

Loyalty and Liberty: The Ambiguous Patriotism of Jack Tar in the American Revolution

Paul A. Gilje
University of Oklahoma

What motivated Jack Tar in the American Revolution? An examination of American sailors both on ships and as prisoners of war demonstrates that the seamen who served aboard American vessels during the revolution fit neither a romanticized notion of class consciousness nor the ideal of a patriot minute man gone to sea to defend a new nation.¹ While a sailor could express ideas about liberty and nationalism that matched George Washington and Ben Franklin in zeal and commitment, a mixxture of concerns and loyalties often interceded. 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. Sailors could have stronger attachments to shipmates or to a hometown, than to ideas or to a country. They might also have mercenary motives. Most just struggled to survive in a tumultuous age of revolution and change. Jack Tar, it turns out, had his own agenda, which might hold steadfast amid the most turbulent gale, or alter course following the slightest shift of a breeze.²

In tracing the sailor's path in these varying winds we will find that seamen do not quite fit the mold cast by Jesse Lemisch in his path breaking essays on the "inarticulate" Jack Tar in the American Revolution. Lemisch argued that the sailor had a concern for "liberty and right" that led to a "complex awareness that certain values larger than himself exist and that he is the victim not only of cruelty and hardship but also, in the light of those values, of injustice."³ Instead, we will discover that sailors had much in common with their land based brethren described by the new military historians. These scholars have de-emphasized the role of ideology in the day to day experience of the men who filled the ranks of the military during the Revolutionary War. A few soldiers served in the army convinced of the justice of the cause. But as the war dragged on, poverty, an enlistment bonus, and the opportunity to take booty from the enemy, played a greater role in filling the manpower needs of the Continental Line. On the battlefield loyalty to ones comrades in arms, and to ones officers, as well as the threat of punishment, convinced men to stand and fight.⁴

This essay comes to similar conclusions about common seamen, while striving to understand the peculiar circumstances of the sailors' experiences. In a time of revolution and upheaval, during a conflict in which loyalty meant different things to different people, and when the definition of a new nation was just coming into focus, it should come as no surprise that a heterogeneous body of seafarers might decide to support either side depending on the cir-

cumstances. But my purpose is not to set up a dichotomy between patriotism and personal interest; it is to explore the conflicting impulses that swirled simultaneously inside the sailor's head. These varied motives suggest that we should be careful in burdening the concept of a sailor's liberty too quickly with largely republican values. Rather, we need to focus on the sailor's immediate, often practical, definition—a moment of personal license and freedom of restraint.

To gain insight into this liberty and the sailor's ambiguous patriotism I will try to identify some of the men who served the American cause at sea, exploring how this identity affected loyalty and patriotism. I will also examine the variety of reasons for signing aboard American vessels of war, and I will follow the career patterns of a few sailors to offer further insight into their choices. Having looked at the American sailor aboard ship, I will then concentrate on the prisoner of war experience as it concerned defecting to the enemy, escaping, and self-organization within the prison to help us understand what loyalty and liberty meant for the American sailor.

I

Determining the identity of sailors and the reasons for serving aboard American ships is not easy. Thousands of men sailed under the American flag during the war and each came from his own particular background and had his own special reasons. There was no single Jack Tar. Almost any male in the American colonies might serve a stint aboard an ocean going vessel.⁵ The sea was an integral part of American life, and most Americans in the 1770s lived within a few score miles of salt water. The Revolutionary War, with opportunities for a quick strike at becoming rich as a privateer, brought landmen who had never sailed before to the deep sea. But many of the men who fought at sea during the revolution had moved in and out of maritime occupations throughout their lives. Sometimes they farmed or worked a trade; other times they sailed aboard ships. After the war they either shifted between the ranks of sailors and landmen, or broke the cycle and established themselves permanently ashore. Some men remained wedded to the sea all their lives, although as they got older they might stay closer to home by working in coastal trade or as fishermen. A select few found life aboard ship as a means of advancement, working their way to become officers and men of property. The forecabin and gun deck of any ship was thus crowded with all sorts of men who had a wide range of experiences and ambitions.⁶

The varied nature of the men who served on privateers or in the state and Continental navies affects the written record of their experience. Over thirty-five extended first person accounts exist written by sailors of the revolutionary war. About half were penned by men who were either officers, or, became officers or sea captains later in life.⁷ Most of the rest were produced by men

who left the sea for other careers after the revolution.⁸ Only a handful of the authors can be identified as men who eked out a living from the ocean for the rest of their lives.⁹ In short, the most inarticulate group among the inarticulate seamen remain almost without a voice.

Even the accounts that we do have cannot be fully trusted.¹⁰ Only a few of these are diaries or journals.¹¹ The rest tend to be the productions of old men, looking back from the democratic high tide of Jacksonian America in an effort to legitimize their own part in the larger script in the story of the triumph of the common man.¹² Recognizing these shortcomings, and handling these accounts with some sensitivity, we can piece together elements of the diverse experience of American seamen during the revolution. Thus Ebenezer Fox's memoir reveals that naval service formed only one phase of his life. Growing up poor in Roxbury, a stone's throw from the sea, he had been bound out at age seven to a local farmer. When he was twelve, in 1775, he ran away to Providence and served as a cabin boy on two voyages. With four dollars in his pocket he returned home and apprenticed to a barber and wig maker in Boston. During the spring of 1780, when business slowed because of the war, he and his master agreed that he should try his luck on the Massachusetts ship, the *Protector*, with the two of them splitting the profits. When Fox returned from this adventure he completed his apprenticeship, set up his own shop and eventually became a storekeeper.¹³ Likewise, the tale of John Blatchford, published shortly after the end of the war when he was reportedly "a poor man, with a wife and two children" employed in fishing and coasting, reflects the life of a more professional salt. Blatchford had a wild revolutionary career that included service under at least six different flags. On one level, his yarn appears unbelievable. Yet while we might question some of the detail, the outline of the story represents the many difficult choices a sailor could face in world confined by hard discipline and few options.¹⁴ And the anxiety packed diary of William Widger, while standing for the kind of account a future sea captain might leave, also provides insight into the daily concerns of seamen during the revolution.¹⁵

Although individuals in these groups had their own interests and concerns that affected loyalty and outlook, we might venture some generalizations. Many sailors saw their time at sea as a temporary aberration in what would have been a normal routine on shore. While others viewed life at sea as perennial, and were more used to experiences that vacillated between constraints at sea and liberty ashore. These men often looked at both the landlubber and the officer with a mixture of envy, hostility, and respect. Sailors working their way to a command, usually considered their fellow tars as men without restraint who somehow had to be watched and controlled. But at any given moment the boundaries between these men in the forecastle blurred and remained vague.

Region, race, ethnicity, and even nationality added to the complexity of the makeup of crews aboard American warships during the Revolution. Sailors came from all over the new United States and included blacks as well as whites. James Forten, who later became an important black leader in Philadelphia, served as a powder boy aboard a privateer.¹⁶ Many an "old country man"—someone born in England—sailed on American ships. Thomas Haley began the war in the service of Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia. Captured on a vessel owned by Dunmore and brought to Philadelphia, Haley incurred "several obligations"—probably debts to an innkeeper—and signed aboard the *Lexington*. But when the British took the *Lexington*, he willingly sought to join the royal navy.¹⁷ American warships also had great ethnic diversity.¹⁸ Even a New England privateer largely recruited from one locality or colony might contain some foreign hands. The crew list of the *Harlequin*, taken by the British in 1780, shows all but a handful of the 87 men and boys came from Massachusetts. Yet the crew also had six Europeans who had been previously on an English merchantman: three Germans, one Swede, one Dane, and one Portuguese.¹⁹

Vessels fitted out in Europe often had crews with higher proportions of non-Americans. Benjamin Franklin commissioned the notorious *Black Prince* in 1779. Almost the entire crew of this cutter came from the Emerald Isle. On its first voyage it had an American as a sham captain, but the owners abandoned this pretense in the wake of its spectacular success.²⁰ When the British took the *Alexander*, a letter or marque carrying American papers, they found only three Americans on board. The rest were chiefly from Spain, France, and the Netherlands.²¹

The identity of Jack Tar therefore was heterogeneous. No single stereotype or characterization holds true in all cases. The color of the skin, the accent of his speech, and the ideas in his head defy our generalizations. However we describe the common sailor, we must always remember that exceptions abound. The implications of this variety were profound.

The polyglot makeup of American crews created real problems. The frigate *Alliance*, under the command of French-born Pierre Landais, faced a crisis on a cruise from Boston to France when the seventy or eighty British members of the crew plotted to seize the vessel and carry her into an English port.²² John Paul Jones confronted similar difficulties. On his renowned "mad cruise" that culminated with the battle with the *Serapis*, some of the British sailors on his ship slipped away and escaped to their homeland. In a calm off the Irish coast, a group of Irish sailors cut loose a barge towing the *Bon Homme Richard* and successfully reached shore. Another desertion occurred immediately after the battle off Flamborough Head. Eight or ten Englishmen stole a boat from the *Serapis* and sailed away with it, landing at Scarborough.²³

The variety of nationalities aboard ships often led to ethnic conflict and mixed loyalties. The frigate *South Carolina*, sailing under the flag of its namesake state, had Americans, Frenchmen and others on her European cruise in 1781. On at least two occasions the rampant discontent aboard the vessel swelled into mutiny. In August 1781, French and Englishmen joined to take over the ship while in a Dutch port. During the ensuing melee one Frenchman had his arm badly cut and other seamen were wounded before the mutineers submitted to the officers. While off the coast of Spain two months later, officers one night awakened the Americans in the crew, armed them and told them to prepare for action "for the Frenchmen were about to force them away from the ship." Again the mutiny was quelled.²⁴

Although James Forten turned down the patronage of an English captain after his capture, and thereby guaranteed himself a berth in a prison ship, the loyalty of many other African Americans took a different tack. At Mill Prison in April 1778, whites accused two blacks of being informants for the British and inflicted three dozen lashes on one of the suspects. Racial tension, which otherwise went unnoticed by the British, must have increased thereafter because two days later they segregated all of the black prisoners into their own building.²⁵ Many other African Americans pursued their liberty by joining the British. Moses Johnson ran away from his Virginia master after Lord Dunmore's proclamation offering freedom to all slaves who fought for the King. Unfortunately for Johnson, Americans captured him on a British privateer, took him to New Jersey, and sold him into slavery.²⁶

More than the varied and international composition of crews complicated the issue of loyalty; sailors felt strong attachments to shipmates and to hometowns. While on rare occasions these bonds interfered with the prosecution of the war, most of the time they merely preoccupied individual tars with immediate feelings of personal loyalty that obscured the larger questions of nation and the cause of America independence.

