As the State ship General Greene and her motley crew dropped down stream late in May, 1779, Joseph Reed, President of the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council, may have murmured the customary "God speed the good ship safe to port." More likely he gave a long sigh of relief.

For he could not but recall the trial and worry she had given him. He remembered the city of Philadelphia before the British came in '77. Then there had been comfort in the homes of its citizens, food a-plenty, wines and brews enough, and fuel for the poorest hearth. But now even flour, salt, and firewood were rationed. Several of his old friends were in gaol accused of hoarding. Others equally prominent were said to be profiteering on such necessities as remained in the shops and warehouses. Prices were outrageous: goods were scarce, because manufactured articles came chiefly from abroad—sugar and salt from the Indies, flour from Maryland and Virginia, fish from New England, cloth from France and Holland—every commodity entailing a sea journey to reach the city. Not a vessel could get into Philadelphia, for the seacoast swarmed with Tory privateers from New York, Bermuda, and Saint Augustine.

The merchants had clamored for protection, for men of war to be stationed in the river and at the capes to allow Philadelphia-bound vessels a fair chance to reach the safety of the upper river. Reed recalled looking over the poor remainder of the once proud Pennsylvania navy—six small vessels and not a one of them fit for sea duty.¹ He had called on the Continental Marine Committee only to learn that Congress could give no aid. Its vessels were either blockaded or off on cruises. He recalled, when vessel after vessel had fallen into the hands of the enemy and bankruptcy threatened the strongest merchants in the city, writing to the nearby sister states suggesting an embargo on all vessels—"to deprive our enemys of their expected prey."² Maryland had followed the proposal, passing a resolution which indefinitely laid up all her shipping—a procedure most unsatisfactory to the Philadelphia traders, who, notwithstanding their

² Journal of Assembly, Mar. 3, 1779.
losses, were still determined to gain huge profits even if it cost their last vessel. President Reed remembered their pleas and petitions. Perhaps they had cursed him for an old fool when he had remained adamant and told them that no more vessels, money, and men were to be thrown into the hands of the Tories: that either the ships were to be protected, as they went and came through the capes and up the river, or none should leave port. He had told them the State had no funds to obtain the vessels necessary to patrol the waters.

Stalemate, it had seemed, until someone had called a meeting at the Coffee House of all the traders and merchants on business of “utmost confidence,” and then had shown them that a single cargo safely landed would yield such enormous profit that each merchant and ship owner could well afford to contribute some of his little remaining capital towards the purchase of a ship to lend the State and give the river and bay the protection upon which the President had insisted. The outcome of the meeting had been the raising of such a fund by private subscription, repayable in six months or sooner “if convenient,” for the express purpose of buying or chartering one or more men of war.

With such co-operation President Reed had set the Supreme Executive Council on the business at once, and sent out a call for vessels. The armed cutter Revenge, commanded by a doughty sea fighter, Captain Gustavus Conyngham, and just in from a highly successful cruise in European waters, had been considered in February. Terms for chartering the cutter were requested of her owners, Nesbit and Company. When presented, their conditions were found to be so high that the Council dropped the matter. The next vessel located was still under construction, but nearly completed, standing on the stocks in the Eyre Shipyard in Kensington. The Council thought she “will answer our purpose better than any other to be procured.” She was a ship provisionally named the General Greene, built expressly for privateering, light and fast, carrying on her main deck fourteen guns, six and four pounders, with howitzers in her tops.

Her owners were a privateering company, Messrs. Irwin, Barclay,
Coxe, and Mitchell. To them the Council wrote to inquire "whether you will sell or hire her to the State . . . and on what terms." The reply was most satisfactory; the Company would sell her as she stood, at a price to be fixed by four impartial judges. Pending authorization by the Assembly to complete negotiations, the Council requested the Company to continue the rigging and outfitting of the ship, and, on March 23, it was resolved to take the vessel. That same day the Council appointed Blair McClenachan and Mathew Irwin agents to complete her as fast as possible "to cruise against the Enemy for the protection of the Trade of this State."

Irwin, in accepting the appointment for himself and McClenachan, made the suggestion that her name be changed to General Reed, in honor of the president of the Council. Reed modestly declined the honor, because "it would give very great Pain. General Greene is not only a brave, valuable, & Amiable Character, but my particular Friend and there is none, the Commander in Chief excepted to whom I would sooner wish to see any mark of Respect & Attention shown."

