quarterdeck, and they have therefore missed, or misconstrued as chaos, the flowering of political activity that suddenly ruptured the social peace that had prevailed between officers and men in the pre-revolutionary navy.<sup>8</sup> Historians of the French Revolution, otherwise often so attentive to the power and enormous creativity of working class self-activity, have likewise overlooked both the extent and importance of the mutinies that rocked the French fleet.<sup>9</sup> The same, remarkably, is true for those historians who have studied the spread of revolutionary activity beyond French borders, even though warships were one of the most important conduits along which radical thought and experience travelled back and forth between France, its overseas possessions, and the port towns of foreign nations in Europe and around the world.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Between 1706 and 1788, only five mutinies were recorded and prosecuted in the French navy. Most likely, many more took place, but it was not in a captain's interest to report them to his superiors, since it reflected poorly on his leadership skills. The same, however, holds true for the British navy, which recorded three mutinies in 1783 alone. Alain Cabantous, *La Vergue et les Fers: Mutins et Déserteurs dans la marine de l'ancienne France (XVIIe-XVIIIe s.)* (Paris: Tallandier, 1984), 13; court martial of Thomas Sneed, William Thompson, George Wright, Robert Dyebell, Benjamin Gravatt, Jacob Francis, James Collins, William Barlo, Samuel Pyle, William Day, Thomas Willson, and William Knox of the *Raisonable*, 10 to 16 July 1783, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5322; court martial against Garret Tobyn, James Burfield, John Reid, John Harris, and Daniel Simmon of the *Camilla*, 28 August 1783, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5223; court martial against Arthur Rice and John Burn of the *Adamant*, 8 to 10 November 1783, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5323.

<sup>9</sup> Among the classics of bottom-up histories are Albert Soboul, *The Sans Culottes: The Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government, 1793-1794* (New York: Anchor Books, 1972); Daniel Guérin, *La lutte de classes sous la Première République, 1793-1797*, 2 vols, rev. ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1968); George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959). In a number of monographs focussing on individual port cities during the revolution, seamen make an appearance, but usually off-stage. See, for example, Malcolm Crook, *Toulon in war and revolution: From the ancien régime to the Restoration, 1750-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); Phillippe Henwood and Edmond Monage, *Brest: Un Port en Révolution, 1789-1799* (Rennes: Éditions Ouest-France, 1989); Samuel Guicheteau, *La Révolution des ouvriers nantais: Mutation économique, identité sociale et dynamique révolutionnaire (1740-1815)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Godechot, *La grande nation: L'expansion révolutionnaire de la France dans le monde de 1789 à 1799*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: Aubier, 1983); R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution*, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959 and 1964); George Rudé, *Revolutionary Europe, 1783-1815* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

It is therefore the burden of this chapter to look again at the history of the French revolutionary navy, but this time from below deck and before the mast. Following a series of interconnected struggles – in Toulon in 1789, in the Levant and Saint-Domingue in 1790, in Brest in 1790-91, in Martinique and Guadeloupe in 1791 through 1793 – it will track the accelerated evolution of new shipboard relations, revolutionary and republican. Mirroring the astonishing speed with which peasants and *sans-culottes* threw off the strictures of the old regime’s paternalist social relations, naval warworkers in the space of just a few months destroyed the system of military subordination that had regulated nearly every aspect of their day-to-day lives. They took with great enthusiasm to the radically democratic ideas of the revolution, fused them with their own traditions of maritime republicanism, and then pushed to replace, at first hesitantly and slowly, but by 1793 confidently and dramatically, the captain’s virtually unlimited authority with the sovereignty of the crew’s collective will.

### 3.1 “INFLAMMABLE DISPOSITIONS”<sup>11</sup>

Raymond-Pierre, *baron* de Glandevès was a man born and bred to command. For centuries, the House of Glandevès had been amongst the most important of the *Provençal* nobility – one ancestor is said to have served under Louis the Pious in the ninth century, another was one of the first knights inducted into the *Ordre du Croissant* in the thirteenth century, and a long stream of bishoprics and lord-lieutenants were bestowed upon the family in the centuries that

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<sup>11</sup> Comte d’Albert de Rions, *Mémoire Historique et Justicatif de M. le Comte d’Albert de Rions, sur l’Affaire de Toulon* (Paris, 1790), 24.

followed.<sup>12</sup> Raymond-Pierre's appointment to the position of *commandant* in Toulon in early 1790 honored this family's proud tradition. As head of the royal dockyard, one of the largest industrial concerns in France, and indeed all of Europe, Glandevès easily became the most powerful man in Toulon. He commanded the labor of approximately 3,000 artisans, convicts, mariners, and manual laborers, all in all more than half of the town's adult male working population.<sup>13</sup> When the navy's Mediterranean fleet was in harbor, seamen from nearly two dozen warships were added to his command, several thousand people in all. *Commandant* Glandevès' influence on the town's economy, politics, and social life was absolutely unequalled.

At least it should have been. By January 1790 Toulon had been turned irrevocably upside down. Glandevès' predecessor in office, *comte* d'Albert de Rions, had spent most of December 1789 in a dungeon, dumped there without formal charge or trial by the city's combative National Guard, the newly formed revolutionary citizen militia. When in late February a mob of "low people" stormed his official residence in order to get a better view of a civic ceremony taking place in the square outside, leaving the house "in disorder, and the furniture broken," Glandevès bore it with dry resignation. He merely suggested to his superior, the minister of the marine in Paris, that perhaps – state finances permitting, of course – one ought to erect an iron grille around the veranda, for he feared that without such a barricade his home "would continuously be exposed to the invasion of the people." He admitted, however, that maybe the time was not right

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<sup>12</sup> Jean-Pierre Papon, *Histoire Générale de Provence* (Paris: Ph.-D. Pierres, 1784), 3:xv; Borel d'Hauterive, *Annuaire de la Noblesse de France et des Maisons Souveraines de l'Europe* (Paris, 1862), 171.

<sup>13</sup> Crook, *Toulon*, 14-15.

for such building work, for it may only serve to trigger yet another “fermentation amongst the people.” Of those there had already been quite enough.<sup>14</sup>

Less than a year earlier, revolution had first erupted in the streets of Toulon. On March 23, 1789 hundreds of “low people,” most of them women, suddenly burst out of Saint-Jean, Saint-Lazare, and Saint-Vincent, Toulon’s dank working class *quartiers* where 40 percent of the city’s dockyard workers and 60 percent of its seamen lived with their families.<sup>15</sup> Their target was city hall, and the meeting of the urban assembly, at that moment mulling over the town’s *cahier de doléances*. The rioters stormed the building and laid siege to the debating chamber, shouting “insults and invectives of every kind.” The “mutineers” demanded that the urban assembly hand over two town officers, M. Lantier and M. Beaudin, whom the crowd accused of “abuses and grave vices.” The assembly managed to sneak the pair into a temporary hiding place, while trying to calm people’s spirits by announcing a reduction in the price of bread, meat, and oil. It was to no avail. The “mob” stormed into the debating chamber, disarmed a detachment of soldiers sent to restore order, and “furiously” tore the place apart, looking for Lantier and Beaudin, whom they finally found hiding in a small antechamber. Both were severely beaten.<sup>16</sup>

Next the “seditious” moved on to the bishop’s palace, launched rocks through all its windows, plundered the kitchen and clothes chamber, and then rode the Episcopal carriage “in triumph” to the harbor, where they smashed it up and tossed the pieces into the sea. Meanwhile,

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<sup>14</sup> Glandevès to Luzerne, minister of the marine, March 12, 1790, SHM-V, BB/1/1, Service Général, Décisions, 1790-91, f. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Crook, *Toulon*, 8-10.

<sup>16</sup> The narrative of the riots on March 23 and 24, 1789 in the following paragraphs is a synthesis of various letters and reports written by Albert de Rions, the dockyard’s *commandant*, as well as by various municipal officers contained in AN (F), Mar B/3/797, Service Général, Toulon, Consuls, Divers, 1789, ff. 5-21; and Rions, *Mémoire*, 5-46.

another group of “mutineers” had moved on to M. Beaudin’s house, plundered, gutted, and destroyed it. Afterwards, they attacked the residence of M. Mourchou, one of the town’s archivists, and left it similarly devastated.

Towards evening, roaming groups of rioters once again converged on the town hall. “A troop of plebeians of the very lowest class, calling themselves the deputies of the populace,” came inside to inform the terrified notables, “in a sharp tone,” that “if they wished to prevent the greatest misfortunes, they would have to satisfy the people by drastically lowering the price of food.” The town authorities complied, and for a second time that day slashed the price of bread, mutton, beef, and oil by about a third.

Next morning, the workers in the royal dockyard went on strike. During the previous day’s rioting, they had been forcefully confined to the *Arsenal* on order of the *commandant*, Albert de Rions, but by nightfall the workers’ wives had descended upon the dockyard and forced their release. When the bell called them back to work again in the morning, only a few entered through the gates. The rest mingled with “foreigners and peasants” and headed into town. The crowd opened the morning’s hostilities by destroying M. Lantier’s house, and then smashed up those of other notables. A second crowd, meanwhile, swarmed around the town hall, where they forced yet another lowering of the price of bread.

By now, however, the town’s ruling elite had recovered from its initial paralysis. To break the crowd in two, one of the town’s richest men offered the naval authorities a loan of 60,000 francs so that seamen and dockyard workers could be paid some of the wages they were owed. In return, both army and navy made troops available to support the ad-hoc *milice bourgeoise* which was sent into the streets to suppress the rioting and protect the houses of the rich. It worked. The extraordinary wage payment defused the anger of seamen and dockyard



workers, as well as the militancy of their wives. Once they had retreated back to their *quartiers* in the eastern end of the city, the forces of law and order quickly managed to contain and arrest the remaining rioters. The streets of Toulon returned to calm.

The insurrection of March 23-24 brought the bourgeois phase of the municipal revolution to an abrupt end. The rioters had not picked an arbitrary date on which to tear the town apart, but one that would maximize their impact on the selection of delegates and complaints for the upcoming Estates-General. The town bourgeoisie, having already neutralized the influence of the provincial nobility, manipulated the election for the urban assembly – the body that would draw up the town’s *cahier de doléances* and select delegates for the *sénéchaussée*, the regional assembly which in turn would select delegates for the Estates-General – in such a way that it illegally excluded the great mass of workers and favored members of the liberal professions, merchants, and rentiers over master craftsmen. The violent invasion of the council chamber on March 23 put an end to all these schemes. The belligerent crowd of rioters forced the assembly to include demands for the abolition of indirect taxes on foodstuffs and an end to subcontracting in the dockyard in the *cahier*, and further forced them to accept twenty-two delegates elected by 1,264 sailors and dockyard workers in an autonomous assembly a few days later.<sup>17</sup>

Toulon’s bourgeois notables had miscalculated their power. After sidelining the provincial nobility in the elections for the Estates-General, they were themselves swept aside by an upsurge of popular anger, coerced into supporting the radical demands of working-class rioters, and forced to call on the royal troops stationed in Toulon to protect their persons and property from the very fires of revolution they had helped to stoke. *Commandant* de Rions feared that the bourgeoisie’s capitulation during the riots of March 23-24 had set a dangerous precedent.

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<sup>17</sup> Crook, *Toulon*, 80-83.

Not only had they given in to utterly unreasonable demands – the tax on foodstuffs, for example, was lowered so drastically that the municipality in effect had abolished its main source of income – but they had failed to take the necessary punitive measures that would have allowed them to portray these concessions not as the result of coercion, but as paternal acts of grace. And this portended badly for the future. The inhabitants of naval port cities, Rions believed, were not inherently more dangerous than others, but “they become so if one is scared of them, and especially if one is clumsy enough to show them this fear.”<sup>18</sup>

Yet the explosion of violence on March 23-24 was not merely an attempt to influence revolutionary politics. It was also, and perhaps primarily, a traditional food riot within the “culture of retribution” that marked the early modern crowd.<sup>19</sup> Toulon, like the rest of the country, had just staggered through the worst winter in living memory, the painful crescendo to several years of successive harvest failures that inflated wildly the price of basic foodstuffs. Life in the city had grown harder with each passing year – the number of beggars, prostitutes, abandoned children, unwed mothers, charity hospital patients, and poor relief recipients had all been rising since the mid-1780s – and by the spring of 1789 starvation was beginning to drive up the mortality rate amongst the poor.<sup>20</sup> *Commandant* de Rions explained to his superiors in Paris

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<sup>18</sup> Copy of a letter from Rions to the mayor and consuls, Toulon, April 17, 1789, AN, Mar B/3/797, Service Général, Correspondance, Toulon, Consuls, Divers, 1789, ff. 20-21.

<sup>19</sup> The classic statement on the food or hunger riot is E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: New Press, 1993), 185-258. See also E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy Reviewed,” in *Customs in Common*, 259-351. On the retributive or vindictive riot, see William Beik, “The Violence of the French Crowd from Charivari to Revolution,” *Past and Present* 197 (2007): 75-110.

<sup>20</sup> Crook, *Toulon*, 71-72.

that those “who have nothing to live off but their labor” are no longer able to afford bread. “Misery,” he continued, “is extreme.”<sup>21</sup>

When the mob surged through the streets and into city hall on March 23, it acted according to established custom for such a crisis. Its objectives conformed to the classic pattern of the female-led hunger riot: punish the individuals guilty of causing market inequities – in this case, the two town officers blamed for the imposition of a high tax on grain, the *droit de piquet* – and then force the proper authorities to reinstate fair price levels for the daily necessities of the poor.<sup>22</sup> These relatively limited aims, however, soon gave way to a more generalized attack on the houses of the city’s rich, including the bishop and other notables not directly responsible for the price of food. Even though the first fires of class war were stomped out before they could consume the city, they reignited in Toulon’s immediate backcountry. Here, inspired by urban insurrectionists, peasants stopped paying their landlords and instead openly assaulted them. The violence continued for days, rapidly evolving into an all-out attack on the nobility. No one, including the royal troops stationed at Toulon, dared confront the rampaging peasant insurgents. Albert de Rions warned that if no serious measures were taken to suppress the rising, and fast, the people in Toulon might in turn be inspired to renew the violence inside the city, and then there really would be a bigger problem:

I do not doubt that if the government delays rigorous action that the revolt against the nobles will become a general one, and if carried to the last resort, it will not just be the

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<sup>21</sup> Rions, *Mémoire*, 14-16, 21-22.

<sup>22</sup> Cormack, *Revolution*, 50.

nobles that suffer from it; all the rich people can then expect to be treated as enemies by an unrestrained multitude, drunk on the impunity it enjoys.<sup>23</sup>

Rions had good reason to fear the continued erosion of respect for traditional authorities. His own stature as paternal *commandant* of the dockyard had suffered severely in recent years, as the aftermath of the American War had required far-reaching economies within all branches of the navy. Having already replaced as much as a third of the waged workforce with cheap and super-exploitable convict labor following the abolition of the galley fleet in the late 1740s, in the mid-1780s the dockyard administration under Rions pushed through a major privatization effort. From now on, every task that could be fulfilled by the private sector was outsourced to a contractor, with the result that the dockyard was able slash its directly employed workforce by nearly two-thirds. The introduction of subcontracting threw only a relatively small number of workers into unemployment, but it was a serious blow to the real wages of those who remained. Most simply continued in their old positions within the dockyard and on average even earned a slightly higher monetary wage, but since they were now employed through a private contractor they had lost the generous set of benefits that service in the King's navy had provided, including free hospital treatment, contributory insurance schemes, steady employment, free firewood, and, in times of need, bread from the *Arsenal's* own bakery.<sup>24</sup>

Because nearly half of the town's adult male population was employed in the naval dockyard, and almost everyone else was indirectly dependent on the funds flowing out of the *Arsenal* and into the local service economy, the wage-slashing reforms of the mid-1780s created

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<sup>23</sup> Rions, *Mémoire*, 17-18.

<sup>24</sup> Crook, *Toulon*, 47; Acerra and Meyer, *Marines*, 88.

a major crisis in the working class districts at the eastern end of the city. The crisis grew even worse when funds stopped flowing altogether. The last wage payment received by dockyard workers and seamen was in late 1788 – after that the navy’s coffers were empty. The abdication of its customary responsibility for the welfare of its workers and their families, followed by the failure to pay the men’s wages altogether as they suffered through the worst winter anyone could remember, created serious strains on the paternal relations that traditionally had prevailed within the navy. But when after two days of violence money suddenly appeared to pay workers what they were owed, Rions knew that a dangerous line had been crossed. After the riots had died down at the end of March, he reported to the minister of the marine in Paris that “the people remain tranquil; but all points to their inflammable dispositions. [...] The people now are well aware that nothing is granted them but out of fear.”<sup>25</sup>

Following the spring riots, which briefly flared up again in mid-April when authorities in the neighboring town of Seyne attempted to reimpose the *droit de piquet*, Toulon moved into the revolutionary summer of 1789 with relative calm. But if Rions and members of the municipal elite continued to view “the people” with fear and apprehension, the laboring poor cast an equally wary eye on the *Arsenal* and the garrison of royal troops stationed in town, especially after rumors of counter-revolutionary starvation plots and massacres swept the country following the July 14 attack on the Bastille in Paris.<sup>26</sup> Relations between naval officers and their subordinated men had deteriorated so badly during the preceding months that dockyard workers were terrified that the aristocrat Rions would order the gates to the *Arsenal* closed, and then have

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<sup>25</sup> Rions, *Mémoire*, 24-25.

<sup>26</sup> Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 75-90.

them all butchered inside.<sup>27</sup> Convinced that he cared little about their livelihood, the workers' suspicion fell even heavier on Rions after the *marquis* du Luc, commander of the royal troops in town, went back on an agreement not to allow or give orders to wear the national cockade before consulting with Rions, thereby exposing the naval officer corps to an angry mob after army officers were seen wearing it.<sup>28</sup> Dockyard workers and the naval artillery corps – the fleet's permanent core of seamen, who also doubled as marines – now demanded to be armed in order to protect themselves against their own officers.<sup>29</sup>

Rions managed to calm the immediate crisis, but relations within the dockyard continued to deteriorate towards armed confrontation as summer turned into autumn, especially after Toulon joined other cities throughout France in forming a revolutionary citizen militia to combat the monopoly of violence enjoyed by the regular army. Toulon's National Guard unit soon began to target naval workers for recruitment, and to their *commandant's* utter horror, they responded with enthusiasm. That his men should be armed and organized by anyone but himself was in contradiction to every basic principle of military subordination and therefore in itself completely unacceptable, but the Guard's propensity to attract troublemakers of all kinds, radicals, revolutionaries, criminals, and those "who have nothing to lose" made it particularly worrisome. The Guard's own officers even lived in open fear of their men. When the unit was first founded, Rions and Luc extended a dinner invitation to its officers, but these dared not accept "for fear of

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<sup>27</sup> Letter from Rions to La Luzerne, minister of the marine, Toulon, August 6, 1789, AN, Mar B/3/797, Service Général, Correspondance, Toulon, Consuls, Divers, 1789, ff. 26-27.

<sup>28</sup> Rions, *Mémoire*, 51.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Rions to La Luzerne, minister of the Marine, Toulon, August 6, 1789, AN, Mar B/3/797, Service Général, Correspondance, Toulon, Consuls, Divers, 1789, ff. 26-27.

stirring up the jealousy of their soldiers.”<sup>30</sup> Rions, it seems, was not opposed to the revolution as such, and he certainly understood the great hardships his men and their families were forced to suffer, but as a naval officer and paternalist aristocrat, he recoiled from the growth of socially corrosive popular autonomy he witnessed all over Toulon and, with the Guard’s recruitment of his men, even in the midst of his very own fiefdom, the *Arsenal*.

By late November, after the Guard’s commanders repeatedly failed to enforce an agreement to preclude naval artillery men, conscripted seamen, and directly employed dockyard workers from membership – largely because proletarian rank-and-file Guardsmen paid little attention to their bourgeois officers and enrolled whomever they pleased – Rions became convinced that his workers, growing more disaffected and aggressive towards him by the day, were plotting an armed insurrection inside the *Arsenal* to take place in December, probably around Christmas. He decided to force a showdown. On November 30, Rions ordered two petty officers – one a known radical, “mutinous, insubordinate, and seditious,” the other a brutal, unpopular man, recently the object of a mutiny on the frigate *Alceste* – out of the dockyard for stirring up trouble and defiantly wearing the National Guard’s insignia while on duty. The reaction was immediate, and massive. By evening, an aggressive mob of *Arsenal* workers had formed, and by the next morning the crowd had grown even larger, taken over the dockyard, and spread into the city.<sup>31</sup>

Prevented by the mob from receiving at the dockyard a deputation of the Permanent Committee, Toulon’s revolutionary municipal government, Rions was forced to make his way through a hostile crowd to his official residence for a crisis meeting. While inside the residence

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<sup>30</sup> Rions, *Mémoire*, 57-60.

<sup>31</sup> Rions, *Mémoire*, 79-86.

Rions and consul Roubaud, the Committee's president, argued back and forth over the measures best suited to calm the mob – Roubaud favored pardoning the two dismissed men, while Rions wanted a declaration of martial law – the crowd outside turned violent, angered in particular by the arrival of two detachments of marines, whom they promptly attacked. After that, the crowd turned its attention on the residence, sending down a hail of rocks upon it. Someone fired a gun at the *commandant* as he briefly appeared at the window.<sup>32</sup> A detachment of the National Guard arrived, ordered by their commanders to protect the residence, but that did not stop the crowd from beating up M. de Bonneval, one of Rions' divisional commanders, nor from injuring a number of other naval officers with rocks. Next, they intercepted M. de Saint-Julien, whom Rions had sent with a request for assistance to the commander of Toulon's royal troops, and beat him to a bloody pulp. Officers of the National Guard stood helplessly by. Rions, together with thirty of his officers, now tried to break out of the residence, but the crowd immediately threw them back. National Guardsmen, wholly disregarding their officers by now, sealed off the building. Early in the afternoon, they demanded of Rions that he hand over M. de Broves, commander of the marine detachment, whom they accused of having given an order to open fire on the crowd. Despite de Broves surrendering himself, the crowd, led by National Guardsmen, stormed the building shortly afterwards, arrested Rions, one of France's highest-ranking naval officers, along with one of the Mediterranean fleet's squadron commanders, M. le marquis de Castelet, who also happened to be the nephew of Admiral de Suffren, and two divisional commanders, M. le *comte* de Bonneval and M. le commandeur de Village. All four of these aristocratic, high-ranking naval officers were forced across town, nearly murdered on the way,

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<sup>32</sup> Anon. [Officiers de la Marine], *Détails des Événemens Relatifs à la Detention de M. le Comte d'Albert, et des Principaux Officiers de la Marine, Adressés à MGR. le Comte de la Luzerne, par les Officiers de la Marine, du Département de Toulon* (Marseille, 1790), 20.



and then dumped in a jail-cell together with de Broves. It was an altogether unprecedented assault on the authority of the naval officer corps.<sup>33</sup>

To contain the damage, spokesmen for the navy's affairs were quick to blame "enemies of the nation," suggesting that "the furious, the seditious" had

persuaded the workers that it was up to themselves to make the laws, that every act of authority is an injustice, that all discipline is an insult to the rights of the people, that dignitaries must have neither authority nor dignity, that liberty, finally, is the right to dare all; and *voilà*, there it is: a people that forgets that all disorders, all the evils of anarchy in the end only hurt themselves is easy to fool and to seduce.<sup>34</sup>

Pierre-Victor Malouet, until 1789 Toulon's naval *intendant* and, like Rions, a centrist, monarchical reformist, even had an idea as to the identity of these troublemakers. Shortly after news of the insurrection reached Paris, he told the National Assembly that "the true criminals, the instigators of this riot, perhaps are foreigners."<sup>35</sup> Earlier in the year, when his own people had demanded to be armed against him, Rions had mouthed similar suspicions: "the town is filled with a great number of foreigners, amongst whom there might be ill-intentioned people, some of whom might be paid by the enemies of the state to create trouble."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Copie de la lettre de M. de la Roque-Dourdan à M. le comte de la Luzerne, en date du 2 décembre 1789," *AP*, 10:416-417; Rions, *Mémoire*, 87-95.

<sup>34</sup> Pierre-Victor Malouet, *Collection des Opinions de M. Malouet, Député à l'Assemblée Nationale. Tome Premier* (Paris, 1791), 1:136

<sup>35</sup> Malouet, *Collection des Opinions*, 1:150.

<sup>36</sup> Declaration given to naval artillery men assembled on August 5, 1789, AN, Mar B/3/797, Service Général, Correspondance, Toulon, Consuls, Divers, 1789, f. 32.

Foreign enemies poisoning the revolution from within was soon to become a common bugbear, one that eventually grew to monstrously destructive proportions as the superheated rhetoric of *la grande nation* usurped republican universalism, but in Toulon in 1789 it nevertheless had a material base in so far as the town's inhabitants were unusually cosmopolitan.<sup>37</sup> The steady expansion of the dockyard over the previous two centuries, the repeated wartime surges in the demand for labor power, and the characteristic demographic ebbs and flows of a port city had all worked together to give Toulon a laboring population that reflected the rich mixture of peoples who worked upon and around the Mediterranean Sea. Warship crews, in particular, contained large numbers of foreign-born men. An ordinance of 1723 determined that the proportion of foreigners amongst the crew was not to exceed 30 percent on any given ship, and though numbers appear to have declined to an average of around 10 percent by mid-century, in the 1780s they were back at around 20 percent. The largest group amongst them were usually Italians (in Christelle Breccia's sample, 22 percent), followed by Britons (19 percent), Dutch (10 percent), Irish (9 percent), and Portuguese (7 percent).<sup>38</sup>

Henri Lauvergne, who grew up in genteel Toulon to become a renowned physician, remembered the overwhelming feeling of alienation that beset him whenever he ventured into the town's working class *quartiers*, where, he thought, "one felt more out of place than in Turkey":

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<sup>37</sup> Alain Cabantous, *Les citoyens du large: Les identités maritimes en France (XVIIe-XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Aubier, 1995), 64-65. For foreigners and the revolution, see Sophie Wahnich, *L'impossible citoyen: L'étranger dans le discours de la Révolution française* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), esp. 82-91, 201-234; see also Badis Guessaier, "Étrangers de la Révolution, étrangers à la Révolution: Francisco Miranda, Anacharsis Cloots et Thomas Paine sous le régime de la Terreur, 1792-1795" (PhD diss., University of California at Davis, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> These figures exclude an unknown number of long-time resident foreign-born men who were either fully naturalized or at least counted as French for purposes of naval conscription. Christelle Breccia, "Les matelots embarqués à Toulon au XVIIIème siècle. D'après les rôles d'équipage du *Guerrier*, de la *Provence* et du *Héros*" (master's thesis, Université de Provence – Centre d'Aix, 2003), 60-62.

Here one spoke low *Provençal*, the corrupted idiom of our coasts, bad Italian, Genoan, Corsican, what have you! All the nations that live by the sea were here represented. All this together formed a mixture of peoples, which we in my youth disliked, [...].<sup>39</sup>

Not only were they alien in language, their behavior and beliefs seemed to belong to a different world altogether. Lauvergne condemned proletarian Toulon as “a living tradition of the sixteenth century, in their physiognomy, their mores, their way of life, their religion.” The dockyard workers were “hard-working, sober, violent, and poor,” not given to “libertinage or intemperance.”<sup>40</sup> The same could not be said for the men who manned the fleet, however. These were a wild, careless, and tempestuous lot, men who came off their ships “with hands full of money, ready to get rid of it anywhere they might find something which would calm the greed of their senses and satiate their appetites.” They were men “who lived to destroy themselves before their time was up, and no moralist was ever caught preaching temperance and sobriety to them.”<sup>41</sup> With most of the Mediterranean fleet anchoring in the roadstead, up to ten thousand of these men were present in the city during the December 1 insurrection, more than doubling the number of adult males available for violent mischief.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Henri Lauvergne, *Choléra-Morbus en Provence* (Toulon: Aurel, 1836), 17, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Lauvergne, *Choléra-Morbus*, 22, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Lauvergne, *Choléra-Morbus*, 23-24, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Twenty ships of the line, over one quarter of France’s overall naval strength, were at anchor in the roadstead off Toulon. Many of the ships would have been disarmed for the winter season, their crews therefore discharged onto land. “Copie de la lettre de M. le comte de la Luzerne, ministre de la marine, à M. le garde des sceaux, en date du 6 décembre,” *AP*, 10:416.

By the time *baron* de Glandevès took over as *commandant* in January 1790, relations between officers and men within the French navy had changed dramatically from the paternalist relations that had still prevailed only a year before. A quick succession of struggles, each more violent and intense than its predecessor, had left the upper rungs of the officer corps isolated and restricted to a degree of near-impotence, and their previously submissive workforce – seamen, marines, petty officers, artisans, and dockyard workers – had within a matter of months grown into a belligerent, self-confident, and consciously revolutionary force. Their actions, from bringing the bourgeois phase of the municipal revolution to a sudden halt with two days of extensive rioting in March to the imprisonment of their highest officer in December, pushed far beyond the traditional boundaries that circumscribed even shorebound popular political participation, never mind what was tolerable on board the King’s men-of-war.

The disintegration of discipline and submission in the Mediterranean fleet raised the specter of complete chaos throughout the navy, and officers were keenly aware of their own vulnerability if infractions of the kind that had brought down *commandant* de Rions were allowed to go unpunished. A group from Rochefort wrote to the minister of the marine to demand the most severe punishments for the Toulon mutineers. Otherwise, they warned, “all discipline will be destroyed, the multitude will henceforth make the law. The ports, the ships of war, even merchantmen, will be exposed to mutinies and insurrections.”<sup>43</sup> Pierre-Victor Malouet, as former commissary in Saint-Domingue, designer of the colonial project in French Guiana, and *intendant* in the war-port of Toulon, was uniquely qualified to perceive the bigger picture that eluded even the officers from Rochefort:

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict*, 74.

After the details that you have just heard, we are all entitled to ask ourselves what will become of government, the authority of law, and on what foundations will repose public liberty; and who, in the end, will command this empire?<sup>44</sup>

It was a good question. It took years to find an answer.

### 3.2 “TO THE AXES! TO THE AXES!”<sup>45</sup>

The frigate *Alceste* sailed from Toulon in mid-May 1790, just as the city was in the grip of yet another popular rising. The revolutionary upheavals of 1789 had contributed little to restoring financial health to the navy, and in late April *commandant* de Glandevès was forced to announce lay-offs in the dockyard. The popular response was immediate and violent. Just five months after Rions’ arrest, another mob of dockyard workers laid siege to the *commandant*’s residence, stormed it, and dragged de Glandevès into the street. He quickly agreed to reverse the cutbacks. A couple of weeks later, just as the *Alceste* was about to sail, yet another wave of violent unrest hit the navy, this time over low rates of pay.<sup>46</sup>

Trouble on the *Alceste* brewed as the officer corps sighed relief at having escaped the revolution in Toulon. “On June 13,” reported midshipman de Pointiers

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<sup>44</sup> Malouet, *Collection des Opinions*, 1:135.

<sup>45</sup> Captain de Beaurepaire, report, August 3, 1790, on board of the *Alceste*, SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 55.

<sup>46</sup> Crook, *Toulon*, 95.

we anchored at the islands of Horlac [in the Aegean Sea]. Until that time, the behavior of the crew had been quite good, despite the license which reigned at Toulon during our departure. [...] We counted on enjoying perfect tranquility during the campaign; just think of the tenderness with which the crew was commanded. But we have been disappointed in our hopes.<sup>47</sup>

The first disappointment came at Smyrna. A boat under the command of Lieutenant de Bruges had been sent ashore to seek out the resident French naval station commander. Unable to find him, de Bruges ordered the boat back to the ship. The boatsmen refused, preferring instead to cavort with the seditious crew of a French corvette anchored in the harbor. “Finally, they left, but only when they wanted to ... .”<sup>48</sup> Back on board, Lieutenant de Ramatuelle immediately called the boat’s crew to the *Alceste*’s great cabin, reproached them for their disgraceful disobedience to their officer, to the king, to the nation, but then failed entirely to punish them. “Until this point,” midshipman de Pointiers later recalled, “the crew had given no indication of being insubordinate, but from this moment onwards, spirits rose, by a perceptible degree.”<sup>49</sup>

It took another month for serious trouble to erupt. Having anchored off Larnaca on Cyprus’ southern coast for several days, Captain de Beaurepaire passed down orders to hoist up all boats before sunset on July 17, preparing for departure first thing the next morning. All returned on time except for the captain’s cook, Pittard (or Pitar), who stayed on shore long into the night. When he finally came on board, Lieutenant de Ramatuelle confronted him, but Pittard,

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<sup>47</sup> De Pointiers, “Relation,” SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 61.

<sup>48</sup> De Pointiers, “Relation,” SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 61.

<sup>49</sup> De Pointiers, “Relation,” SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 61.

in front of several officers and many of the common crewmen, told the lieutenant that he only recognized the captain's authority, liberally peppering his reply "with a thousand invectives." De Ramatuelle applied to the captain for punishment, who in turn ordered the sergeant to have Pittard put in irons. The sergeant quickly returned to report that none of his soldiers would comply with the order, since Pittard was a waged inferior officer and therefore could not by right be forced into irons. Captain de Beaurepaire, hoping to quickly choke the situation, told Pittard that if he did not submit to irons he would have to quit the ship immediately. Pittard said they would "have to break his arms and legs before he would be put in irons," whereupon Beaurepaire withdrew to his cabin. A short while afterwards, Pittard sought him out and "with insolence" demanded a certificate of good conduct. He was afraid, he said, of being stranded on Cyprus with the reputation of being a "scoundrel." Beaurepaire refused out of hand, but Pittard claimed that he was obliged to take him back to Toulon, where he had first embarked. The captain denied this, but nevertheless offered to write to the French consul in Larnaca, asking him to secure a berth for Pittard on the next available ship.<sup>50</sup>

It was not good enough. Rather than preparing to be paid off and leave the ship, Pittard headed for the forecabin, gathered around him "a numerous group of seditious men," accused them of weakness, and threw down a challenge of solidarity: "How can bold men such as yourselves abandon a brave man of the Nation?"<sup>51</sup> His words had the intended effect. The crew grew angry, and lined up behind Pittard: "No! He will not disembark. No. No. We will not have it." Captain de Beaurepaire began to fear "the darkest consequences." He hoped that by assuming

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<sup>50</sup> Captain de Beaurepaire, report, August 3, 1790, on board of the *Alceste*, SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 54; De Pointiers, "Relation," SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 61.

<sup>51</sup> De Pointiers, "Relation," SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 61.

a superior attitude and brushing off the “thousand impertinences” that now flew thick and fast, the crew would eventually submit to his will, and let the cook be thrown off the ship. He was wrong. When he sent his cabin boy to deliver the letter for the consul to Pittard, the crew first slapped the boy around, and cried suddenly “To the axes, to the axes!” Beaurepaire now had a full-blown armed mutiny on his hands. “The agitation of the spirits was extreme.”<sup>52</sup>

Beaurepaire and his officers, vastly outnumbered by the crew, all of whom were armed with battle axes, tried to reason with the mob. Beaurepaire later reported that once the true grounds for Pittard’s disembarkment were laid out to them in full, “an air of indecision came over them.” A number among them still shouted “No! No!” but then one of the gunners, Lapiere, mounted an arms chest and addressed his comrades. “What,” he demanded to know, “do you have to do with M. de Beaurepaire’s cook? He is a waged man and can be sent away if he misbehaves – who of you has a right to find that wrong?” The captain was free to have him removed, a majority of the crew agreed, but not before they had vetted the letter for the consul and Pittard was given his certificate of good conduct. Beaurepaire had no choice but to comply, and his cook was finally taken off the ship.<sup>53</sup>

After this “humiliation,” Captain de Beaurepaire’s command quickly disintegrated.<sup>54</sup> The radicals on board simply stopped paying attention. They ignored disagreeable orders, they wandered on and off the ship at will, and when midshipman de Pointiers determined to return them to duty, they laughed in his face and ridiculed him. This “band of rogues [...] took liberty

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<sup>52</sup> Captain de Beaurepaire, report, August 3, 1790, on board of the *Alceste*, SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 55.

<sup>53</sup> Captain de Beaurepaire, report, August 3, 1790, on board of the *Alceste*, SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 56.

<sup>54</sup> Captain de Beaurepaire to *commandant* de Glandevès, August 9, 1790, on board of the *Alceste*, SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 58.



to mean license,” de Pointiers complained; “the most complete anarchy overtook the ship.” The “scoundrels” finally told de Pointiers that if he did not shut up and stop bothering them, they would throw him into the sea and drown him. Captain de Beaurepaire quickly arranged for de Pointiers to take service on another vessel, and four days later he set course for Toulon. The situation on board had become increasingly dangerous. “Civil war” was threatening to break out on the ship between the radicals and those men still loyal to his command. Both groups, Beaurepaire reminded his superior, were of course “well-accustomed to the use of arms.”<sup>55</sup>

Arriving back at Toulon on August 9, Beaurepaire sought to justify his decision to violate orders and return home early. “What can one expect,” he told *commandant* de Glandevès, who probably recognized the problem,

from a crew that arms itself in order to enforce its will, which refuses to obey even in the smallest matters, and which is not afraid to say out loud that “today, we no longer have a Captain”? Can one really expect, honored sir, that this crew will acknowledge its commander in the moment when it becomes necessary to protect merchantmen by force?

Beaurepaire worried that the crew would not only fail to protect French merchantmen, but might actively endanger them. Towards the end of the cruise, he told Glandevès, he avoided meeting

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<sup>55</sup> De Pointiers, “Relation,” SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 62; Captain to Beaurepaire to *commandant* de Glandevès, August 9, 1790, on board of the *Alceste*, SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 59.

other ships for fear of his crew's "example of criminal disobedience" might spread to their "comrades" on other vessels.<sup>56</sup>

Captain de Beaurepaire does not appear to have been a man particularly well suited for his position, but one can speculate as to how he would have fared had the system of naval governance not broken down quite so spectacularly the year before. For instance, without the events in Toulon 1789 it is difficult to imagine that the *Alceste*'s soldiers would have dared to refuse putting Pittard in irons, an act, strictly speaking, of mutiny, even if the order did violate the *code pénal maritime*. If one of the nation's highest-ranking naval officers could be dragged out of his residence and unceremoniously dumped in prison for alleged abuses without so much as an investigation, let alone criminal charges or convictions, and if instead outspoken members of the National Assembly celebrated the perpetrators as "defenders of the fatherland," what possible hope then could a lowly, isolated frigate commander have against a determined, mutinous, and armed crew?<sup>57</sup>

It was a crew, moreover, that appeared very well informed about the rules and regulations that governed shipboard life. This was evident in the soldiers' refusal to put Pittard into irons, and in the mutineers' eventual acceptance of the captain's right to have his cook removed from the ship. At the same time, the men must have known that the *code pénal maritime* was currently being overhauled – triggering a major struggle in the Atlantic fleet stationed at Brest (see section 3.4 below) – and perhaps they hoped to see some of the old customary usages of the sea reestablished, such as the right to confirm or at least to veto decisions that concerned the

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<sup>56</sup> Captain to Beaurepaire to *commandant* de Glandevès, August 9, 1790, on board of the *Alceste*, SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 58.

<sup>57</sup> M. de Robespierre, National Assembly, session of December 15, 1789, AP, 10:573.

composition of the crew. For not only did the mutineers on the *Alceste* force the captain to submit his decision to disembark the cook to a general discussion amongst the whole crew, who for the occasion had armed themselves with boarding axes, but they drove out officers whose authority over them they deemed unacceptable. Midshipman de Pointiers had not been the first. Months earlier, while the *Alceste* was anchoring at Toulon, the crew had risen in a violent mutiny against boatswain Ganivet, described even by his superiors as “brutal and difficult to live with,” and forced Captain de Beaurepaire to send him out of the ship.<sup>58</sup>

The demand to have a say in the composition of the crew, and especially in the selection of the officer corps, was heard with increasing frequency during these years, and not just in the French navy.<sup>59</sup> In part, it harked back to a time long before the seventeenth-century emergence of specialized deep-sea battle fleets when shipping ventures, including marauding and war-making, were de-centralized, cooperative undertakings with shared risks, relatively flat hierarchies, and forms of limited collective decision-making. These principles, which had assured common seamen a prominent voice in the management of the ship – codified in 1152 by Eleanor of Aquitaine in the Rolls of Oléron, and probably based on the ancient Rhodian Law of the Mediterranean – did not survive the professionalization of maritime warfare in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the newly established *Royale*, and most glaringly on board its convict-powered galleys, coerced service and harsh, violently enforced hierarchies replaced the relative egalitarianism of the privateering fleets. What is known of events on the *Alceste* suggests that the

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<sup>58</sup> Interestingly enough, boatswain Ganivet was one of the two men whose dismissal from the dockyard triggered the December 1 rising in Toulon. This again points to a concern with established rules and customs. Ganivet may not have been well-liked, but that did not give *commandant* de Rions the right to kick him out of the *Arsenal*. Rions, *Mémoire*, 81-83.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, the “mutiny of a most dangerous tendency” on the British *Windsor Castle* in early November 1794. “Letter, November 12, 1794,” TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/392; court martial of William Shield, Esq., and George McKinley, captain and first lieutenant respectively, of the *Windsor Castle*, November 11, 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331. See also section 4.3 below.

troublemakers on board thought the time was ripe to stem the tide and return to an earlier model of shipboard relations.<sup>60</sup>

It is likewise noteworthy that all three serious conflicts on board – the incident at Smyrna, the mutiny over the cook’s dismissal, and the events that drove midshipman de Pointiers out of the ship – erupted when crewmen asserted their right to communicate freely with the shore, another key struggle in French and other navies during these years.<sup>61</sup> While there were many reasons why men might want to spend as much time as possible off the ship – ranging from spoilt provisions over twenty-four hour work cycles to sexual frustration – it is likely that French seamen abroad during these first few months of the revolution also were driven by a ravenous thirst for information, and that thirst was most easily quenched in portside taverns, along the wharves, and on the decks of other ships in harbor.<sup>62</sup>

What news from France might the men of the *Alceste* have picked up that summer? By the time they were anchoring off Larnaca in mid-July they had probably received word of the National Assembly’s May 22 declaration that “the French nation renounces undertaking any war

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<sup>60</sup> Richard W. Unger, “Regulation and Organization of Seamen in the Netherlands and Germany before the Industrial Revolution,” in *Seamen in society / Gens de mer en société*, ed. Paul Adam (Perthes: Commission internationale d’histoire maritime, 1980), 2:66-73; *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, ed. Peter Kemp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), s.v. “Oleron, The Laws of”; Travers Twiss, ed., *Monumenta Juridica: The Black Book of the Admiralty* (London: Longman & Co., 1871), 1:89-133; Taillemite, *Histoire ignorée*, 30-33. See also Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), passim.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, the mutiny on the British man-of-war *Defiance* in October 1795, where the demand for shore liberty led to a three-day armed insurrection. Court martial against William Parker (1<sup>st</sup>), Robert McLawrin, George Wythick, Martin Ealey, William Froud, John McDonald, John Sullivan, William Handy, George Harden [Harding], John Prime, Joseph Flint, Michael Cox, John Lawson, William Morrison, John Graham (1<sup>st</sup>), Charles Pick, and William Avery, of the *Defiance*, January 20 to February 11, 1796, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5334.

<sup>62</sup> On the generally recognized high quality of these proletarian maritime information networks during the revolutionary 1790s, see Julius S. Scott, “Crisscrossing Empires: Ships, Sailors, and Resistance in the Lesser Antilles in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, ed. Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), 128-143.

of which the object is conquest, and it will never use its armed forces against the liberty of any people.”<sup>63</sup> The declaration had come after five days of debate, triggered initially by the King’s order to arm fourteen warships to assist Spain against Britain during the Nootka Sound crisis in accordance with the terms of the 1761 Family Compact between the two Bourbon monarchs. What began as an attempt by radical members of the National Assembly to wrest war-making powers from the King in the course of the debates mutated into a rejection of old regime interstate relations, where bellicose Kings and ministers, autocrats and bureaucrats negotiated peace and mobilized for war without concern for the good of the nation, never mind the rights of man, French or otherwise. The resulting decree not only rejected aggressive wars of conquest as a matter of principle, it also defined war-mongering “on the part of ministers or any other agent of the executive power” as “an injury to the nation” (*lèse-nation*), a crime equivalent to treason.<sup>64</sup>

The decree of May 22 became known as “the declaration of peace to the whole world,” and naval seamen could have been forgiven for thinking that their services were now no longer required.<sup>65</sup> But on June 26, just over a month later, the National Assembly clarified with a report by its *comité de la marine* and yet another decree that such most certainly was not the case. In the past, the report argued, the navy had often been used to fight solely for “the honor of the flag” instead of for the interests of French commerce – “an error quite severe.” Today, it continued, a concern for commerce touches everyone, and with the new constitution vast possibilities have opened up for French navigation and industry. It therefore ought to be decreed that “the naval forces are fundamentally intended for the protection of the merchant marine and

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<sup>63</sup> National Assembly, session of May 22, 1790, *AP*, 15:661-662.

<sup>64</sup> National Assembly, session of May 22, 1790, *AP*, 15:662.

<sup>65</sup> Godechot, *La grande nation*, 65-67.

the [overseas] possessions it sustains.” The report concluded with a shot across the bow of all those who still did not get the message: “If one does not respect you for the moderation you have shown in renouncing all offensive wars, all projects of conquest, one will respect the forces you can deploy against all unjust pretensions.”<sup>66</sup> The mighty *Royale* would not be dismantled any time soon.<sup>67</sup>

It is difficult to know what common seamen dispatched “to protect maritime commerce and the national possessions in the different parts of the globe” made of these decrees, but the available evidence suggests that they were aware of the fine line between commercial rivalry and open belligerence, and that they held sophisticated views on the relative morality of various orders they received.<sup>68</sup> For instance, during the Third Anglo-Mysore War (1789-1792) the French frigate *Résolue*, convoying two merchantmen, ran afoul of a British naval blockade and became engaged in a firefight that left 13 men dead and 66 wounded. Two months later, divisional commander Saint-Félix, head of French naval forces in the Indian Ocean, determined to avenge this insult to “the honor of the flag,” and ordered two frigates under his command, the *Résolue* and the *Cybèle*, to seek out and provoke a fight with the British. The crews of both ships mutinied, declaring, first of all, that the British had not acted unjustly, and secondly, that engaging them in a fight could trigger a war between their two countries, which would not be in

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<sup>66</sup> Report by the committee of the navy on the constitutional principles of the navy, National Assembly, session of June 26, 1790, *AP*, 16:468-469.

<sup>67</sup> Far from being abandoned, the naval armament program was in fact slightly accelerated beginning in 1789. Acerra and Meyer, *Marines*, 56-58.

<sup>68</sup> Article 2 of the decree on the constitutional principles of the navy, National Assembly, session of June 26, 1790, *AP*, 16:469.

the interest of the nation, because “it could hurt the war that was currently being waged in France against the aristocrats.”<sup>69</sup>

Whether the crew of the *Alceste* articulated similar positions is not known, but they too were sent on a mission of convoy protection in the midst of a war in which French merchants stood to lose a great deal. France had long enjoyed most favored nation status in the ports of the Ottoman Empire, but the Russian onslaught from the north, steadily extending its control over the Black Sea region, made that a privilege that with rapidly declining value. After the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774 first gave the Russians direct access to the Black Sea and a base for its navy, France inched towards a neutral stance, befriendng the Russians without alienating the Ottomans. While continuing to trade in Turkish ports, French merchants simultaneously tapped the vast markets for French manufactured goods that opened up in the Russian interior through the newly acquired Black Sea ports. Even more importantly perhaps, the Black Sea trade gave access to the sheer inexhaustible timber resources of Poland and western Russia which France depended on for its massive program of naval armament. Before Russia’s southern expansion, eastern European timber was able to reach France only by way of the Baltic and North Seas, shipping lanes entirely too close for comfort to the home bases of the powerful British navy. But despite the promise of the Black Sea trade, French policy makers in the 1780s had to watch British merchants extend their commercial influence even into their own traditional backyard, the eastern Mediterranean, and in response they began planning for a more permanent military presence in the region, eyeing in particular Egypt and Crete as potential naval bases and

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<sup>69</sup> Norman Hampson, “Une mutinerie anti-belliciste aux Indes en 1792,” *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* 22 (1950): 156-159. Hampson speculates that Robespierre’s famous anti-war stance in 1792 – foreign war as a plot initiated by the court to divert the patriots’ attention from the revolutionary struggle waged at home – might not have been just theoretically derived, but instead suggested to him by frontline resistance among soldiers and sailors.

entrepôts for the Levant trade. When the *Alceste* left Toulon for the eastern Mediterranean in the summer of 1790, it was primarily to protect French merchantmen which continued trading in the region while Russia and the Ottoman Empire fought yet another war, but given France's military objectives in the region, the line between commerce-protection and naval expansionism was indeed a fine one.<sup>70</sup>

The high density of shipping in the Mediterranean makes it likely that the crew of the *Alceste* at some point received news of the May 22 "declaration of peace to the whole world," but we can only speculate as to how they might have viewed their mission in its light. Was Captain de Beaurepaire's fear that the men would refuse to fight to protect merchantmen simply because they were disobedient and obviously did not relish the great dangers of naval combat in general, or was it, as on the *Résolue* and *Cybèle* frigates, because they rejected the passive-aggressive stance their government took and wanted to avoid provocations that could result in open warfare? It is impossible to know. It is worth noting that it took a month before trouble arose on board of the *Alceste*. That was long enough for news to travel from Paris to Marseille or Toulon, and from there on to Smyrna, where, de Pointiers reported, the *Alceste*'s boat's crew consorted with men from a French corvette: "From this moment onwards," he continued, "spirits rose, by a perceptible degree."<sup>71</sup>

Even though it is difficult to recover the full motivations that drove a significant part of the *Alceste*'s crew into open confrontation with their officer corps, some of their actions appear to reassert long-suppressed democratic customs of the sea, and others suggest the possibility of

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<sup>70</sup> T.C.W. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London: Longman, 1986), 57-58; Bailey Stone, *Reinterpreting the French Revolution: A global-historical perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 24-26; Daniel Panzac, "International and Domestic Maritime Trade in the Ottoman Empire during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 189-206.

<sup>71</sup> De Pointiers, "Relation," SHM-V, BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2, f. 61.



an anti-war stance, whether ideologically or pragmatically informed. Yet whatever the cause of the unrest, it failed to congeal into a politically articulate form, it failed to turn disorder into a new kind of order. The radicals among the crew did their best to undermine the authority of their officers, who were already badly shaken from the events in Toulon the year before, but they did not move beyond “complete anarchy” to suggest a revolutionary redefinition of shipboard relations. Perhaps it was because they were a minority amongst the crew, if a very active and vocal one, or perhaps because even questioning an order, let alone suggesting a different course altogether, was an action nearly unthinkable in the violently hierarchical world of late eighteenth-century navies, at least in 1790. Or perhaps it was because there was no real, immediate need for it. The meltdown of discipline on board appears to have brought its crew enough benefits – among them, punishments only with the crew’s consent, and shore liberty whenever they liked – so there was little incentive, and much potential danger, in trying to usurp rather than just disturb their officers’ authority. Despite the revolution, mutiny remained an offense punishable by death, its enforcement dependent on the rapidly shifting political winds at home. The crew of the *Alceste* had no good reason to risk it. Their brothers on the *Léopard* did.

### 3.3 “BAD EXAMPLES ARE CONTAGIOUS”<sup>72</sup>

On January 1, 1790, Captain de la Gallissonnière predicted – with astonishing prescience, it turned out – that his crew on the 74-gun ship *Léopard* would mutiny sometime around the end of July. “It is thus my duty,” he reported to the minister of the marine, “to warn you, *Monseigneur*,

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<sup>72</sup> Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, 12 June 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, ff. 113-114.

that one cannot count on this crew if they remain in the colony past the month of July, at which point it will be very important in order to avoid revolts that the ships on this station be relieved.” Gallissonnière was not a mystic. Earlier that day, the crew had come together in an unauthorized assembly – technically speaking, that too was a mutiny – mulled over their several grievances, and then presented the captain with a single, pressing demand: the ship, they warned, had better return to France before the onset of “the bad season,” the annual summer downpour period which drove illness and mortality rates sky-high in the West India command. Gallissonnière, who otherwise enjoyed good relations with his men and emphasized that they had acted towards him in a manner that was “not in the least reprehensible,” knew that this was serious ultimatum. As “classed” men during peacetime, they were only supposed to serve one year at sea for every three or four at home, but by January 1790 the crew had already spent twenty-one months on board of the *Léopard*, thirteen of them in Saint-Domingue. Since leaving Toulon, they had not been paid at all, and before that only a single month’s wages. It was particularly the many fathers amongst them, noted Captain de la Gallissonnière, who grew increasingly dissatisfied. It did not help, he continued, that the men all have “perfect knowledge” of the “constant troubles in France.”<sup>73</sup>

The *Léopard* had sailed from Toulon on October 30, 1788, and its crew therefore missed the horrid winter of 1788-89 and the revolutionary upheavals that followed. Yet the dense merchant traffic between France and its West Indian possessions guaranteed that even if only few naval vessels were deployed that year, news of the “constant troubles” at home quickly

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<sup>73</sup> Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, 1 January 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, ff. 103-104.

spread throughout the empire.<sup>74</sup> During 1789 alone, 18,460 mariners on 710 French vessels arrived in Saint-Domingue, and while the majority of these came from Boudreaux and Nantes, France's major Atlantic seaports, a substantial number also came from Toulon's close neighbor Marseille, which during the 1780s increased its West Indian trade six-fold.<sup>75</sup> The crew of the *Léopard* was therefore able to follow, with only a few weeks' delay, the growing hardship their friends and families suffered at home, the runaway inflation rate, the shortage of food, the bourgeois attempt to hijack the revolution, the March 23 riots, the mounting tensions throughout the summer, the rumors of counter-revolutionary massacres in the weeks following the fall of the Bastille, the formation of a National Guard unit, and finally the complete breakdown of established military discipline during the December 1 insurrection that ended with the overthrow and imprisonment of *commandant* de Rions. It is hardly surprising that the men on board the *Léopard* were eager to get back home to their friends and families, and that preferably without having to endure another season of sickness in the colonies.

And yet, there still was no sign that the ministry of the marine intended to relieve the ships on the Saint-Domingue station anytime soon. In June, Gallissonnière wrote again to emphasize the urgency of having his men sent home no later than the middle of July. On some ships the crews had already started murmuring about rising up and forcing their ships to sail for France, whether they were replaced or not. "It is possible," Gallissonnière admitted, "that this noise is false and has been spread by ill-intentioned spirits [...], but bad examples are

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<sup>74</sup> A ship sailing from France reached Saint-Domingue in approximately six to nine weeks, unless of course it went by way of the West African slave coast, which usually would prolong the voyage by several months. Kenneth J. Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713-1763* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 76-77.

<sup>75</sup> Julius S. Scott, "The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1986), 60-61; Thomas M. Doerflinger, "The Antilles Trade of the Old Regime: A Statistical Overview," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6, no. 3 (1976), 410-411.

contagious.” The crew of the *Sensible* was openly threatening mutiny, and a volunteer seaman on the *Sans Souci*, recently arrived from Brest, had been trying to incite the crew to rise on their officers ever since the ship left France. Even worse, before sailing the man had had the audacity to complain of bad treatment at the hand of his captain, not to Brest’s naval authorities (which in itself would have been an inexcusable breach of military subordination), but to the officers of the town’s revolutionary municipality.<sup>76</sup> As in Toulon, Brest’s naval warworkers had moved rapidly from mob violence in the spring of 1789 to the formation and mass enrollment in a National Guard unit by the late summer, undermining the military chain of command as they strengthened, then radicalized the town’s civil authorities.<sup>77</sup> In Saint-Domingue, where a small and divided ruling class of 31,000 whites and 28,000 free-coloreds held down 465,000 super-exploited slaves, the threat of contagion from such an example was quite understandably felt to be a dire one. Gallissonnière, as station commander, immediately ordered the man on the *Sans Souci* disembarked and sent back to France.<sup>78</sup>

This did nothing to halt the progress of the revolution in Saint-Domingue, nor to prevent Gallissonnière’s men from eventually becoming entangled in it. Tensions between different factions in the colony had grown throughout the spring, and by July the supporters of two rival assemblies, one at Saint-Marc, the other at Le Cap, were rapidly sliding towards armed confrontation. Initial unity in driving the most hated royal bureaucrats from the colony and

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<sup>76</sup> Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, 12 June 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, ff. 113-114.

<sup>77</sup> Letters from M. d’Hector, Brest, 22 July 1789, 24 July 1789, and 4 September 1789, AN (F), Mar B/3/796, Service Général, Lettres reçue, Brest, Lorient, Painbeuf, Rochefort, 1789, ff. 42, 44-45, 72; Henwood and Monage, *Brest*, 55-82. See also section 3.4 below.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, 12 June 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, f. 114.

loosening the metropolitan bonds on the island's economic life as much as possible gave way to divisions of class and race among Saint-Domingue's revolutionaries. When orders for the election of a temporary consultative colonial assembly arrived in January 1790, the *petits blancs* – white laborers, smallholders, shopkeepers, artisans, overseers, and the like – seized the opportunity to move against their rich white planter allies, the so-called *blancs-blancs* (the white whites), whose domination of the colony's social, political, and economic life they deeply resented. Small whites, alongside coffee and indigo planters from the western and southern provinces involved in the inter-imperial contraband trade, used violence, intimidation, and their superiority of numbers over the wealthy sugar planters of the north to secure a majority in the new assembly. They promptly reconfigured it into a permanent General Assembly and asserted the right to initiate all legislation that concerned the government of the colony. In reaction, the *blancs-blancs* of the north, together with their merchant and lawyer allies in the Provincial Assembly at Le Cap, drew closer to the class of people the small whites detested most of all, the free-colored, many of whom were wealthy plantation owners and therefore simultaneously of an economically superior class and a racially inferior caste.<sup>79</sup>

In Paris, meanwhile, the National Assembly, well aware of the enormous profits that could be lost by meddling with the old regime's colonial system, sought a politically acceptable way of quarantining the revolution in metropolitan France, keeping its universalism away from the racial slave systems of the plantation islands. Saint-Domingue alone produced half of the world's coffee, more sugar than Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil combined, and in 1790 purchased almost half of the 97,860 slaves that European and North American traders sent across the

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<sup>79</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 76-85; C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1980), 50-59.