Conflicting personal allegiances plagued John Paul Jones. The crew of the *Ranger* objected to Jones' raid on the English coast in 1778 and expressed outrage when Jones arrested the *Ranger's* first lieutenant, Thomas Simpson, after returning to France. These sons of New England had signed the sloop's articles largely on Simpson's account, "knowing him to be a Gentleman of honour, Worthey and capeable of his Officeships." They viewed Simpson as a "Faithfull, true and Fatherly Officer," and saw Jones as "ungratefull," "Deceitfull," and "Arbitrary."²⁷ Personal attachment to captain and crew lost John Paul Jones command of the *Alliance* only months after his triumph over the *Serapis*. The remnants of Jones' crew had been assigned to the *Alliance* which came under Jones' direct command. Since the men from the *Bon Homme Richard* claimed that not only had the *Alliance* not aided them in the battle with the *Serapis*, but had actually raked the *Bon Homme Richard* with broad-

sides during the engagement, there was little love lost between the two crews. Animosity intensified, fights broke out; and ultimately Captain Pierre Landais, the *Alliance's* previous commander and Jones' rival, stole the ship with the help of the original crew.²⁸

Loyalty to hometowns often transcended nation or state. As soon as a sailor first entered the yard at Mill Prison fellow townsmen, eager for local news, quickly brought him under their protective wing. Visitors to prisons sought those men from their own local community and then treated them to beer and conversations of home.²⁹ Caleb Foot's letters from prison, full of personal lamentations to his wife, obviously penned them for a larger audience. Almost every letter included a list of Salemites who wished to be remembered to their relations.³⁰ The margins and ends of letters from American prisoners were often crammed with the names of neighbors wishing their families well.³¹ William Widger filled his diary with the names and birth places of recent arrivals in Mill Prison. He even copied a roster of Marblehead boys at Forton Prison. Widger also recorded a dream that transported him back to the waterfront of his beloved Marblehead.³² Considering the varied nationality of sailors and their mix of allegiances, loyalty was a complicated issue, taking many twists and turns, including several layers of often contradictory obligations.

Part of the explanation for this confused loyalty among American sailors is to be found in the reasons for their joining ships. Many sailors were not particularly patriotic. The war devastated shipping and fishing. Other occupations also experienced curtailed opportunities. Serving aboard a privateer, or even in the regular navy, offered the sailor and the landsman the chance not only to earn a living, but also possibly to gain a small fortune.³³

Self aggrandizement created problems and led to complaints of the "Rapacity of the Crews in Stripping the prizes of every Little thing they Could Lay their hands upon," including personal possessions that should have been off limits.³⁴ Wen Ebenezer Fox left his Boston apprenticeship, neither he nor his master were thinking about liberty and the cause of American freedom. They both wanted the prize money from a successful cruise.³⁵ Thomas Andros, who later became a minister of the gospel, claimed in his memoirs in the 1830s that as a seventeen year old Connecticut boy he "had a full conviction at the time, that the Revolutionary cause was just." Such an assertion by an old man a half century later may or may not be trusted. More honest, surprising, and reflecting a sense of Calvinist self-depravation, is Andros' confession that he was "among these deluded and infatuated youth" who, after the arrival of a rich prize in New London in the summer of 1781, "flocked on board our armed ships, fancying the same success would attend their adventures."³⁶

Recruiters worked every angle and combined patriotism with other appeals. A song early in the war addressed to the "JOLLY TARS" who are fight-

ing for the RIGHTS and LIBERTIES of AMERICA," urged sailors to "make your Fortunes now, my Lads, before its too late, Defend, defend, I say defend an Independent State."³⁷ Parading the streets carrying a flag and attended by a band playing martial music, a later recruiter talked of the "zeal for the cause of liberty." He also sang a tune to attract apprentices by denigrating masters and offering adventure and opportunity:

All you that have bad masters
And cannot get your due:
Come, come, my brave boys,
And join with our ship's crew.³⁸

Andrew Sherburne reported that in Boston in 1781 a "jolly tar" was even more direct in promising monetary reward. The wily sailor accosted the fifteen year old Sherburne with "Ha shipmate, don't you wish to take a short cruise in a fine schooner and make your fortune?" Sherburne already had the look of a sailor as he had been to sea for two years and had signed aboard another privateer. Still, knowing that his own vessel would not be ready to sail for a few more months, he agreed to go with the "jolly tar," hoping to take part in the seizure of a few prizes and return before the other vessel was to put out to sea.³⁹ Patriotism could sometimes serve as a thin veneer for less lofty motives.

Manpower was a key to success in naval warfare and even small privateer sloops would pack a hundred men or more to swoop down, board, and overwhelm a merchantman. Since recruiters always had difficulty obtaining a full crew, they used any method that might add a few men. Sherburne's captain, still short-handed when he set sail, coasted down to Maine stopping at each town and provided free food and drink to local menfolk in the hope of signing intoxicated sailors.⁴⁰ Rendezvous houses—places where a ship would officially recruit men and have the sailors put their names or marks to a contract—were taverns. Recruiters offered drink and promised an advance to men who signed up for a cruise. Some men had little choice in the matter, having run up a debt to a bartender or boarding house keeper that could only be squared by the signing of the articles of a ship selected by the supposed patron. Men even sold their future shares of prizes before the cruise to obtain a larger advance. Officials also used more coercive measures like release from goal, and a few captains occasionally relied on impressment.⁴¹

The forces under the control of the Continental Congress, the state navies, and the privateers competed for men. Privateers, however, paid as much as one hundred dollar advances, and had the edge in this contest. Both the army and the navy suffered losses. Joshua Gott began the war by joining the army during the siege of Boston in 1775. Sent to New York in March 1776, he

stayed with the Continental forces through several defeats, but returned to New England in February 1777. For the rest of the war he signed aboard a variety of vessels, including the *Boston* frigate and a host of privateers and merchantmen. After one cruise he collected £ 231 in prize money.⁴² As Benjamin Rush explained to Richard Henry Lee, "many of the continental troops now in our service, pant for the expiration of their enlistments, in order that they may partake of the spoils of the West Indies." Others did not wait for the end of their enlistment. Repeatedly Continental officers searched privateers to reclaim deserters, and at times officials refused to allow privateers to sail until Continental ships were outfitted.⁴³

Sailors in Europe had few options other than signing aboard another warship. Many seamen found themselves returned to Mill or Forton Prison only months after having left its confines when recaptured from a new vessel. In later years these men explained their willingness to join John Paul Jones or some privateer as an effort to seek revenge or even as an expression of their patriotism. The fact that they were penniless, in a foreign country and unable to speak the language, and had no way of getting home probably best explains their choice.⁴⁴ Some sailors did not care what country they sailed for and eagerly signed aboard vessels of countries allied with the United States. A few American prisoners of war who escaped went to the nearest port and joined British privateers. Joseph Myrick was born in Nantucket and had served in the *Black Prince*, the American privateer manned largely by Irishmen out of Dunkerque. In June of 1780 he captained an American crew on a French privateer. Captured by the British in September 1780, he volunteered for His Majesty's navy a year later.⁴⁵

Loyalty could thus be a clouded and confused issue for common seamen. British sailors joined American crews even though they could be executed for treason if they fell into the King's hands. Englishman Charles White feared being hanged when he was captured aboard an American privateer. As soon as his captain ordered the colors lowered, White turned to his shipmates and had them take a razor and mutilate his cheek to obscure the brand the British navy had earlier placed there for desertion. He passed as a wounded American, and was later exchanged.⁴⁶

Other sailors switched sides several times. William Lamb bounced in and out of the royal navy. Andrew Sherburne met him on the privateer *Ranger* in 1779 when the Americans took Lamb from a captured British ship and assigned him to duty. When the *Ranger* surrendered to a British warship, Lamb was pressed into the navy. Two years later, Sherburne ran into Lamb again in a holding vessel in England. By that time Lamb had run away and been re-impressed repeatedly.⁴⁷ The British captured Jonathan Deakens on an American vessel on July 26, 1782. Taken to London, he escaped only to sign aboard a British merchantman bound for the West Indies. A leak forced the vessel to

put in to Ireland where a press gang snatched Deakens. After serving several months on board his majesty's ships, and as the war was winding down, Deakens applied to the captain to become a prisoner of war and was sent to Mill Prison.⁴⁸

John Blatchford's narrative is perhaps one of the most fantastic stories related by an American seaman of the Revolution, but it illustrates how by compulsion, circumstance, and some choice, Jack Tar could serve many flags. Captured in 1777 when he was a fifteen year old cabin boy aboard the Continental ship *Hancock*, the British pressed him into their navy. After several attempts at escape, Blatchford found himself on board an East-Indiaman along with 81 other Americans. Arriving at Sumatra in 1780, the Americans were sent ashore and drafted into the British army. Blatchford and two friends proved recalcitrant, and as punishment they were ordered to work in the "pepper gardens." The three friends ran off together, but the British recaptured them, gave the younger two 800 lashes and executed the eldest. At the end of their convalescence, the two Americans made a desperate escape through the Sumatra wilderness, during which Blatchford's companion died and a half-naked native woman rescued him. Blatchford shipped aboard a Dutch vessel in the China Sea until he could join a Spanish ship headed for South America. Damaged by British cruisers off the Cape of Good Hope, the Spanish ship limped into Brazil where it was condemned. Signing aboard a Portuguese snow, Blatchford got to St. Helena where, perhaps wiser through experience, he earned his keep as a soldier in the British garrison. Amazingly, the *Princess Royal*, the East-Indiaman in which he had gone to Sumatra, arrived. Since the captain was shorthanded he made Blatchford boatswain for the last leg of the trip back to England.

The odyssey, and the serving of different nations, was not yet over. Avoiding impressment in London because he was a petty officer, Blatchford signed onto a storeship sailing to Antigua. From there he escaped to a French island and got work on a French brigantine bound for Philadelphia. The British captured this vessel, but the war was almost over. After a week on the *Jersey* in New York harbor, he was exchanged as a French sailor and sent to France. At L'Orient he joined an American privateer from Beverly. (He even knew some of the crew.) When the short and successful cruise was over, Blatchford found himself stranded in France at war's end. He eventually worked his way back to Massachusetts after a six year absence.⁴⁹

It is hard to determine what Blatchford believed about the American Revolution by the end of the war. He had been cast about like so much flotsam and jetsam. Survival was his biggest goal. As he put it when first placed aboard the East Indiaman, "I now found my destiny was fixed—that whatever I could do, would not in the least alter my situation, and therefore was determined to do the best I could, and make myself as contented as my unfortunate situation would admit."⁵⁰ Blatchford's was an exceptional tale—and who knows how

much of it was just a great yarn spun for posterity. But its elements ring true for the experience of many sailors and outlines the irregular course allegiance could take.

