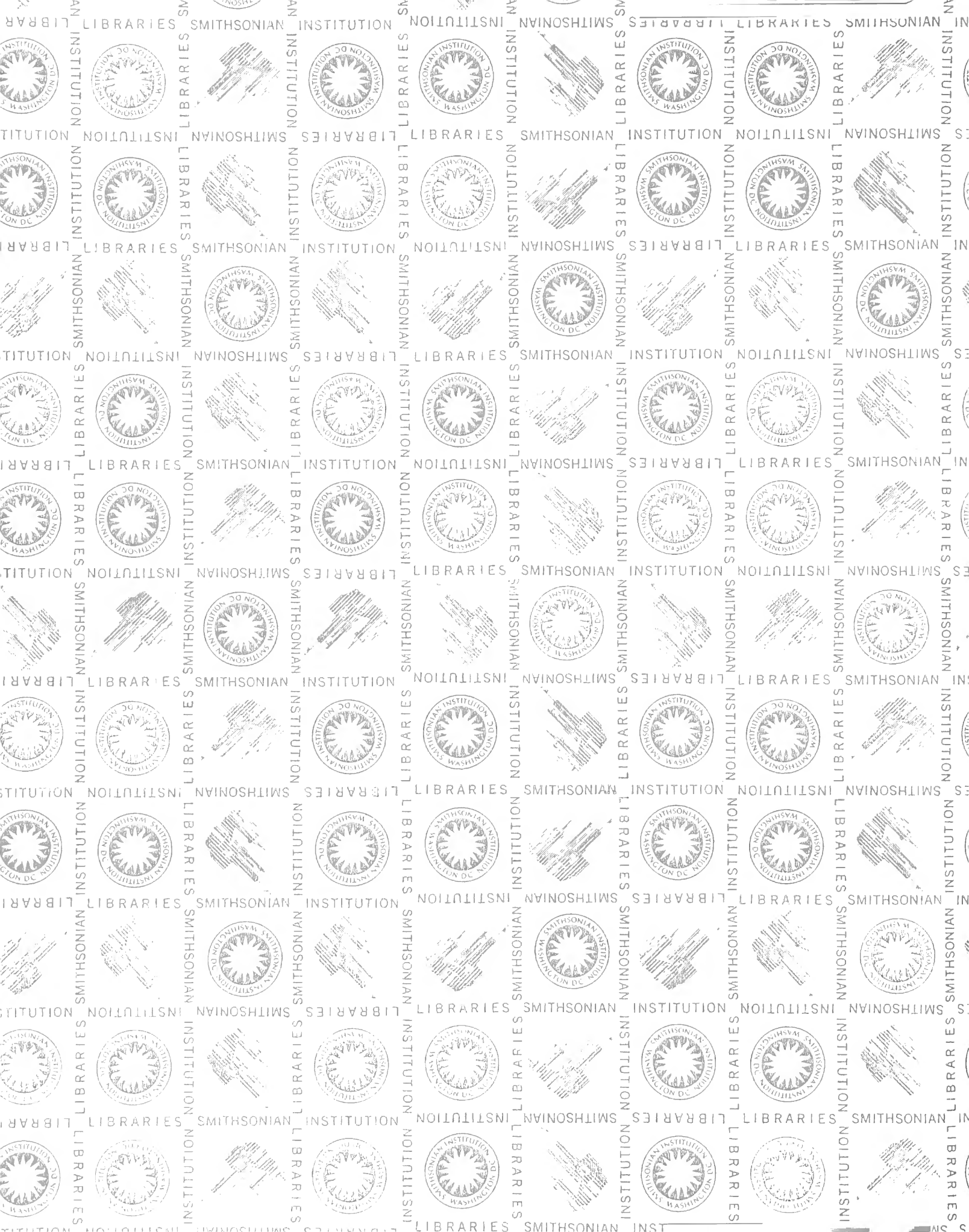
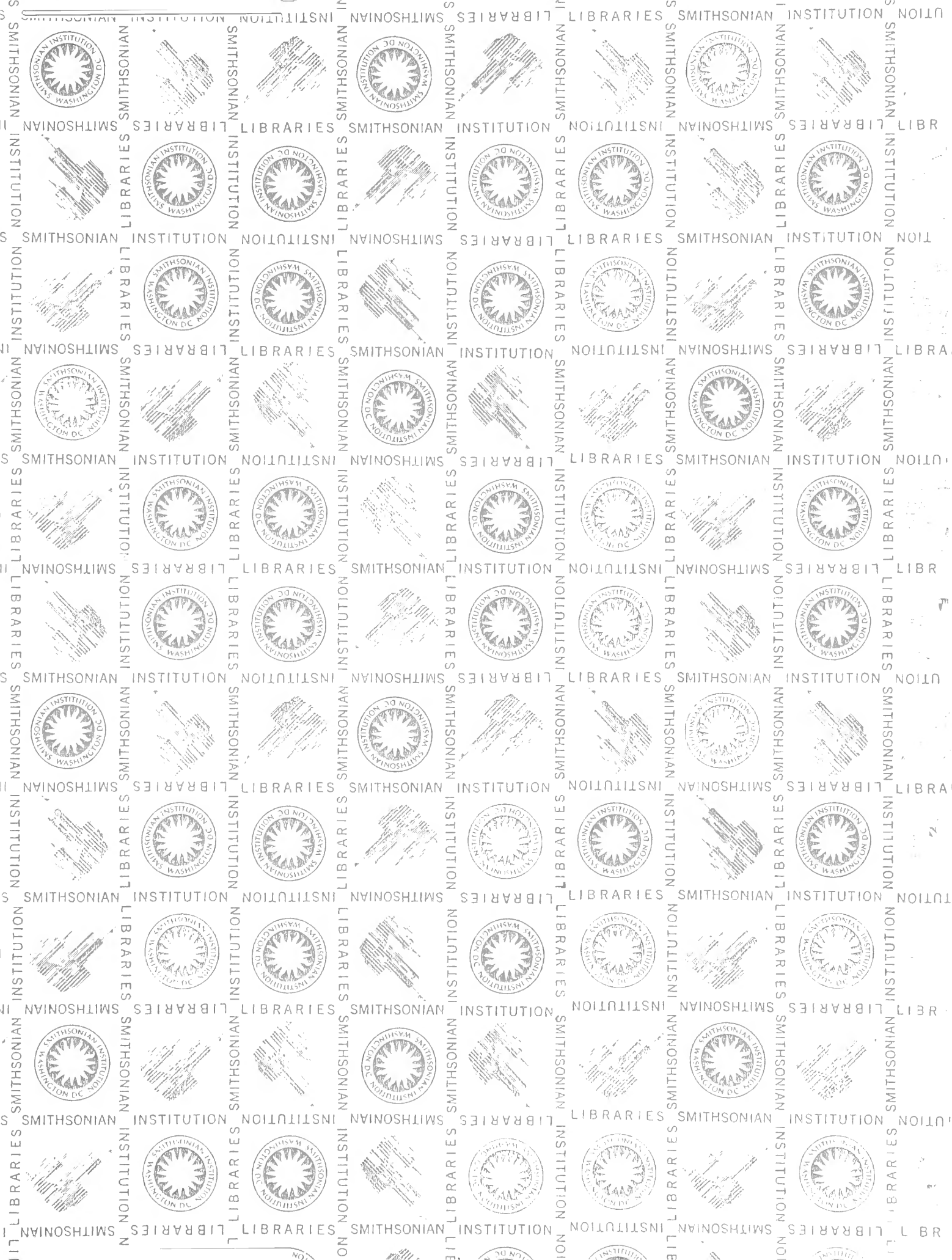


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# *Alfred*

THE FIRST CONTINENTAL FLAGSHIP

1775-1778

*John J. McCusker*



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION PRESS / CITY OF WASHINGTON / 1973

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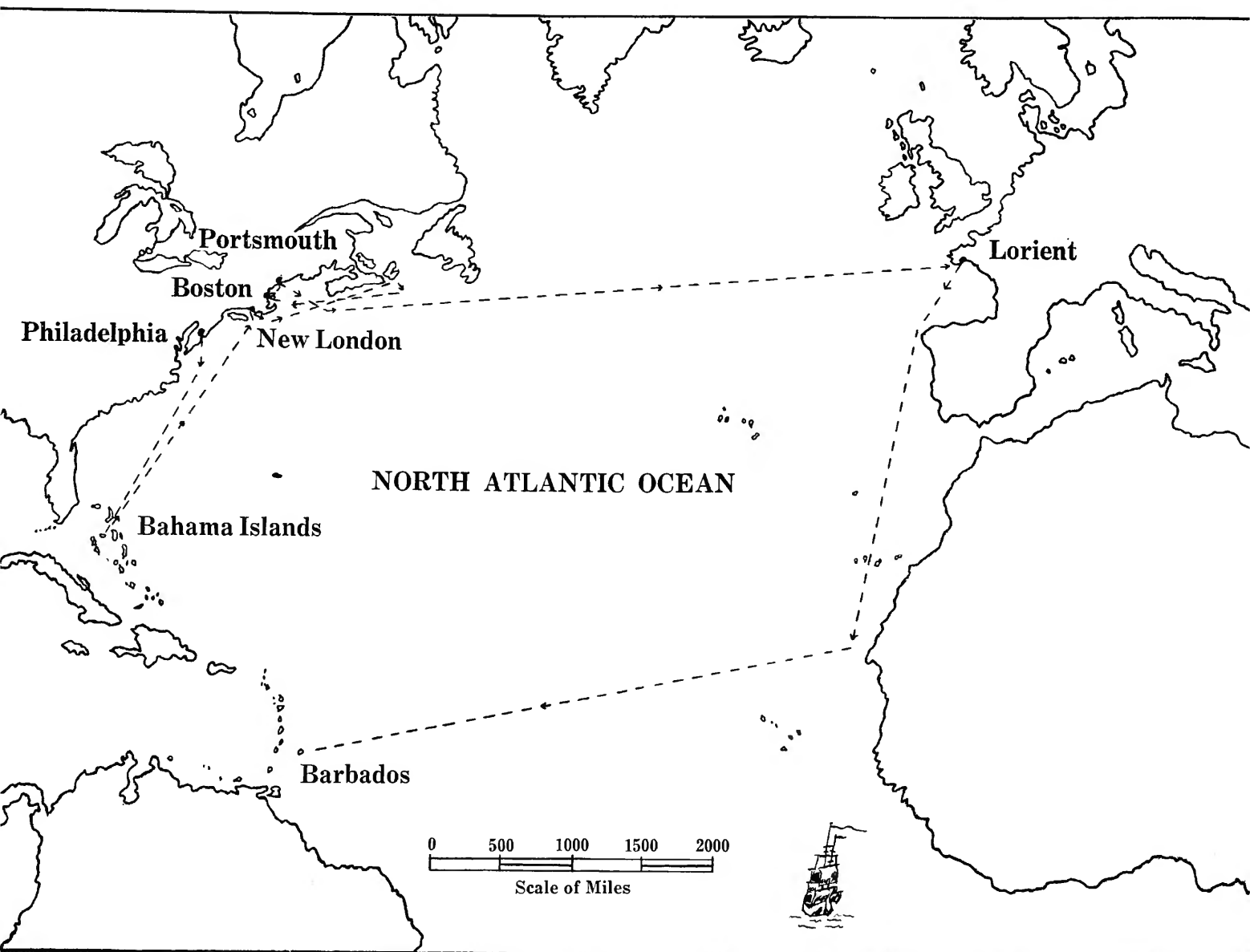
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Frontispiece.—Map showing the route of the three cruises of Continental ship *Alfred*, 1776–1778.