Atlantic that year. The colony was the most productive and profitable piece of land in the entire Atlantic system, quite possibly in the whole world. It played a crucial role in the French imperial economy even before the state bankruptcy and financial crisis of the late 1780s. Afterwards, as the plantation economy kept booming and expanding, its importance only increased. French colonial merchants, shipowners, investors, insurers, bankers, and wholesalers all grew obscenely wealthy from its slave-produced commodities, nearly all of them addictive. Even beyond the great port cities of Nantes, Bordeaux, and Marseille millions of common laboring people depended for their livelihood on the Saint-Domingue trade. If the radical egalitarianism of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen – “all men are born and remain equal in rights” – were allowed to escape beyond French shores and touch upon the slave plantation islands overseas, the whole edifice of this vast tri-continental system of colonial exploitation, transatlantic exchange, and metropolitan accumulation would lose the bedrock it stood upon: racial slavery.<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, on March 8, the National Assembly passed a decree which declared that while “considering the colonies as a part of the French empire and desiring for them to enjoy the fruits of the happy regeneration that here has taken place,” the intention most certainly was not “to subject them to laws which could prove incompatible with their local and particular customs.” The decree left internal colonial governance to local assemblies, “freely elected by the citizens” – a category which may or may not include free-coloreds – but it strictly prohibited “innovations in any branch of commerce, either direct or indirect, between France and its colonies.” Finally, it

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<sup>80</sup> Dubois, *Avengers*, 21; The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, <http://slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces?yearFrom=1788&yearTo=1792&disembarkation=801.305.405.304.600.502.310.804.704.403.307.201.802.308.803.100.309.501.401.203.703.705.306.303.204.402.805.205.311.701.302.702.301.404.202> (accessed June 12, 2009).

erected a protective shield around the institution of slavery by putting “colonials and their property under the particular safeguard of the nation, and whoever works to create an insurrection against them is declared a criminal against the nation.”<sup>81</sup>

The deputies of the General Assembly at Saint-Marc greeted the arrival of the March 8 decree with outrage. The Assembly had been elected with an exceptionally broad franchise – all white males resident for at least a year in the colony were admitted – but the instructions for implementation that accompanied the March 8 decree not only suggested the possibility of political rights for free-coloreds, it introduced property and tax-paying requirements which once again excluded many of the newly enfranchised small whites.<sup>82</sup> Members of the Assembly announced that they would rather die than cede political power to “a bastard and degenerate race.”<sup>83</sup> A campaign of violence against the free-coloreds quickly ensued, culminating at the end of April in two decrees that forcibly confined them to their parishes. Shortly afterwards, on May 28, the General Assembly put forward what it called “the fundamental principles of the constitution of Saint-Domingue,” in which it declared itself sovereign over all affairs internal to the colony, and assumed a significant say in those that concerned its external trade relations.<sup>84</sup>

Even amongst the supporters of the Saint-Marc assembly there were those who thought the May 28 declaration went a little too far in the direction of colonial autonomy. Enemies

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<sup>81</sup> Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (New York: Verso, 1988), 177-183; “Décret,” session of March 8, 1790, *AP*, 12:72-73.

<sup>82</sup> “Instructions Addressed by the National Assembly to the Colony of Saint-Domingue,” in *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. by Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006), 71-72; Blackburn, *Overthrow*, 183.

<sup>83</sup> Pamphile de Lacroix, *Mémoires pour servir à l’Histoire de la Révolution de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: Pillet Ainé, 1819), 1:32.

<sup>84</sup> Souad Degachi, *Barnave: Rapporteur du Comité des Colonies (1789-1791)* (Révolution Française.net Editions, 2007), <http://revolution-francaise.net/2007/09/05/164-barnave-rapporteur-du-comite-des-colonies-1789-1791> (last accessed June 17, 2009), 67; Lacroix, *Mémoires*, 34-37; James, *Black Jacobins*, 58-59.

quickly seized the opportunity to hurl charges of separatism and treason at the General Assembly. Opposition centered on the *blancs-blancs*-dominated Provincial Assembly of the North, which now allied itself with what remained of the colonial government. Together they began to prepare for a military offensive. The General Assembly at Saint-Marc responded in kind, and both sides now claimed sovereignty over the King's forces stationed in the colony. But while the Le Cap assembly worked through the old command structures, the radicals in Saint-Marc declared their enemies traitors and used the network of revolutionary municipalities and regional committees to appeal directly to the troops. This proved largely fruitless amongst the soldiers in the colonial regiments – only one detachment was reformed into a National Guard unit – but the sailors in the Port-au-Prince squadron, and especially on the flagship *Léopard*, seemed dangerously willing to be “seduced by the insinuations of the General Assembly of the Colony meeting at Saint-Marc and the secret machinations of the Committee of the West at Port-au-Prince.”<sup>85</sup>

Gallissonnière knew that a mutiny amongst his men could have devastating consequences. His squadron, led by the flagship *Léopard*, provided the all-important naval screen that provided for the safe, secure, and legal circulation of slaves and tropical commodities in and out of Port-au-Prince, Saint-Domingue's administrative capital and its second most important commercial harbor.<sup>86</sup> When Gallissonnière had first alerted his superiors to the risk of insurrection in his squadron at the beginning of the year, he had been careful to emphasize that

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<sup>85</sup> Lacroix, *Mémoires*, 1:41-42; Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, August 2, 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, f. 119.

<sup>86</sup> In 1789, the value of exports from Port-au-Prince exceeded 34 million *livres tournois*, compared to Le Cap's 46 million. Its trade brought in 1.8 million *livres tournois* in customs duties, compared to 2.4 million at the Le Cap. David Geggus, “The Major Port Towns of Saint Domingue in the Later Eighteenth Century,” in *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850*, ed. by Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 90, 94.



“until this moment the mariners embarked on the King’s ships have taken no side in the troubles that exist here, however agitated they may have become. If they no longer were to recognize their commander, one cannot imagine the level of disorder to which things would be carried. It is all the more dangerous,” he added, “that they are able to ravage both sea and land.”<sup>87</sup> With only about 2,000 royal soldiers in the colony, the *Léopard* alone with its 74 guns and hundreds of men trained at small arms could decisively tip the balance of military power in favor of the Saint-Marc assembly if the crew chose to violate orders and intervene on its behalf.

In fear of such action, Gallissonnière, on July 27, ordered the *Léopard* to prepare for sea. He planned to sail for Le Cap early in the morning, but the next day he received a decree from the Saint-Marc assembly forbidding him to leave the Port-au-Prince roadstead until further notice. Gallissonnière immediately ordered all unauthorized communication with the shore shut down, and in the course of the day intercepted at least three packages addressed to various petty officers, each containing multiple copies of the decree. The crew, it seems, was wavering. In the afternoon, they had appeared happy enough with the prospect of sailing that night, but by nine-o’clock in the evening Gallissonnière was told a conspiracy was underway to refuse orders. An hour later there was enough turmoil in the ship that he gave up all hope of being obeyed that night. He delayed the departure, “flattering myself,” as he put it, “with the notion that the leaders of the cabal would be less audacious in the morning.”<sup>88</sup>

He had flattered himself in vain. When ordered to raise the topsail the next evening, the grumpy crew first reacted sluggishly, and then one by one they began murmuring, their voices

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<sup>87</sup> Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, 1 January 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, f. 104.

<sup>88</sup> Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, August 2, 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, ff. 119-121.

rising louder, until finally the boatswain was forced to pipe for silence over their repeated shouts of “*Non, non, non!*” Gallissonnière reasoned with them, threatened them, reassured them, but when the order for raising the topsail was given again, it was met with another round of “*non, non, non!*” The captain then ordered one of the more enthusiastic mutineers, a volunteer seaman named Martin, arrested, but “the whole crew took his side, [...] shouting that he is not arrested.” The crew told Gallissonnière that the ship would not sail without orders from the Committee of the West. “We are to be used to spill the blood of citizens,” they claimed, “and that we will not do. The [Port-au-Prince infantry] regiment is planning to butcher the town.” Gallissonnière tried to assure them that no such plans were afoot, but the crew wanted to know where he was planning to take them. Le Cap, he said, but that was met with an instant, unanimous refusal. Mole St. Nicholas, he tried, and was refused. Gonaives, he offered, and again was refused. Finally he suggested France, but the crew once again told him that “we want to stay here to defend the citizens of Port-au-Prince.” They would not sail anywhere without orders from the Committee. Mostly for form’s sake, one suspects, Gallissonnière made a final attempt at being obeyed, but he was laughed off the deck when Martin replied to his order to raise the topsail with “sure, we’ll raise the topsail, but the anchor stays where it is, so why even raise the topsail?” Gallissonnière left the ship shortly afterwards, along with most of his officers.<sup>89</sup>

The *Léopard*’s refusal to participate did not in itself avert the risk of a massacre, and the very night Gallissonnière abandoned the ship, July 29, the *chevalier* de Maudit, colonel of Port-au-Prince’s royal regiment, received orders from the colonial government to dissolve, with force if necessary, the Committee of the West, before moving his troops to Saint-Marc, where they

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<sup>89</sup> Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, August 2, 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, ff. 121-122; “Déposition de M. de France, Lieut. de Vaisseau,” SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, f. 158.

were to rendezvous with the regiment sent from Le Cap.<sup>90</sup> The next day, as Maudit was mobilizing his troops, including veterans of the free-colored militia, the *Léopard*'s crew sent Gallissonnière a letter, inviting him, together with his officers, to return to the ship which, in their opinion, "they [had] abandoned without any reason whatsoever." The mutineers continued assuring their captain that

we do not lack that respect which is due to you. But we have the honor to observe that if failing to come back on board the ship, it is up to the crew, in the final instance, to elect (from amongst the few remaining officers) a captain in order to guarantee the preservation of a ship which ought to be dear to all good Frenchmen.<sup>91</sup>

Gallissonnière, of course, declined. Because the crew had thrown in their lot with the General Assembly at Saint-Marc, he told them, they had become "traitors to France, and henceforth could no longer be commanded by Frenchmen." Neither he nor his officers would therefore resume command as long as the crew remained "determined to renounce their fatherland and do every possible evil in trying to squander the beautiful colony of St. Domingue." There is no clearer proof of their treason, he told them, than their unanimous refusal to sail for France. However, having consulted with the military council at Port-au-Prince, Gallissonnière was willing to

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<sup>90</sup> Lacroix, *Mémoires*, 1:42-44; Dubois, *Avengers*, 86.

<sup>91</sup> "Copie de la lettre de l'équipage du vaisseau reçu le 30 juillet 1790," SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, f. 129.

forgive and forget all if they immediately returned to duty, raised the topsail, lifted the anchor, and then, without delay, set course for France.<sup>92</sup>

No one really believed the charge of treason, least of all Gallissonnière. After all, he had spent the previous months writing letter after letter testifying to his crew's burning, near-mutinous desire to return home and be reunited with their families. In his report on the mutiny, he even added an observation which might appear "very singular," he admitted, but one that needed to be made nonetheless. "The crew of the warship *Léopard*," he argued, "is infinitely more unfortunate than guilty. They were truly persuaded that in taking the side of the assembly in St. Marc and against the government and officer corps, they were serving the good cause. They certainly are not disenchanted with France."<sup>93</sup> However, despite Gallissonnière's assurances, they clearly were highly disenchanted with the traditional representatives of France, their officers and the colonial government, and chose to replace them with a local, democratically elected assembly as the proper embodiment of the French nation's will in the colony. But Gallissonnière was surprisingly nonchalant about all this. Perhaps he was hedging his bets, not knowing which way the political winds would be blowing upon his return to France, or perhaps he refused to be anything but kindly paternal to his crew. But Saint-Domingue's governor, M. le *comte* de Peinier, took a far sterner line. In his opinion, the crew was offering a most dangerously corrosive example and "all had to be sacrificed in order to remove this ship which could become the cause of the loss of the colony if the crew, even after having renounced

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<sup>92</sup> Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, August 2, 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, ff. 124-125.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, August 2, 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, f. 127.

them, cling to principles which are difficult to destroy while they remain in St. Domingue.”<sup>94</sup> When the *Léopard* refused to sail for France, Governor de Peinier ordered the harbor batteries and the fort to prepare red-hot shot for a bombardment of the ship.<sup>95</sup>

Colonel de Maudit’s forces in the meantime launched an attack on the Committee of the West, killed three men, arrested forty supporters, and drove most committee members out of town and into hiding. It seemed the feared massacre might yet take place. Colonel de Maudit in particular stoked the fires when he treated the flags of Port-au-Prince’s three National Guard units, which he found in the committee’s meeting place, as trophies captured from an enemy. This united the white townspeople in hatred against the royal troops, even those who had previously sat on the fence. Only the soldiers’ departure for Saint-Marc averted open violence.<sup>96</sup>

On the *Léopard*, meanwhile, the crew watched in disbelief as preparations were being made on shore to bombard them with red-hot shot, the most horrific projectile for a wooden man-of-war, rarely even used against enemies, and certainly never against fellow citizens, be they ever so mutinous. In order to maintain “peace and harmony between the two parties,” they quickly informed Gallissonnière, none of the remaining officers would be allowed off the ship.<sup>97</sup> The next day, having elected “with one voice” the *Léopard*’s second lieutenant, M. de Santo Domingo, to replace Gallissonnière, the crew took the ship to sea, renamed it *Le Sauveur des*

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<sup>94</sup> Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, August 2, 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, f. 125.

<sup>95</sup> Lacroix, *Mémoires*, 1:48. Gallissonnière claimed that no such preparations for a bombardment were made – it was merely a rumor spread by “ill-intentioned men.” Letter from M. de la Gallissonnière, Port-au-Prince, August 2, 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, f. 126.

<sup>96</sup> Lacroix, *Mémoires*, 1:42-43.

<sup>97</sup> “Copie de la lettre de M. de Santo Domingo, reçu le 30 juillet 1790,” SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, ff. 129-130.

*Français* (The Savior of the French), and hurried towards Saint-Marc, some fifty miles up the coast, where the General Assembly had issued a desperate proclamation: “In the name of the Nation, the Law, the King, and the imperiled French part of Saint-Domingue – Union, force, haste, and courage! The infamous [Governor] Peinier, the execrable [Colonel] Maudit have accomplished their vile project: they have soaked their hands in the blood of citizens. To arms!”<sup>98</sup> Yet with two small armies converging on Saint-Marc, one from Le Cap, the other from Port-au-Prince, both preparing to lay siege to the town, the military situation was overwhelmingly against the forces of the General Assembly, which at most consisted of one detachment of soldiers, some ragtag National Guardsmen, and perhaps a few of the town’s braver civilians. The arrival of the *Léopard* – the name-change does not appear to have taken hold – did nothing to change this, since its crew declared that while they were ready “to defend the assembly until the last drop of their blood, they would not take it upon themselves to act offensively in its name against its enemies.” This refusal drove the final nail into the coffin of the General Assembly. Eighty-five of its members, most of those still remaining at Saint-Marc, together with ninety soldiers that had defected from the Port-au-Prince regiment, abandoned the town and boarded the *Léopard*, which immediately heaved its anchor, raised its sails, and set course for Brest. Five weeks later, on September 14, they finally arrived back in France. It had been nearly two years since they first sailed from Toulon.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> “Copie de la lettre de M. le baron de Santo Domingo, reçu le 31 juillet 1790,” SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, f. 130; “Expédition du Procès Verbal fait à bord du vaisseau le *Léopard* surnommé le Sauveur des Français en rade à Saint Marc, 6 août 1790,” SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, f. 150-152; Lacroix, *Mémoires*, 1:45.

<sup>99</sup> Lacroix, *Mémoires*, 1:42-43; Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d’Haïti* (Port-au-Prince: JH Courtois, 1847), 1:46; Letter, Redon de Beaupréau, Brest, September 14, 1790, SHM-V, BB/3/2, Service Général, Correspondance, Brest, Lorient, Rochefort, Toulon, 1790, f. 130.

### 3.4 “VIVE LA NATION! LES ARISTOCRATES À LA LANTERNE!”<sup>100</sup>

While the crew of the *Léopard*, on station in the West Indies, carefully and hesitantly began the process of reconstructing the revolutionary navy from below – rejecting the authority of the royally appointed officer corps, electing their own captain, diverting the chain of command, and finding a new source of legitimacy in popularly elected assemblies – the National Assembly’s *Comité de Marine* set about the same project in Paris from above. Created in October 1789, the committee was charged to review the composition of the naval officer corps, the fleet’s administrative structure, its manning system, and its disciplinary regime. Where necessary, the committee was to suggest new rules and regulations, “founded on reason” and agreeable with a “free constitution.”<sup>101</sup> Its first two proposals – a bill suggesting minor changes to the manning system, and another reconfiguring the balance between civil and military administrators – were considered ill-conceived by the full Assembly, and only after the committee had been expanded with several left-leaning members of the maritime bourgeoisie did it successfully begin to send bills to the floor. On June 26, the new constitutional principles of the navy were passed into law, which turned the fleet into an instrument of the nation’s will, dedicated to the protection of French commerce and overseas colonization (see section 3.2 above). Budgetary control was firmly lodged with the National Assembly, and while the King remained the fleet’s commander in chief, all other positions within the navy were theoretically thrown open to every qualified citizen. With that, naval policy was brought into line with the May 19 abolition of the nobility,

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<sup>100</sup> Letter, Albert de Rions, Brest, 16 September 1790, in *Recueil*, 1:163; “Affaire de Brest,” *Révolutions de Paris* 63 (18-25 September 1790), 527.

<sup>101</sup> Cormack, *Revolution*, 79; “Décret concernant le code pénal maritime (16, 19, et 21 Août 1790),” in *Recueil des lois relatives à la marine et aux colonies* (Paris: L’imprimerie de la république, Year V [1796-1797]), 1:122.

although it would take time before commoners actually began to ascend the quarterdeck in meaningful numbers.<sup>102</sup>

These were important innovations, yet they paled in comparison with the committee's next proposal: a completely new *code pénal maritime* (articles of war), which it presented to the National Assembly on August 16. The *Comité de Marine* rejected the existing code, largely unchanged since the reign of King Louis XIV, as “a work of despotism, as incomplete as it was rigorous.” Inspired by the ideas of enlightenment penology that were rapidly winning converts among European reformers, the committee went on to list its shortcomings: “there are no gradations in punishment, excessive severity, death and galley service pronounced for offences that can be excused by human weakness, and crimes which religion alone ought to punish expose the unlucky or insane perpetrator to the most ferocious punishments.” Despite such oppressive laws, order was maintained in the fleet, the committee argued, because officers and men had reached a tacit agreement to disregard them in favor of gentler paternalist relations. This had worked surprisingly well: “custom has instilled a nearly religious respect for authority [in the men], arbitrary but always exercised with tenderness and moderation, which takes the place of laws that are never executed.” It was high time, members of the committee believed, now that they lived under “a free Constitution,” to abolish this system of personal, arbitrary, and extra-legal rule and reinstate the supreme authority of the law.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Norman Hampson, “The ‘Comité de Marine’ of the Constituent Assembly,” *The Historical Journal* 2, no. 2 (1959): 134-136.

<sup>103</sup> *Rapport sur les Peines à infliger dans l'Armée Navale, et dans les Ports et Arsénaux, fait au nom du Comité de la Marine, dans la Séance du 16 Août 1790* (Paris, 1790), 4-7. For parallel reforms in the French revolutionary army, see Charles H. Hammond, Jr., “The French Revolution and the Enlightening of Military Justice,” *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 34 (2006): 134-146. For discussions of Cesare Beccaria's groundbreaking influence on European penal thought, see Michel Porret, ed., *Beccaria et la Culture Juridique des Lumières: Actes du colloque européen de Genève, 25-26 novembre 1995* (Geneva: Libraire Droz, 1997).



The new *code pénal maritime* contained two major innovations. First, when it came to determining a man's guilt, trial by jury replaced the naval court martial. This introduced the principle of popular sovereignty into a process which traditionally had been dominated completely by the officer corps. Instead of facing a panel made up of only his superior officers, an accused seaman now pleaded to a jury composed of one warrant officer, three petty officers, and three of his fellow *matelots*. In addition, the accused man would be allowed to choose one defender from amongst the crew. His commanding officer was completely removed from the whole process, except at the very end when, in his role as the nation's highest representative on board, he was given "the beautiful right" of being able to show mercy by commuting the sentence to a lesser one. It was an arrangement, the committee believed, "truly based in civil liberty, and honorable to a free people."<sup>104</sup>

Second, the new code tightly regulated, defined, and precisely graded the range of punishments that could be imposed on a guilty man. Here, it distinguished between "afflictive" and "disciplinary" punishments. The latter were incurred for a very broad range of minor offences, such as drunkenness, fighting, absence without leave, or lighting an unauthorized fire below deck. These were all far too small to warrant a trial, and the captain was therefore given the flexibility of choosing an appropriate punishment from a very narrow list of options. Such arbitrariness was not ideal, the committee conceded, but since the aim was correction and not retribution, only mild punishments, such as withholding the wine ration for a few days or forcing a man to wear a foot-ring with a trailing chain, were permitted. The code also urged the captain

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<sup>104</sup> "Décret concernant le code pénal maritime (16, 19, et 21 Août 1790)," in *Recueil*, 1:123-126; *Rapport sur les Peines*, 8.

to exercise all possible restraint and understanding, and to behave towards his crew as mercifully as a father would towards his children.<sup>105</sup>

Violations that called for “afflictive” punishments were a different matter: “here all uncertainty disappears; the punishment is as precise as the crime.” Indeed, most of the new *code pénal maritime* consisted of a long list of serious shipboard offences that were matched to precisely defined punishments, many of them as gruesome as anything contained in the old code, including flogging, dunking, and running the gauntlet. Once a jury issued a guilty verdict, the punishments would automatically be imposed by the majestic objectivity of the law, except for those crimes that demanded the death penalty or galley service, in which case a “martial council” composed of high-ranking naval officers first would have to confirm the verdict by a 7-4 majority (for galley service) or an 8-3 majority (for the death penalty).<sup>106</sup>

Despite retaining some very harsh penalties for serious offences, when compared to those of other navies, the new French *code pénal maritime* was a model of enlightened law-giving. In the Swedish navy, which also rewrote its *Krigs-Articlar* in the 1790s, a seaman could, for example, be killed by firing squad for desertion, blasphemy, or refusal of orders, or have his right hand hacked off, his body broken on the wheel, and his head chopped off for treason. A mutinous crew could be decimated, and the surviving ninety percent flogged with forty lashes each, followed by a life-time of hard labor in the dockyards.<sup>107</sup> British courts martial could sentence seamen to be hanged for, among other things, desertion, uttering seditious words,

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<sup>105</sup> “Décret concernant le code pénal maritime (16, 19, et 21 Août 1790),” in *Recueil*, 1:129-130; *Rapport sur les Peines*, 10.

<sup>106</sup> “Décret concernant le code pénal maritime (16, 19, et 21 Août 1790),” in *Recueil*, 1:130-139; *Rapport sur les Peines*, 10-12.

<sup>107</sup> *Kongl. Maj:ts Krigs-Articlar för des Krigsmagt til Lands och Siös, Gifne Stockholms Slott den 31 Martii 1798* (Stockholm: Kongl. Tryckeriet, 1798).

disobeying or quarreling with an officer, holding or merely plotting mutinous assemblies, sleeping on watch or abandoning one's station, committing robbery, or having homosexual relations on board. In addition, captains were given a virtually free hand in ordering men flogged with the cat-o'-nine-tails.<sup>108</sup> By contrast, the members of the *Comité de Marine* took away the captain's right to impose extra-judicial punishment beatings and even would have liked to see the death penalty abolished – both “humanity” and “justice” demanded it, they argued – but since they felt that such a momentous step ought to be a general one for the whole of the empire, the new articles of war instead restricted its application to crimes that either endangered a large number of citizens or society itself, such as treason or sharing intelligence with the enemy.<sup>109</sup>

The reformed *code pénal maritime* was well-intentioned, informed by humanitarian and democratic ideals, and unrivalled amongst eighteenth-century naval codes in its application of enlightenment penal philosophy. Unfortunately, it was also wholly bereft of understanding for the proud culture of deep-sea naval warworkers. A majority of members on the *Comité de Marine* had personal or professional connections to the sea. Several were high-ranking, aristocratic naval officers and administrators, others merchants, bankers, and lawyers involved in overseas trade. Most came from port cities or the maritime provinces.<sup>110</sup> None of them, however, had spent any time before the mast, and that was all too evident in their work. Seamen reacted with outrage to new *code pénal maritime*, and its official reading on September 6 sparked a massive mutiny at Brest, home to the navy's Atlantic fleet and its largest, most important *Arsenal*. Trouble began on the *America*, spread to the flagship *Majesteux*, and from there to all

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<sup>108</sup> John Irving Maxwell, *The Spirit of Marine Law, or, Compendium of the Statutes Relating to the Admiralty* (London: Bunney and Cold, 1800), 17-30.

<sup>109</sup> *Rapport sur les Peines*, 11-12.

<sup>110</sup> Hampson, “Comité de Marine,” 132-133, 135-136.

the other warships in the roadstead. Soon between 1,500 and 2,000 seamen had seized control of their ships' boats and were rowing towards Brest. Shopkeepers boarded up their stores for fear of looting, and the panic-stricken municipal authorities ordered troops to be assembled and armed in their barracks, ready to meet violence with violence. But to everyone's surprise, the mutineers held a disciplined march through town, and when they arrived at the *hôtel de ville* they asked for permission to present the municipality with a list of grievances regarding the new *code pénal maritime*. Thirty men, two representatives from each of the fifteen crews present, were invited to speak in the chamber.<sup>111</sup>

The men had three complaints. First, they thought it completely unacceptable that the new code allowed boatswains and their mates to continue carrying ropes' ends as symbols of their office. The only real purpose of these was to knock men senseless, and therefore they were totally inappropriate when some kind of insignia on their arms would do just as well for a distinguishing mark. Second, the protesters objected to the new "disciplinary" punishment of being forced to wear a foot-ring with a trailing chain, which replaced the old irons that stapled a man to the deck. The ring and chain, they argued, was a punishment for criminals, and it degraded a seaman of the fleet to be treated like a galley slave. They also really disliked that withdrawal of the wine ration had become an officially sanctioned form of "disciplinary" punishment. Third, despite the restrictions on the application of "afflictive" punishments, some

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<sup>111</sup> "Lettre de M. de la Luzerne, en date du 13 septembre," National Assembly, session of 13 September 1790, *AP*, 18:729; "Rapport sur l'insurrection arrivée à Brest," National Assembly, session of 15 September 1790, *AP*, 18:766; "8 septembre 1790," in *Brest pendant la Révolution (documents inédits): Correspondance de la Municipalité avec les Députés de la Sénéchaussée de Brest aux États Généraux et à l'Assemblée Constituante, 1789-1791*, ed. by L. Esquieu and L. Delourmel (Brest: Soc. Anon. de l'Union Républicaine du Finistère, 1909), 196; "Affaire de Brest," *Révolutions de Paris* 63 (18-25 September 1790), 525.

of them remained unacceptably out of proportion to the crime, such as dunking for bringing alcohol on board or the death penalty for lightly striking an officer.<sup>112</sup>

The municipality promised to urge *commandant* Albert de Rions – after having been chased out of Toulon, the minister of the marine had thought it wise to appoint him to the same post at Brest – to forward their concerns to the National Assembly, which responded with a testy decree a week later. “Some lost men,” it read, “have misunderstood the happy dispositions of the Assembly’s decree, and, confused about the intentions behind a number of articles, have overlooked how the new code, given to them with paternal solicitude, is gentler and more just than the rigorous and arbitrary regime by which they have been governed.” The Assembly went on to reject the complaints put forward by Rions in the men’s name. The rope’s end, it declared with a surprising lack of reforming spirit, had been used since time immemorial in the French and every other European navy, and therefore one should only be concerned with preventing its abuse. As for the foot-ring with the trailing chain, its intention was to replace the painful and unhealthy punishment of being put in irons on deck, and hence there really could be no legitimate complaints about it. The same went for the withdrawal of the wine ration. This was an extremely mild punishment, and in no way could it be construed to be a degradation. The decree did not address the issue of disproportionately severe punishments.<sup>113</sup>

The experienced Rions had warned the Assembly that the men’s complaints needed to be either taken very seriously – preferably two commissioners should be sent to Brest to deal with them directly – or the whole fleet must be disarmed, and the men dispersed. The Assembly

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<sup>112</sup> “8 septembre 1790,” in *Brest pendant la Révolution*, 197-198.

<sup>113</sup> “8 septembre 1790,” in *Brest pendant la Révolution*, 198; “Décret,” National Assembly, session of 15 September 1790, *AP*, 18:767.

dismissed him, perhaps suspecting that after his experiences at Toulon he scared a little too easily in the face of lower-class insurgencies. The revolt was far from a general one among the crews, it claimed, and most likely “enemies of the Constitution (because unfortunately these are everywhere)” were responsible for spreading the seeds of discontent, targeting in particular “new seamen [*matelots novices*], men lacking in training and only barely exercised in discipline, who can very easily be entangled by error and suggestion.” The Assembly was persuaded “that all true mariners remained faithful to military discipline, [and] that the confidence which the seamen have in their commander, as well as their sense of duty, is sufficient for maintaining that exact subordination which has always been the sign of a free people.”<sup>114</sup>

This “free people” who regularly braved the war-torn, storm-tossed waters of the north Atlantic probably felt, one suspects, that they did not need land-lubbing legislators to lecture them on the importance of shipboard discipline. One must assume they were quite aware of the need for proper submission to authority so as not to endanger the ship and everyone in it, but at the same time, as a “free people” they expected that authority to be legitimate.<sup>115</sup> And that, it increasingly appeared, was not the case with their royally appointed officers. At Brest, much like Toulon, the naval officer corps had always been viewed as a powerful alien imposition, and it only made matters worse that virtually all of them had a noble pedigree.<sup>116</sup> Following the July 1789 outbreak of the revolution, suspicion against them mounted continuously, and when they refused to let their men participate in the nationwide, ceremonious oath-swearing of the July 14

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<sup>114</sup> “Rapport sur l’insurrection arrivée à Brest,” National Assembly, session of 15 September 1790, *AP*, 18:766; “Décret,” National Assembly, session of 15 September 1790, *AP*, 18:767.

<sup>115</sup> Even self-governing pirate crews submitted completely to the authority of their captain whenever the ship was in any kind of danger. See Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), esp. ch. 4.

<sup>116</sup> Henwood and Monage, *Brest*, 12-30.

Feast of the Federation in the summer of 1790, grumbling was finally transformed into open hostility. The influential newspaper *Révolutions de Paris* exploded with rage:

At London, Edinburgh, Dublin, Oxford, people came together to join, with their hearts and spirits, our confederation; one hundred thousand Dutchmen, despite the oppression under which they groan, conveyed to us their congratulations; they celebrated our liberty, in spite of the tyrant who oppresses them. Hamburg led the shouts of elation which resounded in northern Germany. The famous Klopstock celebrated our revolution in an ode which he recited. The fires of joy and the sound of artillery rounds honored it, and while perhaps there is not a town in all of Europe which did not applaud our national feast, the port of Brest maintained the most doleful silence.

Echoing Sieyès' famous judgment on the aristocracy, the paper charged Brest's naval officer corps with having made themselves irrevocably into "strangers to their country." "It is high time," the paper concluded, "that the National Assembly takes on the task of regenerating that part of the military to which we have entrusted the safety of our coasts."<sup>117</sup>

The danger of an unreconstructed officer corps dominated by the aristocracy appeared to be confirmed the very next month when the *marquis* de Bouillé used 4,500 troops to put down an army mutiny at Nancy over pay arrears and disciplinary matters with unprecedented savagery. One soldier was broken on the wheel, 22 hanged, and 41 condemned to 30 years galley service at Brest. The so-called *affaire de Nancy* caused a major outcry, and on the national political scene it

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<sup>117</sup> "Nouvelles de Provinces: Brest," *Révolutions de Paris* 57 (7-14 August 1790), 244; Albert Soboul, *A Short History of the French Revolution, 1789-1799* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 10-11.

effectively marked the end of Lafayette's attempt to forge a coalition ruling class between progressive members of the aristocracy and the revolutionary bourgeoisie. Individual nobles had already been implicated in extremist counter-revolutionary plots over the preceding months, but following the events at Nancy the whole aristocratic class became firmly identified with organized, violent reaction. Even Lafayette, "the hero of two worlds, the man who became immortal in the cause of liberty," was denounced by Marat in his *L'Ami du Peuple* as "the leader of the counter-revolutionaries and the inspiration of all the conspiracies against our beloved country."<sup>118</sup>

Into this atmosphere of heated anger the National Assembly released its new *code pénal maritime*, and though "enlightened," it failed to take into account that the longstanding paternalist bonds between aristocratic officers and plebeian men were already damaged beyond repair after only a year of revolution. Seamen now considered themselves equal citizens of the French nation, which is why they complained about the new code to the elected municipality ("because in each town they are the representatives of the nation") and not to their commanders.<sup>119</sup> As citizens, they expected to be treated with dignity and respect. "Nothing is more justified," a writer for *Révolutions de Paris* explained, "than their complaints against the *foot-ring and the foot-ring with a trailing chain*. It is enough that these punishments appear outwardly to assimilate them to convicts in order for them to be insufferable."<sup>120</sup> Many radical seamen in the fleet were also no longer willing to participate in the demeaning illusion of their

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<sup>118</sup> Alan Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters: The Army and French Society during the Revolution and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 16; Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution: From its origins to 1793* (London: Routledge, 2001), 136-139; Jean-Paul Marat quoted in Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution, 1787-1799: From the Storming of the Bastille to Napoleon* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 174.

<sup>119</sup> "8 septembre 1790," in *Brest pendant la Révolution*, 197.

<sup>120</sup> "Affaire de Brest," *Révolutions de Paris* 63 (18-25 September 1790), 529. Italics in the original.



commander as “the head of a large family who chastises with tender, even fatherly corrections those of his children who have strayed into error.”<sup>121</sup> Such undignified pretense was especially intolerable when the imagined father figure was in fact a politically suspicious aristocrat, in whom the new code invested dangerously arbitrary powers not only to punish and but to degrade those citizens who fell under his command. “There is no point in revolution,” the article in *Révolutions de Paris* continued,

as long as the active forces of the empire continue to be directed by commanders known or suspected of being enemies of public liberty. What confidence can they inspire? What obedience can they exact from those who are destined to serve under their command when their conduct and their manifest opinions give the soldier a thousand reasons to believe that it is dangerous to march under their banner?<sup>122</sup>

The brutal suppression of the army mutiny at Nancy – forty-one participants were now incarcerated in Brest’s Pontaniou prison – supplied doubters with ample evidence of these dangers.

Before the National Assembly even had had the opportunity to dismiss the seamen’s complaints against the new *code pénal maritime*, another mutiny broke out at Brest. On September 11, the crew of the *Ferme* refused to weigh anchor and set sail for the West Indies at the head of a small squadron of eight vessels. There had been long delays in their departure, and the three months’ advance they received when coming on board had already been used up. In

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<sup>121</sup> *Rapport sur les Peines*, 10.

<sup>122</sup> “Affaire de Brest,” *Révolutions de Paris* 63 (18-25 September 1790), 529.

order to put to sea they demanded, “with *sangfroid*,” another two months’ wages in advance.<sup>123</sup> Despite the massive protests that had rocked the fleet only a week before, this open, direct refusal of an order to sail signified a worrisome escalation of the conflict between quarterdeck and forecastle. The municipality thought, a little skittishly perhaps, that “the spirit of insubordination in the fleet is reaching an alarming level, and one cannot ignore the frightful consequences that could ensue, for the Nation in general, and for the city of Brest in particular.”<sup>124</sup> In the event, graphic threats of punishment broke the solidarity amongst the mutineers, and after the ship’s petty officers returned to duty, its detachment of soldiers soon followed, and finally its common crewmen as well.<sup>125</sup> But the *Ferme* still could not sail, for the very next day, September 14, the *Léopard* brought the radicalism and violence of the Saint-Domingue revolution to the fleet in Brest.

Not knowing how they would be received in France, the *Léopard*’s crew had drafted a careful petition to the King, in which they downplayed the significance of what had taken place at Port-au-Prince and Saint-Marc, but without in any way denying its substance. “Your faithful subjects composing the crew of your ship the *Léopard*,” they wrote,

were, in Saint-Domingue, forced to make the cruel choice between assassination and the crime of *lèse-nation*, or disobedience to their commanders. They were forced to choose the latter. *Monsieur* de la Gallissonnière, our captain, abandoned us with nearly his whole

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<sup>123</sup> “Copie d’une lettre écrite à M. d’Albert par M. Redon, le 11 septembre 1790,” SHM-V, BB/3/2, Service Général, Correspondance, Brest, Lorient, Rochefort, Toulon, 1790, f. 128.

<sup>124</sup> “13 septembre 1790,” in *Brest pendant la Révolution*, 201.

<sup>125</sup> Letter, *Intendant* Redon, Brest, 13 September 1790, SHM-V, BB/3/2, Service Général, Correspondance, Brest, Lorient, Rochefort, Toulon, 1790, f. 127.

officer corps. *Monsieur* de Santo Domingo, our second in command, replaced him and under his command we returned the ship to your orders. We hope, Sir, that our conduct will not be seen to be either against you or against the corps of naval officers.<sup>126</sup>

These *fleur-de-lis*-draped assurances of continued loyalty most likely were meant in earnest – the King continued to be the most exalted representative, if no longer the embodiment, of the French nation – but even this most deferential tone did not obscure the quiet confidence with which the crew presumed to be better judges of what might constitute an insult to the nation than their own royally appointed, socially superior officers. The crew – common sailors, fishermen, artisans, laborers – did not mind telling the King that, in their humble opinion, obeying the men he had invested with his authority would be condoning, even aiding, murder and treason. Mutiny therefore had become a fully legitimate moral and political imperative.

Upon their arrival at Brest, the men on the *Léopard* – both seamen and the deputies of the General Assembly – did not even bother reporting to Brest’s naval *intendant* M. Redon de Beaupréau, but headed straight for the municipality instead. Redon, barely hiding his annoyance, wrote to the minister of the marine that “I do not know what they talked about, but I can see that it made a strong impression, since the municipality and the district marched with them, ahead of a large detachment of National Guardsmen, volunteer seamen with their swords drawn, and music, cannon-fire, and church-bells ringing. I will give you a more detailed report when I am better informed.”<sup>127</sup> The scenes of celebration Redon told the minister about repeated themselves

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<sup>126</sup> “L’équipage du *Léopard* cherche de justifier sa conduite,” Brest, 13 September 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 3, f. 185.

<sup>127</sup> Letter, *Intendant* Redon, Brest, 14 September 1790, SHM-V, BB/3/2, Service Général, Correspondance, Brest, Lorient, Rochefort, Toulon, 1790, f. 130.

over and over again in the coming days. Seamen, municipal officers, local Jacobins, and the deputies from Saint-Domingue affirmed and re-affirmed their friendship and solidarity – “*Vive la Nation and le Roi!*” (Long live the nation and the King!), “*Vive les députés de Saint Domingue!*” (Long live the deputies from Saint-Domingue!) and “*Vive la Municipalité et les Amis de la Constitution!*” (Long live the Municipality and the Friends of the Constitution!)” Citizens “fought each other for the honor to receive them in their homes and celebrate them.”<sup>128</sup>

News of the “execrable affair” in Saint-Domingue spread fast, and it seemed to confirm all the suspicions against the forces of the aristocratic counter-revolution, which at Brest, now more firmly than ever, attached themselves to the naval officer corps.<sup>129</sup> Rumors instantly swirled through the fleet that the *vicomte* de Marigny, *major général* of the navy and the second in command at Brest, was about to take a squadron to Saint-Domingue, “*to bring to reason and cut to pieces the partisans of the general assembly of the colony.*” In response, someone erected gallows in de Marigny’s front-yard one night – just a small reminder of what might happen to him if he ordered the fleet to sea.<sup>130</sup> The municipal authorities thought “this rather blood-thirsty affront” went too far, but they too had their suspicions and forbade the *Ferme* to sail. They

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<sup>128</sup> “17 septembre 1790,” in *Brest pendant la Révolution*, 206-207; “Affaire de Brest,” *Révolutions de Paris* 63 (18-25 September 1790), 527.

<sup>129</sup> “15 septembre 1790,” in *Brest pendant la Révolution*, 203. The abolitionist *Révolutions de Paris* was among the few dissenting radical voices. The paper fully supported the actions of the sailors (“absolute slaves”!), but it denounced the deputies of the General Assembly as aristocrats, presumably for their privileged racial caste status, since most of them were either small-ish planters or artisans. “Affaire de Brest,” *Révolutions de Paris* 63 (18-25 September 1790), 525, 529.

<sup>130</sup> “Affaire de Brest,” *Révolutions de Paris* 63 (18-25 September 1790), 527. Italics in the original. Erecting gallows – the revolutionaries called them “trees of liberty” – in front of the houses of the aristocracy was a common form of protest during the early years of the revolution. See John Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism: Peasants, Lords, and Legislators in the French Revolution* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 224-225.

wanted to make sure that its real mission was not to bring “desolation” to Saint-Domingue where “already the blood of fellow citizens had been shed.”<sup>131</sup>

Discipline collapsed throughout the fleet. Only four days after the arrival of the *Léopard*, a group of Brest naval officers sent the minister of the marine a desperate plea:

At the moment when everything points to inevitable war, at the moment when the glory of the state and public prosperity might well depend on the actions of our naval forces, there is not a single good citizen who does not shudder at seeing the anarchy and insubordination which reigns amongst the crews of our ships. The officers who command them are totally unable to make them respect the laws; the commander-in-chief himself is publically disobeyed; one dares to insult him on the very ship that flies his standard.<sup>132</sup>

On the *Patriote*, “a great fermentation” broke out when a drunken and “seditious” seaman from the *Léopard* was ordered off the ship. Captain d’Entrecasteaux’s crew feared the man was to be punished, so they told their captain that he had no right to make up laws, and that the man under no circumstances must be harmed. When d’Entrecasteaux reminded them of their oath of loyalty, they denied having ever taken one – presumably meaning to the new regime – and besides, “they were the strongest, they make the law.” In that case, Captain d’Entrecasteaux finally told them, he was forced to resign his post. “So much the better!” his crew hollered back.

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<sup>131</sup> “22 septembre 1790,” in *Brest pendant la Révolution*, 210.

<sup>132</sup> “Copie de la lettre écrite par MM. les officiers de la marine réunis à Brest, à M. de la Luzerne,” in *Recueil*, 1:165-166.

“*Vive la nation! Les aristocrates à la lanterne!* (Long live the nation! Hang the aristocrats from the lamp-posts!)”<sup>133</sup>

*Commandant* de Rions came on board the next day, assuring everyone that there had been no plans whatsoever to punish the man from the *Léopard* – he was merely ordered back to his own ship to sober up – but unfortunately the leader of the previous day’s mutiny would now have to go to prison. It was a brave attempt, but the crew just taunted him: “He will not go, he will not go!” Rions asked for a show hands to see if anyone on board would obey him – not a single hand went up. When he returned on board of his flagship, the *Majesteux*, he learnt that the ship’s detachment of marines were refusing to do regular duty, and for that they had gone unpunished. “In vain did I tell my officers that subordination still reigns in the fleet;” he sullenly reflected, “my mouth was unable to convince them of what I myself no longer believed.”<sup>134</sup>

Rions was finished, and he knew it. On September 20, a week after serious troubles had erupted in the fleet, the municipality described to its deputies in Paris how his men had openly turned on him: “You cannot imagine to which point they have carried their animosity towards the general; they loudly proclaim that they do not want him, that he is an aristocrat.”<sup>135</sup> Two and a half weeks later, Rions resigned his command, the second time within a year that he was driven from his post by popular anger. But his resignation did little to lessen the anti-aristocratic fury that now burned through the fleet. Only ten days later, his temporary replacement, the *vicomte* de

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<sup>133</sup> Letter, Albert de Rions, Brest, 16 September 1790, in *Recueil*, 1:163; “Affaire de Brest,” *Révolutions de Paris* 63 (18-25 September 1790), 527.

<sup>134</sup> Letter, Albert de Rions, Brest, 16 September 1790, in *Recueil*, 1:163-5.

<sup>135</sup> “20 septembre 1790,” in *Brest pendant la Révolution*, 208.

Souillac, informed the minister that his officers were forced to listen almost daily to shouts of “*les aristocrates à la lanterne* and a thousand other horrors.”<sup>136</sup>

The National Assembly finally followed Rions’ advice and dispatched two royal commissioners with extraordinary powers to reestablish order in the fleet. They also ordered anyone who had been on the *Léopard* as far away from Brest as possible, demobilizing the crew, sending the men back to their home departments, and commanding the deputies of the General Assembly to come to Paris. The commissioners were authorized to call on the municipality and “all agents of the public force” in their efforts to “reestablish discipline and subordination in the squadron.”<sup>137</sup> Brest’s influential Jacobin club, having wavered for a month between its dislike for the aristocratic officer corps, its ambivalent support for the incipient *sans-cullotisme* of the lower deck, and its powerful concern for an orderly, bourgeois-led revolution, finally threw its support behind the commissioners and proposed to lead a grand procession through the fleet, exhorting the crews “in the name of *la Patrie*, which we must all defend, in the name of liberty, which together we have won, to obey the Nation and to obey the commanders, who derive their powers from her.”<sup>138</sup> For two full days, members of the Jacobin club, together with the royal commissioners, representatives of the municipality, the National Guard, *Arsenal* workers, soldiers of the royal and colonial regiments, the corps of volunteer seamen, and even of the company of invalids went from ship to mutinous ship, passionately appealed to the seamen’s

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<sup>136</sup> Letter, M. de Souillac, Brest, 18 October 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 90.

<sup>137</sup> “Décret qui ordonne la poursuite des auteurs de l’insurrection qui a eu lieu à bord du vaisseau le *Léopard*, et de l’insulte faite à M. de Marigny, &c.” in *Recueil*, 1:168-169.

<sup>138</sup> Henwood and Monange, *Brest*, 115-116; “Adresse de la Société des Amis de la Constitution, établie à Brest, aux Citoyens composant les Equipages de l’Armée Navale,” SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 94.

sense of duty, and threatened doom and destruction to the fatherland if they continued to cripple its defenses:

Brothers and friends, such is today the state of France: the National Assembly is the pilot of this great vessel, all Frenchmen are its seamen: we all have our stations, and we may only move by the order of those who govern us. But, if deaf to their voice, if rebels to their orders, we refuse to obey, we become the authors of a general loss; and the ship, at the mercy of the waves and the storm, is lost [...]. If France can no longer impose upon its enemies, if our squadrons, otherwise so formidable, become by indiscipline objects of contempt for other nations, you will lose us our colonies, destroy our commerce, our coasts, our ports abandoned, thousands of family fathers without income, without resources, reduced to the most atrocious misery; you yourself, when returning to your families, will find nothing but poverty, despair, and death.<sup>139</sup>

On many of the ships, the crews were moved to participate in what quickly turned into a grand spectacle of national unity (“citizens embraced each other, men and officers shed tears for one another”), but on several others, the crews remained guarded, leaving the members of the procession “with some concern about their sincerity” as they made their way to the next vessel.<sup>140</sup> But nonetheless the commissioners were quick to claim success: “The sailors,” they boasted to the National Assembly, “in an outpouring of most lively joy, affirm their attachment

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<sup>139</sup> “Adresse de la Société des Amis de la Constitution, établie à Brest, aux Citoyens composant les Equipages de l’Armée Navale,” SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 94.

<sup>140</sup> “20 octobre 1790,” in *Brest pendant la Révolution*, 220.



to both their officers and their captain; everywhere one hears the joyful shout: *Vivent la nation, la loi, et le roi!* [Long live the nation, the law, and the King!]. All orders are now executed with the greatest possible care.”<sup>141</sup>

The reality on many ships in the roadstead was rather different. The very next day after the commissioners had dispatched their excited report to Paris, provisional *commandant de Souillac* reminded them that on several vessels officers and loyal men doing their duty had been violently attacked, and the majority of the crews were shielding and hiding the attackers. On one ship an officer had even died under suspicious circumstances after being struck in the head by a heavy object dropped from aloft.<sup>142</sup> Even on those ships where the crew had returned to duty, the undermining and sidelining of the officer corps continued. On the *Superbe* members of the crew took it upon themselves to arrest a drunk man who was trying to reignite the mutiny. The captain, presented with this *fait accompli*, helplessly relinquished his right to decide on a punishment, and the crew took the man to the municipality, who in turn stuck him in prison.<sup>143</sup> A few days later, the crew – or at least thirty-seven men amongst them, most of them petty officers – issued a public address in which they affirmed their rediscovered conviction “that insubordination is the most dangerous poison to any branch in the service. [...] Consequently, our masters, sailors, volunteer seamen, and soldiers of all classes and all grades promise to discard and extirpate from amongst ourselves the last vestige of this dark vice, unanimously to obey all of our commanders and to entrust ourselves to their wisdom.” This, no doubt, their captain was happy to hear, except that it probably would have been more reassuring had it been

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<sup>141</sup> “Rapport et extrait d’une lettre des commissaires envoyés à Brest,” in *Recueil*, 1:181.

<sup>142</sup> “Copie d’un lettre écrite par M. de Souillac à MM. Bori et Gandon, Commissaires du Roy, en date de Brest le 23 octobre 1790,” SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, ff. 101-102.

<sup>143</sup> “27 octobre 1790,” in *Brest pendant la Révolution*, 223.

addressed to him, and not to the local Jacobin club, which the crew evidently thought the more appropriate addressee for this pledge of fidelity.<sup>144</sup>

The arrival of a new *commandant* on November 10 once again escalated the conflict between officers and men. Louis-Antoine (formerly *comte de*) Bougainville was utterly scandalized by the level of insubordination he found at Brest, for he was not the type of officer who took an interest in reasoning, negotiating, or fraternally celebrating with his fellow citizens before the mast. “Every day,” he thundered, “brings an insurrection more or less intense.” Before he even had the opportunity to raise his standard on the *Majesteux*, he was informed of a “grave mutiny” on board of the 74-gun-ship *Dugué-Trouin*. After a man was put in irons for stealing some wine, a number of his comrades broke him out, and when a detachment of soldiers arrived, “quite a large number of men used force to prevent him being taken to Pontaniou [prison].” The soldiers eventually won the stand-off and the man, along with several of the mutineers, was incarcerated on shore.<sup>145</sup> The very next day, Bougainville gave orders to crush “a very forceful insurrection” on the *Temeraire* and ordered four men thrown into prison.<sup>146</sup> A few days later, the crews of the *America* and the frigate *Surveillante* unsuccessfully launched an insurrection, which Bougainville, in a show of paternal grace, was at first willing to forgive, but when members of the *America*’s crew broke an arrested mutineer out of his irons, and threw the shackles into the sea, the *commandant* struck back. He ordered seventeen mutineers arrested – “[they] have incited

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<sup>144</sup> *Adresse de l’Equipage du Vaisseau Le Superbe, en Rade de Brest, à la Société des Amis de la Constitution. Séance du 4 Novembre 1790. Imprimée par ordre de l’Assemblée Nationale* (Paris, 1790). Cormack, *Revolution*, 104-5.

<sup>145</sup> Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 10 November 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 52.

<sup>146</sup> Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 12 November 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 54.

or participated in all the insurrections which for the past three months have rendered the *America* one of the worst examples in the fleet” – and conducted them under guard to the *bureau des classes* (naval conscription office), where their names were formally removed from the list, legally barring them from all future employment at sea, military and civilian. After that, the guards marched the men beyond the city’s walls, and slammed its gates shut behind them. Bougainville announced to the entire fleet that “notes have been sent to their respective departments & to all commercial ports, which [...] will be careful not to employ such perverse men as the navy was forced to reject from its bosom.” He quickly followed up with a chilling order in which he threatened to start executing people – all of course within the proper framework of the law – if complete subordination did not immediately return to the fleet.<sup>147</sup>

Bougainville was under pressure to prepare a major fleet to sail for Martinique, where colonial patriots and royalist planters threatened to plunge the island into civil war, but the rampant anti-authoritarianism of his men seemed more likely to stoke the fires of colonial revolution than choke them. Demonstrative punishments, such as destroying the livelihood of the seventeen *America* mutineers, had a “salutary effect,” Bougainville claimed, but it was not enough to reestablish discipline. Only a week later, on November 26, yet another insurrection broke out, on the *Jupiter* this time, and once again the spark came when the crew tried to protect “a very insubordinate man” from his “just punishment.”<sup>148</sup> It was in Bougainville’s favor that no overarching organization had emerged from amongst the mutinous crews during the preceding

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<sup>147</sup> Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 17 November 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 56; Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 19 November 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 57; “Ordre Général, No. 25,” SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 59; “Ordre Général, No. 26,” SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 62.

<sup>148</sup> Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 26 November 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 63.

months, but the bonds that tied together the crews of individual ships were all the more relentless instead. No matter the crime or the consequences, members of the crew always broke accused comrades out of irons before they would let officers and the law have their way with them. In order to shake up these entrenched lower deck communities, and once again “purify” discipline, Bougainville determined to break up or at least to alter the composition of a number of the most unruly crews, removing the most “gangrenous men” from the squadron bound for the West Indies, and replacing them with “good subjects, who want nothing but employment.” The newly reconstituted crews, he hoped, would know that their families’ subsistence at Brest depended on their continued good behavior on board, and act accordingly.<sup>149</sup>

Bougainville also worried that difficulties in provisioning the fleet – expected to carry over 6,000 troops on five transports, as well as the crews of fourteen warships, up to 3,500 men – would give his discontented crews a new issue to rally around. The required amount of provisions was enormous: the seamen alone needed for a six month cruise approximately 1.1 million pints of wine, 665,000 lb biscuit, 318,000 lb flour, 164,000 lb salt pork, 13,300 lb salt beef, 15,750 lb cod, 23,800 lb cheese, 21,000 lb vegetables, 15,750 lb rice, 52,500 lb peas, 52,500 lb beans, 52,500 lb broad beans, 12,250 lb oil, 35,000 lb vinegar, 33,000 lb salt, 350 lb mustard, and 1750 lb candles.<sup>150</sup> On December 10, Bougainville pleaded with the minister to ensure that his fleet was supplied, in full and on time, so that his men were given no “pretext” whatsoever to pass “from murmuring to insurrection [...] either through innovations or through

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<sup>149</sup> Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 8 December 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 70; Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 10 December 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, ff. 71-72.

<sup>150</sup> Terry Crowdy, *French Warship Crews, 1789-1805: From the French Revolution to Trafalgar* (Botley: Osprey, 2005), 23. Crowdy gives the standard provisions for three-decker, carrying anywhere from 900 to 1,100 men, on a six month cruise. I have multiplied his figures by a factor of 3.5.

shortages in the objects which constitute their legal rations.”<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, only two weeks later, shortages forced Bougainville to order the substitution of *eau-de-vie* for the men’s daily lunch ration of wine, an “innovation” which indeed did trigger mutinies on several ships. The most forward amongst the men were immediately arrested and imprisoned, but it nonetheless took four days to reestablish order in the fleet. The incident confirmed Bougainville’s belief that disorder had become endemic, and with further shortages expected throughout the winter this was unlikely to change: “The murmurings, the refusals of order, the open insults of superior officers, both by able seamen and petty officers, who ought always to be models of subordination for the other men in the crew: examples of these are multiplying and sadly they prove that the spirit which was believed to have disappeared still exists and is perhaps in some manner incurable, infected as it is by the venom of insubordination.”<sup>152</sup>

In fact, large-scale unrest suddenly died off as other kinds of infections devastated the fleet during the coldest of the winter months. The ships were overcrowded, wet, cold, and unsanitary, and the men bored, malnourished, and dirty: ideal conditions for breeding all kinds of diseases, both physical and mental. Illness rates exploded towards the end of November, and by December 1, between 1,400 and 1,500 men had already been taken off the ships and brought to the *Arsenal*’s hospital.<sup>153</sup> Numbers kept rising, and on December 10 Bougainville admitted that

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<sup>151</sup> Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 10 December 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 71.

<sup>152</sup> Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 22 December 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 76-77; “Ordre du 26 decembre,” SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 80.

<sup>153</sup> Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 1 December 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 64.

among the men in the roadstead “innumerable are sick, and they truly suffer.”<sup>154</sup> He failed to specify the diseases, but most likely they included various respiratory ailments, digestive disorders, dysentery, skin infections, rheumatism, fevers, and perhaps even early cases of typhoid, which would later rage with harrowing force at Brest, killing over 8,000 men and sending tens of thousands more to the hospital in 1793 and 1794.<sup>155</sup> Bougainville, concerned most of all with “the humors of insurrection” that might fester on his disease-ridden ships, was not above exploiting the epidemic as a disciplinary tool, punishing mutinous crews by keeping them cooped up on board while granting those loyal and obedient shore leave to recuperate their strength.<sup>156</sup>

The mood throughout the fleet was a foul one when the squadron bound for Martinique finally heaved anchor at the end of January. The weather had remained numbing cold, wet winds lashed the roadstead, and there had been reports of ships lost at sea. Illness rates gave no indication of leveling off, and it had been weeks since the crews had last received their full legal rations.<sup>157</sup> Many of those bound for the open sea also harbored severe doubts about their mission in the islands, and about the real intentions of their aristocratic officers. What might they order their men to do off Martinique? Was the squadron to be made a tool of the aristocratic party or its colonial equivalent, the *blancs-blancs*? Would the men be ordered to spill the blood of fellow

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<sup>154</sup> Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 10 December 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 72.

<sup>155</sup> Taillemaite, *Histoire ignorée*, 284. See also Antoine Poissonnier-Desperrières, *Traité des Maladies des Gens de Mer* (Paris: Lacombe, 1767).

<sup>156</sup> Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 1 December 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 64; Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 8 December 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 70.