While consideration of the struggles of John Blatchford, the international flavor of American crews, the mixture of loyalties of American sailors, the varied reasons for serving aboard American ships, and the methods of recruiting do not preclude an ideological commitment, they suggest that any discussion of ideas about class consciousness, liberty and, a sense of patriotism for the young United States as emerging from the bottom up needs to be carefully qualified.

II

Further insight into the ambiguous loyalty of sailors can be gleaned from their experience as prisoners of war.⁵¹ Scholars have not documented the exact numbers of American seamen captured by the British during the Revolutionary War. Perhaps as many as ten thousand men died aboard the prison ships in New York harbor with many others surviving that ordeal. The British held about three thousand at one time or another in England, and kept scattered hundreds throughout the Atlantic world from Canada to the West Indies.⁵² In the process these men had their beliefs, their loyalty, and their lives tested. I will use the laboratory of prison experience, as Jesse Lemisch called it, to re-examine three key areas of conduct and consciousness: desertion to the enemy, escape, and prisoner self-organization.⁵³

Desertion—the willingness to defect to the enemy—is central to our understanding of the loyalty and mentality of the common sailor. John Blatchford was coerced to defect, resisted, paid a heavy price, and eventually became willing to serve any master so long as he could survive and get home. To some extent all Americans captured during the Revolutionary War faced a similar dilemma. The failure of more sailors to come to the same conclusion as poor Blatchford is an argument in support of the idea that American tars were committed to the cause of liberty. Closer examination of the issue of desertion suggests that this argument is not as conclusive as it first appears.⁵⁴

One out of every eight prisoners in England at one time or another petitioned for a royal pardon to join either his majesty's navy or serve the king in some other capacity. What does this statistic mean for the issue of loyalty for Jack Tars? Were these men disloyal to the American cause? Were they mostly "old countrymen"—born in the British Isles—as some prisoners suggested? Were these sailors merely "citizens of the world" ready to sail under any flag?

Unfortunately there cannot be any definitive answers to these questions. These men were not always disloyal. A few tars had little choice in the matter. Some men volunteered, or so they claimed, with the intention of getting a better opportunity to escape. Samuel Knapp of Salem entered the royal navy

in 1780 after one and a half years in prison, only to run from his ship and escape to France.⁵⁵ Ebenezer Fox, held aboard the *Jersey* prison ship, said that he joined the British army with the promise that he would be stationed in the West Indies away from the fighting with American troops, and in the hope that he could make good his escape.⁵⁶ Although later statements about their rationale for serving the king cannot be entirely trusted, their desertion to the enemy cannot easily be labeled either a sign of disloyalty or loyalty.

We know the nationality of only about one third of the men who joined the British from prisons in England. Of that number, seventy percent (91 of 130) were American born, while slightly over one quarter (36 of 130, or 27.6%) of the "volunteers" were from the British Isles. These percentages differ from the overall proportions within the prison population: Americans were approximately 90% of the total number of prisoners.⁵⁷ This difference is not enough to substantiate claims that most or even half of the volunteers were "old countrymen." Nativity also does not equate to commitment to one side or another. There were loyalists in North America who traced their lineage to the earliest settlements in Virginia and Plymouth. There were "old countrymen" like Thomas Paine, who spoke virulently for revolution and independence.⁵⁸

Many "volunteers" fit neither of these extremes. Their reasons for defecting to the British had less to do with questions of allegiance and more to do with an attitude toward the world. Not every seaman conformed to a pattern that emphasized survival over ideology. But it is important to remember that a sailor's life was often confined and under regulation whether crowded into a forecabin of a merchantman, or restricted to the narrow limits of his hammock on a gundeck brimming with the humanity of a warship, or bound by the walls of Forton and Mill Prison. The British navy provided an alternative. A sailor anxious for some movement and bored with his daily grind, might sign on with the royal navy in the belief that it offered a marginally better life and maybe a change of scenery.

If the loyalty of those who left prison to "volunteer" with the British remains ambiguous, the commitment and allegiance of those who stayed behind was equally unclear. After a group of volunteers left Mill Prison for the British navy in December 1778, a petition asserting loyalty to Congress and opposition to enlisting with the British, gathered less than half the signatures of the remaining prisoners.⁵⁹ Even for those not proclaiming their patriotism, there were good reasons not to join the royal navy. A British official reported that harsh treatment from fellow prisoners prevented men from entering the king's service.⁶⁰ Sailors did not need discouragement from their comrades since every tar knew that living conditions aboard his majesty's ships could be abysmal. Although the mortality aboard the prison hulks of New York harbor was very high, the death rate in English prisons was lower than in the British navy.⁶¹ The food in British service, while greater in quantity than the prisoner's

fare, was often little better in quality. Overcrowding and strict discipline made life difficult aboard his majesty's ships. If a sailor could not control the direction of his own life as a prisoner of war, the tar was equally powerless aboard a royal warship. At the whim of the admiralty he might be whisked off to the frigid waters and storms of the North Atlantic, or the pestilence and sweltering conditions of the West Indies or Africa.⁶² Anglo Americans on both sides of the Atlantic shared a long tradition of avoiding service in the navy that included anti-impressment riots. Sailors therefore shunned the royal navy, especially if there was hope for another way out.⁶³

For the common sailor that hope lay in an exchange of prisoners. Although the Continental government organized few regular cartels in North America, local and state arrangements occurred intermittently.⁶⁴ In Europe negotiations dragged on for years. Rumors of exchange constantly passed through the prisons, and despite delays in implementation, the chance for an exchange kept many tars from petitioning the king to join his navy. A rumor of a cartel, heard aboard a British warship, convinced Caleb Foot, who apparently was serving as a British sailor, to change his status to a prisoner of war. So optimistic was Foot about the opportunity for exchange that he ecstatically proclaimed that leaving the warship and entering Forton Prison "was like coming out of Hell and going into Paradise." Although Foot tended toward hyperbole, his hopes for exchange echoed other prison commentators. Unfortunately for them, cartels did not become regular in England until the war was almost over.⁶⁵

Another avenue of exit from the prisons was escape. In North America escape was difficult. Some men managed to break out of the prison ships in New York harbor, and there were escapes from Halifax, Charleston, the West Indies and elsewhere.⁶⁶ But these efforts pale in comparison to the experience of the men in England. Year after year, hundreds of sailors slipped over, under, and through the walls of Mill and Forton Prisons. British officials were besides themselves with their inability to control this epidemic. During some periods, escapes from Forton Prison, whose record was worse than Mill, occurred almost every other day. Any understanding of the conflicted sense of loyalty and desire for liberty of Jack Tars needs to take into account the escaping sailors of the Revolution. The diaries, reminiscences, and even the British records are so often punctuated with reports of tunneling, massive breakouts, persistent and sometimes spectacular deceptions, that it is easy to suppose that the escapes are a testament to Yankee ingenuity and to the commitment to the cause of independence.⁶⁷ As in the case of desertion, however, this issue is complex and the motives perplexing.

To understand the relationship between escaping from prison and the sailor's mentality, we need to examine the general context of escaping within warfare in this period and within the Atlantic maritime culture. Having estab-

lished this background we can then turn to who escaped from English prisons and what was their motivation.

The idea of escape was neither new nor novel to sailors. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seamen jumped ship—as well as abandoned wives and lovers—for a large variety of reasons. Sailors ran away for the attractions of a brief stay ashore, higher wages elsewhere, and to escape a harsh captain or miserable conditions aboard ship. It mattered little to Jack if he were leaving a warship, a merchantman, a whaler, or a fishing vessel. There could also be reasons for sailors to run away to sea, ranging from the unfaithfulness of a wife to wander lust.⁶⁸

Nor were escapes unique to American prisoners of war. British soldiers and sailors escaped from their American captors in droves to fight in the Continental army, or to return to the British lines. Others settled in the countryside, while some escaped to sign aboard American or British privateers. The French were also great escape artists. During their protracted contests with Great Britain from 1756 to 1815 tens of thousands of Frenchmen were captured. They, like the Americans, tunneled, broke out en masse, and had some fantastic escapes.⁶⁹

Despite these similarities, American sailor prisoners of war confronted some unusual circumstances. Exchanges were delayed since the English charged American seamen taken to Great Britain with treason and piracy. In the eighteenth century belligerents ordinarily quickly drew up an agreement to facilitate exchange. When France, Spain, and Holland joined the United States in its war for independence each government had its own agreement for cartels and thousands of captured men were shuttled between the warring parties. With the expectation of speedy return to one's own country a French, Spanish, or Dutch sailor had little cause to put himself at risk by running away from prison. That some men did so suggests that prisons were poorly guarded.⁷⁰ Americans, on the other hand, had every reason to try to escape when the chances for a cartel looked bleak.

The different treatment of American and allied officers also helps to explain the many American escapes. Rules of war usually dictated a parole for any officer who pledged his honor to remain within a district specified in his enemy's territory and swore not to take up arms until exchanged according to convention rules. Since the British considered American officers pirates and traitors they threw them into prison with their men. Initially they even shared quarters with common seamen. Officers vehemently objected to this equality of condition and petitioned successfully for separate facilities with their own fireplace, locked doors at night to protect their possessions, and privies.⁷¹

There were also distinctions between officers and enlisted men when it came to escaping prison. The records are far from complete, but they provide a clear picture; successful escape was largely for and by officers. Nathaniel

Fanning proudly proclaimed that of the 367 officers held in Forten Prison the year that he was there, 138 made their escape to France.⁷² Timothy Connor lists almost as many officers as enlisted men among the escapees recounted in his journal.⁷³ The numbers in the list of prisoners of war held in England compiled in the twentieth century differ from these calculations, but the message was similar. Over half those listed as captains, more than a third of the subaltern officers, and approximately a fifth of the petty officers successfully escaped. Only a little less than 5% of the seamen did so.