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SMITHSONIAN STUDIES IN HISTORY AND TECHNOLOGY NUMBER 20

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COVER.—Continental Ship *Alfred*, 1775-1778. *Alfred*, Captain Elisha Hinman, is shown off the coast of France in December 1777 in this painting by Colonel Phillips Melville, USAF (Ret.) (Copyrighted © 1968, John J. McCusker; see "Note on *Alfred* Paintings" on page 19.)

*Official publication date is handstamped in a limited number of initial copies and recorded in the Institution's annual report, Smithsonian Year.*

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data  
McCusker, John J.

*Alfred*: the first Continental flagship, 1775-1778.  
(Smithsonian studies in history and technology, no. 20.)

SUMMARY: Chronicles the career of the *Alfred*, a converted merchantman, that participated in the American Revolution.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. *Alfred* (Ship). 2. United States—History, Naval—To 1900. [1. *Alfred* (Ship). 2. United States—History—Revolution—Naval operations. 3. United States—History, Naval—To 1900] I. Title. II. Series: Smithsonian Institution. Smithsonian studies in history and technology, no. 20.

E271.M17 973.3'5 72-8652

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# THE FIRST CONTINENTAL FLAGSHIP

## 1775-1778

*Alfred, as one of the first ships of the Continental Navy of the United Colonies, as the flagship of the first American fleet, as the first ship to hoist the Grand Union Flag of the United Colonies, and the first command ship of an American amphibious invasion of enemy territory, played no small role in the winning of independence for the United States. Her place is secure in our national heritage.*

The Author: *John J. McCusker is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History of the University of Maryland and is currently (1971-1973) on leave as a Fellow at the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia.*

In October 1775 the Continental Congress of the United Colonies, meeting in Philadelphia, took a strategic step in the direction of independence. To the north the struggle for Boston was at a stalemate. General Washington in command of the American forces had lain siege to that city, and upon the outcome of the siege hinged the bargaining position of the Colonies with the Mother Country. If George Washington's troops could hold their own, perhaps Great Britain would consent to some of the colonists' demands. But reinforcements for General Thomas Gage and Admiral Samuel Graves were on their way from England, with soldiers and supplies for Canada as well as for Boston. The threat was coming by sea and it had to be met at sea. The colonists needed a naval force to capture the supply ships. On 13 October the Continental Congress established the Naval Committee—forerunner of the Department of the Navy—and authorized the purchase of two vessels. Two weeks later, on 30 October, it ordered the fitting out of two more ships “for the protection and defense of the united Colonies.” Thus began the navy of the United States.<sup>1</sup>

One of the first ships purchased by the Naval Committee of Congress was *Black Prince*. Built at Philadelphia in the fall of 1774, this 300-ton merchantman belonged to Willing, Morris and Company of that city and had just returned from her second voyage to England. She measured some ninety-two feet long on her main deck, had a breadth of about twenty-seven feet, and drew eighteen feet of water.<sup>2</sup> A full-rigged, three-masted vessel, her performance greatly pleased her skipper Captain John Barry, who pronounced her “the finest ship . . . in America.”<sup>3</sup> Renamed *Alfred*, after the ninth-century West Saxon king who had founded the English navy,<sup>4</sup> “the finest ship . . . in America” soon became the first flagship in the United States navy (cover illustration and Figure 2). The chronicle of her three cruises under Continental colors constitutes a classic chapter in the history of the naval war of the American Revolution (Frontispiece).

It took more than a mere rechristening to convert *Alfred* into a warship. The workmen of the Wharton and Humphrey shipyard labored throughout November and



Figure 1.—John Paul Jones (1747-1792). This bust, a copy of an original which was sculpted in 1780 by Jean-Antoine Houdon, is in the Museum of the United States Naval Academy. (Courtesy United States Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Maryland.)

December 1775 to complete the necessary alterations. When they were done, the *Alfred* mounted thirty cannon—ten six-pound guns on her main deck and twenty nine-pounders below—and four small swivel guns in her tops. Her internal structure had been strengthened to bear the weight of her guns and ports had been cut in her side to allow them access to an enemy, but little else had been changed. A close observer could later remark that she had “very little of the ship of war” about her. With gunports closed she retained her merchantman lines

and generally peaceful appearance.<sup>5</sup> The additional weight of timbering and cannon did affect her sailing qualities, however, making her top-heavy. She was ever after known as “crank” and “tender-sided.” Still, the good seaman could captain her well and John Paul Jones as her commander reported her “capable of giving excellent service.”<sup>6</sup> It was Jones (Figure 1), in fact, who as her First Lieutenant saw her commissioned in early December 1775. The way he told it, Jones himself raised the Grand Union Flag (Figure 3) over her quarterdeck.

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Extract from Entick's Naval History.

THE Saxons, after the death of Egbert, changing their system of politics, let their navy drop; and by a fatality, to which none but a people reserved for punishment by an overruling providence would have yielded, resolved to leave their coasts naked, to fortify their cities, and to fight the enemy after they should land. This fatal mistake, permitting the enemy to land without interruption, enabled the Danes to unite their forces; and at last to drive the inhabitants from the coasts, and to gain settlements for themselves. In one of their expeditions, they sailed up the Thames with three hundred and fifty vessels, BURN'T ALL THE TOWNS ON THE SHORE, landed their men, and laid the country, for many miles within land, waste with fire and sword. It is true that Ethelwolf did at last force them to retire, but they returned, and landed in the west, with a more powerful fleet, and committed such outrages, that when ALFRED ascended the throne of England, the country lay desolate, the cities and great towns were demolished, and the people consumed by continual war, and fighting nine or ten battles in a year, which exhausted their wealth, their strength, and their spirits. So that instead of resolving to make any farther stand in defence of their liberty and property, they seemed determined to submit to the yoke of slavery, rather than to expire with a precarious freedom.

Such was the ruinous condition of the Saxons, when Alfred began his reign over them. However this wife and magna-

nimous Prince presently infused new spirits and better hopes into his bleeding subjects. He reprobated to them the iniquity of those councils in former reigns, which preferred a land to a sea war, and engaged them, as the best security against invasions, to build ships of a proper construction to defend the coast against the naval force of their enemies; and, in consequence of this advice, we find they immediately set about a restoration of their naval affairs, and to build ships of a new construction, devised by the King himself, capable of holding sixty rowers, and in all respects double to the largest ships then in use. When this navy was completed, Alfred took special care to have it manned with experienced sailors, and commanded by officers of untainted courage and fidelity, and ordered them to put to sea, with an express prohibition neither to receive or give quarter. By which he released himself from the incumbrance and hazard which arise from a number of prisoners on board of a ship, and intended to strike terror into those rovers who, as they kept no faith in their treaties, he thereby declared were unworthy of mercy.

The first encounter between this navy and the Danes was off the isle of Wight. The King informed that six pirates of an unusual size infested those parts, he ordered nine of his new ships to sail in quest of them; and his commands were so punctually executed, that they were all, except one, either sunk or taken; and the men, that survived, were hanged as pirates. At Winchester, A. D. 897, in this single year the Saxons destroyed not less than twenty ships, and all their men, on the fourth coast only.

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Figure 2.—“Extract from [John] Entick's Naval History.” This mention of King Alfred as the innovator of a new naval order appeared the day after the ship's new name was announced. (From *The Pennsylvania Evening Post* (Philadelphia), 18 November 1775. Reproduced from the collections of the Library of Congress.)

I hoisted with my own hands the flag of freedom the first time it was displayed on board the Alfred in the Delaware.<sup>7</sup>

The severe Philadelphia winter delayed *Alfred's* departure for more than two months. Meanwhile, the Naval Committee assembled and fitted out seven other vessels, organized crews, and commissioned officers for service in the new navy. The Committee gave command of the entire fleet to Esek Hopkins (Figure 4), a fifty-seven year old sailor from Rhode Island, the former master of slavers, privateers, and merchantmen in the service of Nicholas Brown and Company of Providence. Although Hopkins no doubt was a good merchant captain, his talents as a naval commander proved to be mediocre. He lacked any sense of strategy and possessed none of the qualities recognized in a leader of men. But he was a New Englander, appointed by a committee dominated by New Englanders, at the head of which sat Governor Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island, Esek's brother.

Early in the new year, Hopkins commanded his captains to drop down the Delaware River from Philadelphia preparatory to beginning their voyage. Colonel Christopher Gadsden of South Carolina, a member of

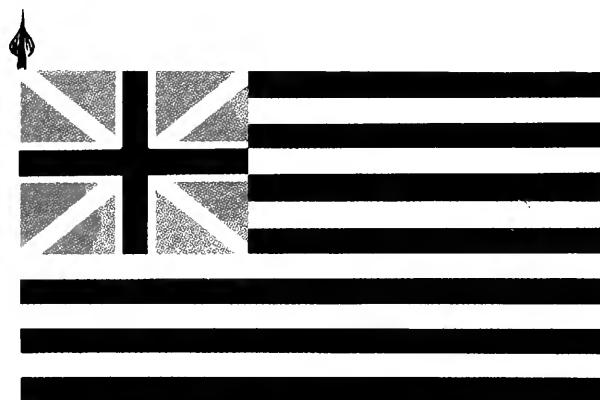


Figure 3.—The Grand Union Flag of the United Colonies, with its crosses of St. George and St. Andrew and its thirteen stripes, was flown by *Alfred*, first flagship of the American fleet, when it put to sea in January 1776. The Stars and Stripes were authorized by the Continental Congress on 14 June 1777.

the Naval Committee, reported the event in stirring terms. “Admired the acclamation of many thousands assembled on the joyful occasion, under the display of a union flag with thirteen stripes in the field, emblematical of the thirteen united colonies,” sailed “the first American fleet that ever swelled their sails on the



Figure 4.—“Commodore [Esek] Hopkins.” Line engraving by Pollard, 1778. This is a dubious likeness since Hopkins (1718-1802) was in his late fifties while “commodore” of the first fleet. (Original engraving prepared for James Murray, *An Impartial History of the Present War in America* (3 volumes, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1778-1780), volume II, opposite page 289. Photograph of a later state of the engraving in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution. Courtesy Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)

TABLE 1.—The First American Fleet as it sailed, 18 February 1776<sup>9</sup>

Vessel	Guns	Men		Captain
		Sailors	Marines	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ship <i>Alfred</i> . . . . .	20 nine-pounders 10 six-pounders	160	63	“Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet” Esek Hopkins Captain Dudley Saltonstall Captain Abraham Whipple
Ship <i>Columbus</i> . . . . .	18 nine-pounders 10 six-pounders	160	63	Captain John B. Hopkins Captain Nicholas Biddle
Brigantine <i>Cabot</i> . . . . .	14 six-pounders	90	43	Captain John Hazard
Brigantine <i>Andrew Doria</i> . . . . .	16 six-pounders	72	37	Captain William Stone
Sloop <i>Providence</i> . . . . .	12 four-pounders	62	21	Captain Hoysteed Hacker
Sloop <i>Hornet</i> . . . . .	10 four-pounders	70	—	Captain William Hallock
Schooner <i>Fly</i> . . . . .	6 nine-pounders	30	—	
Schooner <i>Wasp</i> . . . . .	8 two-pounders	48	—	

Western Ocean, in defense of the rights and liberties of the people of these colonies, now suffering under the persecuting rod of the British ministry and their more than brutish tyrants in America.” The cold winds of that inspiring January day did more than flutter the flags and fill the sails of Hopkin’s ships, however; they brought with them a spell of winter weather which froze up the river and locked the fleet tightly in its grasp. The Delaware, which shortly before had been the road to the “Western Ocean” for the ships of the fleet, now offered itself as a vast skating rink for many of the same Philadelphians who had assembled to bid them farewell. The first American fleet would wait almost six weeks before continuing on its cruise.<sup>8</sup>