<sup>157</sup> “Ordre du 26 decembre,” SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 80.

citizens, and then be denounced both at home and abroad as counter-revolutionaries, as had happened to the crew of the *Illustre* only a few months before? When ordered by governor Damas to blockade the port of Saint-Pierre, Martinique's insurgent patriot stronghold, revolutionaries had denounced the *Illustre* as the *Bastille flottante* (floating Bastille), one of the more unforgiving insults in the revolutionary lexicon. And one that apparently stung, for shortly afterwards the crew mutinied and forced their commander to return the ship to Brest, arriving there less than two months after the *Léopard* had carried a similar tale of colonial counter-revolution, quarterdeck treachery, and lower deck mutiny back from across the Atlantic.<sup>158</sup>

### 3.5 “DOWN WITH THE WHITE FLAG, OR DEATH!”<sup>159</sup>

When the squadron dropped anchor off Fort-Royal in mid-March, what they found hardly reassured them. As on Saint-Domingue, news of the revolution in France had encouraged Martinique's planter-dominated colonial assembly to claim legislative authority over the island's commercial life, and as the first order of business they opened the ports to merchantmen of all nations. The chronically indebted planters hoped that competition would force down the cost of imports and raise the price of sugar, but opposition to these plans quickly congealed in the island's port towns, where an alliance of revolutionary *petits blancs* and colonial merchants, whose businesses had been nurtured and protected by the old regime's *Exclusif*, seized local

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<sup>158</sup> “6 novembre 1790,” in *Brest pendant la Révolution*, 226-227; William S. Cormack, “Legitimate Authority in Revolution and War: The French Navy in the West Indies, 1789-1793,” *International History Review* 18, no. 1 (1996): 5-6, 8.

<sup>159</sup> Jean-François Landolphe, *Mémoires du Capitaine Landolphe, contenant L'Histoire de ses Voyages Pendant Trente-Six Ans, Aux Côtes d'Afrique et aux Deux Amériques; Rédigés sur son Manuscrit, Par J.S. Quesné, Ornés de Trois Gravures* (Paris: A. Bertrand and Pillet Ainé, 1823), 2:137.

government and accused the planters of separatism. The newly formed revolutionary municipality of Saint-Pierre then issued a call to arms, inviting small white patriots from other French islands to come and assist in the struggle against the counter-revolutionary planter class. The colonial government, meanwhile, wavered back and forth between the two sides, but finally sided with the assembly after a small white race riot in early June left several free-colored militiamen dead. Even though the planters pushed to dismantle the *Exclusif* and assert their own legislative autonomy, the patriots' belligerent *sans-cullotisme* and fanatic racism now appeared as a far more immediate danger to the stability of the colonial regime. Over the summer, Governor Damas ordered his troops to impose order and restore regular government in the colony, but following a mutiny among soldiers of the Martinique Regiment in support of imprisoned patriots awaiting deportation in early September 1790, full-blown civil war between the two sides broke out instead.<sup>160</sup>

The 74-gunship *Ferme* and the frigate *Embuscade*, at the head of a small group of transports carrying around 5,000 troops, arrived off Martinique on November 1, and were immediately drawn into the fighting to relieve the colonial government's badly beleaguered forces.<sup>161</sup> After delivering much-needed food supplies to the governor's troops at Gros-Morne, the *Embuscade* and *Ferme*, together with a small group of corvettes, spent most of the winter months chocking off Fort-Royal and Saint-Pierre, both of them patriot strongholds. They repeatedly bombarded both towns as well as other settlements along the coast, intercepted and seized inbound merchantmen, and tried to capture a fleet of small, fast privateers that repeatedly

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<sup>160</sup> Cormack, "Legitimate Authority," 4-6, 8-9. See also Thomas H. Le Duc, "A Yankee Trader Views the French Revolution in Martinique," *The New England Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1938): 802-807.

<sup>161</sup> Despite the mutinies that followed the arrival of the *Léopard*, the ships had finally managed to sail from Brest after the National Assembly sternly reminded the municipality that it had no business embargoing any of the King's ships (see section 3.4 above). National Assembly, session of 18 September 1790, *AP*, 19:48.



managed to swarm out despite the blockades. By the time the squadron from Brest arrived in middle of March 1791, the small naval detachment commanded by the *chevalier* de Rivière, captain of the *Ferme*, was credited with having prevented a patriot victory throughout the colony. But that was a feat many of their newly arrived comrades thought far from commendable.<sup>162</sup>

In June, Rivière complained that “since the arrival of the force destined for this colony, ill-intentioned men have tried to excite the crews of the other ships against my crew [on the *Ferme*] and that of the *Embuscade*.”<sup>163</sup> In truth, however it took no outside agitators to stir up trouble with Rivière’s men.<sup>164</sup> Even though most of them willingly participated in combat, especially after the shore batteries at Saint-Pierre had fired red-hot shot at them in early January, there had been continuous, low-level unrest on both ships ever since they had arrived in the colony in early November. On February 15, finally, “a very great fermentation” broke out on the *Ferme* after Rivière ordered the distribution of prize money from a number of captured and sold enemy merchantmen and privateers. Acting in accordance with both custom and law, Rivière intended to have the spoils divided according to rank, giving officers and in particular the station commander, himself, an exponentially larger share than common crewmen. The protesters demanded that all receive an equal share instead, regardless of rank or position, but Rivière

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<sup>162</sup> M. de Rivière, “Extrait du Journal de ma Station aux Isles du Vent,” SHM-V, BB/4/5, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1791, Vol. 2, ff. 42-57; “Discours prononcé au nom de MM. les Commissaires du roi par M. de Montdenoix, aux gens de Mer qui composent les équipages du vaisseau la Ferme, commandé par M. de Rivière chef de division & la frégate l’Embuscade, commandée par M. d’Orleans. Fort-Royal, à bord du vaisseau la Ferme, le 3 juin 1791,” SHM-V, BB/4/5, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1791, Vol. 2, ff. 70-71; Cormack, “Legitimate Authority,” 4-5, 9-10.

<sup>163</sup> Letter, M. de Rivière, on board the *Ferme*, 17 June 1791, SHM-V, BB/4/5, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1791, Vol. 2, f. 68.

<sup>164</sup> National Assembly, session of 18 September 1790, *AP*, 19:48.

refused. In that case, they informed him, he could keep the money until the National Assembly had a chance to consider the matter.<sup>165</sup>

Rivière noted that the detachment of Norman soldiers on board appeared to be “the engine of the fermentation.”<sup>166</sup> Indeed, on the day following the protest, the *Ferme*’s crew accepted their prescribed share of prize money while the Norman soldiers continued to hold out, preferring to “carry on with the most seditious speeches.” After being informed that they had also misbehaved when given shore liberty, “allowing themselves a number of excesses,” Rivière made a last attempt to recall them to duty. He succeeded only partially, and then resolved to select those “most seditious spirits that attempt to raise a rebellion on board of my ship” for combat duty on shore. When Governor Damas on March 5 asked for reinforcements from Rivière, he happily sent him the most unruly of his Norman soldiers. “Their future conduct,” he remarked, “proved how ill-intentioned they were; for, not only did they break through the bounds of subordination and formally refused to obey their officers, but they allowed themselves excesses and pushed their insolence to the point of firing on their own commander.” When asked to take them back on board, Rivière refused.<sup>167</sup>

Discipline amongst the majority of Rivière’s men held for some time after the arrival of the Brest squadron in mid-March, but by summer there were signs of serious discontent,

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<sup>165</sup> M. de Rivière, “Extrait du Journal de ma Station aux Isles du Vent,” SHM-V, BB/4/5, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1791, Vol. 2, ff. 44, 46, 48, 52-54.

<sup>166</sup> M. de Rivière, “Extrait du Journal de ma Station aux Isles du Vent,” SHM-V, BB/4/5, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1791, Vol. 2, f. 54. During the troubles in Brest the previous fall, *commandant* Bougainville also thought to have discovered men from Normandy to be particularly troublesome. Letter, M. de Bougainville, Brest, 26 November 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1, f. 63.

<sup>167</sup> M. de Rivière, “Extrait du Journal de ma Station aux Isles du Vent,” SHM-V, BB/4/5, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1791, Vol. 2, ff. 54-56.

especially on the *Embuscade*. Illness and mortality rates were escalating with the onset of the rainy season, and the constant subversive appeals from radicals in other ships were beginning to take their toll.<sup>168</sup> Following a truce between the rival factions fighting for control of the colony, the crews of the *Ferme* and the *Embuscade* for the first time since their arrival six months earlier came into sustained contact with merchant seamen and colonial patriots ashore. “At Fort-Royal,” Captain d’Orléans of the *Embuscade* complained

both naval and merchant vessels wintered [i.e. sought shelter during the storm season]. Long periods of inactivity, idleness, free and daily communications with the shore all favored the projects of seduction and corruption that the ill-intentioned aimed mainly at the crews of the *Ferme* and the *Embuscade*, since they had remained loyal and seemingly unshakeable.<sup>169</sup>

But even they began to shake. Discussions with small white patriots ashore and their comrades in the merchant service eventually led them to doubt their mission, for it dawned on them that by obeying orders and fighting on behalf of Martinique’s planter class during the winter’s hostilities, they may well have helped the colonial counter-revolution. And this worried them

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<sup>168</sup> On June 14, 1791, 66 of the *Ferme*’s seamen were in hospital, 16 had died, and 316 were left on board. By November 9, there were only 261 seamen left on board, with 79 in the hospital. On June 13, 1792, only 194 seamen were left on board, slightly less than fifty percent of the ship’s complement. The losses also included an unknown number of desertions. “Le Vaisseau du Roy La Ferme, commandé par M. de Riviere, chef de division. Etat de situation d’Equipage à l’époque du 14 juin 1791,” SHM-V, BB/4/5, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1791, Vol. 2, f. 74; “Le Vaisseau du Roy La Ferme, commandé par M. de Riviere, chef de division. Etat de situation d’Equipage à l’époque du 9 Nov 1791,” SHM-V, BB/4/5, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1791, Vol. 2, f. 90; “Le Vaisseau La Ferme, Commandé par M. de Riviere, Chef de Division. Etat de Situation d’Equipage à l’Epoque du 13. Juin 1792,” SHM-V, BB/4/12, Service Général, Campagnes, 1792, Vol. 5, f. 21.

<sup>169</sup> “Copie d’une lettre de M. d’Orléans, capitaine de la frégate l’Embuscade, en rade de l’île de Ré,” National Assembly, session of 23 November 1791, AP, 35:317.

profoundly. In late August, the crew of the *Embuscade* “expressed the desire to return to France in order to bring clarity to their situation.” A month later, when Captain d’Orléans instead ordered the ship to prepare for a cruise to Guadeloupe, the crew gathered on the forecastle and “imperatively and tumultuously” told him that they would sail for France, with or without his blessing. D’Orléans and all his officers were disarmed and confined to their quarters. The next day the *Embuscade* put to sea.<sup>170</sup>

The crew wrote a formal report on the mutiny, which they conveyed to the National Assembly upon their arrival off Rochefort a few weeks later. “This day, 30 September 1791,” they wrote,

we have communicated to the captain in an unanimous voice our desire to return to France rather than sail to Basse-Terre Guadeloupe; given that we are uncertain about our mission, relative to the troubles which presently reign at Pointe-à-Pitre as well as at Sainte-Lucie, and that we under no circumstances want to commit the same hostilities against our brothers as those for which we already have been reproached, according to letters dated July 15, in which our past conduct is reproached and which mention that we have been denounced in all the clubs of the kingdom as *criminels de lèse-nation* [treasonous criminals], we have decided to sail for France.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> “Copie d’une lettre de M. d’Orléans, capitaine de la frégate l’Embuscade, en rade de l’île de Ré,” National Assembly, session of 23 November 1791, *AP*, 35:317.

<sup>171</sup> “Extrait du procès-verbal des délibérations de l’équipage l’Embuscade,” National Assembly, session of 23 November 1791, *AP*, 35:318.

Rivière pleaded with the National Assembly to punish the *Embuscade* mutineers “rigorously” lest he lose control of his own crew on the *Ferme* as well, but his cries fell on deaf ears in Paris. Under the highly questionable pretense that the mutiny was covered by an amnesty for political crimes whose deadline had in fact passed, the National Assembly decided that the crew of the *Embuscade* could not legally be tried by court martial, nor be sent back to the West Indies as a form of extra-judicial punishment (this latter had been Captain d’Orléans’ idea). The mutiny, in other words, had received the nation’s highest sanction.<sup>172</sup>

Rivière, meanwhile, was left to fight a rising tide of disobedience, sedition, and even violence amongst his men. On January 4, 1792 Jean-Baptiste Bouanchaud of the *Lily* was sentenced to three years galley service for rebelling against Captain Maucler and raising a cutlass against First Lieutenant Odiette. The judgment was nailed to the masts of all naval and merchant ships at anchor in Martinique, as well as distributed to all naval stations and French commercial ports throughout the Caribbean.<sup>173</sup> In June, Rivière purged his ship, already severely undermanned, of twenty-four men who stood out even amongst his insubordinate and “insolent” crew.<sup>174</sup> On October 17, Claude-Antoine Girard of the *Ferme* was sentenced to death by firing squad on a floating pontoon amidst the ships of the squadron for conspiring with soldiers of the Fort-Bourbon garrison jointly to rise on their respective officers and overthrow the authority of

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<sup>172</sup> “Copie d’une lettre de M. d’Orléans, capitaine de la frégate l’Embuscade, en rade de l’île de Ré,” National Assembly, session of 23 November 1791, *AP*, 35:318; Letter, M. de Rivière, Fort-Royal, 9 November 1791, SHM-V, BB/4/5, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1791, Vol. 2, f. 86; National Assembly, session of 17 December 1791, *AP*, 36:203-204; M. Bertrand, minister of the marine, National Assembly, session of 20 December 1791, *AP*, 36:272-273; Cormack, “Legitimate Authority,” 12-13.

<sup>173</sup> On December 27, 1791, Jacques Fleury, Jean Berthaud, Julien Plais, Jean-Baptist Vidard, and Joseph Drean, all of the *Lily*, had been tried for their own, but lesser role in the same incident. “Jugement Rendu par le Conseil Martial, Assemblé à bord du Vaisseau La Ferme, Mouillé en Rade du Fort-Royal, Isle Martinique,” SHM-V, BB/4/12, Service Général, Campagnes, 1792, Vol. 5, f. 10.

<sup>174</sup> Letter, M. de Rivière, Martinique, 17 June 1792, SHM-V, BB/4/12, Service Général, Campagnes, 1792, Vol. 5, f. 19.

the King in the colony. Two of his co-conspirators, François Groffelin and Claude Miche, were to be branded with the letters “G A L” (short for *galérien*, or galley slave) on their shoulders and afterwards conveyed to France for a life-time of heavy labor in the dockyards. François Chapelle, Jean Maffet, Jacques le Tanneur, Jacques-Robert Cotte, and Vincent Cotentin were sentenced to running the gauntlet, four rounds each, and then to be barred for life from all legal employment at sea.<sup>175</sup>

The unusual brutality of these last verdicts grew from Rivière’s decision the month before to side with the governors and colonial assemblies of Martinique and Guadeloupe and openly commit himself to counter-revolution. The royalist coup began with the turning away of a squadron of small warships and transports that came to implement the Legislative Assembly’s decree of April 4, 1792.<sup>176</sup> The decree’s most important provision was to rectify the contradictory position of colonial free-coloreds by finally guaranteeing them full citizenship rights throughout the empire, a step, the metropolitan authorities well knew, that would meet with outraged resistance amongst colonial *petits blancs* patriots. Already ill-disposed towards them for reasons of class envy and race hatred, colonial patriots detested the free-coloreds even more for having sided with the hated class of *blancs-blancs* during the revolutionary struggles that had thrown Martinique into civil war only two years before. In order therefore to guarantee its full implementation, the metropolitan government decided to send a force of 2,000 National Guardsmen along with the decree. This, in turn, alienated the planters and their friends in the colonial governments, who otherwise had no problem with a decree that gave their allies the

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<sup>175</sup> “Jugement Rendu par le Conseil de Guerre tenu à bord du Vaisseau La Ferme, le 17 Octobre 1792,” SHM-V, BB/4/12, Service Général, Campagnes, 1792, Vol. 5, f. 47. Ironically, the King who was to be protected by these butcheries was already overthrown by the time of the trial.

<sup>176</sup> M.A. Lacour, *Histoire de la Guadeloupe* (Basse-Terre: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1857), 2:99-101.

vote. But the prospect of having large numbers of proletarian National Guardsmen run riot in the colony – “They despise the law, and observe neither discipline nor military rules. [...] They inspire nothing but unrest,” in General Chazot’s estimation – terrified the planters, especially since it was only to be expected that sooner or later the Guardsmen would side with the revolutionary *petits blancs*, whatever their orders might be. With only around 10,600 white inhabitants in Martinique, a force of 2,000 armed and motivated soldiers would dangerously tilt the balance of forces in favor of the patriots.<sup>177</sup>

Guadeloupe’s and Martinique’s colonial assemblies resolved to implement the decree in every detail on their own, and when the small squadron carrying the National Guard units, special commissioners, and new governors for all the French Windward Islands arrived off Fort-Royal on September 16, they were refused permission to anchor and disembark the troops. A volley of red-hot shot from the shore batteries emphasized how deadly serious the colonists were. They invited the commissioners to come ashore and ascertain that all laws were followed to the dot in the island, but after that they would have to sail away again. The commissioners naturally rejected this proposal as unacceptable, and in response were told they had better leave then or be prepared to be treated as enemies by Rivière’s superior forces. The squadron had no choice but to make sail, and after they were met with gun-fire off Basse-Terre in Guadeloupe as well, most of the ships headed for Saint-Domingue.<sup>178</sup>

Meanwhile, one of Rivière’s captains, Mallevault of the *Calipso* frigate, picked up a rumor, apparently originating in the British island of Montserrat, that Austrian and Prussian

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<sup>177</sup> Lacour, *Histoire*, 2:98; Cormack, “Legitimate Authority,” 14-15.

<sup>178</sup> Lacour, *Histoire*, 2:99-101.

troops had crushed the revolution and fully re-established Louis XVI's royal authority.<sup>179</sup> Mallevault, a keen royalist, enthusiastically embraced the rumor as fact, immediately replaced the hated tricolor flag with the King's royal white, and then fired a twenty-one-shot salute. White flags soon went up all over Guadeloupe and Martinique, and whoever refused to fly it or sport a white cockade was treated as a traitor. Slave ship captain Jean-François Landolphe was told a day outside of Port-à-Pitre by Lieutenant Duval of the *Perdrix* that he would have to switch flags if he wanted to enter the harbor. But being of a truculent bent of mind, Landolphe instead ordered the revolutionary tricolor nailed to the mast of his slave ship. For that, and his refusal to wear the white cockade, he spent the next three months confined to his ship in harbor (he was allowed to disembark his slaves and lodge them in "an immense warehouse").<sup>180</sup> Unlike captains in the merchant service, most naval officers – their experiences generally only negative since 1789 – were quick to support what rapidly exploded into a colonial counter-revolution. Lieutenant Duval of the *Perdrix* was in fact one of only two commanders who refused the white flag and took their vessels to France instead.<sup>181</sup>

Most common crewmen, as well as most *petits blancs*, appear to have opposed the royalist counter-revolution. When Captain Mallevault, for instance, laid claim to the *Bienvenue*, which had sought the protection of the British at St. Kitts, the crew rioted, smashed up the ship, and abandoned it for the beach.<sup>182</sup> Shortly afterwards, Rivière was faced with the anti-royalist

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<sup>179</sup> Lacour, *Histoire*, 2:102-103.

<sup>180</sup> Landolphe, *Mémoires*, 2:126-136.

<sup>181</sup> National Convention, session of 8 November 1792, *AP*, 53:314-315; Cormack, "Legitimate Authority," 16.

<sup>182</sup> The crew of the *Bienvenue* was known to be disorderly. While wintering in Lorient, their captain had complained that instead of appearing on board "to render the services one has a right to expect," they frolicked away the days in the town's cabarets and only dropped in on the ship in time for dinner. Letter, M. de Secquille, Lorient,



conspiracy on board of his flagship that resulted in the brutal court martial sentences of October 17. Later that month, large numbers of radicals fled Guadeloupe and Martinique, first for the British island of Dominica, later for the French islands of Marie-Galante and Sainte-Lucie. Here and there a naval seaman must have joined the exodus.<sup>183</sup> By December, following the arrival of the staunchly republican Captain Lacrosse on the *Félicité* frigate, Rivière was suffering heavy losses of manpower through desertion. The runaways stole small boats to reach Sainte-Lucie, where Lacrosse established his headquarters.<sup>184</sup>

Lacrosse had sailed from Brest on October 24, before the *Perdrix* had brought news of the counter-revolution to France. His original mission was to explain to the colonists the events that had led to the overthrow of the King, and to encourage them to love the Republic, a task that turned out to be trickier than he probably expected. However, despite or perhaps because of the royalist rebellions in Martinique and Guadeloupe, colonial patriot refugees on the other islands greeted his arrival with extravagant celebrations. On Dominica, where Lacrosse went first, the British governor soon demanded that he leave, lest all this talk of liberty should inspire the slaves to rise on their own oppressors. On Sainte-Lucie, where he went next, revolutionary fever gripped the populace: red bonnets were on everybody's head (Lacrosse probably brought quite a few with him), liberty trees went up all over the colony, and the inhabitants sang the *Marseillaise*

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2 January 1792, SHM-V, BB/3/11, Service Général, Correspondance, Lorient, 1792, f. 4; "Copie du Journal de la Calipso, du 29. 7bre au 15. 8bre 1792," SHM-V, BB/4/12, Service Général, Campagnes, 1792, Vol. 5, ff. 62-70; "Copie du procès verbal de la prise de possession de la Gabare la Bienvenue," SHM-V, BB/4/12, Service Général, Campagnes, 1792, Vol. 5, f. 70.

<sup>183</sup> Lacour, *Histoire*, 108-116.

<sup>184</sup> "Compte rendu à ses concitoyens par le Capitaine Lacrosse, commandant la frégate de la République, La *Félicité*, de sa mission aux Isles-du-Vent de l'Amérique, pendant les années 1792 à 1793," National Convention, session of the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the first month of Year II (13 October 1793), *AP*, 76:510.

until they were hoarse. At the height of their excitement they decided to rename the island La Fidèle, the Steadfast One.<sup>185</sup>

From here, Lacrosse flooded Guadeloupe and Martinique with republican propaganda, promising pardons to all commoners who crossed over into the republican camp. The royalist elites were rapidly losing support, even among many of the free-colored, and on December 20 a popular insurrection broke out in Pointe-à-Pitre on Guadeloupe. A large crowd of blacks and free-colored, soon joined by rebellious soldiers who had refused the oath to the King, sailors fleeing the warships in the roadstead, and merchant seamen who were forced to fly the white flag “with indignation” together demanded that the tricolor once again be raised in the colony. On December 24, seamen from the *Bonne Mère*, a merchantman just arrived from Bordeaux, streamed into town shouting “Down with the White Flag, or Death!” During the night, hundreds of men descended from the surrounding mountains and in three columns attacked the town, leaving many dead and wounded. After the insurrectionists routed a detachment of royalist troops sent from Basse-Terre – naval artillery men are said to have put their skills to good use – the royalists abandoned the island for Martinique, and on January 4, the tricolor finally billowed over Basse-Terre. The next day, Lacrosse sailed into the harbor of Pointe-à-Pitre with a gigantic red cap of liberty on the mainmast of his ship, the *Félicité*. After that, it only took another week for the royalist government in Martinique to collapse as well. On January 12, Rivière took Martinique’s governor Béhague on board, eighteen ennobled planters, the president of the colonial assembly, six militia commanders, ten deputies, as well as several priests, and together

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<sup>185</sup> Lacour, *Histoire*, 2:118-120.

with a small squadron they sailed for Spanish Trinidad, where Rivière surrendered the four ships under his command and asked for asylum. It was duly granted.<sup>186</sup>

Rivière's failure to enforce obedience amongst the crews of his squadron played a crucial role in the coup's defeat. The men had learned their lesson. Ever since being denounced for obeying orders to fight on the side of the planters in Martinique's 1790-91 civil war, they had remained deeply suspicious and continuously watched out for any sign of once again falling out of step with the revolution at home. Many had therefore resisted the royalist counter-revolution from the very beginning, either by murmuring and complaining, plotting insurrection, or simply running away. When Lacrosse showed up with his single frigate in early December, Rivière could not get his squadron, consisting of one 74 gunship, two frigates, and three corvettes, to put to sea and fight him. Too many men had left already, and most of those who remained were less than enthusiastic. Even the free-colored seamen, their experiences with racist colonial patriots less than happy so far, were showing signs of wavering, and once Lacrosse announced that the new French republican empire intended to destroy all racial designations by replacing them, once and for all, with the single name of citizen, they too deserted in large numbers and joined the republican side. In the end Rivière was only able to get his remaining men work by continuously pointing pistols at them.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Lacour, *Histoire*, 2:121-131; Landolphe, *Mémoires*, 2:137-149; "Compte rendu à ses concitoyens par le Capitaine Lacrosse, commandant la frégate de la République, La Félicité, de sa mission aux Isles-du-Vent de l'Amérique, pendant les années 1792 à 1793," National Convention, session of the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the first month of Year II (13 October 1793), *AP*, 76:510-511; Kieran Russell Kleczewski, "Martinique and the British Occupation, 1794-1802" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 1988), 73.

<sup>187</sup> "Compte rendu à ses concitoyens par le Capitaine Lacrosse, commandant la frégate de la République, La Félicité, de sa mission aux Isles-du-Vent de l'Amérique, pendant les années 1792 à 1793," National Convention, session of the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the first month of Year II (13 October 1793), *AP*, 76:521; Lacour, *Histoire*, 2:123; Cormack, "Legitimate Authority," 22.

### 3.6 CONCLUSION

The popular enthusiasm that ushered in the new republican regime and drove the uppermost layer of royalists from Martinique in early January did not last long. It soon gave way, once again, to vicious faction-fighting. The tenuous alliance between bourgeois merchants and port city radicals was rapidly deteriorating, even as royalists together with British agents were plotting a second rebellion in northern Martinique. When it finally erupted in April, the weak and wildly unpopular new administration led by General Rochambeau was forced to rely on free-colored troops and armed slaves to defeat it, a move that alienated even those politically radical but fanatically racist patriots who clung to the republican regime the longest. In response, the regime became more repressive and by late summer jails and prison ships were filling up with suspected counter-revolutionaries, a category which by now included everyone opposed to the administration. In October, the Revolutionary Tribunal began its bloody work on the island.<sup>188</sup>

Confused and irritated by this hopelessly entangled and deeply depressing world of colonial revolutionary politics, the impeccably republican crew of the *Félicité* only took six months before they lost all sense of purpose and belief in their mission. In late July, they asked Captain Lacrosse to take them home. A month later, on August 27, they forced him to do so. “Here are our motives,” they explained in a long declaration signed by 210 men, all but 36 of the frigate’s crew,

The colony, you know this better than we do, is divided into several parties; the factions tear it apart; the whites on one side, the free-coloreds on the other side. On top of that

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<sup>188</sup> Kleczewski, “Martinique,” 77-82, 88-91.

come the slaves, to whom one promised in the hour of utmost danger more liberty than one today, now that the danger has passed, is willing to grant them. The big proprietors, the merchants, all those who belong to the administration, who surround the government, form a class separate to those of mariners, shopkeepers, artisans, those one calls *petits blancs*; the latter make up the small number of real patriots; the former also pretend to be patriots, but without wanting to accept equality, having for that word a repugnance so strong that they would sacrifice nearly all before accepting it.

These diverse parties have for some time now waited for nothing but the right occasion to clash; perhaps at this very moment the explosion is taking place. In these circumstances, having only insufficient means of opposition at our disposal, what party would you like us to side with? That of the whites? But are not the free-coloreds our brothers? Have we not sworn to perish securing them their rights? Then again, if we declare in favor of the new citizens (and we would be forced to take an active part in this struggle), that would mean carrying arms against the same patriots who fought with such relentlessness against the Behagues, the Rivières, the Malvaults; who tore themselves from the arms of their wives, of their children, rather than submit to the yoke of crawling in their homes; to whom we owe both life and liberty. Citizen captain, we leave it to your wisdom, to weigh these reasons, which we have not enough means fully to develop. As long as we had real enemies to fight – the traitors, the rebels, the English – we would have considered it cowardice of speaking about a return to France. [...]

You have our fullest confidence, citizen captain; your well-pronounced, well-proven *civisme*, the talents of which you have given proof, are guarantees for us that you will not lead us into error; but the poor crews, with all their skill and their willingness to

do well, have too many times stepped into the traps that surround them on all sides; they have become the blind instruments of intrigants, of the factious, of the rebels. We are well convinced that the crews of the *Ferme*, of the *Calipso*, of the *Didion* are more unfortunate than guilty, and had they had a La Crosse to command them, they would not have swelled the party of the counter-revolution; but the state of crisis in which the colony finds itself is such, and the path so slippery, that the danger of choosing this or that party appears equally grave on all sides. It therefore seems to be for the best to return to France.

The step we have taken will be frowned upon, we are fully aware of that; it is illegal; but our intentions are pure; if we are guilty in the eyes of the law, our fellow citizens at least cannot reproach us [...].<sup>189</sup>

The seriousness and sophistication of the mutinous crew's declaration belies the image of anarchy and chaos that has dominated the literature on the revolutionary navy. Like those of the *Léopard*, the *Illustre*, and the *Embuscade* before them, the mutineers of the *Félicité* did not take lightly the decision to violate orders, abandon the colony, and sail for home. They took serious their mission "to protect maritime commerce and the national possessions in the different parts of the globe," but at the same time they refused to be simply unthinking cogs in that vast military machine by which Paris projected its imperial power across the seas.<sup>190</sup> Experience had taught them to question their orders, for all too often in the past treacherous officers had exploited the

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<sup>189</sup> "Procès-verbal qui prouve la nécessité dans laquelle La Crosse se trouvé d'abandonner les colonies du Vent et repasser en France," National Convention, session of the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the first month of Year II (13 October 1793), *AP*, 76:532-533.

<sup>190</sup> Article 2 of the decree on the constitutional principles of the navy, National Assembly, session of June 26, 1790, *AP*, 16:469.

blind obedience of well-intentioned crews in order to make them into unwitting tools of the counter-revolution. Seamen on the Windward Islands station knew this better than anyone.

But fear of quarterdeck treason was only part of it. Captain Lacrosse genuinely enjoyed the trust and high esteem of his men, yet the crew nevertheless decided that its desire to return home overrode his orders to remain in the colony. In fact, ever since the navy's strictly hierarchical system of subordination and obedience had fallen apart during the December 1 insurrection in Toulon, seamen throughout the fleet had struggled to establish the crew's collective will as the new sovereign onboard ship. On the *Alceste*, mutineers insisted on having a say in the crew's composition and drove officers whose presence they deemed intolerable from the ship. On the *Léopard*, mutineers went so far as to elect a replacement for the captain who had abandoned them. At Brest, on ship after mutinous ship, crews refused to cooperate with the new jury system under the reformed *code pénal maritime* and aggressively shielded their comrades from arrest. The tone of quiet and polite confidence in the *Félicité*'s crew's declaration, finally, suggests that after four years of revolution the citizens below deck had even come to consider it quite naturally their right ultimately to decide on their ship's operations.

The crew's presumption that each man onboard, whether "citizen captain" or citizen forecandleman, should have an equal vote when it comes to the fundamental decisions regarding the ship's voyage recalled the old maritime custom of collective decision-making in moments of supreme crisis that had been repressed with the professionalization of naval warfare in the seventeenth century (see section 3.2 above). At the same time, with its pronounced emphasis on equality and unapologetic insistence on the right to mutiny despite what the law might say, the crew's declaration also reflected the growing influence of radically democratic *sans-culottes*

republicanism on the navy's lower deck during this first year of the French Republic.<sup>191</sup> Ever since the factional fighting in Saint-Domingue had forced a division between officer and men onboard the King's ships stationed in the islands, the contradictions of colonial revolution had supplied a spark by which these two traditions – indigenous maritime collectivism and urban radical republicanism – could fuse amongst the conscripted mariners, laborers, peasants, and artisans below deck. Deprived of reliable leadership, yet forced to take a stance in relation to the violence that broke out first in Saint-Domingue, then in Martinique and Guadeloupe, naval seamen, on the *Léopard*, on the *Illustre*, on the *Embuscade*, and finally on the *Félicité*, sought legitimacy for their autonomous actions in combining the submerged traditions of the sea with the new language of popular democracy that had flooded onto their ships during their stays at Brest and Toulon.

One can speculate whether the bitter disappointment the radicals onboard the *Félicité* experienced with Martinique's patriot movement may not have sprung from that same mélange of maritime experience and revolutionary enthusiasm when they asked: "Are not the free-coloreds our brothers?" Next to equality, fraternal solidarity, which they celebrated in elaborate ceremonies, ranked at the very top of the list of revolutionary values most treasured by the *sans-culottes* movement.<sup>192</sup> But it was no less esteemed in those exclusively male micro-societies below deck on deep-sea going vessels, where men from many nations, continents, and races habitually thought of and referred to each other as brother tars.<sup>193</sup> It may very well be, therefore,

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<sup>191</sup> For the political world-view of the *sans-culottes* movement and especially its attitude to armed insurrection, see Soboul, *The Sans Culottes*, 95-134.

<sup>192</sup> Soboul, *The Sans Culottes*, 153-157.

<sup>193</sup> Rediker, *Deep Blue Sea*, 243-244; Margaret S. Creighton, "Fraternity in the American Forecastle," *The New England Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (1990): 531-557; Brian J. Rouleau, "Dead Men Do Tell Tales: Folklore,



that the refusal of Martinique's small whites to accept the "new citizens" as brothers, following the National Assembly's April 4, 1792 decree and *sans-culottes* custom, appeared especially galling to the revolutionary cosmopolitans onboard the *Félicité*.

When the mutineers on the *Léopard* sailed away from Saint-Marc and steered for home in the summer of 1790, they felt compelled to emphasize "that the motive for their actions in Saint-Domingue was the preservation of this beautiful part of France."<sup>194</sup> Three years later off Martinique, their equally mutinous brothers on the *Félicité* no longer seemed so sure that the effort was worth it, given that the inhabitants seemed hell-bent on destroying the colony. Not only were they driving the island into another factional civil war, but their complete disregard for the promises made to the slaves during the royalist rebellion in the spring must have appeared almost suicidal against the background of the two-year-old insurrection in Saint-Domingue. Many mariners were sympathetic to the slave revolutionaries, but the crew of the *Félicité* was primarily concerned with the failure of Martinique's patriot movement to unite with their free-colored brothers, together take power away from the fake patriots of the ruling party, and then ameliorate the conditions of the slave population in order to prevent a servile revolt that could destroy the colony.<sup>195</sup>

However, as the *Félicité* sailed eastward across the Atlantic in the late summer of 1793, concerns for Martinique and its future safety probably soon faded into the background, for the survival of France itself, and with her the Revolution, was now at stake. In January, Spain and

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Fraternity, and the Forecastle," *Early American Studies* 5, no. 1 (2007), 30-62; W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 75.

<sup>194</sup> Letter, Lieutenant de Santo Domingo, Brest, 13 September 1790, SHM-V, BB/4/3, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, vol. 3, f. 184.

<sup>195</sup> For countless instances of solidarity and mutual support between slaves and Caribbean mariners, see Scott, "The Common Wind," *passim*.

Portugal had joined the coalition against revolutionary France, and on February 1 the National Convention had declared war on Britain and the Dutch Republic. France was now at war with nearly every major fleet that sailed the Atlantic.

#### 4.0 WARFARE, 1793-1796

The war that finally came in 1793 brought enormous hardship to the lower deck. Europe put to sea fleets that were larger and more powerful than anything the world had ever seen, but many of the ships were old, and some were in a poor state of repair. Ships that urgently needed extensive overhauling before they were battle-ready were often sent out to fight anyway, often with catastrophic consequences for their crew. Moreau de Jonnès, who fought in war's first major engagement on June 1, 1794, later recalled that quite a few of the ships in the French fleet were what old sailors called "drowners," worn-out vessels, with worm-eaten, barnacle-covered hulls, and so leaky that they were "often only kept afloat by their pumps." In combat, such ships, hard to maneuver and even harder to work, could easily become a death trap for its crew.<sup>1</sup>

De Jonnès' own ship, the seventy-four-gun *Jemmappes*, had its brittle fore- and mainmasts blown away early in the battle, and afterwards was a sitting target for the British three-decker *Queen*, which drew up across the *Jemmappes*' stern and started pouring in broadsides, massacring its crew as if they were shooting fish in a barrel. "It was really equivalent to hitting a man when he was down, murdering the wounded and mutilating the dead," de Jonnès remembered. "In the position in which we were[,] none of our guns would bear, and we had no alternative but to allow ourselves to be shot to bits without resistance." British cannon balls crashed through the *Jemmappes*' lower decks, dismounting guns and smashing bodies. One shot found its way into the hold and there created "an appalling slaughter" amongst the wounded

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<sup>1</sup> Moreau de Jonnès, *Adventures in the Revolution and under the Consulate* (London: Peter Davies, 1969), 53.

standing in line to be treated by the ship's surgeon. They were struck several times below the waterline, and even though the *Queen* was soon driven off by another French ship, the *Jemmappes* remained in acute danger of sinking for several more days after the battle had ended.<sup>2</sup>

Combat, on this scale at least, was mercifully rare. But even during the tedious day-to-day operations that dominated life in the service, working on “drowners” put a huge strain on the crews. Samuel Kelly recalled sailing on one that required constant, round-the-clock pumping simply to keep it afloat, and from it “some of our seamen’s hands had lost pieces of skin, and had wounds on their palms nearly as large as a sixpence.”<sup>3</sup> John Hoxse was on another one where the men were “reduced almost to skeletons by such incessant labor.”<sup>4</sup> In Saint Mary’s Sound, off the Scilly Isles, William Spavens saw a ship come in “which had been out so long, that her bottom was quite green, and her sails and rigging bleached white; the crew were so emaciated with continual fatigue, and their strength so much exhausted, that they could scarcely hold themselves on the yards; and one of them was so weak that he fell from the main yard as the ship came into the Sound.”<sup>5</sup>

It has been estimated that every year during the war the Royal Navy alone lost around 1,700 seamen to fatal accidents onboard. A far larger number, at least 2,600 men on average,

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<sup>2</sup> De Jonnès, *Adventures*, 63-65.

<sup>3</sup> Crosbie Garstin, ed., *Samuel Kelly: An Eighteenth Century Seaman, Whose days have been few and evil, to which is added remarks, etc., on places he visited during his pilgrimage in this wilderness* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1925), 195.

<sup>4</sup> John Hoxse, *The Yankee Tar. An Authentic Narrative of the Voyages and Hardships of John Hoxse, and the Cruises of the US frigate Constellation, and her Engagement with the French frigates Le Insurgente and Le Vengeance, in the latter of which the author loses his right arm, and is severely wounded in the side* (Northampton, 1840), 108.

<sup>5</sup> William Spavens, *The Seaman’s Narrative* (London, 1796), 33.

died annually from disease.<sup>6</sup> In part this was an unavoidable consequence of Europe's global military reach that sent large numbers of unseasoned men into ferocious tropical disease environments. But poor nutrition also played an important role. Despite the great efforts that most navies undertook to provision warships adequately, lack of funds, underdeveloped distribution networks, dismal hygiene and poor food preservation techniques left the majority of seamen chronically malnourished, many in a state of semi-starvation.<sup>7</sup> Their weakened bodies became ideal breeding grounds for disease, and epidemics frequently tore through the captive population below deck, where several hundred men were corralled together like sardines in a can. The total number of dead from scurvy, yellow fever, malaria, dysentery, chicken pox, typhus, influenza, and even bubonic plague have never been calculated, but most likely it was several tens of thousands.

French seamen, secure in the knowledge of fighting for the revolution, bore their sufferings with the least complaint, and the number of mutinies, virtually endemic since 1789, dropped to insignificant levels almost overnight.<sup>8</sup> But elsewhere, among enemies, allies, and even neutrals, the atrocious conditions of warwork drove men into hopelessness, alcoholism, and depression, into individual acts of resistance and collective, increasingly violent struggles for improvement. This chapter traces these dynamics across three navies in turn, first in the small neutral Swedish fleet, then in the French-allied Batavian service, and finally in the powerful British Royal Navy.

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<sup>6</sup> Adam Nicolson, *Men of Honour: Trafalgar and the Making of an English Hero* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), 146.

<sup>7</sup> Acerra and Meyer, *Marines*, 182.

<sup>8</sup> For the decline of mutinies in the French navy in 1793-94, see William S. Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 242-290.

#### 4.1 “TO GO NAKED INTO THE NORTH SEA”<sup>9</sup>

The Swedish economy had done rather well amid the near-permanent warfare that raged between Britain, France, and their respective allies for much of the eighteenth century. Following the collapse of its own imperial ambitions with the end of the Great Northern Wars in 1720, Sweden had quickly learned to benefit by successfully repositioning itself as a neutral vendor in high quality war materials, first and foremost timber, masts, turpentine and tar, but also bar iron which it sold mostly to industrializing England. The intensification of inter-imperial warfare after mid-century meanwhile drove up freight rates to such prohibitive heights that many merchants preferred to send their goods in ships sailing under a neutral flag, and Swedish shippers were happy to oblige. During the great conflicts of the late eighteenth century – the American War for Independence and the French Revolutionary Wars, in particular – the Swedish carrying trade experienced explosive growth. Between 1775 and 1782, the number of Swedish ships in the Mediterranean jumped from 222 to 441, a rate of growth almost repeated between 1793 and 1804 when the numbers climbed from approximately 400 to 700. By the end of the century, Sweden, a country with no colonies beside the tiny plantation island of Saint Barthelemy, possessed the fifth largest merchant fleet in Europe, ahead of Spain. Few of its many ships carried Swedish goods for any length of time, and most spent years tramping between foreign ports in Europe and America before returning home. Even though this trade occurred largely far from Swedish

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<sup>9</sup> “Raport utaf Örlogsfregatten Euridice til ankars vid Köpenhamn d: 25 Junii 1794,” KrA (S), 1794 års kommitté för örlogsflottan, Övriga inkomna handlingar, Serie EII, Volym 2, Nummer 618.

shores, it grew to be so valuable that it eventually equaled the economic importance of the domestic iron and timber industries.<sup>10</sup>

The success rested on precarious foundations. In the absence of binding and universally accepted definitions of neutrality, Sweden's carrying trade always ran the danger of seizure when belligerent powers no longer believed that its neutrality served their own interests at least as much as those of their enemies. Britain, which most of the time was able to dominate Atlantic shipping lanes with its powerful navy, therefore usually took a hard line when it came to questions of neutrality. At stake were two issues. First, Swedish merchants, backed by their government, argued that flag covers cargo, and that even if their ships were loaded top to bottom with French sugar, and even if they carried it directly from Port-au-Prince to Nantes, they would not be legally liable to seizure. The British obviously disagreed, and they reserved the right to stop and search all neutral vessels for such cargo. Second, the Swedes argued for a very narrow and precise definition of what constituted contraband of war, for otherwise much of their valuable exports were in danger of being seized. Once again, the British disagreed and unilaterally imposed their own definition, which of course was exceptionally broad, including beside the obvious timber products such commodities as corn and other agricultural products on which France depended for survival.<sup>11</sup>

The seventeenth-century Dutch experience demonstrated that neutrality could be sustained if it was supported by enough force to make it a greater inconvenience for a belligerent power to risk

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<sup>10</sup> Leos Müller, "Neutralitet och svensk sjöfart, 1770-1815," *Forum Navale* 61 (2005): 107-130; Hans Chr. Johannsen, "Scandinavian shipping in the late eighteenth century in a European perspective," *Economic History Review* 45, no. 3 (1992): 479-493; H. Arnold Barton, *Scandinavia in the Revolutionary Era, 1760-1815* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 8-12.

<sup>11</sup> Müller, "Neutralitet," 112-114; Michael Roberts, *The Age of Liberty: Sweden, 1719-1772* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 27-29; Johan Sigfrid Schedvin, "Journal förd om bord på kongliga Svenska fregatten Eurydice. Under en Sjöresa 1793," Sjöhistoriska Museet, Stockholm, SE/SSHM/SME/75/87.

hostilities than to let neutral ships pass into an enemy's harbor. But Sweden's eighteenth-century navy, never fully rebuilt after its collapse during the Great Northern Wars, was unable to deliver such a threat. By the end of the 1760s, the deep-sea fleet had dwindled to only eight serviceable ships, all but three of them older than fifteen years. The navy enjoyed such a sad reputation that when Sweden announced in 1779 it would henceforth send warships to convoy its merchantmen, Britain's prime minister, Lord North, wondered in response "who, then, is to escort the Swedish war vessels?" In the event, Swedish ships of war were protected by the combined strength of the League of Armed Neutrality, which it joined along with Russia, Prussia, Denmark-Norway, Portugal, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and Austria. But the experience forcefully demonstrated that Sweden would have to launch a major rearmament effort if it were to survive even as a regional seapower.<sup>12</sup>

The navy managed to launch only twenty new ships before funds ran out in 1785, but even this modest improvement was undone within five years. In 1788, King Gustav III – whose obsession to enter the pantheon of great Swedish warrior-kings at times bordered on insanity – launched a pointless and illegal war on Russia which dragged on for three disastrous years before ending with a treaty that reestablished the *status quo ante bellum*. The war, poorly planned and badly executed, destroyed about a third of the sailing navy's capital ships, and cost the country around 50,000 people dead and incapacitated, many of them skilled seafarers. Some of the battles, like the two war-ending clashes at Viborg and Svensksund, were fought with exceptional brutality, but most of the war dead were victims of a harrowing typhus epidemic. It originated on

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<sup>12</sup> Roberts, *Age of Liberty*, 25; Lars Otto Berg, "The Swedish Navy, 1780-1820," in *Between The Imperial Eagles: Sweden's Armed Forces during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars 1780-1820*. Ed. by Fred Sandstedt (Stockholm: Armémuseet, 2000), 95; Claes Bernes, *Segelfartygens Tid* (Stockholm: Medströms Bokförlag, 2008), 68-79. Lord North quoted in H.A. Barton, "Sweden and the War for American Independence," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 23, no. 3 (1966): 425.



a single captured Russian warship, spread to the Swedish-Finnish naval station at Sveaborg, and from there to the navy's main base at Karlskrona, where it killed between 10,000 and 20,000 seamen and soldiers in the course of a single year. From there it fanned out to the civilian population in the rest of the country, and eventually to places abroad. Large numbers also died from illness in the open galleys of the so-called archipelago fleet (*Skärgårdsflottan*), where men on average served only four to nine months before they died or were discharged as ill or invalid. Another disaster occurred in June 1790, two months before the end of the war. Karlskrona, filled to the rafters with gun powder pilfered from the royal dockyards, was visited by a devastating fire and a series of massive explosions that wiped out nearly half the town and left 3,000 people homeless.<sup>13</sup>

The demographically and financially disastrous Russian war dangerously intensified the fleet's chronic shortage of skilled manpower. After the war, the navy could afford only to maintain a small permanent corps of skilled volunteer seamen, and the wages it paid them were so low that many soon drifted off to the merchant fleet or into foreign service. Daniel Thulander, for instance, served between 1788 and 1790 in the Swedish navy, but afterwards signed on with a merchant vessel that sailed between Sweden and Amsterdam, and there he eventually jumped

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<sup>13</sup> For Gustav III's sometimes tenuous hold on reality, see Erik Lönnroth, *Den Stora Rollen: Kung Gustaf III spelad av honom själv* (Stockholm: Nordstedt, 1986); for the causes of the war, see Göran Rydstad, "1788: Varför krig? Något om bakgrund och 'orsaker' till Gustav III:s ryska krig," in *Gustav III:s ryska krig*. Ed. by Gunnar Artéus (Stockholm: Probus, 1992), 9-22; for the course of the war, see Bernes, *Segelfartygens Tid*, 80-117; for conditions in the archipelago fleet, see Patrik Höij, "Båtsmännen vid skärgårdsflottan: Tjänstgöringsförhållanden och social förankring i lokalsamhället," in *Skärgårdsflottan: Uppbyggnad, militär användning och förankring i det svenska samhället 1700-1824*, ed. by Hans Norman (Lund: Historiska Media, 2000), 241-260; for the typhus epidemic, see Magdalena af Hällström, "En sjukdom af högst elakt släckte: Återfallsfebern på Sveaborg och i Karlskrona 1788-1790" (master's thesis, University of Helsinki, 2007).

ship to join the Dutch navy (in 1798 he was executed for conspiring with over thirty other men to mutiny onboard the *Utrecht* man-of-war).<sup>14</sup>

At the height of the 1789 typhus epidemic, the admiralty had briefly considered impressment to counter the sudden collapse in manpower, but the plan was soon abandoned as it was feared that widespread resistance would negate whatever advantages might be gained from it.<sup>15</sup> Instead, the navy was forced to rely on dire economic circumstances to drive men aboard its ships. Most crews were made up of *båtsmän* (ship men), desperately poor peasants who volunteered for naval service in return for a ramshackle cottage and a small, usually unimproved piece of land, which a late seventeenth-century law required every local community, called a *rote*, along the coasts to supply. In theory, during peacetime, *båtsmän*, who did not need sea-experience prior to their tenure, were supposed to practice for about one month every year and serve one full season at sea every four years. But since the fleet's manpower needs were modest for most of the eighteenth century usually only those who lived in the immediate vicinity of the three naval bases at Karlskrona, Stockholm, and Sveaborg were called up.<sup>16</sup>

The advantage of this so-called *rotering* system was the speed with which the fleet could reliably mobilize for war, since *båtsmän* were strictly forbidden to leave their communities for more than three days unless explicitly permitted to do so by their local admiralty agent. But the disadvantage of the system was that many of the men thus raised were, and remained, inexperienced and unskilled. During the Russian war they acquitted themselves tolerably well at

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<sup>14</sup> Second interrogation of Daniel Thulander, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), nummer toegang 2.01.11, inventarisesnummer 234.

<sup>15</sup> Otto Emil Lybeck, *Svenska Flottans Historia, Andra Bandet, Tredje Perioden: Från Frihetstidens Slut till Freden i Kiel* (Malmö: A.-B. Allhems, 1945), 419.

<sup>16</sup> Höij, "Båtsmännen," 241-260; Lars Ericson, *Svenska Knektar: Indelta soldater, ryttare och båtsmän i krig och fred*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lund: Historiska Media, 2004), 29-45.

the guns, at least in comparison to the Russian peasants they were fighting, many of whom had never even seen a large body of water before. But as soon as it came to more complex tasks like sail-handling, their performance was generally poor.<sup>17</sup> The admiralty periodically made efforts to encourage *båtsmän* to gain maritime experience by signing on with merchant ships during their off years, but after 1733 only ten percent of the total were allowed to be away at any one time, and of those only one-third were permitted to go beyond the Baltic Sea. The fear was that once *båtsmän* gained enough experience to work as skilled mariners, they might desert while abroad, to Denmark-Norway, the United Provinces, or even Britain, where they could earn far higher wages than they did in the King's service. At mid-century, therefore, a decree determined that any *båtsman* who wished to go to sea would have to leave behind a hefty deposit of one hundred *daler* silver coins, an amount so high it is highly unlikely that many could afford it.<sup>18</sup> The revised articles of war issued in 1755 also prescribed ferocious punishments for *båtsmän* who ran away. If it happened during war-time or if the intention was to go abroad, the punishment was death. During peace-time, and if there was no intention of leaving the country, the first offense was punished with running the gauntlet seven laps, or thirty-two lashes with either the cat or a birch rod (*spöstraff*). The second offense was punished with nine laps or forty lashes, followed by a lifetime of hard labor.<sup>19</sup>

In consequence of the intensified manpower crisis of the early 1790s, the government ordered the articles of war revised once again, recalibrating and in some cases lessening

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<sup>17</sup> Kent Zetterberg, "The Organization of the Army and the Navy in Sweden," in *The Army and the Navy in Spain and Sweden in a Period of Change (1750-1870)*. Ed. by Enrique Martínez Ruiz, Magdalena del Pazzis Pi Corrales, and Juan Torrejón (Cádiz: Fundación Berndt Wistedt, Universidad de Cádiz and San Fernando: Fundación Municipal de Cultura Ayuntamiento de San Fernando, 2001), 23-24.

<sup>18</sup> Höij, "Båtsmännen," 251.

<sup>19</sup> "Art. 72," in *Sveriges Rikes Sjö-Articlar* (Stockholm: Kongl. Tryckeriet, 1755), 39-40.

punishments.<sup>20</sup> Echoing the sentiments of enlightenment penology, the aim of the new code, the king explained, was to return men to good behavior not to lose them for good by systematically brutalizing them.<sup>21</sup> He rightly realized that violent discipline rarely deterred anyone from deserting – in the Swedish or any other navy – and usually, in fact, had the opposite effect. On the *Eurydice* frigate, for instance, one of the first deserters after the ship left Sweden in the summer of 1793 was Captain von Platen’s fifteen year-old black slave-servant Figaro, who ran away at Dover in the hope of reaching London, where, as a child, he had been snatched from his father.<sup>22</sup> When asked why he ran away, Figaro complained that “one treated him ill, without possessing any right to do so.” Johan Sigfrid Schedvin, the *Eurydice*’s diary-writing surgeon, admired the boy’s “strong character,” but noted with regret that “since he could not be convinced that he had done wrong, he was stripped naked the next day to receive his punishment, which was a flogging with a whip with seven separate strings, and several knots in every string – a nasty punishment, but it made little impression on him, because two days later he was just as defiant as before.”<sup>23</sup>

While punishment only intensified Figaro’s rebelliousness, more often, Schedvin noted, Captain von Platen’s notoriously harsh regime made the men careless and self-destructive to the

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<sup>20</sup> *Kongl. Maj:ts Krigs-Acticlar för dess Krigsmagt til Lands och Sjös, Gifne Stockholms Slott de 31 Martii 1798* (Stockholm: Kongl. Tryckeriet, 1798).

<sup>21</sup> Letter, Gustav Adolph, 6 May 1795, Stockholm Castle, RA (S), Krigshovrätten – Huvudarkivet E I c/1 (Inkomna handlingar – Kungliga brev till överrätten vid arméns flotta, 1762-97): SE/RA/420148/420148.04/E I c/1.

<sup>22</sup> There probably were very few such personal slaves in the Swedish navy, but it is impossible to know for certain. The muster roll simply lists Figaro without distinction alongside Captain von Platen’s five other servants. Johan Sigfrid Schedvin, “Journal förd om bord på kongliga Svenska fregatten Eurydice. Under en Sjöresa 1793,” Sjöhistoriska Museet, Stockholm, SE/SSHM/SME/75/3; “Fregatten Euridices Munster Rulla, 1793,” KrA (S), Flottans Arkiv, Sjöexpeditioner, Skeppsmönsterrullor, 1793:1. Olaudah Equiano was the most famous such personal slave in the British Royal Navy. See his *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 62-94.

<sup>23</sup> Schedvin, “Journal,” SE/SSHM/SME/75/3.

point that some even became suicidal. On September 6, he wrote that “life at sea does not encourage one to think well of humanity – it has already made me half a misanthrope – and I hate to hope.”<sup>24</sup> Less than a week later, on September 12, he recorded the death of Jacob Skomakare, a *båtsman* from the central Swedish province of Södermanland, where he left behind a wife and child. Skomakare’s death appeared to be an accident – he was aloft, lost his grip, fell overboard and drowned – but Schedvin afterwards reflected that “punishments here are as frequent as dinner. The same man who today fell into the sea was recently punished for not cleaning his mess gear; and he often spoke about suicide. In this case, who has a right to judge him?”<sup>25</sup>

The history of trauma, depression, mental illness, and suicide has only received little attention from historians of Europe’s early modern war-fleets, but indications are that all of them were shockingly common phenomena. Samuel Leech recorded in his memoirs the case of ward-room steward Hill:

This man came on board with a resolute purpose to give satisfaction, if possible, to his superiors. He tried his utmost in vain. He was still scolded and cursed, until his condition seemed unendurable. One morning a boy entered the after ward-room, when the first object that met his astonished eye was the body of the steward, all ghastly and bleeding. He had cut his throat and lay weltering in his gore.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Schedvin, “Journal,” SE/SSHM/SME/75/7.

<sup>25</sup> Schedvin, “Journal,” SE/SSHM/SME/75/13.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Leech, *A Voice from the Main Deck: Being a Record of the Thirty Years Adventure of Samuel Leech* (London: Chatham, 1999), 43.

Other men in Hill's situation turned their violence outward and became homicidal instead. Johan Baptist Ernaúw, a twenty-seven year-old Piedmontese soldier on the Dutch warship *Medemblink*, fell into such a deep bout of depression after repeatedly watching innocent men being beaten, including himself twice, that he tried to blow up the powder room and kill everyone onboard. For this he earned a sentence of three times keel-hauling, followed by a severe flogging, after which he was put ashore and banished for life.<sup>27</sup> It was not a sentence likely to have restored his mental health. Men who survived such tortures were often left so severely traumatized that they were like walking ghosts, at times completely detached from reality. "We had many such on board our frigate," Leech remembered, "their laughs sounded empty, and sometimes their look became suddenly vacant in the midst of hilarity. It was the whip entering the soul anew."<sup>28</sup>

It is impossible to know how many such men wandered the decks of late eighteenth-century warships. In the British navy, the number of officially recognized "naval lunatics" rose steadily as the war progressed (in Hoxton House, one of asylums used by the navy, from 39 in 1794 to a peak of 238 in 1813), but these numbers of course are minuscule in comparison to those of men mobilized.<sup>29</sup> It is evident, however, that a man would have had to be severely incapacitated before he was removed from service and locked into an asylum, usually for life, or released onto the streets to fend for himself. Virtually all patients with a naval background in Haslar hospital, some of whom in 1824 had been there for decades already, were categorized as

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<sup>27</sup> Court martial of Johan Baptist Ernaúw, 7 February 1789, NA (NL), Hoge Krijgsraad en Zeekrijgsraden, 1607-1794, 1.01.45, inv. nr. 376.

