

Mobility for the cause: the Massachusetts State Navy and inter-service mobility in the  
Revolutionary War

by

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## **Abstract**

Servicemen during the American Revolution chose to participate in the conflict for many different reasons, and they frequently transitioned among the different types of services available to them on sea and land. This thesis, using the Massachusetts State Navy as a focal point, will examine the ways that revolutionary fighters and colonial authorities worked to balance the former's contributions to the war effort in an environment where various official and quasi-official military organizations – privateering vessels, state navies, militias, the Continental Army and the Continental Navy – vied for recruits. The Massachusetts State Navy, dedicated to protecting Massachusetts' coastline, securing necessary trade goods in the face of the British blockade, and raiding British shipping, provided one such option for military service, competing with other Patriot military organizations for recruits. Finding – and retaining – enough seamen was challenging for the Massachusetts State Navy because servicemen might choose to end their military service altogether at the end of an enlistment, move to a privateer or land-based military unit during their current term of service, or desert their posts. This thesis will assess the military careers of ten Patriot servicemen to illustrate the mobility between branches of service that these men and their counterparts often experienced. The thesis will examine the choices that various servicemen made when moving in or out of the Massachusetts State Navy, and the struggle Patriot military forces faced in retaining personnel. While some Patriot servicemen stayed in one military branch for their whole military career, many Patriot sailors and soldiers chose to move from one branch of service to another.

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

By July 1775, Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, commanding the Royal Navy's North American Station, was in an ugly mood. Since he assumed command in 1774, the situation in Britain's North American colonies had steadily deteriorated to the point of open warfare. Even worse, he had been informed by his political superiors that his previous conduct had not been aggressive enough, so he willingly adopted a more antagonistic approach against the Patriots. On October 4, Graves received formal confirmation from the Lords of the Admiralty ordering him to take aggressive action against the Patriots.

In response, on 16 October 1775, several British warships entered the waters off Falmouth (present-day Portland), Maine. In the instructions given to Lieutenant Henry Mowat, the Royal Navy officer responsible for this expedition, Graves explained that "the four New England governments [Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island] are in open an[d] avowed Rebellion against his Majesty," having seized British ships and killed or wounded "many of the King's Subjects serving on board his Majesty's ships."<sup>1</sup> Graves also noted "undoubted Intelligence of their fortifying their Sea Ports, and of their determination to cut off and destroy his Majesty's subjects serving in his Fleet and Army whenever it is in their power."<sup>2</sup> In response to this "rebel aggression," Mowat was ordered "to lay waste [,] burn and destroy such Seaport Towns as are accessible to his Majesty's Ships."<sup>3</sup> Mowat delayed his attack

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<sup>1</sup> "Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Lieutenant Henry Mowat, H.M. Armed Vessel *Canceaux*, 6 October 1775," in William Bell Clark, William James Morgan, et al. eds., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution (NDAR)*, 13 vols. (Washington D.C: Department of the Navy, 1964-2019), 2: 324.

<sup>2</sup> "Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Lieutenant Henry Mowat," *NDAR*, 2: 324.

<sup>3</sup> "Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Lieutenant Henry Mowat," *NDAR*, 2: 324.

by two days, but commenced the bombardment on October 18.<sup>4</sup> Although only Falmouth would face this destruction, it was initially planned to destroy other seaports such as Marblehead, and in particular Machias, where the first Patriot naval victory of the Revolutionary War had occurred.

Graves did not institute this policy on his own initiative but in response to directives from his Royal Navy superiors in Great Britain. This was the culmination of punitive policies from the “Intolerable Acts” that effectively closed off the port of Boston to the Restraining Acts that placed the Newfoundland fisheries off limits to New England fishermen. Unfortunately for the British, the destruction of Falmouth had the same effect as previous policies such as the Intolerable Acts and Restraining Act. While the attack on Falmouth achieved its aim in destroying the town (and making future Massachusetts State Navy sailor and US Navy officer Edward Preble one of those left homeless), it understandably enraged many colonists, and resulted in *increased* support for the Patriots. This only added to an increased perception of British “barbarity,” ultimately serving as a public relations disaster for the British.<sup>5</sup>

On the American side, James Warren fulminated in his correspondence with John Adams over how “the pirates on the Eastern shore have destroyed two-thirds of Falmouth burnt down, and have orders to destroy every sea port from Boston to Pemmaquid.”<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Franklin’s correspondence to his son-in-law, Richard Bache, similarly relayed the news: “We have just receiv’d Advice of the burning of Falmouth Casco Bay; and are assur’d that Orders are come

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<sup>4</sup> “Narrative of Daniel Tucker of Falmouth, 17 October 1775” *NDAR*, 2: 488-89; “Letter of Rev. Jacob Bailey, 18 October 1775,” *NDAR*, 2: 500.

<sup>5</sup> Holger Hoock, *Scars of Independence: America’s Violent Birth* (New York: Crown, 2017), 90.

<sup>6</sup> “To John Adams from James Warren, 20 October 1775,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-03-02-0113>. [Original source: *The Adams Papers*, Papers of John Adams, vol. 3, *May 1775–January 1776*, ed. Robert J. Taylor. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 218–224.]

over to burn, ravage, destroy all the Sea Coast.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, George Washington portrayed the bombardment of Falmouth in a letter to John Hancock as “an Outrage exceeding in Barbarity & Cruelty every hostile Act practiced among civilized Nations.”<sup>8</sup> Even the French took notice of Falmouth, considering the attack a blunder on the part of the British.<sup>9</sup>

The destruction of Falmouth therefore showed the need for a naval force that could protect the Massachusetts coastline. In response, in 1776, Massachusetts created its own naval force, the Massachusetts State Navy. The purpose of the State Navy was to protect Massachusetts’s coast and trade, and capture British ships. Although the Continental Congress created a Continental Army and Continental Navy, the new United States continued to rely on a decentralized form of military power throughout the Revolutionary War, as individual colonies like Massachusetts often took up the burden of their own defense. The Massachusetts State Navy serves as a microcosm of the Patriot war effort, as state navy officers, just like their counterparts in other organizations, struggled to find the manpower to crew their ships, and their seamen also had the option of choosing where they could serve.

In order to properly examine these patterns of service, this thesis will explore the individual experiences of inter-service mobility of ten Patriot servicemen, whose service for the Patriot cause sheds light on service in the State Navy. Eight of these men – Ambrose Allen,

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<sup>7</sup> “From Benjamin Franklin to Richard Bache, 19[–24] October 1775,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-22-02-0143>. [Original source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 22, *March 23, 1775, through October 27, 1776*, ed. William B. Willcox. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982, pp. 241–243.]

<sup>8</sup> “From George Washington to John Hancock, 24 October 1775,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-02-02-0210-0001>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 2, *16 September 1775–31 December 1775*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987, pp. 227–228.]

<sup>9</sup> “Count de Vergennes to Count de Guines, 31 December 1775,” *NDAR*, 3: 467-69.

Cornelius Bassett, Samuel Everson, Ebenezer Fox, George Little, Martin Lloyd, John Nutting, and Benjamin Warner – served in the Massachusetts State Navy, and went on at least one cruise on a State Navy vessel. The other two men – Isaac Drew and John Rutherford – have more tangential connections to the State Navy, but an examination of their service records serves as a form of comparison. From a close inspection of these sailors’ careers, men often switched from one branch of military service to another, whether on land or sea.

This study focuses on the Massachusetts State Navy because the State Navy serves as an underexamined example of the Patriot military experience during the American Revolution, especially regarding the decentralized nature of the Patriot military apparatus as applied to recruitment and inter-service mobility. These military and political institutions had to recruit men on their own initiative, as they could not rely on the Continental Congress or provincial governments do this for them, given the competition for servicemen. Aside from those drafted into military service, men could not only choose which branch of the military they would serve in, but also often moved from one type of military service to another. The military careers of the sailors examined in this study show an inter-service mobility where men could transfer from one branch of Patriot military service to another, such as from the militia to the Massachusetts State Navy.

This inter-service mobility reflected both the circumstances of the war itself and the choices of individual men who served and made decisions reflecting their own values and expectations. From creation to dissolution, the activities of the Massachusetts State Navy highlight the difficulties that the various branches of the Patriot military had in finding men to serve, while at the same time illustrating the mobility of Patriots in military service. This thesis can be seen as an extension of Walter Sargent’s “Answering the Call to Arms.” Unlike Sargent,

who focuses on Massachusetts residents who spent their military careers on land, this work concentrates on the activities of men serving in the Massachusetts State Navy, and also provides overviews of each serviceman's inter-service mobility.<sup>10</sup>

In order to explain inter-service mobility and how it applies to the Massachusetts State Navy in detail, this study is divided into three main sections, each covering a different aspect of the Massachusetts State Navy during the Revolutionary War of 1775-1783. The first section examines the motivations behind the creation of the Massachusetts State Navy, and the objectives of the State Navy, particularly colonial defence and trade. The second section examines the recruitment of sailors for the Massachusetts State Navy, including the specific forms of recruitment, and compares that recruitment to other forms of Patriot military service. The second section also studies how the competition for servicemen affected recruitment, to the extent enemy prisoners were often enlisted into military service. The third (and final) section examines service in the Massachusetts State Navy, particularly the experiences of the men examined in this paper (with a discussion of the hazards of disease and captivity faced by sailors), and further illustrates the movement of servicemen between different Patriot military organizations.

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Sargent, "Answering the Call to Arms: The Social Composition of Revolutionary Soldiers of Massachusetts, 1775-1783," PhD diss. (University of Minnesota, 2004).

## Chapter 2 - Historiography

Regarding inter-service mobility, the historiography is scant, and no works to date have been written on inter-service mobility and the Massachusetts State Navy. Fortunately, more works exist on mobility into and out of Patriot military service. For example, both James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender's *"A Respectable Army": The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789* and Charles Patrick Neimeyer's *America Goes to War: A Social History of the Continental Army* examine how the Continental Army struggled in maintaining manpower, as year after year soldiers would choose to leave the Continental Army rather than reenlist.<sup>11</sup>

An extensive historiography encompasses the exploits of the Continental Navy, and to a lesser extent the Patriot privateers, but little has been written about the Massachusetts State Navy or about the men who served in it.<sup>12</sup> That being said, a substantial historiography exists for general topics covered in this thesis, including the role of New England in the Revolutionary War, impressment, the terrible conditions American prisoners suffered in British captivity, and the frustrations Patriot leaders experienced over fluctuations in manpower. Authors such as John Shy also rightly acknowledge that military operations during the Revolutionary War cannot be viewed in isolation from the political circumstances of the time.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender, *"A Respectable Army": The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 70, 90; Charles Patrick Neimeyer, *America Goes to War: A Social History of the Continental Army* (New York and London: NYU University Press, 1996), 24.

<sup>12</sup> William Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail: The American Navy during the Revolution* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976); Louis Arthur Norton, *Captains Contentious: The Dysfunctional Sons of the Brine* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> John Shy, *A People Numerous & Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Revised Edition) (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990), 121.

Of course, institutions such as the Massachusetts State Navy could only play a role with the men who served in them. Authors such as Christopher Magra have also drawn attention to the significant role New England sailors played in supporting the Patriot cause.<sup>14</sup> For example, Magra's *The Fisherman's Cause* describes how British attempts to control New England fishermen contributed to these same fishermen supporting the Patriots. Attention has also focused on the role of sailors in the Revolutionary War, as authors such as Jesse Lemisch argue sailors were instrumental in providing reliable service for the Patriots due to deeply held ideologies regarding personal and economic liberty. In contrast, authors such as Paul Gilje challenge this claim of ideological motivation. In fact, Gilje asserts the motivations of sailors cannot be as easily defined: rather, their motives fluctuated according to changing circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

Contributing to the growing resentment of New England seamen, another source of tension that contributed to anger against the British (and likely persuaded Massachusetts men to join the Patriot cause) was impressment. While mentioned infrequently in earlier historiography (in Robert Middlekauff's *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*, impressment is explicitly mentioned only once), historians such as Denver Brunsmann have begun to draw more attention to the role of impressment in contributing to the Revolutionary War.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Christopher P. Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause: Atlantic Commerce and Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 235.

<sup>15</sup> Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 25, No. 3 (July 1968): 401, 403; Paul A. Gilje, "Loyalty and Liberty, "The Ambiguous Patriotism of Jack Tar in the American Revolution," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Spring 2000): 165.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 104; Denver Brunsmann, *The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (University of Virginia Press, 2013), locations 2166, 4982 (Kindle version).

Although impressment is associated more with the War of 1812, anger at impressment had existed for decades in Britain's American colonies, and it was the application of impressment that helped contribute to hostilities between the United States and Great Britain.

On mobility in and out of the Patriot military, Walter Sargent's "Answering the Call to Arms" examines the service of Massachusetts residents who served the Thirteen Colonies on land, showing how military service could be flexible in that context. Sargent explains Massachusetts Patriots often would return home after serving a term of service, but this did not mean their military career had finished. Rather, they let their family and/or neighbors take their own turn of service before returning to serve again.<sup>17</sup> In support of his argument, Sargent provides statistics of men who would depart military service but then return three years later.<sup>18</sup> Sargent's analysis does not address Massachusetts' involvement in maritime activities, whether privateering or providing manpower for the State Navy or Continental Navy. However, Sargent does not ignore the importance of the sea, as he points out that Massachusetts had to devote attention towards coastal defense.<sup>19</sup> After all, Massachusetts had ports and an extensive coastline to defend, and until the British evacuation of Boston, a substantial enemy military presence in Massachusetts itself. Also, even though Massachusetts no longer had to worry about enemy garrisons after the British evacuated Boston, this was not true for Massachusetts-controlled Maine. In Maine, the British had established a military presence at Penobscot Bay, which Massachusetts's Penobscot Expedition not only failed to capture, but also resulted in the destruction of a substantial amount of Patriot military equipment, particularly ships. This not

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<sup>17</sup> Sargent, "Answering the Call to Arms," 112, 240.

<sup>18</sup> Sargent, "Answering the Call to Arms," 52.

<sup>19</sup> Sargent, "Answering the Call to Arms," 66.

only reduced the ability of Massachusetts to wage military operations, but meant they had to face the same problems as before with a substantially reduced military capability.

Other historians have addressed the abysmal treatment of American prisoners of war, the brutality of the Revolutionary War, and the impact of slavery. Holger Hoock's *Scars of Independence* examines the overlooked brutal nature of the Revolutionary War, while other authors such as Edwin Burrows and T. Cole Jones take a closer look at the treatment of prisoners during the conflict. As for slavery, Emily Blanck's book, *Tyrannicide* demonstrates how the capture of a ship carrying enslaved people by a Massachusetts State Navy warship revealed a growing division among citizens of different states over the morality of slavery. On the other hand, historians such as W. Jeffrey Bolster, Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh point to how African-Americans could experience more freedom on the high seas, with some serving the Patriot cause as sailors.<sup>20</sup>

In terms of naval activity, the *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* series, published by the Naval History and Heritage Command, provides detailed information about naval activity during the Revolutionary War, including information regarding the Massachusetts State Navy. Thirteen volumes have been published to date, covering 1775 through most of 1778, providing a trove of information on Revolutionary War naval activities. Numerous documents

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<sup>20</sup> Hoock, *Scars of Independence*; Edwin G. Burrows, *Forgotten Patriots: The Untold Story of American Prisoners During the Revolutionary War* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Emily Blanck, *Tyrannicide: Forging an American Law of Slavery in Revolutionary South Carolina and Massachusetts* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2014); T. Cole Jones, *Captives of Liberty: Prisoners of War and the Politics of Vengeance in the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2020); W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*. Cambridge (MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

contain not only information relevant to the Massachusetts State Navy, from the orders presented to State Navy ship captains to correspondence on prizes captured by State Navy vessels, but also other state navies, the Continental Navy, and the Royal Navy. Moreover, these documents not only provide information on specific ships but also on the institutions that supported these warships, such as the Massachusetts Board of War and Continental Congress. In addition to *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, official Massachusetts government documents from the time of the American Revolution are located in the *Acts and Resolves* and *Acts and Laws* of Massachusetts' governing body. Although this series of sources should not be taken as a complete compilation of all of Massachusetts' decisions on the Revolutionary War, it does provide an overview of Massachusetts' government policy during this time period, as well as a historical snapshot on the historical decisions made.

In terms of the military operations of state navies during the Revolutionary War, John A. McManemin's *Captains of the State Navies during the Revolutionary War* examines the military service of ship captains of all Revolutionary War state navies, not just Massachusetts's. Among the officers listed is George Little, one of the men examined in this study, as well as some who likely served as commanders of other seamen belonging to the sample group. McManemin provides a substantial bibliographical section for each commander, but his work does not include footnotes that can guide researchers to the relevant primary sources. Overall, *Captains of the State Navies during the Revolutionary War* appears to be a distillation of other works, as shown by the similarities between McManemin's chapter on George Little and certain sections of Christopher McKee's *Edward Preble: A Naval Biography*.<sup>21</sup> McManemin's work was also

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<sup>21</sup> John A. McManemin, *Captains of the State Navies during the Revolutionary War*, (Ho-Ho-Kus, N.J.: Ho-Ho-Kus Publishing Company, 1984), 135 ; Christopher McKee, *Edward Preble: A Naval Biography 1761-1807* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), locations 730-44 (Kindle Version).

released in 1984, when only eight out of the currently published thirteen volumes of *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* had been published. This does not mean McManemin did not use the sources mentioned in future volumes of *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*: nevertheless, as a result it is harder to tease out where exactly he located the sources in question.

Few, if any, personal accounts exist of men who served in the Massachusetts State Navy. One exception is the memoir of Ebenezer Fox, who served on the State Navy ship *Protector* and wrote of his Revolutionary War military service late in his life. Pension records from the 1800s, however, provide some information about the wartime service of individual Revolutionary War veterans. In 1818, Congress granted pensions to Revolutionary War veterans who served in the Continental Army, but this legislation was limited to those in poverty who had served at least nine months in the Continental Army.<sup>22</sup> It was not until 1832 that Congress loosened the restrictions for Continental Army veterans, and allowed pensions for those who had served in the militia or in a maritime capacity during the Revolutionary War. (Even then, privateers were not included). Even if a veteran was deceased, surviving family members could collect pensions due to their relationship to the veteran in question. Not all pension applications were granted, since veterans had to provide documentation proving their service and/or witnesses who could corroborate their testimony. These recollections, however, provide nuggets of information on what units and/or ships veterans served on, providing information on their military service for researchers to examine.

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<sup>22</sup> Michael A. McDonnell and Briony Neilson, "Reclaiming a Revolutionary Past: War Veterans, Pensions, and the Struggle for Recognition," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Volume 39, No. 3 (Fall 2019): 468.

Unfortunately, pension records only provide information on those who applied for benefits, and deceased veterans with no family members or whose families did not apply would not be included.<sup>23</sup> Also, tracking the service records of individual servicemen is often difficult because of the varying spelling of names common at the time; men often have multiple entries due to different variations of their name. For example, Cornelius Bassett appears as both Bassett and Basset [sic.] in Massachusetts *Soldiers and Sailors*, while Martin Lloyd appears as Martin Loyd [sic.], and John Rutherford has an entry under John Rutheford [sic.].<sup>24</sup> This means historians may overlook relevant material for their research. The pension records also do not record the ancestors or descendants of the pensioner in question unless they are explicitly mentioned by the petitioner or a witness.

Pension records exist for all of the servicemen in this study. Unfortunately, although these records are invaluable in confirming each serviceman's military service and providing an overview of their career, they do not provide significant details about their service. Only Ebenezer Fox left a detailed account of his Revolutionary War military service, which provides some detail not only on what transpired, but also information about his mindset at the time. Aside from Fox, the backgrounds of these men do not appear in the pension records. Their occupations at the time of the Revolutionary War, and more importantly, whether they had had any experience at sea prior to the Revolution, remain unknown. Nevertheless, the contours of their respective careers can be extrapolated to a degree from contemporary primary sources regarding the American Revolution on sea and land.

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<sup>23</sup> McDonnell and Neilson, "Reclaiming a Revolutionary Past: War Veterans, Pensions, and the Struggle for Recognition": 501.

<sup>24</sup> *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War*, (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., State Printers, 1896-1908), 1: 752, 757-58; 9: 1045; 13: 712.

## Chapter 3 - Creating the State Navy

Although the Massachusetts State Navy existed for just over seven years, it undoubtedly proved its worth for the Thirteen Colonies. The State Navy's achievements did not occur through grand military campaigns, although the State Navy did participate in the infamous Penobscot Expedition. Rather, the Massachusetts State Navy achieved its goals through individual voyages to capture or sink British shipping or to transport badly needed supplies to the Thirteen Colonies. Each cruise, taken on an individual basis, did not single-handedly win the war for the Patriots. However, taken as a whole, the actions of the Massachusetts State Navy contributed to supplying the Patriot ground forces ultimately responsible for victory, as the State Navy's attacks on British shipping reduced the numbers of men and supplies that could be used against the Patriots.<sup>25</sup>

The creation of a Massachusetts naval force did not occur immediately after the opening shots at Lexington and Concord, even though a state navy was not an unfamiliar concept. As far back as the first English North American colonies, individual colonies used naval forces of their own to provide security. At the time, English colonials had to be wary of enemy (often French) warships, as well as pirates. Although the colonies only had to worry about their immediate environment, British authorities reasonably had strategic concerns that were more global. After all, the lands that would become the United States were not the only territories the British directly or indirectly controlled. Therefore, British resources such as warships could not be devoted solely to their North American colonies. At the same time, Britain had to keep some ships at home to prevent foreign invasion, given its proximity to unfriendly powers such as

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<sup>25</sup> "Captain Jonathan Haraden to the Massachusetts Board of War, 2 April 1777," *NDAR*, 8: 248-49; "Journal of the Massachusetts Navy Brig *Massachusetts*, Captain John Fisk, 22 April 1777," *NDAR*, 8: 787.

France. Along with long delays in communication, given the separation between Great Britain and the colonies and slow travel times, colonists could not always rely on British naval support.

As early as the 1630s, individual colonies were commissioning vessels in their own service, and Massachusetts was particularly active in providing ships for defense in the decades before the American Revolution.<sup>26</sup> According to Benjamin Schaffer, “provincial governments from Massachusetts to Barbados used these forces to guard commerce, defend coastal cities in emergencies, support infantry campaigns, and to spearhead assaults on enemy ports.”<sup>27</sup> In the case of Massachusetts, the province commissioned ships for use in attempts to capture Quebec in 1689 and Louisbourg in 1745. While the 1689 expedition proved an utter failure, the 1745 expedition successfully captured Louisbourg. The capture of Louisbourg, despite assistance from the Royal Navy, was an entirely New England effort, with Massachusetts providing the most manpower, military resources (including ships), and financial backing.<sup>28</sup> Even though Massachusetts was one of the first colonies to outfit ships for its own service before the Revolution, it was not alone in doing so. During Queen Anne’s War, the colonial government of South Carolina pressed into service several vessels to repel an incoming Franco-Spanish fleet aiming to take Charleston.<sup>29</sup>

Admittedly, the use of provincial navies had downsides along with benefits. As Schaffer points out in his work on English provincial navies, while provincial navies were useful, “the financial and social costs of fitting them out often exacerbated long standing tensions within

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<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Schaffer, *Self Defense and Sea Power: The Provincial Navies of the British Atlantic World, 1689-1763*, PhD diss. (University of New Hampshire, 2021), 33.

<sup>27</sup> Schaffer, *Self-Defense and Seapower*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Schaffer, *Self-Defense and Seapower*, 106; Douglas Edward Leach, *Arms for Empire: a Military History of the British Colonies in North America 1607-1763* (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1973), 231.

<sup>29</sup> Schaffer, *Self-Defense and Seapower*, 41-42.