In the meanwhile the same Naval Committee that had appointed Hopkins to his command now authored his orders. By this time the crisis at Boston had abated somewhat and, since the necessity to go northward was less pressing, the members of the Committee could choose to try to please several different factions in the Continental Congress which had been somewhat sceptical of the need for a navy. The Naval Committee directed Hopkins to harass the enemies of the Colonies first at Virginia, then at South Carolina, and finally at Rhode Island. With little opportunity to train his crews and no chance to practice maneuvers, Hopkins can be forgiven if he failed to share their optimism. Moreover, so fluid was the war that the next month, when the fleet finally broke loose from the icy grip of the Delaware River, new developments—especially the more apparent British strength in the Chesapeake Bay—seemed sufficient to Hopkins to cause him to scrap his instructions and to embark on a scheme of his own. Aware of the colonists’ urgent need for gunpowder and supplies, and

knowing of a large cache of both on the island of New Providence in the Bahamas, Hopkins, on that chilly afternoon of 18 February, ordered his fleet (Table 1) southward to the sun and to the promise of success.<sup>9</sup>

Despite Hopkins’s fond hopes of glory, the American invasion of Nassau in the Bahamas succeeded almost in spite of itself and even then the victory rang hollow. Two weeks to the day after leaving Cape Henlopen, the fleet appeared early on the Sunday morning of 3 March off the bar of Nassau Harbor (Figure 5). The sounds of alarm that greeted the Americans’ careless show of strength argued the wisdom of an indirect attack against the weaker of the two forts which guarded the town. The Continental Marines, in their first amphibious assault, joined with armed sailors from the fleet to capture the easternmost Fort Montagu in a “battle” as bemused as it was bloodless. By late Sunday afternoon, all was quiet again as the Continentals rested from their labors inside their prize. To promote a continued peaceful victory, Hopkins in the early evening issued a proclamation “to the Gentlemen, Freemen, & Inhabitants of the Island of New Providence”:

The reasons of my landing an armed force on the island is in order to take possession of the powder and warlike stores belonging to the Crown, and if I am not opposed in putting my design in execution the persons and property of the inhabitants shall be safe, neither shall they be suffered to be hurt in case they make no resistance.<sup>10</sup>

It had the desired effect. The next morning, commanded by Marine Captain Samuel Nicholas (Figure 6), the invasion force completed the job by securing the second fort and arresting Montfort Browne, governor of the colony. The Americans had conquered merely by coming.

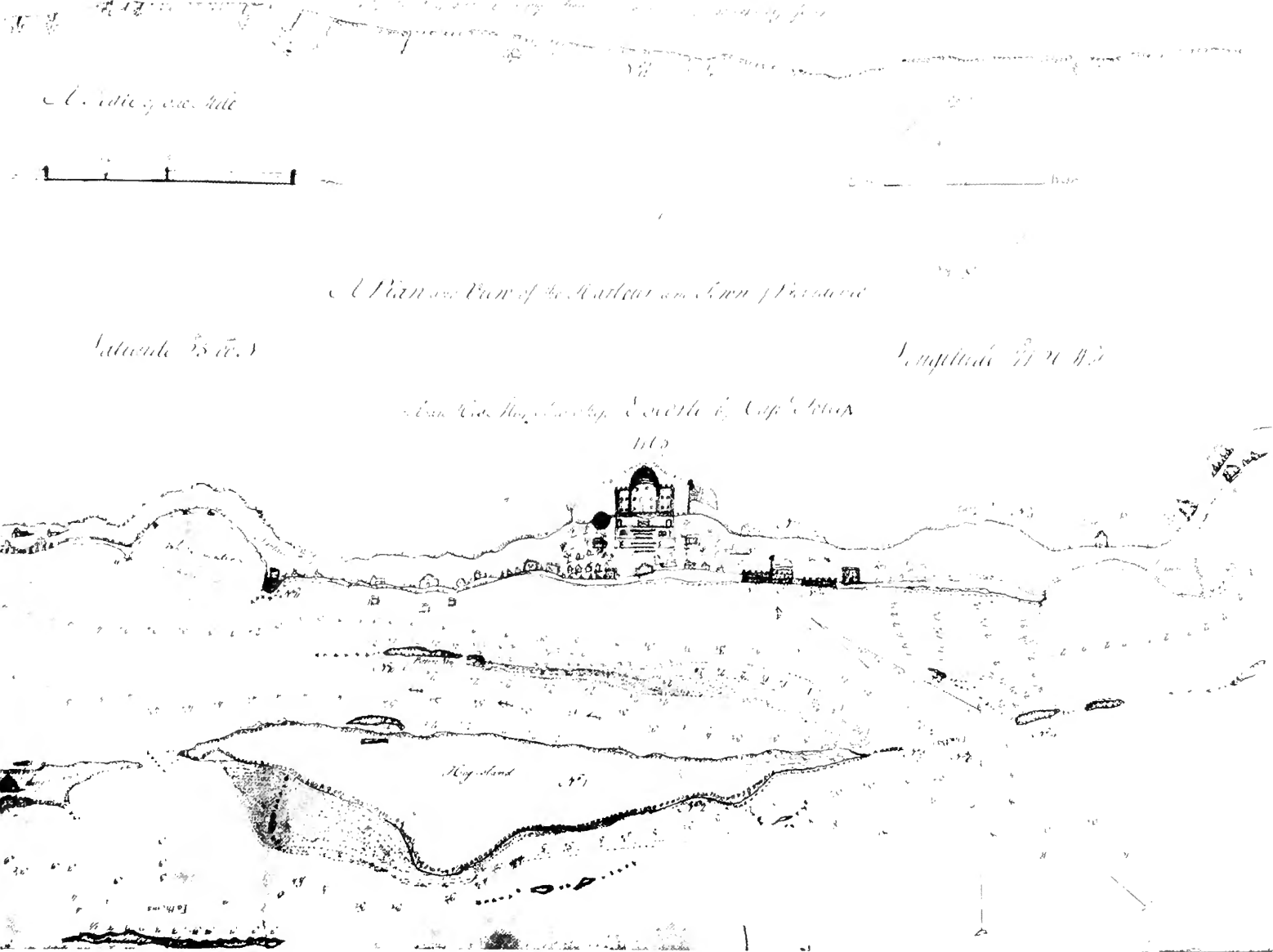


Figure 5.—Nassau, 1765. “A Plan and View of the Harbour and the Town of Providence.” Nassau, on New Providence Island in the Bahamas, as it was drawn for the hydrographic survey of Captain Thomas Foley, HMS *Escorte*, in 1765. Note “Montage Fort, No. 11,” to the left (east) of “Governors House,” and “Nassau Fo[rt], No. 7.” (Reproduced with permission of the Admiralty Library, London, England.)

Nevertheless, Governor Browne had the last laugh on the Americans. Helped by the unbelievable ineptitude of Commander-in-Chief Hopkins, Browne managed to deprive the Americans of the gunpowder they had sought. For reasons that will never be clear, Hopkins simply failed to close the trap. He deployed no ships off the western entrance—and exit—of Nassau Harbor from Sunday night to Monday morning. While the entire Continental fleet huddled far to the east, Governor Browne and his Council shipped almost all of the gunpowder out of the unguarded harbor to St. Augustine, Florida, and safety. *Alfred*, with Commander-in-Chief Hopkins and the rest of the marines and sailors on board, arrived off the bar late Monday morning to be greeted by enthusiastic victors but scant

spoils. When his anger and his billingsgate had quieted, Hopkins tried to repair his blunder by taking a half-loaf. The forts were stripped bare. With every cannon and cartridge from the town stuffed into the ships' holds, the Continental fleet, with *Alfred* in the lead, departed from Nassau on 17 March 1776.

Despite the satisfied calm of the homeward voyage, events to the north were shaping still further troubles for Hopkins and the Continental Navy. The same day on which the Americans left the Bahamas, the British left Boston. Units of the contending naval forces were to encounter each other soon thereafter. In course and in consequence the first battle between the Royal Navy and the Continental Navy prefigured almost every subsequent meeting: British technology, training, and





Figure 6. – Marine Captain Samuel Nicholas (1744-1790). Honored as the first officer in the United States Marine Corps and its first commandant. This is a picture of a miniature presented to the Corps in 1921 by a descendant of Nicholas. (From Edwin N. McClellan and John H. Craige, “American Marines in the Battles of Trenton and Princeton.” *The Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*, volume LV (June 1921), page 304. Courtesy Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)

tactical experience told over American fervor and ferocity.

When the British fleet set sail from Boston for Halifax, no one was sure whether the Americans in breaking the British seige of Boston had won a battle or a war. The British were only regrouping, however. Captain Tyringham Howe of HMS *Glasgow*, twenty guns, had the job of conveying dispatches telling of the British defeat at Boston and of future plans southward to New York and Virginia. Early in the morning of Saturday, 6 April 1776, to the east of Long Island a convoy of ships crossed Howe’s horizon. The freshly victorious Americans were about to meet the recently vanquished Britons for the first time at sea.<sup>11</sup>

For Hopkins and his fleet their cruise from the Bahamas was almost at an end; they could expect to

reach Rhode Island perhaps as early as Easter Sunday evening. Hopkins had had his problems on the voyage, yet his achievements must surely have bred a certain sense of satisfaction. No doubt he was sleeping well when the call to general quarters roused him rudely in the small hours of the morning. The report passed quickly. A large man-of-war was approaching the squadron. It was HMS *Glasgow*. American and British gunports opened sleepily and primed cannon stared warily across the calm sea. Challenge met counter-challenge and the fight was on! The Americans moved with clumsy uncertainty, confounding each other. Captain Howe maneuvered *Glasgow* with studied skill, almost immediately disabling two ships of the Continental fleet. The sheer force of American numbers, alone, almost overwhelmed the *Glasgow*, even if they could not outfight her. Captain Howe turned away and outsailed his pursuers—dispite his ship’s serious damage—back to the British base at Newport, Rhode Island.

The battle was over almost before it had begun. Especially was this so for *Alfred*, whose tiller ropes were shot away just as she joined the fray. The Continental Navy earned meager glory from their first British encounter. Captain Howe was thankful to have escaped with his skin; but for American inexperience he would not have escaped at all. Poor bumbling Hopkins paid the price for his many mistakes. The Continental Congress censured him in August 1776, suspended him from his command in the spring of 1777, and dismissed him from the service in January 1778.<sup>12</sup>

No matter how few the spoils from the first cruise of the Continental Navy, its impact rises to considerably greater significance if viewed from a broader perspective. When the fleet had set sail from Philadelphia the American Revolution appeared as little more than a localized armed rebellion in New England around Boston. By the time Hopkins’ ships entered New London harbor the war had become hemispheric in proportion. In no small measure this was due to the actions of *Alfred* and her sister-ships—perhaps, more precisely, to the threat implied by these actions. The promise of attacks upon shore installations, merchant shipping, and even upon the Royal Navy itself called for a major commitment of English naval vessels to the waters of the Caribbean and the North Atlantic. King George III later lamented that the Royal Navy had been “obliged to send . . . everything we had to America.” It “has crippled us,” he said, in comment upon how thin had become the wall of oak around the British Isles. So few ships, in fact, were available to the Royal Navy in home waters by 1778 that the French Navy—for the first

time in the eighteenth century—could dispose its fleets at will. The French might even plan to launch “the other armada,” in the words of A. Temple Patterson, and invade Great Britain. French naval superiority kept the blockade of Chesapeake Bay in 1781, assuring Washington his victory at Yorktown; he considered it “the pivot upon which everything turned.” The fleets of de Grasse and d’Estaing sailed where they chose because the Royal Navy had other concerns with which to contend. One of these was the Continental Navy of the United Colonies—potentially, if not in fact, a serious challenge to Britain’s ability to carry on a major war at sea.<sup>13</sup>

The reasons the Continental Navy never lived up to its potential were many. Inexperience and ineptitude did much to stifle the infant navy throughout its early history. Ships and supplies always were hard to secure. Particularly debilitating was Congressional parsimony with prize money which ensured the service short crews. Why fight in the Continental Navy, the sailors reasoned, when the government takes most of the proceeds of any capture? Ship out on board a privateer, live an easier life, and get a bigger slice of the captures. Little wonder, then, that service crews were short-handed all through the Revolution, and that *Alfred* herself was in port the whole summer of 1776, with as few as forty men on board at one point, out of a normal complement of one hundred and eighty. Even when she finally did get to sea again, she was undermanned and the crews were poorly trained. Congress never did correct the problem and throughout the war there was a severe shortage of sailors.<sup>14</sup>

It was only on 27 October 1776, with Captain John Paul Jones now in command, that *Alfred* shipped anchor and set a northerly course in company with the sloop *Providence*, twelve guns, Captain Hoysteed Hacker. Jones’s mission was multipurposed. His orders directed him to Cape Breton Island to free American prisoners who, reportedly, were being forced to work the coal mines at Spanish Bay (near modern Sydney, Nova Scotia) and to interfere as much as possible with the coal shipments to the city of New York, which had recently fallen to the British. He was also to keep a lookout for Quebec-bound British supply ships and to take every opportunity to harass the Newfoundland fishery. By mid-November Captain Jones had reached the southern coast of Cape Breton Island, where he took three prizes, one of them the 350-ton *Mellish* loaded with winter clothing for the British troops in Canada (Figure 7). Soon thereafter, the crew of *Providence* induced the not unwilling Captain Hacker to return home.