<sup>28</sup> Leech, *Voice*, 60. For an indispensable, harrowing analysis of the effects of sustained torture by a survivor, see Jean Améry, "Torture," in *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1980), 21-40.

<sup>29</sup> "An Account shewing the number of lunatic Seamen and Marines received into Hoxton House each Year from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1794 to the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1818, with those who have died or been discharged, also the number entered in each year during the same period." TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 105/28.

“incurable,” and their behavior ranged from “generally quiet” and “extremely loquacious but inoffensive” to “turbulent,” “noisy and violent,” and “extremely violent.”<sup>30</sup>

The feeling of completely having lost control of one’s life was responsible for an inordinate amount of stress below deck, and some men were overwhelmed by it. Louis Garneray, who was incarcerated for nine years in British hulks, noted a particular form of insanity that gripped some of his fellow prisoners of war:

At sea, doesn’t *rafaler* or *affaler* mean to lower away or to be caught in a squall? Well! A *rafalé* is a fellow who is completely down and under the weather. Your *rafalé* now, to return to the subject, is above all a gambler at cards, but that’s nothing. What he lacks is dignity. We have only a few of them here, herded together like filthy wild beasts. We hardly ever have dealings with them, but there’s one hulk where they have about two hundred of them. First of all the *rafalés* sell all of their belongings. They have neither hammocks nor bedclothes. To keep themselves warm they sleep huddled together, just like sardines, on the planks of the deck. [...] Your real *rafalé* has no breeches, coat or shirt in this world. He goes bare, stark naked!<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “State of the Lunatics in the Asylum at the Royal Hospital at Haslar in September 1824.” TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 105/28.

<sup>31</sup> Louis Garneray, *The Floating Prison: The Remarkable Account of Nine Years’ Captivity on the British Prison Hulks during the Napoleonic Wars* (London: Conway Maritime Press, 2003), 16-17. For the altogether hellish conditions in the British PoW hulks and prisons, see Carl Roos, *Prisonen: Danske og Norske Krigsfanger i England, 1807-1814* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1953).

The *rafalés*' powerful addiction to gambling most likely was a form of sublimation, a way of channeling the experience of no longer controlling the course of their lives back into an arena in which they, at least, freely chose constantly to risk it all.

The sense of living an utterly unpredictable life, one in which death lurks around the corner each and every day, perhaps was most strongly felt in the murderous prison hulks, but every person who went to sea during the age of sail experienced it to a greater or lesser degree. Professional seamen often coped with these fears by wholeheartedly embracing the unpredictable dangers of their lives. "I have read somewhere," explained Samuel Kelly,

that seamen are neither reckoned among the living nor the dead, their whole lives being spent in jeopardy. No sooner is one peril over, but another comes rolling on, like the waves of a full grown sea. In the Atlantic one fright after another undermines the most robust constitution and brings an apparent old age in the prime of life. No trouble softens their hard obdurate hearts, but as soon as the danger is past they return in the greatest avidity to practice wickedness and blaspheme their Maker and preserver.<sup>32</sup>

Ned Ward, in his more robust language, added that "no man can have a greater contempt for death, for every day [the seaman] constantly shits upon his own grave, and dreads a storm no more, than he does a broken head, when drunk."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Garstin, *Samuel Kelly*, 138.

<sup>33</sup> Ned Ward, *The Wooden World Dissected: In the Character of a Ship of War: as also, The Characters of all the Officers, from the Captain to the Common Sailor*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (London, 1756), 78. See also Rediker, *Deep Blue Sea*, 153-204.



Outside observers often found it difficult to understand the culture of the lower deck, and the apparent contempt with which they treated mortal dangers struck them as irrational, even offensive.<sup>34</sup> After two men had fallen from aloft and drowned in the space of just three days onboard the *Eurydice*, Schedvin exploded in his diary that “this happened because of carelessness, and yet – only two minutes later, just as the captain was busy warning and reminding the men to be cautious – another *båtsman* almost fell from the same spot. God only knows to what one can liken the heedlessness and carelessness of these people?”<sup>35</sup> Since both accidents happened during a storm, it is not actually clear that recklessness really was to blame, since Schedvin, who probably never went aloft, and certainly not during rough weather, most likely had no comprehension of just how hard and exhausting it was to work thirty feet above a swaying deck in howling wind and frigid rain. The anonymous author of *Life On Board a Man-of-War* recalled one gale in the Irish Sea when “the wind was so strong that it nearly took the breath from me, while the rain and the spray from the sea kept me completely drenched. I became so sick of this job, that I scarcely cared whether I held on for my own safety or not.”<sup>36</sup>

Beyond the dangers of accidental death and the risk of imprisonment, the combined operation of the international maritime labor market’s multiple and overlapping coercive labor recruitment systems added a further serious element of instability to the life at sea, especially during war-time. Having already spent nine years continuously away from home at sea, the

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<sup>34</sup> For a wonderful insight into middle class shock and incomprehension of lower deck culture, see Nigel Penn, “The Voyage Out: Peter Kolb and VOC Voyages to the Cape,” in *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World*. Ed. by Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus, and Marcus Rediker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 72-91.

<sup>35</sup> Schedvin, “Journal,” SE/SSHM/SME/75/14.

<sup>36</sup> A British Seaman, *Life On Board a Man-of-War; Including a Full Account of the Battle of Navarino*. (Glasgow, 1829), 56.

twenty-two year-old James Durand was finally on his way back to Milford, Connecticut when he was pressed by the British in 1809 and not released until seven years later: “Despair so completely seized on my frame, after so many hardships and disappointments, that I lost all relish for the world, and for the first 12 days I was on board, my whole victualing would not have amounted to one ration. [...] I had been now nine years from home, in hopes of always reaching that place, so necessary to my happiness, but I now wholly despaired.”<sup>37</sup> His countryman, John Edsall, had a similar experience in 1812 when a British press master at the Downs tore up his protection certificate – i.e. his proof of American citizenship – and then forced him into the *Burlette*: “I began now to despair; my wanderings appeared to be likely to have no termination. I did not like to look forward, and a retrospective glance, the reader will agree with me in saying, was not one calculated to cure sore eyes.”<sup>38</sup>

Sailors like Durand or Edsall, who spent extended periods of time at sea, were sometimes overcome by a peculiar form of very severe homesickness known as calenture, which killed an unknown number of people by deluding them into believing that the sea around them in actual fact was a luscious pasture, or “the green fields of home.” Dr William Oliver, who observed a man seized by calenture in 1693, believed that such attacks were most common at night, and that men without their comrades’ knowledge simply crawled out of their hammocks and over the side, where most of them, being unable to swim, usually drowned. Modern research suggests that after at least a week at sea, under certain conditions, up to be fifty percent of a ship’s crew and

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<sup>37</sup> James R. Durand, *The Life and Adventures of James R. Durand, from the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and One, until the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Sixteen. Written by himself. His first leaving his parents: how he was cast away, and the hardships he underwent; his entering the American service; together with the particulars of his impressment and service on board a British man of war, seven years and 1 month, until 1816* (Bridgeport: Stiles, Nichols & Son, 1817), 54.

<sup>38</sup> John Edsall, *Incidents in the Life of John Edsall* (Catskill, 1831), 93.

passengers can experience some degree of calenture, though often only momentarily and weakly.<sup>39</sup>

On the *Eurydice*, calenture was unlikely a problem, for usually it took calm, cloudless days to induce it, and the crew experienced few of those once the frigate heaved anchor on September 5, headed down the English Channel, and out into the Atlantic Ocean. But a combination of tuberculosis and scurvy, which in its early stages displays symptoms remarkably similar to those of calenture, brought down a man in mid-October.<sup>40</sup> Thomas Trotter, who used his time as a slave ship surgeon to study the effects of chronic malnourishment, in particular insufficient intake of Vitamin C, described the symptoms of scurvy as a “longing desire for fresh vegetables, after being for some time deprived of them. This I have often marked the harbinger of scurvy. [...] It is more or less an attendant on the disease; and not only amuses [the affected person’s] waking hours with thoughts of green fields and rivers of pure water, but in dreams they are tantalized with the same ideas, and on waking nothing is as mortifying as the disappointment.” In the next stage of the disease, he noted, physical decay sets in. First sore gums, fallow facial color, heavy and dull eyes, bloating, constant fatigue, body pains, a feeling of increasing timidity, gloomy thoughts, and sloth. Then come swelling and bleeding gums, fetid breath, swelling of the legs, extreme rigidity in the hamstrings, oppressed respiration, and frequent fainting. The breath grows intolerably foul and pieces of gum “fall off like cloats of coagulated blood,” teeth begin falling out as well, spots appear on the skin, scratches degenerate

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<sup>39</sup> William Oliver, “A Letter of Dr William Oliver, F. R. S. Concerning a Calenture,” *Philosophical Transactions* 24 (1704-05), 1562-1564; A.D. Macleod, “Calenture – Missing at Sea?” *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 56 (1983): 347-350. Macleod disagrees with Oliver, arguing that calenture never occurs at night.

<sup>40</sup> Schedvin, “Journal,” SE/SSHM/SME/75/24. The *Eurydice*’s muster book reported Sven Snäll’s death as due to edema, which has symptoms similar to those of tuberculosis and scurvy combined. “Fregatten Euridices Munster Rulla, 1793,” KrA (S), Flottans Arkiv, Sjöexpeditioner, Skeppsmönsterrullor, 1793:1.

into foul ulcers, diarrhea sets in, and the mind grows timid and desponding towards almost complete indifference, and finally death follows. It was a disease which in the 1790s was still surprisingly common in the Swedish navy.<sup>41</sup>

The *Eurydice*'s voyage down the French and Spanish coasts was accompanied by nearly uninterrupted rain and gales, and the sailors were soon exhausted by having to work the ship under such conditions. They were hardly ever able to dry out their clothes and hammocks, which not only increased the risk of scurvy but also opened up the crew to the epidemic disease they most likely picked up while visiting Cartagena in mid-October. Schedvin, characteristically uninterested in his chosen profession as ship surgeon, did not record the name of the disease, but both yellow fever and bubonic plague were common throughout the Mediterranean, and both were highly contagious and often lethal. By the time the *Eurydice* dropped anchor at the quarantine facilities in the port of Leghorn on October 30, fifty men, almost a third of the crew, were incapacitated, and two had already died, Bengt Krabbe and a man called Fagerström. Three days later Jan Holländare and Nils Högendahl were dead as well, and a further five men had fallen so gravely ill that they were taken to the lazaretto ashore (it is unknown whether they survived, but they did not return on board). On December 6, Jonas Gröning died, and with him the epidemic claimed its last victim.<sup>42</sup>

The *Eurydice* spent the next three months mostly at anchor off Leghorn or showing flag around the Ligurian Sea, before getting ready to convoy a number of merchant ships back to Scandinavian waters at the beginning of March 1794. The weather turned foul even before they

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Trotter, *Observations on the Scurvy: With a Review of the Theories Lately Advanced on that Disease; and the Opinions of Dr Milman* (Edinburgh, 1786), 25-28; Bernes, *Segelfartygens Tid*, 130.

<sup>42</sup> Schedvin, "Journal," SE/SSHM/SME/75/33; "Fregatten Euridices Munster Rulla, 1793," KrA (S), Flottans Arkiv, Sjöexpeditioner, Skeppsmönsterrullor, 1793:1.

passed through the Straits of Gibraltar in mid-April, and after that they barely had two successive days of good, calm winds blowing from the right direction. In early May, somewhere to the west-northwest of Portugal, they were battered by a storm that lasted for several days, followed by one day of good weather, and another week of hard winds and rough seas. On May 23, they finally staggered into Spithead, the Royal Navy's anchorage off Portsmouth. The ship was badly damaged, and water and provisions were running low. After a week of emergency repairs, they got underway for the final run home, and once again they were hit by gale force winds and driving rain as they struggled up the English Channel and across the North Sea, and then through the Skaggerak and Kattegat sounds. Finally, on June 12, they dropped anchor off Elsinore in northern Denmark. Both crew and ship were close to their breaking point.<sup>43</sup>

But they were not yet home. During the *Eurydice's* nearly year-long sojourn to the Mediterranean, British efforts to close down the direct trade between Scandinavia and revolutionary France had intensified, and to counter the Royal Navy's dominance over North Sea shipping lanes Denmark and Sweden had concluded an armed neutrality convention in late March 1794. By the terms of the treaty, both countries agreed to set aside their differences in the face of this much larger shared threat and to mobilize a joint fleet of sixteen ships of the line and assorted smaller vessels for patrol duty throughout the North Sea that summer. The *Eurydice*, instead of being allowed home for a refit and change of crew, was ordered to make sail for Copenhagen immediately and there to join the Danish-Swedish fleet.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Schedvin, "Journal," SE/SSHM/SME/75/49-88; "Raport utaf Örlogsfregatten Euridice til ankars på Helsingörs Redd den 14. Junii 1794," KrA (S), 1794 års kommitté för örlogsflottan, Övriga inkomna handlingar, Serie EII, Volym 2, Nummer 531.

<sup>44</sup> Barton, *Scandinavia*, 226-227; Bernes, *Segelfartygens Tid*, 128.

Captain von Platen was beside himself. The ship had sprung a leak, and after so many weeks of hard weather, its sails and rigging were in no state to brave the winds of the North Sea. As for the crew, it was a miracle that not a single man had died onboard since leaving Leghorn, he noted, for their clothing had long since rotted and fallen off their bodies. He was not exaggerating. Von Platen's superior commander, Vice-Admiral Clas Wachtmeister, confirmed in a letter to the Royal Naval Committee that many onboard the *Eurydice* really were naked: no shirts, no shoes, not even pants. Cables and anchors were also missing onboard, as was brandy, and it was only a question of time before the men would fall ill again in such conditions. "Complaints," von Platen added in another letter, "have been both general and strong, and I, for one, cannot condemn them or consider them in a state of mutiny, since there is no other alternative for people who are expected to go naked into the North Sea."<sup>45</sup>

Discontent, however, never congealed into a full-blown mutiny. A few men deserted, and others were discharged ill, but most stuck around, and by early August it became clear that they probably would not be ordered to cruise in the North Sea that summer after all. The Danes, as usual, had trouble mobilizing sufficient manpower on short notice, and that spring and summer it may have been especially difficult, for Copenhagen had been hit over the past couple of years by a series of strikes and riots that reached their violent peak in 1794. In 1792, a group of seamen unloaded their class resentment against a former comrade who had become a merchant ("Listen here, you dog," they told him, "you were once a seaman like us but now you have become a

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<sup>45</sup> "Raport utaf Örlogsfregatten Euridice til ankars på Helsingörs Redd den 14. Junii 1794," KrA (S), 1794 års kommitté för örlogsflottan, Övriga inkomna handlingar, Serie EII, Volym 2, Nummer 531; Letter, Vice-Admiral Clas Wachtmeister to the Royal Committee, n.p., n.d., KrA (S), 1794 års kommitté för örlogsflottan, Övriga inkomna handlingar, Serie EII, Volym 2, Nummer 601; "Raport utaf Örlogsfregatten Euridice til ankars vid Köpenhamn d: 25 Junii 1794," KrA (S), 1794 års kommitté för örlogsflottan, Övriga inkomna handlingar, Serie EII, Volym 2, Nummer 618; Letter, Vice-Admiral Clas Wachtmeister to the Royal Committee, n.p., n.d., KrA (S), KrA, 1794 års kommitté för örlogsflottan, Övriga inkomna handlingar, Serie EII, Volym 3, Nummer 888.

merchant”), and the altercation quickly escalated into a major riot when the mob turned their anger on a detachment of soldiers who had arrested one of the seamen.<sup>46</sup> On the day news of the execution of Louis XVI reached Copenhagen in early 1793, the so-called *Posthusfejde* (“Post Office Fight”) erupted after a student fought an army officer outside of the post office. Soon large crowds “of servants and the lowest scum (*pøbelen*)” attacked both city hall and the police chief’s official residence.<sup>47</sup> Almost to the day a year later, between 500 and 800 carpenters in the naval dockyard rioted after a number of their comrades had been arrested for trying to leave the yard without permission, something they considered a customary right. Fifty-one men were arrested, and seventeen of them punished with hard labor and public floggings.<sup>48</sup> And in the summer, as riots and strikes spread among carpenters’ apprentices in a number of northern German ports, those in Copenhagen joined in, and sympathy strikes quickly spread to other crafts, first to the masons, and then to the tailors, joiners, and bakers.<sup>49</sup>

Seamen, about one-tenth of the capital’s population of 100,000 people, were among the most enthusiastic participants in these struggles. Perhaps some of the *Eurydice*’s crew went ashore and released some of the tensions and frustrations that otherwise may have led to a mutiny onboard. It is equally possible, however, that Captain von Platen’s very evident and vocal sympathy for their hardship – his complaints to the Admiralty even earned him a stern rebuke – may have blunted the crew’s anger at their abominable working conditions. At anchor in a

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<sup>46</sup> Bent Blüdnikow, “Folkelig uro i København 1789-1820,” *Fortid og Nutid* 33 (1986): 14.

<sup>47</sup> “Om Hovedtrækkene af Dagens Historie,” *Minerva, et Maanedskrivt* 31 (Januar, Februar, og Marts 1793), 274-276; Henrik Horstbøll and Uffe Østergård, “Reform and Revolution: The French Revolution and the Case of Denmark,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 15, no. 3 (1990): 167.

<sup>48</sup> Blüdnikow, “Folkelig uro,” 16-17.

<sup>49</sup> Edit Rasmussen, “Tømmerstrejken i København 1794 og dens omfang,” *Historiske Meddelelser om København* (1984): 69-85.

foreign and friendly port, and with a commander who was on their side, it is not readily apparent what purpose a mutiny really could have served. Demands for clothing, wages, and provisions were pointless, because they knew neither von Platen or any of the other Swedish commanders at Copenhagen had access to them. French sailors in a similar situation might have decided to take the ship home in the name of popular sovereignty, and they would have had a reasonable expectation not to suffer bloody reprisals for it. But the Swedish navy was an unreconstructed product of the old regime, paternalist, strictly hierarchical, and intolerant of dissent from below deck. Had the *Eurydice* been ordered into the North Sea that summer, desperation may have seized the crew, but in the end they only took a brief swing around Öresund in early September and then headed home to Karlskrona, where they finally were discharged after spending nearly fifteen months in their derelict ship.<sup>50</sup>

#### **4.2 “WE’LL BREAK YOUR NECKS IN LIBERTY AND FRATERNITY”<sup>51</sup>**

For the Dutch navy, like the Swedish, the eighteenth century had been one of nearly uninterrupted and finally steep decline. Once the world’s most powerful fleet, by the mid-1770s it had fallen behind even the small Danish navy, and far behind those of Spain, France, and Britain, its traditional enemy. A brief expansion effort in the early 1780s collapsed under the financial and organizational strains of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-84), and after the country had become virtually a British protectorate in 1787, funding for the navy’s deep-sea fleet

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<sup>50</sup> Bernes, *Segelfartygens Tid*, 129-130.

<sup>51</sup> Statement of the *Castor*’s officers, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221.



dried up almost completely. Essential maintenance and even victualing of the crews was neglected, and the conditions onboard many of the ships were close to intolerable. By the time French troops under General Pichegru stormed north across the frozen river Waal in the winter of 1794-95, and within a short few weeks overran the United Provinces, morale below deck had grown so bad that thousands of seamen simply wandered off their ships, sometimes demolishing them first.<sup>52</sup> At the onset of spring, the *Staten Generaal*, ordinarily with a complement of 550 men, only had 122 left onboard; the *Delft*, with a crew of 350 men, only had 10; the *Castor* and the *Princess Frederika Louisa Wilhelmina*, both large frigates with a complement of 270 men, only had 22 and 7 men left respectively, and the *Hector* of the same size was completely deserted, as were many smaller vessels, such as the *St. Lucie* and *La Lurette* gunboats. The Dutch navy had become a ghost fleet.<sup>53</sup>

Once the newly proclaimed Batavian Republic signed the Treaty of The Hague with France on May 16, 1795, it became a matter of great urgency to prevent the further collapse of the state's maritime defenses, for now the country was suddenly at war with Britain. Under the chairmanship of Pieter Paulus, one of the country's most prominent revolutionaries, the provisional government's *Comité tot Zaken van der Marine* (Committee on Naval Affairs) moved quickly to undertake a series of far-reaching reforms in the hope of speeding along the fleet's combat-readiness. First of all, it dissolved and united under its own authority the five autonomous admiralties that together had formed, and with their constant jealous bickering significantly weakened, the navy of the United Provinces. Next, to enforce revolutionary loyalty

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<sup>52</sup> Thea Roodhuyzen, *In Woelig Vaarwater: Marineofficieren in de Jaren 1779-1802* (Amsterdam: Bataafse Leeuw, 1998), 120-121.

<sup>53</sup> "Schepen welke in de maand Febr. 1795 nog in dienst waren" and "Rapport van 's Lands Scheepen en Vaartuijgen liggende te Vlissingen, 8 Maart 1795," NA (NL), Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 227.

in the fleet's upper ranks, the *Comité* dissolved the entire commissioned officer corps, re-employed those of impeccable reputation, promoted petty officers up the ranks, and hired commanders from the merchant service to fill vacant spots on the navy's quarterdeck. But as the fierce struggles in Brest in 1790-91 had shown, it was not enough to replace the old officer corps with politically and socially more palatable commanders. The lower deck demanded truly revolutionary changes to the system of discipline as well. Finally therefore, as in France, in order to make naval service less repulsive, the old fleet's brutal articles of war were replaced with a new code that restricted the power of captains to impose extra-judicial punishments and simultaneously opened up the composition of courts martial to common seamen and petty officers. Some of the more spectacularly vicious punishments, such as keel-hauling or tying a man convicted of murder to his victim and then throwing both overboard, were abolished, though for cases deemed serious the new articles retained a number of extremely violent options.<sup>54</sup> Jan van der Pot, for instance, was sentenced on November 9, 1795, to lose his position as quartermaster on the *Dordrecht*, to be put in the pillory with a noose around his neck, to be severely beaten with oars, to be branded, to spend 50 years at hard labor in a penitentiary, and afterwards to be banned from the territory of the Republic for the remainder of his natural life. His shipmate, Hendrik van der Hoer, was sentenced to 200 cane lashes, ten years hard labor in a penitentiary, and then to be exiled from the Republic for 20 years. Their crime: together with others, they had demanded an advance on their wages, and threatened not to weigh anchor without it.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Roodhuyzen, *In Woelig Vaarwater*, 138-139; J.C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Haarlem: A.C. Kruseman, 1862), 5:209-218.

<sup>55</sup> Court martial against Jan van der Pot, November 9, 1795, and court martial against Hendrik van der Hoer, October 10, 1795, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 210.

The Batavian navy inherited from its predecessor admiralties virtually empty war-chests and a fleet that required at least 5 million guilders in repairs and essential supplies to fight a war.<sup>56</sup> As it was, the navy could barely afford to pay wages, and raising them was completely out of the question, even though everyone knew that it was the only way of getting sufficient numbers of qualified men back onboard the empty ships. The old navy had purposely kept wages low on the peculiar assumption that it would prevent seamen from deserting – the idea was that with no money to spend, they would have nowhere to go – but it also discouraged men from signing up in the first place and thus created a chronic manpower shortage which now, on the eve of a major war, suddenly grew dangerously acute. Promises of pardons and amnesties for those who had left their ships during the chaos of the revolution enticed only a few to return onboard, and the newly increased signing up bonuses attracted only the low-quality recruits that had long filled the lower deck of the old navy, mostly urban slum dwellers and desperately poor rural migrant workers from across the North and Baltic Sea regions, Germany, and the central European heartlands of the Holy Roman Empire. These were the groups who traditionally did the foulest, worst paid, and most lethal work in the Republic.<sup>57</sup>

Even so, war on “Carthage,” as some Batavian radicals insisted on referring to Britain, was wildly popular. Ralph Fell, a sympathetic British traveler, recalled the immense joy and

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<sup>56</sup> Taco Hayo Milo, *De Geheime Onderhandelingen Tusschen de Bataafsche en Fransche Republieken van 1795 tot 1797, in Verband met de Expeditie van Schout bij Nacht E. Lucas naar de Kaap de Goede Hoop* (Den Helder: De Boer, 1942), 1-2.

<sup>57</sup> “Extract uit de Resolutien van de Heeren Staaten van Holland en Westfriesland, genomen in haar Edele Groot Mog. Vergadering op Woensdag den 10 Maart 1779,” NA (NL), Admiraliteitscolleges XXXII Van Bleiswijk, 1690-1787, 1.01.47.22, inv. nr. 18; “Recueil van Resolutien Placaten 1795-1798,” NA (NL), Inventaries Marine 1795-1813: Aanhangsel I, 2.01.29.02, inv. nr. 36; Jaap R. Bruijn, *The Dutch Navy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 201-202; C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 60-93; Karel Davids, “Maritime Labour in the Netherlands, 1570-1870,” *Research in Maritime History* 13 (1997): 41-71.

hurried activity that broke out everywhere as the National Assembly launched an intensely nationalistic campaign to get the country ready for war. “The utmost activity reigned in all the naval arsenals of the republic,” Fell marveled,

and large sums were voted to place the marine forces of the state in a respectable condition. Scarcely anything tended to exasperate the people more against the old government than the neglect into which it had permitted the navy of the republic to fall. [...] The measures adopted by the provisional government relative to the navy, were the most popular steps that could have been pursued. The enthusiasm of the people was kept alive by constant allusions to the bright annals of the republic, to the days of Ruyter, Tromp, and Van Brakel, when the fleets of Holland proudly insulted the coasts of England, or, audaciously forcing the narrow pass of the Baltic, gave laws to the north.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the war fever that gripped the republic, however, recruitment remained slow and only after the provisional government finally made extensive promises of imminent wage increases and improved conditions, including better food, free clothing, and more financial support for war widows, did the number of new recruits finally creep up late in the fall of 1795.<sup>59</sup>

The Batavian state’s worsening financial situation – among other obligations it now had to maintain a French occupation force 25,000 men strong – made a mockery of these promises.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> R. Fell, *A Tour through the Batavian Republic during the Latter Part of the Year 1800. Containing an Account of the Revolution and Recent Events in that Country* (London, 1801), 311-312.

<sup>59</sup> Roodhuyzen, *In Woelig Vaarwater*, 138-140; De Jonge, *Geschiedenis*, 5:229-231.

<sup>60</sup> Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 201-207.

But that was a problem that would have to wait, for the navy was under intense pressure to assemble quickly and put to sea a major fleet to secure the allegiance of the Dutch overseas colonies to the new regime, for shortly after Stadtholder William V hurried off into British exile in mid-January 1795, he had issued the so-called Kew Proclamation in which he ordered Dutch colonial governors to transfer all lands and properties under their authority to the British for temporary safe-keeping. Only the governors of Malacca, Amboina, and West Sumatra obeyed his orders, but the British lost no time conquering most of the remaining Dutch possessions in Asia anyway. In September 1795, they grabbed the strategically crucial Cape colony in southern Africa, and Demerara on South America's Caribbean coast followed only a few months later.<sup>61</sup>

In the fall and winter of 1795-96, people in the mother country had no idea how quickly the empire was collapsing around them as they scrambled to get a fleet underway to prevent just that from happening. It took months to assemble enough ships, supplies, sailors, and soldiers, to create, by mid-January, a modest fleet of eight ships of the line, seven frigates, and a number of smaller vessels. Several more weeks of bad weather stalled the fleet until late February, and even then they were battered and scattered by a severe storm barely two weeks out. Their orders were to sail north around the tip of the British Isles together, and then split into two squadrons, one bound for Suriname, the other for the Cape of Good Hope, and while most of the ships eventually managed to regroup after the storm, the *Jason* frigate was so badly damaged that

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<sup>61</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 1127; A.P. Fortanier, *Geschiedenis van het Ontstaan en de Ontwikkeling der Nederlandsche Koloniën* (Amsterdam: G.L. Funke, 1869), 41-42, 64-65.

Captain Donckum judged it unsafe to continue across the Atlantic in her. He got permission to take her to the nearest port for emergency repairs.<sup>62</sup>

The *Jason* had barely arrived in the neutral Norwegian port of Trondheim before fourteen men, nearly ten percent of her crew, deserted. But that was the least of Donckum's problems, for also riding at anchor in Trondheim were four Dutch East India Company (VOC) ships and two naval vessels, all six of them defiantly flying the colors of the overthrown Orangist regime. Donckum tried to prevail with the ships' commanders to lower their flags and acknowledge the Batavian Republic's authority, but they mocked him and encouraged their men to sing pro-Orangist songs extra loud whenever he complained. The morale on the *Jason*'s lower deck grew noticeably worse during their stay in Trondheim, and Donckum was glad when after two very difficult months he finally was able to order the ship to sea again.<sup>63</sup>

A week later the crew revolted. Early in the morning of June 4, five men – Sergeant Steijner, Corporals Meijer and Bavius, and two seamen, Cardeves and Solomon Leslie – attacked Donckum in his cabin, disarmed and confined him, while another group knocked out the lieutenant of the watch. Soon all the ship's officers were confined, and the helmsman was ordered to turn the ship around and make sail straight towards Scotland's craggy western coast. After that, the mutineers broke into the spirit room and got so terribly drunk that when they finally arrived at their destination, which turned out to be Greenock near Glasgow, several of them had to be admitted to hospital to cure "Fevers brought on by excess in drinking spirituous Liquors." The rest officially surrendered the ship, and after a few weeks of celebration, most of

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<sup>62</sup> Milo, *Geheime Onderhandelingen*, 52-75; De Jonge, *Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, 237-238; Captain Gerardus Donckum's second report, NA (NL), Inventaries van de Archieven van het Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 451.

<sup>63</sup> Captain Gerardus Donckum's second report, NA (NL), Inventaries van de Archieven van het Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 451.

them asked to be permitted to join the British army. Some, including the hard core of the mutineers, entered into the Royal Navy instead. Others made their way back to the Netherlands, where some were discovered and arrested, and at least one hanged with the words “oath-breaking traitor” mounted atop the gallows. Thirty-six of the crew, including the whole officer corps (save for one midshipman), chose to become prisoners of war, and the few common seamen among them were sent into the hulks at Chatham, where they probably remained until the Peace of Amiens six years later. In a strange twist of fate, they were joined at Chatham by the fourteen men who had deserted at Trondheim, and who had been captured by the British onboard a Dutch merchantman on their way back to the Republic.<sup>64</sup>

Donckum, who himself remained a prisoner of war until 1799, afterwards knew exactly who to blame for the mutiny, and it was not himself. The frigate’s common crewmen, he charged, were almost all “runaways and deserters,” and even the soldiers onboard, usually the ones tasked with maintaining order and discipline, were themselves convicted deserters who were forced to serve in the Suriname squadron as a punishment. And as if that was not yet ominous enough, nearly all the petty officers belonged to the counter-revolutionary “Orange party,” and they continuously egged on the crew to be disobedient to the quarterdeck. Once the *Jason* was separated from the fleet, Donckum argued, mutiny therefore became virtually inevitable. The “orange flame” that he claimed to have noticed already at Texel, and which he had hoped would burn itself out as the fleet made its way across the Atlantic together, instead

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<sup>64</sup> “Relaas van de Ondergeteckende gecommandeert hebbende ‘t Bataafse Fregatt van Oorlog Jazon, wegens de overwelding en Aflopen daarvan door de Equipage op den 4e Junij 1796 geschied, omtrent op de Noordenbreidte van 53 Graden en 357 Graden 30 minuten Lengte, en vervolgens het Opbrengen van gen: Fregatt in een Vijandelijke haven aan de Westkust van Schotland gelegen,” NA (NL), Inventaries van de Archieven van het Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 451; court martial of Jacob Hillebrand, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 220; Transport Office, Letters to the Admiralty, June 21, 1796, and February 2, 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 98/107; Prisoners of War register, Edinburgh (and Greenock), 1796-1801, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 103/111.

was stoked by the crews of the ships that anchored alongside the *Jason* at Trondheim, and their propaganda eventually pushed his already unreliable and quarrelsome crew over the edge into mutiny and treason.<sup>65</sup>

Donckum's explanation, while certainly self-serving, was plausible, for the *Jason* was not the only ship in which the survival of pro-Orangist sentiment among the crew led to constant and sometimes serious trouble in the years following the revolution. On the *Cerebus*, first carpenter Klaas Scheepmakers was arrested for shouting out "*Oranje Boven!*" (Long live the House of Orange!), and Jan Christian Ludeman, boatswain of the *Furie*, was tried for mocking and cursing the representatives of the Batavian regime and admitting to support the Prince of Orange.<sup>66</sup> The second surgeon of the *Kortenaar*, Johannes Kamperdijk, was found with an orange ribbon in his possession.<sup>67</sup> More worrisome, six disgruntled men on the *Otter* – a quartermaster, a sergeant, three soldiers, and a seaman – planned to arm the captured crew of the British brig *Lord Chichester*, rise on their officers and if necessary kill them, and afterwards flee to England, where they hoped to join the Stadtholder's service. The conspiracy was betrayed, and four of the men were executed and two severely flogged and thrown into prison for fifteen years.<sup>68</sup> After being forced to watch the punishments of the *Otter* conspirators, the crew of the *Monnikendam* suddenly grew truculent, and seventeen self-professed Orangist loyalists were eventually arrested

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<sup>65</sup> "Relaas" and second report, NA (NL), Inventaries van de Archieven van het Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 451.

<sup>66</sup> Court martial of Klaas Scheepmakers, 25 December 1795, and court martial of Jan Christian Ludeman, 26 February 1797, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 210.

<sup>67</sup> Report of first clerk Hendrik Cramer of the Kortenaar, 28 August 1797, Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 236.

<sup>68</sup> Courts martial of Jacob Cramer, Anthony Stam, Gideon Lotterij, Adrianus Keijzer, Bartholomeus Bruijn, and Gerben Gooijtjes, 4 July 1796, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 210.



for singing “insurrectionary songs,” holding illegal assemblies, identifying and beating up “stinking patriots” amongst their shipmates, threatening not to fight against the English, and promising instead to murder their officers (“traitors,” “patriotic beasts”), and then to hand the ship over to the enemy. Several also tattooed each other with portraits of the Stadtholder and a variety of Orangist slogans, such as “Viva Oranje” and “P.V.O.B.” (an acronym for “*Prins van Oranje Boven*,” or “Long Live the Prince of Orange”).<sup>69</sup>

Orangist sentiment was especially strong among the petty officer corps and other career naval men. The seventeen men arrested on the *Monnikendam*, for instance, included two warrant officers, four quartermasters, a constable’s mate, the ship’s third master, and a cooper, as well as three seamen whose age suggests that they looked back on a long career at sea. These men had ample reason to resent the new regime, for most career naval men like them had long ago attached themselves to a commander and through many years of loyal service steadily advanced up the ranks to their current positions. When the *Comité tot Zaken van der Marine* therefore dissolved the entire commissioned officer corps for being politically suspect, it also, with the stroke of a pen, destroyed the patronage system that had structured the career paths of hundreds of the most highly skilled and dedicated workers in the service. Their anger and

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<sup>69</sup> The courts martial of Willem Rikkert, Johannes Breytenbach, Abram Mulder, Daniel Coens, Pieter van der End, Arij van Heusten, Arij Zuijderveld, Pieter Temperman, Klaas de Kok, Gerret Vinjer, Guiliaum Vijnands, Simon van Sluijsdam, Claas Roels, Jan Reinard, Pieter Elling, Arnoldus Hoijel, and Arnold Homan, 8-14 November 1796, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 210; various papers relating to the investigation of the unrest on the *Monnikendam*, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 212. On the importance and interpretation of seamen’s tattoos, see Ira Dye, “The Tattoos of Early American Seafarers, 1796-1818,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 133, no. 4 (1989): 520-554 and Simon P. Newman, “Reading the Bodies of Early American Seafarers,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 55, no. 1 (1998): 59-82.

bitterness caused enormous damage, and their unwillingness to put their experience at the service of the Batavian Republic was an irreplaceable loss.<sup>70</sup>

But most of the men who worked onboard the ships of the Batavian navy had no such investment in the service, and despite Captain Donckum's attempt to place the majority of the blame for the *Jason* mutiny on counter-revolutionary agitation, he did admit that his crew in fact had quite specific grievances. Many had joined the navy before the revolution and thus not signed up to serve under the flag of the Batavian Republic. However, they had continued on board, trusting the new regime to honor its promises in regard to back payment of wages accumulated before the revolution. These promises had not been fulfilled, and the mutineers therefore felt the navy had unilaterally violated the contract that bound them together. Considering the dreadful conditions they were expected to work under – they pointed to food cooked with salt water, reduced meat and water rations, overwork, and quarterdeck brutality – they saw no compelling reason to continue in the service, especially as they knew of the terrifying disease environment that awaited them in Dutch Guyana.<sup>71</sup>

The *Jason*'s muster book was lost in the confusion of the mutiny, and it is thus impossible to assess the validity of these complaints, since one cannot know how many of the mutineers actually had been in the navy already before the revolution.<sup>72</sup> But in other cases where similar charges of broken promises emerged from below deck, no such ambiguity existed.

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<sup>70</sup> Roodhuyzen, *In Woelig Vaarwater*, 123-124; De Jonge, *Zeewezen*, 209-210.

<sup>71</sup> "Relaas," NA (NL), Inventaries van de Archieven van het Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 451.

<sup>72</sup> It is possible the mutineers destroyed the muster book for precisely this reason. Since it was not amongst the papers the British seized at Greenock, which only included a proclamation from the new regime to the republic's armed forces, a signal book, and Donckum's orders, one must assume that it was lost already at sea. TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/3244.

Among them were the crews who had served in the colonies since before the revolution, and whose loyalty to the new regime also was secured with impossible promises. Two days after his arrival in Suriname on May 13, 1796, for instance, Vice Admiral Braak called together the crews who had been there since 1794 and asked them to swear an oath of fidelity to the new Batavian regime. This oath, he assured them, was entirely voluntary, but even if they refused it they still would have to remain on their ships until they were ordered back to Europe, which probably would happen within the next six or seven months. The only difference was that without the oath they obviously would not be paid for their service, since the new regime hardly could be expected to honor the old regime's obligations, especially to people who remained loyal to it. With that threat hanging over their heads, and with the assurance that soon they would return home, most of the crews swore the oath.<sup>73</sup>

Six months passed, then seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, and finally twelve, and still there was no sign that they would sail for Europe anytime soon. In response, one hundred crewmen of the *Vertrouwen* frigate wrote to Captain Hartsinck, Vice Admiral Braak's successor as station commander, to demand their immediate discharge. When they took the oath over a year ago, they reminded him, it had been with the explicit understanding that

they would return to the fatherland within 6-7 months, and there receive their discharge, whether the four years were up or not [that they originally had signed up to serve under the old regime], and they would receive all their earned wages and a regular letter of discharge. Even though we had signed up for four years, the new oath supersedes that

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<sup>73</sup> Letter, Captain P. Hartsinck, Suriname, 30 May 1797, West-Indisch Comitté, 1795-1800, 2.01.28.01, inv. nr. 128.

promise, and, in fact, we were not obliged even to swear it and rightfully could have taken a discharge then, and therefore it is proper now to most humbly ask that this condition be honored. By now, moreover, we have served out our four years.<sup>74</sup>

Hartsinck dismissed the complaint. He called together all the squadron's commanders and ordered them to inform their crews that there never had been a condition attached to the swearing of the new oath. What they at the time may have understood to be a promise to sail for Europe within six or seven months, he explained, was in reality only a prediction of what was likely to happen. But as it turned out, events unfolded differently, and there could not be any talk of a mass discharge. If anyone had a problem with that, Hartsinck continued, he recommended they be reminded of the articles of war, which they had sworn to obey, and perhaps especially of those sections that dealt with failure to obey orders.<sup>75</sup>

It is not difficult to understand the crews' eagerness to leave. Suriname was easily one of the most viciously violent places within the European orbit, a "space of death" so vile that it troubled even Voltaire's pathologically optimistic character *Candide*.<sup>76</sup> Home to one of the hemisphere's most notoriously brutal plantation regimes – graphically depicted in John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Slaves of Surinam* – the

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<sup>74</sup> Petition, 30 May 1797, NA (NL), West-Indisch Comitté, 1795-1800, 2.01.28.01, inv. nr. 128.

<sup>75</sup> Letter, Captain P. Hartsinck, Suriname, 30 May 1797, West-Indisch Comitté, 1795-1800, 2.01.28.01, inv. nr. 128.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Price, "Dialogical Encounters in a Space of Death," in *New World Orders: Violence, Sanction, and Authority in the Colonial Americas*, ed. by John Smolenski and Thomas J. Humphrey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 47-65; Voltaire, *Candide, or Optimism* (London: Penguin, 1947), 85-86.

“wild coast” was also an unparalleled killer of unseasoned white men.<sup>77</sup> High humidity combined with a merciless sun turned the whole colony into a festering sore. Those afflicted only by fevers, dysentery, diarrhea, or rheumatism were the lucky ones, for thousands for newcomers were wasted in constantly recurring epidemics of chicken pox and yellow fever, and by the mid-eighteenth century even leprosy had become common.<sup>78</sup>

Disease ravaged Suriname’s small naval station. Already in the summer of 1795, a full year before the arrival of the relief squadron, disease had cut down so many sailors that the colony’s maritime defenses were near collapse. On one of the station’s four vessels, the sixteen-gun brig *Thetis*, virtually the entire crew had died. Some months later, station commander Captain S.A. van Overfelt reported that on the *Erff Prins* frigate, ordinarily with a complement of 300 men, only 80 were left onboard, and 60 of those were too sick to work. By March 1796, not enough officers were left alive even to constitute a regular court martial. Vice Admiral Braak’s squadron brought temporary relief in May, but also scores of new victims. Braak himself was dead within three months, and by October 330 men of the squadron’s complement of 1597 were sick, and an unknown number dead. By January 1797, 326 men were sick, and the squadron short of an additional 81 men. By the following July, the current number of sick had fallen to 246, but the squadron was now short of another 145 men, many of them dead, and some of them deserted.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> J.G. Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana on the Wild Coast of South America, from the Year 1772 to 1777* (London: J. Johnson & J. Edwards, 1796).

<sup>78</sup> Cornelis Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas 1680-1791* (Dover, NH: Van Gorcum, 1985), 522-524.

<sup>79</sup> Report, S.A. van Overfelt, 14 August 1794 to 14 May 1796, NA (NL), Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 459; Letter, P. Hartsinck, Suriname, 26 October 1796, NA (NL), West-Indisch Comitté, 1795-1800, 2.01.28.01, inv. nr. 127A; Weekly reports on state of the squadron in Suriname, NA (NL), West-Indisch Comitté, 1795-1800, 2.01.28.01, inv. nr. 127A.

Before the relief squadron arrived, Overfelt had begun exploring the possibility of drafting blacks to fill the many empty berths on the *Erff Prins* frigate, and he even raised the idea of pardoning African-born soldiers who had been sold into slavery as punishment for desertion from Dutch colonial regiments, but Paramaribo's chief of police very firmly made him "understand the impossibility of supplementing the said frigate's crew with negroes."<sup>80</sup> The Suriname authorities were not only apprehensive of giving blacks a critical role in the colony's defense – and given that a major combined slave-maroon insurrection had just erupted in neighboring Demerara, and another major slave revolt in Curaçao, one can easily understand why – but they were also afraid, and they had been for quite some while, that disgruntled European sailors would make common cause with the slaves. In 1789, following an unspecified problem that arose when a seaman, after being punished with keel-hauling followed by a severe flogging, was put ashore, colonial officials requested the Admiralty henceforth stop the practice of discharging mutinous and disobedient sailors in the colonies, where they will become "vagabonds, and thus have the opportunity to mix with the slaves." Ending the practice, they insisted, was necessary for "the preservation of unity."<sup>81</sup>

After the Batavian Republic joined France as an ally in 1795, fears of unrest intensified dramatically, for the colony was now used as a safe haven by commerce-raiding French privateers, who not only were a notoriously unruly lot but also included substantial numbers of

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<sup>80</sup> Report, S.A. van Overfelt, 14 August 1794 to 14 May 1796, NA (NL), Departement van Marine, 1795-1813, 2.01.29.01, inv. nr. 459.

<sup>81</sup> "Verzameling van Zee-Orders voor de Zeemagt van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden 1738-1829," NA (NL), Inventaries Marine 1795-1813: Aanhangel II, 2.01.29.03, inv. nr. 2; Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 270-273; Cornelis Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in Surinam 1791/5-1942* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990), 1-20; for cooperation between sailors and slaves in the Greater Caribbean during the revolutionary 1790s, see Julius S. Scott, "The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1986).

former slaves amongst their crews. Captain Hartsinck, who took over as station commander after Vice Admiral Braak's death, worried about the impossibility of preventing these "Cayenne negroes" from speaking with blacks in the colony, for even if their commanders were asked not to let them off the ships, they still would be able to communicate with the slave lightermen and shipwrights who worked in the harbor, and with black seamen onboard the different merchant ships that visited the colony.<sup>82</sup> The latter group, in particular, drew Hartsinck's ire after it was discovered that a black sailor onboard the American merchantman *Franklin* had tried to help a deserter from the *Snelheid* brig escape from Suriname.<sup>83</sup>

Desertion rates had always been fairly high on the station, but after Captain Hartsinck openly went back on his predecessor's promise to return the veteran crews to Europe, they shot through the roof. But Suriname was a difficult place to escape. Paramaribo's harbor was closely monitored, and those who tried to make it overland to one of the neighboring colonies, French Cayenne or British-occupied Demerara, often met a prolonged, painful death as the jungle slowly sapped their strength. In some cases, they had to contend with hostile maroon communities, and in other cases with native Americans who exploited their confusion and inexperience with the alien jungle environment. Jan le Clerk, Gerriet Hutte, his brother Isaac, and Jan Wax, deserters from the *Kemphaan*, for instance, were recaptured when a group of Indians who pretended to lead them to British-occupied Demerara took them to the nearest Dutch warship instead. Jan

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<sup>82</sup> Letter, P. Hartsinck, Suriname, 5 and 6 May 1797, NA (NL), West-Indisch Comitté, 1795-1800, 2.01.28.01, inv. nr. 127A; for French West Indian privateers, see Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 241-246; on the Batavian Republic's failure to abolish slavery, see Seymour Drescher, "The Long Goodbye: Dutch Capitalism and Antislavery in Comparative Perspective," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 1 (1994): 44-69.

<sup>83</sup> Letter, P. Hartsinck, Suriname, 2 and 4 October 1797, NA (NL), West-Indisch Comitté, 1795-1800, 2.01.28.01, inv. nr. 127A.

Wax and Gerriet Hutte were hanged, and the other two severely flogged, branded, condemned to labor in a chain-gang for two years, and afterwards banned from the territories of the Republic for life.<sup>84</sup>

The colony's financial troubles, and the lack of support from the metropole, made it difficult to maintain order amongst the crews by any other means than harsh discipline. Hartsinck could not even afford to keep his fleet in a decent state of repair, and one ship after another fell apart. The *Vertrouwen* frigate, judged to be in a "good" condition in January 1797, was considered only "decent" six months later, and already "questionable" a few months after that.<sup>85</sup> The crews were rarely paid, and when they were, Suriname's runaway inflation made their money almost worthless. Many could not afford to replace the slops that rotted off their bodies at an astonishing pace in the tropical heat. The sheer brutality of everyday life, and the complete absence of any hope of escape, eventually pushed some crews to contemplate murdering their officers and running off with their ship to the nearest enemy port. On the *Havick* schooner, where the crew was forced to steal food, alcohol, and even linen to fashion trousers and shirts for themselves, a full third of the crew conspired to rise on their officers, either shoot them or throw them overboard, and then take the ship to Demerara. But their plan was found out, and six men were sentenced to severe cane beatings and hard labor, and another three to be confined in irons for eight days.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in Surinam*, 164; courts martial of Jan le Clerk, Gerriet Hutte, Jan Wax, and Isaac Hutte, 19 January 1798, NA (NL), West Indisch Comitté, 2.01.28.01, inv. nr. 128.

<sup>85</sup> Weekly reports on state of the squadron in Suriname, NA (NL), West-Indisch Comitté, 1795-1800, 2.01.28.01, inv. nr. 127A.

<sup>86</sup> Report on the conspiracy on the *Havick*, NA (NL), West-Indisch Comitté, 1795-1800, 2.01.28.01, inv. nr. 128.



In the Cape of Good Hope squadron, lower deck moral collapsed even more spectacularly than in Suriname. The squadron was already in trouble before it left the Republic in late February 1796, for many of the hastily raised recruits were undernourished and in poor health even before they came onboard, and during the fleet's long wait for decent weather conditions at the Texel anchorage their various diseases had time to incubate and spread amongst the tightly packed crews. In early March, after the ships had been at sea for barely two weeks, the flagship *Dordrecht* already counted ninety men on its sick list, and several dead. By the time the squadron reached the Canary Isles off the African coast in mid-April, forty-two men had died on the *Dordrecht*, thirty-one on the *Trompe*, fifteen on the *Revolutie*, thirteen each on the *Braave* and *Bellona*, ten on the *Castor*, three on the *Sireene*, and one on the VOC ship *Vrouw Maria*. The squadron also had 317 men on the sick list, approximately 14 percent of its overall strength.<sup>87</sup>

Discipline onboard the ships was ferocious and as soon as the squadron dropped anchor off Gran Canaria, the men began to desert in droves. Vice-Admiral Lucas in response cancelled all shore leave, even for the sick, and he ordered three captured deserters hanged and another two flogged through the fleet with 400 lashes each. This appeared to have little effect, and when Lucas soon afterwards announced that due to the high cost of provisions in the islands, he would not be able to pay the men their promised wages, there was grumbling throughout the squadron, and even a minor riot on the *Revolutie*.<sup>88</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Henry, who accompanied the expedition at the head of a detachment of French soldiers, worried where this level of open dissatisfaction might lead. He was not surprised, however. The men, he wrote, were constantly

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<sup>87</sup> March 28 and May 13, 1796, Vice-Admiral Engelbertus Lucas' dispatches, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221; the strength of the squadron at Gran Canaria, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221.

<sup>88</sup> May 13, 1796, Vice-Admiral Engelbertus Lucas' dispatches, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221.

told about “the Revolution” and “the Freedom” that allegedly flowed from it, yet the same old vicious discipline continued to determine their everyday lives. Boatswain’s mates still patrolled the decks with rope ends and they still brutalized the men completely at random, out of proportion and without due process. Nor had the men’s wages gone up, and all the old abuses and tricks that were used to deny them the little they were owed continued as well.<sup>89</sup> When news of the squadron’s fate finally reached Holland the next summer, J.P.G., publisher of the staunchly republican *Nationaale Bataafse Courant*, agreed with Henry’s assessment: “If one promises something to men of this class and fails to follow through, that creates dissatisfaction, and then it takes but an insignificant trifle that is not to their liking and there will be an insurrection.”<sup>90</sup>

When the revolt finally came, it was triggered by something far more serious than a mere trifle. The squadron left the Canaries, much delayed, on May 29 and as it slowly drew close to the Cape in late July, it became clear that the British had taken the colony the previous fall. With nearly exhausted provisions and once again rapidly growing sick lists – on the *Sireene* a full third of the crew was incapacitated, on the *Trompe* twenty-nine men had died since leaving Gran Canaria, many of them from scurvy, and on the flagship *Dordrecht* another eighteen men were dead – Vice-Admiral Lucas had no choice but to order the squadron to anchor in Saldanha Bay, some seventy miles north of the Cape. Within days, a powerful squadron of eleven Royal Navy warships shut down the entrance to the bay, and thousands of redcoats commenced a bombardment with red hot shot from the shore. The Dutch squadron was hopelessly outmatched.

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<sup>89</sup> “Relatie van mijne Reise naar Indien in 1796, op het Esquader van den Schout bij Nacht Lucas,” NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221.

<sup>90</sup> *Nationaale Bataafse Courant*, 31 May 1797, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221.

The British warships had more than twice as many guns as the Dutch, and together with the troops on shore nearly 7,500 more men. On the *Trompe*, *Braave*, *Sireene*, *Havik*, and the *Bellona*, the crews were nonetheless willing to fight, even though illness, death, and desertion had so weakened them that they only could man a fraction of their guns. On the flagship *Dordrecht*, the *Revolutie*, and the *Castor*, three of the squadron's most powerful ships, discipline completely disintegrated. Dozens of men took off with their weapons to join the enemy, and on the *Castor* and *Revolutie* large-scale violence erupted. Officers feared for their lives, many were ritually humiliated, several nearly murdered, and the *Castor*'s boatswain Hendrik Prins, boatswain's mate Jurrie Mate, and second constable Jacob Popkes were beaten so savagely that it was hard to identify them afterwards. On the *Castor*, Orangist mutineers cursed their officers for being "damned sons of Batavian freedom" and they promised them that "we will break your necks in liberty and fraternity," but others on the same ship sang Patriotic songs about "the god-damned William of Orange the traitor." Eventually Patriots and Orangists came to blows. Several men were murdered, some stabbed to death, a few thrown overboard and drowned, and yet others knocked around the head and slashed with broken bottles. The violence raged on for a day and a half, and when its fury finally was spent, the exhausted squadron quietly surrendered to the British. It was the most inglorious defeat in the history of the Dutch navy.<sup>91</sup>

When news of the surrender reached the Republic a few months later, there were suggestions that perhaps the 1795 purge of the naval officer corps had not gone far enough, and that in fact the squadron's commanders had willingly delivered themselves up to the British in

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<sup>91</sup> August 20, 1796, Vice-Admiral Engelbertus Lucas' dispatches, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221; Statement of the *Castor*'s officers, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221; Statement of the *Trompe*'s officers, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221; Statement of the *Revolutie*'s officers, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221; *Nationaale Bataafse Courant*, 31 May 1797, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221.

order to hurt the revolution. It seemed suspicious that they had not taken any steps to secure the entrance to the bay with shore batteries, even though it must have been clear to them that the Royal Navy would show up sooner rather than later. Equally odd, when the first British advance parties arrived to drive the Dutch from the bay's two watering places, Vice-Admiral Lucas denied a request from Lieutenant Colonel Henry to land 600 men to fight them off, which would at least have given the squadron the chance to take on enough water to put to sea. Worst of all, why had they not challenged the British squadron to a fight and thus at least been able to damage some the enemy's ships, even if their defeat in the end was a foregone conclusion?<sup>92</sup>

Lucas, aware that such charges would inevitably come, explained that he quite simply had lost trust in his men. If given half a chance, they deserted, so he could not risk putting anyone ashore, and when he called a council of war to determine whether to surrender or fight, it unanimously concluded that the crews were as likely "to shoot and kill their own officers as fire on the enemy."<sup>93</sup> Some of the other officers in the squadron tried to blame pro-Orangist agitators below deck, but Lucas knew better: his men were not for or against anything anymore, they were quite simply "faithless." Many of them had not been off their ships since going onboard at the Texel anchorage the previous winter and they had thus been cooped up for seven, eight, nine months, constantly surrounded by disease and death. What kept them at their duty for so long despite the daily misery was the hope that at the Cape they finally would receive some of their long overdue wages, which they planned to spend with abandon in that famous "tavern of the

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<sup>92</sup> *Nationaale Bataafse Courant*, 31 May 1797, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221; Report of te Captain Adjoint A.J. Knok, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221.

<sup>93</sup> August 20, 1796, Vice-Admiral Engelbertus Lucas' dispatches, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221; conclusions of the council of war, 16 August 1796, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221.

seas.” When news arrived that the British had taken the colony, even that last bit of hope for temporary relief evaporated, and in bitterness, anger, and disappointment they violently revolted.<sup>94</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Henry also put little stock in the idea that Orangism had animated many of the mutineers, for they remembered perfectly well, he claimed, that conditions in the old Orangist navy had not been any better than they were now. Angry at all the broken promises of improvement, they now turned on their new officers, professing loyalty to the old regime out of sheer defiance.<sup>95</sup>

After the surrender, a small number of men immediately joined the Royal Navy – mostly those, it seems, with genuine Orangist convictions – but the majority had no desire to get back onboard a warship anytime soon.<sup>96</sup> But the British, desperately short of manpower themselves, were not about to let a bounty of nearly two thousand seamen slip out of their grasp. By the terms of the capitulation treaty, Admiral Elphinstone promised Lucas that all those who chose to become prisoners of war would be brought “by the most speedy and convenient conveyances to Europe,” but only two weeks later he reported to the Admiralty his belief that the “many foreigners not native dutch or french” who had been part of the squadron could be prevailed upon to join the British service.<sup>97</sup> To Lucas’ intense irritation, Elphinstone delayed sending the prisoners for several months, and he cunningly arranged for celebrations of made-up British

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<sup>94</sup> August 20, 1796, Vice-Admiral Engelbertus Lucas’ dispatches, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221; Kerry Ward, “Tavern of the Seas: The Cape of Good Hope as an oceanic crossroads during seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,” Paper presented at Seascapes, Littoral Cultures, and Trans-Oceanic Exchanges, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., February 12-15, 2003. <<http://www.historycooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/ward.html>> (4 Apr. 2010).

<sup>95</sup> “Relatie,” NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221.

<sup>96</sup> Report of te Captain Adjoint A.J. Knok, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221.

<sup>97</sup> Admiral Elphinstone, terms of the capitulation and letter to the Admiralty, 30 August 1796, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/55.

naval victories, then plied the prisoners with drink and let loose his recruiters among them. By early November nearly seventy-five percent of the Dutch prisoners had signed on with the British, either for service on Royal Navy or East India Company ships, or to work the docks at the Cape. When the prisoner of war cartel finally sailed for Europe on December 6, only 220 men were onboard. One hundred twenty-eight men who were too weak to brave the many months at sea remained behind in hospital, thirty-three were left in prison for unknown reason, and everyone else, somewhere around 1,500 men, had joined the British. It is unlikely the conditions there would be much to their liking.<sup>98</sup>

#### **4.3 “WE SHALL BE UNDER THE NECESSITY TO FREE OUR SELVES”<sup>99</sup>**

On the eve of the war against revolutionary France, relations between officers and men in the British navy had never been worse. At the height of the War of Austrian Succession in 1747, the navy had mustered around 48,000 men; twelve years later, in 1759, the number had risen to 77,000 men; and in the final phase of the American War in 1782 to just over 95,000 (at the conclusion of the French Revolutionary Wars in 1802, the number would reach 118,000, and then go on to climb to over 138,000 in 1812).<sup>100</sup> The number of available seamen, however, could not possibly keep pace with the breakneck speed at which demand, and not just in the

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<sup>98</sup> September 22 and December 7, 1796, Vice-Admiral Engelbertus Lucas' dispatches, NA (NL), Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 221; Letter, Admiral Elphinstone to the Admiralty, 1 November 1796, TNA: PRO (UK) 1/55.