Anglo-American communities and highlighted larger weaknesses in the imperial-provincial military relationship.”<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, as the British could not provide all the necessary resources to protect their North American colonial populations, provincial navies were consistently created in times of war. Although provincial navies were inevitably disbanded after the conclusion of conflicts such as King George’s War and the French and Indian War, their existence set a precedent for the creation of provincial naval forces in other conflicts, including when the colonists decided to fight for independence against the British.

The creation of the Massachusetts State Navy took some time, but this was not merely due to administrative wrangling. As Richard Buel explains, the prime focus of Massachusetts Patriots early on in what became a general war for independence was the siege of Boston.<sup>31</sup> Other matters such as creating a naval force understandably did not receive as much attention. Still, as early as 20 June 1775, just days after the battle of Bunker Hill, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress decided “not less than six” armed vessels were to be equipped for “the protection of our trade and sea-coasts against the depredations and piracies of our enemies, and for their annoyance, capture or destruction.”<sup>32</sup> On 29 September 1775, further consideration was given towards “the Propriety of fixing out Armed Vessels for the Defence of our Sea-Coast,” with a Salem Committee suggesting “the establishment of an armed vessel.”<sup>33</sup>

The need for the State Navy soon became apparent with British “reprisal” actions. Although Vice Admiral Samuel Graves initially advocated for a conciliatory approach, he

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<sup>30</sup> Schaffer, *Self-Defense and Sea Power*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Buel Jr., *In Irons: Britain’s Naval Supremacy and the American Revolutionary Economy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 78.

<sup>32</sup> “Journal of the Provincial Council of Massachusetts, 20 June 1775,” *NDAR*, 1: 724.

<sup>33</sup> “Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 29 September 1775,” *NDAR*, 2: 236-38.

quickly changed his tune, planning to “chastise” believed centers of “treason” such as Salem.<sup>34</sup> Said “chastisement” subsequently occurred, one of the more notorious examples being the destruction of Falmouth by the Royal Navy. Actions such as Falmouth, instead of immobilizing Patriots with terror and forcing compliance, instilled outrage against the British and motivated colonials to take precautions to guard their coastlines.

Although the Patriots did not seek a clean break with Britain until 1776, it became clear that each of the thirteen colonies needed to provide for their own defense against British aggression. Massachusetts had to deal with the British occupation of Boston, and protect a coast at risk from the Royal Navy. Admittedly, Massachusetts did not have the capability to defend every inch of coastline, and British raids could not always be anticipated. While Massachusetts needed to defend the coast, attempting to defend every settlement would disperse their forces. The necessarily small numbers of defending troops per outpost meant that enemy raiders could easily overwhelm these garrisons, as the British and Loyalists had the luxury of concentrating their raiding forces wherever they chose. On the other hand, defending the coasts served as a psychological reassurance for those who supported the Patriots, since these military forces served as a concrete reminder of support.<sup>35</sup> Without the presence of these coastal defense units, people would have gained the impression (correctly or incorrectly) that the Patriots were incapable of protecting the people who supported them, thereby dampening morale and weakening support for the Patriots. This serves as an example of how purely military considerations can be supplanted by other factors.

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<sup>34</sup> “Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Lieutenant Henry Mowat,” *NDAR*, 2: 324-26.

<sup>35</sup> Sargent, “Answering the Call to Arms,” 71, 102.

On 29 December 1775, the Massachusetts Council decided upon the creation of what would become the Massachusetts State Navy, requesting one Jonathan Adams and one Joseph Palmer to form a committee and present “a Plan for fitting out one or more armed Vessels for the Defence of American Liberty.”<sup>36</sup> This was followed by the Massachusetts House of Representatives’ decision to “construct ten sloops of war for the colony.”<sup>37</sup> However, the construction of five of these vessels was suspended because of a shortage of material such as iron or rigging.<sup>38</sup> As of 19 April 1776, five warships were under construction for the State Navy – the *Freedom*, *Independence*, *Republic*, *Rising Empire*, and *Tyrannicide*.<sup>39</sup> The Massachusetts Council did not rely solely on warships under construction, as two existing ships (*Freedom* and *Machias Liberty*) were directly taken into service.<sup>40</sup>

From its creation, the purpose of the Massachusetts State Navy was to protect the Massachusetts coast and trade, and harass British shipping. To carry out the State Navy’s missions proved a challenge, as none of the State Navy’s warships were all in service at the same time. While Massachusetts had six warships that had finished construction in 1776 – *Freedom*, *Independence*, *Massachusetts*, *Republic*, *Rising Empire*, and *Tyrannicide* – *Republic* was soon converted into a trading vessel, and *Rising Empire* became a prison hulk in 1777.<sup>41</sup> Other

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<sup>36</sup> “Journal of the Massachusetts Council, 29 December 1775,” *NDAR*, 3: 291.

<sup>37</sup> “Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 6 February 1776,” *NDAR*, 3: 1144.

<sup>38</sup> “Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 16 February 1776,” *NDAR*, 3: 1315-16.

<sup>39</sup> “Journal of the Massachusetts Council, 19 April 1776,” *NDAR*, 4: 1161-62.

<sup>40</sup> “Journal of the Massachusetts Council, 7 February 1776,” *NDAR*, 3: 1156-57.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Oscar Paullin, *The Navy of the American Revolution: its Administration, its Policy, and its Achievements* (Chicago: The Burrows Brothers Company, 1906), 325, 331; “Journal of the Massachusetts Council, 29 March 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 222-23.

additions occurred not just through construction, but capture, with the British brigantine *Active* becoming part of the State Navy after its capture by the State Navy brigantine *Hazard*.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout the Revolutionary War, the Massachusetts State Navy's warships constantly conducted individual cruises either to hunt British merchants or transport supplies. Occasionally, vessels conducted joint cruises, as *Massachusetts* and *Tyrannicide* did in 1777; they might also sail in conjunction with ships from other services (as in the case of *Massachusetts* and *Tyrannicide* sharing a mission with the Continental Navy ship *Cabot*), but the aim of capturing and/or sinking British merchants remained the chief goal.<sup>43</sup> While the State Navy did achieve notable successes during these cruises, the same cannot be said for the Massachusetts State Navy's only experience in conducting a sizeable military operation with other military organizations: the Penobscot Expedition. This expedition, to counter the British presence in Maine by capturing an enemy fort, resulted in the worst Patriot naval disaster of the Revolutionary War. Although precedent existed for the Penobscot Expedition, given the successful expedition to take Louisbourg during King George's War, the Penobscot ultimately turned out to be a disaster not just for the Massachusetts State Navy, but the Patriot war effort as a whole.

Although the Penobscot expedition proved unsuccessful, it was not due to a lack of resources on the part of Massachusetts. As Walter Sargent notes, "despite its failures, the Penobscot Expedition nonetheless reveals the extent to which Massachusetts was willing to mobilize in 1779, even without support from the Congress or Continental Army."<sup>44</sup> For the

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<sup>42</sup> Paullin, *The Navy of the American Revolution*, 335.

<sup>43</sup> "Journal Kept by Officers of the Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*, Captain Joseph Olney, 23 March 1777," *NDAR*, 8: 183.

<sup>44</sup> Sargent, "Answering the Call to Arms," 177.

Penobscot Expedition, Massachusetts “declared an embargo,” meaning that ships could not travel out of the port in question for a specified period of time.<sup>45</sup> Although Massachusetts did not physically force men into naval service, the embargo still served as coercion to pressure seamen into serving in the Penobscot Expedition by taking away other options. With the embargo, the only option for seamen was to enlist for whatever military activities were planned. This was the case for the Penobscot Expedition, providing Massachusetts with the necessary manpower to carry out this operation – although many of these recruits were new to the service, possibly hindering military operations. Ironically, this resembled similar Royal Navy “embargos” intended for impressment, although lacking the coercive power of British press gangs. More evidence exists as to physically forcing state troops to serve, as Massachusetts’s adjutant general, Major Jeremiah Hill, noted that some militiamen were forcibly brought to serve on the expedition.<sup>46</sup>

Unfortunately for Massachusetts (and the Patriot war effort as a whole), the Penobscot Expedition proved to be an unmitigated catastrophe. While Massachusetts provided the land forces, as well as the State Navy vessels *Active*, *Hazard*, and *Tyrannicide*, further naval support was provided not only by the Continental Navy and New Hampshire, but also by multiple Massachusetts-based privateers “commandeered” into state service by the Massachusetts government. However, between the expedition’s arrival on July 25 and the arrival of a British naval squadron on August 14, little progress was made in capturing the fort. Instead, the ground and naval commanders spent their time arguing over whether to destroy a British naval

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<sup>45</sup> Norton, *Captains Contentious*, 72.

<sup>46</sup> George E. Buker, *The Penobscot Expedition: Commodore Saltonstall and the Massachusetts Conspiracy of 1779* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002), 25.

detachment first and then capture the fort, or vice versa.<sup>47</sup> In the end, the British not only relieved the garrison but were able to capture four Patriot vessels, the remaining Patriot warships and transports being destroyed to prevent their capture – among them, the State Navy warships *Active*, *Hazard*, and *Tyrannicide* – with only one ship escaping.<sup>48</sup> Aside from the warship *Protector*, under construction at the time, the Massachusetts State Navy had no more warships.

After the failure of the Penobscot Expedition, the Massachusetts State Navy would never again engage in military operations of an equivalent scale. However, even after the Penobscot Expedition resulted in the loss of the state navy warships *Active*, *Hazard*, and *Tyrannicide*, construction of what would become the frigate *Protector* was well underway, so the Massachusetts State Navy still performed its duties. The reduction in size of the State Navy as a result of Penobscot does not imply a general decline of Massachusetts' military effort in the Revolutionary War. Massachusetts kept on providing manpower and resources for the Patriot cause, even after the failure of the Penobscot Expedition. However, this military disaster meant that Massachusetts had to be more judicious in terms of creating and using military force.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, Massachusetts continued to provide men not only for its own defense, but for the Continental Army. Even after the possibility of a substantial military threat to Massachusetts receded, and “as the main British threats moved southward to a great distance from Massachusetts, the service days of Massachusetts soldiers in 1779 still matched the service levels of 1775 and 1776,” as noted by Walter Sargent.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, “even as the main theater of war

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<sup>47</sup> Buker, *The Penobscot Expedition*, 57-58, 65

<sup>48</sup> Buker, *The Penobscot Expedition*, 95-96.

<sup>49</sup> Sargent, “Answering the Call to Arms,” 162.

<sup>50</sup> Sargent, “Answering the Call to Arms,” 251.

moved to the South, New Englanders felt very much in an active state of war.”<sup>51</sup> After all, British naval raiders could still at any time launch surprise attacks upon the Massachusetts coast. Although the Penobscot Expedition has understandably drawn substantial attention from historians, it was an atypical experience for State Navy servicemen. While some of the servicemen examined in this thesis did participate in the Penobscot Expedition, daily service for State Navy sailors consisted more along the lines of commerce warfare, defending the Massachusetts coast, and transporting supplies.

While State Navy sailors, as will be seen, did undertake coast protection missions, guarding Massachusetts’s coasts would not be the only mission of the Massachusetts State Navy, as the protection of trade was also deemed an essential objective. After all, soldiers and sailors could not fight without proper weapons and food. In other words, with inadequate supplies of food and drink to keep them nourished, clothing to protect them from the elements, and weapons to ensure a chance against their opponents, having large numbers of men would be a hindrance, not a benefit. The Patriot military and political leadership were fully aware of the need to supply their military forces. After all, the resources at hand for Massachusetts Patriots – and the Patriot cause as a whole – were just a fraction of those possessed by the British. Therefore, the need to acquire military supplies persisted throughout the Revolutionary War.

Even though military supplies could be captured from the British, this was not a reliable means of supply. The Patriots therefore had to search for resources to a wider extent. One such source was the West Indies, where European powers aside from Great Britain possessed colonies. Due to the wealth of these colonies, extensive trade networks existed that could be used to obtain supplies. Given that Massachusetts merchants traded often in this region, the West

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<sup>51</sup> Sargent, “Answering the Call to Arms,” 177.

Indies served as an invaluable source of military supplies.<sup>52</sup> On 26 October 1775, the Continental Congress called for “importing arms and ammunition” from Europe and the West Indies.<sup>53</sup> In order to acquire “arms, ammunition, Sulphur, and salt petre,” individual colonies were advised to trade “as much provision or any other produce, except horned cattle, sheep, hogs, and poultry.”<sup>54</sup> Individual colonies had an incentive to conduct trade in the region, for even though they possessed their own military stores, they could only call upon the resources at hand at the moment.

At ports such as Dutch-controlled St. Eustatius, the Patriots were able to trade with friendly merchants, with French, Spanish, and Dutch colonial authorities ignoring British complaints over their legitimization.<sup>55</sup> Trade was also conducted directly with European powers such as France, although only Massachusetts and the other New England colonies “enjoyed direct commercial contact with France throughout the war.”<sup>56</sup> For example, the Massachusetts trading vessel *Union* was dispatched to France transporting “masts and spars for the French Navy,” but was captured by the British. The capture of *Union* and its cargo is mentioned in a letter to Samuel Phillips Savage, the President of the Massachusetts Board of War.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Buel, *In Irons*, 111.

<sup>53</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, ed. Washington C. Ford et al. (Washington D.C., 1904-37), 3: 306.

<sup>54</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 3, 308.

<sup>55</sup> Buel, *In Irons*, 119-120; Victor Enthoven, “That Abominable Nest of Pirates”: St. Eustatius and the North Americans, 1680-1780,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Spring 2012): 295; J. Franklin Jameson, “St. Eustatius in the American Revolution,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (July 1903): 690-91.

<sup>56</sup> Buel, *In Irons*, 21.

<sup>57</sup> “Penet, DaCosta, Frères & Co. to Samuel Phillips Savage, President of Massachusetts Board of War, 3 August 1778,” *NDAR*, 13: 1117-1120.

Trade in the West Indies was extremely important to Massachusetts, as illustrated by the decision made on 16 December 1775 by the Massachusetts Council to form a committee to “fix out ten vessels loaded with livestock and food.”<sup>58</sup> The intended destination of these vessels? The West Indies, where the cargos of these vessels “would be traded for ammunition and German steel for manufacturing gun locks.”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, on 27 January 1777, the Massachusetts Board of War commissioned the ship *Duc de Chartres* to convey rum and sugar to South Carolina. *Duc de Chartres* was then supposed bring aboard rice and convey this cargo in turn to France.<sup>60</sup> Approximately thirty-two vessels would be used by the Massachusetts State Navy for the purpose of trade, significantly more than the number used as warships used.<sup>61</sup>

This focus on supplies extended to the wartime cruises of the Massachusetts State Navy, as not only trading vessels but also State Navy warships contributed to supplying the Patriot war effort. For the Massachusetts Board of War, it did not matter whether the vessels that would transport goods across the Atlantic were dedicated trading vessels or warships: what mattered was whether they would safely arrive with their cargoes. The importance of trading for military supplies can be seen in the orders to State Navy warship commanders. In 1777 the State Navy warships *Massachusetts* and *Tyrannicide* were to ordered to sail to France, and transport military stores back home. This voyage was of such importance that the commanders of these two ships were explicitly ordered not to engage any enemy vessels.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> “Journal of the Massachusetts Council, 16 December 1775,” *NDAR*, 3: 124.

<sup>59</sup> “Journal of the Massachusetts Council,” *NDAR*, 3: 124.

<sup>60</sup> “Massachusetts Board of War to Captain Alexander Wilson, 27 January 1777,” *NDAR*, 7: 1043-44.

<sup>61</sup> Paullin, *The Navy of the American Revolution*, 331.

<sup>62</sup> “Massachusetts Board of War to Captain Jonathan Haraden, 14 March 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 105.

State Navy warships not only successfully transported supplies, but also “acquired” them through capturing enemy merchantmen. The Massachusetts Board of War’s instructions to John Foster Williams, commanding officer of the Massachusetts State Navy ship *Hazard*, included the provision that upon capture “ships bound for the West-Indies and loaded with fish” were to be sent to Martinique, specifically to the merchants Godfrey and William Hutchinson.<sup>63</sup> The Hutchinson’s provided help to the Patriots not only with disposing of prize cargos, but also in bringing prize vessels safely into port safely, regardless of contemporary laws regarding neutrality.<sup>64</sup> Williams was also ordered to send captured prizes to friendly ports, “preferably eastward of Boston.”<sup>65</sup> The Massachusetts Board of War therefore paid attention to obtaining necessary supplies such as armaments and clothing not just through trade but also commerce warfare. Similarly, the Massachusetts Board of War ordered John Lambert, commander of the Massachusetts State Navy brigantine *Massachusetts*, to sail and “to use your best exertions to Capture or destroy all Arm’d and other Vessells laden with British property.”<sup>66</sup> Lambert was also instructed to send ships from Africa or vessels carrying fish or lumber to Martinique, specifically to the merchant Godfrey Hutchinson.<sup>67</sup> The importance of military supplies is also highlighted, as “all other prizes that may be laden with provision, Cloathing Ammunition &<sup>c</sup> our orders are

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<sup>63</sup> Samuel Phillips Savage, President of the Massachusetts Board of War to Captain John Foster Williams, Massachusetts Navy, July 1778,” *NDAR*, 13: 235-36.

<sup>64</sup> Michael J. Crawford, *The Hawke and the Dove, a Cautionary Tale: Neutral Ports and Prizes of War During the American Revolution*, *The Northern Mariner*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3-4 (July-October 2008): 57-58.

<sup>65</sup> “Samuel Phillips Savage, President of the Massachusetts Board of War to Captain John Foster Williams, Massachusetts Navy,” *NDAR*, 13: 235-36.

<sup>66</sup> “Massachusetts Board of War to Captain John Lambert, 31 January 1778,” *NDAR*, 11: 242-43.

<sup>67</sup> “Massachusetts Board of War to Captain John Lambert,” *NDAR*, 11: 242-43.

that you send them immediately to this [Boston] or the nearest port on the Eastern Shore of this State.”<sup>68</sup>

*Massachusetts* was not the only State Navy warship to transport or capture supplies. On 5 March 1778, Simeon Samson, commanding the State Navy ship *Hazard*, wrote to the Massachusetts Board of War from Martinique of three prizes *Hazard* and *Tyrannicide* had taken together. These were the brigantine *Alexander* voyaging from Halifax to Jamaica, the schooner *Good Intent* voyaging from Newfoundland to Dominica, and the brigantine *Polly* sailing from St. John, Newfoundland to Barbados. All three vessels had fish as part of their cargo, and *Alexander* and *Polly* were also carrying wood.<sup>69</sup> However, Samson informed the Board of War that *Alexander* and *Good Intent* had been recaptured by the British, with only *Polly* arriving with a prize crew to safe waters at Martinique. This not only deprived the Patriots of needed resources, but also State Navy servicemen of prize money.

A cruise by the Massachusetts State Navy warship *Freedom*, commanded at the time by John Clouston, provides another example of the successes and failures of the Massachusetts State Navy’s actions regarding commerce warfare and trade. On 23 May 1777, Clouston informed the Massachusetts Board of War of having taken eleven prize vessels (a twelfth having been retaken by the British warship *Foudroyant*) before arriving in France, where he had taken on board “forty tons of military stores.”<sup>70</sup> Of his remaining eleven prizes, he burned three, sent seven others back to Boston, and used the final vessel to release prisoners he had taken – the ship arriving in Cork, Ireland, a month before Clouston sent off his letter. State Navy officials did not always seek to take prisoners to transport home, but in some cases, would release them. It is

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<sup>68</sup> “Massachusetts Board of War to Captain John Lambert,” *NDAR*, 11: 242-43.

<sup>69</sup> “Captain Simeon Samson to the Massachusetts Board of War, 5 March 1778,” *NDAR*, 11: 527-28.

<sup>70</sup> “Captain John Clouston to the Massachusetts Board of War, 23 May 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 863.

possible in these cases that not enough rations and/or water existed to supply both captors and captives for the remainder of the voyage. It would then be in the interest of Patriots to release those they could not provide for at the time. Regarding the seven prize vessels sent to Boston, three managed to return to Boston, while two others were recaptured by British warships, with the fate of the final two ships unspecified.

In facilitating trade, Massachusetts was tending to local interests, not just national interests. After all, Massachusetts had a coastline with multiple settlements and ports, and it had justifiable concerns over British attacks, as shown by the bombardment of Falmouth. Along with local interests, the creation of the State Navy also reflects how repugnant the British had become to the Patriots. Early on in the conflict, the British believed that only force would subdue rebels, one of the first instances being the burning of Falmouth. Although this harmed Patriot infrastructure, it also intensified anger at the British conduct, inspiring many to join the Patriot military forces.

The impact of actions such as these can be seen in Mercy Otis Warren's correspondence with John Adams, where she compared the British Navy to the Barbary Pirates, revealing how the actions of the Royal Navy had become delegitimized in the minds of the Patriots: "The sea coasts are kept in Constant Apprehensions of being made Miserable by the Depredations of the once formidable Navy of Briton Now Degraded to A level with the Corsairs of Barbary." Warren also characterized the British soldiers as "veteran slaves," reflecting the common perception of Patriots that British soldiers and sailors were "enslaved" by a system that deprived them of their liberty.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> "To John Adams from Mercy Otis Warren, 5 July 1775," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-03-02-0035>. [Original source: *The Adams Papers*, Papers of

Mercy Otis Warren was not the only New Englander who had come to view the British in this light. In a similar vein, when recounting the arrival of a prize ship, a Boston newspaper asserted the ship's cargo of lumber would have aided "those very Blood-Hounds of Britain there, whose hellish Cry continually is, Havoc, Blood, Murder and Plunder... 'Tis really a Pity some Method could not be taken to banish those Sons of Tyranny, Oppression, and Slavery."<sup>72</sup> This extended to propaganda designed to entice British sailors and soldiers to desert, as shown by this document dated 15 June 1775:

Gentlemen: Your situation is very unhappy, being dishonoured by the most infamous service, and under the command of the most vile and miserable wretches that ever disgraced the name of Briton...Turks and Indians would scorn such rascally conduct...May you soon be freed from the service of tyrants, become the glorious defenders of freedom, and join the victorious Americans.<sup>73</sup>

In fighting an increasingly hated enemy, the Massachusetts leadership had to consider the war effort as a whole because Massachusetts was rebelling against Britain with twelve other colonies, and this affected the actions of the State Navy. Consequently, the administrators of the State Navy were fully aware of the overall concerns of the Patriot war effort, not just how they pertained to Massachusetts. On 22 August 1776, the Massachusetts Council instructed John Foster Williams, the commander of the State Navy sloop *Republic*, to "proceed on a Cruize not

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John Adams, vol. 3, *May 1775–January 1776*, ed. Robert J. Taylor. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 56–58.]

<sup>72</sup> "Independent Chronicle, Thursday, October 10, 1776," *NDAR*, 6: 1195-96.

<sup>73</sup> "'To the Soldiers and Seamen serving in the British Fleet and Army in America,' 15 June 1775," *NDAR*, 1: 685.

only against our unnaturall Enemys but also for the protection of trade of the United States.”<sup>74</sup>

The explicit goals of the State Navy were to fight the British and to protect the trade of the United States. Similar orders were given to John Fisk when he became commander of the Massachusetts State Navy ship *Massachusetts*: he was “to take, burn, sink & destroy all armed and other vessels, together with their Cargoes, belonging to the King of Great-Britain, Enemies to the United States of America & the natural Rights of Mankind.”<sup>75</sup> Here, these orders portrayed the United States as fighting on the side of right, defending cherished principles that the British had once shared but to which they were now opposed.