Captain Jones and his crew sailed on alone in *Alfred*.

He sent some boats into the harbor of Canso, Nova Scotia, where his men burned another supply ship and a whale oil warehouse. Off Louisbourg he took, in a stroke of good fortune, three colliers from Spanish Bay. From the captured crews he learned that the American seamen-turned-miners had bought their freedom by joining the Royal Navy and, more importantly, that at least three British warships were in the area looking for him. Wisely turning home, Jones paused to take another prize and was almost taken himself. HMS *Milford*, twenty-eight guns, chased *Alfred* for about four hours, but Jones drove ship and sailors hard and well and managed to escape, losing only his most recent capture, a small letter of marque, to the pursuing Briton. *Alfred* and her prizes reached Massachusetts in mid-December and the voyage was accounted a success.<sup>15</sup>

Never one to underestimate his own contribution to the history of the world, Jones later claimed a hand in winning the Battle of Trenton on the strength of these exploits! In his *Mémoire* to King Louis XVI of France he boasted:

The news that the uniforms had been captured on board *Mellish* restored the morale of General Washington’s army which at that time was almost completely without clothing. This unexpected help contributed not a little to the success of the army at the Battle of Trenton.

The “help,” despite Jones’s implication, must only have been his good news, for none of the uniforms could have reached Washington’s troops between the time Jones and *Mellish* arrived at Boston and 25 December, the date of the battle. *Alfred*’s prize might well have clothed the army at Valley Forge later, in 1777, but not in 1776.<sup>16</sup>

The same winter, farther north, saw changes wrought in the *Alfred* and in her command. Both centered in John Paul Jones. Ever anxious for a better vessel more worthy of his talents and always willing to advise his superiors, he wrote the Marine Committee in January finding fault with *Alfred* and suggesting that she be retired to merchant service. She had suffered too much in her conversion to naval duty, he argued, and was both poorly gunned and, for her build, overgunned. Perhaps Jones’s brush with *Milford* had been too close or perhaps *Alfred* had been damaged more than he cared to admit when he had grounded her while entering Plymouth harbor in December. Whatever his motives, his ideas bore fruit and the Marine Committee initiated a thorough refitting in the spring of 1777.<sup>17</sup> Instead of being advanced in the Continental service and given a better ship, as he expected, Jones found to his chagrin that in Congress’s view he was not even worthy of commanding the *Alfred*. A “new man” in the colonies,

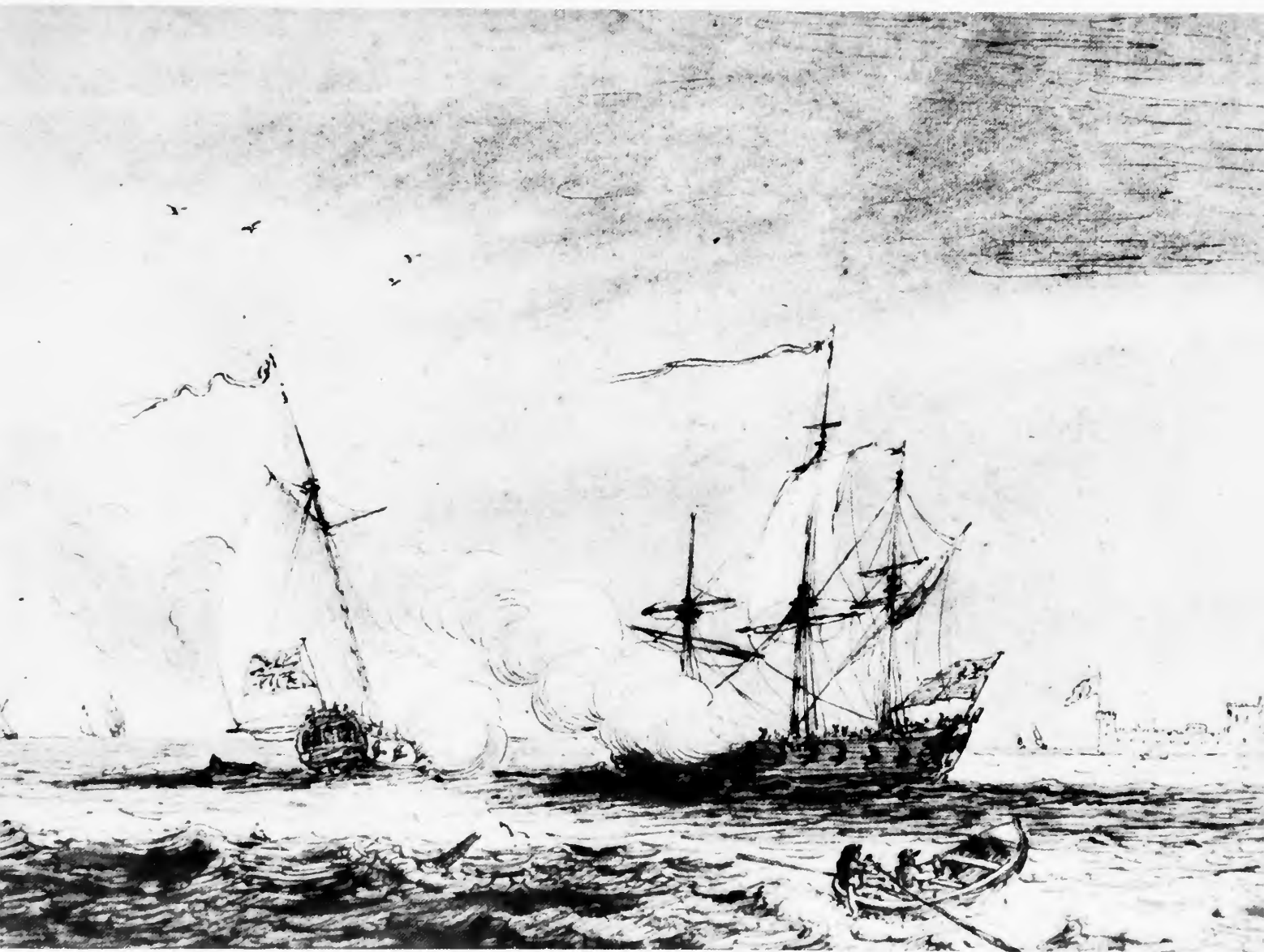


Figure 7.—“The Capture of the *Mellish*, 1776.” Sepia wash drawing, formerly believed to represent the capture by *Alfred* of the British transport *Mellish* off the coast of Cape Breton Island on 12 November 1776. See “Note on *Alfred* Paintings,” page 19. (From the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Collection of Naval Art. Courtesy Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.)

he had few supporters at Philadelphia. In consequence, the Marine Committee placed his name so far down the recently compiled roster of naval captains that he had to wait several months until another ship could be found for him.<sup>18</sup>

Elisha Hinman of Connecticut (Figure 8) replaced Jones on board *Alfred*. It was his responsibility to see her repairs and refitting completed. At this time her armament was reduced in an attempt to make her less

crank, and thereafter *Alfred* mounted fewer cannon each time she put to sea. Hinman had completed all of the work by the middle of May, pausing only long enough to take a bride. But it was late August before she sailed again. This time *Alfred*'s destination was France.<sup>19</sup>

The War for Independence had not gone well for the Americans during the long summer of 1777. Sir William Howe's ultimately successful campaign against Philadelphia started in late July. The month before General



Figure 8.—Elisha Hinman (1734-1805). A nineteenth-century engraving of “E. Hinman,” tentatively identified as a picture of the captain of *Alfred*. Note that he wore his pigtail fastened to the top of his head. (Official United States Navy Photograph. Courtesy Division of Naval History, Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C.)

“Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne had begun his advance south from Canada intent upon dividing the Continental camp along the line of the Hudson River. Until Burgoyne’s startling surrender at Saratoga, New York, on 17 October, the future of the colonial cause looked bleak indeed—in the Old World as well as in the New. Perhaps with the hope that a visible presence in European waters would brighten the gloomy picture of American prospects, Congress chose this same time to send several ships to France.

*Alfred*, in company with the Continental Navy’s new thirty-two gun frigate *Raleigh* (Figure 9), Captain Thomas Thompson, departed Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on Friday, 22 August 1777. Almost from the beginning they proved poorly matched. Within two

weeks Hinman and Thompson had thrown away what was surely the best opportunity ever presented to the Continental Navy.<sup>20</sup>

Daylight, 4 September, found the two ships within striking distance of the sixty-member Windward Islands convoy on its way from the West Indies to England, fully loaded with the produce of the British sugar colonies. An earlier capture of a straggler from the same group had given Thompson and Hinman a copy of the convoy’s sailing orders and signals. The merchantmen were theirs merely for the taking. Yet they captured not a one. *Alfred*, “crank” and “tender-sided” as usual, could not keep up with *Raleigh*. Thompson bravely but naively preferred to attack the Royal Navy escorts of the convoy rather than wage “war against merchantmen.”