<sup>99</sup> “Winchelsea Crew,” 14 September 1793, Petitions 1793-1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5125.

<sup>100</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 638-639; Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Penguin, 1976), 120.

British navy, was rising. In order therefore to maximize the exploitation of available labor power, naval administrators in London were forced to take a more active, interventionist role in managing the distribution of workers across the fleet. They centralized the powers of promotion and preferment that had previously resided with individual commanders and enabled them to build up loyal followings. The old system was good for morale and the fighting efficiency of individual ships, but it tied up skilled manpower that was more urgently needed elsewhere. The administration further restricted the authority of individual commanders by standardizing the rules and regulations that governed day-to-day operations at sea in order to facilitate the smooth movement of men between different ships. This made it possible to break up and turn-over crews, re-assigning its members to whatever other ships stood in need of their skills whenever a vessel was temporarily taken out of service for repairs, maintenance, and the like. Under the new system both officers and men were increasingly treated as cogs in a vast war machine, easily replaceable, and reshufflable at will.<sup>101</sup>

The changes in the deployment of labor across the navy destroyed the long-term stability that had allowed quarterdeck and forecastle on individual ships to get to know one another during long years of service together. Mutual anonymity, further reinforced by the rise in average crew sizes, in turn undermined the “disciplinary paternalism” that earlier in the century had emerged as the dominant form of labor control throughout the deep-sea maritime industries.<sup>102</sup> The loss of personalized bonds of authority and their declining ability to reward loyalty and good behavior prompted commanders to become more insistent on enforcing the near-boundless

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<sup>101</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, “Shipboard Life in the Old Navy: The Decline of the Old Order?” in *The North Sea: Twelve Essays on the Social History of Maritime Labour*, eds by Lewis R. Fischer, Harald Hamre, Poul Holm, and Jaap R. Bruijn (Stavanger: Stavanger Maritime Museum / The Association of North Sea Societies, 1992), 32-34.

<sup>102</sup> Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 207-208.

powers of punishment formally vested in their position. Crewmen, meanwhile, now had less incentive to participate in the rituals of paternalist deference and hope for individual preferment as a solution to their shared hardships below deck. The strictly class-divided society onboard ship, which previously was obfuscated by an ideology and limited practices of mutual obligation and reciprocity, now emerged more clearly as the fundamentally antagonistic relationship that in reality it always had been.

The growing conflict between officers and men quickly intensified under the immense pressures of war-time mobilization in early 1793, and it took the crew of the *Winchelsea* only six months before they had had enough. On August 17, 1793, the crew sent a petition to the Admiralty protesting that “our usage was more like Turks, than of British Seamen. [...] If we are all to go out in the Ship, we shall be under the Obligation of using such means that is unbecoming of British Seamen.”<sup>103</sup> They demanded either new officers for the *Winchelsea* or that the crew be broken up and distributed among different ships. There was no response, and a month later they sent another petition, emphasizing just how serious they were: “If We get no Redress to this Letter your Lord Ships May Depend that we One and All shall be under the Necessity to free Our Selves.”<sup>104</sup> Apparently it was clear to them that once again they would get no answer, for only three days later they mutinied. When called to muster in the morning, forty-four men remained below, shouted “one and all,” and then barricaded themselves behind their rolled up hammocks in the bay. Captain Fisher immediately put the marines under arms, and went below deck to talk to the mutineers. Talk quickly turned into threats and Fisher fired his

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<sup>103</sup> “Winchelsea Crew,” 17 August 1793, Petitions 1793-1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5125.

<sup>104</sup> “Winchelsea Crew,” 14 September 1793, Petitions 1793-1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5125.



pistol into one of the hammocks. The mutineers, armed only with a single handspike, took ten minutes to deliberate, and then gave up.<sup>105</sup>

Two weeks after the mutiny, a court martial assembled on the *Royal William* in Spithead Harbour sentenced William Price and William Duggan to be flogged around the fleet with 200 lashes each. Both men were beaten nearly to death in front of the assembled Channel fleet – Duggan’s punishment was called off after 141 lashes, Price’s after 131 – but the mutineers were afterwards granted their demands: nine days after the floggings, Captain Fisher, eight petty officers, and eight of his followers on the lower deck were reassigned to other ships. This compromise pleased neither officers nor men.<sup>106</sup>

Aware that the tensions between officers and men could easily escalate out of control, Admiral Sir Peter Parker, commander in chief at Portsmouth, perhaps had hoped that by imposing a solution painful to both sides in the aftermath of the *Winchelsea* mutiny he would signal that the navy’s leadership henceforth would tolerate neither excessive violence from above nor political demands and threats from below. But neither side listened. Between 1794 and 1796, the crews of the *Lady Taylor*, *Squirrel*, *Bellerophon*, *Ceres*, *Amphitrite*, *Weazle*, *Nassau*, *Blanche*, *Crescent*, *Shannon*, *Brunswick*, *Reunion*, and *Emerald* all sent petitions to the Admiralty protesting the behavior of their officers. On the *Weazle*, wrote its crew in August 1795, Lieutenant McKenley almost daily ordered some of the men to strip, had them tied to the rigging, and then beat them within an inch of their lives. The same month the crew of the *Nassau* complained that they were “realy used worse than dogs,” and that they suffered “under the hand

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<sup>105</sup> Court martial of William Price, William Duggan, and Robert Field of the *Winchelsea*, 30 September to 2 October 1793, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5330.

<sup>106</sup> Court martial of William Price et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5330; Jonathan Neale, *The Cutlass and the Lash: Mutiny and Discipline in Nelson’s Navy* (London: Pluto, 1985), 6-7.

of a Tyrant.” On the *Shannon*, the crew, in words powerfully evocative of Rousseau’s famous opening line of the *Social Contract*, explained that “we are born free but now we are slaves.”<sup>107</sup>

Lower deck anger at this treatment soon enough exploded into another mutiny. On the evening of November 9, 1794, 300 members of the *Windsor Castle*’s crew rose up against two of their officers, Captain William Shield and First Lieutenant George McKinley. Having learned their lesson from the fate of their brothers on the *Winchelsea*, the first thing the mutineers did was arm themselves with all the small arms, tomahawks, cutlasses, boarding pikes, and handspikes they could find. To increase the confusion during the first phase of the mutiny, they fired off a number of pistols to keep loyalists, officers, and marines at bay, and meanwhile ran in four of the great guns and pointed them aft, in the direction of the quarterdeck. Then they unshipped the ladders to make it impossible for any of their officers to come below.<sup>108</sup>

The morning after the mutiny commenced, Vice Admirals William Hotham, acting commander in chief of the Mediterranean squadron, and Sir Hyde Parker went onboard to investigate the cause of the commotion. Someone from below tossed a letter up on deck, signed “The Company of His Majesty’s Ship the *Windsor Castle*”: “No man can go aloft now,” the mutineers complained, “But what he is in dread of Being punished for the least frivolous

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<sup>107</sup> “Winchelsea Crew,” 17 August 1793 and 14 September 1793, “Lady Taylor Armed Sloop’s Company,” 30 March 1794, “Squirrel,” 24 February 1795, “Bellerophon Ship’s Company,” 6 May 1795, “Ceres Frigate Ship’s Company,” 3 July 1795 and 15 July 1795, “Amphitrite Ship’s Company,” 28 July 1795, “Weazle Sloop Company,” 16 August 1795, “Nassau Ship’s Company,” 19 August 1795, “Blanches Ships Company,” 8 November 1795, “Crescents Ships Company,” 23 December 1795, “Shannon Ship’s Company at Sheerness,” 17 June 1796, “Brunswick Ship’s Company,” 1 July 1796, “Reunion Ship’s Company,” 15 November 1796, “Emerald Ship’s Company,” December 1796, *Petitons 1793-1797*, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5125. Rousseau opens Book I, Chapter I of *The Social Contract* with “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and other later political writings*, ed. by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 41.

<sup>108</sup> Court martial of William Shield and George McKinley of the *Windsor Castle*, 11 November 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331; Letter, William Hotham to the Admiralty, Britannica, St. Fiorenzo Bay, 10 November 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/392.

Accident whatever may happen, if not punished with Lashes their wine is stopt and given to another part of the Ships Co. which is quite contrary to the Rules of the Navy.”<sup>109</sup>

Captain Shield and Lieutenant McKinley felt certain a jury composed of their fellow officers would not hesitate to dismiss these charges as ill-intentioned or ludicrous, and they immediately applied for a court martial to try the allegations against them. Vice Admiral Hotham, relieved at thus being able to regularize the conflict, sent word to the mutineers to prepare a list of witnesses. They refused. They had no interest in such a trial. They wanted new officers, no more, but certainly no less. “We endeavoured by all the arguments we could use,” Vice Admiral Parker afterwards reported,

to persuade the men to return to their duty, or to bring forward in a proper manner their complaints, that the officers they complained of might be tried by a Court Martial; but they refused to do either and persisted in declaring that they would not go upon deck nor do any duty until another Captain, First Lieutenant, and Boatswain were appointed.<sup>110</sup>

Since no one was willing to step forward to support the charges made against Shield and McKinley, the court martial dismissed them as “malicious, frivolous, and without the smallest foundation of truth” (this, there can be only little doubt, would have been their sentence anyway).

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<sup>109</sup> Court martial of William Shield and George McKinley of the *Windsor Castle*, 11 November 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331; Letter, William Hotham to the Admiralty, Britannica, St. Fiorenzo Bay, 10 November 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/392.

<sup>110</sup> Letter, Hyde Parker to William Hotham, St. Fiorenzo Bay, 10 November 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/392.

Both officers, having always acted with “humanity and moderation” according to one defense witness, were fully vindicated. But the mutiny continued nevertheless, now into its third day.<sup>111</sup>

Breaking the mutiny by force was never raised as an option, or at least it is not mentioned in the surviving records. The mutineers were armed, fully in control of the lower deck and all its access points, and by all appearances determined to do whatever it took to win their demands, even if it involved casualties. Since the mutineers controlled all of the ship’s provisions, waiting them out was not an option either. Nor did there appear to be any room for negotiation: “They said that they were determined at every risk to keep their position until the Captain and First Lieutenant were removed, whose treatment they could no longer endure, nor would they fire a Gun against an Enemy until this their request was complied with.”<sup>112</sup> Left with no other options, on the fourth day of the mutiny, Captain Shield and Lieutenant McKinley requested from Hotham “to permit them to quit the ship, which I not only approved of, but recommended, as the only method of pacifying the crew and restoring order at this critical juncture.”<sup>113</sup> The mutineers had won. The two hated officers, cleared by a court martial of any wrongdoing, were forced out of the ship by the crew, without a single man being punished afterwards. This would establish a precedent.

Three weeks later, a mutiny erupted in the Channel fleet. On December 4, around 10 pm, between 40 and 50 of the *Culloden*’s crew suddenly began running around the lower deck, shouting “Huzzah!”, dodging below and between the tightly packed hammocks, overturning a

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<sup>111</sup> Court martial of William Shield and George McKinley of the *Windsor Castle*, 11 November 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331.

<sup>112</sup> Letter, William Hotham to the Admiralty, Britannica, St. Fiorenzo Bay, 10 November 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/392.

<sup>113</sup> Letter, William Hotham to the Admiralty, Britannica, St. Fiorenzo Bay, 12 November 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/392.

few of them, cutting down others, rolling and hurling shot around the deck, creating complete, disorienting mayhem. The mutineers, with lightning speed, made their way through the chaos, disarmed the marine sentries, and herded together all officers and men known to be loyal to their rule, driving some of them up on deck (“We’ll have no Sculkers,” they shouted). Others raced to the hatchways and unshipped the ladders in order to prevent the marine detachment from coming below, while yet another group began building a “barrocadoe” in the bay, piling up rolled up hammocks, running in two of the great guns and turning them aft. Someone broke into the magazine and distributed small arms and cutlasses.<sup>114</sup>

The officers present on deck were taken aback by the sudden noise below, but before the mutineers had time to unship the ladders Second Lieutenant John Griffiths managed to get down to see what was happening. He was met with a hail of shot hurled in his direction, and was struck on the leg as he dashed back up. He was able to report that the men had shouted “A new ship!” Third Lieutenant Edward Owen also made his way down, but when seeing who he was, the mutineers stopped throwing shot. “I went forward to the Starboard Bay,” he later testified, “and attempted to reason with the Men and persuad them to return to their Duty. They answered that the Ship had struck and that they would not go to Sea in her unless overhauled. That if they did go to Sea in her they would not fire a Shot but would be taken by the French.” After having clarified just how serious they were, “they then advised me to get upon Deck and began throwing a number of Shot again.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> The events of the mutiny are reconstructed from the the minutes of the court martial trial against Francis Watts, James Johnson, (the 2<sup>nd</sup>), Cornelius Sullivan, Joseph Curtain, David Hyman, Jeremiah Collins, Samuel Triggs, James Leader, John Morrish, and James Bartlett of the *Culloden*, 15 to 20 December 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331; the correspondence contained in Letters from the Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/1008; *Culloden*, Captain’s log, 9 November 1794 to 8 November 1795, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 51/1130; *Culloden*, Master’s log, 29 December 1793 to 29 December 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 52/3014.

<sup>115</sup> The court martial of Francis Watts et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331.

Two weeks before the mutiny, the *Culloden* had been knocked about badly by violent gales that had raged across the Channel in mid-November – it ran aground, sprang a leak, and had its rudder smashed to pieces. But the *Culloden*'s new captain, Thomas Troubridge, who was responsible for anchoring in such an exposed position in the first place, nevertheless pressed ahead with preparations for taking the ship to the Mediterranean as ordered, assuring everyone who would listen, and most of all himself, that nothing serious had happened. But his crew did not trust him. Troubridge had arrived in the ship in early November with the record of having already lost a frigate to the French that year (he had only been onboard a few weeks), and he now faced the possibility of having done serious damage to one of the fleet's line-of-battleships (again, after only a few weeks in command). Even if it was not his fault, Troubridge, as the son of a London baker and thus without connections amongst the navy administration's upper echelons, could not afford to build a reputation as an officer who loses and destroys every ship he commands. He was therefore under immense pressure to take the *Culloden* to sea, and the crew knew it.<sup>116</sup>

What made matters worse, Troubridge had been quick to give the impression of incompetence. Only three days after assuming command on November 9, he attempted to wear the ship but instead rammed the *Robust* and carried away its jib boom and foretopgallant mast. A week later, he managed to anchor the ship right next to a rock that would pierce its bottom once the gales started blowing. Perhaps it was not his fault – he blamed erroneous charts – but it did not exactly inspire confidence in his judgment, especially among those whose lives depended on

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<sup>116</sup> *Culloden*, Captain's log, 9 November 1794 to 8 November 1795, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 51/1130; Neale, *Cutlass and the Lash*, 68-71; P.K. Crimmin, "Troubridge, Sir Thomas, first baronet (c.1758-1807)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 55:435-440.

it. The crew knew perfectly well that in case of catastrophe, two of the ship's three boats were reserved for the officer corps.<sup>117</sup>

Wooden men-of-war only very rarely went down, but the *Cullodens* were among the few who knew exactly what it looked like when one did. At the end of the fighting on the “Glorious First of June,” they had been one of the first ships to reach the sinking *Vengeur du Peuple*, and while they managed to save over 200 of its crew, they failed to save hundreds of others. What they saw that day, and the sounds they must have heard as scores of men were dragged below fighting and screaming for their lives, was no doubt still fresh in their minds when just six months later, in early December, they decided that refusing orders was a lesser risk than taking the recently damaged *Culloden* to sea.<sup>118</sup>

Knowing that Troubridge was a strict disciplinarian with very little patience for collective disobedience, the mutineers were prepared to fight, quite literally, to win their demands. The first serious test of their resolve came only a few hours into the mutiny when Troubridge made preparations to break it by force. As soon as the mutineers realized what was afoot, they put themselves into full-scale combat readiness: “Stand by your guns!” they shouted, and then lit their matches, primed the guns, and sent one of the ship's boys, an experienced powder monkey, down to work the passage between magazine and gundeck. No one wavered, and Troubridge, unwilling to be the cause of a bloodbath, backed down. Breaking the mutiny by force clearly would be costly.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> *Culloden*, Captain's log, 9 November 1794 to 8 November 1795, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 51/1130; Neale, *Cutlass and the Lash*, 68-71, 75-76.

<sup>118</sup> William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain, from the Declaration of War by France, in February 1793; to the Accession of George IV, in January 1820* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1822), 1:234.

<sup>119</sup> Court martial of Francis Watts et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331.

While Troubridge on the *Culloden*, his superior Vice-Admiral Bridport on the *Royal William*, Bridport's superior Admiral Parker in Portsmouth, and Parker's superiors at the Admiralty in London all struggled to find a way to end the mutiny without losing face or shedding excessive amounts of blood, the mutineers prepared themselves for a long, drawn-out struggle. The mutiny was planned and initially carried out by 50 to 60 men, but once it started, it rapidly won the support of about two-thirds of the crew, or just over 250 men.<sup>120</sup> By the second full day of the mutiny, they had organized themselves into nine watches of twenty-seven men each. Each watch was led by one of the original mutineers, but their role and authority was very limited, and appears to have consisted largely in coordinating necessary tasks that needed to be carried out in order to keep the ship safe. Even so, most men spontaneously took responsibility for various jobs, and the only task that no one seemed very enthusiastic about was emptying the buckets in which they all "relieved" themselves. Several witnesses later testified that no one among the mutineers was really invested with any more power than the others, and one witness emphasized that those who headed the watches were considered "corporals" and not "lieutenants," indicating that they had risen from below on account of their skill and experience but were not invested with executive authority.<sup>121</sup>

The same day they made out the watch bill, the mutineers also drafted a formal letter to Vice-Admiral Lord Bridport, the Channel fleet's commanding officer. They began by recalling to his memory their service together during the battle on the first of June, and having thus established their record of "courage and valour," they explained why they did not believe the

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<sup>120</sup> During the initial confusion, 82 men opposed to the mutiny fled or were driven up on deck and, according to Troubridge, another 46 remained stuck below against their will. There is no indication that they tried to interfere with the mutiny in any way. Court martial of Francis Watts et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331; Letter, Thomas Troubridge to Admiral Peter Parker, Culloden, Spithead, 6 December 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/1008.

<sup>121</sup> Court martial of Francis Watts et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331.



*Culloden* was “fit for His Majesty’s Service without being overhauled or more properly examined.” They also registered their objections to the “indifferent usage” they received at the hands of the First Lieutenant, Mr. Whitter, who it appears called them “Cowardly Rascalls” and threatened them “with a small empty Pistol, which is enough to irritate the mildest and coudest tempers in Mankind.” They concluded by expressing their hope that “your Lordship will take the trouble of visiting us once more when we will be best able to treat with your Lordship upon what terms we can most Amicable and Honourable settle.” The letter was signed: “I am my Lord your very Humble and Obedient Servant, a Delegate.”<sup>122</sup>

This was explosive language. Apart from the signature – it could have been signed “A Jacobin,” “A Republican,” or “A Democrat” and it would have been hardly more unnerving – words such as “treat ... terms ... [and] settle” belonged to the vocabulary of negotiation between enemies and equals, not to that of supplicant children begging to be heard, the usual register in which petitions were written in the eighteenth century.<sup>123</sup> The lower deck had adapted its attitudes and forms of struggle to the decline of paternalist relations between officers and men over the previous half-century. Marcus Rediker, in his study of the early eighteenth-century Atlantic merchant marine, has argued that “mutinies provided perhaps the most clear-cut examples of the way class lines were drawn on board the ship, since self-consciously organized centers of authority and control emerged from below to challenge for power.”<sup>124</sup> This was true for any mutiny in the strictly hierarchical world of deep-sea-going ships, but with the tactics that first appeared on the *Winchelsea*, then on the *Windsor Castle*, and finally in its full maturity on

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<sup>122</sup> “Attachments,” court martial of Francis Watts et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331.

<sup>123</sup> Neale, *Cutlass and the Lash*, 85.

<sup>124</sup> Rediker, *Deep Blue Sea*, 233.

the *Culloden*, the lower deck went one step further: these mutinies not only clarified class lines onboard, they militarized them. This transformed the language of inter-class negotiations from an emphasis on social unity characteristic of eighteenth-century paternal relations to a recognition of fundamental and permanent opposition that foreshadowed the vicious class conflicts of the industrializing nineteenth century. No longer did the mutineers appeal to their superiors' virtue and generosity, not to custom, not to lost privileges, but they stated their demands and then let their control of the ship's weaponry speak for itself. This was class war in a very literal sense.

The mutiny put the authorities into a tight spot. On the one hand, it was perfectly possible that the mutineers were correct in their complaints. Most of the crew had spent nearly two years onboard the *Culloden*, twice crossed the Atlantic on her, and then sailed her into battle on the "Glorious First of June." Unlike Troubridge, who had been onboard for less than a month, they knew the ship, and they presumably knew when something was wrong with the ship.<sup>125</sup> Delaying the departure for a few days therefore was an acceptable price for averting a possible catastrophe on the high seas. On the other hand, the mutineers' presumptuous arrogance and extreme militancy made it a dangerous proposition to give in to their demands, however reasonable in substance. If the lower deck got it into their heads that orders were up for negotiation if only they were prepared to point loaded guns at their officers, discipline may well collapse throughout the fleet.

Nevertheless, faced with only bad options, the Admiralty determined that if the mutineers' complaints proved correct, the ship should be taken for repairs to the dock at Hamoaze. But so as not to vindicate the crew's collective disobedience, they were to be broken up and distributed among different ships afterwards. But the complaints turned out to be wrong.

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<sup>125</sup> Neale, *Cutlass and the Lash*, 71-72, 76.

Lord Bridport, along with two other high-ranking officers of the fleet and a number of shipwrights from the yard in Portsmouth, had gone on board and drawn samples of the *Culloden*'s bilgewater: it was pitch black, indicating that its hull was tight and admitted only small amounts of fresh seawater. In that case, the Admiralty informed Parker, he was to send two three-deckers alongside the *Culloden* and use whatever means necessary "to bring the Mutineers on board His Majesty's Ship *Culloden* to Obedience, and for securing the Ringleaders."<sup>126</sup>

On the *Culloden* they accepted that their ship was seaworthy after all, but insisted that without guarantee "not to punish any man concerned in the present business or to mention or remember it there after," they would not return to duty.<sup>127</sup> Captains Seymour of the *Leviathan* and Pakenham of the *Invincible*, whom Admiral Parker sent onboard to attempt a negotiated surrender, came back with the news that the mutineers were quite serious in their resolve: the men had told them they were willing to go "down in the Ship rather than come upon Deck on other Terms." Seymour and Pakenham concluded that there was no use "hoping that any thing will avail but Coercion or a General Pardon."<sup>128</sup> This was probably more than just idle posturing on the part of the mutineers. Several witnesses testified that Jeremiah Collins, a forty year-old able seaman from Cork and one of the most militant men on board, went around cursing that "by

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<sup>126</sup> Letter, Admiral Parker to the Lords of the Admiralty, Royal William, Spithead, December 7, 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/1008; letter, Captains Seymour and Pakenham to Admiral Parker, *Leviathan*, Spithead, December 7, 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/1008; letter, Admiral Parker to the Lords of the Admiralty, Royal William, Spithead, December 9, 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/1008

<sup>127</sup> "Attachments," court martial of Francis Watts et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331.

<sup>128</sup> Letter, Captains Seymour and Pakenham to Admiral Parker, *Leviathan*, Spithead, 7 December 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/1008.

the holy St. Jesus before we will go up without coming to honorable Terms I'll blow them to the Bounds of Buggery.”<sup>129</sup>

The end of the mutiny is shrouded in mystery and controversy. Rough winds delayed the sending of the *Royal George* and the *Royal Sovereign* to lay alongside the *Culloden* and force its crew to surrender, and in the meantime Captain Pakenham was ordered to take another stab at convincing the mutineers to return to duty. And, surprisingly, he succeeded. On December 9, after five days of being barricaded below, the *Culloden* mutineers shuffled up on deck. It is possible that a majority of the men had come to accept defeat, and knowing that only the most forward or known troublemakers amongst them were likely to be arrested and stand trial, they decided to give up. But that is not what many on the navy's lower deck came to believe. Troubridge, Bridport, Parker, and all the other officers had a strong incentive not to order force against the mutineers, for what if their orders were refused? What if the crews of the *Royal George* and the *Royal Sovereign* refused to open fire on their comrades? And what if they did obey and then unleashed a broadside or two? And what if the *Culloden* fought back? The consequences would be just as disagreeable, and potentially very expensive if the three ships managed to inflict any kind of damage upon each other. It is therefore conceivable, and many thought very likely, that Pakenham was told to deceive the mutineers, that he lured them up on deck by promising them that a full pardon had been granted.<sup>130</sup>

Troubridge believed that those who initiated the mutiny were “mostly of the lower order of Irish,” but the men's efforts to remain anonymous and their extraordinary level of solidarity in

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<sup>129</sup> Court martial of Francis Watts et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331; *Culloden* muster book, October 1 to November 8, 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/12169.

<sup>130</sup> James Dugan, *The Great Mutiny* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 107-108.

the aftermath of the mutiny makes that a difficult claim to evaluate.<sup>131</sup> It is possible, but how would he have known? Having been onboard for just three weeks, he barely knew the men, and during the mutiny they did everything to appear as a united, undifferentiated mass in the eyes of their officers. Soon after the mutiny broke out, they hung hammocks around the hatchways in order to obscure the view from above, and whenever they negotiated they spoke from behind a screen. Even the letter to Bridport was anonymously handed up on deck attached to a stick. During the court martial, both the witnesses and the accused continuously sought safety in the anonymous mass, swearing over and over again that no one ever took the lead in anything, that everything happened spontaneously, or that they were too drunk to remember this or that event, that they slept through the mutiny entirely. The court repeatedly had to remind the men that whatever oath they may have taken during the mutiny – and they did take one, though its content is unclear – it was neither legally nor morally binding. One of the witnesses, Maurice Dunn, was sentenced to three months solitary confinement in London's Marshalsea prison for gross prevarication.<sup>132</sup>

The Swedish navy's *Krigs-Articlar* (articles of war) authorized the decimation of a mutinous crew, but the British Royal Navy only recognized crimes committed by individuals, even in the case of mutiny.<sup>133</sup> In practice, of course, courts martial often prosecuted men more or less at random in order to impose exemplary punishments, but without witnesses that testified to

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<sup>131</sup> Letter, Thomas Troubridge to Admiral Peter Parker, Culloden, Spithead, 6 December 1794, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/1008.

<sup>132</sup> Court martial of Francis Watts et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331.

<sup>133</sup> *Kongl. Maj:ts Krigs-Articlar för des Krigsmagt til Lands och Siös, Gifne Stockholms Slott den 31 Martii 1798* (Stockholm: Kongl. Tryckeriet, 1798), ch. 5, §14.

an individual's specific role in the mutiny, there could be no conviction.<sup>134</sup> Of the three men put on trial following the strike on the *Winchelsea*, for example, one had to be acquitted because not a single witness could place him anywhere near the mutiny, and the other two could only be shown to have done nothing to stop it.<sup>135</sup> As for the ten men prosecuted for their part in the *Culloden* mutiny, it appears that some of them indeed were more active than others (Jeremiah Collins was one of them, the Irishman who wanted to blow up the ship), while the rest, as Jonathan Neale has suggested, simply were the only men that Troubridge could find witnesses against. Of the ten, eight were sentenced to death by hanging, of whom three were recommended for mercy, and two acquitted. Troubridge acknowledged that there were another thirty men whom he strongly suspected of having had leading roles in the mutiny, but he could not find or compel anyone to testify against them.<sup>136</sup> The crew had learnt the value of strict solidarity.

By refusing to testify in front of the court martial, the *Culloden* mutineers also refused to become their comrades' executioners in a very literal sense.<sup>137</sup> Capital punishment in the British navy was by hanging the victim from the yard-arm. He was taken to stand on the cat-head, a large wooden beam projecting outward from the bow of the ship, a noose tied around his neck, and the rope run up through a block attached to the foreyard and then dropped down along the

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<sup>134</sup> For the operation, in theory and practice, of the British naval court martial, see John D. Byrn Jr., *Crime and Punishment in the Royal Navy: Discipline on the Leeward Islands Station, 1784-1812* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989). See also Marcus Eder, *Crime and Punishment in the Royal Navy of the Seven Years' War, 1755-1763* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>135</sup> Court martial of William Price et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5330.

<sup>136</sup> Court martial of Francis Watts et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331; Neale, *Cutlass and the Lash*, 95-97.

<sup>137</sup> For a discussion how court martial proceedings functioned as a site of counter-insurgency and resistance, see David Featherstone, "Counter-Insurgency, Subalternati and Spatial Relations: Interrogating Court-Martial Narratives of the Nore Mutiny of 1797," *South African Historical Journal* 61, no. 4 (2009): 766-787.

foremast to the forecastle, and from there into the waist, where the crew was forced to assemble.

“Set tort, men,” the boatswain then ordered, and

the chaplain then comes up to the forecastle, and makes a short prayer – after which the master at arms turns to you, and says, “You are to be hung by the neck under that yard, until you are dead, dead, dead; and may the Lord have mercy on your soul;” then orders the people to run you up, and you are run up until your head touches the yard, when he takes the rope, and belays it, and thus you hang about half an hour.<sup>138</sup>

It was a ritual meant to humiliate the crew, forcing them to murder one of their own and thus driving home the reality of their complete submission to the captain’s will, a lesson especially important in the aftermath of a mutiny.

Many crews refused to learn it, and instead of breaking their solidarity, punishments of all kinds instead emerged as the single most frequent trigger of mutiny during the 1790s, and not just in the British navy. It was also the cause of the next major mutiny after the *Culloden*. Following a night of violent rioting onboard the *Defiance*, the crew, including those who until then had remained peaceful, exploded into full-blown mutiny when their officers arrested eight of the most active troublemakers and then attempted to send them into a different ship. But rather than barricade themselves below deck, the crew simply refused to do any duty, and as the first full day of the mutiny came to an end, they informed Captain Home that he had better release the

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<sup>138</sup> Joshua Davis, *A Narrative of Joshua Davis, an American Citizen, who was Pressed and Served On Board Six Ships of the British Navy. He was in seven engagements, once wounded, five times confined in irons, and obtained his liberty by desertion. The whole being an interesting and faithful narrative of the discipline, various practices and treatment of pressed seamen in the British Navy, and containing information that was never before presented to the American People* (Boston, 1811), 66.

prisoners, for otherwise it surely would be done by force during the dark of night. Home had no choice but to comply.<sup>139</sup>

The original riot had been a chaotic affair, fuelled by pent-up frustration and a sense of violated custom. The *Defiance* had just returned from a difficult three-month cruise along the Norwegian coast and the crew was looking forward to spending some time ashore, perhaps with their friends and families, or with the more temporary companions that could be found in the taverns along the Leith waterfront. Their hopes were disappointed: only officers would be allowed off the ship. Captain Home, like many of his colleagues, had learned the lessons of the American war when nearly one in every four men deserted at least once, and he was determined to do whatever it took to minimize the risk of his men getting away, even if it meant, as they put it, that he made them feel “like convicts.”<sup>140</sup> To lessen their discomfort and discontent, Home allowed married men to send for their families to join them, but he refused to let the sex workers that otherwise flocked to every ship in harbor come on board. The young, unmarried men who made up the majority of the crew, and whose only opportunity for sexual relief during the past three months had been with each other, were not happy.<sup>141</sup> They became even less happy when Captain Home ordered their grog watered down beyond the tolerable. It was the middle of October, the weather was wet, windy, and cold, and the men expected their daily ration of grog

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<sup>139</sup> Court martial of William Parker (1<sup>st</sup>), Robert McLawrin, George Wythick, Martin Ealey, William Froud, John McDonald, John Sullivan, William Handy, George Harden, John Prime, Joseph Flint, Michael Cox, John Lawson, William Morrison, John Graham (1<sup>st</sup>), Charles Pick, and William Avery of the *Defiance*, January 20 to February 11, 1796, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5334.

<sup>140</sup> Peter Kemp, *The British sailor: A social history of the lower deck* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1970), 139; Court martial of William Parker (1<sup>st</sup>) et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5334.

<sup>141</sup> Most naval historians continue to deny the existence of homosexuality on the lower deck despite ample evidence to the contrary, including in the court martial minutes of the *Defiance* trial. Court martial of William Parker (1<sup>st</sup>) et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5334; Neale, *Cutlass and the Lash*, 161-162; see also B.R. Burg, *Boys at Sea: Sodomy, Indecency, and Courts Martial in Nelson’s Navy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).



to have the customary proportion of one pint rum to three pints water. Even that was barely strong enough to give a man the illusion of warmth, let alone allow him to get drunk, but Captain Home had determined that on the *Defiance* “five-water grog” would be served, “which renders our Grog of no Service to us being thereby spoiled,” as the mutineers later explained.<sup>142</sup>

The crew had legitimate complaints, but they were riven by internal conflicts and lacked the unity, discipline, and mutual trust that was necessary to pull off an organized mutiny like their comrades on the *Culloden* had done. Instead they rioted, broke into the spirit room, threw shots at their officers, randomly fired pistols out of the port holes, and eventually, in some cases, turned the violence upon each other, using the cloak of chaos to settle some of the scores that had built up over the preceding months. A wiser commander of men than Home perhaps would have recognized these divisions, and by further deepening them solidified his own authority. But his rash decision to seize eight of the most active rioters in the morning had precisely the opposite effect: regardless of their other disagreements, the crew was now largely united in opposing the punishments, and the mutiny soon took an even more radical turn. Many of the most experienced and skilled members of the crew had not participated in the riot the night before – some had even attempted to stop it – but these men now emerged as the leaders of the mutiny. And they were determined to seize the moment to have their customary rights reestablished.<sup>143</sup>

The morning after the prisoners had been freed someone tossed a letter onto the quarterdeck in which “the Ships Co. of H.M. Ship *Defiance* under your Command (all and singular)” made their position clear. First of all, their original demands had been for shore leave and stronger grog, and these still stood. “2ndly,” they continued, “Here is a quantity of Men upon

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<sup>142</sup> “Copy of Petition from the *Defiance*,” TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/522.

<sup>143</sup> Court martial of William Parker (1<sup>st</sup>) et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5334.

record who gave in their Names to the Ships Clerk Mr. Thomson as Royalists, these we ordain to go out of the Ship.”<sup>144</sup> With “Royalists,” they meant the scabs, those among the crew who refused to join the mutiny and remained loyal to their officers. The choice of word is extraordinarily significant, as it shows how the crew adopted the language of the revolutionary Atlantic to understand and describe the specific conditions of tyranny they lived under onboard ship. If loyalty to the officer corps was equivalent to counter-revolution, mutiny in turn was a revolutionary act, not just a corrective intervention to reestablish lost rights and social harmony. It is a further indication that for a substantial number of men in the navy the struggle between quarterdeck and forecabin had become an irreconcilable and permanent division.

It was perhaps not by coincidence that the process of lower deck radicalization had gone furthest on a ship in the North Sea fleet, for these were filled with men who truly hated the service. It had cost His Majesty’s press gangs stationed in the northeast enormous efforts to round up men during the mobilization of 1793-94. Just months before the outbreak of the war, England’s North Sea collier fleet – the nursery of some of the world’s toughest and most highly skilled seamen, Captain James Cook among them – was gripped by a militant strike that succeeded in pushing up wage levels in the industry. From October into late November, the strikers brought Tyneside shipping to a complete standstill, interrupting the vital coal deliveries for London’s hearths just at the onset of winter. After several weeks of conflict, the shipowners were eventually forced to concede defeat and raise wages from £2.10s per voyage to £3.<sup>145</sup> When press gangs showed up only a few months later to force the same men to serve in the King’s fleet

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<sup>144</sup> “Copy of Letter thrown on the Quarter Deck of the Defiance. Writer not known.” TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/522.

<sup>145</sup> Norman McCord and David E. Brewster, “Some Labour Troubles of the 1790s in North East England,” *International Review of Social History* 13, no. 3 (1968): 366-383.

for wages as low as 5 shillings a week, violence immediately exploded. In Whitby, rioters threatened to demolish a press gang's rendezvous, forcing it quickly to abandon the town. In Sunderland they freed captured men from the gang's tender and then laid siege to its rendezvous. In South Shields, hundreds marched behind a banner proclaiming "Liberty For Ever," before ritually humiliating gang members and throwing them out of town. Shortly afterwards they erected a liberty pole in the town's market square, just like the fed-up residents of Boston, New York, Newport, Philadelphia, and other American port cities had done two decades before. In Newcastle, seamen organized in the Magna Carta Club discussed the questionable constitutionality of impressment, while crowds marched through the streets shouting "No King! Tom Paine forever!"<sup>146</sup> One of the city's sons, Thomas Spence – in 1794 imprisoned for high treason – published new lyrics to the nation's favorite belligerent anthem:

When BRITAIN first impelled by pride,  
Usurp'd dominion o'er the main,  
Blest peace, she vainly threw aside,  
And gave her sons the galling chain.  
  
View Britannia, Britannia view the waves,  
On which thy darling sons are slaves.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval impressment and its opponents in Georgian Britain* (London: Continuum, 2007), 106-107.

<sup>147</sup> "A Song. Tune – Rule Britannia," in Thomas Spence, *One Pennyworth of Pig's Meat; or, Lessons for the Swinish Multitude, Vol. II* (London, 1794), 67. For more songs that liken coerced naval servitude to slavery – and crucially oppose both – see Richard Lee, *Songs from the Rock, To Hail the Approaching Day, Sacred to Truth, Liberty and Peace. To which is added, The Tribute of Civic Gratitude: A Congratulatory Address to Thomas Hardy* (London, 1795), *passim*; A Cosmopolite, *The Political Harmonist; or, Songs, and Political Effusions, Sacred to the Cause of Liberty* (London, 1797), *passim*.

The *Defiance* also saw the same slide from labor militancy into revolutionary politics. William Handy, who during the mutiny had cleared the quarterdeck of scabs with the help a burgoon stirrer, proclaimed “with an Oath that the World was nothing without liberty.” He clearly spoke about more than just temporary shore leave.<sup>148</sup>

Admiral Pringle, commander in chief at Leith, never appears seriously to have contemplated giving in to the demands of the mutineers – their radicalism can hardly have encouraged him – and though making conciliatory noises he was determined to break the mutiny by force. Captain William Bligh, late of the *Bounty*, enthusiastically volunteered to lead a detachment of soldiers onboard to restore order, “which,” Pringle soon was able to report, “was carried into execution this Morning, but not without some disturbances such as the Men throwing Shot into the Boats, and again loading some of the lower deck Guns.” Despite the resistance, which in truth was only minor since the mutineers could not bring themselves to fire the guns, the mutiny rapidly collapsed once Bligh and his troops had gained the deck. The eight original prisoners were re-arrested, and were soon joined by nine other men who had taken leading roles in the second phase of the mutiny. The subsequent court martial, one of the longest in British naval history up to then, sentenced eight men to death by hanging, four to be flogged round the fleet with 300 lashes each, and three with 100 lashes. Two men were acquitted. The rest of the crew was broken up, and one hundred of them were sent under the harsh tutelage of William Bligh in the *Director*.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Court martial of William Parker (1<sup>st</sup>) et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5334.

<sup>149</sup> Letter, Admiral Pringle to the Lords of the Admiralty, on board the *Asia*, October 19, 1795, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/522; Gavin Kennedy, “Bligh and the *Defiance* Mutiny,” *Mariner’s Mirror* 65, no. 1 (1979): 65-68; Court martial of William Parker (1<sup>st</sup>) et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5334; Neale, *Cutlass and the Lash*, 159.

The growing militancy and political radicalism of the mutineers on the *Culloden* and the *Defiance* was a gauntlet thrown from below onto the quarterdeck, and the severe punishments that followed was an answer of sorts. The earlier attempts at conciliation that had met the mutinies on the *Winchelsea* and the *Windsor Castle* were abandoned, and from now on force would be met with force. The same message was bloodily reinforced on the *Terrible* man-of-war at the same time as the *Defiance* mutiny. When a substantial part of the crew barricaded themselves in the bay to protest against their rotten, weevil-infested provisions, Captain Campbell angrily told them that “it shall not be a Windsor Castle’s Business” and then ordered the marines to tear open holes in the deck and immediately to open fire on the men below. When the smoke cleared, five mutineers lay seriously wounded. Charles Rogers was shot through both arms, George Everett through one arm and one thigh, William Miles through one of his knees, George Wilkinson through his groin and thigh bone, and Mattio Ciantar through both his shoulders and lungs. Captain Campbell then ordered Lawrence Lawrence, John Best, Thomas East, Robert Wyatt, and Thomas Bruce (2<sup>nd</sup>) flogged on the spot. Lawrence and Bruce together with ten more men were afterwards tried by a court martial, which sentenced six of them to death: Hugh Irwin, William Rogers, Michael Collins, Edward Masters, James Luddington, and Lawrence Lawrence. Two days later, five of them were hanged in front of the assembled Mediterranean fleet in Saint Fiorenzo Bay, Corsica. Admiral Hotham, who had specifically returned to port with as many ships as possible for the occasion, called it “a striking and forcible example.”<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Court martial of Hugh Irwin, William Rogers, Michael Collins, Edward Masters, James Luddington, William Wilkinson, Robert Bullmer, Richard Peacock, James Davidson, John McKenzie, Lawrence Lawrence, and Thomas Bruce (2<sup>nd</sup>) of the *Terrible*, September 25 to October 3, 1795, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5331; Letter, Admiral Hotham to the Lords of the Admiralty, *Britannia*, at sea, September 12, 1795, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/393.

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

In each of the three navies discussed in this chapter the lower deck reacted differently to the hardships of naval warwork. Outright mutiny everywhere remained a rare event in comparison to the numbers of ships mobilized, but given the difficulties and lethal dangers of collectively refusing orders, the relatively small numbers of actual events must be considered as the visible tip of the iceberg of lower deck discontent. Moreover, if, when, and where they did occur, mutinies in each of the navies tended to be triggered by circumstances and to follow trajectories particular to that service. These differences in turn point to the kinds of tensions that developed in each navy, and how the men below deck chose to respond to them, and why.

The same holds true even for the Swedish navy, although here it is a matter of explaining an absence since none of its crews mutinied despite sharing some of the severe conditions that contributed to revolts on Batavian and British ships. But both of these forces were far larger. The *Eurydice* frigate, for example, was only one of less than a dozen ships put to sea during the early years of the war to protect neutral Swedish commerce, and even though the crew suffered horrendously during its 1793-94 return voyage to the Mediterranean, it was statistically unlikely that they should have mutinied. The specific conditions of service under which men in the Swedish navy served, however, also contributed to lessen that likelihood. Unlike the British navy, where men were enrolled for the duration of the war, and that frequently against their will, the Swedish navy was made up entirely of volunteers, and their twelve month term of service was generally honored, despite the *Eurydice* crew's experience of not being ordered home until fifteen months had passed. The Batavian navy was also an all-volunteer force, but reflecting the global reach of its empire which made twelve-month terms impractical, seamen here were signed up to serve for four years at a time, long enough to push a crew to the brink of despair, and

sometimes beyond. Especially in the brutal disease environments of the East and West Indies, where the Dutch had several naval stations, four years were often more than a man could reasonably expect to survive. Swedish seamen, by contrast, knew that however hard the conditions they labored under, the end was always in sight. This made it very difficult for those men who could not bear it to find enough comrades willing to revolt, and they were forced to fall back on individual coping mechanism instead, including desertion, but also alcoholism, depression, and suicide.

A further important difference between the Swedish and Batavian services was the far greater number of foreign-born men in the latter. The Dutch traditionally recruited non-domestic labor to fill the majority of berths in its deep-sea industries, primarily German, central European, and Scandinavian migrant workers with no familial ties in the Republic (see section 2.1 above). When therefore they mutinied and ran away with the ship or handed it over to the enemy, they did not abandon or betray a physical home, as would have been the case in the Swedish navy. British warships also had a substantial proportion of foreign-born men onboard, but nowhere near as many as the Dutch, at least not this early in the war. This in turn may help explain why British mutinies tended to be aimed at improving the conditions of service, whereas discontented seamen on Batavian ships instead had a propensity to take off, alone or with the whole ship, whenever they reached their breaking point.

The same tendency towards treason in the Batavian navy was reinforced by the anger that many career naval men, who in the majority were ethnically Dutch, felt for the revolution. Unlike the French service, where seamen spent four years reconstructing and taking ownership of their navy from below, the most disaffected seamen in the Dutch navy took off during the wave of mass desertions that accompanied the revolution in the winter of 1794-95. Only the men

most dedicated to the service stuck around, but far from awarding their loyalty, the revolutionary government only a few months later destroyed their careers by dismissing the entire commissioned officer corps, and thus cancelling the old navy's patronage system. Some among them may very well have been willing to give the new regime the benefit of the doubt – socially they were close to the artisan class which everywhere, including in the Low Countries, were among the staunchest supporters of revolution – but when the financial constraints of the war led to one promise of improvement after another to remain unfulfilled, they turned on the service and the revolution with a vengeance.

The British navy did not have to cope with the fall-out of a political revolution, but the intense pressures of the naval arms nevertheless led to changes in the deployment of labor that undermined the customary relationship between officers and men in ways not dissimilar to the Batavian service. But unlike their comrades across the North Sea, British tars as a group chose to stand together and fight. Perhaps they realized that as naval seamen they would do worse almost anywhere they went, for despite the hardships they suffered the British Navy was still the most well-funded, best officered, and most powerful force in the world. Quite apart from the fact that few probably fancied the idea of finding themselves on the receiving end of the Royal Navy's martial violence, they knew, and were proud of, that its power in large parts derived from their own skill and efficiency at the guns.<sup>151</sup> This in turn gave them confidence in their collective power whenever they turned those guns onto the quarterdeck, organized themselves into watches, put themselves into combat-readiness, and then commenced negotiations for better conditions.

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<sup>151</sup> In every major engagement from the First of June 1794 to the Battle of Trafalgar eleven years later, British gun crews outkilled their enemies, in total by a proportion of about six to one. Nicolson, *Men of Honour*, 20.



Like their comrades in the French Navy, and in contrast to those in the Batavian service, British sailors were largely united behind the war effort during these early stages of the conflict. Their complaints always concerned matters they experienced as a violation of the terms and customs they believed to have a right to expect as British seamen, including shore leave, ships that would not break apart in a gale, bread that was not completely infested with weevils, grog that contained the traditional proportion of rum to water, and officers that did not exploit their position to establish a regime of violence and terror. But with each turn in the cycle of mutiny and repression, more and more language began to creep in that suggested a growing political sophistication below deck that integrated their particular complaints into a systemic understanding of their situation. Not enough evidence survives from these mutinies to even sketch what that understanding may have looked like, but that the *Culloden* mutineers asked a “delegate” to write a letter on behalf of the crew, or that the *Defiance* mutineers likened class treason to royalism indicates that at least a few of the revolutionary seeds that in the spring of 1797 would blossom into “the floating republic” at the Nore had already taken root during the mutinies of the first few years of the war.

## 5.0 STRIKE, 1797

E.P. Thompson called the mutinies that hit the Royal Navy's home command in the spring and early summer of 1797 "events of world-wide significance," and so they were.<sup>1</sup> It was not the first time that workers in Britain had successfully struck for higher wages, nor was it the first time seamen had done so.<sup>2</sup> But never before had they done it on such a scale, or in such a strategically important industry. As the mutinous crews themselves reminded the Admiralty in their initial petitions, it was only by their "manly exertions [that] the British flag rides triumphant in every part of the globe."<sup>3</sup> Theirs was the labor that threw a protective screen over the vast, maritime infrastructure of the British Empire, and without their cooperation there no longer would be slaves coming to the British West Indies, the islands themselves would not be safe from invasion, and no sugar, coffee, tobacco, indigo, or capital would circulate back to the metropole. There would be no trade with North America, Europe, or Asia, which in turn would trigger an unimaginable economic crisis at home, perhaps a revolution, perhaps even a French invasion. The way the war was going in 1797, it already looked like Great Britain itself might not survive for very much longer. French republican forces had driven British arms from the continent, and

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<sup>1</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 184.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it was London merchant seamen fighting for better wages in 1768 who introduced the word "strike" to signify combative work-stoppage: in order to prevent their ships from sailing, they had "struck," i.e. lowered, the sails. *OED*, s.v. "strike"; see also Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 309-318; for the 1792 Tyneside collier strike, see section 4.3 above; for an overview of labor disputes more generally in eighteenth-century England, see C.R. Dobson, *Masters and Journeymen: A Prehistory of Industrial Relations, 1717-1800* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), esp. Appendix I.

<sup>3</sup> Petitions from the ships at Spithead, March-April 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5125.

the country's allies were dropping off one by one. Belgium and parts of Germany were conquered, Italy was well on the way, Prussia was knocked out of the war, and Austria was soon to follow. The Batavian Republic had declared war in 1795, Spain in 1796, and France, in the same year, had launched an invasion attempt of Ireland. It was now plotting another one. A Dutch force was rumored to be massing at Texel, possibly to attack England itself. If either of these put to sea, there was only one force strong enough to stop them: the home command of the Royal Navy, the most powerful concentration of seaborne violence ever assembled. Its heart was the huge fleet that lay at Spithead, and it was here that the mutiny began.

The Channel fleet employed nearly 18,000 men, or approximately 15 percent of all British naval personnel, who sailed on 16 ships of the line, 14 light and heavy frigates, and 15 lesser vessels.<sup>4</sup> It was by far the largest assembly of workers anywhere in England, perhaps even the world. Only a few of the very largest industrial sites on land even employed as many people as a single ship of the line, and in the Channel fleet there were well over a dozen of these ships. The *Queen Charlotte*, flagship of the fleet, housed nearly 850 men onboard her three decks, 186 feet in length and 50 feet in breadth, all of them packed tight with 100 great guns, spare sails, cables, small arms, powder, livestock, water casks, salt meat, biscuits, dried peas, oatmeal, vinegar, lard, cheese, spirits, beer, and other provisions. It was here, deep in the crowded bowels of the ship, that a small handful of conspirators came together in February 1797 to draft a "humble petition" for a pay raise that eventually would trigger the single largest, most sustained and well-organized working class offensive of the eighteenth century. By the time it was all over in the middle of June, the mutiny had spread from the Channel fleet to engulf the entire home command of the navy, from the Plymouth and Cork squadrons in the west all the way to the Nore

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<sup>4</sup> James Dugan, *The Great Mutiny* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 476-478.

anchorage and North Sea fleet in the east. Altogether around 30,000 men on over 100 ships rose on their officers, seized control of their vessels, formed ship and fleet committees, appointed delegates, and in the end even elected a president. In the midst of the annual fighting season of 1797, Britain's jolly Jack Tars took two full months off from blowing the French and Dutch out of the water, and instead spent the time discussing the Rights of Man, and how these might best be implemented in the Royal Navy, the seaborne battering ram of the European counter-revolution. This was indeed of "world-wide significance."

Historians have long debated how best to characterize the mutiny. Was it, in Thompson's poignant summary of the prevailing view, "a parochial affair of ship's biscuits and arrears of pay," or was it, as he believed, "a revolutionary movement"?<sup>5</sup> The mutiny can usefully be divided into two distinct phases, the first a strike for higher wages in the Channel fleet at Spithead from mid-April through mid-May, the second a politically radical and violent insurrection centered on the Nore from mid-May into early June.<sup>6</sup> Since the Admiralty convinced the government to grant the demands of the Channel fleet and substantially raised the seamen's wages in early April, historians have focused most of their attention on trying to explain the causes of the more radical mutiny at the Nore that continued for several more weeks. Some have

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<sup>5</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 184.

<sup>6</sup> W.J. Neale, the mutiny's first historian, did not explicitly draw this distinction, but following Conrad Gill's 1913 study it has become the standard narrative, though lately historians have suggested further subdivisions into four, five or even six phases. W.J. Neale, *History of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore* (London: William Tegg, 1842); Conrad Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1913); G.E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: An Account of the Mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935); James Dugan, *The Great Mutiny* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965); Henri Verdier, *Flottes en Colère: La Grande Mutinerie de la Marine britannique 1797* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1976); for suggestions at further sub-divisions, see N.A.M. Rodger, "Mutiny or Subversion? Spithead and the Nore," in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, ed. by Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh, and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 549-564; and Anne Hawkins and Helen Watt, "'Now is our time, the ship is our own, huzza for the red flag': Mutiny on the *Inspector*, 1797," *Mariner's Mirror* 93, no. 2 (2007): 156-179.

proposed that essentially it was a mistake. The ships here did not rise up until the Admiralty had already conceded as much as it ever would, and since the Nore mutineers were strategically in a much weaker position than the mighty fleet at Spithead, they possessed no leverage to push for more. But once the mutiny had started, it was carried forward by its own internal dynamics and soon reached a point where neither mutineers nor government could back down without suffering a major defeat.<sup>7</sup> Some have suggested that different sociological profiles marked the mutineers in both cases. The mutiny at Spithead, they argue, was dominated by experienced seamen who understood the imperatives of the service and therefore restricted themselves to the justified demand of a pay raise, while at the Nore a much greater proportion of recent recruits were involved who had no desire to serve, did not understand what life at sea was like, and lacked the experience and discipline of cooperative labor that true seamen gained as a matter of course. The mutiny at the Nore therefore was badly planned, chaotically executed, and intended to bring about all sorts of impossible changes to the service.<sup>8</sup>

A related question concerns the degree to which political radicals influenced the course of the mutiny, in particular at the Nore where mutineers very vocally spoke of “tyranny” and “slavery,” of “justice,” “rights,” and “liberty,” and at one point even proclaimed that “the age of reason is at length arrived.”<sup>9</sup> Few historians deny that revolutionaries played some role in

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<sup>7</sup> N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 445-450; Anthony G. Brown, “The Nore Mutiny – Sedition or Ships’ Biscuits? A Reappraisal,” *Mariner’s Mirror* 92, no. 1 (2006): 60-74.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard F. Guttridge, *Mutiny: A History of Naval Insurrection* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1992), 42-72; Jonathan Neale has argued a similar point from a left-wing perspective. See his “Forecastle and Quarterdeck: Protest, Discipline and Mutiny in the Royal Navy, 1793-1814” (Ph.D. diss., University of Warwick, 1990). For an interpretation that emphasizes conflicting views of masculinity in this context, see Jeffrey D. Glasco, “The Seaman Feels Him-self a Man,” *International Labour and Working-Class History* 66 (2004): 40-56.

<sup>9</sup> “Address to the Delegates of the Different Ships Assembled in Council,” TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5125.

shaping the mutiny, though little agreement exists on who they were, where they came from, and what exactly their role might have been.<sup>10</sup> At one end of the spectrum are historians like Roger Wells and Marianne Elliott who have argued that large numbers of committed revolutionaries were funneled into the navy through the operation of the 1795 Quota Acts and 1796 Irish Insurrection Act, and that their political ideals and experience provide the key to understanding the rapid radicalization of the mutiny at the Nore.<sup>11</sup> Recent studies, meanwhile, have shown that only few Quotamen and Irishmen had prominent roles in the mutiny, and that their influence therefore might not have been as large, or at least not as direct, as previously was believed.<sup>12</sup> At the other end of the spectrum is Joseph Price Moore III, who downplays outside influences and instead emphasizes the importance of shipboard social relations, and the forms of class struggle they gave rise to. Moore is virtually alone in pointing to the important, politically transformative practice of mutiny itself, and while he is correct in emphasizing the indigenous causes of the rising, his narrow workerist focus leads him to neglect the ways in which the experience of life, labor, and struggle onboard ship interacted with the radical ideas of the revolutionary era, which were much in evidence on the mutinous ships.<sup>13</sup>

A number of writers believe to have spied foreign influences in the language, demands, and forms of organization that emerged during the mutiny, but none so far have considered that

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<sup>10</sup> N.A.M. Rodger is a rare exception who argues that whatever revolutionaries there may have been below deck, these were mostly loud-mouthed troublemakers with little real influence. Rodger, *Command*, 445-450.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Wells, *Insurrection: The British Experience, 1795-1803* (Gloucester: Allan Sutton, 1986), 79-110; Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 134-144.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Price Moore III, "'The Greatest Enormity That Prevails': Direct Democracy and Workers' Self-Management in the British Naval Mutinies of 1797," in *Jack Tar in History: Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour*, ed. by Colin Howell and Richard J. Twomey (Fredericton, NB: Acadiensis Press, 1991), 76-104.

these might not have come only from shore, but were transmitted through the networks of the mutinous Atlantic itself.<sup>14</sup> The mutineers of 1797 inherited a rich tradition of lower deck struggle that reached beyond just their own navy to those of France and the Batavian Republic, and perhaps even beyond. Lessons from their own struggles with the officer corps since the beginning of the war strongly asserted themselves at the Nore, but so, for example, did the belief that an agreement between quarterdeck and forecastle unilaterally had been cancelled from above, which already was so evident in the Batavian fleet. The French experience that the “people” can decide for themselves how they wish their navy to operate also re-emerged with force during the mutinies. What was new at Spithead and especially the Nore, however, was the unprecedented freedom, as well as necessity, to experiment in naval self-government, to construct democratic institutions with the support and participation of the majority. The experiment only lasted a few weeks, but its lessons were transmitted back into the mutinous Atlantic, as was the memory of its vicious repression.