Rank	Escapes of Prisoners of War in England			
	Captains	Subalterns	Petty Officers	Seamen
Total in Prison	54	127	86	2235
Successful Escapes	30	43	19	108

Source: Kaminkow and Kaminkow, eds., *Mariners of the American Revolution*.⁷⁴

The inegalitarian nature of prison escape was noticed at the time. Caleb Foot wrote to his wife in August 1780 asking "But what can I say or what can I do to get my liberty? It is impossible for one without the help of some friend. It is almost impossible for a man to make his escape from this [place] without the help of money."⁷⁵ Charles Herbert knew from hard experience that Foot was right. Herbert had escaped with over one hundred others through a tunnel on a cold December night and wandered around the wintery countryside only to be quickly recaptured. Herbert lamented that "Our officers that have made their escape so many times lately, may thank good friends and their money for getting off; but a poor foremast hand, with no friends, and no money in his pocket, would stand but a poor chance to get off, if he was without the walls."⁷⁶ The English recognized the need for money to escape as well. One anonymous letter to the admiralty complained of the frequent escapes from Forton Prison and declared "you may Depend that those who can get money will not long remain Prisoners."⁷⁷ The cost for escaping varied, but was generally out of the reach of the common sailor. Samuel Cutler, who had been a clerk aboard a privateer, spent over £ 38 to escape and to obtain passage to America.⁷⁸ Nathaniel Harrington, Jr., a ship's surgeon, paid only half a guinea (about 10 shillings) to escape Forton in 1780. But it cost him at least another five guineas (about £ 5) to get to France, where he had to borrow another £ 5 before signing aboard a new vessel.⁷⁹

Both officers and common seamen had many reasons for running the gauntlet and risking punishment by trying to escape. Loyalty and patriotism did play some role in the minds of many escapees, especially the officers. However, there probably was also a strong desire to get back to business—not only

of fighting the war, but also the business of making money in the war. Somehow the financial loss of being captured and the expense of the escape had to be recovered. Most escapees signed aboard privateers and warships soon after reaching France.⁸⁰

For many sailors the reason for escape was even less lofty and long term. A number of escapees, men who scratched away to dig tunnels for weeks or who merely arranged things with a corrupt official, breaking out meant only a brief bout of liberty. Like sailors on shore leave they would get drunk, have sex, and then be back a day or two later to their berths in prison. Carpenter John Long saw Drury Lathing, an American prisoner, in a bar outside Forton's walls "with a young Woman drinking together" in September 1781. He does not describe the entire transaction between the two, but we can well guess what was intended.⁸¹ This type of liaison occurred repeatedly. One prisoner, Thomas Kinsey, escaped Forton at least sixteen times. No sooner would he be returned to close confinement in the infamous black hole reserved for recaptured escapees, than he would break out again. Either he was very unlucky, or he was in close collusion with his keepers. British bureaucrats, who paid a small fortune as a reward for his recaptures, seemed to think he was getting help.⁸²

The special conditions of imprisoned Americans created a peculiar situation that was easy to take advantage of by shrewd tars and prison officials. Since the Americans were committed to prison for the capital offenses of treason and piracy, parliament and the admiralty set a reward of £ 5 for the recapture of any escapee. The reward for other prisoners of war was ten shillings.⁸³ The lower level bureaucrats, especially those at Forton, appear to have been very corrupt. One British officer complained that the clerk at Forton Prison, who had no independent means "lives like a Gentleman and keeps his horse" on a meager salary that was obviously augmented by illicit means.⁸⁴ When Long interfered with the clerk's arrangement with the young woman and the prisoner Drury Lathing, the irate clerk promised that Long would soon find himself aboard a British warship. The very next day a press gang arrived at the construction site where Long was working to drag him off to a fate many viewed worse than prison. The army guard at the prison rescued Long, but the constant escaping and recapturing continued until officials reduced the £ 5 reward to normal levels.⁸⁵

The records do not make clear how many of the prisoners were "five pounders" who escaped merely to split the reward, and how many had other motives. By 1780 and 1781, British officials believed that the majority of escapes fit the five pounder category. The quick capture and return of most escapees suggests that the British officials were correct and that a large number of "foremast hands" who had not enough money to buy their way out of England, seized the opportunity for a spree.⁸⁶

We should not taint every escaping sailor with the stereotype of the jolly tar out on a prearranged "liberty." Some sailors, like the Israel Potter immortalized by Herman Melville, escaped only to melt into the English population.⁸⁷ At least two escapees made it to Portsmouth to sign aboard British privateers. A few managed to sign aboard English merchantmen as common seamen. Press gangs picked up less fortunate tars who were either on their way out of the country or in a tavern. Others bought passage or stole boats to get across the channel.⁸⁸ Motivation for escaping, as it was for defecting, was therefore very mixed.

The coordination necessary for many of the escape attempts, at least those by others than the "five pounders," focuses our attention on the third key area of the prisoner of war experience that helps us to understand the sailors in the American Revolution—prisoner self government. Like desertion and escaping, the organizational efforts of American prisoners also needs to be placed in a larger context. British soldiers and sailors held in America petitioned for a redress of grievances several times, and on at least one occasion drew up a pact vowing to abide by mutual parole.⁸⁹ Even more disciplined were the French prisoners of the 1790s and early 1800s. These men established their own courts of law, and, despite republican principles, set up an elaborate caste system differentiating groups of prisoners.⁹⁰

Little is known about the exact nature of the American self government in the prisons during the Revolutionary War. Aboard ships like the *Jersey* there was some form of organization in which officers took a leading role. In the rules drawn up by the prisoners late in the war, they selected the oldest officer as judge in ad hoc courts to try violators of regulations.⁹¹ Prisoners at both Mill and Forton organized not only to escape, but also to petition authorities and to regulate behavior among themselves. Just as aboard the *Jersey*, there is some indication that prisoner self government was not as egalitarian and infused with democratic principles as has been suggested.⁹² Although separated in their sleeping arrangements after January 14, 1778, officers and seamen in England interacted on a daily basis in the exercise yard. Officers therefore had plenty of opportunity to continue to influence men they previously commanded.⁹³ Officers acted as intermediaries when John Thornton, an agent for the American Commissioners in France, visited the prisons, and they supervised the relief money raised by subscription from sympathizers in England.⁹⁴ A few months after the officers gained separate quarters, Thomas Wren described his efforts to aid the prisoners in a letter to Franklin. Wren added that he "communicated the intelligence of yours [concerning a potential exchange] on the 21st to the officers at Forton, and they to the people, which gave the whole body of them great pleasure and contentment."⁹⁵ When the prisoners in Forton in the fall of 1778 decided to write Franklin pleading for exchange, they selected three officers as spokesmen. After the celebration of the victory

at Yorktown almost turned into a riot, the American officers stepped in to quiet their countrymen.⁹⁶ It appears that the prison walls did not wholly diminish the status of the quarterdeck.

The role of officers in drawing up the various petitions sent to British and American officials is less clear. According to Timothy Connor in March 1778 the officers wrote a petition to the king for an exchange.⁹⁷ Many of the major petitions listed no names and were signed generically with labels like "Petition of upwards of two hundred American Prisoners at present confined at Mill Prison."⁹⁸ Common seamen demonstrated the capability of sending individual petitions themselves even when they could not sign their names. Yet when a series of names appeared on a petition, an officer's name might well come first.⁹⁹ The content of the petitions provides few clues into the sailor's mind set. Ordinarily the petitions addressed specific conditions and perceived abuse. The language stressed the humility of the petitioners and the power of the petitioned, conforming to the legalistic standard of the day. In short, we cannot tell whether the petitions came from organizations of common seamen or organizations controlled by officers.¹⁰⁰

We also cannot be sure of the impact of the officers on the writing of the articles of regulation in the prisons. We do know that the articles were written to limit drinking, brawling, and gambling that were common practices among sailors that the officer corps opposed. Although seamen had a voice in the regulations, the control of officers was not precluded. Aboard the *Jersey* officers were active in meting out punishments, while in Mill Prison one provision, that would be tough for many sailors to accept, outlawed "blackguarding" (cursing) and forbade "any improper language to any officer or soldier," (notice who is listed first) "who are now, or may hereafter, be appointed to preside over us." Some men opposed these provisions, and created a great "uproar" by refusing to be "conformable to the rules and articles." These malcontents tore down the articles at night. The prisoners supporting the regulations corporally punished three of the most vehement opponents the next day. Men continued to sell their clothes to obtain money for drink, they continued to gamble, and they continued to brawl. We cannot be sure if these regulations represented a democracy of the lower decks in action, or an attempted assertion of power by officers and the more respectable of the common seamen.¹⁰¹

If many sailors were not entirely driven by the spirit of 76 an ideology of egalitarianism developed from below, ideas about liberty, patriotism and loyalty to the American cause were not entirely absent either. Some sailors seized upon the symbols of the Revolution and made them, even if only temporarily, their own in slogans, songs, and celebration. Cabin boy Christopher Hawkins proudly sported pewter buttons on his jacket with "liberty and property" emblazoned upon them. On the night a crew of one hundred privateersmen were first captured and crammed into a crowded cable tier of a British warship, the

men taunted their enemies by singing patriotic songs with refrains like "For America and all her sons forever will shine."¹⁰² On July 4, 1778, the walls of Mill Prison pulsed with excited noise when the men formed thirteen divisions, gave three cheers, and joined in a great huzzah at the end.¹⁰³ The sailors hoisted the American flag upon their hats along with the words "Independence" and "Liberty or Death." They also celebrated American victories. After the news of Cornwallis' surrender reached Mill Prison, not only did the prisoners wear American cockades but they taunted the guards to shoot.¹⁰⁴ (French and British prisoners also celebrated national holidays.) Amid all the hardship, short rations, and daily grind, Charles Herbert was able to buy Thomas Paine's *American Crisis* while in prison.¹⁰⁵ Andrew Sherburne described a mutiny over short rations aboard a cartel ship as a "revolution" and called the United States the "land of liberty."¹⁰⁶

III

The purpose of this essay has not been to minimize the significance of Jack Tar to the American Revolution. Nor does it deny that the American Revolution had some impact on the consciousness of common seamen. Instead, the essay has striven to provide a view of Jack Tar as a human being who was pushed and pulled in many directions and who operated with values and consciousness that was peculiarly his own.