The British and Loyalists understandably did not view the Massachusetts State Navy – and the Patriot cause as a whole – in such a favorable light. The operations of the Massachusetts State Navy and other Patriot ships, whether warship or trading vessel, threatened the legitimacy of the British cause. The British were enraged that fellow – admittedly unfriendly – European powers were conducting trade with the “rebels” as if they were legitimate powers. This trade, in the eyes of British authorities, legitimized an illegitimate cause because the Patriots were treated as though they represented an established power rather than the “criminals” they were – at least to the British.<sup>76</sup> For instance, the British governor of the Leeward Islands, William Burt, wrote a scathing letter to the French governor of Guadeloupe regarding the latter’s willingness to trade with the Patriots, portraying Guadeloupe’s population as “taken in Alliance and Partnership with Pirates and Rebels.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> “Massachusetts Council to Captain John Foster Williams, 22 August 1776,” *NDAR*, 6: 261.

<sup>75</sup> “Massachusetts Board of War to Captain John Fisk, 5 August 1777,” *NDAR*, 9: 707-08.

<sup>76</sup> Eric Jay Dolin, *Rebels at Sea: Privateering in the American Revolution* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2022), 92; Crawford, “The Hawke and the Dove, a Cautionary Tale,” 51.

<sup>77</sup> “Governor William Mathew Burt to Comte d’Arbaud, 8 November 1777,” *NDAR*, 10: 437-39.

At the same time, Patriot political and military authorities could not remain complacent, as they were well aware that any misstep on the part of an overzealous naval captain could throw the legitimacy of the Patriot cause in jeopardy. In the abovementioned example of the *Hazard*, Captain Samson noted that “a number of Vessells” belonging to countries such as France and Spain had been let go after inspection by his ship.<sup>78</sup> This shows that conscientious commanders like Samson did not capture prizes indiscriminately. After all, the Patriots could not afford to antagonize neutral powers. Attacks on neutral shipping threatened the legitimacy of the Patriot cause, proving a boon for the British as these attacks reinforced the British argument that the Patriots were no more than pirates who thus enjoyed no legitimacy. Gustavus Conyngham, a successful Patriot naval captain, on several occasions captured neutral ships, causing major headaches for Patriot diplomats such as Silas Deane, Benjamin Franklin, and Arthur Lee.<sup>79</sup>

Throughout the conflict, the actions of the Massachusetts State Navy were viewed as comparable to the activities of other state navies, the Continental Navy, and privateers. After all, these different institutions shared a common goal in waging war against the British, as well as capturing prizes not only to deny their use to the enemy, but also to take any cargos transported and use them for their own ends. This bears some similarity to the perspective of the British – if not for the same reason. The British understandably did not view the Patriots as representing a legitimate government. It therefore made no sense to distinguish between the various branches of Patriot military service, as all organizations were composed of rebels.

Throughout the Revolutionary War, the British and Loyalists consistently portrayed Patriot warships, whether they were operating under Continental or State authority, or simply as

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<sup>78</sup> “Captain Simeon Samson to the Massachusetts Board of War,” *NDAR*, 11: 527-28.

<sup>79</sup> Kylie A. Hulbert, *The Untold War At Sea: America’s Revolutionary Privateers* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2022), 84, 166.

privateers, as a homogenous body of raiders. For example, John Paul Jones was characterized as a “pirate” for his raid on the Earl of Selkirk’s estate.<sup>80</sup> Given that he planned to take the Earl prisoner (he was not successful, as the Earl was not present at the time), and that his crew did make off with the family silver, the British understandably felt justified in denigrating Jones’s status.<sup>81</sup> In a similar vein, in a letter to Vice Admiral James Young dated 23 December 1776, Royal Navy Captain John Colpoys railed about Dutch-controlled St. Eustatius’s willingness to fire salutes for Patriot ships: “... I cou’d never think of degrading the Flag of the King my Master so much as either to give, or receive Salutes, from the Forts, of a State, who made no distinction between the Flag, of a Lawful Sovereign, or that of a Set of Pirates, & Rebels.”<sup>82</sup>

In raiding British commerce, the Massachusetts State Navy not only hindered the British war effort, but also brought badly needed supplies to Patriot ports. The protection of Massachusetts itself and trade also fit in with the Patriot belief of fighting for a righteous cause. In contrast, the actions of State Navy vessels were viewed by the British as nothing more than acts of rebellion and piracy, a perception applied to the Patriot cause as a whole. The activities of the Massachusetts State Navy therefore can be viewed as a representation of the American Revolution as a whole.

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<sup>80</sup> “Henry Ellison and William Brownrigg to Earl of Suffolk, 24 April 1778,” *NDAR*, 12: 595.

<sup>81</sup> Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail*, 155-56.

<sup>82</sup> “Captain John Colpoys, R.N., to Vice Admiral James Young, 23 December 1776,” *NDAR*, 7: 586-88.

## Chapter 4 - Finding Manpower for the State Navy

In recruiting the men needed to man its warships, the Massachusetts State Navy could easily find sailors angry at having their livelihoods threatened by repressive British policies and the possibility of impressment, as well as backers frustrated by the limited opportunities of trade allowed by the British. However, the exact motivations of the State Navy sailors in this study remain unknown, except for Ebenezer Fox. Yet anger at the British more than likely contributed to their desire to serve the Patriot cause in general. Other possible motivations, such as economic advancement, adventure, and a desire to protect one's community, also contributed to men enlisting in the state navy. Whatever the motivations of the men examined in this study who joined the Massachusetts State Navy, their service records serve as examples on how they might have experienced their military service.

At the same time, the ten sailors appraised in this thesis also show that Patriot military service was not exclusive: in other words, one did not have to serve in either the Continental Army or another organization for their entire military career. Rather, one could complete a term of service with one institution – for example the Continental Army – and then serve in another way, such as privateering. Patriot servicemen therefore could move between different types of military service on land or sea. For naval forces, this consisted of the Continental Navy, the State Navies, and privateers. While the Continental Navy was intended to serve the colonies as a whole, the State Navies were intended to serve the interests of their respective colonies.<sup>83</sup> As for privateers, the goal was simply to make money, although this could be combined with an ideological fervor as well, given that the American Revolution was a revolt against centralized

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<sup>83</sup> Paullin, *The Navy of the American Revolution*, 315.

authority.<sup>84</sup> Since privateers did not possess the hierarchical organizations of the Continental Army and Navy, those who were looking for a form of military service that did not demand strict discipline found it in privateering.<sup>85</sup>

Recruitment for the military services of the United States operated on a decentralized basis, with individual states handling recruitment both for their own individual military services and for the Continental Army and Navy as well.<sup>86</sup> After all, the Continental Congress reasonably had oversight over the war efforts as a whole, but this necessarily took up a lot of this body's time and energy, and Congress could not be expected to oversee every tiny detail, such as recruiting. Instead, Congress relied on the inherent localism prevalent in colonial American society, with state authorities assuming the responsibility for providing recruits and supplies.<sup>87</sup> Any form of centralized administration ran against the localist spirit prevalent among the Patriots. After all, local officials who had been battling British attempts to limit their autonomy would not take kindly to any similar efforts taken by the Patriots.<sup>88</sup> In the same light, the state governments operated a decentralized form of recruitment, applying not just to ground forces but to naval organizations as well. In the case of the Massachusetts State Navy, instead of relying on

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<sup>84</sup> Alfred F. Young, "George Robert Twelves Hewes (1742-1840): A Boston Shoemaker and the Memory of the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., Vol. 38, No.4 (October 1981): 606.

<sup>85</sup> Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies & Practice, 1763-1789* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983), 338; Rick Atkinson, *The British Are Coming: The War for America, Lexington to Princeton, 1775-1777* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2019), 468; E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 6.

<sup>86</sup> Walter Sargent, "The Massachusetts Rank and File of 1777," in *War & Society in the American Revolution: Mobilization and Home Fronts*, edited by John Resch and Walter Sargent (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 44-46.

<sup>87</sup> Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 24, 172.

<sup>88</sup> Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 14.

centralized recruitment and then sending crewmen off to different ships, the commanders of individual ships were expected to recruit crewmen on their own even as they were provided funds to facilitate recruitment. For example, the Massachusetts Board of War instructed John Clouston, at the time commanding officer of the Massachusetts State Navy brig *Freedom*, to “hire a house for a Rendezvous,” and to provide Rum &c from his Brig.”<sup>89</sup> Presumably, the promise of alcohol tempted men to listen to recruiters.

Unfortunately for State Navy recruiters, finding the necessary manpower was not an easy task. Since different avenues of recruitment were available to potential enlistees, the Massachusetts State Navy and other Patriot military institutions were in constant competition for the men needed to fill their ranks. Potential recruits were not limited in their options, but could choose to serve in whatever organization they wished. Competition for military personnel only increased with the creation of the Continental Army, as each state had a quota of men to contribute to the Continental Army, and Massachusetts had to find men to fill its quota.<sup>90</sup> Alongside volunteers, men of color and prisoners of war were allowed to join the State Navy in order to provide the needed manpower. This proved necessary, since the State Navy encountered the substantial problem of desertion. Unfortunately for the Patriots, the Massachusetts State Navy was not alone in facing this predicament.

Another major problem was that Patriot military institutions could not introduce long-term enlistments for all recruits, but resorted to terms of service that lasted for just months or a year at most. From the beginning, professional officers such as George Washington understood

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<sup>89</sup> “Minutes of the Massachusetts Board of War, 9 August 1777” *NDAR*, 9: 727.

<sup>90</sup> Resch and Sargent, ed., *War and Society in the American Revolution*; Sargent, “Answering the Call to Arms,” 182; Richard C. Wiggin, *Embattled Famers: Campaigns and Profiles of Revolutionary Soldiers from Lincoln, Massachusetts, 1775-1783*, (Lincoln, MA: Lincoln Historical Society, 2013), 35.

the flaws with limited terms of service. After all, long-term planning will not function that well with an army constantly fluctuating in terms of manpower.<sup>91</sup> Although military officers recognized the need for some form of professional military service, it was inevitable that limited terms of service were the best option to maintain manpower. Long-term service was ideologically anathema as this form of military service reeked too much of the much-loathed British military.<sup>92</sup> To unilaterally impose this method of military service on the Patriot military would not only fail to draw more recruits; it might motivate those who had had enough to desert the ranks. Therefore, professional officers in the mold of George Washington had to accommodate limited tours of duty, rather than an army composed entirely of soldiers enlisted for the duration. While these terms of service were ideologically acceptable, they meant that Patriot soldiers and sailors would not remain consistently in the ranks.

Nevertheless, the inability to force all servicemen to remain in service for the duration did not mean that temporary enlistees would never return to the Patriot military. Walter Sargent's "Answering the Call to Arms" explains how veterans frequently reenlisted, often years after they completed their initial enlistment.<sup>93</sup> Sargent also points out that throughout the Revolutionary War, recruitment never focused entirely on the "poorer classes,"<sup>94</sup> which implies the United States never found itself resorting to extreme measures for recruitment. Men could always be found, at least in Massachusetts, to serve the Patriot cause. As Sargent notes, "the coming and going of soldiers and recruits was more a performance of militia custom and the tradition of

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<sup>91</sup> Martin and Lender, "*A Respectable Army*", 69-70.

<sup>92</sup> Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence*, 104.

<sup>93</sup> Sargent, "Answering the Call to Arms," 243.

<sup>94</sup> Sargent, "Answering the Call to Arms," 123, 243, 251.

campaigning seasons than a sign of disaffection with the cause.”<sup>95</sup> This system of shorter-term service provided both societal and individual needs. Society as a whole could not afford the permanent departure for long periods of time of laborers vital for the community, as the Patriot war effort relied on the supplies such as weaponry and foodstuffs created by these same farmers and craftsmen. At the same time, individual servicemen could complete a term of service, and then return home to resume their former occupations, as well as directly provide for their families.<sup>96</sup>

Although men did reenlist to join the Patriot military, one question needs to be addressed. What motivated people to join the Massachusetts State Navy, and for that matter, support its creation? The attack on Falmouth likely served as an impetus for the State Navy’s creation: because Massachusetts’ economic life depended on the sea, it needed to protect its coastline. Massachusetts seamen accordingly had a vested interest in serving in an organization that protected their economic livelihood. The motivation for seamen to join the Patriot cause was fueled to a degree by the pre-Revolutionary use of impressment by the Royal Navy. The colonials considered impressment an abuse of authority. As early as the 1690s, impressment by the Royal Navy in Massachusetts was controversial, with colonial and British authorities clashing over this topic.<sup>97</sup> Riots over impressment were common in Britain’s North American colonies and marked discontent with British policy. These were on the whole local affairs, arising when British naval officers, desperate for crewmen, resorted to “pressing” men in the immediate area.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Sargent, “Answering the Call to Arms,” 123.

<sup>96</sup> Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 71.

<sup>97</sup> Brunsmann, *The Evil Necessity*, Location 2073 (Kindle version).

<sup>98</sup> Brunsmann, *The Evil Necessity*, Location 4544 (Kindle version).

Anger at impressment was based on the notion that impressment involved the “subjugation” of free citizens to a despotic organization, in this case, the Royal Navy.<sup>99</sup> Ironically, attempts to counter impressment floundered due to arguments that a more centralized system of recruitment would in fact *hinder* British liberty, because a more centralized system would require an expansion of government power.<sup>100</sup> Inevitably, lives were lost over impressment: in the 1760s, for example, John Adams defended several sailors who had killed a British naval officer in the process of fending off an attempt at impressment.<sup>101</sup> This does not count the lives lost in military service: Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker claim that during the 1600s, “three out of four pressed men died within two years.”<sup>102</sup>

It was not just the act/threat of impressment that angered mariners in Massachusetts, but the fact that a geographical bias existed where impressment was practiced. For example, while the North American colonies bore a substantial toll in impressment, Britain’s West Indies’ possessions were mainly unaffected.<sup>103</sup> British policymakers considered the West Indies as more strategically valuable, as shown by the diversion of manpower and material to this region upon the French and Spanish declarations of war.<sup>104</sup> The dominant political force in the British West Indies was the planter class, and because of their wealth, they possessed substantial influence in the halls of power in London.<sup>105</sup> This made mainland colonists, including New Englanders, feel

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<sup>99</sup> Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity*, Location 5127 (Kindle version).

<sup>100</sup> Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity*, Locations 900 – 908 (Kindle version).

<sup>101</sup> Christopher P. Magra, “Soldiers...Bred to the Sea”: Maritime Marblehead, Massachusetts, and the Origins and Progress of the American Revolution,” *The New England Quarterly*, Volume 77, No. 4 (Dec. 2004), 531-32.

<sup>102</sup> Rediker and Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 159.

<sup>103</sup> Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity*, Location 4672. (Kindle version).

<sup>104</sup> Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 414.

<sup>105</sup> Magra, *The Fisherman’s Cause*, 105-107; Christopher Paul Magra, “The New England Cod Fishing Industry and Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution,” PhD diss. (University of Pittsburgh, 2006), 164-66.

the British did not value them compared to other colonials, particularly those living in the West Indies – and therefore disregarded their own concerns. Moreover, the colonials and British disagreed on the applicability of impressment. Many colonials felt that a law passed during the reign of Queen Anne in the early eighteenth century, which prohibited impressment in the colonies, remained in force. In contrast, British political and military authorities asserted that this law was no longer in force, and that impressment was legal.<sup>106</sup>

Although the ones most directly affected by impressment, sailors were not alone in hating the practice. Merchants did not have to worry about being “pressed” into service themselves, but they still resented this policy because sailors in their employment could be impressed. Therefore, ships sometimes could not sail for lack of sufficient crewmen, and the merchants lost money as a result. Merchants also resented the British because of pre-Revolutionary War limitations on whom they could trade with. After all, before the Revolution colonials could only trade within the British sphere of influence, although they benefited from prior British restraint in dealing with “smuggling.” With the imposition of previously neglected taxes, merchants found it harder to make a living, which encouraged businessmen such as John Hancock to join the ranks of resistance. These merchants did not see themselves as lawbreakers, but as merely sidestepping policies they felt were unjustified. Many colonials came to see that the British control of colonial trade as a symbol of subordination, linking trade – and economic concerns in general – to constitutional and political arguments.<sup>107</sup> Specifically, these colonials pushed back against the dominant perception in the British government that they “enjoyed the fruits of empire without

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<sup>106</sup> Brunsmann, *The Evil Necessity*, Location 2304 (Kindle version).

<sup>107</sup> Margaret Ellen Newell, *From Dependency to Independence: Economic Revolution in Colonial New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 277.

ever picking up the tab.”<sup>108</sup> Also, more and more of the colonial elite began to question why they should be taxed by an institution that did not allow them a voice.<sup>109</sup> They resented the economic subordination of colonies such as Massachusetts, but it would not be until the Revolution that this resentment became a force to be reckoned with. Combined with the British unwillingness to address colonial concerns, all these factors contributed to the deterioration in relations between both parties.

With the outbreak of open warfare, the protection of Massachusetts trade became important, as was the need to protect against British raiders and hinder British trade. This meant that there were those who strongly advocated for naval forces to serve the Patriot cause, as well as men willing to serve in them. From the beginning, however, it was clear that finding men to serve in naval organizations was easier said than done. In 1778, Captain Thomas Mayhew, commanding the Massachusetts State Navy trading ship *Adams*, wrote to the Massachusetts Board of War of his difficulties in finding crewmen: “...some of the men I expected to get, have ship’d in different Vessells. Others are going up to Boston to look out for Voyages....”<sup>110</sup> Based in Plymouth, Mayhew explained he was offering 45 dollars per month for crewmen, but potential recruits were migrating to Boston as they heard they could earn 60 dollars a month for enlisting on ships there.<sup>111</sup> This was not a new problem: as early as 1775, the Newburyport Committee of Safety informed the Massachusetts Council of difficulties in recruiting men to man two ships, “owing to a large number being in the Continental Army, & to several Privateers out on

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<sup>108</sup> Woody Holton, *Liberty is Sweet: The Hidden History of the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021), 65.

<sup>109</sup> Holton, *Liberty is Sweet*, 41.

<sup>110</sup> “Captain Thomas Mayhew to Massachusetts Board of War, 12 February 1778,” *NDAR*, 11: 325-26.

<sup>111</sup> “Captain Thomas Mayhew to Massachusetts Board of War,” *NDAR*, 11: 325-26.

Cruises.”<sup>112</sup> This is a prime example of the competition to find men before they already committed to another form of military service.

This did not mean that the Massachusetts government did not take any action to ensure the Patriot naval services were able to recruit enough seamen. On 29 April 1776, the Massachusetts General Court decreed that the State Navy be allowed to recruit from the seacoast defense companies, whose only options for enlistment outside their present service was the Massachusetts State Navy and the Continental Navy.<sup>113</sup> In the words of the original directive:

*Resolved* That the Officers of Said Vessels [State Navy ships] be and hereby are allowed to Inlest [enlist] men out of the Companies raised for the Defence of the Sea Coasts and the officers of Said Companies are hereby Directed to permit any of their Men to Inlest into the Colony & Continental Sea Service only and to Inlist others to Supply vacancies occasioned thereby as soon as may be.<sup>114</sup>

This provided a potential pool of recruits for the Continental and Massachusetts navies, although the two services competed with one another. This assumes mechanisms existed to prevent those serving in the seacoast companies from enlisting on privateers, which is not apparent. On the surface, this also resembles Royal Navy policy on impressment, which allowed only for the “pressing” of certain groups, since impressment was restricted to British and colonial

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<sup>112</sup> “Newburyport Committee of Safety to the Massachusetts Council, 24 February 1776,” *NDAR*, 4: 63-64.

<sup>113</sup> “Acts and Resolves of the Massachusetts General Court, 29 April 1776,” *NDAR*, 4: 1302-03.

<sup>114</sup> “Resolve Granting One Month’s Advance Wages to Sea Men, &c.,” in Abner Cheney Goodell, Jr., John H. Clifford, et al., eds., *The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of Massachusetts: To Which Are Prefixed the Charters of the Province* (Boston: Wright & Potter, State Printers, 1869-1922), Vol. XIX, 1775-1776: 364.

professional merchant seamen.<sup>115</sup> However, these sources of manpower were not enough to feed the voracious appetite of the Patriot military apparatus.

The limited availability of professional seamen meant that many of those recruited into naval service had never been to sea before. It is unclear as how true this was of the Massachusetts State Navy, but a set of instructions for a Rhode Island privateer includes the provision that “one Third at least of your whole Company shall be Landsmen.”<sup>116</sup> This guidance is identical to orders from the Continental Congress.<sup>117</sup> This shows an awareness to preserve the number of trained seamen. While every Patriot vessel needed to be crewed by a proportion of men who had some experience at sea, they had to conserve that limited resource and balance out the rest of the crew strength with landsmen. The higher value of professional seamen can be seen in a document from the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety, which offers higher wages (3 pounds a month) for seamen compared to fifty shillings a month for landsmen.<sup>118</sup> Likewise, in 1778, John Paul Jones noted in his correspondence that during his command of the Continental Navy ship *Ranger* the landsmen under his command were given an advance of twenty dollars, while the seamen were given forty dollars.<sup>119</sup>

Each form of military service offered inducements that attempted to draw as many recruits as possible. As a result of these multiple avenues of military service, a competition for manpower existed. With the need to find manpower, Patriot ship commanders occasionally

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<sup>115</sup> Brunzman, *The Evil Necessity*, location 285 (Kindle version).

<sup>116</sup> “Instructions to Captain James Munro, Commander of the Rhode Island Privateer Ship *Blaze Castle*, 20 November 1776,” *NDAR*, 7: 218-20.

<sup>117</sup> “Journal of the Continental Congress, 3 April 1776,” *NDAR*, 4: 648-52.

<sup>118</sup> “Minutes of the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety, 3 June 1776,” *NDAR*, 5: 363.

<sup>119</sup> “Captain John Paul Jones, Continental Navy, to the American Commissioners in France, 6 August 1778,” *NDAR*, 13: 1126.

resorted to impressment. The unpopularity of this practice can be seen in the case of the Continental Navy officer James Nicholson. When Nicholson resorted to impressment in Maryland, Maryland's Governor, Thomas Johnson, told him to release those impressed. In response, Nicholson informed Johnson that since Congress had not explicitly disapproved of impressment, he saw no reason to refrain from the practice.<sup>120</sup> The Continental Congress viewed Nicholson's action, especially his disrespect towards Johnson, poorly.<sup>121</sup> As a result, not only were the impressed men released, but Congress suspended Nicholson from active service for a time.<sup>122</sup>

Nicholson was not the only example of the Continental Navy resorting to impressment. While Nicholas Biddle's *Randolph* was docked in Philadelphia, he received a letter from one Christianna McMullen asserting that her son had been "pressed" to serve on *Randolph*. As her son was essentially her sole provider, McMullen pleaded with Biddle to release him from service: "May it therefore please your honor to take your Petitioners Case into your Honrs Wise and serious Consideration in Pleasing to Discharge your Petitioner's Son which will be the means of Supporting your Honrs Petitioner."<sup>123</sup> Regretfully for historians, Biddle's reply is not available. Another example can be found in testimony from the master of the British merchantman *Spiers*. Held for a time as a prisoner in Massachusetts, he asserted that English sailors had been impressed on board the Continental Navy frigate *Boston*.<sup>124</sup> This assertion is supported by a deposition dated 14 December 1776, where John Trotman, a resident of Barbados

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<sup>120</sup> "Governor Thomas Johnson to Captain James Nicholson, 24 April 1777," *NDAR*, 8: 421; "Captain James Nicholson to Governor Thomas Johnson, 25 April 1777," *NDAR*, 8: 430-31.

<sup>121</sup> Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail*, 288.

<sup>122</sup> "Journal of the Continental Congress, 1 May 1777," *NDAR*, 8: 886.

<sup>123</sup> "Christianna McMullen to Captain Nicholas Biddle, 19 December 1776," *NDAR*, 7: 521-22.

<sup>124</sup> "Observations by the Late Master of the British Ship *Spiers*, 27 November 1776," *NDAR*, 7: 299-300.

who was studying in Philadelphia, stated he and one George West had been “pressed” into service on board the Continental Navy ship *Andrea Doria*.<sup>125</sup> To resort to large-scale impressment to fill out the ranks of the Patriot naval forces would have been unacceptable to those who supported the Patriots. After all, they were fighting against an opponent that brought men into “bondage” through prolonged military service, and to impose an identical practice would have reduced support for the cause. Nevertheless, it appears the Patriots did practice impressment on occasion.