After briefly summarizing the course of the mutiny at Spithead, the first section of this chapter is concerned primarily with the mutiny at the Nore, and in particular with an analysis of the lower deck’s democratic ideals that found expression both in the political demands it directed at the government and in the institutions it created to govern the mutinous fleet after the expulsion of the officer corps. The next section is dedicated to the bloody repression that

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<sup>14</sup> Herman Melville articulated this theory most poetically when he wrote in *Billy Budd* that “reasonable discontent growing out of practical grievances in the fleet had been ignited into irrational combustion as by live cinders blown across the Channel from France in flames.” As already noted, Wells and Elliott suggested Irish impulses, and Dugan and Brown have added that perhaps impressed Americans brought their revolutionary experience to bear. No one, so far, has argued for the likely influence of the Caribbean slave revolts, even though many of the men in the fleet had been to the West Indies, and no other large group of workers lived in conditions objectively as close to those of slaves. Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor, & Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 333; Wells, *op. cit.*; Elliott, *op. cit.*; Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*, 90, 94; Brown, “Ships’ Biscuits or Sedition,” 69-70.

followed after the mutiny's collapse as the Admiralty desperately tried to reimpose the quarterdeck's authority. The number of executions in the summer of 1797 was unprecedented in the navy's history, but they did not succeed in breaking the lower deck's will to resist completely. But it did force a change of tactics, which became evident with the murderous and treasonous mutiny on the *Hermione* in September of that year, the subject of section three. The mutiny's extreme violence sent a profound shock through the naval officer corps, and in response they launched a decade-long, transatlantic and international manhunt for the fugitives. One of them, Thomas Nash, became the first person extradited from the United States, a decision so broadly unpopular that President Adams was nearly censured over it. This story is told in section four.

## 5.1 "RED FOR EVER"<sup>15</sup>

The events that eventually mushroomed into "the great mutiny" began on a very small scale, but with extraordinary ambition. In February 1797, a tiny handful of conspirators came together deep below deck on the Channel fleet's flagship *Queen Charlotte* to draft a "humble petition" for a modest pay raise, which at first they circulated only amongst their messmates, then throughout the ship, and finally like a modern-day chain letter out across the lower deck of the whole fleet. Inspired perhaps by the abolitionist movement's large-scale petitioning drives, their plan was to unleash on their commander in chief, the aging Admiral Lord Howe, a coordinated barrage of identical petitions from every ship in the fleet, each signed anonymously by the whole ship's

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<sup>15</sup> "The Delegates of the Different Ships at the Nore Assembled in Council – to their fellow Subjects," Petitions 1793-1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5125.



company “in behalf of themselves, and the rest of their brethren on board the Fleet at Spithead or elsewhere.”<sup>16</sup> It was a wildly ambitious plan, never before attempted, and it must have seemed almost certainly doomed to failure, however modest, moderate, and justified their demand may have been. To keep a general conspiracy quiet for several weeks in the cramped conditions of a single ship would have been a spectacular feat of discipline and solidarity, to spread it out successfully and unite nearly 18,000 men on 45 ships in one common cause almost beggars belief. And yet, they did it.<sup>17</sup>

Most likely, the mutineers initially restricted themselves to the single issue of low wages for tactical reasons, since it certainly was not the men’s only grievance. It was, however, the only one they all shared equally. Some of the crews wanted to be rid of their officers, but others did not. Some demanded an end to impressment, but for others who may have agreed in principle, this was not the most pressing concern. Some attacked excessive flogging and lack of shore leave, but for those with humane commanders this was not as important as higher wages. Some were outraged by constant startings, but petty officers who never felt the rope’s end on their own backs, and sometimes were the ones who wielded it, were not.<sup>18</sup> The demand for a pay raise, however, was an issue that concerned them all, and one that even reached beyond them into the larger population on shore, since many of them had families and lovers who depended for their survival on part of the seamen’s wages. It was also a demand whose justice not easily could be

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<sup>16</sup> For anti-slave trade petitioning, see Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 212-232.

<sup>17</sup> For a narrative of the preparatory steps of the Spithead mutiny, see Gill, *Naval Mutinies*, 3-15 and Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*, 53-71. Copies of twelve surviving petitions are preserved in Petitions 1793-1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5125.

<sup>18</sup> “Starting” was the degrading practice of beating men over their backs and heads with ropes’ ends to get them to speed up the execution of orders.

denied, since both the army and the militia had recently seen their wages increase, while those of seamen in the navy had not been raised since 1652, when England last had been a republic.<sup>19</sup>

Lord Howe, preoccupied with treating his severe gout, barely reacted to the flood of petitions that reached him at Bath, where he had taken to the famous waters. He simply passed them on to the Admiralty, which in turn thought it could defuse the brewing mutiny by ordering the fleet to sea, thus making communication and coordinated action difficult for the crews on the various ships. But when order to lift anchor rang out on the morning of Easter Sunday, April 15, the fleet refused. The mutiny was on. And once it was underway, it did not take long before new, more extensive demands were heard from several of the mutinous ships. Some crews started muttering about short provisions, others about excessive floggings, yet others about lack of shore leave, some about the unjust distribution of prize money. But the most insistent and widespread call was for the removal of tyrannical officers, and after Admiral Colpoys on May 7 opened fire on the mutinous crew of the *London* and killed three men, the crews of over a dozen ships took matters into their own hands and expelled their officers. The captain of the *Marlborough*, the crew explained, batters the people so viciously with whatever objects he has handy that both his spy glass and his trumpet are in constant need of repair. The surgeon accuses sick men of skulking and has them flogged. The master's mate tears through the lower deck like "a ravenous wolf," threatening anyone who resists his beatings with cutting their throats and drinking their blood. The captain of marines forces his men to wash their uniforms with seawater and urine, and when the weather is bad he often orders a review and takes delight in seeing the men's necessaries get blown away. All four officers were summarily thrown off the ship. On the

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<sup>19</sup> Bernard Capp, *Cromwell's Navy: The Fleet and the English Revolution, 1648-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 57-58, 259-260.

*Pompée*, Lieutenants Baker, Sparks, Humphreys, Bowman, and Snow were sent ashore for being both incompetent and cruel. They had frequently punished men for mistakes that were caused by their own inability to give correct orders. On the *Terrible*, the crew finally got rid of Captain Campbell, whose regime had grown intolerable since he successfully suppressed the mutiny two years before (see section 4.3 above). In total, more than 100 officers were driven from their commands, and it was now the mutineers' "final determination" that, in addition to a pay raise and general royal pardon for everyone involved in the mutiny, which at that point already had been granted, the Admiralty would have to accept their expulsion. "Then and not till then shall we be as ready as ever to weigh with the rest of the Fleet."<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, not a great deal is known about how the Spithead mutineers regulated their internal affairs or what decision-making structures they put in place, but for the first couple of weeks, at least, the majority of the crews appear to have been content to take their cues from the mutiny's leadership, the men called "delegates," two from each ship. It is unclear by what mechanism they were selected, but they were, almost without exception, career naval men, able seamen and petty officers, and most likely they emerged naturally as leaders by virtue of the respect they enjoyed below deck for their skill and the wealth of their experience.<sup>21</sup> It was also they who had facilitated the initial spread of the conspiracy by circulating petition drafts from ship to ship, sending them to men they knew on other ships, usually former shipmates, and asking them to pass them on to as many men they could trust on yet other ships.<sup>22</sup> Some among the delegates may have been political radicals, including, it seems, Thomas Evans, a disbarred

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<sup>20</sup> Declarations of the crew and marines of the *Marlborough*, the *Pompée*, the *Terrible*, and the *Ramillies*, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4172.

<sup>21</sup> Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 448-449.

<sup>22</sup> Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*, 65-66.

lawyer who called himself “solicitor to the tars of old England” and had a history of fighting for sailors’ rights.<sup>23</sup> But Valentine Joyce, speaker of the delegates, who in older accounts is often characterized as a disaffected Belfast tobacconist with United Irish leanings, was not one of them. He was, like most of the others, a professional sailor with a long service record in the navy.<sup>24</sup> These men had no interest in hurting the navy, and probably no desire to rattle its foundation any more than was strictly necessary to win their demands. They wanted decent treatment in return for their service, no more, but certainly no less. As one mutineer at the Nore later put it: “Give us our Due at once and no more of it, till we go in search of the Rascals the Enemys of our Country.”<sup>25</sup>

After the violent events on the deck of the *London* on May 7, the delegates appear to have lost some of their influence over the mutinous crews. They only barely managed to prevent the lynching of Admiral Colpoys and Lieutenant Bover in retaliation for the three murdered mutineers, and they seem to have had no formal role in the spontaneous escalation of the mutiny that began with the expulsion of the officers shortly afterwards, though individually they may

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<sup>23</sup> Gill, *Naval Mutinies*, 78n1; Emma Christopher, “‘The Slave Trade is Merciful Compared to [This]’: Slave Traders, Convict Transportation and the Abolitionists,” in *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World*, ed. by Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus, and Marcus Rediker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 116; Thomas Evans, *A Letter to the Right Honorable the Earl of Sandwich* (London, 1791).

<sup>24</sup> It is not clear where or why this idea about Joyce’s identity originated, but the most likely source are panicky Admiralty papers that saw Irish radicals hiding behind every mast in the mutinous fleet. The faulty rumor has been repeated by Gill, Manwaring and Dobrée, Dugan, Neale, Elliott, and Wells. It has, however, been shown that Joyce was born on Jersey and had served in the navy since the age of eleven, and that his family was living in Portsmouth. Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 449; see also Letter, Aaron Graham to John King, Portsmouth, 12 May 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4172.

<sup>25</sup> “No. 29 (Note, Henry Long to the Lords Commissioners of the Board of the Admiralty, onboard the *Champion*, n.d.), Papers found onboard of the *Repusle*, 12 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370.

have agreed with it.<sup>26</sup> They were, however, eager to bring the mutiny quickly to a negotiated end before it could drift even further out of control, and after the Admiralty agreed to the reassignment of around fifty of the expelled officers, the delegates took it upon themselves to impose the settlement on the fleet and forced a number crews who wanted to hold out for more concessions to return to duty.<sup>27</sup>

It had been the Admiralty's strategy from the beginning to sow divisions amongst the mutineers in order to re-establish authority over the fleet and prevent similar insurrections from occurring in the future. Only three days after the mutiny erupted, Captain Payne, an otherwise obscure and undistinguished commander in the fleet, wrote to Earl Spencer, First Lord of the Admiralty that "[this] cannot be dealt with like mutinies in individual ships, system and management must be met with the like, nor can anything be executed with success till some *apparent* disunion is created in the fleet. They are perfectly sensible that their force arises from agreement." Agreement, however, had its limits, and Payne argued that the Admiralty was most likely to succeed if it concentrated its efforts on driving a wedge between the different factions that made up the mutinous fleet. He therefore recommended that the demand for a wage increase should be granted, but not to all men equally, and that way the issue that united them would be transformed into one over which they became divided. "The increase of wages is so seductive," he wrote, "that they probably cannot [be] divided thereon – though holding out the impropriety of increasing the lowest classes of seamen with the higher ones, would tend to spread difference

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<sup>26</sup> Anon., *Address to the Nation, by the Seamen at St. Helen's*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, 1797), 5-6; Guttridge, *Mutiny*, 58.

<sup>27</sup> Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*, 166-167, 172

of opinion, and call on the higher to keep down the claims of the lower orders. Irregularities will be sure to produce schisms, [...].”<sup>28</sup>

The Admiralty implemented Payne’s recommendations. The navy pay bill that was sent for ratification to Parliament contained a carefully staggered wage increase that especially benefitted experienced seamen, from whose ranks nearly all the delegates were drawn. “Able seamen” and petty officers saw their monthly wages go up from 1l.2s.6d. to 1l.10s.0d., an increase of 33 percent. “Landmen” received only a more modest raise of 20 percent, from 0l.17s.6d. to 1l.1s.0d., but their ranks were divided by promoting some of them into the newly established intermediate pay grade of “ordinary seaman,” whose wages went up 25.7 percent when compared to their previous pay as “landmen.”<sup>29</sup> There is no direct evidence that anyone took issue with this unequal wage increase. Experienced seamen usually enjoyed great prestige below deck, and their comrades probably did not begrudge them this special recognition of their skill and importance. However, it may well have induced those particularly favored by the wage increase, and especially the delegates, to throw their weight behind the settlement and impose its terms on those among the mutineers who wanted to continue the fight for still greater concessions, just as Payne had predicted.

Even if the end of the Spithead mutiny was marred slightly by disagreement amongst some of the crews – most, it must be said, were happy to return to duty – the outcome was still a spectacular victory for the lower deck that signified a major shift in the power relations that determined day-to-day life onboard the King’s ships. For a whole month, some of the most

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<sup>28</sup> “Captain Payne to Spencer, George Inn, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1797,” in *Private Papers of George, second Earl Spencer, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1794-1801*, ed. by Julian S. Corbett (London: Navy Records Society, 1914), 2:112-113. Author’s emphasis.

<sup>29</sup> Anon., *Address to the Nation*, 3-4.

wretchedly degraded workers in the Atlantic world had controlled one of the principal pillars of British imperialism, maintained order and discipline amongst themselves, and extracted unprecedented concessions from one of Europe's most entrenched autocracies. The seamen of the fleet had felt "what power there is in so numerous a body," Lord Collingwood ruefully reflected, "What is conceded to them is not received as a provision which justice makes them, but as what they have extorted, and they now know how they may extort, what in justice they have not the same claim to."<sup>30</sup>

The seamen at the Nore anchorage at the mouth of the Thames, who watched from afar as events unfolded in the Channel fleet through April and into early May, learned the same lesson, and by their understanding of "justice" they were entitled to "extort" quite a bit more. When they rose on their officers on May 12, they originally hoped to coordinate their actions with those of their comrades in the Channel fleet at Spithead, but when they found out shortly afterwards that these had returned to duty, and won nothing more than a wage increase and the removal of some fifty disagreeable officers, they quickly sat down to formulate their own, far more radical list of demands. Since they did so at a moment of victory, when they believed themselves strong enough to force the concessions they really wanted, their list of demands probably reflects the feelings and beliefs below deck much more accurately than the tamer demands with which the mutiny at Spithead had commenced.

In total, they had ten demands, six of them concerned with pay. First, they wanted assurances that they too, and all other seamen in the navy, were covered by the pay raise (which they were). Second, they asked that the marines also would receive a modest increase in pay to

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<sup>30</sup> "To Dr. Alexander Carlyle, *Excellent*, off Cadiz, June 3, 1797," in *The Private Correspondence of Admiral Lord Collingwood*, ed. by Edward Hughes (London: Naval Records Society, 1957), 82-83.

bring them up to the same level as seamen. Since all other branches of the armed forces had lately received a raise, this was only fair. Third, while higher pay was all very well, wages were routinely kept in arrears for longer than the navy's own regulations allowed, and since many of the seamen had families who "have no other support than the scanty sum that we can send them out of our own hard-earned wages," the mutineers demanded that the rule of only keeping six months' wages in arrears when a ship goes to sea be rigorously and verifiably observed. With a similar insistence on contractual agreements, they demanded, fourth, that volunteers and quota-men must be paid their bounties in full when signing up. These were, after all, promised in order to encourage men to enter into the service, and "if Government will break their words with us how can they expect we will keep faith with them – this is only Justice and has a Right to be demanded the same as a Mans Wages." Fifth, while pressed men did not receive a bounty, the mutineers proposed that instead they ought to be given a two month advance on their wages, and thus be able to furnish themselves with whatever necessities they need for a long voyage and not be obliged to procure overpriced slops from the ship's purser on credit against their future earnings.<sup>31</sup>

By themselves, none of these demands were especially radical, but taken together they had a clear tendency that counteracted the potentially divisive staggered pay raise Parliament had just passed. The Nore mutineers were aware that in order to be truly united in a wage struggle, the specific conditions of employment of all the different groups below deck had to be addressed.

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<sup>31</sup> "Address from the British Seamen and Marines at the Nore to their Brethren and Fellow Subjects on shore," Papers found onboard the *Repulse* 12 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370. The mutineers' fifth demand for an advance interestingly foreshadows one of the central issues of the class struggle in the industrializing nineteenth century, when factory workers frequently would be forced to buy their food and clothing at inflated prices on credit in the hated company store. What makes this arrangement especially infuriating, Marx points out, is the fact that in reality it is the worker who advances a credit to the company, since wages usually are not paid until the end of a given period of work, usually a week, sometimes a fortnight or even a month. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I* (London: Penguin, 1990), 278-279.



But they were not just concerned with leveling the differences amongst themselves, they equally wanted them lessened in relation to the officer corps, as evidenced in their sixth demand for “a more equal distribution of Prize Money.” By the terms of the 1708 Convoys and Cruizers Act, the fleet’s commander-in-chief, whether he was present at a capture or not, received one-eighth of the proceeds from every prize taken by one of his ships, the captain was given a quarter, the master, lieutenants, surgeon and captain of marines shared an eighth, the warrant officers and petty officers shared another eighth each, and the remaining quarter was distributed among the crew and marines, sometimes several hundred men.<sup>32</sup> In words powerfully reminiscent of Colonel Thomas Rainsborough’s famous intervention at the 1647 Putney Debates, the last time England’s armed forces had collectively negotiated with the government, the mutineers asked: “What can be more absurd not to say unjust than for an Officer to receive perhaps 200 pounds when at the same time a foremast man who runs as much risk of his life – whose life is as dear to his Wife & Children as that Officers – receive but 12 or 14 shillings[?] What a shameful disproportion why should not that officers pay be sufficient without having such an enormous share of prize money[?]”<sup>33</sup> Seamen in the North Sea fleet, who soon afterwards joined the mutineers at the Nore and endorsed their demands, added that a more equitable distribution would be for the petty officers, crew, and marines to share three-fifths of all prizes equally among them, and “the remaining 2/5 be divided as His Majesty & the Lords of the Admiralty may think proper to distribute among the other Officers which if Gentlemen worthy of that

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<sup>32</sup> Rodger, *Command*, 522; Dudley Pope, *Life in Nelson’s Navy* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1981), 234.

<sup>33</sup> “Address from the British Seamen and Marines at the Nore to their Brethren and Fellow Subjects on shore,” Papers found onboard the *Repulse* 12 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370. At Putney, Rainsborough had declared on behalf of the Leveller-dominated New Model Army that “the poorest he that is in England has a life to live as the greatest he.” Christopher Hill, *A Century of Revolution, 1603-1714* (London: Abacus, 1978), 119.

Appellation or possessed of the least Spark of Justice or Humanity will consider to be as equal a Proportion as honest Men could require or have a right to expect.”<sup>34</sup> Such a distribution would still have given each officer on average a share at least four times greater than everyone else’s onboard, so the leveling spirit had its limits.

The mutineers’ next demand was for “Liberty,” the sailors’ traditional word for shore leave, though clearly they also had a broader meaning in mind when they explained that “this invaluable Privilege more particularly inherit to an Englishman, the pride and boast of our Nation & the Natural Right of all, has always been denied us.”<sup>35</sup> The reference is to the rights of the freeborn Englishman, and in particular to the famous habeas corpus article of Magna Carta: No freeman shall be taken.<sup>36</sup> This right had indeed always been denied to them, for shortly after King John was forced to promulgate the Great Charter in 1215, he issued warrants for a major press, and thus implicitly excluded sailors from its protection.<sup>37</sup> Ever since then, seamen’s rights had been systematically violated whenever the country mobilized for war, and never was their lack of “liberty,” the sovereignty over their own bodies, more painfully real than in the navy’s despicable practice of pressing seamen straight out of incoming merchantmen:

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<sup>34</sup> “Articles demanded by the North Sea Fleet in addition to those demanded by the Fleet at the Nore,” Papers found onboard the *Repulse* 12 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370.

<sup>35</sup> “Address from the British Seamen and Marines at the Nore to their Brethren and Fellow Subjects on shore,” Papers found onboard the *Repulse* 12 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370.

<sup>36</sup> In the 1772 Somerset case which declared slavery in England a violation of habeas corpus and thus illegal, Chief Justice Lord Mansfield gave official legal sanction to the notion that the rights of the English freeman indeed were, as the mutineers put it, “the Natural Right of all.” It is not surprising that the cosmopolitan and multiethnic crews of the King’s navy should have been especially sensitive to that fact. See Peter Linebaugh, *Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 94-118.

<sup>37</sup> J. R. Hutchinson, *The Press-Gang Afloat and Ashore* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1914), 5, 7.

What can affect the feeling of a Man who has been born into the Enjoyment of Liberty more than after a Voyage of 16 Months to India which he has undertaken probably with the hope of gaining as much as will enable him and perhaps a helpless family to partake of the comfort and enjoyment of his Native home – on his Passage back he is big with hopes of imaginary enjoyment & every day brings him nearer for the much longed for port – But on his coming into that port he is that moment press'd – far from all his hopes immur'd in a ship for 3 4 or perhaps 5 Years without so much as being permitted to see his dear Family or of once treading on his Native Land – What a Disgrace to British Liberty.<sup>38</sup>

In a related demand, the mutineers asked for “a free pardon for all desertions from the navy.” After all, the primary reason men ran away, they explained, was their deprivation of “Liberty (which is the principal enjoyment of Life),” and if that was regularly granted, and they were no longer used “the same as a Parcel of Slaves,” desertions would be far less frequent.<sup>39</sup>

But to prevent desertions shore leave alone was not enough. Conditions onboard the ships also had to improve, and in particular the “oppressing and tyrannizing over us according to the caprice and temper of the Officers” had to stop. The mutineers demanded to live in a shipboard society of laws and not of men, and to that end they proposed that only juries composed entirely

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<sup>38</sup> “Address from the British Seamen and Marines at the Nore to their Brethren and Fellow Subjects on shore,” Papers found onboard the *Repulse* 12 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370. See also Hutchinson, *The Press-Gang*, 106-130.

<sup>39</sup> “Address from the British Seamen and Marines at the Nore to their Brethren and Fellow Subjects on shore,” Papers found onboard the *Repulse* 12 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370. In a later communiqué, they went one step further and likened their condition to that of “African Slaves.” “The Delegates of the Different Ships at the Nore Assembled in Council – to their fellow Subjects,” Petitions 1793-1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5125.

of seamen and marines, assisted by “able Councillors to explain the Civil Law,” be authorized to impose corporal punishments from now on.<sup>40</sup> “This is what has been much wanted,” they explained

which if adapted long since would have saved humanity a number of Tears[.] For what tender or feeling Man can hear without a pang that an Officer heretofore from private pique – from a conceived offence which was never intended from a man’s looks and even from his very thoughts have form’d a crime [–] order’d a wretch’d helpless man into irons[.] sport’d with his feelings for the course of a fortnight 3 weeks a month or often more[.] confined in a torturing Suspense at last he is dragged from his Irons Brought before his Shipmates in a disgraceful manner, strip’d tied up to the gangway hands & feet – his defense not heard but he is entirely left to the caprice & cruelty of the Captain. [...] His flesh is Mangled & torn & his Blood streaming down his back[.] All this for no real cause but that a cruel Lordly Officer conceives that he deserves it.

Trial by jury was another one of those rights of the freeborn Englishman that had existed since “time out of mind” and was confirmed by Magna Carta (Articles 14 and 39), but perhaps the mutineers were thinking of more recent examples as they drafted this demand. Both French and Dutch seamen had won the right to be tried by a jury of their peers since the beginning of the revolution (see section 3.4 and 4.2 above), and experience had shown that this resulted in far

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<sup>40</sup> “Articles demanded by the North Sea Fleet in addition to those demanded by the Fleet at the Nore,” Papers found onboard the *Repulse* 12 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370.

fewer, far less bloody convictions. One French officer deprived of his autocratic powers ruefully complained that juries are “too favorable to impunity.”<sup>41</sup>

Finally, inspired by the Spithead mutineers’ success in forcing the Admiralty to remove fifty of the most objectionable officers from their posts, the Nore mutineers proposed that the crews’ veto power be made permanent so that “all Officers turn’d out of a Ship for cruel & oppressive Usage shall never return to the same Ship without the Consent of the Ship’s Company.”<sup>42</sup> Officers, from now on, were to serve at the pleasure of their men. The intention of such a measure was not, as the crew of the *Pompée* already had declared during the final days of the mutiny at Spithead, “of encroaching on the Punishment necessary for the preservation of good order, and discipline so necessary to be observed in his Majesty’s Navy, but to crush the Spirit of Tyranny and Oppression so much practiced and delighted in, by Individuals contrary to the Spirit, or Intent of any Laws of our Country.”<sup>43</sup> It would not be enough simply to restrict the officers’ powers by issuing new rules and regulations, since “often do we see these statutes trampled upon by the very persons who are appointed to see them enforced.”<sup>44</sup> The mutineers also understood, as the experience of the *Winchelsea* among others had shown (see section 4.3 above), that the quarterdeck could not be relied upon to police itself, since one would have to search far and wide even for a single officer, never mind half a dozen, willing to break rank and

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<sup>41</sup> Linebaugh, *Magna Carta Manifesto*, 91-92; William S. Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789-1794* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 114; “Aux Représentans du Peuple composant la commission nommée par le conseil des cinq cens pour le code penal maritime,” SHM-V, CC/3/1650, Personnel, Troupes et équipages (1792-1913), Lettres reçue se rapportant à diverses questions de justice maritime.

<sup>42</sup> “Address from the British Seamen and Marines at the Nore to their Brethren and Fellow Subjects on shore,” Papers found onboard the *Repulse* 12 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370.

<sup>43</sup> Declarations of the crew of the *Pompée*, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4172.

<sup>44</sup> Declarations of the crew of the *Marlborough*, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4172.

condemn one of their brothers for excessive brutality in a court martial. Shipboard democracy therefore was the only way of preventing tyranny from taking hold on the quarterdeck.

Taken together, the mutineers' ten demands amounted to a sophisticated program of political change that, if implemented, would have begun the transformation of the Royal Navy into a democratic fighting force. More remarkably still, while the Admiralty and government pondered how best to meet this presumptuous challenge tossed up from below, the mutineers took matters into their own hands and set about creating institutions of self-government that reflected the democratic spirit of their demands. Every new crew that joined the mutiny – in total fifteen ships of the line, nine light and heavy frigates, and thirteen smaller vessels, with approximately 11,000 men onboard – was first of all told to have each person onboard (including women) “voluntarily make Oath and Swear that I will be true in the cause we are embarked in.”<sup>45</sup> After thus formalizing their entry into the “floating republic,” each crew created a number of committees to regulate their internal affairs, including one to determine who would be allowed shore leave and for how long, called the “committee of liberty.”<sup>46</sup> There was also General Committee, usually made up of nine seamen, three marines, and a president, which was the ship's primary political forum.<sup>47</sup> This committee collected and sifted through complaints,

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<sup>45</sup> For a list of the ships that participated at the Nore, see Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*, 476-478; for a copy of the full oath, see “No. 7,” Papers found onboard of the *Repulse*, June 12, 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370; on the importance of oaths to “subaltern political activity” during the 1790s, see David Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 110-114; on women being sworn, most of them presumably visiting wives, girlfriends, and sex workers, see court martial of John Burrows, Joseph Hudson, William Redfern, Thomas Lunniss, Brian Finn, and Joseph Gloves of the *Standard*, 22-25 August 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5341.

<sup>46</sup> “No. 8,” Papers found onboard the *Repulse* 12 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370.

<sup>47</sup> Court martial of Richard Brown, John Doughty, William Frith, Andrew Earls, John Callaghan, Peter Wood, Lawrence Vankerand (alias Bartram), Matthew Williams, John Miller, William Vance, Nicholas Williamson (alias Nicholson Williamson), George Cook, Maurice Fitzgerald, Robert Holmes, James McKlewhan, Alexander Thompson, John Dunn, and John De Ruyter of the *Monmouth*, 29 July-5 August 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

information, ideas, and proposals from the crew, some of which in turn it passed on to one of the two fleet-wide General Committees, one for internal regulation that met every morning on the *Director*, the other responsible for the overall direction of the mutiny that met onboard the *Sandwich*, the so-called “parlament ship.”<sup>48</sup> Committees reached decisions “according to the form amongst themselves by holding their hands up.”<sup>49</sup>

Committee members were surrounded by a tight web of democratic controls, and in particular the delegates who were sent to the General Committee on the *Sandwich* were treated by the crews with a healthy dose of anti-authoritarian republican suspicion. This may have been in reaction to the dismay that some felt at the role the Channel fleet delegates had played in bringing the mutiny there to an end against the wishes of some of the crews. At the Nore, in any case, the mutineers determined in Article 1 of the “Rules and Regulations” that became the bare-bones constitution for the mutinous fleet that “we recommend the strictest unanimity as the only means of accomplishing the great object we have in view.”<sup>50</sup> To increase oversight still further, the crew of the *Pylades* (“one of the most violent and rebellious ships in the fleet”) suggested that delegates should not be allowed on shore to hold discussions with Admiralty representatives, as had happened at Spithead, but that the mutinous fleet as a whole instead should have an

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<sup>48</sup> Charles Cunningham, *A Narrative of Occurrences that took place during the Mutiny at the Nore, in the Months of May and June, 1797; with a few Observations upon Impressment of Seamen, and the Advantages of those who are employed in his Majesty's Service; also on the Necessity and Useful Operations of the Articles of War* (Chatham, 1829), 15; Letter, T.K. King to Jenny King, Sheerness, June 1, 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) PC 1/38/122.

<sup>49</sup> Court martial of William Gregory, James Hockless, Thomas Appleyard, John Whitley, George Scott, George Taylor, Joseph Hughes, Thomas Brady, Charles Chant, William Thomas Jones, George Gainer, John Davis, Peter Holding, Charles McCarty, James Leurser, Henry Wolf, James Jones, James Brown, Thomas Brooks, and William Porter of the *Sandwich*, 6-19 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

<sup>50</sup> No. 40 (“Orders and Regulations to be observed on board the different ships in the fleet, May 13 1797”), Papers found onboard of the *Repulse*, June 12, 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370.

ongoing role in the negotiations.<sup>51</sup> The Nore mutineers also modified the oath sworn by their comrades at Spithead to “be true to the Delegates at present assembled” to include the qualifying clause “whilst they continue to support the present Cause.”<sup>52</sup> Finally, in order to prevent the emergence of a leadership strata, most crews elected their delegates directly and instituted a rule that no one person could be both a ship committee member and a fleet delegate at the same time.<sup>53</sup>

Both fleet delegates and ship committeemen were subject to immediate recall if they failed to reflect the interests of their crews, or if they in any way misbehaved. Both James Robertson and Thomas Sterling, delegates from the *Leopard*, were ousted from their positions for returning from shore in a state of intoxication.<sup>54</sup> On the *Grampus*, the crew removed and punished their committee’s first president James Smart, who claimed that he had been “a speaker at the London Corresponding Society” and was considered “a scholar” by his shipmates, for neglecting his orders while being on shore. The crew also purged some of the more moderate members from its committee for advocating what a later generation of revolutionaries would call “defeatist” positions.<sup>55</sup> On the *Monmouth*, too, the crew replaced about half of its initial general

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<sup>51</sup> “No. 6,” Report and results of the papers found on board the *Inflexible*, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 3/137.

<sup>52</sup> “No. 7,” Papers found onboard of the *Repulse*, June 12, 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370.

<sup>53</sup> Court martial of Richard Brown et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

<sup>54</sup> Court martial of Dennis Sullivan, Alexander Lawson, William Welch (2<sup>nd</sup>), James Robertson, Joseph Fearon, William Ross, John Habbigan, George Shave, and Thomas Sterling of the *Leopard*, 28 June-4 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5339.

<sup>55</sup> Court martial of James Smart, John Taylor, John Preston, Joseph Croskell, Robert Hardy and Thomas Franklin of the *Grampus*, 10-12 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.



committee “in consequence of some of the first Committee not being liked by the Ship’s Company.”<sup>56</sup>

Mirroring the widespread erection of gallows in front of the houses of the French rural aristocracy in 1789-90, mutinous crews at the Nore reeved yard ropes to symbolize that they had reconstituted themselves according to the principles of the lower deck and from now on assumed the responsibility of maintaining good order onboard themselves.<sup>57</sup> This was more than just a confrontational gesture. While opposition to unjust punishments imposed from above was one of the most frequent triggers of mutiny in this period, not just in the British navy, seamen were well aware that their collective security onboard ship, especially when lying so close to shore as they did at the Nore, depended on strict discipline and careful attention to duty. The mutineers therefore took great care to maintain regular and good order amongst themselves, and they created democratically-controlled courts to try men for a variety of offences, most commonly for drunkenness and neglect of duty, which violated two of their “most sacred laws, enacted for the Preservation and Unanimity of the Ship’s Company.”<sup>58</sup> In some cases, punishments were imposed “by the desire of the majority,” in others following the verdict of a jury.<sup>59</sup> Often the mutinous crews went to great lengths to follow proper procedure when trying a man, formally swearing juries and witnesses to strict impartiality, and providing the accused with a competent

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<sup>56</sup> Court martial of Richard Brown et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

<sup>57</sup> John Markoff, *The Abolition of Feudalism: Peasants, Lords, and Legislators in the French Revolution* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 224-225. See also section 3.4 above for an instance of French sailors erecting gallows in front of the house of Vice-Admiral Marigny at Brest.

<sup>58</sup> “No. 12,” Papers found onboard of the *Repulse*, June 12, 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370.

<sup>59</sup> Court martial of Dennis Sullivan et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5339.

councilor who pleaded on his behalf.<sup>60</sup> The courts were willing to recognize extenuating circumstances, even when they tried their former terrors. The boatswain of the *Proserpine*, for example, argued that he had only followed orders when previously he had abused the crew, and this was enough to sway the court to commute his corporal punishment to ritual humiliation:

He was disfigured with a large swab tied upon each shoulder, a rope round his neck, and his hands tied behind him: in this state he was placed in a boat, and rowed round the Fleet, with a Drummer by his side, occasionally beating the “Rogue’s March”; he was then landed at Sheerness and marched through the Dock Yard and Garrison, guarded by a party of Mutineers; and when they considered him sufficiently punished and degraded, they let him loose, and left him without farther molestation.<sup>61</sup>

Others were not so lucky. Master’s mate Edward Dawson of the *Monmouth*, along with the sergeant of marines and a midshipman, was found guilty of conspiring against the ship’s company and therefore sentenced to three dozen lashes, which was exceedingly mild compared to the blood-thirsty punishments usually imposed by regular courts martial for mutiny.<sup>62</sup>

If the reeving of yard ropes symbolized the emergence of a new order in the fleet, the red flags that flew alongside of them were intended to show that it was here to stay, whatever it took. The red flag had several overlapping meanings in the late eighteenth century, but it usually indicated the intention to temporarily suspend peaceful means of conflict resolution in favor of

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<sup>60</sup> “No. 9” and “No. 11,” Papers found onboard of the *Repulse*, June 12, 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370.

<sup>61</sup> Cunningham, *Narrative*, 13-14.

<sup>62</sup> Court martial of Richard Brown et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

brute force. Authorities on shore, for instance, sometimes used the red flag to announce martial law, and in the navy the “bloody colours” signified that a ship was prepared to give battle. The latter use of the flag had evolved from the medieval *baucans*, a thirty-yard long solid red streamer that north European ships flew as they sailed into combat to indicate that no quarter would be given or taken, or, in other words, that it would be a fight to the death.<sup>63</sup> Pirates during the so-called Golden Age used the “bloody flag” to convey the same meaning, and they ran it up the mast if their prey refused to surrender at the sight of the black Jolly Roger.<sup>64</sup> During the great 1775 Liverpool sailors’ revolt, lower deck insurgents fought under the red flag as they bombarded the city’s Mercantile Exchange.<sup>65</sup> It reemerged at Spithead, where it occasionally flew from the masts of the mutinous fleet, but at the Nore “the bloody flag of defiance” was there from the beginning and it flew throughout. Sailors even brought it with them to shore and marched behind it during large demonstrations they organized at Sheerness.<sup>66</sup>

Unlike its earlier appearances during moments of emergency and struggle, there are signs the mutineers at the Nore embraced the red flag as a positive and permanent symbol of their ongoing fight for better conditions. One of their communiqués was signed with the slogan “Red

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<sup>63</sup> W.G. Perrin, *British Flags: Their Early History, and their Development at Sea; With an Account of the Origin of the Flag as a National Device* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 160-161.

<sup>64</sup> Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates during the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon, 2004), 83. Intriguingly, a red Jolly Roger recently has come to light which was first captured from North African pirates in 1780. See “Rare crimson Jolly Roger restored,” BBC News online, 20 June 2007. <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/hampshire/6222054.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/hampshire/6222054.stm)> (10 May 2010).

<sup>65</sup> R. B. Rose, “A Liverpool Sailors’ Strike in the Eighteenth Century,” *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 68 (1958): 85; Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 256.

<sup>66</sup> Cunningham, *Narrative*, 8; Anon., *The Whole Trial and Defense of Richard Parker, President of the Delegates for Mutiny, &c. On board the Sandwich, and others of His Majesty’s Ships, the Nore, In May, 1797. Before a Court Martial, held on board the Neptune, of 98 Guns, Laying off Greenhithe, near Gravesend, on Thursday, 22d of June, 1797, and following Days* (London, 1797), 4, 12, 34-35; Court martial of Dennis Sullivan et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5339.

For Ever” and an eye witness reported that he had heard some mutineers shouting “huzza for the red flag.”<sup>67</sup> This perhaps indicates that a substantial number of the mutineers no longer believed they were engaged in a narrow corrective or restorative struggle for lost rights and paternalist class compromises but instead had begun to develop a consciousness of permanent opposition between themselves and their rulers, the have-nots and the haves, that pointed towards the vicious social conflicts of the industrializing nineteenth century. One of the songs they sang during the mutiny suggests as much:

In days of yore when rich and poor agreed  
Poor served the rich and rich the poor relieved  
No Despotic Tyrants then the womb produced  
But mutual all, each loved, and none abus'd  
But now how dreadful is the scene revers'd  
We're blessed with birth but by oppression cursed.

The theme I treat on is our Royal Tars  
Whose Godlike Spirits rival even Mars  
From their Supiness now their Souls are rous'd  
To Rod and Yoke no longer are exposed  
But all alike each swears he will be true

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<sup>67</sup> “The Delegates of the Different Ships at the Nore Assembled in Council – to their fellow Subjects,” Petitions 1793-1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5125; Hawkins and Watt, “‘Now is our time’,” 156.

And Tyrants ne'er their former Course Renew.<sup>68</sup>

Many mutineers also wore red cockades fixed to their hats and caps, bringing together the red flag's combative maritime symbolism with the red of the French Revolution, which by the late 1790s had become an international symbol of regicide, class warfare, and social renewal.<sup>69</sup> The mutineers were in fact so successful in colonizing the meaning of the red flag that the navy dropped it entirely from its official *Signal Book for the Ships of War* in 1799.<sup>70</sup>

William Gregory of the *Sandwich* summed up the confluence of uncompromising republicanism with lower deck militancy when he demanded to know from his shipmates: "Is there not many among you here as fit to be our Sovereign as George Rex? He has power and we have the force of gun powder."<sup>71</sup> It is difficult to know just how many such hard-line insurrectionists there were in the fleet, but there is evidence of a few. Thomas Jephson, fiddle-player onboard the *Sandwich*, for example rejected an officer's order to play "God Save the King" with the explanation that "by Jesus, it's an old state tune and I care nothing about Kings and Queens – Bad luck to the whole of them." Jephson went on to exclaim that "he thought [the mutiny] a glorious thing and that he would be d----d if ever it would end until the head was off of King George and Billy Pitt." He further suggested the mutineers should agitate amongst the soldiers at Sheerness, for he was sure they would join them, and if the fleet would stop all

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<sup>68</sup> "No. 35 (A Copy of Verses on the Seamen Displaying their Noble Spirit in the Year 1797)," Papers found onboard of the *Repulse*, June 12, 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C370.

<sup>69</sup> Court martial of Dennis Sullivan et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5339; court martial of William Gregory et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

<sup>70</sup> Perrin, *British Flags*, 175.

<sup>71</sup> Court martial of William Gregory et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

shipping going up the Thames to London, they might be able to trigger a general insurrection: “By Jesus before Saturday night all London will be in an uproar.” He also told his comrades that shortly before the mutiny he had been to London and met with revolutionaries who assured him that both the Scots and the Irish were ready to rise up against the government.<sup>72</sup> Similarly at Plymouth, at around the same time, Robert Lee, a private marine whose brother was said to be “an original Member of the Societies of United Irishmen,” attempted to lead a violent revolt “to overturn the government” that involved fomenting a mutiny in the naval squadron lying off shore and freeing the French prisoners of war held at Mill Prison.<sup>73</sup>

Committed revolutionaries like Gregory, Jephson, and Lee represented a minority position among the mutineers, just as they did in the population at large, whose political demographics they probably reflected more or less accurately. However, their particular experiences on the frontlines of the war had a radicalizing effect on them that was not necessarily shared on land. In a letter to his wife Elizabeth, William Roberts of the *Director* explained that “wee poor Men ave been fiteing against our enemies, and now wee are come hom, wee desire to fite for beter usage: it is a fin thing to bee a Solder or Seler, so it is to walk about Birmingham; [...] wee poor Selers and Solders want nothing more, then to be used well.”<sup>74</sup> It especially annoyed the mutineers to have their patriotism publically challenged by the government and some of the newspapers, when it was they who suffered more than anyone else for the defense of

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<sup>72</sup> Court martial of Thomas Jephson of the *Sandwich*, 27 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340. Jephson was not only one who thought chocking of the London trade would lead to general disturbances there. See Hawkins and Watt, “‘Now is out time’,” 158.

<sup>73</sup> Courts martial of Robert Lee, 23 June 1797, Daniel Coffey, 24 June 1797, and John McGinness, 26 June 1797, Plymouth, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5491; Letter to Charles Grenville, Dublin Castle, 4 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) HO 100/70; see also Tom L. Haughton, “The Execution of Three Royal Marines on Plymouth Hoe in 1797,” *Irish Sword* 11, no. 45 (1974): 246-247.

<sup>74</sup> Letter, William Roberts to Elizabeth Roberts, *Director*, 2 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) PC 1/38/122.

the country. In an address “to their fellow subjects,” the General Committee of Delegates declared that

the publick prints teem with falsehood and Misrepresentation, to induce you to Believe things as far from Our Design as the Conduct of those at the Helm of State is from Honesty and Good Decorum, Shall we who have endured the Toils of a long Disgraceful War Bear the Shackles of Tyranny and Oppression, Which Vile Gilded Pampered Knaves wallowing in the Lap of Luxury choose to load us with?<sup>75</sup>

George Shave of the *Sandwich* noted “that the Country had been oppressed for these five years, that the war had been too long and now was the time to get themselves righted.”<sup>76</sup>

While the mutiny at the Nore raged on, some men on the *Pompée*, one of the ships that had participated in the mutiny at Spithead, attempted to renew the revolt in the fleet together with the crews of three other ships, including the *Mars* and the *Duke*, both of which had been unwilling to return to duty a few weeks earlier. This time, however, the object would be to force the government to conclude a peace. While the *Pompée* was on blockade duty off the coast of France, William Guthrie, the leading conspirator, one day “pointed his hand through the Port towards France and said it is not our Enemies that live there it is our Friends. He mentioned some words of having left his wife at home with only a shilling.” Guthrie added that “the French were willing long ago to make a peace with us but we would not make it with them. He said in

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<sup>75</sup> “The Delegates of the Different Ships at the Nore Assembled in Council – to their fellow subjects,” included in court martial of William Gregory et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

<sup>76</sup> Court martial of Dennis Sullivan et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5339.

case of invasion or if it was necessary for us to go to sea he would go and defend the Country to the utmost.” But as things stood, the conspirators thought the greatest danger to the country came not from the French, but from the war-mongering ministry, and they believed only the seamen of the fleet were strong enough to force it into making peace. “Towns and Parishes throughout England had petitioned for it and they could not get it,” they said, “and if the seamen stood out they were the people who could get it.” And once there was peace, the people of England could finally fight for “Freedom with Equity” at home, a phrase that worried the gentlemen composing the court martial that tried the *Pompée* mutineers to no end.<sup>77</sup>

At Sheerness there were signs the mutiny had begun to transmit its revolutionary impulse onto shore. Large numbers of people joined their demonstrations behind the red flag, “inflammatory handbills were published and circulated among the Seamen on board as well as on shore,” and rich people evacuated their belongings as the mutiny “was fast spreading itself into a general rebellion.”<sup>78</sup> Encouraging news also reached the fleet from further afield. J. and M. West wrote to their brother Thomas onboard the *Isis* that even in their hometown of Chertsey in Surrey “the lower Class of People in general wish the Sailors good Success.”<sup>79</sup> In Exeter, the general mood of the population was so supportive of the seamen that Thomas Williams, a deserter not connected to the mutiny at the Nore, could score free drinks in several of the town’s pubs by pretending to be a travelling delegate on his way back to Sheerness.<sup>80</sup> In London, radical activists began to take an interest in the mutiny. P.F. McCallum, who would later become a

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<sup>77</sup> Court martial of William Guthrie, James Callaway, Thomas Ashley, Robert Johnson, and John Davis of the *Pompée*, 20-23 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5339.

<sup>78</sup> Cunningham, *Narrative*, 12, 17, 70.

<sup>79</sup> Letter, J. & M. West to Thomas West, Chertsey, 5 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) HO 42/212.

<sup>80</sup> Court martial of Thomas Williams of the *Braakel*, 24 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5339.



transatlantic, anti-imperialist troublemaker, published a democratic newspaper in support of the mutineers, and there were persistent and widespread rumors that various mysterious persons thought to be active revolutionaries came down from London to visit with the mutineers at the Nore.<sup>81</sup>

But however much sympathy the mutineers may have enjoyed amongst the population at large, there were no signs of an actual solidarity movement, and once the government in late May made it clear that it would not grant a single concession and instead was fully prepared to break the mutiny by force, the ships soon found themselves completely isolated and surrounded by soldiers who were getting ready for a bombardment with red-hot shot. Most of the mutineers remained determined to see their grievances redressed, but many amongst them grew nervous about the bloodshed that looked ever more likely if they refused to back down. John James of the *Belliqueux* wrote to Susanna Johnson to explain that “we want no more than our Right, and if they do not supply us with Provisions there will be a great deal of Blood spilt I am afraid.”<sup>82</sup> R. Mabson of the *Nassau* wrote to reassure his wife that “if you don’t hear from me so often don’t make yourself so unhappy for I hope no danger will come to us but I am afraid it will be some time before it is settled.” But then he added ominously: “If the Admiralty do not settle this, it will be bad, here is a large fleet here.”<sup>83</sup> John Pickering thought the conflict “in all probability can

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<sup>81</sup> James Epstein, “The Radical Underworld Goes Colonial: P.F. McCallum’s *Travels in Trinidad*,” in *Unrespectable Radicals? Popular Politics in the Age of Reform*, ed. by Michael T. Davis and Paul A. Pickering (Aldergate: Ashgate, 2008), 148; court martial of William Gregory et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340; court martial of Thomas Jephson, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340; Cunningham, *Narrative*, 97-100.

<sup>82</sup> Letter, John James to Susanna Johnson, *Belliqueux*, 1 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) PC 1/38/122.

<sup>83</sup> Letter, R. Mabson to Mrs Mabson, *Nassau*, 2 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) PC 1/38/122.

terminate in nothing but Civil War,” and John Cox told his wife that “we are afraid of our Lives.”<sup>84</sup>

There had been many discussions early on of taking the fleet to sea if their demands were refused, but in the end not nearly enough men were willing to take that ultimate step and turn their backs on England for good, even if the country had proved itself less than appreciative of their many sacrifices. The practical problems alone must have seemed nearly insurmountable. To begin with, where would they go? William Ross suggested an initial rendezvous at Bantry Bay in Ireland, and his shipmate William Welch proposed France, but to that John Copey objected because “no Enemy shall have our Ship.” Instead he advocated sailing for Madeira, “where we will have wood, wine and water.”<sup>85</sup> But then what? Someone proposed the “New Colony,” which probably referred to New South Wales.<sup>86</sup> They all no doubt remembered that less than a decade before, the crew of the *Bounty* had succeeded in starting a new life beyond the reach of the British Empire somewhere in the south Pacific, but the difference was of course that they had already been there when they mutinied, they had officers who could assist in the navigation of the ship, and they were well-provisioned with both food and water. The ships at the Nore had none of these things, and in addition there were large numbers of severely sick men onboard. Even before the mutiny started, virulent fevers had raged on some the ships, and conditions were unlikely to have improved after the government refused to allow anyone to come ashore or be

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<sup>84</sup> Letter, John Pickering to James Pickering, Yarmouth, 29 May 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) PC 1/38/122; letter, John Cox to Mrs John Cox Galston, Nore, 31 May 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) PC 1/38/122.

<sup>85</sup> Court martial of Dennis Sullivan et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5339.

<sup>86</sup> “No. 57,” Report and results of the papers found on board the *Inflexible*, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 3/137.

transferred to a hospital ship.<sup>87</sup> The *Nancy*, for example, tried to evacuate 70 of her crew to the *Spanker* hospital ship, but the port admiral ordered them all sent back, but not before stuffing their pockets with various proclamations from the Admiralty. They were so ill that they did not even notice this.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the odds and without a clear destination, on June 9 the General Committee of Delegates signaled for the fleet to put to sea, but not a single ship obeyed. Terrified and insecure, pushed into a corner by the government's confrontational stance, many of the men who had been neither delegates nor committeemen had begun to calculate their chances of escaping the mutiny unharmed to be fairly high, since the Admiralty, unable to punish over 10,000 men, most likely would concentrate its wrath only on those who had stood out as especially active. On ship after ship, therefore, the committees were pushed aside and the crews surrendered. Mostly, this was a quiet and resigned affair, but on some of the ships it led to large-scale violence between hard-line mutineers and their former comrades. On the *Iris*, there was a shoot-out between the "blue party" and the "bloody party" during which a woman shot a lieutenant through the head who had just cut down her husband with his cutlass.<sup>89</sup>

For some, the end of the mutiny was a heart-breaking experience, and at least one of them, a "north Briton" on the *Standard* with the proud name of William Wallace, chose to shoot himself in the head rather than accept defeat.<sup>90</sup> Others who were convinced they would be

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<sup>87</sup> Letter, Surgeon William Snipe to Captain James Robert Mosse of the *Sandwich*, 22 March 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727.

<sup>88</sup> Cunningham, *Narrative*, 70.

<sup>89</sup> Anon., *Memoirs of Richard Parker, the Mutineer; Together with an Account at large of His Trial by Court Martial, Defence, Sentence, and Execution and A Narrative of the Mutiny at the Nore and Sheerness, from its Commencement to its Final Termination* (London, 1797), 20.

<sup>90</sup> Cunningham, *Narrative*, 82.

executed for their role in the mutiny chose to turn their violence outward. James Robertson of the *Leopard* cursed that “he was sure of being hung and he would be damned if he did not do as much mischief as he could.” His shipmate Alexander Lawson crawled into the foretop with a musket and opened fire on the officers who now were reclaiming the quarterdeck. But it was an act of desperation. The tide on the lower deck was turning inexorably in the direction of surrender. Some of the very last hold-outs considered sacrificing themselves and committing mass murder. William Welch told his remaining comrades “when all comes to all we’ll break into the magazine and blow her up.”<sup>91</sup> But their resolve faltered, and in the end they and hundreds more like them were overwhelmed by their newly loyalist shipmates and arrested. The last three ships surrendered on June 16, almost to the day two months after the Great Mutiny had started with the Channel fleet’s forty-five ships’ refusal to lift anchor and go to war on Easter Sunday, April 15.

## 5.2 “THE TIMES REQUIRED SUMMARY PUNISHMENTS”<sup>92</sup>

Even though the defeat in the end was a painful one, for those who had participated in the mutiny, it was a transformative experience. Reflecting no doubt the feelings of many onboard the mutinous ships, Alexander Davison wrote to his friend Robert Dunn to boast and marvel at the height of the insurrection that “all Duty is carried on as well as before we took the Command of

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<sup>91</sup> Court martial of Dennis Sullivan et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5339.

<sup>92</sup> Letter, Admiral Jervis to Evan Nepean, *Ville de Paris*, 3 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/396.

her or better for every one does their utmost endeavours in regard to the Duty of the Ship.”<sup>93</sup> If only for a few weeks, the seamen of the fleet had created a different navy, a different way of working together onboard ship that replaced the supreme tyranny of his Majesty’s officer corps with democratic assemblies below deck, and the unrelenting terror of the lash with common agreement. The mutineers had formed popular institutions of some complexity that reflected the most radical political ideals of the revolutionary era. Together they took hundreds of decisions big and small, that pertained to everything from dirty laundry to negotiating with the King himself. If anyone failed to meet their responsibilities, they were not arbitrarily brutalized as before, but tried by a newly established, democratically controlled justice system worthy of the name. It truly had been “a revolution of the fleet.”<sup>94</sup>

For some of the men, this had not been their first experience of mutiny, and for many more it would not be their last. Matthew Hollister had been one of the leading figures in the *Defiance* revolt just two years before, a disheartening experience that taught him the importance of solidarity, determination, and organization (see section 4.3 above). It is not surprising that he should have volunteered, and been accepted, to go as a delegate from the Nore first to the Channel fleet at Spithead and later to the North Sea fleet at Yarmouth.<sup>95</sup> Isaac Bowstead, “a man of uncommon abilities,” was suspected of having been a ringleader of the *Culloden* rising in 1795 (see section 4.3 above), and after the final collapse of the Nore mutiny he was arrested in Colchester for behaving “in a very outrageous manner.” Bowstead had twice seen the lower

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<sup>93</sup> Letter, Alexander Davison to Robert Dunn, *Sandwich*, 2 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) PC 1/38/122.

<sup>94</sup> “Captain Payne to Spencer, George Inn, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1797,” in *Spencer Papers*, 2:113.

<sup>95</sup> Court martial of William Parker (1<sup>st</sup>), Robert McLawrin, George Wythick, Martin Ealey, William Froud, John McDonald, John Sullivan, William Handy, George Harden, John Prime, Joseph Flint, Michael Cox, John Lawson, William Morrison, John Graham (1<sup>st</sup>), Charles Pick, and William Avery of the *Defiance*, 20 January-11 February 1796, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5334; Gill, *Naval Mutinies*, 171.

deck's organizational capabilities, and he had twice seen the uncompromising repression it encountered. Bitter and disappointed, he "damned his King & Country, [and said] that the Town ought to be burned to the ground."<sup>96</sup> Of the more than 10,000 men who had mutinied at the Nore, and of the tens of thousands more who had mutinied elsewhere, how many now felt similarly?

Quite a few men left England for good in the weeks following the mutiny. In late July, the Admiralty was informed by one of its agents at Gravesend that a "practice has lately prevailed of many seamen embarking for Hambro' or Embden, but in fact they go to Holland. [...] I don't remember seeing such a number attempting to go out of the Kingdom as there has been for these three weeks or month past." He suspected the Dutch navy was actively recruiting them in London, and perhaps a few of the ex-mutineers really found the idea of going to war against England appealing.<sup>97</sup> Others left for America with the aim of joining the newly formed navy there, even though they were not particularly welcome.<sup>98</sup> Captain Thomas Truxtun of the US frigate *Constellation* complained after having faced down several mutinous assemblies among his own crew during the early summer months of 1798 that "the Seamen of Great Britain have sat such an Example of Infamy, that the Marine Laws of the United States, England, France, Spain, and Holland, as well as the Rest of the Maritime Powers of Europe, have been, and will still be made more severe in Consequence thereof. It is in the Interest of all Parties at

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<sup>96</sup> Letter, William Mason to the Duke of Portland, Colchester, 25 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4172.

<sup>97</sup> "Extract from a letter from Gravesend, 26 July 1797, forwarded to Evan Nepean," TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4173.

<sup>98</sup> Moreau de Jonnès, *Adventures in the Revolution and under the Consulate* (London: Peter Davies, 1969), 157.

War, to pass Laws, and check such Proceedings, and it has been wise in them to do it.”<sup>99</sup> The Americans were not the only ones who worried about the subversive example sailors set in England. In Sweden, as in many other European countries, radical journalists reported enthusiastically on the mutinies, but after they inspired a strike for higher wages in Stockholm’s iron carrier corps, the King imposed a complete ban on the publication of any news relating to the seamen in Britain.<sup>100</sup>

In Britain, too, fears abounded that the insurrection would spread to other industries, and in particular that fugitive ex-mutineers would carry their experience into the merchant fleet, and from there convey it “to the distant colonies.”<sup>101</sup> The idea of blacklisting known mutineers was first voiced by members of the naval officer corps, but in order to create the impression of a unified front it was thought best if the merchant community itself came to “an immediate public resolution of not employing in their Service any Seamen who after a certain period should have continued in a state of insubordination.”<sup>102</sup> In early June, a powerful “Union of Merchants, Ship Owners, and others interested in Navigation,” including Prime Minister William Pitt, Hugh Inglis, chairman of the East India Company, Thomas Raikes, governor of the Bank of England, Richard Neaves, former chairman of the Society of West Indian Merchants and the London Dock Company, as well as director of the Hudson Bay Company, and forty-six other men of similar

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<sup>99</sup> “Captain Truxtun concerning mutinous assemblies on board U.S. Frigate *Constellation*, 2 July 1798,” in *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War between the United States and France* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1935), 1:157.

<sup>100</sup> Rolf Karlbom, *Hungeruplopp och Strejker 1793-1867: En Studie i den Svenska Arbetarrörelsens Uppkomst* (Lund: Gleerup, 1967), 41-42; for examples from the Danish press, see *Minerva, et Maanedskrivt* 48 (April, May, and June 1797), 121-124, 250-251, 388-392.

<sup>101</sup> “Captain Payne to Spencer, George Inn, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1797,” in *Spencer Papers*, 2:113; Cunningham, *Narrative*, x.