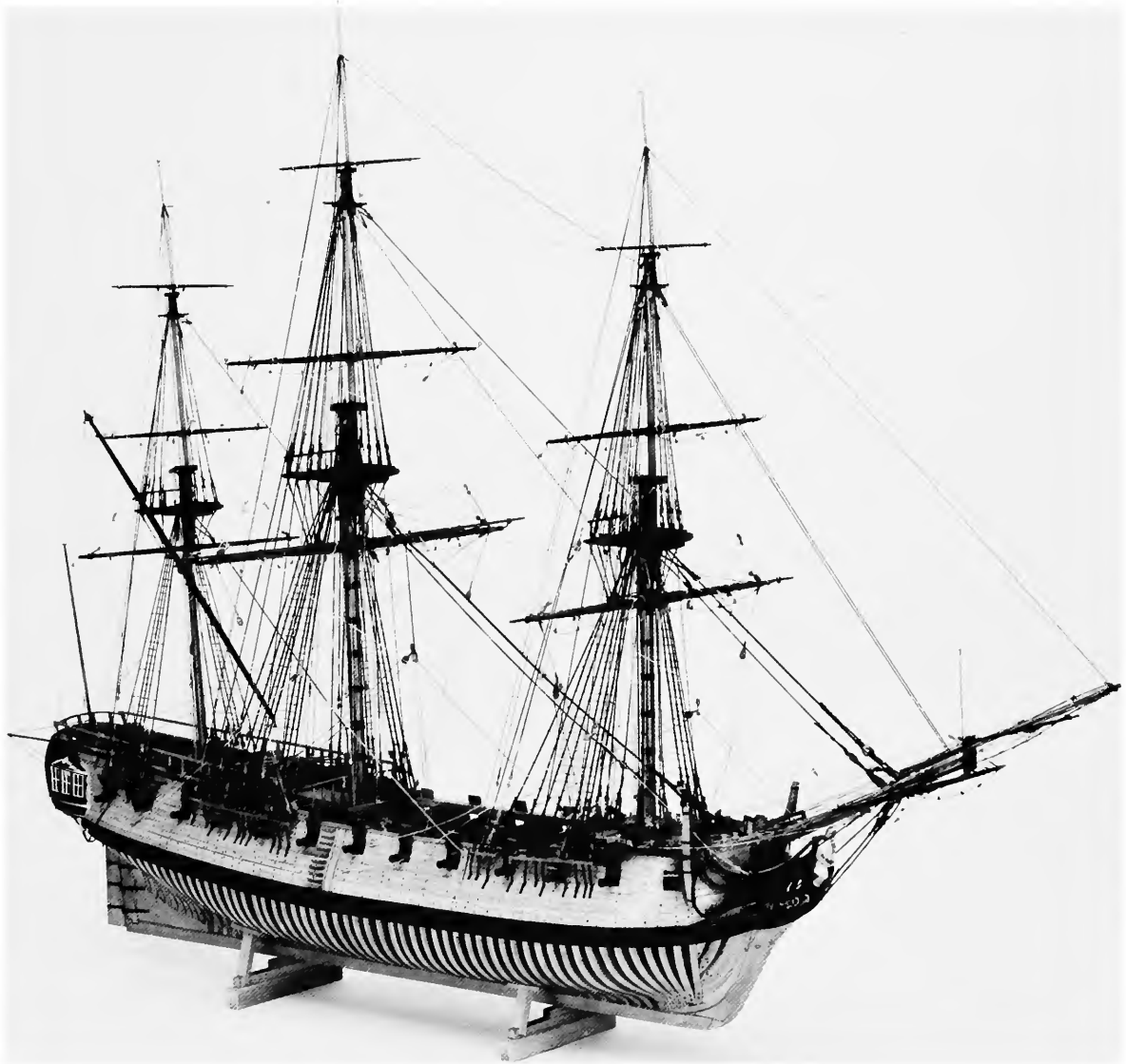


Figure 9.—Continental ship *Raleigh*, 1777. An Admiralty-style model of the Continental frigate *Raleigh* constructed by Robert V. Bruckslaw. (Courtesy Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.)

Storming into the middle of the convoy, he attacked the nearest naval vessel, H.M. sloop-of-war *Druid*, fourteen guns, Captain Peter Carteret.

Our ports were down [Thompson later reported], and our guns hosed, and we shot up alongside within pistol shot; then we up sails, out guns, hoisted Continental colours, and bid them strike to the Thirteen United States.

*Raleigh*'s first broadside killed *Druid*'s master and fatally wounded her captain but the First Lieutenant,

John Bouchier, was not easily daunted. Eleven broadsides later, although *Druid* was in wreckage about him, Bouchier had still not surrendered. With the rest of the British squadron about to enter the fray, Thompson had no choice but to break off and rejoin *Alfred* several miles away. After the British captains had chased him off, they gathered up the scattered convoy and stubbornly refused to be enticed into further battles. Thompson later complained that he and Hinman

challenged the enemy “for three days successively to come out of his fleet and engage us, but he declines the challenge.” The Americans exhibited once again both their admirable spirit and their lack of military sophistication. *Alfred* and *Raleigh* could do little more than resume their voyage to France where they arrived at Lorient (Figure 10) a month later on 6 October.<sup>21</sup>

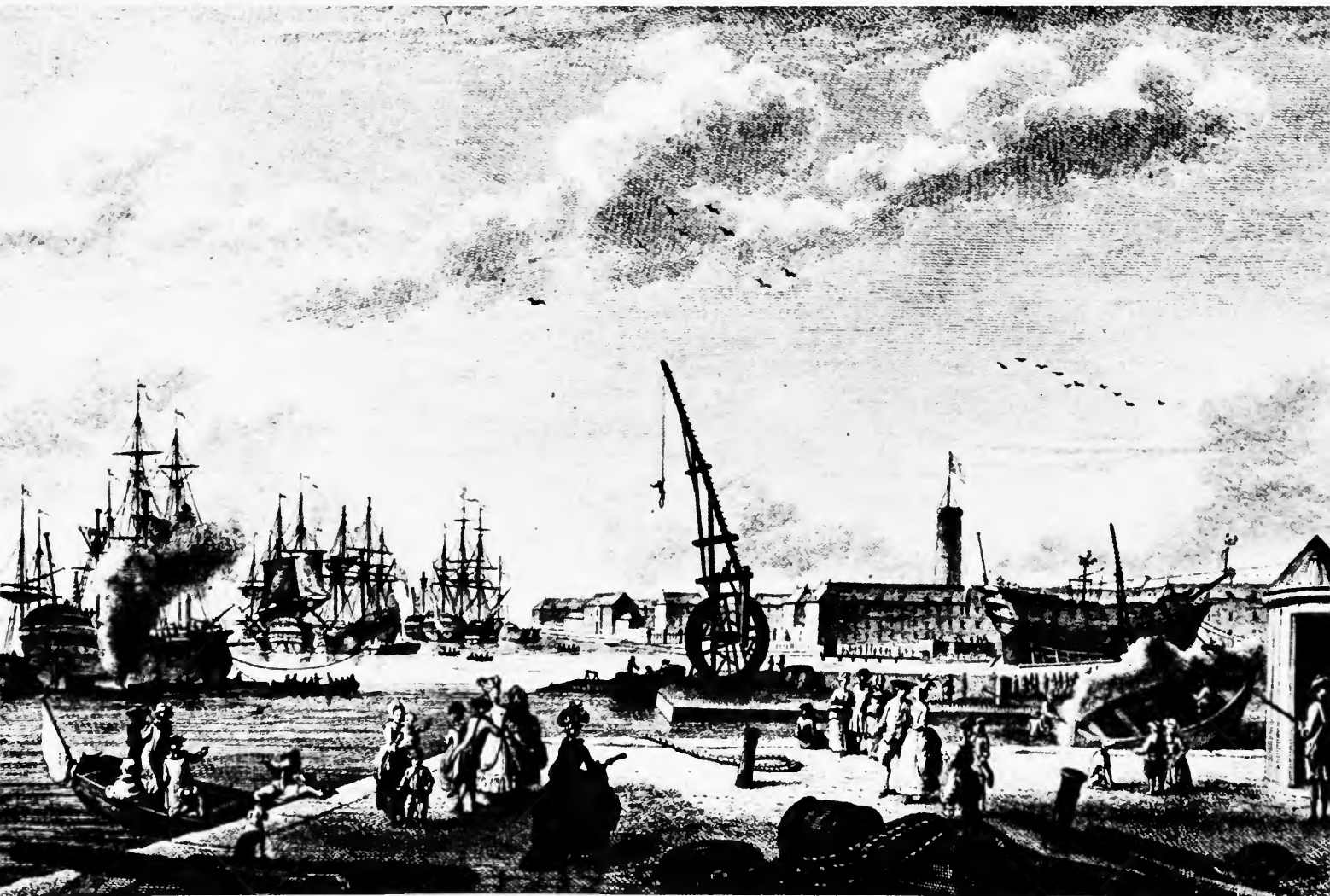
Although Hinman and Thompson were personally well received at Lorient, they could not have come at a worse time in their country’s fortunes. Wined and dined and publically saluted, the American captains found everything to their liking except the French reluctance to enter the war on the side of the American Colonies. Hinman wrote home soon after his arrival and summed

up the whole situation rather perceptively, if a bit overenthusiastically.

The French are really friends at heart to the Americans in the present controversy; but rather seem to decline a war at present, altho large armaments are fitting and getting in readiness both by sea & land. They will give America every assistance in their power, but not publicly; and are determined that a final separation of America from Great Britain shall take place, even at the expence of a war. Spain may be said to be equally disposed as France.

We can accuse Hinman of enthusiasm not only in his assessment of Spanish zeal but also in his suggestion that France was willing to go to war, no matter what.<sup>22</sup>

*Figure 10.*—Lorient, France. The port of Lorient at the time of the American Revolution. Engraving by Gouaz, after Ozanne. (From the copy in the Musée de la Marine, Paris, France. Official United States Navy Photograph. Courtesy Division of Naval History, Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C.)



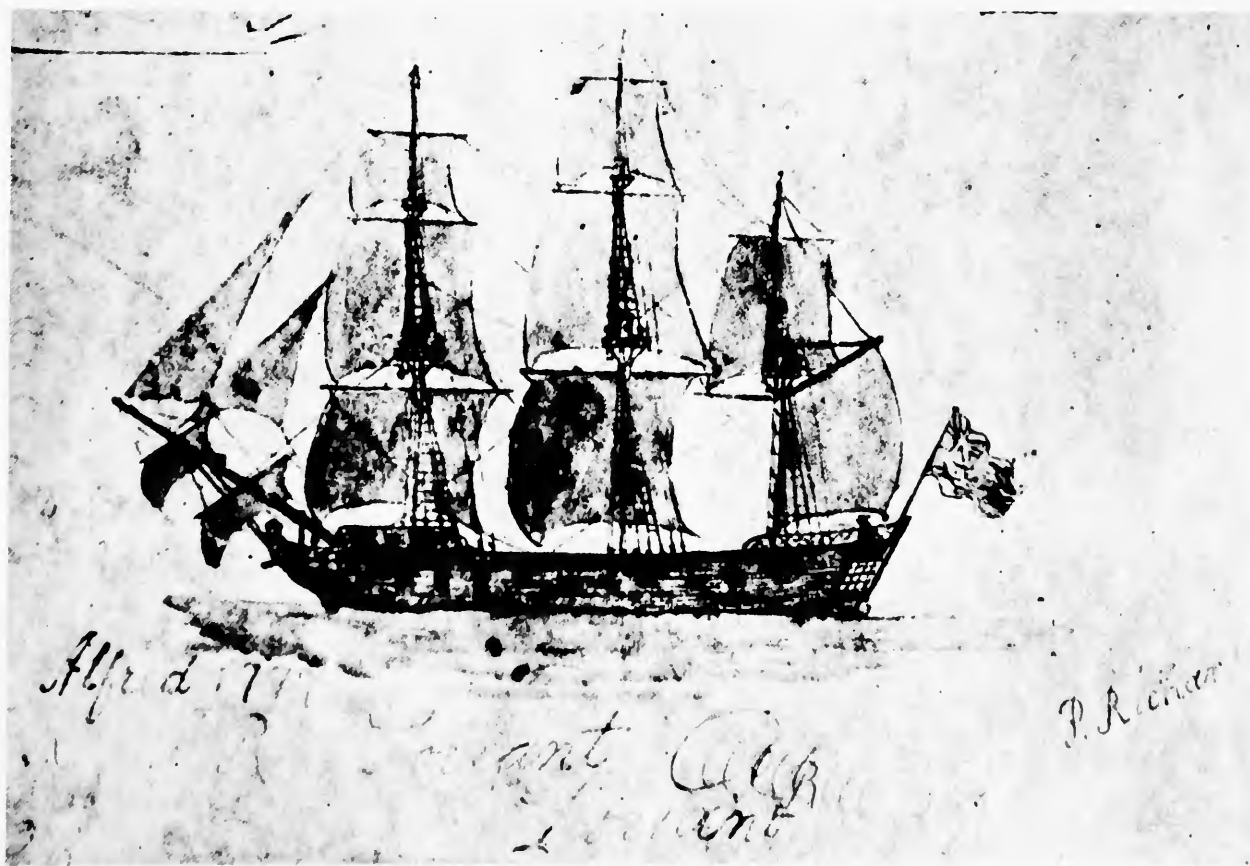
Actually the French had already begun to wonder if all had not been lost. The news from North America during the summer and early fall of 1777 contained little to justify a belief in anything but imminent British triumph over the colonial rebels. The American Commissioners in Paris—Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee—who were seeking an increased French commitment, had all they could do to maintain the status quo. With each British victory came greater pressure upon the French government to stop helping the Americans, and particularly to close the ports of France to the ships of the Continental Navy. The arrival of *Alfred* and *Raleigh*, duly reported to London, brought still another protest from the British government and further strain upon the difficult position of Franklin, Deane, and Lee. Consequently, they concluded that the best place for these ships was somewhere else.