While recruiters for each service were desperate to find men, their political and military superiors were aware of the necessity not to “eat into” the manpower requirements for other branches of service, especially if these represented other states or the Continentals. The South Carolina Navy Board informed one officer not to recruit men who were serving on the Continental frigate *Randolph*, or men enlisted in the South Carolina Continentals or state troops.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, the Massachusetts State Navy enjoyed recruiting advantages over the Continental Army and Navy, one advantage being pay. In 1776, pay rates for Massachusetts State Navy sailors ran from a carpenter receiving £1.10 a month to £4 for a captain, with a vessel’s entire crew receiving a “one-third the proceeds of all captures made.”<sup>127</sup> On 29 April 1776, the Massachusetts Council ordered that “One Months advance wages be paid to the said Seamen at the time of their passing Muster,” providing a motivation to serve in the State Navy in the first place.<sup>128</sup> Previously, men serving in coastal defense units were allowed to claim a third of a ship’s value as a prize to be divided among them, with “the remainder . . . to the Use of the

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<sup>125</sup> “Deposition of John Trotman, 14 December 1776,” *NDAR*, 7: 485-86.

<sup>126</sup> “South Carolina Navy Board to Captain Stephen Seymour, 30 May 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 1046.

<sup>127</sup> *Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives*,” *NDAR*, 3: 1156-57.

<sup>128</sup> “Acts and Resolves of the Massachusetts General Court,” *NDAR*, 4: 1302-03.

Colony.”<sup>129</sup> While the Massachusetts government would keep most of the proceeds from a captured enemy prize, the men of the coast defense unit responsible for the capture would divide the remaining third of the profits among themselves. For State Navy servicemen, the Massachusetts Council decreed on 8 January 1777 that captains would receive fourteen pounds and eight shillings a month, while “boys” would be paid one pound and four shillings a month.<sup>130</sup> A crew list of the Massachusetts State Navy brigantine *Hazard* dated 12 June 1778 showed ordinary seamen receiving £2 8s.<sup>131</sup> On 28 June 1781, the Massachusetts council passed a “Resolve establishing the pay of officers and seamen in the service of the Commonwealth.” This authorized pay rates of sailors, ranging from captains receiving twelve pounds a month to “boys” receiving a pound per month.<sup>132</sup>

In comparison, Robert Morris put a positive gloss on the opportunities in the Continental Navy, writing to Silas Deane on 20 December 1776 that pay for ordinary seamen in the Continental Navy was eight dollars per month, and that seamen enjoyed the “freedom to be discharged after a cruise.”<sup>133</sup> A month earlier, the Continental Congress resolved to pay Continental Navy sailors “a bounty of twenty dollars” for British prizes and any weaponry on board the prizes, as well as “eight dollars a head” for each prisoner on these prizes.<sup>134</sup> Prize shares were also given to Continental Navy seamen, with ten shares to be divided up between all

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<sup>129</sup> “Acts and Resolves of the Massachusetts General Court, 23 April 1776,” *NDAR*, 4: 1214-15.

<sup>130</sup> Paullin, *The Navy of the American Revolution*, 333; “Journal of the Massachusetts Council, 8 January 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 885-88.

<sup>131</sup> “Payroll of Massachusetts Navy Brigantine *Hazard*, 12 June 1778,” *NDAR*, 13: 88-95.

<sup>132</sup> “Resolve Establishing the Pay of Officers and Seamen in the Service of this Commonwealth, 28 June 1781,” *Acts and Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Company, 1890-98), Vol. 1780-81: 671-72.

<sup>133</sup> “Robert Morris to Silas Deane, 20 December 1776,” *NDAR*, 7: 528-34.

<sup>134</sup> “Journal of the Continental Congress, 15 November 1776,” *NDAR*, 7: 179-180.

the “inferior officers, seamen, and marines.”<sup>135</sup> On 6 January 1776, Congress decreed how prize money should be divided up, with ordinary seamen receiving 8 ½ shares out of twenty, which was then to be divided among them.<sup>136</sup> Continental Navy seamen were allowed to serve a term of service lasting several months.<sup>137</sup> This contrasted with privateers, which let men leave after a single cruise.<sup>138</sup>

In spite of advantages such as relatively high wages and short enlistments, throughout the Revolutionary War, the Massachusetts State Navy found it excruciatingly difficult to find crewmen, as it faced stiff competition, especially from privateers. Admittedly, authorities took steps to ensure that Continental and State forces would have some men available for service. As the historian Gardner Weld Allen notes,

to ensure a full quota for the Continental Army and Navy and the State Navy it was necessary to restrict the recruiting of privateersmen and at times lay an embargo on the sailing of private vessels until the requirements of the public service had been met.<sup>139</sup>

Privateer bonds, for example, sometimes contained requirements not to recruit in towns providing men for the Continental Army.<sup>140</sup> As each state had to fulfill a quota of men to serve in the Continental Army, it was in the interest of colonial leaders to ensure their quotas were met –

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<sup>135</sup> “Journal of the Continental Congress, 28 November 1775,” *NDAR*, 2: 1174-82.

<sup>136</sup> “Journal of the Continental Congress, 6 January 1776,” *NDAR*, 3: 655-57.

<sup>137</sup> “Journal of the Continental Congress,” *NDAR*, 2: 1174-82.

<sup>138</sup> Buker, *The Penobscot Expedition*, 23.

<sup>139</sup> Gardner Weld Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution* (Boston: the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927), 42.

<sup>140</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution*, 66.

and not to be diverted to other forms of service, in this case privateers. Often this was not enough, because not all privateers observed these restrictions. Some privateers would recruit men who had already enlisted in services such as the Continental Army and Navy, to the frustration of Continental and State Navy captains.

One reason serving on privateers involved the chance to have a say in the decision-making process. The Massachusetts cobbler and serviceman George Robert Twelves Hewes, whose life experiences have been chronicled by historian Alfred Young, recalled from his service on a privateer that captains did not make decisions unilaterally but were responsive to the men they commanded. For example, during his cruise on the privateer *Defence*, his commanding officer asked the crew whether they wanted to pursue enemy ships that had just been spotted, to which the crew assented.<sup>141</sup> When the voyage in question had ended, British privateers were spotted, and although the crewmen were legally not obligated to serve any longer, *Defence's* captain asked if the crew was willing to serve for five more days – to which they unanimously agreed.<sup>142</sup> The possibility of having a voice rather than simply being commanded was likely part of the allure of service on privateering vessels.<sup>143</sup>

The attraction of privateers had a downside, as the Massachusetts State Navy, other state navies, and the Continental Navy found privateering difficult to compete with. In his correspondence with the Massachusetts Board of War, Captain William Haynes of the State Navy trading ship *Union* wrote he could not find the necessary number of crewmen even with

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<sup>141</sup> Alfred M. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 63.

<sup>142</sup> Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, 63.

<sup>143</sup> Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, 63-64.

the promise of a \$25 cash inducement per month.<sup>144</sup> Haynes's lack of success in finding crewmen resulted in the Board of War discharging him from service.<sup>145</sup> It was probably in Haynes's interest that the Board of War dispensed with his services because *Union* would be captured in 1778 (with John Nutting, one of the sailors in this study, serving as a crewman on board). The reverse sometimes happened as well. In a letter dated 24 March 1777 to Continental Army General William Heath, Continental Navy Captain John Manley explained that he was struggling to gain sailors for Continental Navy service due to the State Navy offering shorter terms of service.<sup>146</sup> Massachusetts also sometimes had to deal with other states seeking to enlist men of their own. In one instance, South Carolina's Council of Safety authorized Captain Robert Cochran to "inlist...any number of able-bodied seamen you can procure in any of the New-England, to not exceed five hundred in the whole."<sup>147</sup> Fortunately for Cochran, Massachusetts ultimately agreed to allow him to recruit three hundred men.<sup>148</sup>

In finding servicemen, the Massachusetts State Navy on occasion recruited African-Americans, even though slavery still existed in Massachusetts. In a war being fought for independence and freedom, the Massachusetts State Navy was not immune from the contradictions within the Patriot cause. After all, the Patriots were fighting for a cause that still permitted the enslavement of human beings. Before the war, Massachusetts sailors participated alongside their fellow New Englanders in the Atlantic slave trade. Merchant Peter Faneuil, for

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<sup>144</sup> "Captain William Haynes to the Massachusetts Board of War, 28 May 1777," *NDAR*, 8: 1038.

<sup>145</sup> "Board of War to Captain William Haynes, 2 June 1777, 24 March 1777," *NDAR*, 9: 4-5.

<sup>146</sup> "Petition of Captain John Manley to Major General William Heath," *NDAR*, 8: 186-87.

<sup>147</sup> "Minutes of the South Carolina Council of Safety, 31 December 1775," *NDAR*, 3: 325-29.

<sup>148</sup> Paullin, *The Navy of the American Revolution*, 422; "Journal of the Continental Congress, 16 January 1776," *NDAR*, 3: 818.

whom Boston's Faneuil Hall is named, was involved in the slave trade, making his money from goods produced by enslaved people.<sup>149</sup>

During his second cruise on *Protector*, Ebenezer Fox recounted that *Protector* captured a slave ship, then promptly "sold" the enslaved people on board.<sup>150</sup> (According to McManemin, this vessel was a Dutch vessel that had been captured by the British and was under the control of a prize crew).<sup>151</sup> Yet at the same time that the Massachusetts State Navy willingly participated in the slave trade, African-Americans were members of ship crews.<sup>152</sup> Evidence exists that at least two African-Americans were crewmen on the Massachusetts State Navy warship *Protector*. According to *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, a compendium of those who served, Prince Quam and Sharp Quam enlisted to serve on *Protector*, on 13 March and 14 March 1780, respectively. Prince Quam survived to be discharged from service five months later, but Sharp Quam died four months into the voyage.<sup>153</sup>

Also, in 1779, five captured black sailors had expressed their willingness to serve in the State Navy. Allen Hallet, commanding the State Navy brigantine *Active*, was directed to enlist

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<sup>149</sup> National Park Service. "The Complicated Legacy of Peter Faneuil." June 14, 2022, [https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/peter-faneuil-legacy.htm#\\_ftn9](https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/peter-faneuil-legacy.htm#_ftn9); for more information on African American Patriot servicemen, read Judith L. Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light: African American Patriots in the American Revolution* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017); on general information on African American sailors during the colonial era, read Bolster, *Black Jacks*.

<sup>150</sup> Ebenezer Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox, in the Revolutionary War: illustrated by elegant engravings from original designs* (Boston: C. Fox, 1848), 81.

<sup>151</sup> McManemin, *Captains of the State Navies*, 196.

<sup>152</sup> Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 153.

<sup>153</sup> *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 12: 885; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, VA, by the University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1996), 86.

these men “provided they are yet free & willing to enlist on board said Brig<sup>t</sup>...”<sup>154</sup> At the same time, Hallet was also instructed to see if a black man named Jack, who was being held on a prison hulk, would be willing to serve, since Jack had also expressed his willingness to serve in the State Navy. If Jack remained willing to serve, the “Commissary of Prisoners is hereby directed to liberate him.”<sup>155</sup> While not facing the intense degradation enforced upon African-Americans in the Americas, black sailors still faced restrictions. Yet it was at sea that black men were able to find some nature of autonomy compared to life on land.<sup>156</sup>

This willingness to enlist black sailors taken prisoner shows that the Patriots were willing to enlist men of color on occasion. This also points to a trend of allowing prisoners to join the ranks of the armed forces. This was not an isolated occurrence: in 1776, for example, the Continental Congress ordered “the commanders of all ships of war and armed vessels in the service of these states, or any of them, and all letters of marque and privateers” to enlist those willing from captured ships.<sup>157</sup> On the other hand, those who refused to join the Patriots were to be treated as prisoners of war.

Admittedly, enlisting prisoners was done out of necessity, given the struggles of finding eager recruits – and this did not mean these former prisoners would willingly aid the Patriots. For example, on the Continental Navy ship *Boston* a man by the name of Monroe or Munroe, a

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<sup>154</sup> Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, 86; Frank A., Gardner, M.D., Ed., “Department of the American Revolution. 1775-1782,” *The Massachusetts Magazine: Devoted to Massachusetts History, Genealogy, Biography, Volume II*, Salem, MA: Salem Press Company, 1909, 236.

<sup>155</sup> Gardner, Ed., “Department of the American Revolution. 1775-1782,” *The Massachusetts Magazine*, 236.

<sup>156</sup> Van Buskirk, *Standing in their Own Light*, 45; Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, 198.

<sup>157</sup> “Journal of the Continental Congress, 5 August 1776,” *NDAR*, 6: 63.

captive from the British prize *Martha*, was allegedly involved in planning a mutiny.<sup>158</sup> Another instance of the disadvantages of relying on prisoners to fill up a ship's complement occurred on the Continental Navy warship *Trumbull*, commanded by James Nicholson, in 1781. When *Trumbull* found herself in combat with two Royal Navy warships, the majority of the crew, a significant number of whom were former British prisoners of war, refused to fight. Although Nicholson and a handful of others put up a stubborn resistance, in the end, *Trumbull* was forced to surrender.<sup>159</sup>

In spite of such disheartening instances, the recruitment of prisoners for military service continued. On 27 July 1778, the President of the Massachusetts Council, Jeremiah Powell, was notified that Allen Hallet, commanding the Patriot ship *Tyrannicide*, wished to inform the Council that *Tyrannicide* was ready to sail but needed twenty more seamen. Hallet could leave in four hours if he were allowed to enlist twenty prisoners held on prison hulks in Boston. Hallet's request was approved by Jonathan Avery, the Council's deputy secretary.<sup>160</sup> This instance of prisoner enlistment was not unique. On 20 July 1778, for example, the Massachusetts Council decreed that no more than twenty-five prisoners who wished to enlist in Patriot service would be assigned to the Continental Navy frigate *Warren*.<sup>161</sup> This implies cooperation between state and

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<sup>158</sup> "Deposition of Sergeant Jerome Cazeneuve, Continental Marines, 27 May 1778," *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, 12: 762-64.

<sup>159</sup> Gardner Weld Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution*, Vol. 2 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, the Riverside Press Cambridge, 1913): 557; John A. McManemin, *Captains of the Continental Navy* (Ho-Ho-Kus, N.J.: Ho-Ho-Kus Publishing Company, 1981): 335; Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail*, 123.

<sup>160</sup> "'Jonathan Mason, Jr., to Jeremiah Powell, President of the Massachusetts Council, 27 July 1778," *NDAR*, 13: 522-23.

<sup>161</sup> "Journal of the Massachusetts Council, 20 July 1778," *NDAR*, 13: 443.

Continental authorities in terms of recruitment. Another example occurred in 1777, when the Continental Navy Board of the Eastern Department ruled the following:

That application be made to the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Council of the State of Massachusetts bay that they would permit Cap<sup>t</sup> M<sup>c</sup>Neil to inlist as many Foreign Prisoners now on board the Guard ships as are willing to Enter into the Service and such a number of the British Seamen as he shall think proper. –<sup>162</sup>

In spite of the competition for manpower, the Continental military and state governments cooperated with another on occasion.

Prisoner recruitment did not just result from the decisions of policy makers; it also depended on the individual initiative of prisoners themselves. On 29 September 1777, the Massachusetts Council, the governing body of Massachusetts, received a petition from two prisoners, Henry Strickland and Samuel Johnson. Both men claimed that they had deserted from the British warship *Milford*, and were travelling to Cork, Ireland, when a Patriot privateer captured the vessel on which they were travelling on. The two subsequently ended up in a prison hulk upon the privateer's arrival in Boston. Both men claimed that because of their desertion, "if your petitioners are sent to Halifax as Prisoners they expect nothing but to be Hanged for Desertion."<sup>163</sup> Therefore, they pleaded for the chance to be released so they could serve the

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<sup>162</sup> "'Votes and Resolutions of the [*Continental*] Navy Board of the Eastern Department, 18 November 1777,'" *NDAR*, 10: 529.

<sup>163</sup> "Petition of Henry Strickland and Samuel Johnson to the Massachusetts Council, 29 September 1777," *NDAR*, 9: 978.

Patriot cause.<sup>164</sup> The Massachusetts Council granted their request, ordering their release so they could “enter the American service.”<sup>165</sup> Of interest is that one of the petitioners – Samuel Johnson – asserted he had been impressed by the British to serve on the *Milford* against his will.<sup>166</sup> This shows that while impressment did guarantee a somewhat steady supply of crewmen, it did not ensure the crewmen in question would not “jump ship” if given the chance.

On occasion, the Massachusetts State Navy found willing recruits from the British, given that a number of British deserters chose to join the Patriot ranks. In many cases these deserters willingly served the Patriots, but this did not mean that they would remain in service to the Patriot cause indefinitely. On 28 March 1777, the Massachusetts government granted the petition of John Horrogan and Patrick McCarthy, Irishmen who had been pressed into British service. Upon reaching North America, the two men escaped and subsequently served on Patriot privateers. Both men asserted that given their status as deserters, they were at high risk if they were “found in the Service of these States.”<sup>167</sup> However, if they were allowed to return to Ireland, they would not face as much risk. Likewise, Rhode Island allowed prisoners to depart for Great Britain as long as they would not take up arms against the United States again.<sup>168</sup>

Nor was the Continental Congress above was recruiting “ordinary” prisoners in its quest for manpower – in other words those who had been convicted of crimes. Congress informed Continental Navy Captain Nicholas Biddle that he could “enlist into the continental service, such

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<sup>164</sup> “Petition of Henry Strickland and Samuel Johnson to the Massachusetts Council,” *NDAR*, 9: 978.

<sup>165</sup> “Petition of Henry Strickland and Samuel Johnson to the Massachusetts Council,” *NDAR*, 9: 978.

<sup>166</sup> “Petition of Henry Strickland and Samuel Johnson to the Massachusetts Council,” *NDAR*, 9: 978.

<sup>167</sup> “Acts and Resolves of the Massachusetts General Court, 28 March 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 217.

<sup>168</sup> “Permission Granted to British Prisoners in Rhode Island to Depart for Great Britain, 15 November 1776,” *NDAR*, 7: 165-68.

of the sailors in prison as he shall think proper.”<sup>169</sup> The same was true in Massachusetts, as shown in a petition from one James Dennis. Dennis “petitioned the Massachusetts Council that he had had been ‘corporally punished,’ but was unable to pay an accompanying fine and legal fees, therefore pleading to serve either in the Continental Navy or Massachusetts State Navy.” In response, the Council granted his request.<sup>170</sup>

The Patriots were not alone in using prisoners of war for military service. The British did so as well – albeit more forcibly. At times, the British resorted to conscripting Patriot prisoners into military service. Continental Navy officers taken prisoner when the frigate *Hancock* was captured recounted not just the brutality of their treatment at the hands of the British but also the extreme measures taken to “press” men into service, showing that the British went to this extreme quite often:

...all the old countrymen and foreigners, that were taken prisoners, and almost every boy, were kept on board the British ships, some, through threatenings, persuasions, &c. were induced to enter into the British service; and often did the land and navy officers, come to the said provost-guard, and ordered persons to go on the British ships, and, upon their refusing this, were kicked and banged, and hauled forceably away...were taken away in this inhuman and cruel manner.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> “Journal of the Continental Congress, 7 December 1776,” *NDAR*, 7: 405.

<sup>170</sup> “Resolving permitting James Dennis, Prisoner in Boston Gaol for a Breach of the Laws, to Enlist in a State or Continental Vessel of War, One Half His Wages and Prize-Money to go towards his Fine, the Other to his Family, 23 June 1779,” *Acts and Resolves*, Vol. XXI, 1779-1780: 85.

<sup>171</sup> *The Independent Chronicle, and the Universal Advertiser*, Thursday, February 5, 1778,” *NDAR*, 11: 288-291.

While Massachusetts may not have always treated enemy prisoners fairly, no evidence exists indicating the State Navy resorted to forcibly recruiting prisoners of war.

Even with the enlisting of prisoners, problems still occurred regarding recruitment, as State Navy sailors sometimes transferred to another military force. On 2 May 1779, the state Navy ship *Protector*'s commander, John Foster Williams, was ordered "to discharge one of his sailors, Joshua Hubbard," so Hubbard could "enlist for the quota for the Continental Army."<sup>172</sup> Interestingly, this occurred on the prompting of a Continental Dragoon corporal, Jedediah Bass, who was asking to enlist one of *Protector*'s sailors. Whatever Bass's motivations for enlisting a State Navy sailor, this instance serves as a clear example as to how the State Navy's interests took a back seat to Massachusetts's commitments to the Continental Army. Of greater importance is that this shows that State Navy personnel were allowed to leave State Navy service not just at the end of their enlistment, but also to transfer into another branch of the Patriot military, in this case the Continental Army.

At the same time, switching military services could occur the other way around. On 15 April 1779, the Massachusetts Council ordered John Foster Williams' State Navy brig *Hazard* to proceed on a "cruise lasting eight days." Moreover, it granted the request of one Captain Perez Cushing and some artillerymen – Massachusetts State troops, not Continental Army soldiers – under the command of none other than Paul Revere, to serve on *Hazard* for the duration of the cruise in question. The council permitted Cushing and "not more than thirty" artillerymen to join

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<sup>172</sup> "Resolve Directing John Foster Williams, Commander of the Ship Protector to Discharge Joshua Hubbard on his Enlisting to Serve as one of this State's Quota in the Continental Army for the War, 2 May 1780," *Acts and Resolves*, Vol. XXI, 1779-1780: 472.

*Hazard*'s complement, and to return to their unit upon the completion of the cruise.<sup>173</sup> This shows how non-State Navy servicemen could serve on State Navy vessels, indicating a degree of flexibility in service. Two days later, the Council referred to Williams' inability to find the necessary crewmen, and instructed him to wait for further instructions from the Massachusetts Board of War.<sup>174</sup> A similar example can be found with John Paul Jones' Continental Navy ship *Ranger*. Jones had a substantial amount of trouble in finding the crewmen needed to man his ship in Portsmouth, New Hampshire – remarking that “selfishness is not particular to Boston” – to the extent that the New Hampshire House gave him permission to recruit from artillerymen garrisoned at Piscataqua Harbour.<sup>175</sup>

For specific examples of inter-service mobility, a close examination of the individual service histories of the ten servicemen studied in this thesis illustrates how common inter-service mobility occurred. Of the ten servicemen, all but John Nutting experienced inter-service mobility. Ambrose Allen and George Little served on privateers before their State Navy service, while Martin Lloyd served on a Continental Navy warship after his service in the State Navy. The remaining six men discussed in this study began their military service not in the Massachusetts State Navy, but on land in the Continental Army or militia. For example, Benjamin Warner successively served in the militia, the Massachusetts State Navy, the militia again, and on a privateer throughout the course of his military service. Warner's unit, commanded by Christopher Osgood, mobilized for the fighting at Lexington and Concord, but

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<sup>173</sup> “Resolve Permitting Capt. Perez Cushing and Men to Serve on Board the Brig Hazard, 15 April 1779,” *Acts and Resolves*, Vol. XX, 1777-1778: 671.

<sup>174</sup> “Resolve on the Representation of Capt. John Foster Williams, 17 April 1779,” *Acts and Resolves*, Volume XX, 1777-1778: 675.

<sup>175</sup> “Captain John Paul Jones to Abraham Livingston, 4 September 1777,” *NDAR*, 9: 872; “Journal of the New Hampshire House of Representatives, 22 September 1777,” *NDAR*, 9: 948.

saw no fighting that eventful day. Of interest is that after Lexington and Concord, Warner's duties involved guarding prisoners taken by the schooner *Lee*, under the command of John Manley.<sup>176</sup> A record of some prisoners taken by Manley exists, and it is possible that Warner guarded some of the men listed in this document.<sup>177</sup>

After Lexington and Concord, Warner participated in building "fortifications for the defense of Salem Harbor."<sup>178</sup> A report dated 19 June 1776 states that these fortifications consisted of two completed forts, with another under construction.<sup>179</sup> The purpose of these forts was to protect against the British. One of his comrades at the time described how their "company was armed and clothed at our own expense."<sup>180</sup> Warner's unit could not rely on their communities to provision them but had to fend for themselves in supplying the necessary weaponry and clothing.