<sup>102</sup> Letter, Stow to Evan Nepean, 27 May 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C341.

caliber, responded with a public proclamation “that no Seaman shall be henceforwards employed in the Service of the Undersigned, who cannot produce a Certificate from his former Commander or Commanders in the Navy, of his orderly and obedient Conduct.” They further resolved “to raise a Fund, by Voluntary Subscription, [...] for the purposes of detecting and bringing to public justice such lurking Traitors as may have excited and fomented the present mutiny at the Nore.”<sup>103</sup>

Unwelcome among employers and state officials alike, and by now thoroughly fed up with serving under others, some ex-mutineers decided to go to sea under their own direction instead. The option of turning pirate had already cropped up a few times during the mutiny and some continued to advocate it afterwards, but in reality it was hardly a viable option in the late 1790s.<sup>104</sup> The seas were far more militarized than they had been during the so-called Golden Age of piracy in the first few decades of the century, and more importantly perhaps none of the great ports now allowed pirates to trade and blow their booty in relative safety. The ex-mutineers therefore chose the next best thing and became privateers, independent, self-governed commerce raiders licensed by one or other of the belligerent powers. One crew that sailed out of Dunkirk to attack British prizes honored the memory of the late president of the General Committee of Delegates at the Nore by christening their ship “Le Président-Parker.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *At a Numerous and Respectable Meeting of Merchants, Ship-Owners, and Insurers, and other Inhabitants of London, concerned in Commerce and Navigation, etc.*, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 3/137.

<sup>104</sup> Court martial of Patrick Tobin and Francis Matthew of the *Emerald*, 17-18 August 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5341; court martial of Colin Brown, James Hayes, James O’Neale, Robert Gray and Thomas Needs of the *Phoenix*, 3-7 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340. One US newspaper even fantasized about the whole fleet turning piratical. “On the British Naval Mutiny Business,” *The Time Piece and Literary Companion* 1, no. 44 (1797), 175.

<sup>105</sup> Letter, Morard de Galles to the Minister of Marine, Brest, 11 Frimaire Year VI of the Republic, SHM-V, BB/3/114, Service Général, Correspondance, Brest, 1797, f. 207.



It is unclear how many men managed to get away during the chaotic collapse and in the immediate aftermath of the mutiny, but most likely their numbers did not exceed a few hundred. The authorities moved quickly to isolate the crews that returned to duty and weeded out those it considered most likely to have been leading figures in the mutiny, initially 560 men, of whom 412 eventually were held for trial.<sup>106</sup> President Richard Parker was the first to be court-martialed, and to no one's surprise he received a sentence of death, which thousands of sullen ex-mutineers were forced to watch as it was carried out onboard the *Sandwich* on June 30. With his dying words, Parker begged that his death might "be considered a sufficient atonement for the offences which have been committed and that no more lives will be sacrificed."<sup>107</sup> But the Admiralty was out for blood, and his prayer went unheard. Evan Nepean, the influential secretary to the Board of Admiralty, furiously argued that the evidence collected from the *Sandwich* alone was "enough to dispose of a dozen Scoundrels of Parker's description," and that was on just one of several dozen mutinous ships.<sup>108</sup> But after Parker's funeral nearly tipped over into a massive riot in London, the Admiralty was forced to moderate its lust for revenge, or at least to satisfy it more discretely. J. King suggested to Nepean that perhaps "in order to prevent similar disturbances of the public Peace upon the Execution of such of the Persons as are or may be convicted by the Court Martial now sitting, such measures [...] should be adopted to prevent the bodies from being exposed to the public view."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Dugan, *Great Mutiny*, 389.

<sup>107</sup> "A Statement of the Circumstances attending the Execution of Richard Parker on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1797 on board H.M.S. Sandwich lying at Blackstake off Queenborough," TNA: PRO (UK) PC 1/38/123.

<sup>108</sup> Letter, Evan Nepean to Thomas Pasley, London, 19 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/727 C395.

<sup>109</sup> Letter, J. King to Evan Nepean, Whitehall, 4 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4173.

British penal logic had finally moved away from public executions after a mob during the 1780 Gordon Riot burned down Newgate Prison, London's most prominent symbol of state judicial terror, but the navy with its insistence on the extreme subjugation of the lower deck was not prepared to abandon the practice just yet.<sup>110</sup> In addition to Parker, at least twenty-five men were executed in front of their assembled comrades throughout July and August, most of them at the Nore and some at Spithead, and at least a further seventeen men had their death sentences publically and ceremoniously commuted to hard labor from one to seven years. At least five men were sentenced to being flogged through the fleet with between 40 and 300 lashes each.<sup>111</sup> Nearly everyone else disappeared into various carceral institutions, including at least two men who were deported to the newly established penal settlements of New South Wales and Norfolk Island, both not far from where the *Bounty* had mutinied only a few years before.<sup>112</sup> About three hundred men were held mostly without trial at his Majesty's pleasure for several months in the *Eagle* prison hulk, but many of them received a pardon in September 1797, just in time to join the British fleet going out to meet the Dutch at Camperdown.<sup>113</sup>

Two dozen men sentenced to solitary confinement, "the principal part of whom appear to be Irish, and convicted of mutiny, sedition and such like dangerous crimes," were sent to the

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<sup>110</sup> Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 333-370.

<sup>111</sup> Due to the incomplete and sometimes unclear documentation, historians disagree about the exact number of men sentenced and executed, though all estimates are within a similar range. For a compilation of estimates, see Dugan, *Great Mutiny*, 389-390. My own figures are based on the partially incomplete "List of the Mutineers," TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 3/137.

<sup>112</sup> One of the two was William Redfern, the *Standard*'s young enthusiastic surgeon's mate who quickly earned a free pardon and went on to join the colonial ruling class as a major landowner, reformer, and medical pioneer. Redfern eventually had a neighborhood in Sydney named in his honor. "Convicts transported, 1787-1809," TNA: PRO (UK) HO 11/1. See also *ODNB*, s.v. "William Redfern (1774/5?-1833)."

<sup>113</sup> Dugan, *Great Mutiny*, 390.

dilapidated Marshalsea prison in the London suburb of Southark. The prison was notorious for the miserable conditions that prevailed inside, and one of the mutineers, John Martin of the *Leopard*, who had been sentenced for refusing to give evidence against his shipmates, hanged himself after only a few weeks. The small building, dating from the early fourteenth century, was in such an advanced state of decay that the keeper worried it might not be able to actually hold “such a desperate set of men” for very long. He was right. On September 6, John Broghan, James Hayes, James O’Neale, David Lamb, and John McEvoy “escaped by breaking through the Prison Wall.” Most of the remaining prisoners were quickly transferred to the newly built prison at Coldbath Fields, where they joined several dozen of their comrades who were already incarcerated there.<sup>114</sup>

Coldbath Fields may have been more secure than the Marshalsea, but the conditions here were even worse. Prisoners sentenced to solitary confinement were held in “dark cells, close confinement, without exercise, without sufficient food, without warmth, without light, without cleanliness, with proper opportunities for their natural occasions, without intelligence given or received, debarred from books, pen, ink, paper, their friends excluded.”<sup>115</sup> One prisoner described the cells as “about 8 feet by 6, very damp, the walls were of brick, and covered with moisture, the floor of stone, which in very severe weather is crusted over with ice. On one side of this miserable tenement, I found about three feet from the floor, three planks projecting from the wall, so as to form what is there called a bedstead; on this was a straw mat, a small thin rug, and

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<sup>114</sup> Letter, William Cruchley to the Duke of Portland, 27 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) PC 1/44/156; Entry book for Admiralty prisoners, 1773-1799, TNA: PRO (UK) PRIS 11/15; List of pardoned mutineers sent to Coldbath Fields prison in preparation of their being sent to the hulks, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4173. See also Jerry White, “Pain and Degradation in Georgian London: Life in the Marshalsea Prison,” *History Workshop Journal* 68 (2009): 69-98.

<sup>115</sup> Francis Burdett, *Cold Bath Fields Prison, by some called the English Bastille!* (London, 1799), 11.

a most filthy blanket.”<sup>116</sup> According to the regulations, each prisoner was to receive about a pound of bread every day, and four days each week about six ounces of bread with some broth, but these provisions were hardly ever issued in full.<sup>117</sup> Most of the prisoners were severely undernourished, and several starved to death, though official records determined their cause of death to be a “visitation of god.” There were also at least four suicides between 1797 and 1800.<sup>118</sup>

The conditions inside Coldbath Fields were not caused by neglect but by design. It was a common practice in eighteenth-century prisons that inmates who could afford to do so were given the chance of purchasing various upgrades, such private apartments, laundry services, food and drink delivered from the outside, visitation rights for friends, families, sex workers, and so forth. Thomas Aris, Coldbath Field’s entrepreneurial governor, took this system one step further.<sup>119</sup> Rather than charging his few well-heeled inmates for their privileges, he charged everyone for their necessities instead. “Every article is turned to profit,” Francis Burdett, an early prison reformer, railed in Parliament, “the food, the fuel, the mattresses, the beds, the apartments, the kitchen, even the hospital, all are sources of profit for this Governor!”<sup>120</sup> Aris would not have been able to maintain this profitable regime had Coldbath Fields not been newly built according to the ideas of enlightenment penology. Unlike older prisons, where the majority of inmates were

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<sup>116</sup> Affidavit by Joseph Burks, LMA (UK) MJ/SP/1799/FEB/054/1-4.

<sup>117</sup> *Impartial Statement of the Cruelties Discovered in the Coldbath-Fields Prison, by the Grand and Traverse Juries for the County of Middlesex, and Reported in the House of Commons, on Friday the 11<sup>th</sup> of June, 1800* (London: J.S. Jordan, 1800), 15.

<sup>118</sup> “Register of the Deaths of Prisoners in the House of Correction for the County of Middlesex; and of what Diseases or Complaint they died,” LMA (UK) MA/G/CBF/417.

<sup>119</sup> Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin, 1991), 139.

<sup>120</sup> Burdett, *Cold Bath Fields Prison*, 10.

housed together in a series of large interconnected rooms and yards, and only the rich lived in segregated chambers, Coldbath Fields was designed with individual cells for nearly every prisoner.<sup>121</sup> This allowed Aris and his turnkeys to fine-tune the conditions of each prisoner according to the precise amount of money they were able to extort. And those completely broke, or without friends and relatives able to support them on the outside, were left to rot alone in their cells, waiting for a “visitation of god.”

The prison population was separated into three different wings. One contained vagrants, debtors, and a broad array of convicts, among them smugglers, gamblers, forgers, and libelers. A second wing was reserved for the mutineers. A third one was occupied by state prisoners, which by 1799 included Edward Despard, John Bone, and Thomas Evans, all of them leading figures in the insurrectionary wing of the British democratic movement. Their presence inside the prison, and their militant wives outside of it, disrupted the regime of total isolation upon which Governor Aris grounded his rule. Janet Evans, in particular, smuggled out letters from her husband which she passed on to sympathetic allies in Parliament, first and foremost Francis Burdett, who eventually succeeded in establishing a select committee that took evidence and looked into the practices of Governor Aris. Janet also gave information to her contacts among London’s radical book publishers, who used the information to whip up popular anger against the English “Bastille” which culminated in two riots outside the prison gates, a small one led by John Bone’s wife Elizabeth in 1798 and a major one in early 1800.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 231-256.

<sup>122</sup> Iain MacCalman, *Radical underworld: Prophets, revolutionaries and pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 16; J. Ann Hone, *For the Cause of Truth: Radicalism in London, 1796-1821* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 121-128.

As might be expected, Governor Aris was viciously intolerant of dissent. William Ryan and Charles Rowe attempted to get a petition smuggled out to the King, but they were found out, and both locked away in total isolation until they died from “consumption” (probably pulmonary tuberculosis). The prison register delicately listed their cause of death as “decline.”<sup>123</sup> John Bone was similarly thrown into an isolated dark and damp cell for five weeks, from which he emerged “extremely ill,” after he had decorated one of the prison’s walls with a drawing of a guillotine, complete with a severed head and the slogans “This is the base Pitt” and “This is a cure for the King’s Evil.”<sup>124</sup> But despite the repression, the prisoners succeeded in building unity across the wings, and again Janet Evans helped her husband’s effort on the inside by signaling to the mutineers from the outside.<sup>125</sup> They responded enthusiastically to the agitation and even hatched a plan to kill the prison doctor and Governor Aris’ son, one of the prison’s most hated turnkeys. Their idea was to fake a suicide and in the ensuing chaos murder the two men, but one of the conspirators snitched and Aris punished them with solitary confinement and reduced provisions. It was not long before “the Seamen complained of illness; and in general they had the appearance of men worn out by wretchedness and disease.”<sup>126</sup>

The seamen of the fleet did not forget their unfortunate comrades on the inside. As the mutiny was falling apart in the summer of 1797, several crews seem to have made agreements

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<sup>123</sup> Burdett, *Cold Bath Fields Prison*, 8; “Register of the Deaths,” LMA (UK) MA/G/CBF/417.

<sup>124</sup> “Statement of Thomas Aris, governor of Cold Bath Fields, 10 January 1799,” Middlesex – Proceedings of the General Quarter Sessions in the Month of January 1799 respecting several Matters relating to the House of Correction for the said County and certain Prisoners confined in that Prison, LMA (UK) MA/G/GEN/450.

<sup>125</sup> “Statement of Thomas Aris,” and “Second examination of Thomas Aris, 14 January 1799,” Middlesex – Proceedings of the General Quarter Sessions in the Month of January 1799 respecting several Matters relating to the House of Correction for the said County and certain Prisoners confined in that Prison, LMA (UK) MA/G/GEN/450.

<sup>126</sup> *Impartial Statement*, 10.

that those who escaped persecution would collect money amongst themselves to support the prisoners.<sup>127</sup> And they remained true to their word. In May 1799, Captain James Walker of the *Braakel* reported to the Admiralty with some consternation that he had detected “a new Species of Crime, which the Articles of War do not appear to provide for. [...] William French and Henry Jordan, Seamen belonging to this Ship and who were both deeply concerned with the Mutiny, the first in the Polyphemus, the other in the Saturn, have been detected since the Ship was paid in raising a Subscription amongst the Men for the relief of the Mutineers confined in Cold Bath Fields Prison.” Upon searching their chests, Walker found letters to and from other crews in the fleet, as well as from a mysterious Mr. Rishiman of Queen Street in London, to whom they intended to send the money.<sup>128</sup>

The crew that collected the most money for the Coldbath Fields prisoners was that of the *Saturn*, whose dedication to self-government remained solid in the aftermath of the fleet mutinies. During a cruise in June 1797, the crew created a committee below deck that rapidly encroached on the government of the ship, and eventually took it over completely. While the committee from the beginning only replaced the authority of the officer corps, by mustering the crew themselves and taking over the organization of the day-to-day labor processes onboard, they appear to have considered the captain as the executive branch of their little shipboard *polis*. After the committee sentenced Thomas Chapping to be flogged for snitching and scabbing, for instance, they sent a delegation to the quarterdeck instructing the captain to carry out the punishment. He responded by calling them “a mutinous set of Rascals,” and from then on they

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<sup>127</sup> Letter, Richard Smith to John Roguin Smith, *Eagle* prison ship, 18 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) HO 42/212.

<sup>128</sup> Letter, James Walker to Evan Nepean, Nore, 21 May 1799, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/731.

simply ignored him. Shortly afterwards, the committee decided to give the crew shore leave and put the ship into Plymouth harbor, where they were all arrested. Eight men were sentenced to death, and three to be sent to Coldbath Fields, among them Luke Early, a private marine, who little over a year later starved to death in his cell.<sup>129</sup>

Even though the *Saturn*'s crew was not the only one that remained committed to the principles of the floating republic, most realized the opportunity for establishing shipboard democracy had passed. Individual lower deck radicals like Colin Brown of the *Phoenix* still occasionally wanted to run away and "have no Government but their own will[,] the sea being wide enough and any Country better than their own."<sup>130</sup> But no crew was actually prepared to take that step, at least for the time being. Most chose to wait and see instead what kind of disciplinary regime would emerge throughout the navy in the aftermath of the mutinies. For even though they had been defeated, everyone realized the balance of power between quarterdeck and fore-castle had decisively shifted in the latter's favor. On every ship nervous and insecure officers were forced to confront the problem of reestablishing their authority onboard without once again pushing their men over the edge into open revolt. Knowing full well, and perhaps better than ever, that the lower deck was still seething with discontent, some commanders hoped to convince their crews to regularize their protests, to speak to them about their grievances before taking action, and to use whatever legal mechanisms were available to see them remedied. Captain Burges of the *Beaulieu*, for instance, appealed to his crew "that should you at any time have just

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<sup>129</sup> Court martial of John Goody (alias Gooday), George Perry, James Dixon, John Farrel (3<sup>rd</sup>), Thomas Biddle, John Burton, Charles Painter, Joseph Simpson, John Evans, Thomas Kenyon and Luke Eardly (alias Early), James Pilton (alias Pitton), and William Dickinson of the *Saturn*, 19-27 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340; *Further Account (Being Part II.) of the Cruelties Discovered in Coldbath-Fields Prison, as Reported in the House of Commons, on Tuesday, the 22d July, 1800, etc.* (London, J.S. Jordan, 1800), 10.

<sup>130</sup> Court martial of Colin Brown et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.



cause of complaint [...] the same laws are open for you to apply to; it is equally in your favour to bring your officers before a court martial, and this I wish to enforce on your minds, doubt not but strict justice would be rendered you without consideration of persons.” But most crews, including the *Beaulieu*'s, did very much doubt that and continued to push for a more humane disciplinary regime through direct action instead. Burges was eventually forced to inform the Admiralty that despite his best efforts to reason with the crew, they would not allow him to carry out the executions of four convicted mutineers onboard.<sup>131</sup>

Explosions of discontent, repeatedly triggered by mass resistance to punishment, continued to rock the home command throughout the summer and into the fall, but the main force of revolt was now moving outward into the Atlantic.<sup>132</sup> On July 1, shortly after news had arrived of the fleet mutinies at home, unrest flared up throughout the small Mediterranean squadron cruising off Cadiz. On the *Almene*, Jens Christian Larsen and George Rankin, the first a Dane, the other an American, and both illegally impressed at Lisbon, tried to free James Davis from his confinement in irons and stir up the rest of the crew to mutiny, but their shipmates were too scared to act.<sup>133</sup> Not so the crew of the *Kingfisher*. After Thomas Leach had been put in irons

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<sup>131</sup> Court martial of Abraham Nelson, William Hooper, James Keates, John Gardum, George Penlington, David Walker, William Murray, John Herron, William Smith, John Williams, Charles Barnett, Thomas Hunter, William Brown, John McKnight, John Dyer and Charles King of the *Beaulieu*, 6-17 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

<sup>132</sup> For further unrest in the home command, see court martial of Joseph Wells, William Davy, James Johnson, Matthew Wilkinson, John Shehan, and Joseph Young of the *Calypso*, 14 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340; court martial of Colin Brown et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340; court martial of William Lee and Thomas Preston of the *Royal Sovereign*, 28-29 August 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5341; court martial of John Lloyd (alias Lydd) of the *Friendship*, 4 August 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5341; court martial of Michael Collins of the *Revolutionnaire*, 24-26 August 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5341; court martial of John Burn of the *Boedica*, 13-14 December 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5342; court martial of John Grover and John Brown (3<sup>rd</sup>) of the *Ganges*, 15-16 December, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5342.

<sup>133</sup> Court martial of John Anderson (alias Jens Christian Larsen) and George Rankin of the *Almene*, 22-24 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

for drawing a knife on the sloop's master who had punched him at least a dozen times in the face for refusing an order to pick up a broken bottle, his friend John Sayle in solidarity demanded to be put in irons alongside of him. When Captain Maitland a short while afterwards ordered all hands on deck to witness the two men's punishment – a flogging – the crew refused to leave the forecastle and commenced cheering instead. Maitland went berserk, "Damn your bloods, I'll cheer you you Rascalls," he screamed, and then stormed alone into the forecastle with his dirk drawn, murdered one man, and wounded four others, none of whom, he later confessed, had made any resistance beyond hissing at him. In the face of such vicious brutality, the short-lived mutiny collapsed.<sup>134</sup>

More serious trouble erupted the same day on the *Prince Royal*. In the morning, the crew, led by John Anderson and Michael McCann, came to the quarterdeck and presented the officer of the watch with a petition that pled for the life of two of their shipmates, who the day before had been sentenced to death for sodomy.<sup>135</sup> Captain Peard, who at the time was in his cabin "in the act of shifting myself," sent word that he deeply disapproved of their conduct but nevertheless would forward the petition to Admiral Jervis, one of the most hard-nosed and callous commanders in the navy.<sup>136</sup> His response was not surprising: the two men would be hanged at the appointed hour. "The crime of which they were convicted was of so horrible and detestable a nature, and the times," he drily added, "required summary punishments."<sup>137</sup> The crew reacted

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<sup>134</sup> Court martial of Thomas Leach and John Sayle of the *Kingfisher*, 10-11 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

<sup>135</sup> Court martial of John Benson and Philip Francis and the *St. George*, 30 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

<sup>136</sup> Letter, Captain Peard to Admiral Jervis, *St. George*, 5 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/396.

<sup>137</sup> Letter, Admiral Jervis to Evan Nepean, *Ville de Paris*, 3 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/396.

angrily to the news, and spent the next hours “whispering” amongst themselves, eventually deciding to rise on the officers that night and take control of the ship. They hoped, Lord Collingwood wrote, “to new model the fleet, *à la Nore*,” but the solidarity onboard was not strong enough to pull it off.<sup>138</sup> A few hours before the planned insurrection, “which involved a great Number of People,” a snitch informed Captain Peard of the plan, who immediately ordered all sentinels doubled, and the marines and soldiers armed. He then arrested four of the suspected conspirators and sent them out of the ship. It broke the back of the conspiracy, and the next morning, surrounded by armed soldiers and marines, the crew was forced to hang their two unfortunate shipmates.<sup>139</sup>

A few days later, the trials of the mutineers got underway. John Anderson, Michael McCann, John Hayes (2<sup>nd</sup>), and James Fitzgerald of the *St. George* were sentenced to death and hanged on July 10. The same day, the trial against Thomas Leach and John Sayle opened, and both were sentenced to receive a punishment beating, Leach with 36 lashes, Sayle with 100 lashes. Two days later, Captain Maitland was tried for murdering one of his men and wounding four others while putting down the mutiny on the *Kingfisher*. In his defense, he cited “the late mutinies in England” and expressed “heartfelt satisfaction” at having prevented something similar onboard his own ship. He was acquitted of all charges. Ten days later, Jens Christian Larsen and George Rankin of the *Almene* were put on trial. Larsen was acquitted, Rankin was executed. And with that, the mutinies in the Mediterranean squadron were stomped out.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> “To his sister, *Excellent*, off Cadiz, August 7, 1797,” in *Private Correspondence of Admiral Lord Collingwood*, 85.

<sup>139</sup> Letter, Captain Peard to Admiral Jervis, *St. George*, 5 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/396.

<sup>140</sup> Court martial of John Anderson, Michael McCann, John Hayes (2<sup>nd</sup>), and James Fitzgerald of the *St. George*, 7-8 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340; court martial of Thomas Leach and John Sayle of the *Kingfisher*, 10-11 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340; court martial of Captain John Maitland of the

A few months later, a series of mutinies erupted in the Cape of Good Hope squadron, and again the initial trigger was mass resistance to punishment. Captain John Stephens of the *Tremendous* was just about to commence the usual ceremonies that preceded a shipboard flogging on October 7, when the crew suddenly charged, freed the man, and then scurried up into the rigging to cheer the other ships of the squadron, who all immediately cheered back.<sup>141</sup> The moment had been well-prepared in advance. Ever since the *Rattlesnake* sloop had arrived a few weeks before from the Nore, its crew had circulated letters to the other ships urging them to rise together in a mutiny, and when the signal finally came the insurrection spread like wildfire through the whole squadron. On all seven ships, the crews immediately set about electing delegates and drawing up lists of grievances, which were later collated and conveyed to Rear-Admiral Pringle on shore. On several ships, the mutineers called their officers one by one to the fore-castle, briefly debated their behavior, and then voted on whether to expel them from the ship or not.<sup>142</sup>

The mutiny collapsed after six days. It had rested on precarious foundations from the beginning. The majority of the men were fundamentally loyal but thoroughly fed up with the chronic shortage of provisions that had plagued the squadron, and the whole colony, for months.<sup>143</sup> But there was also a significant, politically motivated minority which took its cue

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*Kingfisher*, 12 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340; court martial of John Anderson (alias Jens Christian Larsen) and George Rankin of the *Almene*, 22-24 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

<sup>141</sup> Letter, Rear Admiral Thomas Pringle to Evan Nepean, *Tremendous*, Cape of Good Hope, 13 October 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/56.

<sup>142</sup> Court martial of Captain George Hopewell Stephens of the *Tremendous*, 6-14 November 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5342.

<sup>143</sup> Letter, Rear-Admiral Pringle to Evan Nepean, *Tremendous*, 17 August 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/56.

from the Nore and hoped to push for radical change. They had initially provided fuel for the mutiny with accusations of quarterdeck brutality that emphasized the unlawful nature of such behavior.<sup>144</sup> But instead of reacting with violence and repression, which would have served to prove such charges, Rear-Admiral Pringle, neither insulting nor reproaching the men, instead calmly offered a general pardon and pledged to look into all of the mutineers' grievances. If any accusations against officers were found to be justified, he promised to hold them accountable by court martial. This satisfied the majority of the mutineers and they returned to duty.<sup>145</sup>

The radicals attempted to rekindle the mutiny twice during the next month, but they failed both times for lack of support, and they were left isolated and vulnerable when the repression finally came. Richard Foot, James Reese, Philip James, and Daniel Chapman were all sentenced to death, Jonathan Scofield to two years' imprisonment, Francis Peacock to eighteen months, and Thomas Kelly to one year. Henry Thomas received fifty lashes, and Andrew Burnett, John Wilson, and Anthony Parker were severely reprimanded.<sup>146</sup> True to his word, Pringle also put two of his officers on trial. Captain Stephens of the *Tremendous* was cleared of all charges, and William Stewart, master of the *Rattlesnake*, was sentenced for tyranny, oppression, and neglect of duty to be dismissed from the service.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Address of the *Rattlesnake*'s crew, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/56.

<sup>145</sup> Letter, Rear-Admiral Pringle to Evan Nepean, *Tremendous*, 9 October 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/56.

<sup>146</sup> Court martial of Philip James of the *Tremendous*, and Daniel Chapman and Francis Peacock of the *Sceptre*, 17-23 November 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5342; court martial of Andrew Burnet, Jonathan Scofield, Richard Foot, James Reese, John Wilson, Anthony Parker and Henry Thomas of the *Tremendous*, 30 November-5 December 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5488; court martial of Thomas Kelly of the *Jupiter*, 9 December 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5487.

<sup>147</sup> Court martial of George Hopewell Stephens, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5342; court martial of William Stewart of the *Rattlesnake*, 7-8 December 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5487.

### 5.3 “ALL THE OFFICERS MUST BE PUT TO DEATH”<sup>148</sup>

Despite the wave of repression that followed in the Nore mutiny’s wake, the lower deck remained dedicated to the principles first articulated and put into practice on the ships of the “floating republic.” The mutineers had shown that a democratic navy was possible, and wherever their fellow tars in squadrons around the world learned of their example, they decided to implement it themselves. Their attempts were crushed one by one, until finally in September 1797 the crew of the *Hermione* had had enough. They decided to answer violence with violence, murder with murder. Their mutiny was to be the most bloody ever in the history of the British Royal Navy.<sup>149</sup>

The crew of the *Hermione*, part of the navy’s West Indian squadron, first heard of the mutiny at the Nore from their comrades on the *Thames*. The crew, in mid-May, had taken part in the last stages of the fleet mutiny at Spithead, and had then sailed to Yarmouth where they arrived just in time for the mutinies in the North Sea squadron on May 26. In early June, they received orders to make sail for the West Indies, but many on board would rather have stayed in England. One of them, John Jenkinson, swore that “he did not like to go to the West Indies and if every man in the Ship was of his mind they would go back to Spithead.” Henry Peters agreed,

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<sup>148</sup> Court martial of John Watson and James Allen, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5353.

<sup>149</sup> Christopher McKee, “Fantasies of Mutiny and Murder: A Suggested Psycho-History of the Seamen in the United States Navy, 1798-1815,” *Armed Forces and Society* 4, no. 2 (1978): 293-304; Dudley Pope, *The Black Ship* (London: Owl Books: 1963); J. D. Spinney, “The *Hermione* Mutiny,” *Mariner’s Mirror* 41 (1955): 123-36. There are also sections on the *Hermione* in Leonard F. Guttridge, *Mutiny: A History of Naval Insurrection* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1992), 75-82; Lawrence James, *Mutiny in the British and Commonwealth Forces, 1797-1956* (London: Buchan & Enright, 1987), 67-71; and Richard Woodman, *A Brief History of Mutiny* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2005), 124-37.

and helpfully pointed out the option of cutting the weather lanyards, sending the masts overboard, and making any sailing to the West Indies, or elsewhere, impossible.<sup>150</sup>

All this muttering put the *Thames*' officers on edge, and they appear to have gone conspicuously armed. This angered the crew. John Chrystall suggested that maybe one ought to teach the officers a lesson on the relative balance of power on board by turning some of the guns aft and "blowing the Quarter Deck to Hell." George Delmar further undermined the officers' monopoly of violence when he threatened to use a shot of iron to bash the boatswain's brains out. John Daley, finally, questioned the officers' right to beat people, grumbling that "it was a pity we were not like the French, to have no flogging at all."<sup>151</sup>

This was the unruly crew that brought news of the fleet mutinies to the *Hermiones*, and one can only imagine with what enthusiasm and anger they chose to speak about them. They had not witnessed the final suppression of the "floating republic" at the Nore, but by the time they had left Yarmouth, sometime in late May or early June, it was already clear which way things were going. The government was no longer in a conciliatory mood, and rumors were circulating that they had ordered thousands of troops to the Nore, and red hot shot to be made ready for a bombardment of the mutinous ships.<sup>152</sup> It is hard to imagine that the rebellious men of the *Thames* would have forgotten to mention this.

Before leaving St. Nicola Mole in St. Domingue's far northwest for their final cruise, the *Hermiones* were forced to witness the punishments of three men from the *Thames*. They had

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<sup>150</sup> Court martial of John Chrystall, Henry Peters, George Delmar, William Cummins, John Jenkinson and John Daley of the *Thames*, 14-15 August 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5341; *Thames* log book, 12 December 1796 to 31 December 1798, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 51/1227.

<sup>151</sup> Court martial of John Chrystall et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5341.

<sup>152</sup> Letter, William Shoveller to Thomas Shoveller, Great Nore, 31 May 1797, TNA: PRO PC 1/38/122.

uttered words of mutiny and sedition, and for that a court martial that included the *Hermione's* Captain Hugh Pigot sentenced one of them to 50 lashes, and two to be flogged round the fleet with 300 lashes each, an extraordinarily vicious punishment. In light of their own mutiny a few weeks later, it is interesting to consider what conclusions the men on the *Hermione* may have drawn from watching these vile spectacles right after hearing of the great but defeated upsurge of lower deck militancy earlier that summer. On thing at least must have seemed certain: the lines were hardening, and the time for putting forward petitions and demands had passed. The lower deck had struck with unprecedented force, yet the Admiralty had swept aside most of their demands and instituted a policy of repression instead. The *Hermiones* were no doubt especially disappointed to hear that no mechanism for replacing tyrannous officers would be forthcoming any time soon. They were stuck with Captain Pigot.

Sadistic, erratic, and highly irritable, Pigot flogged frequently and without mercy. A week before the mutiny, he appears to have come completely unhinged. First he took the most irregular step of publicly flogging and demoting one of his midshipmen, David O'Brien Casey, probably the most popular officer on board. The grounds were spurious – a minor mistake, an imagined slight – but once Pigot had worked himself into a rage, there was no going back. Casey recalled that Pigot “launch’d out in the most abusive and unofficerlike language, calling me a damn’d lubber, a worthless goodfornothing fellow, that I never did any thing right, & used many other severe expressions.” Pigot, Casey later suggested, “appear’d to have drank freely.”<sup>153</sup>

A few days later, Pigot exploded again. This time, some of the topmen struck him as not quite fast enough, and so he screamed and shouted, threatening the last man down with a flogging. Three panic-stricken men slipped. They crashed onto the quarterdeck, dead. Their

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<sup>153</sup> “Statement of service,” NMM (UK) BGR/12.



comrades aloft froze and stared, and Pigot instantly dispatched two boatswain's mates to beat them all indiscriminately with ropes' ends. The three bodies were unceremoniously dumped overboard. The next morning, "a very severe punishment of several Men, I believe twelve or fourteen, took place in the usual way at the public place of punishment." The men had grumbled at the events of the evening before. Finally, a couple of days later, Pigot had yet another three men punished with the lash, but this time it is not clear why. That night the crew revolted.<sup>154</sup>

On September 21, around 10:30 at night, between 25 and 30 men suddenly fanned out across the ship, and in three separate groups attacked the cabin, the quarterdeck, and the gunroom. The first to die was the captain: "Reminding him of his own severity, and Cruelty," around half a dozen mutineers stabbed and cut Captain Pigot, "according to the Weapons they were arm'd with (which were various)," and left him in "a dying state."<sup>155</sup> John Farrell found him, a little later, leaning against his couch, soaked in blood but still alive. "You bugger, are you not dead yet?" he cursed, knocking him hard over the head, once again leaving him for dead.<sup>156</sup> But still Pigot clung to life. Finally, Joseph Mansell, an able seaman from Switzerland, clarified to the captain that he really was to die ("You have shewn no Mercy yourself, and therefore deserve none"), and then ran him through with a bayonet, making sure he really was dead this time, before pushing the body out through the cabin window.<sup>157</sup>

The next to die was Third Lieutenant Henry Foreshaw, officer of the watch. Already fighting for his life with a number of mutineers, Foreshaw was knocked in the head and launched

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<sup>154</sup> "Statement of service," NMM (UK) BGR/12; John Mason's confession, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/248. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>155</sup> "Statement of service, 1789-1839, of Lt. David O'Brien Casey (1779-1853)," NMM (UK) BGR/12.

<sup>156</sup> Court martial of James Irwin et al TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5344.

<sup>157</sup> Joseph Mansell's confession, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/248.

overboard when the group that had led the first attack on the captain's cabin emerged onto the quarterdeck. But Foreshaw saved himself: he managed to hold on, and crawled onto the half-deck through one of the portholes, "with streams of blood running down his face." Thomas Nash, a leading mutineer, was beside himself. He roughly grabbed the wounded lieutenant by the arm: "Foreshaw, you Bugger, are you not overboard yet; Overboard you must and overboard you shall go." Together with several others, Nash made sure that this time Foreshaw really did go into the water.<sup>158</sup>

Then came the turn of Second Lieutenant Douglas and Midshipman Smith, one of the ship's teenage officers. Midshipman David O'Brien Casey later remembered their deaths:

I perceived Mr. Douglas Second Lieutenant run past my hammock calling out for Mercy and on getting abreast of the Midshipman's Birth saw him seized by several of the Crew [...]; those men fell on him and left him apparently Dead on the gratings of the after hold, [...]; I then saw Mr. Smith the Midshipman put to death in the like manner in the same place.<sup>159</sup>

John Place, sergeant of marines, estimated that Douglas had about "twenty Tomahawks, Axes and boarding pikes jagged into him."<sup>160</sup> For some of the mutineers this still was not nearly enough vengeance. They had fallen to fighting over who was allowed to strike another blow

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<sup>158</sup> Court martial of James Irwin et al TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5344.

<sup>159</sup> Court martial of John Williams, John Slenison, alias John Slushing, James Parrott, John, alias Richard, Redmond, and Jacob Tollard, alias Jacob Tuldge of the *Hermione*, 13-15 March 1799, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5348.

<sup>160</sup> Court martial of John Watson and James Allen of the *Hermione*, 30 July 1800, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5353.

while their victims were still alive, and some continued stabbing, slashing, and cutting even after they were quite obviously dead:<sup>161</sup>

The examinant afterwards saw [Lieutenant Douglas] dragged up the after Ladder from between decks by the Heels followed by William Crawley a Foretopman with a Tomahawk in his hand saying Where is the Bugger? Let me have another stroke at him before he goes. On which he struck Lieutenant Douglas on the head with the point of a Tomahawk. He was then thrown overboard through a porthole.<sup>162</sup>

Midshipman Smith went the same way.

And with that, the killings stopped, for the moment at least. After placing the remaining officers under guard, posting sentinels throughout the ship, and securing all the small arms, the mutineers retreated into the captain's cabin to deliberate on their next moves. First they had to agree on what to do with the ship, where to take it. This was not too difficult: after rejecting both France and Spain as possibilities, the choice quickly fell on the Spanish-American port of La Guaira in the province of Caracas, less than a week away across the Caribbean Sea. Next they had to determine some sort of command structure in order to sail the ship there. They kept it simple: William Turner, master's mate, was appointed captain, but only as far as working the ship was concerned. Thomas Nash, a forecastleman, Robert McReady, a maintopman, and John

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<sup>161</sup> Court martial of John Williams et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5348.

<sup>162</sup> Court martial of James Irwin et al TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5344.

Luxton, captain of the hold, were to act as his boatswains. Finally, there was the question of what to do with the remaining officers. This is where the disagreements began.<sup>163</sup>

There seem to have been no discussions about the acceptable level of violence prior to the mutiny, and while most could probably see the advantage of having knocked out the ship's highest authority and his temporary placeholder with the murders of Captain Pigot and Lieutenant Foreshaw, the wanton butcheries of Lieutenant Douglas and Midshipman Smith were something else altogether. Men like James Phillips, Thomas Jay, and John Mason – all among the original group of mutineers, and all opposed to violence from the start – had perhaps hoped to put the officers into a boat somewhere near land, much like the mutineers of the *Lady Shore*, a British convict ship, had done a few months earlier off the coast of Brazil. But others thought differently, especially those who had been involved in the first round of killings.<sup>164</sup>

While the lead mutineers debated their options, a wild celebration erupted throughout the ship. The remainder of the crew, not initially involved in the mutiny, had broken into the spirit room and began looting their officers' possessions. Adrian Paulson, a Dane, was suddenly seen wandering around in a frilled shirt, and James Allen, the late Lieutenant Douglas' fourteen year-old servant boy, helped himself to his master's gold rings, shirts, and boots, telling all who would listen: "He shall not make me jump around the Gun Room any more." Midshipman Casey

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<sup>163</sup> Court martial of James Irwin et al TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5344; court martial of John Williams et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5348; John Slenison's confession, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/397.

<sup>164</sup> Court martial of James Irwin et al TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5344; court martial of John Williams et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5348; John Black, *An Authentic Narrative of the Mutiny aboard the Ship Lady Shore* (Ipswich, n.d.).

remembered that “all were more or less inflam’d, and excited by Spirits.” Some of the men “were dancing on the Quarter Deck.”<sup>165</sup>

Suddenly, the mood shifted. Lawrence Cronin, surgeon’s mate from Belfast, climbed onto the gunroom table, and “desired all the people to be assembled around the Sky Lights”:

He read a paper he had got written previous to the Mutiny, purporting the conduct of the Captain and Officers, that he had been a Republican ever since the War, that they were doing a good thing, that all the Officers must be put to death as it was of no use to put [just] one to death.<sup>166</sup>

Cronin’s words had a galvanizing effect: the captain was a tyrant, his officers cruel stooges, and the time had come for calling them all to account. The time had come for their punishment. The mutiny now turned into a revolutionary tribunal, its justice merciless and swift. But it was no random slaughter. Each officer on board was hauled up on deck, his crimes and merits debated, and after a general vote either killed or sent back below. Edward Southcott, the *Hermione*’s master, was among the ship’s eight surviving officers:

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<sup>165</sup> Court martial of John Pearce of the *Hermione*, 25 August 1801, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5357; court martial of John Watson and James Allen, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5353; “Statement of service,” NMM (UK) BGR/12.

<sup>166</sup> Court martial of John Watson and James Allen, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5353.

They brought me on Deck to put me to Death, and [...] they then said that if any body had a Mind to save my life, they should hold up their Hands, the greatest part of the Ship's Company held their hands up, they gave 3 cheers, and I was ordered below.<sup>167</sup>

But the crew found the behavior of six other officers wanting, and these were immediately executed. "Some were wounded and thrown overboard, and others thrown over un hurt." Macintosh, the lieutenant of marines, "out of his mind in a Fever," lay dying in his cot when they came for him: four men rolled him onto a sheet, carried him above, and after a brief debate and a general vote launched him over the side.<sup>168</sup>

The trials carried on into the early morning hours, when most of the crew, exhausted from the night's events, finally collapsed into their hammocks. The original group of mutineers now seized the opportunity to reassert their authority. The trials and executions had gone far beyond anything they had planned, and even though they had tried to save as many of the officers as possible, there was little they could do.<sup>169</sup> But with the ship back in their power, they took a firm line. Their aim had been to get off the ship and away from the navy as quickly as possible, and not, it seems, to launch experiments in retributive justice and shipboard democracy. They now made sail straight for La Guaira, dispensing with the need for any further general

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<sup>167</sup> Court martial of John Watson and James Allen, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5353.

<sup>168</sup> "Statement of service," NMM (UK) BGR/12; court martial of John Williams et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5348.

<sup>169</sup> Midshipman Casey later went so far as to praise "the steady good Conduct of some of the principal Mutineers." "Statement of service," NMM (UK) BGR/12.

meetings of the crew. No one dared challenge them: they “paraded the decks with Cutlasses threatening to murder any Man that disliked their conduct.”<sup>170</sup>

Support for the mutiny, or at least for the course plotted by its self-appointed leadership, dropped very rapidly. At first, “the whole Ship’s Company appeared to be unanimous,” but during the following days, according to Midshipman Casey’s estimation, only about 25 percent of the crew remained committed. That number is roughly confirmed by a list containing the names of forty-nine men who took part in a lottery of the officers’ valuables a few days later. This, it appears, was voluntary and it can therefore be assumed that participation in the lottery signaled continued support for the direction taken by the principal mutineers. The fact that as many as two-thirds to three-quarters of the crew chose not to participate in sharing the loot perhaps helps explain why subsequently they were all made to swear an oath “not to divulge what had pass’d, or in any case to impeach one another.”<sup>171</sup> At the same time, it must have been clear to everyone on board that since none of them had actively opposed the mutiny, the Admiralty would view them all as murderers and seek their death should they ever return to England or otherwise fall into their hands.

After an uneasy passage across the Caribbean Sea, the *Hermione* dropped anchor at La Guaira a week after the mutiny. A group of “Delegates” was sent ashore to negotiate terms with the Spanish authorities. In return for surrendering themselves and the ship to the King of Spain, “they asked to be treated as his subjects and not handed over to the English, not even at the conclusion of peace. They also demanded some money.” After this had been provisionally

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<sup>170</sup> Court martial of James Irwin et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5344; John Slenison’s confession, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/397.

<sup>171</sup> Court martial of James Irwin et al TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5344; court martial of John Williams et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5348; Joseph Mansell’s confession, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/248.

granted – it would, of course, take some time for the King to make his pleasure known in the matter – the *Hermiones* came ashore, and soon dispersed. The mutiny was over.<sup>172</sup>

How is one to explain its unprecedented ferocity? While Pigot’s escalating brutality undoubtedly had been the spark that set off the mutiny, the truly horrifying conditions of naval warwork in the Caribbean had long since prepared the tinder. The *Hermione* had spent nearly five years in the West Indies before the mutiny, and her crewmen grew to be hardened veterans of the catastrophic British invasion attempt of St. Domingue. They had watched thousands die when yellow fever tore apart the squadron in 1794. “In the *Hermione* alone,” Midshipman Casey remembered,

we lost in three or four Months, nearly half our Crew; many from apparent good health, dying in a few hours, and such was the malignancy of the prevailing disease, and the extreme rapidity of putrefaction, that we were absolutely obliged to dispose of the Corpse, the moment the person expired. I have often as Midshipman, when Conveying a Corpse a certain distance to Sea, been call’d back to receive a second and a third.<sup>173</sup>

Over sixty percent of all British troops sent to St. Domingue never returned.<sup>174</sup> In the West Indies as a whole, between 1793 and 1801, malaria and yellow fever together killed at least

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<sup>172</sup> Trial of James Irwin et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5344; Statement, Don Ysidro Ornez, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/397.

<sup>173</sup> “Statement of service,” NMM (UK) BGR/12.

<sup>174</sup> David Patrick Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue 1793-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 275.



65,000-70,000 British warworkers, 19,000-24,000 of whom were seamen.<sup>175</sup> Of the two killers, malaria was the more merciful. Death, though painful, came within only hours and days. Yellow fever dragged on for up to two weeks. After enduring high fever, severe headaches, and nausea, a sufferer entering the toxic phase developed jaundice, vomited and defecated congealed blood, bled through the mouth, nose, eyes, and stomach, and eventually suffered kidney failure. Then, finally, he died.

Many of the later *Hermione* mutineers had come out to the West Indies between 1793 and 1795. For years, therefore, they had lived with the daily fear of – and in closest possible proximity to – death through disease. Out of a shipboard population that usually hovered at just below 180, 134 men died between December 1792 and July 1797, on average one man every ten days or so.<sup>176</sup> As on all of the navy's ships stationed in the West Indies, watching one's closest, most trusted friends quite literally rot to death became an everyday event on board of the *Hermione*. The psychological traumas these men must have suffered can barely be guessed at.

Disease, moreover, was not the only horror the West Indies held for the newly arrived warriors from Europe. Slave insurrections broke out on almost every plantation island, and these eruptions generated levels of violence that even hardened naval men found difficult to stomach. Nowhere more so than in St. Domingue, where half a million African slaves went to war against their masters. Britain hoped to exploit the chaos and collapse of French rule to capture the colony. It poured thousands and thousands of troops into the revolutionary race war that ensued,

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<sup>175</sup> Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar, and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War Against Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 333-334. The losses represented approximately .4 percent of the population. The present-day equivalent would be the death of around 240,000 British, or of 1,200,000 American, troops in an eight-year campaign.

<sup>176</sup> The death rate peaked dramatically between 1793 and 1795, the years of "seasoning." *Hermione* muster book, April-July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/12011.

and all of them became witnesses, victims, and perpetrators of truly horrifying acts of violence.<sup>177</sup> As a young midshipman, David O'Brien Casey witnessed Cap Français falling into the hands of the insurgents in 1793: "The scenes which followed were dreadful in the extreme, and impossible for to describe; the Whites were almost indiscriminately murder'd."<sup>178</sup>

As the campaign to reimpose slavery in St. Domingue ground on, the *Hermiones* added their efforts to the general mayhem that consumed the colony. They chased enemy privateers around the coast, bombarded rebel positions ashore, burnt down villages to terrorize the population, and often took part in amphibious assaults:

In Capturing Port au Prince, the *Hermione* was singly opposed to one of the Batteries for some hours, & in addition to the injury and loss sustained from the Enemy's fire, We suffer'd very severely in Kill'd and Wounded, by the unfortunate bursting of one of our Main Deck Guns; by which accident the larboard side of our Forecastle was also blown up – We were also partially engaged at the reduction of St. Marks, Le Arch Leogane, and other fortified places along the Coast, the names of which I do not recollect.

The *Hermione's* duties, Casey concluded, "were very harassing and distressing in the extreme."<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> These have been described in great and necessary detail elsewhere. See, for example, Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution From Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2001).

<sup>178</sup> "Statement of service," NMM (UK) BGR/12. See also Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 180-232.

<sup>179</sup> "Statement of service," NMM (UK) BGR/12.

The men who planned and initially led the mutiny had survived years in this environment of counter-revolutionary combat and ferocious disease. They were among the most highly skilled, brutally efficient warworkers in the world. Edward Southcott, the *Hermione*'s master, later exclaimed in disbelief that "all the best Men were the Principals of the Mutineers."<sup>180</sup> Most of the thirty or so men who belonged to this original core group were carried on the books as "able," a number of them had advanced to become petty officers' mates, and the rest were nearly all topmen, the elite of the lower deck.<sup>181</sup> About a third of them even belonged to a group of twenty-two men who had voluntarily followed Pigot from the *Success* into the *Hermione* in February 1797.<sup>182</sup> This was a common enough practice in the navy, and crews sometimes petitioned the Admiralty to be allowed to stay with a popular commander who was given a new ship.<sup>183</sup> In this case, however, it was Pigot who asked his men to stay with him, and it seems that out of the twenty-five he approached, only three refused.<sup>184</sup> All of them were highly skilled and Pigot evidently regarded them as critical for making his new command in the *Hermione* a success. About half of them were petty and warrant officers, or their mates – gunners, quartermasters, and the like – and the remaining half were all rated as "able."<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Court martial of William Johnson and Adiel Powelson, alias Henry Poulson, 2 July 1801, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5357.

<sup>181</sup> *Hermione* muster book, April-July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/12011.

<sup>182</sup> *Hermione* muster book, April-July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/12011; *Success* muster book, December 1796-September 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/14745.

<sup>183</sup> See various petitions in TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5125.

<sup>184</sup> Court martial of John Williams et al, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5348.

<sup>185</sup> *Hermione* muster book, April-July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/12011; *Success* muster book, December 1796-September 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/14745.

Whatever their reasons for staying with Pigot, the fact that many of them took a leading role in the mutiny seven months later suggests that it was hardly a matter of loyalty. Nevertheless, their decision remains remarkable, for not only was Pigot a terrible commander to serve under, but their old ship, the *Success*, was bound for home waters. Given the horrors of service in the West Indies, it is difficult to understand what made them volunteer to stay there. Perhaps it was the prospect of further prize money, or the reassuring familiarity of a life they knew, or even a perverse joy in warfare. Perhaps Pigot simply was the devil they knew, and maybe they hoped that despite his sociopathy he recognized the mutual benefits of the patronage system and eventually would reward their cooperation with promotions.<sup>186</sup> Or maybe it was just their desperation for a few days' worth of drunken revelry in Port Royal's dockside taverns, which Pigot made sure to promise them. Either way, whatever emotional or familial ties might once have bound them to the British Isles, where most of them were born, after several years of service in the fleet, these had evidently weakened. They appear to have had no particular desire to return home.

Professional deep-sea sailors, while certainly not immune to the lure of patriotism and xenophobia, usually cared relatively little about the flag they sailed under. If the wages and conditions were right, and the captain did not have the name of a "tartar," such men were as likely to be found working on American slave ships as on Danish whalers, English merchantmen, French warships, or Dutch East Indiamen.<sup>187</sup> Carl Ortmann, who was executed for conspiracy to

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<sup>186</sup> N.A.M. Rodgers, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986), 122-123.

<sup>187</sup> See, for an earlier but formative period, Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For a different, US-centric view, see Daniel Vickers (with Vince Walsh), *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Both of these studies have

mutiny on the Dutch man-of-war *Utrecht* in 1798 was typical of these ocean-wandering laborers: born in Danzig, he had served in the French navy, been imprisoned by the British, and was hanged for plotting a violent, treasonous mutiny on a Dutch warship. One of his co-conspirators, Louwrens Perinai, was born in Hungary and had served in the Imperial navy in the war against the Ottoman Empire and after that had made his way to the Low Countries. A third conspirator, Daniel Thulander, came from Sweden and had served in the war against Russia between 1788 and 1790, after which he had signed on with a merchantman that left him in Amsterdam.<sup>188</sup> Though we lack substantial information, it is likely that quite a few of the British-born men on the *Hermione* must have had similarly globe-trotting biographies. Men like Robert Gray, who was flogged round the fleet for plotting mutiny in the *Phoenix* in the summer of 1797: a total of fifteen years at sea, he had served several times on different Royal Navy ships, sometimes he had been impressed and sometimes he had volunteered, he had twice been imprisoned in France, once in Toulon and once in Brest, he had sailed on merchantmen from Bristol, Hamburg, and Genoa, and he had toiled under British, American, and French colors.<sup>189</sup>

In the late 1790s, the number of men with experiences similar to those of Gray, Thulander, Perinai, and Ortmann grew exponentially on almost every ship. On the *Hermione*, for example, not even half the crew had been born in England, a fifth came from across the British Empire (Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, Canada, Nova Scotia, and the British West Indies), another fifth hailed from Ireland, and the remaining ten percent included Prussians, Swedes,

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been the subject of fruitful roundtable discussions in the pages of the *International Journal of Maritime History* (1, no. 2 (1989): 337-57; and 17, no. 2 (2005): 311-66).

<sup>188</sup> Sentence against Carl Ortmann, sentence against Louwrens Perinai, and second interrogation of Daniel Thulander, Nationaal Archief (NL), Den Haag, Hoge Militaire Rechtspraak, 1795-1813 (1818), 2.01.11, inv. nr. 234.

<sup>189</sup> Trial of Colin Brown, James Hayes, James O'Neale, Robert Gray and Thomas Needs, 3 to 7 July 1797, TNA: PRO ADM 1/5340.

Norwegians, Danes, Dutchmen, Portuguese, Italians, Swiss, Americans, and Danish West Indians. At least two of the men were of African descent, but there probably were quite a few more given the ship's long service in the Caribbean.<sup>190</sup> All of these diverse men ate, drank, toiled, and slept together in cramped conditions for months on end. They all earned the same measly wages, they all spent them on the same rum and on the same women, they all chewed on the same tough salt beef, they all suffered from the same diseases, they all were screamed at by the same officers, and they all were ripped to shreds by the same enemy broadsides. Quite literally, they were all men in the same boat. Whatever ethnic, racial, national, or religious prejudices that may otherwise have divided them, they had no choice but to trust each other implicitly when up in the yards during a gale or down on the gun deck in a battle. Cosmopolitanism, to such men, was not an ideal but an elementary fact of life below deck, and it is easy to understand how some of them came to feel, like Florence McCarthy of the *Phoebe*, that "one country was as good to him as another."<sup>191</sup>

At the time of the mutiny, there were around 160 men on the *Hermione*'s lower deck. Only one of them afterwards surrendered to the British authorities. Thirty-five others were captured between 1797 and 1806, of whom fifteen were hanged and gibbeted, nine were hanged, two were transported to New South Wales for life, one was recommended for mercy, two were admitted King's evidence, and six were acquitted. All others got away, making sure to leave as little evidence about themselves as possible. Based on rumors and the testimonies of those who

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<sup>190</sup> The last surviving muster book, ending in July 1797, contains 168 names. For about half of these (85) we can establish a place of origin. *Hermione* muster book, April-July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/12011; *Adventure* muster book, January-February 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/12931; *Success* muster book, December 1796-September 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/14745.

<sup>191</sup> Court martial of Florence McCarty and William Grace of the *Phoebe*, 7 April 1800, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5352.

were caught, it appears that many stayed safely put in Caracas, and those who had learnt a trade before entering the navy took it up again. Among these was Lawrence Cronin, the Belfast republican. Others became day laborers, and quite a large number were allowed to enlist in the Spanish army.<sup>192</sup> The ship's only two confirmed black men, Thomas Diamond and John Jackson, together joined the local coasting trade.<sup>193</sup>

Many of the professional seafarers amongst the mutineers appear to have melted back into the international maritime labor market from whence they had originally come. Sometimes they went back onboard warships, and in a small number of cases there are even creditable suggestions that former *Hermione* men participated in mutinies on other ships. John Pearce, one of the troublemakers on the *Malta*, had been a marine on the *Hermione* and it seems that one of the *Danae* mutineers might also have served on that ship at the time of the mutiny.<sup>194</sup> There were even two cases of unrest in the young US Navy that centered on men who might have come from the *Hermione*.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> *Mutineers of the Hermione* (Antigua, 1798); Joseph Mansell's confession, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/248.

<sup>193</sup> Court martial of John Brown, William Benives (alias William Murray), William Herd (alias William Mitchell), and John Hill (alias Samuel Swain) of the *Hermione*, 5 May 1798, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5344; for African-Atlantic coasting, see W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. ch. 2 and David S. Cecelski, *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>194</sup> Letter, Alan Gardner, Cawsand Bay, 26 March 1800, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/115; *The New Hampshire Gazette*, August 12, 1800; Letter, Milbank, Spithead, 11 August 1801, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/1048.

<sup>195</sup> "Extract from Captain Thomas Truxtun's journal, U.S. Frigate *Constellation*, at Hampton Roads, 31 August 1798, Friday" in *Naval Documents*, 1:312, 1:365; W.M.P. Dunne, "The *Constellation* and the *Hermione*," *Mariner's Mirror* 70, no. 1 (1984): 82-85; Eugene S. Ferguson, *Truxtun of the Constellation: The Life of Commodore Thomas Truxtun, U.S. Navy, 1755-1822* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 146-147; James E. Valle, *Rocks and Shoals: Order and Discipline in the Old Navy, 1800-1861* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1980), 110-111.

But most of the fugitives seem to have avoided further naval service and went aboard Danish, Dutch, American, Spanish, French, Swedish, or British merchantmen instead, and in these they continued working the Caribbean, going up the North American seaboard, and crossing the Atlantic to Europe and Africa. John Duncan signed on with the Danish *Eagle* and cruised the Caribbean for a while, but he told his shipmates who he was, and somehow the governor of Saint-Croix came to hear about it. Duncan was put into confinement, sent to Saint-Thomas, and from there to Copenhagen, where King Christian VII instructed his foreign minister to present him as a gift to the British consul. Duncan was hanged soon afterwards in Portsmouth Harbor.<sup>196</sup>

More adventurous types joined French privateers and in these waged commercial war on Britain. This promised higher wages and better conditions of service than most merchantmen, but the dangers were greater too. John Mason, Antonio Marco, John Elliott, Joseph Mansell and Pierre D'Orlanie were only on board the *Magecienne* for a few weeks before HMS *Valiant* made her a prize.<sup>197</sup> Isaac Stoutenling and Thomas Charlton held out slightly longer, but they, too, fell into British hands on a French privateer. Like almost all of those who got caught, they simply could not keep their mouths shut. They bragged about the mutiny, someone told on them, they were arrested, tried, hanged and gibbeted.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> John Duncan's confession, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/731; Letter, Robert Stephen Fitzgerald, Copenhagen, 10 December 1798, TNA: PRO (UK) FO 22/32; Rigsarkivet (DK), 0008, Marineministeriet, Skibsjournaler 1650-1969, Iris Fregat 1797-1798, Nummer 689A-1 – 689A-3; Rigsarkivet (DK), 515, Holmens chef (søetaten), Vagtrapporter fra Gammel- og Nyholms Hovedvagt, 1798-1800, Nummer 12.