In a revolution that was beginning to define a new nation and articulate a new set of principles, the heterogenous mix of men who served aboard American ships reacted to the ideals of liberty in a variety of ways. The concept of "liberty," while crucial to the rhetoric of the revolution and an important signpost for American patriotism, ordinarily had a very specific meaning for common seamen. On a day to day basis, which was the way many sailors lived, these men cared little for abstraction. When Caleb Foote told a British official in Quebec that he had no regard for his majesty or the locks on his doors, he proclaimed that "What I was after was *my* liberty." (Emphasis added.) He wanted to end his imprisonment and was not referring to a larger sense of American liberty.¹⁰⁷ Other sailors used the word "liberty" in a similar fashion. William Widger celebrated the news of Yorktown because it raised expectations among the prisoners that they would thereby "obtain our Liberties" and leave Mill and Forton Prisons.¹⁰⁸ Young Joseph Adkins wrote Samuel Cutler that he had "obtained his liberty" after his release from service aboard a British man-of-war.¹⁰⁹ In none of these references was there any suggestion of a larger meaning to the word liberty. "Liberty" meant having individual freedom right then and there.

For many tars, especially those who remained in the forecastle, life was a continual round of abdicating liberty—usually aboard ship—and reckless behavior while ashore. Christopher Hawkins described how he spent prize money

earned while serving in a British warship: "What I had I got, what I spent I saved, and what I kept I lost."¹¹⁰ Repeatedly sailors aboard a defeated or outmanned ship about to surrender, broke into the ship's locker, and in a last binge—one last fling at liberty—guzzled as much liquor as they could.¹¹¹ In this sense even the "five pounders" escaped to gain their liberty, if only for a few hours, and the prisoners who opposed the articles of regulation in Mill Prison and who continued to drink, gamble, fight, and curse, were asserting their liberty.

This mentality emphasizing immediate liberty without regard to the long-term future or without regard to principle, helps to explain the complex reactions of sailors concerning loyalty and patriotism. At times sailors overcame their own concerns, at other times they did not. Many sailors remained trapped and denied liberty whether confined by prison walls or by life aboard ship. Caleb Foot, after serving on British warships and enduring over a year and a half in Forton Prison, referred to his time spent in the *South Carolina* as the "worst of hells."¹¹² Under these conditions distant commitments to nation and family became ephemeral and the only attainable goal was some immediate liberty.

Perhaps the contradictions and inconsistencies of the common sailor might best be seen in the experience of Joshua Davis. Excited about turning twenty-one, the day he became "free," Davis lay chained by his feet to seven other American sailors on the deck of a British holding vessel in Spithead before being transferred to Mill Prison. With the aid of a sympathetic English sailor, Davis obtained a bottle of gin. Naturally he passed it round to his companions. When the bottle was empty, Davis, "feeling pretty merry," sang a tune that began

Vain Britain, boast no longer proud indignity—
By land your conq'ring legions, your matchless strength by sea;
Since we have your braver sons incens'd, our swords have girded on,
Huzza, huzza, huzza, huzza, for *war* and *Washington*.

Two months later Davis was no longer a prisoner and was serving in His Majesty's navy.¹¹³

Notes

1. The work of Jesse Lemisch and Marcus Rediker, while often rooted in a sophisticated and nuanced argument, implies that sailors both before and during the revolution developed a special consciousness based on class. In his dissertation, recently published as a book, Lemisch said that the seaman "is a seagoing proletarian." Building on Lemisch, more recently, Sheldon Cohen has portrayed sailor prisoners of war as something akin to patriotic minute men. Cohen declared that his most significant aim was to portray how "these often inarticulate Yankee captives" played a role "in the struggle for freedom of the United States." Lemisch, *Jack Tar vs. John Bull: The Role of New York's Seamen in Precipitating the Revolution* (New York, 1997), 9; Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 25 (1968), 371-407; Lemisch, "Listening to the 'Inarticulate': William Widger's Dream and the Loyalties of the American Revolutionary Seamen in British Prisons," *Journal of Social History*, 3 (1969), 1-29; Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge, 1987); Sheldon S. Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols: Prisoners of War at Forton and Mill, 1777-1783* (Newark, Del., 1995). For quotation see *ibid.*, 8.

2. This essay centers on the impact of the revolution on American sailors. An equally important question, which is not the focus here, is what effect the common seaman had upon the age of revolution. For an interesting exploration of this question see Marcus Rediker, "A Motley Crew of Rebels: Sailors, Slaves, and the Coming of the American Revolution," in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *The Transforming Hand of Revolution: Reconsidering the American Revolution as a Social Movement* (Charlottesville, 1996), 155-98. See also Paul A. Gilje, "The Meaning of Freedom for Waterfront Workers," in David Thomas Konig, *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic* (Stanford, 1995), 109-40.

3. Despite my criticism of Lemisch's argument,

I view his work as path breaking since he spearheaded the drive to examine the "inarticulate" in history during the 1960s. Without his pioneering effort, this essay, my other published work, and much of the entire field of social history would not have been possible. I agree with Lemisch that sailors were not irrational and mindless. But rather than proclaiming that Jack Tar "went to sea in the American Revolution . . . quite literally, to protect his life liberty and property," this essay emphasizes the ambiguity of commitment by sailors. Although Lemisch took cognizance of some of this ambiguity, the weight of his argument minimized and overlooked ambiguity and fell on the side of a special consciousness on the part of Jack Tar. This essay will highlight points of contrast between Lemisch's interpretation and mine in the notes. Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets," *WMO*, 3rd ser., 25 (1968), 407. See also Lemisch, "Listening to the 'Inarticulate,'" *JSocH*, 3 (1969), 1-29. For Lemisch's qualifications of his position emphasizing consciousness see *ibid.*, 16, 19, 22, 23.

4. Nation O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, 1977); Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War* (Chapel Hill, 1984); Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World*, (New York, 1976), 133-70; Robert Middlekauff, "Why Men Fought in the American Revolution," in David D. Hall, et al., eds., *Saints and Revolutionaries: Essays on Early American History* (New York, 1984), 318-31; Gerhard Kollman, "Reflections on the Army of the American Revolution," in Erich Angermann, et al., eds., *New Wines in Old Skins: A Comparative View of Socio-Political Structures Affecting the American Revolution* (Stuttgart, 1976), 153-76; Edward C. Papenfuss and Gregory A. Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits: The Peacetime Career of the Revolutionary War Private," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 30 (1973), 117-32; John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (New York, 1976), 163-79; John E. Ferling, *A Wilderness of Miseries: War and Warriors in Early America*

(Westport, Conn., 1980); James Kirby Martin, "The Continental Army and the American Victory," in John Ferling, ed., *The World Turned Upside Down: The American Victory in the War of Independence* (Westport, Conn., 1988), 19-34; Paul David Nelson, "The American Soldier and the American Victory," in *Ibid.*, 35-51; Richard H. Kohn, "The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research," *American Historical Review*, 86 (1981), 553-67; Peter Karsten, "The 'New' American Military History: A Map of the Territory Explored and Unexplored," *American Quarterly*, 36 (1984), 389-418; Charles Patrick Neimeyer, *America Goes to War: A Social History of the Continental Army* (New York, 1996). Charles Royster disagrees. See his *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill, 1979), especially 73-78.

5. For a discussion based upon detailed statistical analysis of the maritime labor force see Ira Dye, "Early American Merchant Seafarers," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 120 (1976), 331-60; Billy G. Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990), 152-58; Daniel Vickers, "Nantucket Whalers in the Deep-Sea Fishery: The Changing Anatomy of an Early American Labor Force," *Journal of American History*, 72 (1985), 277-97.

6. Knut Weibust divides seamen into three categories: Vagabonds—part time sailors; vocational—full time sailors; and officers or officers to be. On American ships during the revolution these categories are not so clear cut. See Knut Weibust, *Deep Sea Sailors: A Study in Maritime Ethnology* (Stockholm, 1969), 211. During the American Revolution the most important distinction remained between the officers and the "people"—the latter category refers to everyone but the officers. There may be other ways to divide up this population. Distinctions in region, or type of service—coastal trading, fishermen, and merchantmen—also reveal the diversity of the men who can be labeled Jack Tars. This essay focuses on sailors who served on privateers, in the state navies, and in the Continental navy during the Revolutionary War.

7. These include Mary Barney, ed., *Biological Memoir of the Late Joshua Barney: From His Autobiographical Notes and Journals in Possession of His Family, and Other Authentic Sources* (Boston, 1832); Robert Wilden Neeser, ed., *Letters and Papers Relating to the Cruise of Gustavus Conyngham, A Captain of the Continental Navy, 1777-1779* (New York, 1915); Samuel Cutler, "Prison Ships, and the 'Old Mill Prison,' Plymouth, England, 1777," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 32 (1878) 42-44, 184-88, 305-08, 395-98; [Nathaniel Fanning], *Narrative of the Adventures of an American Naval Officer* (New York, 1806); Jabez Fitch, *The Diary (In Facsimile) of Jabez Fitch: A Prison-Ship Martyr of 1776* (New York, 1903); Caleb Foote, ed., "Reminiscences of the Revolution: Prison Letters and Sea Journal of Caleb Foot: Born 1750; Died 1787," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 26 (1889), 90-122; Albert Greene, *Recollections of the Jersey Prison Ship: From the Manuscript of Capt. Thomas Dring* (New York, 1961; orig. pub. Providence, 1829); [John Green], "American Prisoners in Mill Prison at Plymouth, in 1782: Captain John Green's Letter," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Register*, 10 (1909), 116-24; Marion S. Coan, ed., "A Revolutionary Prison Diary: The Journal of Dr. Jonathan Haskins," *New England Quarterly*, 17 (1944), 290-309, 424-42; John Kilby, "Narrative of John Kilby: Quarter-Gunner of the U.S. Ship *Bon Homme Richard* under Paul Jones," *Scribner's Magazine* (1905), 23-41; Walter Drew McCaw, "Captain John Harris of the Virginia Navy: A Prisoner of War in England, 1777-1779," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 22 (1914), 160-72; [Nathaniel Harrington], "Letter of Nathaniel Harrington, Jr., in 1781, to his Father," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 51 (1897), 322-23; Luke Mathewman, "Narrative of Lieut. Luke Mathewman of the Revolutionary Navy," *Magazine of American History*, 2 (1878), 175-85; Thomas Painter, "Personal Reminiscences of the Revolutionary War by the Late Thomas Painter of West Haven," *Papers of the New Haven Colony Historical Society*, IV (New Haven, 1888), 231-52; Thomas Philbrook, "Mr. Philbrook's Narrative," *Proceedings of the Rhode Island Historical Society*,

1874-1875 (Providence, 1875), 75-81; George Ralls, "Narrative of his Capture, May 1777, While in Command of Schooner *Jenny*, and Confined in Old Mill Prison in England," MS, New-York Historical Society, New York City (henceforth N-YHS); George Thompson, "Diary of George Thompson of Newburyport, Kept at Forton Prison, England, 1777-1781," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 76 (1940), 221-42. See also the letters in Henry B. Stiles, *Letters From Prisons and Prison-Ships of the Revolution* (New York, 1865); William Widger, "The Diary of William Widger of Marblehead, Kept in Mill Prison, England, 1781," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 73 (1937), 311-47; *ibid.*, 74 (1938), 22-48, 142-58.