Like Warner, Cornelius Bassett began his military service in the land forces of the United States. He recalled serving in a unit under Captain Joshua Fahey, although the name does not appear in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*. Bassett stated he then served in 1776 under Captain Elisha Myers for a year. *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors* does record a Cornelius

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<sup>176</sup> Benjamin Warner, Pension Number S. 23,057, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca.1800 – ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 – ca. 1900 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Microfilm roll 2494); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773-2007, Record Group 15; National Archives Building, Washington D.C., page 3, accessed August 5, 2022, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/20330596>

<sup>177</sup> "Brigadier General Horatio Gates to Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 4 January 1776," *NDAR*, 3: 601-602.

<sup>178</sup> Benjamin Warner, Pension Number S. 23,057, page 4, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/20330600>

<sup>179</sup> "Report of the Committee Appointed to Examine the Coast from Boston to Newburyport, 19 June 1776," *NDAR*, 5: 615-17.

<sup>180</sup> Benjamin Warner, Pension Number S. 23,057, page 8, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/20330640>

Basset [sic.] enlisting under Captain Elisha Nye on 25 January 1776.<sup>181</sup> Samuel Everson served in the land forces before his State Navy service as well, his pension records indicating he served for two months in the State Navy and nine on land. Before his service in the Massachusetts State Navy, Everson first enlisted in Captain Samuel Sparrow's company in 1779, being discharged after six months.<sup>182</sup> Another record, on the other hand, presents Everson serving as a fifer in the same unit for only twenty-two days.<sup>183</sup> Yet an additional record presents Everson as serving under Sparrow from 30 November 1779 to 1 January 1780, while another "muster and pay roll" presents him as serving in the same unit from 11 July 1779 to 1 December 1779.<sup>184</sup> During the time in question, the regiment Everson served in was stationed in Rhode Island, likely to keep an eye on the British garrison stationed in Newport.<sup>185</sup> Everson possibly joined to help protect Massachusetts from any British activity from Newport.

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<sup>181</sup> *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 1: 752.

<sup>182</sup> Samuel Everson, Pension Number S. 30,406, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca.1800 – ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 – ca. 1900 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Microfilm roll 0945); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773-2007, Record Group 15; National Archives Building, Washington D.C., page 4, accessed July 16, 2022, at fold 3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/17230917>

<sup>183</sup> "Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775-1783," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:2:Q5BV-Z4VC> : 19 February 2021), Entry for Samuel Everson, 8 Jun 1779; citing Military Service, Kingston, Plymouth, Massachusetts, United States, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston; FHL microfilm.

<sup>184</sup> "Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775-1783," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSQZ-CQ69-R?cc=2548057&wc=QZZQ-MQC%3A1589088593> : 20 September 2019), Erving, William - Fairbank, Jotham > image 1694 of 2559; Massachusetts State Archives, Boston; "Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775-1783," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:2:Q51Q-6WGL> : 19 February 2021), Entry for Samuel Everson, 11 Jul 1779; citing Military Service, Massachusetts, United States, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston; FHL microfilm.

<sup>185</sup> *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 16: 238.

While Everson's motivations cannot be teased out, more information exists on Ebenezer Fox. Fox previously served as a substitute for the barber he was apprenticed to, serving in a unit stationed in Albany, New York, for approximately six weeks. Fox began his ground service in September 1779, under the command of Captain William Bird.<sup>186</sup> This was just a month after General "Mad Anthony" Wayne's successful assault on British-controlled Stony Point, and before Benedict Arnold's defection to the British in 1780. According to Fox, he enlisted because he was bored with his current job, and that "the spirit of adventure had been suppressed, not destroyed within me."<sup>187</sup>

While all of the previously mentioned men served on land before their State Navy service, this was not always true for their comrades. The sole officer among the State Navy sailors examined in this paper, George Little spent his entire Revolutionary War service at sea, not land. Little first served on the Massachusetts privateer *Active*, commanded by John Foster Williams, but ended up in captivity when *Active* was forced to surrender to the British warship *Mermaid*.<sup>188</sup> Although an officer and not an enlisted man, Little exemplifies how State Navy sailors transitioned between one form of military service to another.

While John Rutherford never served on a State Navy ship, his military service nevertheless provides a point of comparison. Like Cornelius Bassett, Samuel Everson, Ebenezer Fox, and Benjamin Warner, Rutherford served in the land forces of the United States before his naval service. Born in the Massachusetts town of Newburyport in 1762, Rutherford apparently entered the military of the United States when he was thirteen or fourteen years old. Age was no

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<sup>186</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox, in the Revolutionary War*, 49.

<sup>187</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox, in the Revolutionary War*, 48-49.

<sup>188</sup> McManemin, *Captains of the State Navies*, 133; "Journal of H.M.S. Mermaid, Captain James Hawker," *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, 10: 528.

barrier, as Richard Wiggin's *Embattled Farmers*, which studies Revolutionary War servicemen from Lincoln, Massachusetts, indicates that men as young as eleven joined the military.<sup>189</sup> In any case, Rutherford was less than five years younger than Ebenezer Fox, who at the age of sixteen or so served as a substitute. Rutherford served in Hutchinson's Regiment for ten months and fifteen days.<sup>190</sup> Israel Hutchinson was in command of what would become the 27<sup>th</sup> Continental Regiment, and a detachment of the 27<sup>th</sup> Continental Regiment (Massachusetts militia) were apparently present at the battle of Fort Washington. The pension record of one of the detachment's officers, Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Holden, confirms his capture at Fort Washington, as does an entry in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*.<sup>191</sup> Likewise, a John Rutherford [sic.] is noted in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors* as having been taken prisoner at Fort Washington.<sup>192</sup>

Unfortunately for Rutherford, he apparently was a part of this detachment – and as a result, joined his compatriots in captivity. Rutherford became a captive on 16 November 1776, one of the darkest days of the Patriot cause. On this day, British and Hessian soldiers had overcome stubborn Patriot resistance in not only capturing Fort Washington, but also forcing the

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<sup>189</sup> Wiggin, *Embattled Famers*, 508.

<sup>190</sup> John Rutherford, Pension Number W. 26422, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca.1800 – ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 – ca. 1900 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Microfilm roll 2105); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773-2007, Record Group 15; National Archives Building, Washington D.C., page 3, accessed July 16, 2022, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/15174516>

<sup>191</sup> Benjamin Holden, Pension Number R. 5121, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca.1800 – ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 – ca. 1900 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Microfilm roll 1305); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773-2007, Record Group 15; National Archives Building, Washington D.C., page 3, accessed June 14, 2022, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/23082336>; *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 8: 97-98.

<sup>192</sup> *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 13: 712.

surrender of almost three thousand Patriot soldiers. Although Rutherford was one of the thousands shuffling off into captivity, he proved luckier than many of his fellow Fort Washington prisoners. Rutherford spent only seven weeks in captivity before being exchanged, rather than suffering the prolonged horrors of an extended captivity that cost the lives of many of his comrades.<sup>193</sup> Rutherford's spell as a prisoner-of-war did not dissuade him from continuing his military service – and in fact could have motivated him to take up arms again, given the poor treatment of American prisoners. Rutherford would later serve on the privateer *Glasgow* under the command of a Captain Parsons, which apparently captured the British ship *Oxford* during a three-month cruise starting in September 1777.<sup>194</sup> Unfortunately, *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* does not mention either of these ships, and Allen's *Massachusetts Privateers* does not include an entry for any vessel named *Glasgow*.

Like Rutherford, Isaac Drew never served on a Massachusetts State Navy ship during wartime cruise. According to Drew, his military career began in 1775, when he served in a land unit under a Captain Pearley.<sup>195</sup> His next service was on the schooner *Harrison* under a Captain Coit, which appears to have been with “Washington's fleet.” Drew served as a carpenter and was paid a total of ten dollars per month, as well as two shares of prize money. Drew recalled that during his service on this ship (which lasted seven months), *Harrison* engaged in combat with a

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<sup>193</sup> Brian Patrick O'Malley, “1776: The Horror Show,” *Journal of the American Revolution*, 29 January 2019, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2019/01/1776-the-horror-show/>; John Rutherford, Pension Number W. 26422, page 14. <https://www.fold3.com/image/15174573>

<sup>194</sup> John Rutherford, Pension Number W. 26422, Page 14, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/15174573>

<sup>195</sup> Isaac Drew, Pension Number W. 14640, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca.1800 – ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 – ca. 1900 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Microfilm roll 0853); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773-2007, Record Group 15. National Archives Building, Washington D.C., pages 7, 82, accessed July 16, 2022, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/16969384>, <https://www.fold3.com/image/16969528>

British brig, which resulted in heavy damage inflicted to *Harrison*. Initially, Drew spent most of his time under Coit's command, and then under Coit's replacement, a man named Dyer.

While Drew did not go on cruise on a Massachusetts State Navy vessel, he was nevertheless employed after his service on the *Harrison*, spending two months as a carpenter in constructing the State Navy ship *Independence*.<sup>196</sup> The State Navy needed vessels expressly designed for naval warfare, not just civilian ships "pressed" into service. As Louis Arthur Norton notes in *Captains Contentious*, most Patriot state navy vessels "were converted merchant vessels."<sup>197</sup> As mentioned above, provincial naval forces were often organized at the outbreak of hostilities, and taking the time to construct actual warships conflicted with the need to put ships – any ship – into military service. While refitting existing vessels was not as costly, these vessels were not as well suited for engaging in military combat compared to new vessels specifically designed for that purpose.

While he helped build *Independence*, Drew did not serve on her when she went to sea. Instead, he hired a substitute named Samuel Delano, who would serve on *Independence*'s first cruise in his place. Drew probably had some money, because not everyone could afford to pay someone to serve for him. The entry on Delano in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors* indicates that, after his initial term of service, he served again as a carpenter on *Independence* for six months and five days.<sup>198</sup> But this was not the end of Drew's military service. On the same day he hired Delano as his substitute, he enlisted for six months in a company commanded by James Harlow, in a regiment commanded by Colonel Ezra Wood, which was mobilized for eight

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<sup>196</sup> Isaac Drew, Pension Number W. 14640, pages 17-18, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/16969403>  
<https://www.fold3.com/image/16969405>

<sup>197</sup> Norton, *Captains Contentious*, 13.

<sup>198</sup> *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 4: 648.

months to “guard the North river.”<sup>199</sup> Drew recalled serving from 18 July 1776 to January 1777.<sup>200</sup> However, records indicate he enlisted in said unit on 22 June 1778, serving a total of seven months and twenty two days.<sup>201</sup> Soon after his service constructing *Independence*, Drew became attached to Brewer’s Regiment (which would be dispatched to New York), with his immediate commanding officer being a Captain Ayers.<sup>202</sup> Drew shifted service from land to “Washington’s Fleet” to constructing ships to the Massachusetts State Navy to land service again. While not explicitly mentioned, Drew possibly chose to hire Delano to sail on *Independence* in his place because he did not see a potential economic benefit in doing so. Another rationale for Drew’s decision to change military services could have been a desire to serve in New York, as the British would soon attack there.

Drew appears to have spent 1777 engaging in nonmilitary activities, but in 1778, Drew stated that he “was ordered” by the Massachusetts Board of War to assume command of a galley in Boston. Drew recalled that Joshua Winslow was a Lieutenant on board, as well as a “lieutenant of marines,” and he also recalled the names of several privates on board.<sup>203</sup> Drew was commander of this vessel and another – the *Defiance* – at the same time for approximately ten months. Drew had long lost the “sailing orders,” but he possessed a certificate referring to his service in command.<sup>204</sup> The fact that Drew was entrusted command of these ships implies that the Massachusetts Board of War had trust in him as a ship captain. Evidence on the existence of

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<sup>199</sup> *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 7: 292.

<sup>200</sup> Isaac Drew, Pension Number W. 14640, page 80, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/16969525>

<sup>201</sup> Isaac Drew, Pension Number W. 14640, page 73, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/16969513>

<sup>202</sup> Isaac Drew, Pension Number W. 14640, page 8, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/16969386>

<sup>203</sup> Isaac Drew, Pension Number W. 14640, page 8, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/16969386>

<sup>204</sup> Isaac Drew, Pension Number W. 14640, page 8, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/16969386>

these two ships is scant, although a galley named *Lady Washington* was in the service of the Continental Navy.

These examples reveal that State Navy sailors often did not begin their careers in the Massachusetts State Navy, nor did they remain in the State Navy for their entire military service. Instead, these men often transitioned to the State Navy from organized military institutions such as the militia and Continental Army, and from the State Navy to the less-disciplined privateers. This inter-service mobility shows the Patriots struggled in competing for manpower, as well as the need to recruit those who normally would be considered unreliable, such as prisoners of war. Nevertheless, inter-service mobility also allowed Patriot servicemen to choose what branch of military service would best suit their needs, whether providing for their family or taking arms to defend their own community.

## Chapter 5 - Serving in the State Navy

Those who chose to serve in the Massachusetts State Navy participated in voyages transporting valuable cargos, capturing British ships, and occasionally engaging in ship-to-ship combat. State Navy sailors not only had to reckon with the potential dangers of military combat, they also had to face the chances of suffering from disease, or if captured by the British, enduring the agony of captivity. Even with military success and the capture of an enemy ship, they could not expect to be paid on time. For some men, their military careers concluded upon their departure from State Navy service, while others continued fighting for the Patriots. State Navy sailors sometimes experienced events that revealed the inconsistency in waging a war for independence while still allowing the enslavement of human beings. State Navy commanders also had to expect attrition of their crews through desertion or movement to another arm of the Patriot military machine.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, inter-service mobility proved a double-edged sword. While this meant ordinary sailors could enlist for however long they wanted in the Massachusetts State Navy, State Navy officers found it harder to find the necessary recruits. Therefore, State Navy sailors could not expect to immediately set out on a cruise, but often had to wait for the necessary number of men to crew their ship to be found. Along with potential boredom, service in the Massachusetts State Navy did not mean a steady paycheck. On 11 September 1777 two officers of the Massachusetts State Navy schooner *Diligent* petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for financial aid. Not only had their previous voyages witnessed no captures of enemy vessels, but they had not received any pay.<sup>205</sup> The Massachusetts government

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<sup>205</sup> “Petition of Ethan Compstock and Joshua Wing to the Massachusetts General Court, 11 September 1776,” *NDAR*, 6: 777-78.

simply could not always pay its navy's sailors on time. This problem of payment can also be seen in the directive that State Navy crewmen must provide their own firearms, cutlasses, and blankets upon enlistment, showing Massachusetts's need to husband its financial and military supplies.<sup>206</sup>

The question of pay relates to how the Patriots struggled to keep enough servicemen in the ranks. After all, commanders needed incentives to retain experienced servicemen, and delays in paying their men would be a significant hindrance to that objective. Throughout the Revolutionary War, military commanders from George Washington all the way to individual regiment and ship commanders struggled with retaining men in military service for the Patriot cause. On the one hand, limited terms of military service meant constant turnover: even if quite a few veterans returned, the constant influx of new personnel meant that fresh recruits needed to adjust to military service. On the other hand, undetermined terms were ideologically anathema, as they were too close to the British mode of military service. Two separate documents, both dated 29 November 1780, present cases with different durations of service. The first has the enlistee enlisting for the duration of the conflict, while the second lists a term of three years. Other than these different terms of service, the language of these is the same in emphasizing the duty of the enlistee to follow the orders of their officers. Both documents provide for the possibility of an "earlier discharge."<sup>207</sup> Rather than one set duration of time to serve, this shows that a variety of options existed for Patriot servicemen. In other words, they had some freedom in

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<sup>206</sup> Paullin, *The Navy of the American Revolution*, 326.

<sup>207</sup> "Resolve Prescribing a Form of Inlistment for the Men Belonging to this Commonwealth, Who Shall Inlist into the Service of the United States, to Continue in the Service Until the End of the Present War with *Britain*, 29 November 1780," *Acts and Laws*, Vol. 1780-81, 180-81.

deciding how long they could serve for. At the same time, Patriot military organizations proved adaptable to changing circumstances.

Enlisting for Massachusetts State Navy service did not mean that one would automatically serve on a State Navy vessel. On 19 June 1776, a report was issued by a committee whose purpose was to evaluate the defenses of the Massachusetts coast from Boston to Newburyport. The committee suggested that the “Sea Coast companies be filled up from men who had enlisted in the Continental or State Navy.”<sup>208</sup> This connects with the abovementioned requirement that members of these same units be drawn to serve in the Continental or State Navies, and nowhere else.

Even when men could be found for the State Navy, there was no guarantee these men would provide productive service. Regrettably, not all officers of the Massachusetts State Navy had the competence of George Little and John Foster Williams. For example, Jeremiah O’Brien, at the outset of the Revolutionary War a resident of Machias, Maine, led his neighbors (and five brothers) to victory in the first naval engagement of the Revolutionary War in capturing the British warship *Margaretta*.<sup>209</sup> O’Brien would soon after become the commander of the State Navy warship *Machias Liberty*, but his tenure would be dogged by controversy. O’Brien was accused of drawing wages for men not serving as crewmen, and not paying the men in question.<sup>210</sup> O’Brien was also reproached for staying in port instead of fulfilling his duties and “taking the fight to the enemy.”<sup>211</sup> In a letter to John Adams, Isaac Smith characterized O’Brien

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<sup>208</sup> “Report of the Committee Appointed to Examine the Coast from Boston to Newburyport,” *NDAR*, 5: 615-17.

<sup>209</sup> “Deposition of Thomas Flinn, Master of the *Falmouth Packet*, 10 July 1775,” *NDAR*, 1: 848-49.

<sup>210</sup> “Benjamin Foster, Chairman of the Machias Committee, to the Massachusetts General Court, 30 August 1776,” *NDAR*, 6: 357.

<sup>211</sup> “Petition of Boston Committee to the Massachusetts General Court, 13 July 1776,” *NDAR*, 5: 1055.

as “lying in harbor, the chief of his time and doing no service.”<sup>212</sup> O’Brien did have supporters, as some Machias residents presented a position to the Massachusetts General Court attesting “that unjustifiable Methods had been taken to injure the Character of Captain Jeremiah Obrien.”<sup>213</sup> Nevertheless, this was not enough to prevent him from losing his command. On 15 October 1776, the Massachusetts General Court authorized the discharge from service of the *Machias Liberty* and its crew.<sup>214</sup> There were those who welcomed O’Brien’s departure from State Navy service. Continental Navy prize agent John Bradford wrote to John Hancock that the Massachusetts Council was “glad to be rid of him [O’Brien].”<sup>215</sup> Nevertheless, O’Brien found his way back to military service when he assumed command of the privateer *Resolution*.

Regardless of O’Brien’s lackluster performance as a State Navy officer, plenty of State Navy officers and crewmen provided good service. State Navy sailors participated in both combat and trade voyages, and a significant number served at the Penobscot, including three of the sailors examined in this paper – George Little, John Rutherford, and Benjamin Warner. George Little served in the Penobscot expedition as First Lieutenant of the State Navy ship *Hazard*, having been promoted to the rank of First Lieutenant on 21 April 1778.<sup>216</sup> Benjamin Warner, on the other hand, served as a gunner’s mate on the privateer *Hector* commanded by

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<sup>212</sup> “To John Adams from Isaac Smith Sr., 6 August 1776,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-04-02-0195>. [Original source: *The Adams Papers*, Papers of John Adams, vol. 4, *February–August 1776*, ed. Robert J. Taylor. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 436–437.]

<sup>213</sup> “Acts and Resolves of the Massachusetts General Court, 10 October 1776,” *NDAR*, 6: 1195.

<sup>214</sup> “Acts and Resolves of the Massachusetts General Court, 15 October 1776,” *NDAR*, 6: 1270.

<sup>215</sup> “John Bradford to John Hancock, 6 March 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 36.

<sup>216</sup> McManemin, *Captains of the State Navies*, 133, 186.

John Carnes.<sup>217</sup> *Hector* carried one hundred and twenty men and twenty cannons. Although commissioned as a privateer, *Hector* was pressed into Massachusetts service for the Penobscot Expedition. In contrast to a previous cruise on the Massachusetts State Navy warship *Tyrannicide* where acted as master-of-arms, it appears Warner served in a more subordinate position on *Hector*, for gunner's mates operated under the direction of the chief gunner in managing a ship's cannons. His status as a gunner's mate still placed Warner above the status of an ordinary seaman or landsman. Warner possibly chose to enlist on *Hector* because privateers often offered higher wages compared to the Continental Navy and State Navy.<sup>218</sup> Warner likely decided that the promise of more wealth outweighed his subordinate rank.

Although not a State Navy sailor, John Rutherford also served at Penobscot on the privateer *Sky Rocket*. While *Sky Rocket* and her fellow privateers were ostensibly free agents, the Massachusetts Council "directed the Board of War to 'engage as many armed Vessels of private Property as they judge proper and suitable to join with the Continental and State Ships or Vessels destined for Penobscot,'" basically pressing into service these privateers for the "public good"<sup>219</sup> Massachusetts, in other words, had "requisitioned" these vessels for the Penobscot Expedition. This can be compared to the impressment of sailors, but instead of sailors, ships were drafted into state service. However, sponsors of privateers were not always averse to serving for the "public good," as on 23 June the financial backers of *Sky Rocket* and three other privateers

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<sup>217</sup> Benjamin Warner, Pension Number S. 23,057, page 4, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/20330600>; Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution*, 173; John A. McManemin, Ph.D., *Captains of the Privateers during the Revolutionary War* (Spring Lake, NJ: Ho-Ho-Kus Publishing Company, July 1985): 139.

<sup>218</sup> Hulbert, *The Untold War at Sea*, 32.

<sup>219</sup> "Resolve Directing the Board of War to Engage Privateers and Equip State Vessels to Join with the Continental Navy in Penobscot Expedition, the Privateersmen to Receive Continental Pay and Loss or Damage of the Vessels to be Made Good, 24 June," *Acts and Resolves*, Vol. XXI, 1779-1780: 93.

placed their ships at the disposal of the Massachusetts General Court for the Penobscot Expedition.<sup>220</sup>

Before his service in the Penobscot Expedition, Rutherford had served on several other privateers, the first being the schooner *Hornet*. In this instance, Gardner Weld Allen's Massachusetts *Privateers of the Revolution* mentions the ship in question, as well as its commander, William Springer.<sup>221</sup> According to Rutherford's pension records, *Hornet's* crew consisted of approximately forty men, and the voyage "occurred sometime in 1778," cruising off "Halifax and the Eastern Shore."<sup>222</sup> As Halifax was a British controlled port, it makes sense that a privateer would attempt to capture prizes in this area, although a careful lookout had to be kept at the same time for patrolling British warships. During this cruise, *Hornet* succeeded in capturing the British ship *Success*, which was transporting provisions for the British Army.<sup>223</sup> Rutherford subsequently served on another privateer, the schooner *Shark*. This ship also appears in *Privateers of the Revolution*, along with its captain, William Preston.<sup>224</sup> Lasting two months, Rutherford's cruise on *Shark* proved successful, since two British ships carrying fish were captured by *Shark* according to Rutherford.<sup>225</sup>

According to his pension records, after his cruises on *Hornet* and *Shark* Rutherford successively served on the privateers *Gates* and *Monmouth*, and then on the brig *Adventure*.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Buker, *The Penobscot Expedition*, 17.

<sup>221</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution*, 182.