In late November, at the nadir of American fortunes in France, they ordered *Alfred* and *Raleigh* to set sail for home.<sup>23</sup>

One of the reports on the sojourn of *Alfred* and *Raleigh* at Lorient which English spies dispatched was fuller than the rest and contains the most detailed account of the *Alfred* (Figure 11) which has survived. We can imagine the informant, probably an English merchant on business in the city, walking down by the docks, talking with sailors and tavern keepers, gathering information. He set down his observations in a long memorandum.

The *Alfred* was formerly a merchantman [and] is about 275 or 300 tuns at most[.] [She is] pierced for 20 guns[.] 9 p[ou]nde[rs][.] & carries 6 four pound[er]s on the q[ua]rte[r] deck & forward. the capt[ain] [is] an American. She they say has 160 men, & is better

Figure 11.—*Alfred* at Lorient, 1777. A supposed sketch of *Alfred* in 1777, signed by "P. Richard." (See "Note on *Alfred* Paintings," page 19.) (From a photograph (original unknown) in the Collection of Rear Admiral Elliot Snow, The Mariners Museum, Newport News, Virginia. Courtesy The Mariners Museum.)



officered then the other [ship Raleigh], but sails dully. Her appearance when her guns are housed & ports lowered down has very little of the ship of war. she is square sterned, without quarter gallery or badges, [and] has a figurehead painted yellow with a remarkable large plume of feathers on his helmet painted white. The ship is painted plain black & yellow with a white bottom[.] [She] is very taunt but not square rigged[,] her royall mast and [w]hole mizen top mast head [being] more out of proportion than the Rawleighs [and she] has a gaff mizen[.] [Her] top armour & quarter cloths [are] blue with 13 white stars the same as in the upper corner of their colors. neither have their names in the stern[.]<sup>24</sup>

The peaceful posture was a purposeful pose in obedience to Marine Committee orders “to keep your guns covered, and concealed; and to make as little warlike appearance as possible.” Peaceful they looked and peaceful they remained on into late December while the fate of the United States swung in the balance.

When *Alfred* and *Raleigh* actually set sail on Monday, 29 December 1777, the state of affairs had changed drastically in favor of the Americans, but the instructions given to Thompson and Hinman remained unaltered. Official word of Burgoyne’s surrender had reached Paris on 3 December and had set off a frantic series of negotiations. Within two weeks the British government had made an informal offer of peace to the colonists, but without independence, and, two days later, the French Foreign Minister, Comte de Vergennes, who was anxious to forestall an Anglo-American settlement, came forth with the long-sought military alliance and treaty. The tide had turned in the quest for American nationhood.<sup>25</sup> It is not clear if *Alfred* and *Raleigh* merely got lost in the swirl of events or whether, in spite of the changed situation, the Commission still thought it best that these ships be sent home.

We do know that circumstances could have been otherwise. Less than three weeks after *Alfred* and *Raleigh* sailed, Franklin, Deane, and Lee dealt differently with another vessel assigned to them under similar orders. They turned her captain loose in European waters without restriction and told him merely to “proceed . . . in the manner you shall judge best for distressing the enemies of the United States.” John Paul Jones, new commander of *Ranger*, eighteen guns, found in this commission the opportunity for many of the exploits for which he is most remembered.<sup>26</sup> Had Hinman and Thompson been given the same chance, we can but imagine what they might have accomplished. As it was, *Ranger* sailed to glory, *Alfred* and *Raleigh* to defeat and disgrace.

Their return voyage began well enough. Following the orders given them, Hinman and Thompson dropped

down the coast of Africa, where they took a prize sloop, and then set a course for the West Indies. They hoped to be able to capture several British vessels in the Caribbean trade before turning northward and home. Instead, the tables were turned.

Soon after sunrise on Monday, 9 March 1778, near the island of Barbados, *Alfred* and *Raleigh* spied two ships to the southwest. They were HMS *Ariadne*, twenty guns, Captain Thomas Pringle (Figure 12), and HMS *Ceres*, sixteen guns, Captain James Richard Dacres (Figure 13). Although outweighing the British seven guns to five, the Americans chose to flee. Again *Alfred* lagged behind, unable to keep up with the faster *Raleigh*. The two British captains sensed their tactical advantage. After a chase which lasted through the morning, they attacked, concentrating their fire on the nearer adversary, *Alfred*, which they hoped to subdue before the other ship could turn to join the fight.

At ½ past 12 the *Ceres* came up with the stern-most ship, who hoisted rebel colours & exchanged a broadside with him in passing. At 1 [the *Ariadne*] came to action with the before mentioned ship as did the *Ceres*; and at ½ past 1 the Rebel struck, the headmost ship making off.<sup>27</sup>

Pringle and Dacres had read the situation correctly. “The headmost ship,” *Raleigh*, continued its flight after their attack on *Alfred* had begun. Thompson later testified at a court of enquiry that he had hoped to lure the British ships away from *Alfred*. But Pringle and Dacres were not to be lured away. *Alfred* fought on for half an hour after they caught up with her—not the ten minutes Thompson remembered—before hauling down the Stars and Stripes. Thompson hoisted all sail, threw overboard everything he could in order to lighten *Raleigh*, outran his pursuers and escaped, only to stand court martial and be dismissed from the service. Hinman and his officers were sent to Forton Prison in England where in less than a week they bribed their jailors and got free by means of a hole through their chamber floor. Hinman returned home the next year. His crew had gained their release almost immediately because the British lacked facilities in the West Indies to detain them. The net loss to the Continental Navy was only the good ship *Alfred*.<sup>28</sup>

What ultimately became of *Alfred* we do not know. She was treated as a prize of war and sold at Barbados, presumably to someone from the island of Grenada since we find that Pringle, in command of *Ariadne*, later escorted her there. The last mention of *Alfred* occurs in the master’s log of *Ariadne* for 6 November 1778 which states that the “ships company was paid 12 dollars & 5 bitts a fore mast [man] for the *Alfred*[,] rebel ship of





Figure 12.—Captain Thomas Pringle (circa 1740-1803). Engraving by Orne, Jr., after Stuart, of then Rear Admiral Pringle. The Captain of HMS *Ariadne* on 9 March 1778. (Reproduced with the permission of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England. Courtesy Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)



Figure 13.—Captain James Richard Dacres (1749-1810). Engraving by Page, after Bowyer, of then Vice Admiral Dacres. The Captain of HMS *Ceres* on 9 March 1778. (Courtesy National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England.)

war, Elisha Hinman commander.”<sup>29</sup> We might imagine her, the proud purchase of some West Indian merchant, spending the rest of her days tramping in the Caribbean or carrying sugar to Bristol. If so, she would have come full circle. It is more likely that her owner fitted her out as a privateer to prey on her own kind.

Nevertheless, as one of the first ships of the

Continental Navy of the United Colonies, as the flagship of the first American fleet, as the first ship to hoist the Grand Union flag of the United Colonies, and the first command ship of an American amphibious invasion of enemy territory, the Continental Ship *Alfred* played no small role in the winning of independence for the United States. Her place is secure in our national heritage.

#### NOTES

1. *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, edited by Worthington C. Ford et al. (34 volumes; Washington, 1904-1937), volume III, pages 293-294, 311-312. Events leading to the establishment of the navy can be traced most conveniently in the volumes of the *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, edited by William Bell Clark and William James Morgan (in progress; Washington, 1964 to date). See also “The Secret Journals of Congress, 1774-1780,” kept by Charles Thomson, Secretary of the Continental Congress, volume I, Charles Thomson Papers, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia [hereinafter abbreviated HSP]; and Gardner Weld Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution* (2 volumes;

Boston and New York, 1913), volume I, pages 1-58. Allen is still the standard work, and the sources he cited are the first sources for all that follows. Normally only those references will be mentioned which add to or alter what he has said. Also valuable are Charles Oscar Paullin, *The Navy of the American Revolution: Its Administration, Its Policy, and Its Achievements* (Cleveland, 1906) and William Bell Clark, *George Washington's Navy: Being An Account of His Excellency's Fleet in New England Waters* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1960).

2. William Bell Clark, *Gallant John Barry, 1745-1803: The Story of a Naval Hero of Two Wars* (New York, 1958), pages 40-66, describes the mercantile career of the ship and her

purchase. The *Black Prince* log from December 1774 to 4 October 1775 is in the Barry Papers now in the personal collection of Mr. Barry Hayes Hepburn of Philadelphia.

Based upon entries in the 1775-1783 ledger of Philadelphia ship chandler James Wharton, Clark concluded that "it is apparent the *Black Prince* was acquired by the Naval Committee on Saturday, November 4, and, on Wednesday, November 8, was rechristened the *Alfred*" (page 66). A better guide is Wharton's daybook entries, from which the ledger was compiled. In a slim volume covering the period 21 October to 21 November, the ship is referred to as *Black Prince* until Friday, 17 November, when the first entry charges *Black Prince* and the second charges *Alfred* (page 28). The ledger and the daybook are in The Wharton Papers, HSP. For a detailed discussion of the ship, see John J. McCusker, "The Continental Ship *Alfred*," *Nautical Research Journal*, volume XIII (Autumn 1965), pages 37-68, and "The Tonnage of the Continental Ship *Alfred*," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* [hereinafter abbreviated *PMHB*], volume XC (April 1966), pages 227-232.

3. Quoted in J[ohn] Thomas Scharf and Thomas Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* (3 volumes; Philadelphia, 1884), volume I, page 303, note 2, most likely from the "Memorial of John Barry to Pennsylvania House of Assembly [1783]," a copy of which is in the Barry Papers, cited above, note 2.

4. So recorded John Adams, one of the members of the Naval Committee. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 1st series of *The Adams Papers*, edited by L[yman] H. Butterfield et al. (4 volumes; Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961), volume III, page 350.

It was no coincidence that on Saturday, 18 November, *The Pennsylvania Evening Post* (Philadelphia) printed a lengthy "Extract from Entick's Naval History" (Figure 2) in which Alfred appears at the head of a new navy to save his people from the depredations of the Danes who were burning the coastal towns, a clear allusion to the burning of Falmouth (Portland, Maine) by the British in October. Compare John Entick, *A New Naval History: or, Compleat View of the British Navie* (London, 1757), page iii. As was the custom, the same extract was repeated in *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet or, The General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), Monday, 20 November 1775, and in the *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 22 November 1775.

5. See pages 13-14. Some of the details of the refitting of *Alfred* are mentioned in Clark, *Gallant John Barry*, pages 66-67. More can be found in the daybook and ledger of James Wharton (cited above, note 2) and in Wharton and Humphreys's Ship Yard Accounts, 1773-1795, pages 42-43, The Joshua Humphreys Papers, HSP.

6. Allen, *Naval History*, volume I, page 230. See Jones's encounter with HMS *Milford*, page 8.

7. John Paul Jones to Samuel Huntington, President of Congress, *Alliance*, Texel, 7 December 1779, John Paul Jones Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. [hereinafter abbreviated LC].