8. These include Thomas Andros, *The Old Jersey Captive, or a Narrative of the Captivity of Thomas Andros . . .* (Boston, 1833); John K. Alexander, ed., "Jonathan Carpenter and the American Revolution: The Journal of an American Naval Prisoner of War and Vermont Indian Fighter," *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society*, 36 (1968), 74-90; John Chandler, "Autobiography, 1838," copy of original in Maine Historical Society in Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston (henceforth MHS). Excerpts published in Maine Historical Society, *Collections*, IX, 167-206; Charles Francis Jenkins, "John Claypoole's Memorandum-Book," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 16 (1892), 178-90; Jonathan Elkins, "Reminiscences of Jonathan Elkins," *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society*, 9 (1921), 187-211; Ebenezer Fox, *The Adventures of Ebenezer Fox in the Revolutionary War Illustrated By Elegant Engravings from Original Designs* (Boston, 1847; orig. pub., 1838). Philip Freneau, *Some Account of the Capture of the Ship "Aurora"* (New York, 1971; reprt. of New York, 1899); Christopher Hawkins, *The Adventures of Christopher Hawkins, Containing Details of His Captivity, A First and Second Time on the High Seas, in the Revolutionary War, by the British and His Consequent Sufferings and Escape from the Jersey Prison Ship, Then Lying in the Harbour of New York By Swimming* (New York, 1864); Israel Potter, "Life and Remarkable Adventures of Israel Potter," facsimile of 1824 edition in Herman Melville, *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years*

of Exile, Harrison Hayford, *et al.*, eds. (Evanston and Chicago, 1982), 277-394; William Russell, "Journal of William Russell (1776-1782)," in Ralph D. Paine, *The Ships and Sailors of Old Salem: The Record of a Brilliant Era of American Achievement* (New York, 1909), 119-74; Andrew Sherburne, *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne: A Pensioner of the Navy of the Revolution* (Utica, 1828).

9. These include John Blatchford, *Narrative of Remarkable Occurrences, in the Life of John Blatchford of Cape-Ann, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Containing His Treatment in Nova Scotia, the West Indies, Great Britain, France, and the East Indies, as A Prisoner of War in the Late War* (New London, 1788); E. S. W., "Copy of a Letter Written by Jonathan Archer from Mill Prison, England, September 25, 1778," *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute*, 6 (1864), 113-14; William Richard Cutter, ed., "A Yankee Privateersman in Prison in England, 1777-1779," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 30 (1876), 174-77, 343-52; *Ibid.*, 31 (1877), 18-20, 212-13, 284-88; *Ibid.*, 32 (1878), 70-73, 165-68, 280-86; *Ibid.*, 33 (1879), 36-41; Joshua Davis, *A Narrative of Joshua Davis, An American Citizen, who was Pressed and Served on Board Six Ships of the British Navy* (Baltimore, 1811); Joshua Gott, "Commonplace Book, 1781-1807," Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. (henceforth PEM); Charles Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution, Containing a Full and Particular Account of the Sufferings and Privations of All the American Prisoners Captured on the High Seas, And Carried Into Plymouth, England, During the Revolution of 1776 . . .* (Boston, 1847); Thomas Smith, "Revolutionary Letter from Thomas Smith, Forton Prison, 1780," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 41 (1905), 227; Louis F. Middlebrook, "Thomas Witham, of Cape Ann: An Episode of the American Revolution," *Ibid.*, 67 (1931), 289-98. For a further glimpse of the concerns of the common seamen see "Continental Army and Navy Letters," Marblehead Historical Society, Marblehead, Mass. (henceforth MbHS).

10. John K. Alexander, "Jonathan Haskins' Mill Prison 'Diary': Can it Be Accepted At Face Value?" *New England Quarterly*, 40 (1967), 561-64.

11. On the relationship between the seaman's yarn and his journal see Greg Denning, *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge, 1992), 73-74.
12. See Richard M. Dorson, ed., *America Rebels: Narratives of the Patriots* (New York, 1953); Robert C. Doyle, *Voices from Captivity: Interpreting the American POW Narrative* (Lawrence, 1994); Alfred F. Young, "George Robert Twelves Hewes (1742-1840): A Boston Shoemaker and the Memory of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 38 (1981), 561-623.
13. Fox, *Adventures*.
14. Blatchford, *Narrative*, 22.
15. Widger, "Diary," *EIHC*, 73 (1937), 311-47; *ibid.*, 74 (1938), 22-48, 142-58.
16. Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 51-52; W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997) 3, 94, 153-54, 157.
17. Petition of Thomas Haley, Sept. 21, 1777, Adm./M/404, microfilm, National Maritime Museum, Great Britain (henceforth, NMM).
18. For the purposes of this essay, anyone who served aboard an American vessel of war—regardless of nationality—is considered an American seaman. Even after independence, a high proportion of men serving in the United States navy were not born in the United States. See Christopher McKee "Foreign Seamen in the United States Navy: A Census of 1808," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 42 (1985), 383-93. For a discussion of the ethnic diversity of the Continental army see Neimeyer, *America Goes to War*.
19. Ebenezer Putnam, comp. "American Prisoners at Quebec During the Revolution," *Genealogical Quarterly Magazine*, 3rd ser., 3 (April 1902), 43-44. Similar variety of nationalities appear in the crew lists provided by Charles Herbert for prisoners held in Mill Prison, 1777-1779. See Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 243-58.
20. Leonard W. Labaree, et al., eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, 1959-), XXX, 203-04; 390; William Bell Clark, *Ben Franklin's Privateers: A Naval Epic of the American Revolution* (Baton Rouge, 1956), 33-92. See also Henry Malo, "American Privateers at Dunkerque," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, 37 (1911), 933-93.
21. Lords Admiralty (henceforth Adm.) to Commissioners of Sick and Hurt Seamen (henceforth CSHS), Mar. 8, 1783, Adm./M/405, microfilm, NMM.
22. Labaree, et al., eds. *Franklin Papers*, XXVIII, 486-89; James Fenimore Cooper, *History of the Navy of the United States of America*, 2nd ed., I (Philadelphia, 1840), 146-49.
23. [Fanning], *Narrative*, 35; Kilby, "Narrative," *Scribner's Magazine* (July 1905), 29-30; Samuel Eliot Morison, *John Paul Jones: A Sailor's Biography* (Boston, 1959), 208; Cooper, *History*, I, 175.
24. Foote, ed., "Reminiscences of the Revolution," *EIHC*, 26 (1889), 112, 115. On the history of the *South Carolina* see Richard G. Stone, Jr., "The *South Carolina* We've Lost: The Bizarre Saga of Alexander Gillon and His Frigate," *American Neptune*, 39 (1979), 159-72.
25. Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 116-17.
26. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 66-67. Fighting for the American cause did not guarantee freedom for African Americans either. In 1777 slave owners attempted to sell their slaves even after they had served aboard the brigantine *Freedom*. See R. T. Paine to _____, May 8, 1777, R. T. Paine MS, MHS.
27. The men also believed that Jones had altered the *Ranger's* articles to extend their enlistment and that he had stalled payment of prize money. Robert J. Taylor, et al., eds. *Papers of John Adams*, 8 vols. (Cambridge, Mass. 1977-), VI, 182; Morrison, *John Paul Jones*, 167-72.
28. Kilby, "Narrative," *Scribner's Magazine* (1905), 35-37; Morison, *John Paul Jones*, 293-301; [Fanning], *Narrative*, 83-88.
29. Sherburne, *Memoirs*, 80; Widger, "Diary," *EIHC*, 73 (1937), 329; *ibid.*, 74 (1938), 24, 43; Coan, ed., "A Revolutionary Prison Diary," *NEQ*, 17 (1944), 298.
30. Foote, ed., "Reminiscences of the Revolution," *EIHC*, 26 (1889), 90-101.
31. Silvester Stevens to Mrs. Stevens (his wife), May 23, 1780, prison ship *Hunter*, Continen-

tal Army and Navy Letters, MbHS; Peter Smothers to his wife, Prison ship *Jersey*, Jan. 21, 1781, *ibid.*, Prison ship, Halifax Harbor, June 29, 1782, *ibid.*; Jonathan Deakins to wife, Mill Prison, Dec. 8, 1782, *ibid.*

32. Widger, "Diary," *EIHC*, 73 (1937), 347.

33. For assessments of the impact of the revolution on seafaring see Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston, 1979; reprinted Boston, 1921), 29-30; Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fisherman: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill, 1994), 264-66.

34. William Bell Clark, ed., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (Washington, D. C., 1968), III, 110-11. While comparing discipline in the British and American navies, Denning writes "There was a strong privateering spirit abroad [on American ships during the revolution] against which the rhetoric of loyalty and sacrifice faltered." Denning, *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language*, 149-50.

35. Fox, *Adventures*, 57-59.

36. Andros, *The Old Jersey Captive*, 5-6.

37. Clark, ed., *Naval Docs.*, III, 47.

38. Fox, *Adventures*, 58.

39. Shelburne, *Memoirs*, 33-36.

40. *Ibid.*

41. [Fanning], *Narrative*, 44, 102; Kilby, "Narrative," *Scribner's Magazine* (1905), 28; William James Morgan, ed., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (Washington, D. C., 1976), VII, 220-21, 299-300, 521-22, 532. 42. Gott, "Commonplace Book, 1781-1807," PEM. For a similar career path see "James Gray's Memorandum, Aug., ?, 1783?," Nathan-Dane Papers, MHS.

43. Quotation from Morgan, ed., *Naval Docs.*, VII, 543. See also *ibid.*, 11, 17, 30, 31, 56-57, 83, 85, 205, 208, 301, 357, 374, 510, 543-44, 983, 1006-07, 1062-63, 1255.