<sup>222</sup> John Rutherford, Pension Number W. 26422, page 5, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/15174526>

<sup>223</sup> John Rutherford, Pension Number W. 26422, page 5, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/15174526>

<sup>224</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution*, 279.

<sup>225</sup> John Rutherford, Pension Number W. 26422, page 5, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/15174526>

<sup>226</sup> John Rutherford, Pension Number W. 26422, pages 14-15, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/15174573>, <https://www.fold3.com/image/15174578>

Rutherford's pension records show that he served on board the "privately armed brig *Gates* commanded by a Captain Newman," and cruised off Halifax sometime in 1779, capturing a British vessel that carried Madeira wine, as well as an "armed British schooner."<sup>227</sup> Rutherford's account of serving on *Gates* under the command of a Captain Newman is corroborated by the existence of a brigantine named *Gates*, commanded by Joseph Newman, in 1780.<sup>228</sup> Rutherford next shipped out on the privateer *Monmouth*, commanded by a Paul Newman. Although Rutherford did not remember exactly when the cruise occurred, he did recall that *Monmouth's* complement consisted around thirty men, and that a British ship was captured.<sup>229</sup>

After escaping the aftermath of the Penobscot Expedition, Rutherford continued his military career at sea, serving successively on the privateer *Drake*, ship *Mercury*, brig *Congress*, and ship *General Stark*.<sup>230</sup> Gardner Weld Allen's *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution* shows that a brigantine named *Drake* was in operation in 1780, captained by Nathaniel Newman of Newburyport, as was a ship named *Mercury* under the command of a Captain Johnston (or Johnson).<sup>231</sup> In contrast, multiple entries for privateer vessels named *General Stark* exist.<sup>232</sup> Rutherford would ultimately be captured again by the British and imprisoned on British-controlled Antigua when the United States and Britain agreed to peace. The ship he was on when captured may have been the brig *Congress*, captained by Daniel Ropes, since this vessel was reported by the *Boston Gazette* as having been captured by the British and taken into Saint

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<sup>227</sup> John Rutherford, Pension Number W. 26422, page 5, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/15174526>

<sup>228</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution*, 142.

<sup>229</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution*, 225; John Rutherford, Pension Number W. 26422, page 5, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/15174526>

<sup>230</sup> John Rutherford, Pension Number W. 26422, page 15, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/15174578>

<sup>231</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution*, 120, 219.

<sup>232</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution*, 219-220, 152-154.

John's.<sup>233</sup> It is unclear to what extent Rutherford suffered in captivity. While he was not sent off to New York to be imprisoned in hulks such as the *Jersey*, he was not imprisoned in Great Britain, where some restraint in treating Patriot prisoners of war occurred.<sup>234</sup> Regardless, Rutherford's continued service on privateers provides several possible rationales for his repeated enlistments, such as an attraction to a more relaxed form of discipline or the possibility of high profits.

Although the Penobscot Expedition had a significant impact on the State Navy, the men who served in the Massachusetts State Navy generally did not participate in operations designed to conquer territory, but instead in trading missions and commerce warfare. For example, Martin Lloyd served approximately six months on the State Navy vessel *Tyrannicide*, then approximately another six months on the Continental Navy frigate *Providence* (at the time under the command of Patriot war hero Abraham Whipple).<sup>235</sup> Of interest is that both cruises took place in the West Indies. In his pension record, Lloyd stated he enlisted to serve on *Tyrannicide* on 22 February 1779.<sup>236</sup> Another document not only confirmed his enlistment but also stated that he left *Tyrannicide* on 30 April 1779, serving for just two months. This would have been five days after *Tyrannicide* returned to port on 25 April.<sup>237</sup> Although this does not fit in with Lloyd's application of six months service on *Tyrannicide*, Lloyd likely was present on *Tyrannicide* when

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<sup>233</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution*, 104.

<sup>234</sup> Dolin, *Rebels at Sea*, 183; Hoock, *Scars of Independence*, 229-230.

<sup>235</sup> Martin Lloyd, Pension Number S. 5697, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca. 1800 – ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 – ca. 1900 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Microfilm roll 1574); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773-2007, Record Group 15; National Archives Building, Washington D.C., page 4, at fold3, accessed May 13, 2021. <https://www.fold3.com/image/25096221>

<sup>236</sup> Martin Lloyd, Pension Number S. 5697, page 10, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/25096233>

<sup>237</sup> Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution*, Vol. 2: 387.

that vessel captured the British privateer *Revenge* after a hard-fought battle.<sup>238</sup> During Lloyd's enlistment, *Tyrannicide* sailed on 9 March 1779, and although *Tyrannicide* returned on 25 April, just over a month later, it had captured two prizes.

At the time of his first enlistment, Lloyd resided in Boston.<sup>239</sup> Lloyd was not a native-born son of Massachusetts, but was born in England in 1761 and came to America in 1775, the year hostilities commenced.<sup>240</sup> However, his pension record also states that he recalled enlisting on *Tyrannicide* in 1777, not 1779.<sup>241</sup> This does not mean that Lloyd's recollections should be disregarded as unreliable. Rather, Lloyd applied for his pension decades after the events in question, and while he may have forgotten details such as his time of service, he still would have been able to remember the general course of events. During Lloyd's reported service on *Providence*, ten or eleven British ships were captured from a convoy, and eight of the prizes successfully arrived at Patriot-controlled ports.<sup>242</sup> Aside from his assertion that he served approximately two years on privateers, Lloyd's service on *Tyrannicide* and *Providence* constituted his entire Revolutionary War military service.<sup>243</sup> Other forms of military service are not listed in his pension record. Although Martin Lloyd did serve out his time in Patriot service, his record is remarkably brief compared to some of his fellow servicemen, with Benjamin Warner serving as one contrasting example.

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<sup>238</sup> Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution* Vol. 2: 386-88; McManemin, *Captains of the State Navies*, 112-13.

<sup>239</sup> Martin Lloyd, Pension Number S. 5697, page 4, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/25096221>

<sup>240</sup> Martin Lloyd, Pension Number S. 5697, page 6, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/25096225>

<sup>241</sup> Martin Lloyd, Pension Number S. 5697, page 5, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/25096223>

<sup>242</sup> Paullin, *The Navy of the American Revolution*, 172; Gardner Weld Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution*, Vol. 2, 382-85.

<sup>243</sup> Martin Lloyd, Pension Number S. 5697, page 5, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/25096223>

In contrast to Lloyd, whose Patriot military service was limited to sea in the Continental Navy, Massachusetts State Navy, and privateers, Benjamin Warner provided substantial military service for the Patriot cause before he set foot on a State Navy warship. After his service at Salem, Warner undertook a cruise on the Massachusetts State Navy ship *Tyrannicide*, where he served as a “Master of Arms.” The duties of a “master of arms” consisted of policing the ship and ensuring discipline, showing that Warner was entrusted with substantial responsibility.<sup>244</sup> According to his pension record, Warner sailed off on *Tyrannicide* around 24 February 1777, and he returned on 18 September 1777, after “a very successful cruise,” as noted in his pension record.<sup>245</sup> In contrast, a pay roll indicates he enlisted on *Tyrannicide* on the same date in February, but was discharged on 31 August 1777.<sup>246</sup>

Warner’s voyage on *Tyrannicide* corresponds to documents recounting *Tyrannicide*’s activities. On 14 March 1777, the Massachusetts Board of War ordered Jonathan Haraden, recently appointed Captain of *Tyrannicide*, to sail to Europe and sink British shipping, and to transport from France military goods, sharing the task with the fellow State Navy ship *Massachusetts*, which was given the same orders.<sup>247</sup> On 2 April, *Massachusetts* captured the merchant ship *Chaulkley*, carrying a cargo of wood.<sup>248</sup> On 8 April, the British *Lonsdale* was captured by *Tyrannicide*. *Lonsdale* reached the friendly port of Piscataway under the command

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<sup>244</sup> Jack Coggins, *Ships and Seamen of the American Revolution – vessels, crews, weapons, gear, naval tactics, and actions of the War for Independence* (N.P.: Promontory Press, 1969), 176.

<sup>245</sup> Benjamin Warner, Pension Number S. 23,057, page 4, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/20330600>

<sup>246</sup> "Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775-1783," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:2:QG7N-JPNS> : 17 March 2018), Entry for Benjamin Warner, 31 Aug 1777; citing Military Service, Massachusetts Bay, British Colonial America, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston; FHL microfilm 2,048,173.

<sup>247</sup> “Massachusetts Board of War to Captain Jonathan Haraden,” *NDAR*, 8: 105.

<sup>248</sup> “Captain Jonathan Haraden to the Massachusetts Board of War, 2 April 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 248-49.

of prize master Littlefield Silsby on 13 May.<sup>249</sup> On April 17 and April 23 successively, the brigantines *Eagle* and *Favourite* were captured.<sup>250</sup> On board the *Favourite* were sixty-three Hessian soldiers – who promptly became Patriot prisoners, diminishing the supply of soldiers for the British.<sup>251</sup> On 27 April, *Tyrannicide* captured the British snow *Sally*, which was transporting a cargo of blankets (*Sally* arrived safely in Boston on 9 June), while on 30 April, the brig *Trepassy* was captured.<sup>252</sup> On May 17, *Massachusetts* and *Tyrannicide* were separated from one another, and they would not join up again.<sup>253</sup>

Subsequently, *Tyrannicide* had a close call when it was almost captured by a British warship, the crew being forced to the drastic measure of lightening the ship by throwing off all the cannons.<sup>254</sup> On 29 August, *Tyrannicide* arrived in Boston via Bordeaux, and most of its crew were discharged.<sup>255</sup> From the available information, it is unclear whether Warner was among those men initially discharged or was one of those retained to bring *Tyrannicide* into port. After his service on *Tyrannicide*, Warner served as a private in a company of horsemen commanded by Robert Perkins, which was part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Essex County Regiment, that in turn served in the Saratoga Campaign.<sup>256</sup> Given that New England was directly threatened by Burgoyne’s attempt

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<sup>249</sup> “Captain Jonathan Haraden to the Massachusetts Board of War, 8 April 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 750; “Littlefield Silsby to the Massachusetts Board of War, 13 May 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 959.

<sup>250</sup> “Captain John Fisk to Samuel Phillips Savage, 23 April 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 787-88.

<sup>251</sup> “Journal of the Massachusetts Navy Brig *Massachusetts*, Captain John Fisk, 22 April 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 787; “Captain John Fisk to Samuel Phillips Savage,” *NDAR*, 8: 787-88.

<sup>252</sup> “Captain Jonathan Haraden to the Massachusetts Board of War, 27 April 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 796; *Boston Gazette*, Monday, June 9, 1777,” *NDAR*, 9: 77; “Captain Jonathan Haraden to the Massachusetts Board of War, 1 May 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 806.

<sup>253</sup> “Captain John Fisk to Samuel Phillips Savage, 21 May 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 857.

<sup>254</sup> “Thomas Morris to Samuel Phillips Savage, 17 June 1777,” *NDAR*, 9: 405.

<sup>255</sup> “Minutes of the Massachusetts Board of War, 29 August 1777,” *NDAR*, 9: 846.

<sup>256</sup> *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 16, 579.

to split off New England from the remaining Thirteen Colonies, many New England militiamen flocked to New York to repel Burgoyne, with Warner one of their number. It remains unclear whether Warner fought in combat at Saratoga, but his pension records clearly indicate he guarded Hessian prisoners who surrendered with General Burgoyne.<sup>257</sup> Warner not only found himself at the scene of momentous events such as Saratoga, but also experienced substantial inter-service mobility.

Much like Benjamin Warner, Cornelius Bassett enlisted in the Massachusetts State Navy after his military service on land, joining the crew of Massachusetts State Navy ship *Republic* in 1776. For three months and eleven days he served on *Republic*, specifically from 7 August 1776 to 18 November 1776.<sup>258</sup> Under the command of John Foster Williams, *Republic* set off on a cruise on 5 October, but returned on 3 November. Nevertheless, in just under a month *Republic* had taken two ships, one of which, the *Julius Caesar*, allegedly transporting a cargo valued at 11,000 sterling, while the other, unnamed, vessel carried fish.<sup>259</sup> Of note is that on *Republic*'s return, Captain Williams was directed by the Massachusetts Council to release any of *Julius Caesar*'s crewmen who wished to join "any armed Vessel in this or any of the united States..." with those men remaining on board *Republic* presumably wanting exchange.<sup>260</sup> The day after

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<sup>257</sup> Benjamin Warner, Pension Number S. 23,057, page 4, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/20330600>

<sup>258</sup> Cornelius Bassett, Pension Number S.30,255, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca.1800 – ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 – ca. 1900 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Microfilm roll 0169); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773-2007, Record Group 15; National Archives Building, Washington D.C., pages 3, 22, accessed July 16, 2022, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/11694682>, <https://www.fold3.com/image/11694742>

<sup>259</sup> McManemin, *Captains of the State Navies*, 183-84; "Boston Gazette, Monday, November 4, 1776," NDAR, 7: 34-35; "Independent Chronicle, Thursday, November 7, 1776," NDAR, 7: 70-72.

<sup>260</sup> "Order of Massachusetts Council to John Foster Williams, 5 November 1776," NDAR, 7: 46.

Bassett's discharge, *Republic's* crew sold their share in *Julius Caesar* for the sum of 10,000 pounds (Bassett presumably shared in this windfall).<sup>261</sup>

February 1777 saw Bassett enlist on the Continental Navy brig *Cabot*, commanded by Captain Joseph Olney. Before Bassett's enlistment, Olney was instructed by Commodore Esek Hopkins on 15 January to "proceed directly on a Cruize against the Enemy of these States, and Chiefly for Transports."<sup>262</sup> *Cabot's* voyage was postponed after the ship apparently suffered damage during a snowstorm, but it was able to depart on 23 March 1777 in company with the Massachusetts State Navy ships *Massachusetts* and *Tyrannicide*.<sup>263</sup> At the time of the voyage, the crew of *Cabot* numbered approximately 182 men.<sup>264</sup>

However, Bassett's cruise on *Cabot* proved less successful than his voyage on *Republic*, for *Cabot* was forced aground by British warships on 24 March 1777, just a day after leaving port. While all but one of *Cabot's* crew were able to escape unharmed, the ship itself was later pressed into British service.<sup>265</sup> Bassett apparently escaped capture as *Cabot's* crew returned to Boston by 17 April 1777, accompanied, according to a Boston newspaper, by some Royal Navy deserters. Although the ship ran aground off the coast of British-controlled Nova Scotia, *Cabot's* journal indicated that the civilian population treated *Cabot's* crew fairly.<sup>266</sup> In contrast, the

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<sup>261</sup> "Sale of Captors' Shares in the Prize Ship *Julius Caesar* to the State of Massachusetts, 19 November 1776," *NDAR*, 7: 207-08.

<sup>262</sup> "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Captain Joseph Olney, 15 January 1777," *NDAR*, 7: 958.

<sup>263</sup> "Commodore Esek Hopkins to Robert Morris, 28 February 1777," *NDAR*, 7: 1318-19; "Journal Kept by Officers of the Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*, Captain Joseph Olney, 23 March 1777," *NDAR*, 8: 183.

<sup>264</sup> "Journal of H.M.S. *Milford*, Captain Andrew Barkley, 25 March 1777," *NDAR*, 8: 196.

<sup>265</sup> "Journal Kept by Officers of the Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*, Captain Joseph Olney," *NDAR*, 8: 195-96; "*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, April 17, 1777," *NDAR*, 8: 361; Cornelius Bassett, Pension Number S.30,255, pages 27-28, <https://www.fold3.com/image/11694759>, <https://www.fold3.com/image/11694762>

<sup>266</sup> "Journal Kept by Officers of the Continental Navy Brig *Cabot*, 27 March 1777," *NDAR*, 8: 209.

Halifax newspaper *Independent Chronicle* asserted that *Cabot's* crew “plundered the adjacent houses for provisions.”<sup>267</sup> By April, it appears that word had reached Massachusetts of the fate of *Cabot* and her crew.<sup>268</sup> After his service on *Cabot*, Bassett recalled he concluded his military service “as a private for two months in Captain Joseph Palmer’s company.”<sup>269</sup>

Cornelius Bassett and Benjamin Warner were not the only State Navy sailors examined in this paper who participated on this particular cruise. John Nutting’s career in the Massachusetts State Navy began when he enlisted to serve on the brig *Massachusetts*, commanded by John Fisk.<sup>270</sup> In applying for a pension, Nutting’s widow said that his cruise on *Massachusetts* commenced on 24 March 1777, and only returned after about twelve months. Nutting likely joined the crew of *Massachusetts* at an earlier date, because a pay abstract dated 17 February 1777 for “one month’s advance wages” exists.<sup>271</sup> His widow recalled that *Massachusetts* had sailed out with the State Navy ship *Tyrannicide*, “making several captures.”<sup>272</sup> *Tyrannicide’s* orders for the same cruise indicate that upon arrival in France,

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<sup>267</sup> “*Independent Chronicle*, Thursday, June 19, 1777 [22 April 1777],” *NDAR*, 8: 396.

<sup>268</sup> “Interleaved Almanacs of William Wetmore, Salem, 6 April 1776,” *NDAR*, 8: 280-81.

<sup>269</sup> Cornelius Bassett, Pension Number S.30,255, page 14, 22, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/11694715>, <https://www.fold3.com/image/11694742>

<sup>270</sup> John Nutting, Pension Number W. 26,587, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca.1800 – ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 – ca. 1900, (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Microfilm roll 1834); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773-2007, Record Group 15. National Archives Building, Washington D.C., page 3, accessed July 16, 2022, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/25140793>

<sup>271</sup> “Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775-1783,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:2:QR32-9RKC> : 19 February 2021), Entry for John Nutting, 17 Feb 1777; citing Military Service, Massachusetts, United States, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston; FHL microfilm.

<sup>272</sup> John Nutting, Pension Number W. 26,587, page 3, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/25140793>

*Tyrannicide* was supposed to load on board “as many Arms & other warlike stores.”<sup>273</sup> Both *Massachusetts* and *Tyrannicide* were instructed not to try to take any prizes or engage in combat, but to sail home with their valuable cargos.<sup>274</sup> None other than Casimir Pulaski, who helped save the Continental Army at Brandywine and died a hero’s death at the Siege of Savannah, took passage on *Massachusetts* during Nutting’s service on the State Navy ship. Pulaski’s passage shows that the Massachusetts State Navy’s accomplishments should not be measured only in terms of enemy ships captured or cargos successfully transported to friendly harbors. Nutting subsequently enlisted on the State Navy trading ship *Union*, but *Union* would be captured by the British. Nutting was released from captivity after approximately thirteen months.<sup>275</sup>

Unlike Cornelius Bassett and Benjamin Warner, but similarly to John Nutting, Ambrose Allen spent his entire Revolutionary War career at sea, including time in the direct service of the Massachusetts State Navy. According to Allen, he served on privateers before he enlisted in the State Navy.<sup>276</sup> Among these vessels was the *True Blue*, under Captain Stiles; the [*Bowdian*] commanded by Captain Stevens; the *Free Mason*, commanded by “Captain John Connaway or Conway;” [*Terrible*], commanded again by “Connaway or Conway;” the *Fox*, commanded by a Captain whose name is unclear in the pension records; the *Tyger*, commanded by Captain Nathaniel Brookhouse, and “various others.”<sup>277</sup> A privateer named *True Blue* commanded by

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<sup>273</sup> “Massachusetts Board of War to Captain Jonathan Haraden,” *NDAR*, 8: 105.

<sup>274</sup> “Massachusetts Board of War to Captain Jonathan Haraden,” *NDAR*, 8: 105.

<sup>275</sup> John Nutting, Pension Number W. 26,587, page 3, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/25140793>

<sup>276</sup> Ambrose Allen, Pension Number W. 20577, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca.1800 – ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 – ca. 1900 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Microfilm roll 0033); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773-2007, Record Group 15; National Archives Building, Washington D.C., page 4, at fold3.

<https://www.fold3.com/image/11151606>

<sup>277</sup> Ambrose Allen, Pension Number W. 20577, page 4, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/11151606>

Richard Stiles (with a privateer bond dated 28 April 1777) is recorded in Gardner Weld Allen's *Massachusetts Privateers*. The sloop *Bowdoin* under Thomas Stevens and the brigantine *Free Mason* commanded by John Conway are also recorded in *Massachusetts Privateers* (the privateer bonds for these two vessels are dated 2 July 1778 and 27 July 1778 respectively).<sup>278</sup> Two different entries for ships named *Terrible* exist, both entries showing John Conway in command; and a corresponding entry for *Fox* cannot be identified.<sup>279</sup> The trail of historical evidence picks up with an entry for the schooner *Tiger*, commanded by Nathaniel Brookhouse, whose privateer bond is dated 14 December 1778.<sup>280</sup> In his pension claim, Allen claims that he did not previously apply for a pension because he was not aware he was eligible.<sup>281</sup>

Allen enlisted on the Massachusetts State Navy ship *Tyrannicide*, under the command of Jonathan Haraden, for six months starting in 1777.<sup>282</sup> According to a "Muster and Pay Roll," dated 1 October 1777, Allen enlisted on this date as a seaman.<sup>283</sup> In an account of his service, Allen also named John Bray as *Tyrannicide*'s First Lieutenant, and although Allen was not certain, he thought the Second Lieutenant was one Joseph Dolliver. During this cruise, in which *Tyrannicide* was accompanied by another State Navy ship, the *Hazard*, several prizes were captured. At least one prize was brought into Martinique, and according to Allen, another prize was brought into Massachusetts. For his service during this voyage, Allen was awarded a share

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<sup>278</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers*, 87, 138-39, 296-97, 302, 307.

<sup>279</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers*, 296-97.

<sup>280</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers*, 302.

<sup>281</sup> Ambrose Allen, Pension Number W. 20577, page 5, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/11151608>

<sup>282</sup> Ambrose Allen, Pension Number W. 20577, page 4, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/11151606>

<sup>283</sup> "Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775-1783," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:2:Q5YT-JHH3> : 19 February 2021), Entry for Ambrose Allen, 1 Oct 1777; citing Military Service, Massachusetts, United States, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston; FHL microfilm.

of prize money. In the pension records, William Hooper, one of Allen's fellow seamen on *Tyrannicide* during the cruise in question, gave more detail on the prizes captured, which were three brigs and a schooner.<sup>284</sup>

Documents from *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* provide more information on the voyage in question. *Tyrannicide* returned to Boston from a previous voyage on 29 August 1777, which had resulted in the capture of several prizes.<sup>285</sup> Although Allen enlisted on *Tyrannicide* in October, it was not until the middle of November that *Tyrannicide* set sail, accompanied by the fellow State Navy ship *Hazard*. The orders for both captains were to sail off the coasts of Spain and Portugal, and to acquire and transport specific cargoes to particular locations. For example, ships carrying cargoes of "Fish or Lumber" were to be sent to Martinique; "Fish and Oil" to Bilbao, Spain; certain woods to Bordeaux and Nantes in France; and everything else to Boston "or the nearest port upon the Eastern Shore."<sup>286</sup> Before they set off, however, *Tyrannicide* and *Hazard* were ordered to patrol off the town of Townsend and if possible capture two enemy privateers.<sup>287</sup> Although this particular mission proved unsuccessful, *Tyrannicide* did capture the brigantine *Alexander* on 13 December, which carried a cargo of fish and wood.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Ambrose Allen, Pension Number W. 20577, page 21, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/11151665>

<sup>285</sup> "Minutes of the Massachusetts Board of War," *NDAR*, 9: 846.

<sup>286</sup> "Massachusetts Board of War to Captain Simeon Samson and Captain Jonathan Haraden, 16 November 1777," *NDAR*, 10: 510-11.

<sup>287</sup> "Massachusetts Board of War to Captain Simeon Samson and Captain Jonathan Haraden, 21 November 1777," *NDAR*, 10: 555-56.