<sup>197</sup> The *Magecienne* was quite a haul. Along with five *Hermiones*, there were three deserters from the *Aquilon*, and two suspected mutineers from the *Grampus* on board. The latter two were let go for lack of evidence, however. Letter, Admiral Parker, Saint Nicholas Mole, 12 March 1798, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/248; court martial of Anthony Mark (alias Antonio Marco), John Elliott, Joseph Mansell, Peter Delany (alias Pierre D'Orlanie) of the *Hermione*, 17 March 1798, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5343; Court martial of John Percy, Timothy Cardigan and James Kelly of the *Aquilon*, 17 May 1798, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5344.

<sup>198</sup> Letter, Halifax, 13 September 1798, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/494.



#### 5.4 “SPIRIT OF SEVENTY-SIX, WHITHER HAVE YE FLOWN?”<sup>199</sup>

On February 20, 1799, William Portlock showed up at the door of a Charleston JP to swear away the life of his shipmate Jonathan Robbins. Portlock claimed that Robbins had once, in the harbor of Santo Domingo, bragged to a number of French privateersmen that he “was boatswain’s mate of his Britannic Majesty’s frigate *Hermione*, when she was carried into the port of Cavillia,” and on several occasions afterwards, when drunk, “he, the said Robbins, would mention the name *Hermione*, and say, bad luck to her and clench his fist.” It was a serious charge, enough to get Robbins thrown in jail until his identity could be determined. The Royal Navy quickly sent Lieutenant John Forbes, who, as a former midshipman on the *Hermione*, had become a roving identifier of suspected mutineers, and he immediately recognized Robbins as Thomas Nash, “a seaman on board the *Hermione* British frigate,” and “one of the principals in the commission of the said acts of murder and piracy, whose conduct in that transaction has become known to this deponent by depositions made, and testimony given in courts-martial, where some of the said crew have been tried.” The British immediately asked for the man’s extradition.<sup>200</sup>

Nash was not the first *Hermione* fugitive the British asked the Americans to hand over, but he was the first with whom they succeeded. In February 1798, only five months after the

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<sup>199</sup> “Jonathan Robbins!” *The Constitutional Telegraph*, October 16, 1799; “From the (Phila.) *Aurora*.” *Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, September 2, 1799. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>200</sup> William Portlock’s and John Forbes’ affidavits are reprinted in Charles Pinckney, *Three Letters, Written and Originally Published, under the Signature of A South Carolina Planter. The first, on the Case of Jonathan Robbins; Decided under the Twenty-Sixth Article of the Treaty with Great Britain, in the District Court of the United States, for South Carolina. The second, on the Recent Captures of American Vessels by British Cruisers, Contrary to the Laws of Nations, and the Treaty between the Two Countries. The third, on the Right of Expatriation* (Philadelphia: Aurora Office, 1799), 5-6; court martial of Jonathan (or Nathan) Robbins (alias Thomas Nash) of the *Hermione*, 15 August 1799, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5350; on the legal and political context of the case, see Ruth Wedgwood, “The Revolutionary Martyrdom of Jonathan Robbins,” *The Yale Law Journal* 100, no. 2 (1990): 229-368; and Christopher H. Pyle, *Extradition, Politics, and Human Rights* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 8-47.

mutiny, Simon Marcus, an able seaman from Tuscany, was plucked off a schooner in Delaware, but since there was no proof that he had participated in the mutiny in any capacity other than simply being present on board, he was soon let go. A few weeks later, three more men were arrested in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Joannes Williams and John Evans, the one a Swede, the other an Englishman, were quickly released on the same grounds as Marcus. But William Brigstock's case was different, for he stood accused of striking Lieutenant Foreshaw around the head with a tomahawk, and under Article 27 of the 1794 Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation (also known as the Jay Treaty), the United States and Great Britain agreed to extradite persons accused of murder and forgery if there was sufficient evidence to justify a trial in the country of capture. The problem was that Brigstock was a native-born American citizen, and on top of that there was a suggestion that the British had pressed him into service. By the terms of the treaty this made no difference, yet if the case were to go to trial in the United States, a jury most likely would interpret Brigstock's violent actions as justifiable self-defense, and thus acquit him of murder. To hand him over to the British, where he would face not a jury of his peers but a court martial made up entirely of British naval officers, which most likely would sentence him to death, therefore appeared a politically not entirely prudent step to take for the embattled Adams administration. At the same time, refusing a legitimate extradition request would establish a problematic precedent that played into the hands of the Republican opposition, which vehemently opposed the idea of a *détente* with Britain in general, and the Jay Treaty in particular. It appears members of the government communicated these difficulties to the British, who perhaps realized that they would gain nothing by pressing the case, and upon inquiry it was

determined that Brigstock was not sought as a principal in the mutiny after all. He too was soon let go.<sup>201</sup>

When Thomas Nash was arrested just a few months later both British diplomats and hard-line Federalists in the Adams administration, most of all Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, were determined to make Article 27 operational, and to finally establish a precedent. Pickering was still angry at his failure to push through Brigstock's extradition, and this time he simply bypassed Attorney General Charles Lee, who in that case had advised against extradition, and took the British request directly to Adams. The president, on vacation in New England, distractedly went along with Pickering's suggestions and agreed to "advize and request" that the presiding judge move ahead with the extradition process, as long as enough evidence was presented that would justify a trial in an American court. Had Adams, formidable trial lawyer that he once had been, taken the time to study the case, he most likely would have come to the conclusion that the evidence against Nash consisted of hearsay, for Lieutenant Forbes had not been onboard the *Hermione* at the time of the mutiny, and thus was only able to report what he had heard other people say about Nash's involvement in the events of that night. If, like Brigstock, Nash had been a native-born American citizen, it is difficult to imagine that Adams would so easily have consented to the British request for extradition, but since he was identified as an Irishman, and a potentially murderous troublemaker besides, the president probably did not give it a second thought.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Wedgwood, "Jonathan Robbins," 269-278; Pyle, *Extradition*, 26-30; "William Brigstock, indictment for murder," Circuit Court of the United States, Middle Circuit of the New-Jersey District (n.p., 1800); *Gazette of the United States*, August 8, 1798.

<sup>202</sup> Wedgwood, "Jonathan Robbins," 287-299.

It was unfortunate for Nash that he arrived in the United States in the midst of a blistering xenophobic scare that was especially severe in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of the Quasi-War with France in the summer of 1798. Taking advantage of the belligerent fervor that ripped through the country during those months, the Federalist majority in Congress rushed through the infamous Alien and Sedition Acts, an extraordinarily repressive suit of laws that, among other things, made every non-citizen liable for deportation at the president's pleasure. The four acts were justified as necessary for preventing the radical currents of the revolutionary Atlantic from undermining the constitutional settlement of 1789, but in reality they were meant primarily to intimidate and neutralize immigrant political activists, who overwhelmingly supported the Republican opposition. Irishmen, who streamed into the country by the tens of thousands in the 1790s, were a particular target, for their virulent Anglophobia, intolerance of privilege, and insurrectionary experience made them into natural enemies of the Federalist party, one of whose members railed hysterically on the floor of the House that "I feel every disposition to respect those honest and industrious people who have become citizens [...] but I do not wish to invite hordes of wild Irishmen, nor the turbulent and disorderly of all parts of the world, to come here with a view to disturb our tranquility, after having succeeded in the overthrow of their own Governments."<sup>203</sup>

Nash himself was evidently aware of the disadvantage of being Irish, for shortly before he was to be handed over, he suddenly produced a seaman's protection certificate made out in the name of Jonathan Robbins, native of Danbury, Connecticut. He went on to claim "that about

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<sup>203</sup> James Morton Smith, *Freedom's Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), 3-34; Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis, Federalist, 1765-1848* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913), 1:108. See also on Irish immigrant radicalism David A. Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States: Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

two years ago he was pressed from on board the brig Betsey of New-York, commanded by capt. White, and bound for St. Nichola Mole, by the crew of the British frigate Hermione, [at that time] commanded by captain Wilkinson, and was detained there contrary to his will, in the service of the British nation, until the said vessel was captured by those of her crew who took her into a Spanish port by force; and that he gave no assistance in such capture.”<sup>204</sup>

This, of course, was entirely plausible. The Royal Navy impressed thousands of Americans during the 1790s, and US newspapers were full of stories similar to the one told by Nash. On April 27, 1796, for instance, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* published a letter from Joshua Whiting who, together with four other American seamen, was pressed at Port-au-Prince out of the *Samuel* merchant brig earlier that year. “At length we conceived a plan to escape by swimming,” Whiting recalled,

According[ly] myself, Jacob Parmeter, and Thomas Harris, plunged into the water, and made for a Philadelphia brig, which lay between our brig and the British ship, about two miles distance. On our passage Thomas Harris had the whole calf of his leg bit off by a shark. I arrived first to the brig, took her boat, and went back and brought the wounded man and the other on board the brig. The Captain was not on board, the Mate said he dare not harbour us, and we must be carried on board the man of war again: this we refused, I then jumped into the water, and swam to a Connecticut schooner, took her boat, went on board the brig, and brought my comrades to said schooner (our brig having sailed).<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Pinckney, *Three Letters*, 7-8.

<sup>205</sup> “Boston, April 18,” *Pennsylvania Gazette* (April 27, 1796). When anchoring near land, naval officers sometimes threw meat into the water to attract sharks and thus hoping to discourage desertion. Anon., *A Short Journey to the West Indies, In which are Interspersed Curious Anecdotes and Characters* (London, 1790), 1:26-27. I

Whiting and his two comrades were lucky to have escaped, but less than a month later, the same paper told of seven American mariners who had fared less well after being pressed out of the *Astrea* at Fort Royal, Martinique: “Their treatment was harsh, rigid, and severe; that for the space of forty-eight hours, they were unfurnished with any article of sustenance or food; that during their stay at Martinique, an American seaman [...] having endeavoured to effect an escape, was retaken, and continued in irons during the space of three whole days, and then severely whipped.”<sup>206</sup>

The British claimed to press only their own subjects, thousands of whom actually did work in the booming American merchant marine. But it was virtually impossible to tell an American citizen from one of His Majesty’s subjects, and faced with both an acute and chronic shortage of manpower, most of the Royal Navy’s press gangs did not try very hard to make the distinction. They picked their way through hundreds of American merchant ships and simply pressed any skilled mariner who could plausibly be suspected of being British (in some cases, tolerable command of English was considered sufficient proof). Some British officers justified their actions with reference to the doctrine of perpetual allegiance which denied that any American born before the 1783 Treaty of Paris – and that included the vast majority of US seafarers – could be anything but a British subject for life, whatever else he may fancy himself to be.<sup>207</sup>

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am grateful to Marcus Rediker for this reference. See also his “History from below the water line: Sharks and the Atlantic slave trade,” *Atlantic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2008): 285-297.

<sup>206</sup> “New York, May 19,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 25, 1796.

<sup>207</sup> George Selement, “Impressment and the American Merchant Marine, 1782-1812,” *Mariner’s Mirror* 59, no. 4 (1973): 409-418; James Fulton Zimmerman, *Impressment of American Seamen* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1925), esp. 11-90; Pinckney, *Three Letters*, 18; see also Anon., *The Impress, Considered as the Cause*

In order to strengthen their mariners' claim to American citizenship, Congress in 1796 passed "An act for the relief and protection of American seamen" which, among other things, officially regularized the vocationally specific proto-passports that seafarers had begun carrying after the revolution. Under the act, seafarers who brought proof of US citizenship and a witness, and also paid a small fee, would be issued with a "seaman protection certificate" that contained the man's name, age, birthplace or date and place of naturalization, as well as any distinguishing physical marks, such as height, complexion, scars, injuries, or tattoos.<sup>208</sup> But the descriptions were often vague, and that quickly allowed for the creation a flourishing market for certificates below deck. Many US mariners were more than happy to obtain multiple certificates, selling each one to a shipmate for a few dollars or a drink, before simply getting a new one next time they were in port. The real Jonathan Robbins most likely was one of these men.<sup>209</sup> His certificate, issued in 1795, the year before they were standardized, simply described him as "five feet six inches high, and aged about twenty-three years."<sup>210</sup> Nash, according to the *Hermione's* muster book, was twenty-eight in 1795, and in a British government pamphlet listing the most

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*why British Seamen Desert from Our Service to the Americans; with a Review of the Encouragement now held out by the Royal Navy, and the Means in Our Power of Abolishing the Impress* (London, 1810).

<sup>208</sup> Simon P. Newman, "Reading the Bodies of Early American Seafarers," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 55, no. 1 (1998): 60; Zimmerman, *Impressment*, 29-61.

<sup>209</sup> Most of the available evidence suggests quite clearly that the man arrested in Charleston was Thomas Nash, not Jonathan Robbins. See Wedgwood, "Jonathan Robbins," 310-311. For an opposing view suggesting the likelihood of Nash/Robbins being, as he claimed, a native-born American citizen, see Larry D. Cress, "The Jonathan Robbins Incident: Extradition and the Separation of Powers in the Adams Administration," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 111, no. 2 (1975): 99-121.

<sup>210</sup> Robbins' protection certificate is reprinted in Francis Wharton, *State Trials of the United States during the Administrations of Washington and Adams* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1849), 394.

sought after mutineers, he was described as “5 feet 10 inches high.”<sup>211</sup> The fit was close enough to be plausible, or at least Nash hoped so.

But Judge Bee, the man presiding over his case, was not impressed. First of all, he found it a trifle odd that an American named Jonathan Robbins would remain for an extended period of time on board a British man-of-war under the name of Thomas Nash, that he would advance to the rank of boatswain’s mate, which few pressed men did, and that he would stay in jail for several months without making any mention of all this or producing the certificate that allegedly proved his US citizenship. And yet, even if all this was true, and Judge Bee was perfectly willing to grant that possibility, it did not really matter, for by the terms of the treaty with Great Britain, which President Adams himself had advised and requested him to apply, the man’s real name, his country of citizenship, and whether or not he was pressed into service were issues “altogether immaterial” to the question at hand. Even if Nash had been the most “respectable citizen of the U. States,” given the same circumstances, Bee still would have had to deliver him up to the British. And so he did. Nash was quickly taken to Jamaica, put in front of a court martial, sentenced to death, and hanged. His rotting body was left hanging in a gibbet at the entrance of Port Royal harbor as a warning to other disgruntled seafarers: remember, you can mutiny and you can run, but you cannot escape his Majesty’s terrible vengeance forever.<sup>212</sup>

Republican oppositionists in the US were outraged by the precedent that had been set by the extradition and subsequent execution. It was bad enough, they believed, that the Jay Treaty had failed to bring impressment to an end – that issue, among others, had caused riots up and

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<sup>211</sup> *Hermione* muster book, April 7 to July 7, 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 36/12011; *Mutineers of the Hermione Frigate* (Antigua, 1798), 1.

<sup>212</sup> Pinckney, *Three Letters*, 8-9; “British Frigate Hermione,” *The Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Advertiser*, August 12, 1799; Wedgwood, “Jonathan Robbins,” 299-305.



down the Atlantic seaboard when details of the treaty were first made public in 1795 – but no one had thought that the inconspicuous extradition article, which at the time barely received mention, would four years later end up turning the American government itself into a collaborator of the Royal Navy’s thuggish press gangs.<sup>213</sup> In a series of anonymous open letters, South Carolina Senator Charles Pinckney argued that Jonathan Robbins’ extradition under Article 27 of the treaty meant that henceforth no American seaman, or any other citizen travelling abroad, for that matter, would be safe from impressment, for the British would know that if anyone dared to resist by force, the American government would not step in to protect, aid, or even assist its own citizens.<sup>214</sup> According to the *Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, this was like telling America’s seafaring population:

Remember, that should you be pressed by any of the ships of war belonging to his Britannic Majesty – ye must there do duty faithfully and truly; if you are set at liberty, ‘tis well, if not, though it were in your power to regain your liberty, you *must not*, for in the attempt should you kill any of his Majesty’s subjects, your country will undoubtedly give you up to his Majesty, the King of Great Britain, and God have mercy on your souls.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Todd Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 71-103.

<sup>214</sup> Pinckney, *Three Letters*, 8-9.

<sup>215</sup> “From the (Phila.) Aurora.” *Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, September 2, 1799. Emphasis in the original.

To some, this very much seemed like an abdication of independence. One scandalized newspaper demanded to know “Why did we overthrow the government of *good old George*?” and another asked with despair: “Spirit of Seventy-Six, whither have ye flown?”<sup>216</sup>

Others wondered where that of Sixty-Nine had gone, for in that year the young Boston lawyer John Adams had succeeded in persuading a court to rule the murder of a British press ganger from the HMS *Rose* justifiable homicide, a key victory on the road to revolution and independence.<sup>217</sup> But now, thirty years on, the same John Adams as president was ordering the removal of a man who stood accused of essentially the same crime to be tried by a British military court, a place where he would enjoy none of the protections enshrined in the American Bill of Rights. One newspaper accused the president of acting like the hapless Captain Isaac Phillips of the USS *Baltimore*, who the year before had allowed a British officer to board his ship and remove fifty-five men with barely so much as a protest, let alone any form of material resistance. It seemed shocking for a lowly frigate commander to treat his country’s sovereignty with such contempt, but for the captain of the good ship United States it was quite intolerable. He had to be replaced: “The crew of the Federal ship will shortly be piped on deck to choose a new commander,” the *Centinel of Freedom* reminded its readers, but the article’s author most certainly “would not [be] holding up his hand for John Adams, our present commander.”<sup>218</sup> The attacks on Adams eventually peaked with an official censure motion in Congress in early 1800,

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<sup>216</sup> “Jonathan Robbins!” *The Constitutional Telegraph*, October 16, 1799; “From the (Phila.) Aurora.” *Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, September 2, 1799. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>217</sup> Denver Alexander Brunsman, “The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2004), 267-302.

<sup>218</sup> John F. Campbell, “The Havana Incident,” *American Neptune* 22 (1962): 264-276; for a representatively outraged newspaper reaction to the incident, see “British Aggression.” *Columbian Centinel*, January 12, 1799; the *Centinel of Freedom* is quoted in Wedgwood, “Jonathan Robbins,” 360.

but the attempt was soundly defeated after Representative John Marshall offered a brilliant defense of his president, a feat that fast-tracked his appointment first to the position of Secretary of State and then to the Supreme Court later that year.<sup>219</sup>

In order to amplify the enormity of the government's crime, the opposition had enthusiastically embraced the idea of "the unfortunate Jonathan Robbins," a young American mariner guiltlessly wronged, but like Melville's Billy Budd unfailingly virtuous nonetheless. Robbins was portrayed by Republican journalists as bearing impressment and injustice without complaint, his virtue emerging from the beastly sufferings he endured before finally he struck back with decisive force against his cruel British oppressor. To further underscore Robbins' role as republican hero and slayer of royalist tyrants, opposition writers outdid each other in describing Captain Pigot's depraved rule onboard the *Hermione* in lurid and obscene detail. *The Times* claimed to know that Pigot, "one of the most cruel monsters that ever disgraced the human form," habitually had two boatswain's mates simultaneously flog the men, that he had the boatswain flog the mates, and that he finally flogged the boatswain, all at the same time.<sup>220</sup> Not to be outdone, *The Democrat* breathlessly recounted that when Pigot's wife asked for a divorce, he, "enraged, accompanied by a part of his crew, seized upon the defenceless fair, carried her on board his ship, and – horrible to relate! stripped her naked, tied her down upon her back, and with a cat o'nine tails in his own hands, compelled every man on board the vessel to offer some

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<sup>219</sup> *Mr Livingston's Motion, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1800* (Philadelphia, 1800); *Speech of the Hon. John Marshall, Delivered in the House of Representatives, of the United States, on the Resolution of the Hon. Edward Livingston, Relative to Thomas Nash, alias Jonathan Robbins* (Philadelphia: Printed at the Office of the "True American", 1800). See also R. Kent Newmyer, *John Marshall and the Heroic Age of the Supreme Court* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 136-142.

<sup>220</sup> *The Times; and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, October 10, 1799.

indignity to *his wife*, thus placed!”<sup>221</sup> Other newspapers began to wildly exaggerate the number of other impressed Americans onboard the *Hermione*, and in their pages the mutiny slowly morphed into a miniature American Revolution. Claiming that between sixty and seventy US seamen participated in the mutiny, the *Otsego Herald; or, Western Advertiser* went on to describe the executions onboard in grisly detail, and then concluded with the caustic observation that “the cruelty of tyrants sometimes recoils on their heads.”<sup>222</sup> A writer for the *Aurora General Advertiser* reported that around two-thirds of the *Hermione*’s crew were impressed Americans, and then confessed that when he had “first heard of the extirpation of the officers of this execrable corsair, he felt that intense satisfaction which every man must feel, who wishes for the liberty of American seamen.”<sup>223</sup>

Jonathan Robbins, and the other imagined Americans onboard the *Hermione*, were welcomed with such fervor, because their case coincided with the emergence of American seamen as central and powerful emblems of early republican nationalism.<sup>224</sup> During the late 1790s and early 1800s, the struggle against Britain’s continued impressment of American seamen, in particular, played an important role in articulating the larger meaning of American independence, but also of the racialized nature of American citizenship. In Britain itself, anti-impressment activism as early as the 1770s had come to be closely intertwined with the growing abolitionist movement – Granville Sharpe, for instance, was among the leaders of both

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<sup>221</sup> *The Democrat*, May 21, 1806.

<sup>222</sup> *Otsego Herald; or, Western Advertiser*, December 27, 1797.

<sup>223</sup> “From a Correspondent.” *Aurora General Advertiser*, March 16, 1798.

<sup>224</sup> Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 155-162. See also his “‘Free Trade and Sailors’ Rights’: The Rhetoric of the War of 1812,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 30 (2010): 1-23.

campaigns – but in America such a connection was obviously a more delicate matter.<sup>225</sup> And yet, Americans hurled around accusations of slavery with surprising ease, though frequently they specified that what they were talking about was the North African variety, which threatened every American mariner who sailed into the Mediterranean.<sup>226</sup> Many Americans considered this as far worse than their own southern slave system, in part because the idea of being the slave of a Muslim master was particularly abhorrent to many American Christians. But more importantly, as slavery in the US was increasingly justified with reference to pseudo-scientific theories of racial difference, it seemed perverse that North Africans would enslave people with complete disregard for their color, and even stoop to something so utterly unnatural as to enslave white people.<sup>227</sup> Since the American critique of impressment similarly turned on the fact that the British seized whomever they pleased without regard for national citizenship – like race, a category with much purchase in the post-revolutionary United States – it was easy for nationalists in the early republic to harness the growing moral weight of antislavery and conflate British press gangs with Barbary corsairs, and by extension the plight of impressed Americans with that of slaves in general.<sup>228</sup>

But the insistence on similarities only went so far, for in contrast to the imagined docility of African-descended slaves, America's tars were portrayed as almost constitutionally averse to

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<sup>225</sup> Brunsman, "The Evil Necessity," 319-323.

<sup>226</sup> See, for example, "On the British Naval Mutiny Business," *The Time Piece, and Literary Companion*, June 21, 1797.

<sup>227</sup> Frederick C. Leiner, *The End of Barbary Terror: America's 1815 War Against the Pirates of North Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 16-17.

<sup>228</sup> Matthew Mason, "The Battle of the Slaveholding Liberators: Great Britain, the United States, and Slavery in the Early Nineteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 59, no. 3 (2002): 665-696. For a general study of the influence of Barbary slavery on the formation of national identity in the US, see Lawrence A. Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen: Barbary Slavery and the American Public, 1785-1816* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

tyranny. But such claims only served their purpose of racializing the characteristics required for republican citizenship if, like the imaginary Jonathan Robbins, impressed American seamen were white and native-born, but such was often not the case. When in 1806, for instance, the British frigate *Leopard* famously opened fire on the USS *Chesapeake* to force the surrender of four deserters, it was an inconvenient and therefore frequently unreported fact that two of the four Americans fighting for their liberty – David Martin and William Ware – were African-Americans.<sup>229</sup>

Martin and Ware, along with the real Thomas Nash, were in fact typical of those who labored on American ocean-going ships. Like them, many of those who carried the Stars and Stripes across the oceans were either excluded from US citizenship altogether or they belonged to groups that were marginalized from the community of genuine national citizens, increasingly defined as racially white, and ideally of Germanic descent. An 1808 census found that around 60 percent of the US navy's personnel was foreign-born, and that the vast majority of them were Irishmen.<sup>230</sup> Likewise, in the early nineteenth-century American merchant marine, a large and growing proportion of men below deck were foreign-born, and – as illustrated most powerfully in that “Anacharsis Cloutz deputation from all the isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth, accompanying old Ahab in the Pequod” – the New England whaling fleet was particularly dependent on the skill and muscle-power of foreign-born hands.<sup>231</sup> Finally, in both the armed and

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<sup>229</sup> Robert E. Cray, Jr., “Remembering the USS Chesapeake: The Politics of Maritime Death and Impressment,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 25, no. 3 (2005): 456-458, 463-465. See also Anon., *The Trial of John Wilson, alias Jenkin Ratford, for Mutiny, Desertion and Contempt: To which Are Subjoined, A Few Cursory Remarks* (Boston, 1807).

<sup>230</sup> Christopher McKee, “Foreign Seamen in the United States Navy: A Census of 1808,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 42, no. 3 (1985): 186-188.

<sup>231</sup> Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront*, 24-25; Daniel Vickers (with Vince Walsh), *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 174-178; Herman Melville, *Moby-*

civilian services blacks, the majority of them free African-Americans, formed around 20 percent of many crews.<sup>232</sup>

There was, especially amongst the naval officer corps, a fair amount of unease about the many foreign-born and non-white men who served onboard their ships, for it was impossible to know who they were, where they had been, or what kind of ideas and experiences they might be carrying with them onto the lower deck. It was distressing thought, for instance, that black sailors who had witnessed or participated in the slave revolts that rocked the Caribbean would find their way onboard US warships, where they might sabotage the nation's seaborne defenses in support of a rumored invasion attempt by "ten thousand blacks and people of color," armed in the French Caribbean, and prepared to start a revolutionary race war in America's slaveholding southern states. Such paranoid fears in part explain why time and again orders were issued to exclude non-whites from the service altogether.<sup>233</sup> In March 1798, Secretary of War James McHenry informed the lieutenant of marines onboard the *Constellation* that "no Negro, Mulatto, or Indian [is] to be enlisted nor any Description of Men except Natives of fair Conduct or Foreigners of unequivocal Characters for Sobriety & Fidelity."<sup>234</sup> A month later, Captain Thomas Truxtun of the *Constellation* urged his lieutenant to "pay particular attention in examining the men you enter, So that none but hale hearty men compose the Crew of this Ship, and the more real Natives

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*Dick, or The Whale* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 132; James Farr, "A Slow Boat to Nowhere: The Multi-Racial Crews of the American Whaling Industry," *Journal of Negro History* 68, no 2 (1983): 159-170.

<sup>232</sup> W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 6; Ira Dye, "Early American Merchant Seafarers," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 120, no. 5 (1976): 348-353; see also Harold L. Langley, "The Negro in the Navy and Merchant Service, 1789-1860," *Journal of Negro History* 52, no. 4 (1967): 273-286.

<sup>233</sup> Langley, "The Negro in the Navy and Merchant Service," 275-276; "To the President of the United States from H. Knox, Boston, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1798," in *Naval Documents*, 1:139-140.

<sup>234</sup> "To Lieutenant of Marines, Frigate *Constellation*, from Secretary of War, 16 March 1798," in *Naval Documents*, 1:41.

you can procure the better.”<sup>235</sup> In August of the same year, Benjamin Stoddert, the newly minted Secretary of the Navy, repeated the order that “no Negroes or Mulatoes are to be admitted, and as far as you can judge, you must be cautious to exclude all Persons whose Characters are suspicious.”<sup>236</sup>

There is no evidence to indicate that black or foreign-born seamen serving in the US navy actually were any more likely to cause trouble than their white native-born shipmates, and if anything it might well have been the reverse. American-born seamen had very high expectations of what a post-revolutionary, republican navy was supposed to be like, and inevitably there was disappointment, bitterness, and unrest when it turned out that conditions were not so very different than in the old world’s royal navies. The US navy’s Articles of War in fact were closely modeled on those that governed Britain’s Royal Navy, and they too authorized brutal punishment beatings for minor mistakes.<sup>237</sup> Some of the fleet’s early officers, most notably Captain Thomas Truxtun, tried to limit the application of corporal punishments to cases of willful disobedience and mutiny, and when inexperience or simple human error were to blame for a violation they frequently granted pardons. But many of the less charismatic or skilled commanders of men made no such distinction, and hundreds of men working on American warships were viciously beaten over trivialities.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> “To Lieutenant John Rodgers, U.S. Navy, from Captain Thomas Truxtun, U.S. Navy,” in *Naval Documents*, 1:50.

<sup>236</sup> “To Lieutenant Henry Kenyon from Secretary of Navy,” in *Naval Documents*, 1:281.

<sup>237</sup> James E. Valle, *Rocks and Shoals: Order and Discipline in the Old Navy, 1800-1861* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1980), 43.

<sup>238</sup> “To Captain Thomas Tingey, U.S. Navy, from Captain Thomas Truxtun, U.S. Navy, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1800,” in *Naval Documents*, 7:1-3.



John Rea, a proudly republican seaman on the USS *George Washington*, was stunned by this, and he could not believe that such brutality was allowed to exist onboard the ships of the US navy. After he left the service in 1802, Rea published an open letter in which he denounced the dismal conditions he had found onboard, including the constant punishment beatings:

Who could believe that on board of an *American Ship*, carrying but one hundred men, exclusive of officers, in a nine months voyage, upwards of fifty men should be put in *irons* – upwards of forty *flogged at the gang-way*; amongst whom, *three hundred and sixty-five lashes* were distributed – exclusive of innumerable *rope's-ending's*, *sword beatings*, &c. &c. &c. And all this, except in one solitary instance (for *theft*) for *eating*, *drinking*, *sleeping*, *missing of muster*, or some other trifling fault, which all men are subject to, and which no *gentleman*, or *humane Officer*, could think of punishing!!<sup>239</sup>

For Rea, the violence itself was not the worst of it. It was the feeling of degradation that came from it, and like many seamen at the time, he found it particularly unbearable to be brutalized by the *George Washington's* midshipmen, trainee officers who could be as young as twelve or thirteen years old. “How preposterous does it appear,” he demanded, “to have brats of boys, twelve or fifteen years old, who six months before had not even seen salt water, strutting in livery, about a Ship's decks, damning and flashing old experienced sailors!”<sup>240</sup> James Durand similarly recalled in his memoirs that “some of [the midshipmen] were so small that they could

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<sup>239</sup> John Rea, *A Letter to William Bainbridge Esqr., Formerly of the United States Ship George Washington; Relating to Some Transactions Onboard Said Ship, during a Voyage to Algiers, Constantinople, &c.* (Philadelphia, 1802), 16. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>240</sup> Rea, *A Letter*, 13.

not reach to strike a man in the face, but would make him stoop, so that they could beat him in the face.”<sup>241</sup> William Robinson, writing anonymously as Jack Nastyface, remembered one particularly vicious little boy-officer in the British navy who “would get on the carriage of a gun, call a man to him, and kick him about the thighs and body, and with his fist would beat him about the head; and these, although prime seamen, at the same time dared not murmur.”<sup>242</sup>

Rea’s anger at the horrific conditions he encountered in the navy served to invigorate the strength of his republican convictions. To his mind, the American Revolution’s outstanding achievement was to have secured the equality of all men, and he therefore was outraged by the class arrogance he found among the officers onboard. As someone whose “family contributed their part in the Revolution,” he expected to be treated with the dignity and respect due to a fellow citizen, and not to be beaten up by upper-class children or, as a “freeman,” to be ordered around and brutalized by a captain so violent he was “unfit for having command in a *Negro-Quarter!*”<sup>243</sup> In answer to the tyranny he discovered onboard the *George Washington*, Rea invoked “the main deck of America, where ‘all men are equally free’,” but his own racial consciousness, and his attempt to appeal to the privileges he imagined were due to his native-born whiteness, of course gave the lie to that comparison.<sup>244</sup> William Ray, in contrast, who sailed under the same captain as Rea a few years later, emphasized in his autobiography *Horrors of*

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<sup>241</sup> James R. Durand, *The Life and Adventures of James R. Durand, from the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and One, until the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Sixteen. Written by himself. His first leaving his parents: how he was cast away, and the hardships he underwent; his entering the American service; together with the particulars of his impressment and service on board a British man of war, seven years and 1 month, until 1816* (Bridgeport: Stiles, Nichols & Son, 1817), 24.

<sup>242</sup> William Robinson, *Jack Nastyface: Memoirs of an English Seaman* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1973), 55.

<sup>243</sup> Rea, *A Letter*, 3, 14, 23.

<sup>244</sup> Rea, *A Letter*, 3-4.

*Slavery* that in his globetrotting experience it did not much matter who you were or where you went – the deck of an American warship, the prisons of North Africa, or even the United States itself – as a poor man of whatever race you were likely to have to fight tyranny and abject slavery everywhere.<sup>245</sup>

If Rea was inspired by the segregated “main deck of America,” Ray’s cosmopolitan radicalism was forged on the lower deck, a place far off shore where equality perhaps was most fully realized, for here, at least, all races, ethnicities, and nationalities were exploited with equal vigor. A generation before, that same experience, and the cooperative resistance it engendered, had carried seamen from around the Atlantic world into the port cities of North America to stoke the fires of revolution.<sup>246</sup> But even then, their participation was considered by the emerging American ruling class as both vital and threatening at the same time, and processes of distortion and exclusion, through racist public discourse and discriminatory legislation, commenced almost immediately and accelerated after the constitutional settlement of 1789. Crispus Attucks, for example, the first victim of the American Revolution, was remembered, if at all, by the early republican myth-makers of the revolution as white and respectable, and not for what he was: a runaway slave and Atlantic sailor of both African and Native American descent.<sup>247</sup> It is ironic that John Adams, the man who ordered Thomas Nash to be extradited, also defended Crispus

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<sup>245</sup> William Ray, *Horrors of Slavery, or, The American Tars in Tripoli*, ed. by Hester Blum (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

<sup>246</sup> On the role of seamen in the conflicts leading up to the revolution, see Jesse Lemisch, “Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 25, no. 3 (1968): 371-407; and his *Jack Tar vs John Bull: The Role of New York’s Seamen in Precipitating the Revolution* (New York: Garland, 1997); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon, 2000), 211-247.

<sup>247</sup> Marcus Rediker, “The Revenge of Crispus Attucks; or, The Atlantic Challenge to American Labor History,” *Labor: Studies in the Working-Class History of the Americas* 1, no. 4 (2004): 35-45; Mitch Kachun, “From Forgotten Founder to Indispensable Icon: Crispus Attucks, Black Citizenship, and Collective Memory, 1770-1865,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 2 (2009): 249-286.

Attucks' killers in court almost thirty years before, and to the extent that the Nash-Robbins affair contributed to his defeat in the 1800 presidential election, it may be considered a small token of revenge for the revolutionary Atlantic. But it changed nothing, for those who attacked Adams did so in defense of a nationalist fantasy, and by embracing the imaginary Jonathan Robbins, white republican Connecticut tar, they reinforced the xenophobia that made possible the delivery of the real Thomas Nash into the hands of his executioners in the first place. One US newspaper sympathetic to the cause of Irish freedom lamented that handing Nash over to be tried and killed by the British meant that "the law formerly of the British in Ireland, that killing *a mere Irishman was not murder*" would now apply to the United States as well.<sup>248</sup>

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

The revolts, repression, and counter-violence of 1797 swept away the last vestiges of the old paternalist system that had regulated relations between officers and men for most of the century. By embracing the red flag as their symbol, the mutineers at the Nore signaled their understanding that this was a conflict between two clearly defined sides with fundamentally opposed interests, and that a resolution to this conflict could only come by superior force. The Admiralty accepted the challenge and unleashed perhaps the most intense campaign of shipboard terror in history. Week after week, thousands of ex-mutineers were forced to watch as their comrades were dragged up on deck, tortured with the cat, or murdered with the rope. In total that year, the Royal Navy executed at least fifty-nine men for mutiny and related offences, and flogged a further

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<sup>248</sup> *The Times; and District of Columbia Advertiser*, February 18, 1800. Emphasis in the original.

thirty-seven with up to 1,000 lashes each. Hundreds were locked up for several months without trial, and dozens more sentenced to several years of solitary confinement and hard labor. The reign of terror that broke upon the lower deck in the summer of 1797 rivaled in intensity that which swept through revolutionary France in 1793-94.<sup>249</sup>

But despite the violence, the lower deck's commitment to the ideals and political principles first articulated onboard the ships of the floating republic at the Nore remained unbroken. With every ship leaving England that summer, naval insurrection sailed along as a stowaway. Revolts erupted successively in the Mediterranean squadron in early July, in the Cape squadron in October, and as far away as the Indian squadron off Ceylon in mid-January.<sup>250</sup> Nowhere, however, did the lower deck explode with as much rage as in the West Indies. The crew of the *Hermione* struck with astonishing force against the quarterdeck, and yet they also showed remarkable restraint. Considering the cavalier arrogance with which seamen were routinely beaten and killed by their officers, and in particular in the months following the fleet mutinies, it is astonishing how many of their officers they spared, even though that dramatically increased the risk of getting caught. For all their rage and quick recourse to interpersonal violence, they never abandoned their concern for justice. They weighed each officer's crimes and merits on a case-by-case basis, and then together decided if he was to live or die. This was a far more open and democratic, if no less brutal, system of shipboard justice than they themselves

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<sup>249</sup> In proportion to population, the number of men killed in the Royal Navy in 1797 is comparable to the reign of terror in France in 1793-94. With a total manpower of 120,000 and 59 killed, the Royal Navy executed about 0.5 percent of its men; the French terrorists, if we assume a population of 28 million and 16,600 officially executed, killed about 0.7 percent of the population. François Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds, *Dictionnaire Critique de la Révolution Française* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), s.v. "Terreur."

<sup>250</sup> Court martial of John Bray, John Humphries, Joseph Songster, Anthony Nicholls, William Morris, and Michael McGuire of the *Suffolk*, 5-6 June 1798, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5345.

had endured under the very officers they now put on trial. This, too, was an expression of the radically egalitarian culture that had briefly flourished at the Nore.

Never again would there be such an extraordinary tribunal on any of the navy's ships, but not because the navy's seamen rejected it in principle. Being a fugitive from the *Hermione* was not a stain on one's character below deck, and some men even wrongfully claimed to have been part of the mutiny to earn respect. Both John Baird and William Oates, for instance, boasted when drunk, of being *Hermiones*, and Oates, in particular, was wont to point out that he had cut off heads in the past, and if certain people on the quarterdeck were not to mend their ways, he may well be forced to do so again.<sup>251</sup> John Jones, Captain Pigot's former steward, was made to feel the full strength of the lower deck's solidarity with the mutineers after he gave testimony that proved crucial for hanging John Duncan. A few days after the trial, he passed the *Gladiator* man-of-war in a small boat in Portsmouth Harbour and very nearly sparked a shipboard riot. A woman stuck her head through a porthole and, upon seeing him, screamed: "There goes bloody Jack Catch, belonging to the *Hermione*, you bloody buggar you hung the Man the other day, if ever I catch you on shore I will have your bloody life taken from you." Jones went on board to find the woman, but "a great Number of Men hooted and hissed at him." Thomas Nelson violently charged him: "You buggar who are you going to hang now, that is the bloody buggar belonging to the *Hermione* who hangs all the Men, you Buggar if I had my Will of you I'd hang you, I'd make a swab of you upon the Beach." Jones, prudently, decided to leave, but "[Nelson] still kept abusing me as far as I could hear him."<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Letter, R. Bennet, Port Royal, 9 February 1801, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/251.

<sup>252</sup> Court martial of Thomas Nelson of the *Royal William*, 30 July 1800, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5353.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION: THE MARINE REPUBLIC

*Whenever I see a fellow look as if he was thinking, I say that's mutiny.*

-- Captain Thomas Troubridge, Royal Navy<sup>1</sup>

In 1794, Thomas Spence, just released from prison on a charge of high treason, published “The Marine Republic,” a short allegorical origin story of Spensonia, a place where property was held in common, the political structure democratic, and the population prosperous, tolerant, and cosmopolitan. An old man, so the story went, called together his many sons and gave them a “gallant ship,” not to one of them, not to two of them, not to a select few, but to all of them, to hold and enjoy as common property. They were to elect officers from amongst themselves, and replace them whenever necessary. Every man was to be paid regularly and fairly “according to station and agreement,” and all profits remaining after wages and expenses had been subtracted were to be shared equally among the crew. The sons lived by the principles of what they called the “Marine Republic” and prospered, but before long they grew tired of England’s monarchical government and together with their families set off for America in the hope of finding a more egalitarian and equitable form of government there. They never made it. Their ship, somewhere

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Adam Nicolson, *Men of Honour: Trafalgar and the Making of an English Hero* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), 235-236.

out in the Atlantic, sailed into a storm, was tossed about, and was eventually wrecked on an uninhabited island, where the “luxurious soil and agreeable climate” induced them to stay. They broke up their ship to build houses, and they began to cultivate the soil. They adopted the “Marine Constitution,” and “they declared the property of the island to be the property of them all collectively in the same manner as the ship had been, and that they ought to share the profits thereof in the same way. The island they named Spensonia, after the name of the ship which their father had given them.”<sup>2</sup>

Spence’s great concern in life was the realisation of his land plan, a plan for the expropriation of all landlords and the reestablishment of the commons. So why then this allegory, why a marine republic? Why a story about ships and islands when he dreamed most of all about a global confederation of democratic, egalitarian parish communes? Genre is part of the answer. Maritime imagery – the ship of state in storm-tossed seas, the mutinous crew, the tyrannous captain – crop up repeatedly in the history of European political thought, from Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece, Horace in Augustan Rome, to Harrington and Locke in early modern England.<sup>3</sup> The appeal of such images for political philosophers who came from societies intimately connected to the sea but with no experience of seafaring themselves was their intuitive simplicity, at once concrete and abstract. They could deploy ships as metaphors for purely political societies, unencumbered by economically determined class relations, in which the existence of ruler and ruled, captain and crew, seemed determined by the physical environment itself and not by a history of struggle between contending social classes. Self-contained and

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Spence, “The Marine Republic,” in *Pigs’ Meat; or, Lessons for the Swinish Multitude* (London, 1794), 2:68-72.

<sup>3</sup> Norma Thompson, *The Ship of State: Statecraft and Politics from Ancient Greece to Democratic America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 167-174.



isolated, apparently devoid of productive activity, ships were a perfect canvas on which to project a variety of political theories.

Spence knew differently. He knew, in contrast to the political philosophers, that the social relations onboard ship were not purely political but were produced by a history of expropriation. He understood that common seamen had once shared in the ownership of the means of production, and only when they lost that share did they acquire “the desperate, careless, and reprobate character” which was essentialized into the degrading stereotype of jolly Jack Tar in England, Jan Maat in the Low Countries, and Jean Matelot in France.<sup>4</sup> Spence knew, because he had spent his life around sailors. He was born in Newcastle, home to the fiercely combative North Sea collier fleet, and in 1788, at the age of thirty-eight, he moved to London, the world’s greatest port, where thousands of sailors from all the world’s seagoing nations clogged the streets of the very same neighborhoods in which he hawked his pamphlets.<sup>5</sup> In his writings, he returns again and again to the plight of common seamen, but also to the world-transformative promise of their struggles. In early 1795, as press gangs tore through London’s sailortown and were met with rioting crowds nearly everywhere they went, Spence threw his hat into the ring and published a treatise that likened the condition of naval warworkers to that of slaves and argued for the legality and moral justice of armed resistance.<sup>6</sup> The same year, he serialized a history of

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Spence, “The Restorer of Society to Its Natural State,” in *The Political Works of Thomas Spence*, ed. by H.T. Dickinson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Averro, 1983), 83.

<sup>5</sup> The only full, if brief, biography of Spence is P.M. Ashraf, *The Life and Times of Thomas Spence* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Frank Graham, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> “The Seaman’s Friend,” in *Pigs’ Meat; or, Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*, ed. by Thomas Spence (London, 1795), 3:8-21. Spence may have been influenced by the ideas of J. Philmore who thirty-five years earlier, at the height of Tacky’s Rebellion in Jamaica, had argued that slaves “may lawfully repel force with force.” Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon, 2000), 223.

the 1647 Neapolitan Revolution led by Masianello, a simple fisherman.<sup>7</sup> In 1797, he supported the fleet mutineers and later compared their struggle to the great revolutions in America and France.<sup>8</sup> Plato had warned that “those who want a well-governed city ought to shun the sea as a teacher of vice.”<sup>9</sup> But that is not what Spence wanted, and the ruling class philosopher’s vice is often the proletarian’s virtue. Spence therefore looked to the sea for instruction and inspiration, and he came back with the recommendation to the people of England that they follow the lower deck’s example with a “mutiny on land.”<sup>10</sup>

For Spence, a true revolution meant “the restoration of society to its natural state,” the reclamation of lost rights and liberties, and the reestablishment of the commons. And that is what he saw when he looked out into the mutinous Atlantic. From the hesitant struggles in the French fleet during the first few months of the revolution to the “floating republic” at the Nore eight years later, naval mutineers in 1790s drew on traditions of maritime egalitarianism that were centuries old, that had survived often deeply submerged and only as memories of what once was. But they were never forgotten, and occasionally they came gushing to the surface with torrential force. It is no coincidence that naval mutineers repeatedly invoked piracy, that Patrick Tobin after several times being denied his prize money called “black colors as good as any,” or that Colin Brown demanded “a roving commission,” for among the pirate crews of the early

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<sup>7</sup> “The Remarkable History of the Rise and Fall of Masianello, the Fisherman of Naples,” in *Pigs’ Meat; or, Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*, ed. by Thomas Spence (London, 1795), 3:22-56, 67-97, 123-136, 152-164, 172-178, 197-213. See also Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 112-116.

<sup>8</sup> Spence, “Restorer,” 78.

<sup>9</sup> Plato quoted in John R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 6; see also David Keyt, “Plato and the Ship of State,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Plato’s Republic*, ed. Gerasimos Santas (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 189-213.

<sup>10</sup> Spence, “Restorer,” 78.

eighteenth century, they found within recent history a workable and highly successful model of equitable shipboard relations.<sup>11</sup> The mutineers' demands for equal shares of prize money, for the election of officers and the limitation of their authority, for the company's right to determine or at least veto the ship's mission, for democratic jury trials, and their insistence on voluntarism and contractual agreements all had been realized amongst the pirates.<sup>12</sup> They were also fundamental principles of Spence's "Marine Constitution."<sup>13</sup>

The mutineers' use of language and forms of organization specific to the revolutionary era at times obscures the maritime character of their struggles. Certainly, establishing "committees," selecting "delegates," electing "presidents," addressing each other as "citizen" and speaking in terms of "natural rights," "consent," and "justice" were political forms imported from the revolutionary movement on shore. But they were adopted with such enthusiasm below deck because their content corresponded to the egalitarian culture already there. Mutinous sailors therefore had little difficulty integrating the language of radical republicanism with their own political traditions. A 1793 petition from the crew of the French frigate *Melpomene*, for instance, combined the traditional form of the Round Robin, in which the lower deck's egalitarian and

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<sup>11</sup> Trial of Patrick Tobin and Francis Matthew of the *Emerald*, 17 to 18 August 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5341; Trial of Colin Brown, James Hayes, James O'Neale, Robert Gray and Thomas Needs of the *Phoenix*, 3 to 7 July 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/5340.

<sup>12</sup> Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 60-82.

<sup>13</sup> We can only speculate how familiar Spence might have been with pirate republicanism, but it is likely he knew of Captain Johnson's *General History of the Pyrates* (often attributed to Daniel Defoe) and possibly of Exquemelin's memoirs from his buccaneering days in the 1660s as well. In "A Letter from Ralph Hodge, to his Cousin Thomas Bull" of 1795, Spence defended pirates by pointing out that the governing classes "far excelled in depredation, as the African coast and both the Indies can woefully witness; insolence and robbery, rapine and murder, have been tried in every quarter of the globe." Daniel Defoe, *A General History of the Pyrates*, ed. Manuel Schonhorn (Mineolo, NY: Dover, 1999); Alexander O. Exquemelin, *Bucaniers of America: Or, A True Account of the Most Remarkable Assaults Committed of Late Years Upon the Coasts of the West Indies, By the Bucaniers of Jamaica and Tortuga, Both English and French* (London, 1684); Thomas Spence, "A Letter from Ralph Hodge, to his Cousin Thomas Bull," in *Political Works*, 25.

collectivist ethos is expressed by signing names in a circle and thus giving each equal prominence, with the language of radical republicanism: the petitioners referred to themselves as “the *sans culottes* composing the crew of the *Melpomene*,” addressed themselves to “citizens, brothers & friends,” and adorned the document with the slogans “Union and Fraternity” and “Liberty or Death.”<sup>14</sup>

The repeated invocation of fraternity, first in the address, then in the slogan, is revealing. Along with liberty and equality, it was one of the core values of the revolutionary movement which expressed the ideal of solidarity with the entire human race, at least in principle if not always in practice. But it was also a value that resonated in particular with seamen who – torn from home, scattered across the world, and thrown together in close confinement with men from many nations – frequently emphasized their shared occupational identity by referring to each other as “brother tars.” In contrast to the landed revolutionaries’ principled embrace of fraternity, the “brotherhood of the sea” was a lived experience that on one level embraced the whole community of seafarers and enabled men to move between different ships and navies, and on second level expressed itself on individual vessels in the creation of “fictive kinship” networks (or, in Marcus Rediker’s words, “miniature mutual aid societies”) that were especially strong if a

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<sup>14</sup> “Melpomene – Minerve, 1793 (An II),” SHM-T, Institutions de répression, Cour martial maritime, Procédures et interrogatoires, 1792-An XIV, 4 O 1. Round Robins first appeared among low-level French government employees in the early seventeenth century, but were soon adopted by seamen throughout the Atlantic world with whom they came to be associated by the eighteenth century. The name derived from *ruban rond* (or round ribbon), which referred to the circular shape in which signatures were attached to the document. Abram Smythe Palmer, *Folk-Etymology, A Dictionary of Verbal Corruptions or Words Perverted in Form or Meaning, by False Derivation or Mistaken Analogy* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1882), s.v. “Round Robin.” I am grateful to Isaac Curtis for this reference. See also Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 234-236.

crew had gone through combat together.<sup>15</sup> These bonds were invaluable before, during, and after a mutiny when the strength of a crew's solidarity could mean the difference between life and death.

Liberty was another revolutionary demand that resonated especially strongly with sailors. For them, liberty meant shore leave, which is what the *Melpomene* crew demanded in their Round Robin, for it was a time when they escaped from the coercion, the constant supervision, the twenty-four hour work cycles, and the terroristic discipline of the lash. When revolutionaries spoke of tyranny, the horrors of slavery, and the blessings of liberty, sailors knew better than most what they were talking about. The denial of shore leave, the lack of liberty that kept hundreds of malnourished, overworked, and bored men cooped up in a tiny space for months and years was also one of the most important reasons why epidemic disease repeatedly tore through the lower deck and left thousands of victims in its wake. The slogan "Liberty or Death" was therefore not just a threat, not just a measure of the lower deck's determination, but also a simple statement of fact.

The ever present danger of death, and perhaps in equal measure the likely prospect of inflicting it upon others, contributed to the enthusiasm with which naval seamen embraced the ideas of consent and popular sovereignty.<sup>16</sup> Seamen in the Batavian navy, perhaps because they were all volunteers and to a large part foreign-born, were especially prone to justify mutiny by arguing that the post-revolutionary change of flags invalidated their prior agreement of service.

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<sup>15</sup> Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 230-231. The emergence of exceptionally strong group cohesion among warriors is a well-known phenomenon. For an analysis, see Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behavior of Men in Battle* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 31-73.

<sup>16</sup> Dave Grossman has argued that the fear of killing is far greater than the fear of death in most warriors. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1995).

They had not given their consent to serving the Batavian Republic. A similar attitude among their own men worried the British officer corps. After witnessing the importance that the Nore mutineers placed on swearing public oaths, some suggested that all seamen, before receiving their pay, should be forced to sign an oath of allegiance. “This I recommend,” Admiral Lord Keith wrote, “upon the suggestion that many of the Mutineers seem to feel the Impression of the illegal Oath they had taken to be true to the Mutineers’ Cause, but none had ever been tendered to them on the part of the King or His Majesty’s Government, and this Class of Men are in general too ill informed to understand that all Subjects owe Allegiance from their birth.”<sup>17</sup>

Lord Keith may really have believed this to be true, but in reality, of course, the lower deck was not under any kind of misapprehension as to whom they owed allegiance. First and foremost they were true to each other, but increasingly, first in the French navy, then in the British, they developed a consciousness of acting on behalf of the nation, which was embodied not by the sovereign but by the people as a whole. They were conscious that the control of massive fire power not only gave them strength but also imposed a responsibility, and that responsibility they treated with great seriousness. French seamen repeatedly overrode orders, even from commanders they deeply respected, if they thought them not in accordance with the interests of the people they served or suspected they were out of the step with the revolutionary movement at home. In the British navy, mutineers at both Spithead and the Nore repeatedly issued explanations of their actions “to their fellow subjects on shore,” but never to their commanders, the Admiralty, or the King, to whom they only ever issued demands.

The 1790s saw the final decline of the disciplinary paternalism that had governed shipboard relations for most of the eighteenth century, and on the lower deck across navies there

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<sup>17</sup> Letter, Admiral Lord Keith to Henry Dundas, London, 27 June 1797, TNA: PRO (UK) ADM 1/4172.

was a growing awareness of the fundamental opposition between ruler and ruled that received its most striking and permanent symbol in the adoption of the red flag. But class war never replaced international war. Outright anti-war mutinies were exceedingly rare, but that in itself was not unusual (workers, after all, hardly ever go on strike to demand the abolition of the factory system either). Nor were there many instances of crews refusing to enter combat, which likewise is not difficult to understand. Most navies authorized officers to execute men on the spot who refused to fight, and once cannon-balls started to fly it would have been suicide not to fire back. Moreover, among the native-born members of a crew, which in the French navy was the overwhelming majority and in the British navy usually at least half a ship's company, many were willing to fight both against their own officer corps and against their nation's enemy, especially if, as in the French and British case, a century of near-incessant seaborne combat had created a culture of enmity which was passed down from generation to generation. It probably was not a coincidence that only the Batavian navy, with its huge number of foreign-born men, experienced a mutiny which was triggered by a fleet's refusal to fight.

Nevertheless, the rising number of men circulating between navies and across the war's frontlines, and the emergence of similar struggles and emancipatory ideologies everywhere, made battles like the one off Camperdown in 1797, where mutineers from both sides fought ferociously on both sides, truly tragic. But it also showed how far the world of the 1790s was from the one envisioned by Spence, whose story of the "Marine Republic" may have been written in that decade but was inspired by dreams that were centuries old. Those fed up with Europe's tyrannical governments could no longer hope for asylum in America, as the extradition of Thomas Nash, the Alien and Sedition Acts, and the blistering xenophobia and racism of the early republic made clear. Nor could they hope to be castaway on an uninhabited Atlantic island,

as Spence's "marine republicans" had been, for most those were covered in slave plantations, the one place indisputably worse than the lower deck of a warship. Even the South Pacific, where the *Bounty* mutineers had found refuge less than a decade before, was rapidly turning into Britain's carceral archipelago. By the late 1790s, British courts martial even began sentencing naval mutineers to penal servitude in New South Wales.<sup>18</sup>

The mutinous Atlantic did not end in 1797. The solidarity of the men below deck remained strong wherever they found themselves, but the unrestrained violence of the quarterdeck and the inability to escape from under lash also kept them on the defensive. The back of lower deck insurrectionism was broken. Individuals could run away, and they did so in large numbers, but wherever they went – even if, like Thomas Nash, it was to the best poor man's country in the world – they were likely to find conditions that were as dismal and repressive as those they left behind. Mutinies continued to erupt now and again for the remainder of the war, but not until the great mutinies at Wilhelmshaven and Kronstadt 120 years later did sailors once again feel strong enough to seize control of whole fleets, run up the red flag, form *Räte* and *soviets*, and, with the radically democratic principles of the Marine Republic to guide them, reconstruct, from the bottom to the top, life and labor onboard the north Atlantic's men-of-war.

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<sup>18</sup> Convicts transported, 1787-1809, TNA: PRO (UK) HO 11/1.



## APPENDIX A

### Abbreviations

AN (F)	Archives Nationales (National Archives), Paris, France
AP	Mavidal, Jérôme, Emile Colombey, Louis Claveau, Constant Pionnier, and Louis Lodoïs Lataste, eds. <i>Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860 recueil complet des débats législatifs &amp; politiques des chambres françaises</i> . 101 vols. Paris: Librairie administrative de P. Dupont, 1862.
KrA (S)	Krigsarkivet (War Archives), Stockholm, Sweden
LMA (UK)	London Metropolitan Archives, London, UK
NA (NL)	Nationaal Archief (National Archives), Den Haag, The Netherlands
NMM (UK)	National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> . New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
OED	Oxford English Dictionary Online, < <a href="http://www.oed.com">www.oed.com</a> >
PRO: TNA (UK)	Public Records Office: The National Archives, Kew, UK
RA (DK)	Rigsarkivet (National Archives), Copenhagen, Denmark
RA (S)	Riksarkivet (National Archives), Stockholm, Sweden
SHM-V	Service Historique de la Défense, Marine (Naval Archives), Vincennes, France
SHM-T	Service Historique de la Défense, Marine (Naval Archives), Toulon, France

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Mar B/3/797, Service Général, Toulon, Consuls, Divers, 1789

#### **Service Historique de la Défense, Vincennes**

BB/1/1, Service Général, Décisions, 1790-91

BB/3/2, Service Général, Correspondance, Brest, Lorient, Rochefort, Toulon, 1790

BB/3/11, Service Général, Correspondance, Lorient, 1792

BB/3/114, Service Général, Correspondance, Brest, 1797

BB/3/153, Service Général, Correspondance, Brest, 1799

BB/3/158, Service Général, Correspondance, Toulon, 1799

BB/4/1, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 1

BB/4/2, Service Général, Campagnes (1790-1913), 1790, Vol. 2

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