There has been considerable discussion over the date of this commissioning, but the best-informed sources agree that Sunday, 3 December, was the most likely day. This is the day mentioned in the intelligence sent by one "B.P." to the Earl of Dartmouth from Baltimore, 20 December 1775, as printed in *The Principles and Acts of the Revolution in America*, edited by Hezekiah Niles

(Baltimore, 1822), page 541, and in *American Archives*, edited by Peter Force [and Matthew St. Clair Clarke] (9 volumes in 2 series; Washington, 1837-1853); 4th series, volume IV, page 360. See also *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, edited by Clark and Morgan, volume II, pages xlii and 1307, note 2. Both necessary elements for such an event were at hand: the fleet commander and the flag. Just the day before, on Saturday, 2 December, Esek Hopkins had decided to accept his appointment to preside over the fleet; letter of Samuel Ward and Stephen Hopkins to Nicholas Cooke, Philadelphia, 2 December, in *ibid.*, volume II, pages 1233-1234. On that same day the Wharton ledger, page 38, (cited above in note 2) debits the *Alfred* for an "Ensign" made by seamstress Margaret Manny. Compare Howard M. Chapin, "Some Recently Found Flag Items," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, volume XXXII: *Transactions, 1933-1937*, pages 524-525. If the commissioning were done on 3 December, then it took place in the morning or early afternoon and a proper ceremony was made of the occasion for all the Rhode Islanders present (the Hopkinses were from Rhode Island) gathered that afternoon for a celebration. See letter of Samuel Ward to Henry Ward, Philadelphia, 3 December 1775, in *Correspondence of Governor Samuel Ward, May 1775-March 1776*, edited by Bernhard Knollenberg (Providence, 1952), pages 133-135.

8. *The Virginia Gazette* [Dixon and Hunter] (Williamsburg), 2 March 1776; *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, edited by Clark and Morgan, volume III, page 1189n; extract from a letter from Philadelphia, 29 January 1776, in Governor William Tryon to Secretary of State, New York, 11 February 1776, Colonial Office Papers [hereinafter abbreviated CO], Class 5: New York, Original Correspondence to Secretary of State, volume 1107, Public Record Office, London [hereinafter PRO]. Second and subsequent references to record groups in the PRO will take a short form using only the abbreviation of the group name, the class number, the volume number and, where applicable, the number of the page or folio (e.g., CO 5/1107, PRO).

9. For the details of this first cruise up to the fleet's departure from New Providence, see John J. McCusker, "The American Invasion of Nassau in the Bahamas," *The American Neptune*, volume XXV (July 1965), pages 37-68. Compare the Captain's log of H.M. Schooner *St. John*, Lt. William Grant, Admiralty Papers [hereinafter abbreviated Adm], Class 51: Captain's Logs, volume 4330. PRO. See also the log of the Continental Schooner *Wasp*, High Court of Admiralty Records, Class 30: Miscellaneous, volume 773, no. 10, PRO.

Marine Captain Samuel Nicholas (Figure 6) is remembered as the first commandant of the Marine Corps; *Home of the Commandants* (Washington, 1956), pages 48-50.

10. *The Letter Book of Esek Hopkins, Commander-in-Chief of the United States Navy, 1775-1777*, edited by Adverda S. Beck (Providence, 1932), page 44. A slightly later, different version signed by Hopkins, is in CO, Class 23; Bahamas, Original Correspondence to Board of Trade, volume 10, f. 246, PRO.

11. The evacuation of Boston can be traced in *The Despatches of Molyneux Shuldham, Vice-Admiral of the Blue and Commander-in-Chief of His Britannic Majesty's Ships in North America, January-July, 1776*, edited by Robert Wilden Neeser, *Publications of the Naval History Society*, volume III (New York, 1913), printed from Adm 1: Secretary's Department: In Letters, volume 848, PRO.

12. Allen, *Naval History*, volume I, pages 101-108; Samuel Eliot Morison, *John Paul Jones: A Sailor's Biography* (Boston, 1959), pages 47-53. Hopkins's career can best be followed in the introductions and texts of two volumes of his papers edited by Adverda S. Beck: *The Letter Book of Esek Hopkins*; and *The Correspondence of Esek Hopkins, Commander-in Chief of the United States Navy* (Providence, 1933). Her title for him is, of course, spurious; Gardner Weld Allen, "Esek Hopkins," *The New England Quarterly*, volume IX (September 1936), pages 483-485. Edward Field, *Esek Hopkins* (Providence, 1898) is still useful. For Hopkins's earlier life, see also James B. Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: Colonial Years* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1952), *passim*.

Captain Howe's reports and other relevant papers are in *The Despatches of Molyneux Shuldham*, edited by Neeser, pages 177-186, 207, 212, 227, 273, and 287. Other reports of the engagement are to be found variously scattered. Governor Montfort Browne, Royal Governor of the Bahamas, was a prisoner on board *Alfred*; see his letter to Lord George Germain, New York, 5 November 1776, CO 23/23, PRO, and as printed in "The Taking of the Bahamas by the Continental Navy in 1776," edited by Malcolm Lloyd, Jr., *PMHB*, volume XLIX (October 1925), pages 355-356. Captain David Hawley of Connecticut was a prisoner on board *Glasgow*; his account appeared in the *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford), 20 May 1776. Also on board *Glasgow* was James Parker, Loyalist merchant of Virginia and victualler for the British forces in America; his version survives enclosed in a letter of Governor William Tryon of New York to the Earl of Dartmouth, New York, 15 April 1776, CO 5: Original Correspondence, volume 1107, PRO. Captain Nicholas Biddle of *Andrew Doria*, one of Hopkins's ships, described the whole affair as a farce in his letter to his brother Charles Biddle, 2 May 1776, "The Letters of Captain Nicholas Biddle," edited by William Bell Clark, *PMHB*, volume LXXIV (July 1950), pages 384-385. See also Clark's *Captain Dauntless: The Story of Nicholas Biddle of the Continental Navy* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1949), pages 110-113.

13. George III to Lord Sandwich, Queen's House, 29 April 1778, in [John Montagu, Fourth Earl of Sandwich], *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1771-1782*, edited by G[eorge] R. Barnes and J[ohn] H. Owen, Publications of the Navy Record Society, volumes LXIX, LXXI, LXXV, LXXVIII (4 volumes; London, 1932-1938), volume II, pages 38-39; Washington to Benjamin Franklin, New Windsor, New Jersey, 20 December 1780 in *The Writings of George Washington*, edited by John C. Fitzpatrick (39 volumes; Washington, 1931-1944), volume XX, page 50; Patterson, *The Other Armada: The Franco-Spanish Attempt to Invade Britain in 1779* (Manchester, 1960). See also McCusker, "The American Invasion of Nassau" (cited in note 9).

14. Allen, *Naval History*, volume I, pages 50-51, 110-111; Morison, *John Paul Jones*, pages 66-71.

15. Allen, *Naval History*, volume I, pages 121-127; Morison, *John Paul Jones*, pages 76-86. Note Jones's reports to the Marine Committee, 12 and 16 November 1776 and 11 and 12 January 1777, in the Papers of the Continental Congress, Item 58, pages 99, 101, 103, and 107, Record Group 360, United States National Archives, Washington, D.C. [hereinafter abbreviated NA]. The first two of those letters are printed, in part, in *American Archives*, edited by Force and Clarke, 5th series, volume III, pages 659, 738. Compare the Master's log of HMS

*Milford* entries for 9-10 December 1776, Adm 52/1865:62-63, PRO. For the raid on Canso, see A. C. Yost, *Guysborough Sketches and Other Essays* (Guysborough, Nova Scotia, 1950), pages 98-103.

16. "Extrait du Journal des mes Compaignes . . . pendant le cours de la Revolution Americaine" [pages 9-10], enclosed with a letter from Jones to Louis XVI, Paris, 1 January 1786, Jones Papers, LC. See also *The Weekly Register* (Baltimore), 6 June 1812. Compare Morison, *Jones*, page 80. The agent for the Continental Navy at Boston, John Bradford, writing to the Secret and Marine Committees of the Continental Congress on Saturday, 21 December 1776, reported that *Mellish* "arrived safe at Dartmouth [i.e., New Bedford, Massachusetts], last Fryday . . ." He meant the day before, Friday, 20 December, since he continues:

I sent order by the return of the Express to unload her and convey the clothing into safety immediately— Mr. Livingston sets out for Dartmouth this hour in order to receive what part of the cargo is wanted for the Army and to forward it.

John Bradford Letter Books, 1776-1782, volume I (1776-1777), LC.

17. McCusker, "Continental Ship *Alfred*," page 51, and note 46, pages 63-64. See Jones to Marine Committee, Boston, 11 January 1777, Papers of the Continental Congress, Item 58, pages 103-104, NA, and Jones to Robert Morris, Boston, 16 January 1777, Jones Papers, LC. This last letter is printed in [Anne Farwell] de Koven, *The Life and Letters of John Paul Jones* (2 volumes; New York, 1913), volume I, pages 176-178.

Jones later wrote, in characteristic fashion, that being sent to sea "in ships unfit for war like the *Alfred* . . . distracts my very soul!" Jones to Joseph Hewes, *Ranger*, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 30 October 1777, Jones Papers, LC.

18. Allen, *Naval History*, volume I, pages 182-183; Morison, *John Paul Jones*, pages 87-92.

19. Scattered details of this refitting (and mention of Hinman's having gone "to get a wife") can be found in the letters of the Continental naval agent at Boston, John Bradford; Bradford Letter Books, 1776-1782, LC.

20. The orders to Thompson and Hinman were nearly identical. Compare John Hancock to Elisha Hinman, "By order of [the] Marine Committee," Philadelphia, 6 September 1777, in Admiral James Young to Phillip Stephens, the Secretary of the Admiralty, Antigua, 23 March 1778, Adm 1/310:147, PRO; and Marine Committee to Thomas Thompson, [Philadelphia], 6 September 1777, as printed in *Outletters of the Continental Marine Committee and Board of Admiralty, August, 1776-September, 1789*, edited by Charles Oscar Paullin, Publications of the Naval History Society, volumes IV-V (2 volumes; New York, 1914), volume I, pages 155-156.

21. [John Almon (editor)], *The Remembrancer; or, Impartial Repository of Public Events* (17 volumes; London, 1775-1784), volume V, pages 403-404, printing the report of Captain Thompson dated, at sea, 28 September 1777; Captain's log of *Druid*, Adm 51/4172, PRO; Captain's log of *Camel*, Adm 51/156, PRO.

22. Hinman to Ellis Gray of Boston, Lorient, 26 October 1777, in Young to Stephens, Antigua, 23 March 1777, Adm 1/310: 147, PRO.

23. Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (New York, 1935), pages 16-57. *Revolutionary Diplo-*

*matic Correspondence of the United States*, edited by Francis Wharton (6 volumes; Washington, 1889), volume II, page 428, prints the Commissioners' instructions.

24. This intelligence was relayed to a Mr. F. Steward of Weymouth by "a gent[leman] of the strictest veracity" who had left Lorient on 4 December. It was forwarded to the Admiralty by Captain Thomas Graves, HMS *Conqueror*, 19 December 1777; Adm 1/1833 (13), PRO.

25. Bemis, *Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, pages 58-61.

26. Jones's orders are in a letter to him from Franklin and Deane, Paris, 16 January 1778, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Miscellaneous, volume II, page 398, LC. A somewhat condensed version was printed in *Life and Correspondence of John Paul Jones Including his Narrative of the Campaign of the Liman*, [edited by Robert Charles Sands] (New York, 1830), page 74. It was while in command of *Ranger* that Jones raided the Irish Sea coast of England and captured HMS *Drake* off Belfast. Allen, *Naval History*, volume I, pages 337-352; Morison, *John Paul Jones*, pages 120-163.