44. Labaree, et al., eds., *Franklin Papers*, XXIX, 238, 276-78, 448-49; Morrison, *John Paul Jones*, 196-97.

45. Labaree, et al., eds., *Franklin Papers*, XXXII, 616-17.

46. John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago, 1980), 321.

47. Sherburne, *Memoirs*, 75.

48. Deakens to his wife, Mill Prison, Dec. 8, 1782, Continental Army and Navy Letters, MbHS. Even men with strong local connections might join the British navy. Admiral Peter Parker refused to exchange five New Englanders who "have been volunteers for many months" even though their friends had sent five captured British sailors to the fleet off Rhode Island for a specific exchange. Admiral Peter Parker to Richard Cooke, June 7, 1777, Norcross Collection, 1751-1791, #2, MHS.

49. Blatchford, *Narrative*.

50. *Ibid.*, 10.

51. On the general British policy toward prisoners see Francis Abell, *Prisoners of War in Britain, 1756 to 1815: Record of Their Lives, Their Romance and Their Sufferings* (London, 1914); Richard H. Amerman, "Treatment of American Prisoners During the Revolution," *New Jersey Historical Society Proceedings*, 78 (1960), 257-75; Olive Anderson, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in Britain During the American War of Independence," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 28 (1955), 63-83; Larry G. Bowman, *Captive Americans: Prisoners During the American Revolution* (Athens, Ohio, 1976); Danske Dandridge, *American Prisoners of the Revolution* (Baltimore, 1967; orig. pub., Charlottesville, 1911); Charles H. Metzger, *The Prisoners in the American Revolution* (Chicago, 1971).

Besides the relevant works by individual prisoners, conditions in the English prisons are discussed in Howard Lewis Applegate, "American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison During 1777-1782," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, 97 (1961), 303-20; John K. Alexander, "American Privateersmen in the Mill Prison During 1777-1782: An Evaluation," *Ibid.*, 102 (1966), 318-40; Alexander, "Forton Prison During the American Revolution: A Case Study of British Prisoner of War Policy and the American Prisoner Response to that Policy," *Ibid.*, 103 (1967), 365-89; and Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*. For conditions in the British navy see Peter Kemp, *The British Sailor: A Social History of the Lower Deck* (London, 1970); Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seamen, 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (London, 1968); Dudley Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy* (Annapolis, 1981). Conditions on the New York prison ships are

discussed in Eugene L. Ambruster, *The Wallabout Prison Ships, 1776-1783* (New York, 1920); James Lenox Banks, *David Sproat and Naval Prisoners in the War of the Revolution* ([New York], 1909); Henry Onderdonk, Jr., *Revolutionary Incidents of Suffolk and Kings Counties; With an Account of the Battle of Long Island, and the British Prisons and Prison-Ships at New-York* (New York, 1849), 207-50; Louis H. Roddis, "The New York Prison Ships in the American Revolution," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, 61 (1935), 331-36. Similar conditions existed in other American ports occupied by the British. Chandler, "Autobiography," copy of original in Maine Historical Society in MHS; CSHS to Adm., Jan. 6, 1779, Adm. 98/11/406, microfilm, Public Record Office, Great Britain, (henceforth PRO).

52. These numbers are only the roughest estimates. At the end of the war, several sources indicated that at least ten thousand men died aboard prison ships in New York harbor. We have a better count for the men held in the prisons in England. Kaminkow and Kaminkow list 2235 names as prisoners in England. Since the CSHS correspondence lists names not in the Kaminkow and Kaminkow count, we can revise that figure upward. There are no statistics available for the number of American sailor prisoners held in Halifax, occupied ports like Newport, Charleston, and Savannah, nor is there a definitive number for American prisoners held in the West Indies. Hundreds, if not thousands were held in these and other locations. Add to this number the men compelled to join the British navy when first captured, and it appears likely that a twenty thousand estimate is a conservative number. For post war commentary of the number of prisoners to die on New York prison ships see [Philadelphia] *Pennsylvania Packet*, April 29, 1783; [New London] *Connecticut Gazette*, April 25, 1783. For the list of prisoners in England see Marion Kaminkow and Jack Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution* (Baltimore, 1967). See also *Boston Gazette*, June 24, July 1, 8, 1782.

53. Lemisch, "Listening to the 'Inarticulate,'" *JSocH*, 3 (1969), 1-29. A comprehensive history of the prisoner of war experience through-

out American history remains to be written. In one form or another these issues have appeared in every war. It is not the purpose of this essay to explore comparisons. The literature on the subject is vast. A sampling can be found by examining Doyle, *Voices from Captivity*; Robin F. A. Fabel, "Self-Help in Dartmoor: Black and White Prisoners in the War of 1812," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 9 (1989), 165-90; William Marvel, *Andersonville: The Last Depot* (Chapel Hill, 1994); E. Bartlett Kerr, *Surrender and Survival: The Experience of American POWs in the Pacific, 1941-1945* (New York, 1985); Eugene Kinkead, *In Every War But One* (New York, 1959); Albert D. Biderman, *March to Calumny: The Story of American POW's in the Korean War* (New York, 1963); Joe Dunn, "The POW Chronicles: A Bibliographic Review," *Armed Forces and Society*, 9 (1983), 495-514. 54. Lemisch argues that the American prisoners had "an ethos concerning defection" that equated the "refusal to defect" with "loyalty to the Revolution." Lemisch, "Listening to the 'Inarticulate,'" *JSocH*, 3 (1969), 16. For a similar conclusion see Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 74-77, 102-05, 142-44.

55. Kaminkow and Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution*, 107. See also Widger, "Diary," *EIHC*, 74 (1938), 148, 155.

56. Fox, *Adventures*, 146-53.

57. Based on Kaminkow and Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution*. Although both British and American seamen were technically guilty of treason for serving aboard American ships, some British sailors strove to disguise their nationality for fear of severer treatment. There was therefore an over-reportage of the nationality of Americans. Herbert provides statistics from his experience at Mill Prison. He lists 30 of 61 volunteers for the British navy as coming from the British Isles. Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 243-58.

58. Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 107, 155, 157, 159, 169-72, 183, 216.

59. *Ibid.*, 201-02.

60. This torment was not universal. On at least one occasion the "volunteers" and remaining prisoners parted on friendly terms cheering for each other on separation. Thomas Pye to Adm., May 30, 1781, in Adm. To CSHS, June

5, 1781, Adm./M/405, microfilm, NMM; Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 172.

61. After investigating complaints about conditions in Mill Prison in June 1781, the Commissioners of Sick and Hurt Seamen proclaimed "no people ever enjoyed more perfect health than they [the American prisoners] have done since their Confinement." This statement may have been an exaggeration, but the CSHS also reported that of 631 men confined in Mill Prison from May 1777 through June 1781, only eighteen died. CSHS to Adm., June 25, 1781, Adm. 98/13/372, microfilm, PRO. In the single year of 1779 there were supposed to be 70,000 men in the British navy (there were probably less), 1,658 died and 28,592 were sick. For conditions in the British navy see Lloyd, *British Seamen*, 258-64.

62. Kemp, *British Sailor*; Lloyd, *British Seamen*; Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy*.

63. Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets," *WMQ*, 3rd ser., 25 (1968), 381-95; Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (Chapel Hill, 1987) 12-13, 23.

64. Betsy Knight, "Prison Exchange and Parole in the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 48 (1991), 201-22. For an example of a state arranged cartel see Massachusetts Council's instructions to Captain Greeley about the cartel ship *Happy Release*, Nov. 28, 1778, Revere Family Papers, MHS.

65. Foote, ed., "Reminiscences of the Revolution," *EIHC*, 26 (1889), 110. For rumors of exchange see [Fanning], *Narrative*, 23; Widger, "Diary," *EIHC*, 74 (1938), 36, 47; *ibid.*, 73 (1937), 317, 320. See also Catherine M. Prelinger, "Benjamin Franklin and the American Prisoners of War in England during the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 32 (1975), 260-94.

In North America and Europe delays in exchange were caused by miscues in politics and diplomacy. For the American situation see *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington, D.C., 1904-1937), XIII, 104-05; *Ibid.*, XV, 1288; *Ibid.*, XVI, 49-53, 89-94; *Ibid.*, XVII, 704-06; *Ibid.*, XIX, 96; John C. Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington: from the Original Manuscript Sources,*

1745-1799 (Washington, D.C., 1937) XXIII, 407-09; [New York] *Royal Gazette*, June 12, 1782.

The twists and turns and convoluted circumstances behind the exchange policy in Europe can be traced in Labaree, *et al.*, eds. *Franklin Papers*, XXVI, 626; *Ibid.*, XXVII, 94-95, 576-77; *Ibid.*, XXVIII, 169, 218, 245-46; *Ibid.*, XXIX, 23-24, 233-34; *Ibid.*, XXX, 246, 370-71, 380, 620; Adm. To CSHS, Dec. 12, 1778, Jan. 23, Feb. 5, June 11, Sept. 21, Nov. 11, 1779, Feb. 9, May 10, Aug. 5, 1780, Adm./M/404, microfilm, NMM; CSHS to Adm., Nov. 16, Dec. 21, 29, 1778, Jan. 5, 19, 25, 1779, Adm. 98/11/337-41, 379-80, 398-01, 417-19, 425-26, microfilm, PRO; *Ibid.*, May 31, June 11, Sept. 7, 27, Nov. 2, 10, 22, 24, 1779, Feb. 5, May 12, 1780, Adm. 98/12/34, 38-39, 162, 194, 249-52, 262-63, 270-71, 276, 360-62, 452-53, *Ibid.*

66. For examples of escape in these areas see Andros, *Old Jersey Captive*, 21-80; Fox, *Adventures*, 116-31, 159-204; Greene, *Recollections*, 5-6; Lambert Letterbook, MS, 152-54, MHS; Deposition of Arthur Mclellan, July 1781, Snow MS, MHS; Deposition of Captain William Keith, July 9, 1781, *Ibid.*

67. While admitting to "complexities involved in generalizing about what escape meant to prisoners," Lemisch concludes "escape implied loyalty" to the American cause. Lemisch, "Listening to the 'Inarticulate,'" *JSocH*, 3 (1969), 18-20. For a similar argument see Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 105-08, 144-47. Olive Anderson offered a different perspective in "American Escapes From British Naval Prisons During the War of Independence," *Mariner's Mirror*, 41 (1955), 238-40.

68. Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 116-52; Weibust, *Deep Sea Sailors*, 437-45.

69. Gerald O. Haffner, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War by the Americans During the War of Independence" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1952) 47-48, 82, 92-93, 136-37, 147-48, 225, 234, 239; Abell, *Prisoners of War in Britain*, 146-47, 160-61, 230-31, 363; Morgan, ed., *Naval Docs.*, VII, 195, 241-42, 324, 1171.