After the selection of the vessel came the choice of officers, a most important matter, since it was always the practice to have a vessel’s commander supervise the equipment and outfitting of his own ship, and to have all possible work done by the crew. Greater familiarity with the craft on which the men had to depend for their lives in times of storm and battle insured better results. By March 27 the professional ship-carpenters, riggers, and other maritime tradesmen were so far along in their work that Irwin began to recommend officers. Three men were suggested to command her: James Montgomery, one time commander of the State galleys Ranger and Chatham and the Queen of France privateer; Thomas Houston, formerly commander of the galley Warren and the brig Convention; and John Green, commander of the Continental brigantine Retaliation. The choice of the Council fell on Montgomery, who, on March 30, was officially

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9 Ibid., 320.
10 Ibid., 320.
11 Ibid., 244, 246.
12 Ibid., 244, 246.
15 Ibid., 263.
16 Ibid., 265.
17 Ibid., 266.
On April 15 the other commissioned officers were selected: first lieutenant, Samuel Cassin; second lieutenant, Joseph De Hart; captain of marines, Robert Caldwell and lieutenant of marines, John Hambright. Following these appointments, the Executive Council prepared to enlist the seamen and marines. First their pay was decided upon, a meager amount of five to eight dollars a month, as the chief inducement for naval enlistment was the distribution of prize money. This the Council fixed at the full value of the vessel, to be divided among the officers and crew, for the capture of any of His Majesty's men-of-war, or a privateer; or, if the prize were a merchant vessel or a letter of marque, then one-half the amount obtained at public sale.

A rendezvous was opened, and to the music of fife and drum, the lieutenants, aided with free drinks, painted to all comers a picture of good food, good rum, easy life aboard ship, and prize money galore to those enlisting for a cruise. No one joined. Although the drinks were strong and the promises big, the privateers that filled the harbor, all looking for crews, outbid the State. In addition to higher wages, they gave the new crews part of the pay in advance for a spree ashore before sailing. The Council, deciding to over-reach the privateers' top offer, proffered a bounty of one hundred dollars to each man, payable when the articles were signed. Then both seamen and marines stepped forward quickly enough. The privateersmen had no intention of letting the State best them in their efforts to get rich quick. They induced the General Greene's recruits to desert even though the articles had been signed, and "a great part of the bounty money" accepted and spent. The Council took the strongest possible action. It closed the port of Philadelphia for fifteen days, prohibiting all vessels of any type from sailing. All port officials were ordered to stop, by force of arms, any craft that might try surreptitiously to sneak down the river.

That ended the trouble from the privateers in the port of Philadelphia. A few more men enlisted. They accepted their bounty money and

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17 Ibid., 751.
18 Ibid., 281.
19 Ibid., 281.
21 Ibid., 763.
promptly disappeared. The officers instituted a search. Two deserters were pursued as far as Baltimore, caught, and brought back. The Council issued warrants for the arrest of three men suspected of enticing recruits out of the State. Hailed before the authorities, each claimed to be hunting deserters from his own vessel, and after posting bonds totaling £2000 “not to hire seamen till the General Greene had sailed” all three were dismissed. Despite these efforts the crew could not be completed.

Next Montgomery tried the time honored methods of manning the British fleet—impressment. Sailors in the city were wary. Only a poor French seaman, two sailors from a Massachusetts ship, and a runaway slave fell into his hands. On May 14 the Council extended the embargo for another fortnight. When the task of securing men appeared utterly hopeless, President Reed gave Captain Montgomery orders to take enough men from the gaols to fill out the crew. A choice lot, these men—British prisoners, American deserters, thieves, renegades of all descriptions. When mustered, three of them, all deserters from Colonel Procter’s Pennsylvania artillery, were returned to the gaol as they were considered “such dangerous and atrocious characters that Captain Montgomery did not incline to take them on board the State Ship.” On May 24 the Muster Master General reported that the General Greene had on board 83 seamen and officers and 29 marines, a total of 112 men. Next day the ship, being fully found, the Council, with wishes for “all Imaginable success,” instructed Captain Montgomery to take her to sea with “all possible dispatch.”

The State ship had hardly passed out of sight beyond League Island when Reed learned that three Continental frigates had been ordered by the Marine Committee to make a voyage against New York privateers. An express to Captain Montgomery was sent down the river with instructions to join these vessels. But so fast was the General

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26 Ibid., 781.
27 Ibid., XII. 7.
28 Ibid., 4.
29 Ibid.
30 John H. Sheppard, Life of Samuel Tucker, III.
Greene that she was clear of Delaware Bay long before the express reached the Overfalls. Boldly Montgomery set a course for the enemy’s principal cruising ground.