<sup>288</sup> Log of the Massachusetts Navy Brigantine *Tyrannicide*, Captain Jonathan Haraden, 13 December 1777," *NDAR*, 10: 725.

While little information exists on how most of the sailors in this study experienced their service in the Massachusetts State Navy, the same is not true for Ebenezer Fox. Like Martin Lloyd, Fox was still in his teens when he enlisted to serve in the Massachusetts State Navy, having been born in 1763.<sup>289</sup> Unlike Lloyd, Ambrose Allen, and John Nutting, but like Cornelius Bassett, Samuel Everson, and Benjamin Warner, Fox had previously served on land. When he enlisted to serve on the State Navy warship *Protector*, Fox noted that the ship was commissioned to counter “British assaults on commerce.” He also referred to a “rendezvous” organized for potential recruits. This resembles the way in which John Clouston attempted to gain recruits for his vessel *Freedom* with his own rendezvous.<sup>290</sup> While Fox’s first voyage on *Protector* was not *Protector*’s first voyage – *Protector* had conducted a previous voyage – it would be eventful in its own right. On 9 June 1780, *Protector* fell into combat with the British ship *Admiral Duff*, which was transporting a cargo of sugar and tobacco from the West Indies to London.<sup>291</sup> Although the *Admiral Duff* mounted thirty-two guns to *Protector*’s twenty-six, it was the *Protector* that sank the *Admiral Duff*. Fox recounted that during this engagement a cannonball fired by the *General Duff* knocked Captain Williams’ speaking trumpet from of his hand. In response, Williams merely picked up his trumpet and resumed walking.<sup>292</sup> Also, Fox’s comrade Luther Little was wounded, which is noted in Fox’s pension records.<sup>293</sup> Fox himself did not

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<sup>289</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 7.

<sup>290</sup> “Minutes of the Massachusetts Board of War,” *NDAR*, 9: 727.

<sup>291</sup> Gardner Weld Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution*, Vol. 2: 514.

<sup>292</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 66.

<sup>293</sup> Ebenezer Fox, Pension Number W. 19269, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca.1800 – ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 – ca. 1900 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Microfilm roll 1012); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773-2007, Record Group 15; National Archives Building, Washington D.C, page 41, accessed August 6, 2022, at fold3.

<https://www.fold3.com/image/20440965>

escape harm, as his hearing was permanently damaged, although it improved over time.<sup>294</sup> Fox at least had the consolation of being a participant in a victorious engagement.

Given that his previous voyage had resulted in some profit, Fox's decision to enlist for another cruise on *Protector* makes sense. After all, Fox was familiar with the vessel from his previous cruise, and no doubt would be able to rely on crewmen with whom he had served previously. Like him, they may have chosen to enlist on a vessel that had been successful rather than one just setting out on its first voyage or one that had not captured any prizes. Fox recounts that his second recruitment occurred amidst patriotic drama; "amid loud huzzas for liberty and independence, sailors fell rapidly into our ranks, and our complement of men was obtained in a short time."<sup>295</sup> This contrasts keenly with the recruitment for *Protector*'s previous voyage, which, Fox recounts, took quite some time to recruit enough men.<sup>296</sup> The success of *Protector*'s previous cruise likely played a part in this successful recruitment for the new cruise, since there was no reason to assume the second cruise might not get as many prizes. In contrast, a vessel that constantly made unsuccessful voyages would have a harder time enlisting new recruits and retaining those who had been on earlier cruises. The veterans might seek a berth on a ship whose previous cruises had some success.

Unfortunately, while some prizes were captured on *Protector*'s second voyage, Fox would not enjoy the spoils of victory thanks to *Protector*'s capture by the British. Fox recounts that at the beginning of his captivity, the British impressed a third of his fellow crewmen against their will, for "sailors they wanted, and have them they would, if they set law and gospel at

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<sup>294</sup> Ebenezer Fox, Pension Number W. 19269, page 41, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/20440965>

<sup>295</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 79.

<sup>296</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 58.

defiance.”<sup>297</sup> Fox presents this impressment as an abuse of power, resembling the earlier example of “impressing” prisoners from the Continental Navy frigate *Hancock*. According to the historian Edwin Burrows, Fox’s account of his captivity on the *Jersey* apparently draws much from the nineteenth-century writer Albert Greene’s account of a fellow captive’s own recollections of captivity on the *Jersey* – in this instance, the privateersman Thomas Dring. Nevertheless, some of Fox’s reminiscences appear plausible, such as his memories of the diet for prisoners and his recollections of his own escape attempts.<sup>298</sup> After a prolonged period of imprisonment on *Jersey*, Fox and several other Patriot servicemen volunteered for service in the British Army. This contrasts with Dring’s assertion that no prisoner took up service with the British.<sup>299</sup>

Fox and his compatriots, however, did not enlist out of a desire to “turn their coats.” In Fox’s case, he enlisted because he found the conditions on the already notorious *Jersey* unbearable. Fox asserted he enlisted for West Indies service only so he could escape from the British, which he ultimately succeeded in. Even though he perceived this as his only option, Fox said that “enlisting in the British service was something I had never ceased to regret, from the moment I left the Jersey prison-ship.”<sup>300</sup> Although this decision increased his chances of survival, Fox appeared to compromise his beliefs, rather than steadfastly remaining defiant, as did quite a few of his fellow prisoners. Fox was able to escape British custody and rejoin the Patriot military, but he understandably regretted his decision to join the British military, even if he never intended to honor his new commitment. The experiences of Fox and his compatriots further illustrates the shortcomings in relying on prisoners of war as sources of manpower, as

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<sup>297</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 94.

<sup>298</sup> Burrows, *Forgotten Patriots*, 225-226.

<sup>299</sup> Burrows, *Forgotten Patriots*, 226.

<sup>300</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 202.

Fox entered service as a means of escaping captivity, and sought to “leave” British service as soon as possible. The horrendous conditions of British captivity undoubtedly served as a strong motivator to join the “unnatural enemies of mankind.”

Fox ultimately escaped British custody in Jamaica to Spanish-controlled Cuba, and then took passage to French-controlled Saint-Domingue. At Saint-Domingue, Fox chose to enlist on the American privateer *Flora*, commanded by Henry Johnson, which was preparing to sail for France. Fox chose to enlist on *Flora* “for an opportunity to pay off some old scores, which I fancied were then their due.”<sup>301</sup> While in Saint-Domingue, Fox and several of his comrades from *Flora* had gone on shore and were enjoying themselves in a “public house.” All of a sudden, a French press gang walked in, seized Fox and his companions, and marched them on board a French warship, where they discovered they had just been impressed into French service.<sup>302</sup> Although they were allied with the French, Fox and his compatriots were not eager to serve on the French warship: “although we had no objections to fighting our old enemy, the British, we yet had some choice as it respected the company we fought in, and had but little desire to obey the orders of French officers, or to mingle our blood with that of their crew.”<sup>303</sup> Remonstrations to the French captain proving ineffective, Fox secured his and his comrades’ release by jumping overboard and swimming a quarter of a mile to their own ship.<sup>304</sup> Upon being informed of what had happened, Fox’s commander immediately secured the release of the remaining crewmen.<sup>305</sup> During Fox’s wartime cruise on the *Flora* beginning in May 1782 two British ships were

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<sup>301</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 207.

<sup>302</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 212-13.

<sup>303</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 213.

<sup>304</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 214.

<sup>305</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 216.

captured, but only one reached friendly waters with its prize crew, the other being recaptured.<sup>306</sup> Regarding maintaining manpower, when *Flora* arrived in France “part of the crew were paid off and discharged; the remainder, that chose, were permitted to remain on board upon small wages.”<sup>307</sup>

Fox, like all too many who fought for the United States, saw no contradiction between the ideals for which they fought and the treatment of human beings as property, as shown by his indifference to *Protector*'s capture of the ship transporting slaves discussed earlier. This self-contradiction may be rooted in the contemporary perception, described by historian Francois Furstenberg, that those who resisted slavery deserved freedom – but those who did not fight against their enslavement did not deserve freedom.<sup>308</sup> As Emily Blanck notes in her work *Tyrannicide*, Massachusetts whites perceived “slavery as not a physical state but a mental one. A person was a slave because he or she did not fight for freedom but accepted submission to another.”<sup>309</sup>

However, Fox also recounted how during his and his companions' escape from British custody in the West Indies, they seized a boat crewed by four black men. Subsequently, Fox and his comrades considered taking these men along to sell them as slaves in Cuba.<sup>310</sup> As Fox states, “Had we been disposed to do an unjust action, we had an opportunity of realizing a considerable amount of money...the temptation was great to men destitute of funds as we were; but our moral

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<sup>306</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 217.

<sup>307</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 218.

<sup>308</sup> François Furstenberg, “Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue, and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (March 2003): 1302-03.

<sup>309</sup> Blanck, *Tyrannicide*, 34.

<sup>310</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 196.

sense overcame the temptation.”<sup>311</sup> Even though Fox previously had no problem with selling black men and women into slavery, in this instance Fox and his comrades shrank away from this horrendous option. Although the black men subsequently attempted to capture them upon their release, Fox never retracted the statement that selling them into slavery would be unjust, and earlier on, did not appear to consider the possibility of killing the black men in cold blood. Given that Fox had previously served alongside at least two African-American sailors on *Protector*, this implies a more ambivalent view towards slavery than one would expect from someone who had no qualms in “selling” a cargo of enslaved people. The distinction here may have been that Fox had an actual say in the decision he and his comrades made, which he did not possess as an ordinary seaman on *Protector*. One must wonder how Fox’s African-American crewmates felt about the re-enslavement of people who shared their skin color.

Although Fox would not see action with the Massachusetts State Navy again, George Little, his former superior officer, served as commanding officer of the Massachusetts State Navy’s final warship, *Winthrop*. After escaping from British custody, Little became commander of *Winthrop* on 4 March 1782.<sup>312</sup> Under Little’s command, *Winthrop* and her crew captured several prizes. His first cruise on *Winthrop* started on 24 June 1782. *Winthrop* was accompanied by the fellow State Navy ship *Tartar*, commanded by *Tyrannicide*’s last commander, John Cathcart.<sup>313</sup> This cruise lasted just two days, as *Tartar* and *Winthrop* encountered a British warship that Cathcart assumed “was armed with 50 guns,” far beyond the power of *Tartar* and *Winthrop* to fight. Upon *Tartar* and *Winthrop*’s return, it was revealed that the British ship was

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<sup>311</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 196.

<sup>312</sup> McManemin, *Captains of the State Navies during the Revolutionary War*, 134.

<sup>313</sup> McKee, *Edward Preble, a Naval Biography*, location 692 (Kindle version).

not as powerful as Cathcart had assumed. In fact, it was only a sloop armed only with 18 cannons!<sup>314</sup>

Little's next voyage on *Winthrop* proved more successful. Even though his mission was to escort three vessels up to Maine, on his return to Boston on 4 August 1782, he brought three prizes back with him, including the Loyalist privateer *Swallow*.<sup>315</sup> Ironically, *Swallow* originally operated under the Patriot cause, but the men responsible for recruitment did not realize that among those who enlisted were several Loyalist sympathizers. The Loyalists in question staged a successful mutiny, but they did not succeed in bringing *Swallow* to British territory before they encountered *Winthrop*.<sup>316</sup> On its third voyage, *Winthrop* captured two more enemy privateers, the *Hammond* and the *Merriam*. Little's fourth voyage as *Winthrop*'s captain (and *Winthrop*'s third voyage up to Maine) led to the capture of another two enemy privateers, one of which was captained by none other than *Merriam*'s former commanding officer. *Winthrop*'s fifth (and final) voyage marked a change of scenery from Maine to the West Indies. During this cruise, Little and his crewmen captured two vessels and sent them off with prize crews to French territory.<sup>317</sup> *Winthrop* returned to Boston on 13 March 1783, but preparations for another cruise were cancelled upon hearing of the successful peace negotiations in Paris.

Little's appointment to command *Winthrop* is preserved in the pension records, and his orders explicitly advocate an aggressive approach: "By force of arms attack seize and take the ships and other Vessels belonging to the inhabitants of Great Britain or any subject or

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<sup>314</sup> McKee, *Edward Preble, a Naval Biography*, location 696 (Kindle version).

<sup>315</sup> McManemin, *Captains of the State Navies during the Revolutionary War*, 134.

<sup>316</sup> McKee, *Edward Preble, a Naval Biography*, location 727 (Kindle version).

<sup>317</sup> *Edward Preble, a Naval Biography*, location 871 (Kindle version).

subjects.”<sup>318</sup> This corresponds to orders given in July 1778 to the State Navy brigantine *Hazard*’s commander, John Foster Williams, “to take, Burn, Sink, & Destroy, all Armed & Other Vessels with their Cargoes, belonging to y<sup>e</sup> Subjects of the King of Great-Britain, Enemies to the Sovereign Independent United States of America, & to the natural rights of Mankind.”<sup>319</sup> While *Hazard* was operating as a vessel of the Massachusetts State Navy, these instructions show that *Hazard* was intended to operate for the benefits of not just Massachusetts but of all the allied American states. As with the orders given to John Fisk mentioned above, these orders clearly mark Britain as the epitome of evil. In a similar light, the Massachusetts Council asked that the Governor “order the sloop *Winthrop* to continue her cruise on the coast of the Commonwealth, for the protection of the trade thereof.”<sup>320</sup> Once again, the protection of trade was of key importance.

Little’s final voyage on *Winthrop* became controversial because of where he chose to sail. Governor John Hancock provided orders for Little to cruise in the West Indies, including a provision that *Winthrop* undertake coastal protection duty first and *only then* to cruise off Bermuda for several weeks, before sailing on to the West Indies. Little’s decision to cruise immediately in the direction of the West Indies came as a shock to the Massachusetts House of

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<sup>318</sup> George Little, Pension Number W. 21,578, Case Files of Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service, compiled ca.1800 – ca. 1912, documenting the period ca. 1775 – ca. 1900 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Microfilm roll 1571); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 1773-2007, Record Group 15; National Archives Building, Washington D.C., page 7, accessed, July 16, 2022, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/25096838>

<sup>319</sup> “Samuel Phillips Savage, President of the Massachusetts Board of War to Captain John Foster Williams, Massachusetts Navy,” *NDAR*, 13: 235-6.

<sup>320</sup> “Resolve Directing the Commissary General to Procure a Quantity of Beef and Pork and Granting Him £.4000, and Appointing a Committee to Make Sale of the Ship *Tartar*, and to Procure a Suitable Vessel to Guard the Coast, and Requesting the Governor to Continue the Cruise of the Sloop *Winthrop*, 12 November 1782,” *Acts and Laws*, Vol. 1782-83: 358-60.

Representatives. This was not because Little ignored the first provision in his orders but because his orders included the provision of sailing to the West Indies at all, which the House of Representatives never intended to occur. Instead, they anticipated that *Winthrop* would undertake only coastal patrols. This explains why the Massachusetts legislature reacted so strongly upon learning of Hancock's written orders allowing *Winthrop* to cruise in the West Indies. Hancock's rationale was that "prize money earned in the West Indies would boost the morale of officers and men in the *Winthrop* and provide income for the state treasury."<sup>321</sup> While the Legislature was thinking in terms of commerce protection, Hancock aimed to maintain State Navy morale and improve Massachusetts's finances.<sup>322</sup>

Fortunately for Little, it appears he was not formally disciplined for his initiative. He and his crew even received compensation for their prizes.<sup>323</sup> On *Winthrop*'s return, the Massachusetts Council granted Little's petition that his crewmen henceforth should receive pay equivalent to those serving in the Continental Navy: "*Resolved*, That the prayer of the petition be granted...that the Treasurer be, and he hereby is directed to pay the wages due to the crew of the sloop *Winthrop*."<sup>324</sup> Although Little initially served on privateers, the majority of his Revolutionary War career occurred in the Massachusetts State Navy. Up to the capture of *Protector*, Little consistently served under the command of John Foster Williams. It can be inferred that Williams saw Little as a reliable subordinate, which accounts for Little's steady

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<sup>321</sup> McManemin, *State Navies*, 137; McKee, *Edward Preble*, location 820 (Kindle version).

<sup>322</sup> McKee, *Edward Preble*, location 820 (Kindle version).

<sup>323</sup> McManemin, *State Navies*, 138-139.

<sup>324</sup> "Resolve on the Petition of George Little, Making an Appropriation of the Prize Money in His Hands, and Establishing the Pay of His Officers and Men, 22 March 1783," *Acts and Laws*, Vol. 1782-83: 468.

promotions. Likewise, Little probably chose to serve under Williams because he saw him as a competent commanding officer.

Like Little, Samuel Everson also served on *Winthrop*. After his service in Samuel Sparrow's unit, Everson subsequently served under Captain Jesse Sturtevant for approximately three months as a corporal, beginning on 13 October 1780 according to one source.<sup>325</sup> Another source has him serving from 2 August 1780 to 1 November 1780.<sup>326</sup> After his service on land, Everson enlisted on 10 May 1782 to serve on *Winthrop* under Little's command. Everson's enlistment lasted two months and twenty-six days, and he was discharged on 6 August 1782.<sup>327</sup> Everson's service corresponds to *Winthrop's* cruise when the British privateer *Swallow* was captured.

Throughout the military service of these men, desertion kept rearing its ugly head, as John Fisk, commanding the Massachusetts State Navy vessel *Tyrannicide*, offered a \$10 reward to anyone who could detain two men who had deserted his ship. The possibility of punishment was not raised, merely that both men would be returned to their duty, but the notice stressed that these men be "recaptured" so they could not return to British service. Both men were originally from Great Britain, and both had been prisoners of war who joined the State Navy directly from prison. The possibility exists that they pretended to join the State Navy in order to escape

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<sup>325</sup> Everson, Pension Record S. 30,406, page 17, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/17230947>

<sup>326</sup> Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775-1783," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:2:Q5BV-Z4VF> : 19 February 2021), Entry for Samuel Everson, 22 Jun 1780; citing Military Service, Massachusetts, United States, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston; FHL microfilm.

<sup>327</sup> "Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775-1783," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:2:Q5BV-Z4VN> : 19 February 2021), Entry for Samuel Everson, 10 May 1782; citing Military Service, Massachusetts, United States, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston; FHL microfilm.

captivity – like Ebenezer Fox, but the other way around – but without corroborating evidence, this remains a speculation.<sup>328</sup>

Unfortunately for the Massachusetts State Navy, *Tyrannicide* was not the only State Navy ship to lose sailors to desertion. In the same newspaper article recounting *Republic*'s capture of the *Julius Caesar*, it is also stated that eleven crewmen of the State Navy brigantine *Independence* had deserted. Interestingly, the origins of some, but not all, of the crewmen were given in the article. Several of these men's hometowns were noted: Eastham, Hingham, Plymouth, Sandwich, and Stotenham, while another was explicitly said to be from Great Britain. The ethnicities of two of the native Massachusetts men were also mentioned – the man from Eastham was said to be from Portugal, while the man from Sandwich was described as an "Indian." The authorities wanted the deserters returned to the *Independence* or sent to Plymouth Gaol.<sup>329</sup>

The Massachusetts State Navy was not the only naval organization suffering from desertion. On 24 February 1777, William Coit, Captain of the Connecticut State Navy ship *Oliver Cromwell*, sent a muster list to Connecticut governor Jonathan Trumbull. Of the two hundred and thirty-three men noted as part of *Oliver Cromwell*'s crew, forty-eight were listed as having deserted and another eighteen were listed as "Absent without Leave."<sup>330</sup> On 13 August 1778, Captain John Gordon, commanding the Maryland State Navy galley *Conqueror*, informed Commodore Thomas Grason, his superior officer, that *Conqueror*'s "Boatswain and another

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<sup>328</sup> "Advertisement for Deserters from the Massachusetts State Sloop of War *Tyrannicide*, 24 July 1776," *NDAR*, 5: 1196.

<sup>329</sup> "*Boston Gazette*, Monday, November 4, 1776," *NDAR*, 7: 34-35.

<sup>330</sup> "Captain William Coit, Connecticut Ship *Oliver Cromwell*, to Governor Jonathan Trumbull, 24 February 1777," *NDAR*, 7: 1279-80.

crewman had deserted.”<sup>331</sup> Desertion was not just out of military service into the civilian world, but into other forms of military service as well. Patriot naval officer Nicholas Biddle, who died a hero’s death in battle against the British, complained in his correspondence how State Navy and privateer vessels in South Carolina were recruiting his own men.<sup>332</sup> No matter how hard he tried, he was unable to retrieve crewmen who had joined several privateer crews.<sup>333</sup> This went to the extreme of Biddle actually firing his cannons at a fellow Patriot warship in order to retrieve four of his crewmen.<sup>334</sup> In this case, he only succeeded in retrieving two of the men in question.

The Patriots were not alone in suffering problems with crew reliability, as the Royal Navy also endured desertion. Royal Navy Lieutenant Edward Pakenham, commanding the armed schooner *Viper* while on patrol in the Delaware, wrote that two of his men had “deserted in the Boat from alongside & ran her on Shore.”<sup>335</sup> This had consequences outside the effective loss of two crewmen. A party sent to retrieve the boat ended up skirmishing with the Patriots, resulting in the fatal wounding of the officer commanding the boat retrieval detachment. Unfortunately for the British, *Viper*’s experience was not unique. On 31 August 1777, Captain John Henry of the *Vigilant* recorded that seven men detached from the ship chose to “leg it” with some weapons and ammunition. To add to Henry’s woes, on the morning of September 2, a quartermaster fled with *Vigilant*’s “Jolly Boat,” resulting in Henry reading the Articles of War to *Vigilant*’s remaining crew.<sup>336</sup> Ironically, the British decision to allow privateering against Patriot shipping

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<sup>331</sup> “Captain John Gordon, Maryland Navy, to Commodore Thomas Grason, Maryland Navy, 13 August 1778,” *NDAR*, 13: 840-41.

<sup>332</sup> “Captain Nicholas Biddle to Robert Morris, 1 September 1777” *NDAR*, 9: 863-864.

<sup>333</sup> “Captain Nicholas Biddle to Robert Morris,” *NDAR*, 9: 863-4.

<sup>334</sup> “Captain Nicholas Biddle to Robert Morris,” *NDAR*, 9: 863-4.

<sup>335</sup> “Journal of H.M. armed schooner *Viper*, Lieutenant Edward Pakenham, 13 June 1778,” *NDAR*, 13: 104.

<sup>336</sup> “Journal of H.M. Armed Ship *Vigilant*, Captain John Henry,” *NDAR*, 9: 867-68.

also contributed to desertion. On 14 January 1778, Vice Admiral Clark Gayton, commanding the Royal Navy's Jamaica Station, informed Secretary of the Admiralty Philip Stephens that he was

sorry to inform their Lordships that since Privateers have been allowed to be fitted out here We have lost a great Number of Men by desertion, they meeting with so much encouragement from the owners of the Vessels that 'tis with the greatest difficulty I can Keep the Fleet under my Command compleatly manned.<sup>337</sup>

While privateering diverted valuable manpower always from the Continental and State Navies, privateers accounted for a substantial amount of British merchant ship losses, not only hindering British commerce but also the British ability to supply their forces in North America.<sup>338</sup> At the same time, British privateers would capture vessels that were not as valuable.<sup>339</sup> This proved an unnecessary diversion of manpower from the Royal Navy, which possessed a greater potential to decisively affect the war's outcome.

As desertion implied that a particular military organization was unattractive to serve in, this hindered efforts to enlist new recruits. Desertion sometimes reflected disaffection with military service; some Continental Army soldiers came to perceive military service as a form of servitude.<sup>340</sup> These problems with desertion could potentially adversely affect military operations. On 12 October 1777, for example, Commodore John Hazelwood of the Pennsylvania

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<sup>337</sup> "Vice Admiral Clark Gayton to Secretary of the Admiralty Philip Stephens, 14 January 1778," *NDAR*, 11: 121-23.