70. For cartel agreements between European powers see CSHS to Adm., Nov. 12, 1779,

Adm. 98/12/264, 316-34, microfilm, PRO; *Ibid.*, Feb. 23, 1781, Adm. 98/13/237-47, *Ibid.* For examples of French prisoners escaping see *Ibid.*, July 16, Aug. 10, 30, 1779, Adm. 98/12/102-03, 127-28, 155, *Ibid.*; see also Cutter, "A Yankee Privateersman," *NEHGR*, 32 (1878), 70, 166-68, 282-284. For a general discussion see Olive Anderson, "The Establishment of British Supremacy at Sea and the Exchange of Naval Prisoners of War, 1689-1783," *English Historical Review*, 55 (1960), 77-89.

71. CSHS to Adm., Jan. 14, 30, 1778, Adm. 98/11/154-55, 165-66, microfilm, PRO; Labaree, *et al.*, eds., *Franklin Papers*, XXV, 414-19.

72. [Fanning], *Narrative*, 25.

73. Cutter, ed., "A Yankee Privateersman," *NEHGR*, 30 (1876), 174-77, 343-52; *Ibid.*, 31 (1877), 18-20, 212-13, 284-88; *Ibid.*, 32 (1878), 70-73, 165-68, 280-86.

74. The numbers in the table above are intended to indicate a trend and do not reflect an absolute breakdown of officers to enlisted men escapees. The number of escapees in the table, derived from Kaminkow and Kaminkow, is inaccurate. The correspondence of the CSHS indicates at least 564 escape attempts. (The CSHS number includes repeat escapes.) Kaminkow and Kaminkow's numbers add up to only 236. Even the CSHS numbers cannot be relied upon. By 1779 the CSHS listed only those escapees who were not swiftly recaptured. By 1780 they hardly mentioned when they recaptured escapees. The appearance of repeat escapees indicates that officials continued to recapture escaped American prisoners of war. Based on earlier figures, when the CSHS monitored numbers of recaptures more carefully, and on two separate reports of total escapes and recaptures over given periods of time, the recapture rate was at least fifty percent.

Kaminkow and Kaminkow also underreport the number of officers in prison. Joshua Barney, for example, is not indicated in their list as an officer. Nor is their list a complete list of prisoners held in England. Several individuals named in the CSHS records as escapees, can not be found on their list.

Revised figures might therefore include

larger numbers across the board. In lieu of more reliable numbers and more complete records, the table is less significant in absolute terms than it could be. Conclusions drawn from the table, however, are supported by the other evidence discussed in the text.

For CSHS reports on escapes and recaptures see CSHS to Adm., Oct. 27, 1779, Adm. 98/12/240-41; *Ibid.*, Nov. 22, 1780, Adm. 98/13/136-41.

75. Foote, ed., "Reminiscences of the Revolution," *EIHC*, 26 (1889), 97-100.

76. Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 199.

77. Anonymous to Adm., July 28, 1778, Adm./M/404, microfilm, NMM.

78. Cutler, "Prison Ships and the Old Mill Prison," *NEHGR*, 32 (1878), 397. See also Thompson, "Diary," *EIHC*, 76 (1940), 232-36; and Taylor, *et al.*, eds., *John Adams Papers*, VI, 407.

79. [Harrington], *NEHGR*, 51 (1897), "Letter," 322-23.

80. Except for Samuel Cutler and Israel Potter, every sailor who escaped and left a personal record sooner or later signed aboard a warship. This included Joshua Barney, John Blatchford, Thomas Dring, Ebenezer Fox, Caleb Foot, Christopher Hawkins, and Luke Mathewman.

81. Deposition of John Long, Sept. 9, 1781, in [Thos.] Fitzwilliams to Adm., Oct. 17, 1781, Adm./M/405, microfilm, NMM.

82. Cohen reports only fifteen recaptures and declares "Kinsey's efforts exemplify many of the Yankee captives' undaunted desires to get clear of their incarceration by any available means." We have no direct evidence of Kinsey's motives beyond the suggestions of the British officials. Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 180; CSHS to Adm., Dec. 11, 1781, Jan. 7, Feb. 5, Mar. 5, 19, 1782, Adm. 98/14/29, 59-60, 79, 97-98, 112, microfilm, PRO.

83. Adm. To CSHS, July 10, 1777, Adm./M/404, microfilm, NMM.

84. Fitzwilliams to Adm., Sept. 28, 1781, Adm./M/405, microfilm, NMM.

85. Fitzwilliam to Adm., Oct. 17, 1781, Adm./M/405, microfilm, NMM.

86. The records do not indicate what each sailor did with his share of the reward. The records do indicate that many sailors used the

money for a spree. It is possible some sailor, with an acquisitive instinct, saved the money for the future. Timothy Connor identified the "five pounder" as the bounty hunter eager to capture the escaped American prisoner. Luke Mathewman identifies the "five pounder" as the escaped American prisoner out on a lark. Lemisch and Cohen refer to the five-pounders only as English bounty hunters. Lemisch, "Listening to the 'Inarticulate'," *JSocH*, 3 (1969), 19. For a similar argument see Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 77, 108, 146-47, 186, 220, 221. For Connor's references see Cutler, "A Yankee Privateersman," *NEHGR*, 30 (1876), 347; *Ibid.*, 31 (1877), 19; *Ibid.*, 32 (1878), 165. For a definition of a "five pounder" as escaped POW see Mathewman, *Narrative*, 182. The CSHS often discussed the problem of the reward. See CSHS to Adm., May 7, Oct. 27, 1779, Adm. 98/12/10-11, 240-41, microfilm, PRO; *Ibid.*, March 5, April 12, 1782, Adm. 98/14/99-100, 141, *Ibid.* See also Adm. to CSHS, Oct. 15, 1779, Adm./M/404, microfilm, NMM; Gen. Smith to Adm., Feb. 14, 1782 in Adm. to CSHS, March 2, 1782, Adm./M/405, *Ibid.* For the order reducing the reward see Adm. to CSHS, May 1, 1782, *Ibid.* 87. Melville, *Israel Potter*, Hayford, ed., Potter's full story remains a mystery. He claimed that he served as a courier to France after his escape. But he may have been a British spy. Regardless, he thereafter lived in obscurity in England for most of the rest of his life. David Chacko and Alexander Kulcsar, "Israel Potter: Genesis of a Legend," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 41 (1984), 365-89.

88. Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 169; Adm. to CSHS, Oct. 20, 1780, Adm./M/404, microfilm, NMM; CSHS to Adm., April 25, 1777, Adm. 98/11/95, microfilm, PRO; *Ibid.*, Oct. 17, 23, 1780, Adm. 98/13/108, 114, *Ibid.*, Labaree, et al., eds., *Franklin Papers*, XXIV, 402; *Ibid.*, XXVI, 12-13, 179, 382-83; *Ibid.*, XXVIII, 553-54; *Ibid.*, XXIX, 646-48.

89. Haffner, "Treatment of Prisoners of War," (Ph.D., diss., Indiana University, 1952), 82, 90, 145-48.

90. Abell, *Prisoners of War in Britain*, 56, 58-59, 80, 141, 182, 202-04, 229-32, 280. For an American sailor's description of the French during the War of 1812 see Charles Andrews,

The Prisoners' Memoirs, or Dartmoor Prison; Containing A Complete and Impartial History of the Entire Captivity of the Americans in England . . . (New York, 1815), 24, 43-54, 72-75, 86.

91. Greene, *Recollections*, 25, 84-88.

92. Lemisch asserted that "the prisoners articulated a collectivist ethical code" and that "their government was egalitarian." Lemisch, "Listening to the 'Inarticulate'," *JSocH*, 3 (1969), 26. For a similar argument see Cohen, *Yankee Sailors*, 113-14, 137-38.

93. Ralls, "Narrative of His Capture;" N-YHS; [Fanning], *Narrative*, 35; Cutler, "Prison Ships, and the 'Old Mill Prison,'" *NEHGR*, 32 (1878), 395; Coan, ed., "Revolutionary Prison Diary," *NEQ*, 17 (1944), 294, 303; Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 97; CSHS to Adm., Jan. 14, 1778, Adm. 98/11/154-55, microfilm, PRO.

94. Thornton is a shadowy figure. The name may be an alias and he later became an agent for the British. Labaree, et al., eds., *Franklin Papers*, XXV, 26-27, 414-19; Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 219.

95. Labaree, et al., eds., *Franklin Papers*, XXVI, 165.

96. Sherburne, *Memoirs*, 86.

97. Cutler, "A Yankee Privateersman," *NEHGR*, 30 (1876), 350.

98. Petition of Prisoners at Mill Prison, in Adm. To CSHS, June 23, 1781, Adm./M/405, microfilm, NMM.

99. Petition of Fourteen Persons confined in the inner Prison at Forton, in Adm. To CSHS, Mar. 25, 1778, Adm./M/404, microfilm, NMM.

100. For examples of other petitions from prisoners see Labaree, et al., eds. *Franklin Papers*, XXXI, 442-43; "Petition of American Prisoners on the *Diligente*," June 26, 1782, Adm./M/405, microfilm, NMM; Petition of John Dagon . . . , Oct. 20, 1777, Adm./M/404, *Ibid.* See also CSHS to Adm., June 1, 25 1781, Adm. 98/13/353, 371-73, microfilm, PRO; *Ibid.*, Oct. 4, 1782, Adm. 98/14/254, *Ibid.*

101. Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 145-48; Coan, ed., *Revolutionary Prison Diary*, "NEQ", 17 (1944), 427-28; Sherburne, *Memoirs*, 83. See also CSHS to Adm., Jan. 27, 1779, Adm. 98/11/442-44, microfilm, PRO.

102. Hawkins, *Adventures*, 24, 62-63.
103. Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 142.
104. Sherburne, *Memoirs*, 86.
105. Herbert, *A Relic of the Revolution*, 79.
106. Sherburne, *Memoirs*, 100, 116.
107. Foote, "Reminiscences of the Revolution," *EIHC*, 26 (1889), 107.
108. Widger, "Diary," *EIHC*, 74 (1938), 156.
109. Cutler, "Prison Ships and the 'Old Mill Prison,'" *NEHGR*, 32 (1878), 185, 187, 306.
110. Hawkins, *Adventures*, 32-37.
111. See examples in Fox, *Adventures*, 85-90; and Paine, *Joshua Barney*, 80-81.
112. Foote, ed., "Reminiscences of the Revolution," *EIHC*, 26 (1889), 112, 119.
113. Davis, *Narrative*, 35-39.