For a few days the General Greene moved along the sea lane, sighting nothing. About daybreak on June 7, the watch made out a sail coming up over the northern horizon. For the first time the State ship could try her speed and mettle. All sail was set in chase. The seamen were piped to stations at the great guns, ready for action. Captain Caldwell’s marines paraded to their posts on the quarter deck and in the tops. Steadily the General Greene gained on the strange vessel whose English flag betold an enemy. At two o’clock Mr. Hollingsworth, the sailing master, laid the ship within range. Up went the General Greene’s gun port lids. Before a single gun could be brought to bear, down fluttered His Majesty’s ensign. Sails were put aback, and a prize crew took possession of the surrendered vessel. She proved to be the privateer brigantine Impertinent of New York, commanded by Captain Jacob Getchus, a Philadelphia turn-coat, armed with “ten double fortified four pounder carriage guns, twelve swivels and 53 men.” She had left Sandy Hook on June 2 in company with the British frigates Delaware and Daphne and the privateer Union, all bound for a cruise. Two days after getting to sea, the Daphne sighted a Continental vessel and engaged her. The Delaware was quite a distance astern. Captain Getchus feared he might be taken should the Daphne be captured. With the aid of a light fog, he beat a hasty retreat southward to fall straight into Montgomery’s hands. A brave man, this Captain Getchus, a great fighter with half-armed merchant vessels, but, when a vessel of force came along, an arrant coward. How the General Greene’s crew must have chuckled—a prize without so much as firing a pistol!

Soon after transferring the prisoners to his own vessel, Montgomery found his mizzenmast to be in bad condition, and set a course towards the Delaware with the Impertinent in company. On the way in good fortune again smiled on the General Greene. Off Cape May a vessel was sighted. All sail was again set in chase, and soon Montgomery had the pleasure of taking, a second time without a struggle,

82 Pa. Packet, June 12, 1779.
the schooner *Humming Bird*, Jesse James, master, loaded with fifty hogsheads of tobacco. The schooner was a little trader which had been dispatched from the Eastern Shore of Virginia to Santa Croix, but off Hatteras she had fallen in with the Tory privateer *Bayard*, ten guns, commanded by Benedict Byrne, of New York. Captain Byrne had put a prize crew aboard and ordered her to New York.

On June 8 into the Delaware sailed Captain Montgomery, to anchor that night under Cape May, safe in from the sea with two fine prizes. As the light began to grow the next morning the anchor watch saw, looming large over in the Roads, the forms of two frigates. Immediately the commander was aroused. Yes, there they were, but although either was more than a match for his vessel, Montgomery remained unperturbed. His sea-wise eyes saw other things as well. The wind vane at the masthead showed a breeze blowing steadily from the northeast, and the ripples along the hull of the ship evidenced an ebb tide. Both told him that the *General Greene*, lying to windward, could not be reached by the two strange frigates, be they friend or foe. Taking no chances on a shift of wind, however, all hands were quietly called, signals made for the two prizes to get under weigh, and up the stream went all three.

Besides the safety of his prizes and the damaged mast, another reason prompted Captain Montgomery to set his course for a safer haven. A most cogent one it was too. In the hold under guard of the most trusted men in the *General Greene*’s crew were, of course, Tory prisoners from the *Impertinent* and the *Humming Bird*, a gang capable of giving plenty of trouble were they to get out of hand. But more to be feared was the *General Greene*’s own crew. These men, it will be remembered, had been taken largely from the raking of the gaol and from among British prisoners of war. When only a few days out, they had plotted mutiny, waiting only for an opportunity to carry the ship into a Tory port. Knowing the character of these men, Montgomery was on the watch for just such a move. Before trouble developed, the officers seized the ringleaders and clapped them in irons. With these “Villons” in the hands of the Continental Commissary of Prisoners at New Castle, the ship was safer from attack from within, but this loss sadly depleted the crew. When the remaining men were told off, it was found there were only six real seamen on board.84 This

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situation was reported to Reed who again opened a recruiting rendezvous in Philadelphia. For once the Council had no trouble securing men. Thanks to the success of the first few days' cruising, the General Greene had gained the name of a lucky ship and seamen and marines flocked to sign on. Captain Montgomery, when these men came down, paraded them on board and found he now had 140 in all. What was more important than mere numbers, they were the pick of the seamen in Philadelphia, instead of the city's sweepings.35

Repairs to the spars were quickly made, and, on June 15, President Reed sent down orders for the conduct of the next cruise. The General Greene was again instructed to join the Continental frigates Boston, Confederacy, and Deane, then lying off Cape May. Montgomery was told to place his vessel under the command of Captain Tucker of the Boston, and to proceed against the enemy for a period of three weeks.36 Again, before the orders arrived the General Greene had put to sea, setting her course up along the New Jersey coast. Nearly a week the ship cruised between Cape May and Sandy Hook with no success. Then on June 26, while off the Highlands, a vessel was sighted. The stranger soon made out the General Greene's character and laid a course for New York, a sure sign of a British vessel. Captain Montgomery ordered all his canvas out, but luck or his slant of wind did not favor him. Although he went "Cloas in With Sandey Hook," the enemy escaped.37

Back off shore Montgomery took his ship, to lie just out of sight of land in the hope that the game, seeing no enemy hovering about, might be tempted out again. Sure enough, next day, the lookout at the masthead spied a sail. Again the crew was piped to quarters and all sail set in pursuit. Instead of turning in flight, the stranger came on. No weak-kneed Tory privateer this time, but a regular British cruiser! And Captain Montgomery was "Oblig'd to Run in turn." Fortunately a heavy fog came in. Under its cover the General Greene slipped quietly into the anchorage at Cape Henlopen.