<sup>338</sup> Dolin, *Rebels At Sea*, 161-63.

<sup>339</sup> Dolin, *Rebels At Sea*, 163.

<sup>340</sup> Neimeyer, *America Goes to War*, 132.

State Navy informed George Washington his “fleet had so badly been reduced by desertion that four of his ships did not have enough crewmen to man even one of them.”<sup>341</sup>

This report was of special concern because it came during the Philadelphia Campaign, when Washington was trying to pry the British out of recently occupied Philadelphia, while at the same time the British were trying to make the Delaware River safe for shipping in supplies.<sup>342</sup> The lack of crewmen meant that the Patriots would find it difficult to prevent the British from achieving their objectives. Desertion was a cause for concern not just for State Navy ship commanders, but also for their political and military superiors. After all, these “unexcused absences” did not just hinder the ability of ships’ captains to sail their vessels. In a broader sense, desertion hindered the objectives of the Patriot political and military leadership. Desertion deprived the Patriots of the needed manpower to achieve their objectives. Nevertheless, in the case of the Pennsylvania State Navy, although the British successfully cleared the Delaware in November, the Patriots managed to cause substantial British losses, such as repulsing a land assault on 22 October 1777, and destroying two British ships at the same time.<sup>343</sup>

However, not all who left State Navy service did so without orders. On 27 July 1776, the Massachusetts State Navy ship *Tyrannicide* was in the process of both retrieving a crewman and resupplying off Cape Ann, Massachusetts. On that day, John Fisk, *Tyrannicide*’s commander, decided to deal with two crewmen acting “unruly.” Instead of disciplining them, Fisk discharged the two men from State Navy service and left them on shore.<sup>344</sup> This displays the autonomy State Navy captains possessed in recruiting sailors and discharging sailors from service.

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<sup>341</sup> “Commodore John Hazelwood to George Washington, 12 October 1777,” *NDAR*, 10: 128-29.

<sup>342</sup> Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence*, 187.

<sup>343</sup> Paullin, *Navy of the American Revolution*, 385.

<sup>344</sup> “Journal of the Massachusetts Sloop *Tyrannicide*, Captain John Fisk, 27 July 1776,” *NDAR*, 5: 1237-1238

Another way to effectively leave military service was capture by the enemy – and throughout the Revolutionary War this fate befell thousands of Patriots. Early in 1776, the *London Chronicle* recorded that prisoners were to be “treated with the greatest humanity” for exchange.<sup>345</sup> Unfortunately for those they kept as prisoners, the British did not adhere to humane standards of care. If Patriot captives were to be treated as prisoners of war, they then belonged to a recognized state, which would legitimize the Patriot cause, an outcome anathema to British policymakers.<sup>346</sup> On the other hand, treating them explicitly as rebels required harsh punishment, and, given how controversial the war was with elements of British contemporary society, the British were not ready to take such a drastic step.<sup>347</sup> This was simplified to an extent when Parliament passed a law in 1777 effectively suspending habeas corpus for Patriot prisoners of war.<sup>348</sup>

By that point in the war, it was common knowledge that capture by the British meant a higher probability of death. Upon capturing the Patriot warship *Hancock*, the British allegedly packed those sick with “smallpox, yellow fever, and other disorders” on a prison hulk, thereby increasing the risk of spreading disease to non-infected prisoners.<sup>349</sup> Inoculating prisoners who had never had smallpox was allegedly forbidden as well. It must be noted that the British were not always cruel to their prisoners. A “Vice Admiral Amherst” informed the British Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty, who oversaw the operations of the Royal Navy, that sickness infested many Patriot prisoners on a ship at Plymouth. In response, he was ordered to “cause

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<sup>345</sup> “*London Chronicle*, Tuesday, January 9 to Thursday, January 11, 1776,” *NDAR*, 3: 497.

<sup>346</sup> Hoock, *Scars of Independence*, 182.

<sup>347</sup> Dolin, *Rebels at Sea*, 182.

<sup>348</sup> “*London Chronicle*, Saturday, February 8 to Tuesday, February 11, 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 581; Dolin, *Rebels at Sea*, 182.

<sup>349</sup> “*The Independent Chronicle, and the Universal Advertiser*, Thursday, February 5, 1778,” *NDAR*, 11: 288-91.

such of them as are under that description [diseased] to be sent ashore to the Hospital, taking care that they are guarded so as to prevent making their escape.”<sup>350</sup> “Proper means” were also to be “used for their recovery,” implying that the British at the very least intended to give some medical treatment.<sup>351</sup>

At times, the Patriots admittedly treated their prisoners abysmally, but the death toll of those held in Patriot custody never reached the numbers of those held by the British. A report on prisoners held by the Patriots on prison ships in Boston assessed that, even though the prisoners appeared healthy and satisfied with their rations, they “were poorly cloathed and Some of them Complained Verry much for want of shirts.”<sup>352</sup> These circumstances were similar for Patriot prisoners taken in European waters, in contrast to their brethren across the Atlantic. The former were generally sent to prisons located in England, where captivity at the hands of the British, while strenuous to endure, did not reach the level of horror witnessed in the prison hulks off New York.<sup>353</sup> This fate likely befell John Nutting while he continued his service in the State Navy. After his service on *Massachusetts*, Nutting enlisted as a second mate on the State Navy trading ship *Union*, commanded by Richard James, which, as mentioned above, the British captured while on a voyage to France. Those held captive in the European theater, such as Nutting, were held in captivity under a more lenient form of imprisonment compared to those held captive in the Americas. After all, the Revolutionary War was a controversial topic in Great Britain, and

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<sup>350</sup> “Philip Stephens to the Commissioners for Sick and Hurt Seamen, 13 February 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 584-85.

<sup>351</sup> “Philip Stephens to the Commissioners for Sick and Hurt Seamen,” *NDAR*, 8: 584-85.

<sup>352</sup> “Report on Condition of Prisoners on board Prison Ships *Kingston*, *Favourite* and *Rising Empire*, 30 September 1777,” *NDAR*, 9: 981-82.

<sup>353</sup> Hoock, *Scars of Independence*, 229.

therefore it was in the interest of the politico-military establishment to treat prisoners held on British soil in an acceptable manner.

In contrast to the environment in the British Isles, conditions for British prisons in North America were downright abysmal. The prison hulk *Jersey* became infamous for the grim conditions Patriot prisoners had to endure. Numbers remain uncertain, but historians generally agree between 8,500 and 18,000 Patriots died as prisoners of the British.<sup>354</sup> The results of such captivity were both physically and psychologically traumatic. As the example of Ebenezer Fox shows, some of those who escaped or were exchanged inevitably wanted revenge, and this was not limited to former POWs.<sup>355</sup> One account portrays the dilapidated state of released Patriot prisoners, some of whom died from the effects of their imprisonment. Prisoners released in January 1777, many of whom were taken prisoner during the Battle of Fort Washington, were reported as dying almost as soon as they returned home.<sup>356</sup>

It was not just combat or desertion that reduced crew numbers, but disease as well. Up to the twentieth century, combat deaths were outweighed by those from deaths due to disease, contributing to a significant number of Patriot deaths in British captivity. For example, on 21 April 1777, one such instance was discussed at a meeting of Boston selectmen, who played an integral role in government in New England, functioning effectively as the executive branch. Allen Hallet, captain of the Massachusetts State Navy sloop *Republic*, reported that after his departure from Martinique on 28 March, his crew (totaling nineteen at the time) suffered an outbreak of smallpox. One of his crewmen died from smallpox eight to nine days after sailing from Martinique. At the time the selectmen met, another crewman was sick, and five others were

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<sup>354</sup> Jones, *Captives of Liberty*, Location 126 (Kindle version).

<sup>355</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 207; Hulbert, *The Untold War at Sea*, 32.

<sup>356</sup> O'Malley, "1776 – The Horror Show." <https://allthingsliberty.com/2019/01/1776-the-horror-show/>

“liable to it & now complaining.”<sup>357</sup> The selectmen instructed Hallet to establish strict quarantine procedures, such as “not permitting any Person to leave the Sloop or come on board her without permission.” Hallet was also instructed to take *Republic* to a designated place (Rainsford Island) “to have your Vessel and everything liable to Infection well smoked and cleansed by Mr Hartley Keeper of the Hospital on said Island.”<sup>358</sup>

Concerns over smallpox were valid, especially since the disease not only took the lives of thousands; it adversely affected military operations. For example, during the American attempt to take Quebec, smallpox inflicted hundreds of casualties, which proved a decisive factor in the expedition’s failure.<sup>359</sup> Similarly, the Patriot forces defending Charleston during the Siege of 1780 had fewer troops to call upon due to fears of smallpox.<sup>360</sup> Although George Washington was able to successfully inoculate his army by early 1778, he was not able to complete this quickly. In contrast to the British Redcoats, whose ranks were filled on the whole by men who had encountered smallpox earlier in their lives, Washington’s Continentals did not enjoy the same degree of acquired immunity.<sup>361</sup> If Washington had tried to inoculate all of his men at the same time, he would have run the risk of putting the majority of his troops out of action for a while, which would hinder the Continental Army’s combat performance.<sup>362</sup>

Although Washington succeeded in inoculating the men of the Continental Army under his own command, the Patriot military would never be entirely immune from the scourge of

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<sup>357</sup> “Minutes of the Selectmen of Boston, 21 April 1777,” *NDAR*, 8: 391-2.

<sup>358</sup> “Minutes of the Selectmen of Boston,” *NDAR*, 8: 391-2.

<sup>359</sup> Elizabeth Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 66-67.

<sup>360</sup> Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 116-17.

<sup>361</sup> Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 77, 92-93

<sup>362</sup> Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 47, 94.

smallpox. The Massachusetts State Navy would be no exception. The State Navy warship *Tyrannicide* suffered a particularly severe outbreak of smallpox on a voyage to the West Indies. On 3 May 1778, Jonathan Haraden, *Tyrannicide*'s commander, informed the Massachusetts Board of War that "I have been very unfortunate ever since I left Home," because *Tyrannicide* had sick crewmen for the entire cruise.<sup>363</sup> On the day on which *Tyrannicide* departed Martinique, it had left on shore several sick crewmen, some of whom were suffering from smallpox. Nonetheless, after departure, yet another crewman was discovered to have smallpox. This required Haraden to inoculate all his crewmen who had previously not been affected by smallpox (about thirty), but this was not enough to prevent an outbreak. In Haraden's own words, "I have buried three and now have some very bad with it – and several others Sick with Fevers [,] near 50 in the Doct<sup>rs</sup>. List which makes me very weak handed."<sup>364</sup>

Given the reduction in available healthy crewmen – and being sick himself – Haraden felt forced to consult with his officers on what to do once they lost contact with the State Navy brigantine *Hazard*. Given the debilitated condition of *Tyrannicide*'s crew, they decided they needed to cruise home immediately, because they did not feel confident in being able to fight any British ship they might come across. This resulted in *Tyrannicide* returning to a friendly port capturing a British prize in the process. Haraden requested guidance on whether the crewmen sick with smallpox on Rainsford Island – or as most of the sick crewmen were from Marblehead, to put them ashore there. According to the author of the twelfth volume of *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, on 5 May Haraden let off twenty-five crewmen sick with smallpox at

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<sup>363</sup> "Captain Jonathan Haraden, Massachusetts Navy, to Massachusetts Board of War, 3 May 1778," *NDAR*, 12: 255-56.

<sup>364</sup> "Captain Jonathan Haraden, Massachusetts Navy, to Massachusetts Board of War," *NDAR*, 12: 255-56.

Rainsford Island.<sup>365</sup> As early as 1744, Rainsford Island had been used “for the reception of such persons as shall be visited with any contagious sickness.”<sup>366</sup> The outbreak of sickness directly (and adversely) affected *Tyrannicide*’s cruise, and as a result, Patriot military operations. Yet in spite of hazards such as disease and dying in captivity, men still enlisted to serve in the Massachusetts State Navy.

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<sup>365</sup> “Captain Jonathan Haraden, Massachusetts Navy, to Massachusetts Board of War,” *NDAR*, 12: 255-56.

<sup>366</sup> “An Act for Regulating the Hospital of Rainsford[‘s] Island, and Further Providing in Case of Sickness, March 5 1743-44,” *Acts and Resolves* Vol. III, 1742-43: 124-26.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion

At the end of the American Revolutionary War, the Massachusetts State Navy, like other Patriot military organizations, exited the stage of history, with *Winthrop*, the sole remaining State Navy warship, removed from service. Nevertheless, in contrast to other State Navies such as the South Carolina State Navy, the Massachusetts State Navy maintained some form of military presence from its creation to the conclusion of the Revolutionary War.<sup>367</sup> Even though the State Navy had ceased to exist, the men who served in the State Navy lived on, with some gaining additional military experience. George Little's military service continued in the "Quasi-War" with France, when he was appointed commander of the USN frigate *Boston*.<sup>368</sup> Although Little captured several prizes, the US Navy ultimately discharged Little from service because of complaints his crew had robbed French prisoners.<sup>369</sup> Although a court-martial acquitted Little, his reputation was ruined.<sup>370</sup> Little's actions after the Revolutionary War highlighted his willingness not to toe the line – with adverse professional results. With the establishment of a permanent Navy, he had less leeway compared to the Massachusetts State Navy.

While not gaining the same degree of renown and notoriety as Little, Ambrose Allen also served his country again – in his case, in the War of 1812. During the conflict, he served for almost two years on board the American brig *Rattlesnake*, which was captured by the British. Allen also conducted three cruises on privateers during this conflict.<sup>371</sup> While Ebenezer Fox

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<sup>367</sup> Paullin, *The Navy of the American Revolution*, 434.

<sup>368</sup> "Little I (Destroyer No. 79)," *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/l/little-i.html>

<sup>369</sup> Frederick C. Leiner, "Anatomy of a Prize Case: Dollars, Side-Deals, and *Les Deux Anges*," *American Journal of Legal History*, Volume 39, No. 2 (April 1995),

<sup>370</sup> Frederick C. Leiner, "Unworthy of American Seamen," *Naval History*, Volume 13, Issue 6 (December 1999), 34.

<sup>371</sup> Ambrose Allen, Pension Number W. 20577, page 18, at fold3. <https://www.fold3.com/image/11151655>

remains relatively unknown to history, the same is not true for a fellow sailor on *Protector*, Edward Preble. Preble served on Fox's second cruise on *Protector*, and also became a captive of the British upon *Protector*'s capture. However, unlike Fox, Preble spent significantly less time in British captivity thanks to family connections with William Tyng, a loyalist now living in New York – a relationship strained, but not fractured, by the American Revolution.<sup>372</sup> Preble would later serve as an officer under George Little on the Massachusetts State Navy ship *Winthrop*. Preble's service in the Massachusetts State Navy would lead to a distinguished career in the United States Navy, and in contrast to Little, Preble's career in the Navy would be marked by success. Although he died in 1807 due to a medical condition, Preble is still remembered as having led US forces to victory in the First Barbary War.

While the Massachusetts State Navy did not provide a military presence on the same level as the Continental Army – or for that manner, the Royal Navy – the State Navy still provided a valuable contribution to the Patriot military effort. In addition to protecting the Massachusetts coast and transporting badly needed military supplies to Patriot-controlled or other friendly ports, vessels of the State Navy conducted commerce warfare against the British, capturing numerous prizes. This deprived the British of material and manpower badly needed to prosecute the war. The number of State Navy vessels dedicated to trade highlights the importance of supplies for the Patriots. Finally, the State Navy on occasion transported persons such as Casimir Pulaski, who had a significant impact on the war for the Patriot cause.

The State Navy's significance is not limited to its actions during the Revolutionary War, but also extends to inter-service mobility in the Patriot military. All but one of the men in this study – John Nutting – did not just serve in the Massachusetts State Navy throughout the

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<sup>372</sup> McKee, *Edward Preble: A Naval Biography*, locations 653-670 (Kindle version).

Revolutionary War, but took advantage of inter-service mobility to enlist for different branches of military service. This includes not only institutions such as the militia and Continental Navy, but also privateers. Several of the men in this study – Ambrose Allen, Ebenezer Fox, and Martin Lloyd, who served in the Massachusetts State Navy, as well as John Rutherford, who did not serve in the state navy – enlisted on privateers at some point during their Revolutionary War military careers. They either chose to serve on a privateer because it was the first vessel they came across (as did Fox), or they were drawn by factors such as an increased share of prize money or more equitable treatment by the Captain. Their service on privateers is more difficult to tease out compared to more formal forms of military service in Continental or state service. According to *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, Ebenezer Fox’s service on *Protector* is noted, but does not mention his service on land or his cruise on *Flora*.<sup>373</sup> Although privateering certainly assisted the Patriot cause during the Revolutionary War, it did not fit in with the narrative established after independence was secured. Even new pension laws allowing for State Navy service made no provision for privateers.

For other forms of military service, four – Cornelius Bassett, Samuel Everson, Ebenezer Fox, and Benjamin Warner – served on land in either the Continental Army or militia, while only Cornelius Bassett and Martin Lloyd served in the Continental Navy. As for the final two servicemen, Isaac Drew and John Rutherford, both not only served at sea in some capacity, but also on land, and moved from one branch of military service to another. (Like Fox, Little, and Nutting, Rutherford also experienced British captivity.) This shows that one did not have to serve solely in the Massachusetts State Navy to experience inter-service mobility. Changes in military service over time, if any, occurred due to the need to prioritize the Continental Army, the need to

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<sup>373</sup> *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors*, 5: 961.

mobilize militia forces if needed, and the losses inflicted as a result of the Penobscot Expedition. This meant that service in the State Navy, while of importance for Massachusetts, was not *the* most important branch of the military. After all, Massachusetts's interests were not always the same as the thirteen colonies as a whole, and it would be organizations such as the Continental Army that served *all* of the thirteen colonies that would ultimately win American independence.

Another significant finding relates to Ebenezer Fox, particularly regarding motivation for military service. Specifically, men's motivations for service could change throughout their various enlistments. An examination of Ebenezer Fox's motivations shows that his reasons for service changed over time. When he served as a substitute, he did so out of a sense of adventure, and because he "longed for some employment productive of variety."<sup>374</sup> In his subsequent service in the Massachusetts State Navy, Fox initially was drawn to serve because a "a spirit of roving once more got possession of me; and I expressed a desire to go to sea."<sup>375</sup> However, he expressed no preference as to whether he served in the Continental Navy, the Massachusetts State Navy, or a privateer. His choice to enlist in the Massachusetts State Navy had more to do with the appeal of the recruiting officer than any other factor. If an officer from a privateer or a Continental Navy vessel had given a more convincing presentation, there is nothing to indicate Fox would not have joined that officer's crew, and therefore a different naval service. What mattered to Fox was not the specific branch of service but the fact that he was going to serve the Patriot cause. Fox's account indicates the personal nature of choosing what branch of military service to join. For those like Fox, what mattered was not whether they served in the Massachusetts State Navy,

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<sup>374</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 48-49.

<sup>375</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 56.

Continental Army, or other land and naval organizations, *but that they served in some form for the Patriot cause.*

Fox's second enlistment on *Protector* occurred for different reasons than those that fueled his first enlistment. In contrast to the desire for adventure that facilitated his first enlistment, his rationale for the second one was economic. His father had recently died, depriving his family of its primary breadwinner, so Fox felt he could better provide for his family by participating in a second cruise.<sup>376</sup> The State Navy did not follow the practice of privateers in dividing up the spoils entirely between the crew and owners – some of the profit from the captures of the State Navy would end up in the hands of the Massachusetts government. Nevertheless, Fox could gain some profit in capturing prizes. After his escape from captivity and British military service, Fox chose to enlist again, this time on a privateer, “as I felt willing to encounter the hazards of an engagement, for an opportunity to pay off some old scores, which I fancied were then their due.”<sup>377</sup> In this case, the motivation was revenge, which is understandable given the numerous accounts of the hellish experience endured by Patriot prisoners on prison hulks such as the *Jersey*. Some historians estimate that approximately half of all Patriot prisoners died in British captivity.<sup>378</sup> Fox's example confirms to some extent Paul Gilje's article, “Loyalty and Liberty:” “For many sailors the issue was seldom simply a question of loyalty and liberty. Some men shifted their position to suit the situation; others expressed a variety of motives almost simultaneously.”<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 79.

<sup>377</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, 207.

<sup>378</sup> Jones, *Captives of Liberty*, Location 126 (Kindle version).

<sup>379</sup> Gilje, “Loyalty and Liberty,” 165.

Examining the experiences of those who served in the Massachusetts State Navy also shows the varying motivations for fighting, whether it was for adventure, patriotism, profit, or revenge. Moreover, as Ebenezer Fox's account revealed, motivations for service did not always remain constant, but changed over time. This fits in with one of the conclusions reached by Walter Sargent in his work on Massachusetts military service, that "individual characteristics and circumstances...better explain enlistment patterns between militia and Continental service."<sup>380</sup> The example of Ebenezer Fox clearly fits in with this thinking, as Fox's reasons to serve clearly evolved over time with respect to his respective enlistments. Likewise, while Joseph Plumb Martin -- an ordinary New England soldier whose career has been much examined by historians -- first enlisted in order to be "a defender of his country," his next enlistment occurred due to the constant harassment of Continental Army recruiters.<sup>381</sup> This suggests that motivations were flexible and apt to change over time. Motivations for not entering service can also extrapolated. As George Robert Twelves Hewes, who served for approximately twenty months for the Patriots, explained, he did not serve more because he had a family to take care of.<sup>382</sup>

Hewes' recollections of his motivations also show how Revolutionary War veterans could remember significant details decades after the events in question. In recalling his military service, Fox asserted that because of his youth, he remembered the key events he participated in, as these events "made a much more lasting impression on his mind than if he had been older."<sup>383</sup> In other words, these were key events that dramatically affected a youthful serviceman, who

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<sup>380</sup> Sargent, "Answering the Call to Arms," i.

<sup>381</sup> Joseph Plumb Martin, *A Narrative of some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier; interspersed with anecdotes of incidents that occurred within his own observation* (N.p.: Glazier, Masters & Company, 1830), 13, 45.

<sup>382</sup> Young, "George Robert Twelves Hewes (1742-1840)," 603-04.

<sup>383</sup> Fox, *The adventures of Ebenezer Fox*, v.

therefore would remember the exact date when said event/s occurred. On the other hand, if he had experienced these events at an older age, these memories would be mixed with more mundane recollections. While the memories of veterans such as George Robert Twelves Hewes might be shaped by the passage of years and selectively focus on some events while neglecting others, the general *sense* of the events in question could still be recalled.<sup>384</sup>

In their service in more than one military organization – Continental Army and Navy, State Navy, militia, and privateers – the men examined in this study frequently moved from one type of service to another. The recruiting efforts of the Massachusetts State Navy also shows the difficulty an organization can have in preserving manpower when faced with competing military organizations. This existed because servicemen had the *choice* to either reenlist for their current branch of the Patriot military, enlist in another type of military service, or return to civilian life. While the competition for manpower admittedly hindered the Patriot cause, at the same time there were advantages. Inter-service mobility was crucial to the Patriot cause because it did not force men to choose between serving for the entire war or staying out altogether. It also presented the opportunity to reconsider military service, as limited terms of service allowed men to leave instead of forcing them to remain. Inter-service mobility flourished because of the options for military service available to those who wanted to join the Patriot military. It appears that men choose to enlist in the Massachusetts State Navy and other Patriot military organizations not only because of what was available for them, but what they felt would benefit themselves.

This work cannot – and should not – be taken as the final word on the Massachusetts State Navy. It merely serves as an introduction to an otherwise neglected topic of the American

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<sup>384</sup> Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, 12.

Revolution, and a part of US history in general. Future historians may be able to reveal more about the men who served the American cause in the Massachusetts State Navy during the Revolutionary War, as well as more pertinent information on the Massachusetts State Navy. This will add to our understanding of the Revolutionary War, and the people who participated in this pivotal event that shaped the course of history.

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