27. Captain's log, *Ariadne*, 10 March 1778, Adm 51/68: 58, PRO.

28. Allen, *Naval History*, volume I, pages 301-304, 312-314. Hinman's version of the capture and later events have to be pieced together from a variety of sources. See R[oyal] R. Hinman, "A Family Record of the Descendants of Sergt. Edward Hinman," part 6 of his *A Catalogue of the Names of the First Puritan Settlers of the Colony of Connecticut* (Hartford, 1852-1856), pages 818-819; Benjamin J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution* (2 volumes; New York, 1852), volume II, page 846, note 11; and the American Prisoners' Journal of Forton Prison, Portsmouth, 1777-1779, entries for 18 and 24 July 1778, United States Navy Papers, LC. Compare Louis F. Middlebrook, *History of Maritime Connecticut during the American Revolution, 1775-1783* (2 volumes; Salem, Massachusetts, 1925), volume II, pages 150-153.

Thompson's tale of both legs of the voyage is in two published letters: *The Independent Chronicle* (Boston), 9 April 1778, and *The Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*

(Boston), 30 April 1778. William Bell Clark prints some of the public debate subsequent to the court martial of Hinman initiated by Thompson which took place in February 1777 in "The Battle of Words: A Naval Episode of the Revolutionary War," *The Minute Man* [Chicago, Illinois], volumes XL-XLI (October, December 1950, February 1951), [5-7], [8-12], [5-8]. Hinman was acquitted with honor. On the disposition of the crew of *Alfred*, see Governor Lord George Macartney to Secretary of State, St. Georges, Grenada, 10 April 1778, CO 101; Grenada, Original Correspondence-Secretary of State, volume 21, PRO.

The British version of the battle and its aftermath survives in several places: the Captain's log of *Ariadne*, Adm 51/60:57, PRO; the Master's log of *Ariadne*, Adm 52/1576, PRO; the Captain's log of *Ceres*, Adm 51/4141:197, PRO; and a letter from Captain Pringle to Admiral James Young, Carlisle Bay, [Barbados], 18 March 1778, in Young to Stephens, Antigua, 23 March 1778, Adm 1/310:147, PRO. *Ariadne* and *Ceres* had the additional advantage of being copper sheathed, making them potentially faster than their opponents. Admiralty to Navy Board, 9 December 1778 and 10 January 1777, Adm 2/244:41, 103, PRO; Pringle to Young, 18 March 1778, Adm 1/310:147, PRO. Some contemporaries "esteemed [*Ceres* as] the fastest sailer in the British Navy," as quoted by J.W. Damer Powell in *The Mariners Mirror*, volume XV (July 1929), page 320. Pringle and Dacres had already proven their mettle against the fleet of Benedict Arnold on Lake Champlain in October 1776 and both were later to rise to the rank of admiral in the Royal Navy; *The Private Papers of John, Earl of Sandwich*, edited by Barnes and Owen, volume I, pages 177-179, 183-191. Again, technology and talent were on the side of the British forces.

29. Adm 52/1576, PRO. This amounted to about £2.85 sterling for each seaman, the equivalent of nearly nine weeks' salary. Presuming that the prize money was divided in the usual fashion (the crews split among themselves one-fourth of the total), and that both ships shared the money (there were roughly 250 men on board both), the total received for *Alfred* must have been in excess of £2800.00.

### Note on *Alfred* Paintings

The painting of Continental Ship *Alfred* (cover illustration), published here for the first time, resulted from collaboration between this writer and the naval artist, Colonel Phillips Melville, USAF (Ret.). Colonel Melville's art has appeared in the *American Heritage* and the *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*; he is also a maritime historian in his own right. An earlier drawing of *Alfred* appeared on the cover of *Nautical Research Journal* (volume XIII [Autumn 1965]), which contained an article summarizing research about the ship. Some of the resulting suggestions have been incorporated to improve the finished work, as has other newly acquired information. *Alfred* is portrayed against a Brittany coast background as she sailed from Lorient with *Raleigh* in late December 1777.

While our effort has been to produce as accurate a portrayal of *Alfred* as possible, this is a hypothetical rendering. The painting is based upon careful research and has been cautiously produced, but it is still only conjectural.

By contrast, the other two purported pictures of *Alfred* used here have no claim to credence whatsoever. They are fully discussed and evaluated in the *Nautical Research Journal* article mentioned above and more recently in *The American Neptune* (volume XXVIII [January 1968]). The Roosevelt Collection drawing (Figure 7) has been incorrectly identified as to its subject. The Richard sketch (Figure 11) is either a nineteenth-century pipe dream or a twentieth-century hoax. Neither pictures the ship *Alfred*.

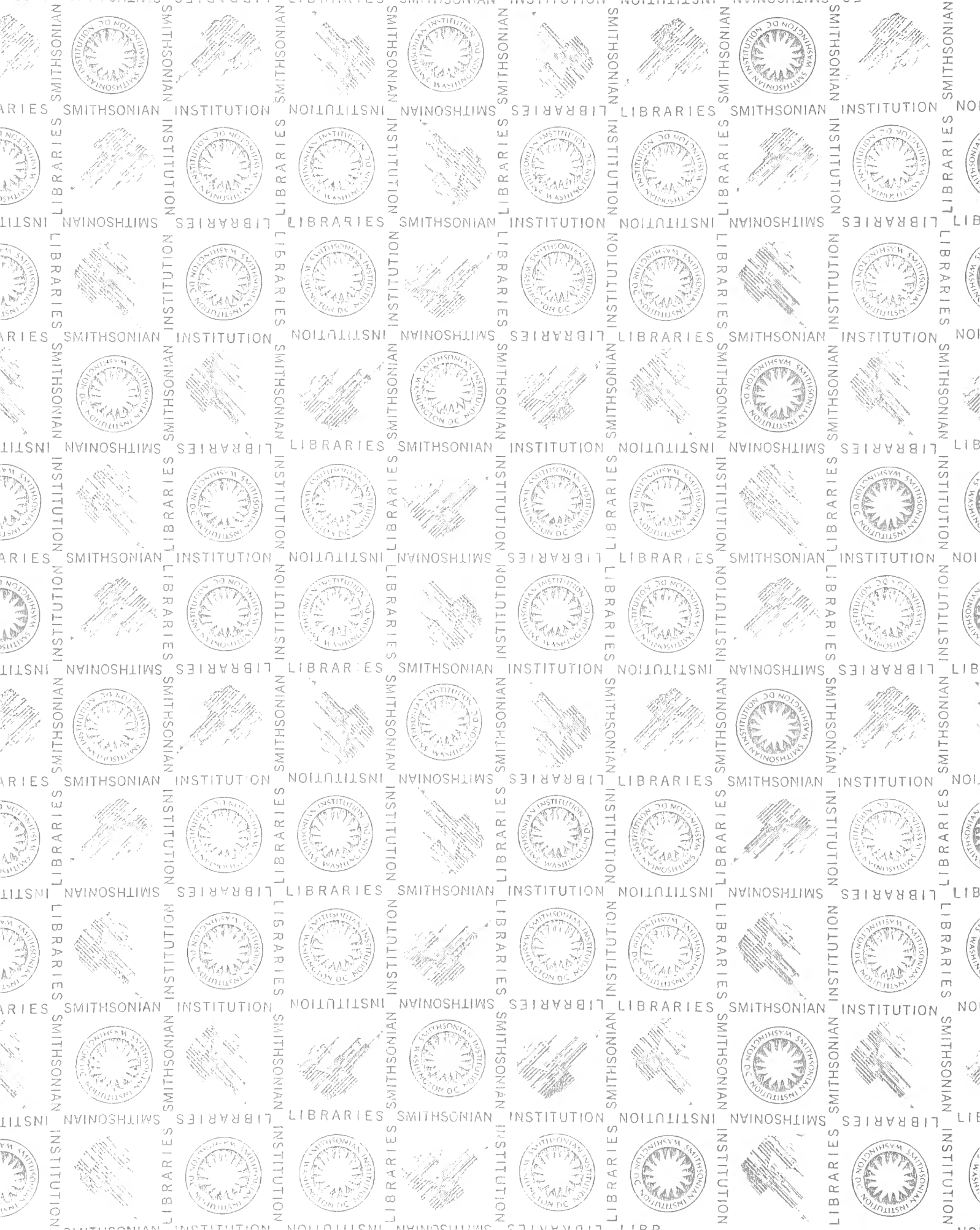


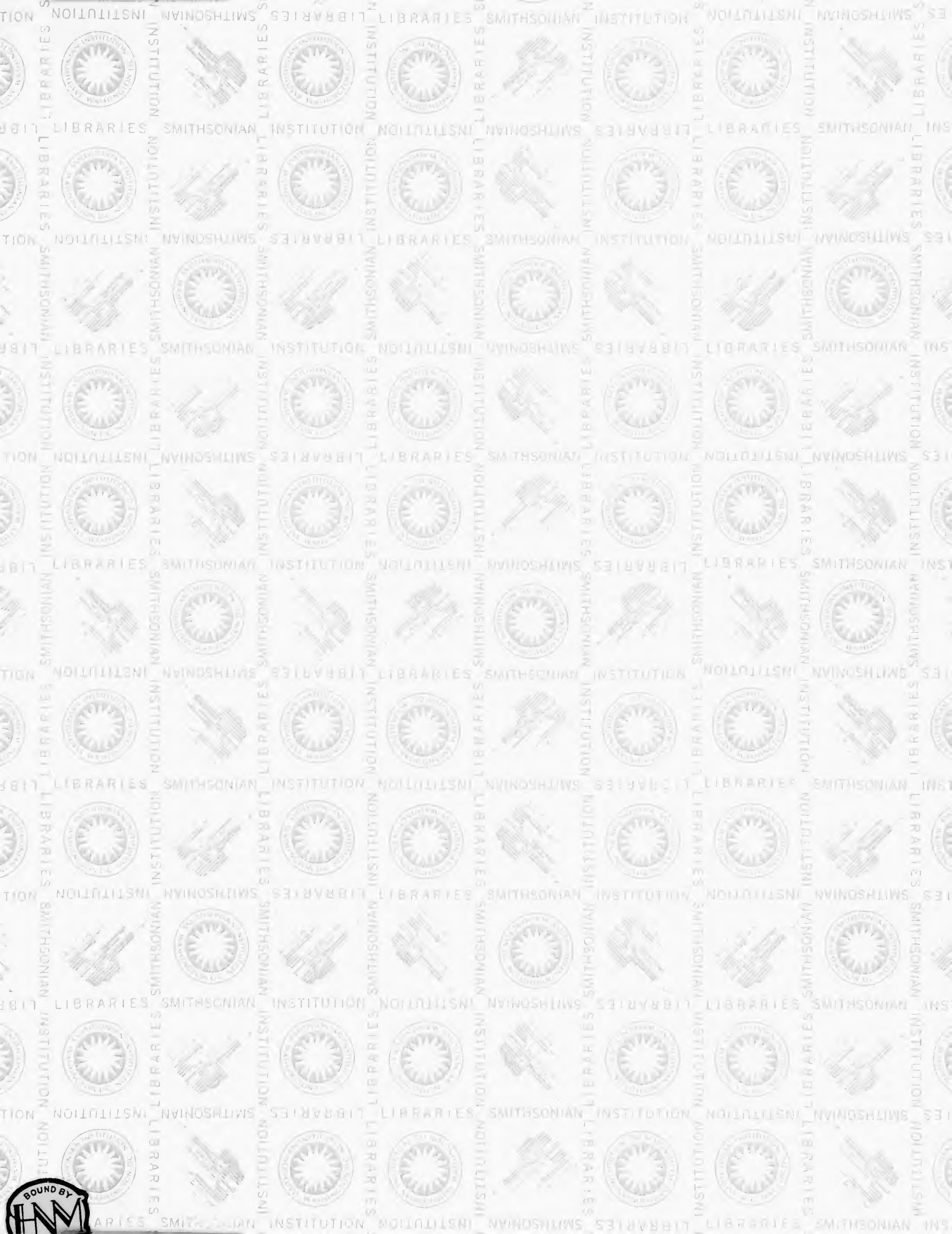












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