Having successfully dodged a British frigate the day before, the Captain was more than a little disquieted when, next morning as the fog began to lift, he made out two heavy frigates lying close by, almost

36 Ibid., 1st ser., VII. 487.
37 Ibid., 521.
within gun shot. No protecting wind and tide this time and no chance
to flee! Captain Montgomery, hoping for the best, ran up his recogni-
tion signals. Only when the strangers sent to their masts the private
flags of the Continental frigates Boston and Confederacy did his pulse
return to normal. Later in the day the Continental frigate Deane
came downstream with signals flying for an immediate council of war.
Montgomery went aboard to find that Captain Nicholson carried
orders from President Reed instructing the General Greene to join
the three vessels for a joint expedition. The particular purpose was to
destroy a number of Tory privateers then known to be lying in wait
for West Indiamen homeward bound for the Chesapeake and Dela-
ware. By way of warning, the Continental Marine Committee advised
the squadron that the British admiral at New York had ordered a
twenty and a twenty-four gun frigate out to blockade the mouth of
the Delaware. “We need not remind you,” the Committee’s dispatch
concluded, “how greatly it would redound to your reputation and the
honor of the American flag to capture these vessels.”

Next morning, June 29, came their opportunity. At daybreak three
guns were heard to fire out at sea. In the offing, just within sight, were
three British men-of-war of indiscernible force. Unfortunately the
American vessels could not move from the anchorage, for, although
there seemed to be plenty of wind off shore, not a catspaw stirred the
waters of the bay. Montgomery hoped “the Breeze will shortly spring
up and make no Doubt but we shall shortly Give a Good Acct of
them.” Despite his optimism, the breeze did not get inshore and
the enemy vessels went off, perhaps with the intention of trying Mont-
gomery’s own ruse of hiding over the horizon. Not until July 2 did
the Continental frigates, accompanied by the General Greene, finally
sight their sails. Commodore Nicholson “hove out a Signall to Chais.”
With all hands at battle stations, the American vessels, under a press
of canvas, stood down towards the enemy. As soon as the leader got
close enough to discover their force, he saw not light frigates, but a
two-decker, a heavy frigate, and a large sloop-of-war. No time could
be lost, or all four of the American vessels would probably have found
themselves under the British flag and their crews on the way to prison

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* Ibid.
* Marine Committee Letter Book, II. 81-83; Ms. in Library of Congress.
ships in Wallabout Bay. The commodore made a hasty signal that they “bee too hard for us.” All four helms were put hard down. With the British squadron close astern in hot pursuit they made for the Delaware capes, the crews still at the guns “Determin’d to have Sold their Ships Verey Dear had the two Decker Came up with us.” Speed won the day, and Captain Nicholson and his consorts safely made the protection of Cape May. Certainly not a very great addition to anyone’s reputation and honor.

The General Greene had fared better cruising by herself, and Montgomery, chafing at not being his own master, doubtless wished he could continue to do so. The chance soon came. As the four vessels anchored, a boat came off-shore bearing fresh orders for the Continental vessels. Captains Nicholson and Tucker were to sail for Hampton Roads and Captain Harding was to proceed up to Philadelphia, leaving the General Greene alone at the capes. Knowing the tactics of the British, Montgomery guessed they would watch for the Continental frigates to put out again, follow them, and attempt to force an engagement. If so, it would allow his shallow-draft ship a chance to sneak out of the river and up towards Sandy Hook close in along the Jersey shore. With his usual reverence for the dangers of the sea and the enemy Captain Montgomery, reporting to President Reed, wrote “Please God I shall go to Sea as soon as the Frigats goes out.” With the knowledge of a protecting British squadron on the coast, the Tory privateers would swarm out of New York, he was sure, so he added, “I hop to Pick Som of them in a little Tim.” And so he did, for shortly there came up the Delaware river the Ship William and Ann, of 300 tons burden, loaded with molasses, muscovado sugar, coffee, and black men, retaken from the enemy by the General Greene. Everything—goods and slaves alike—was sold at public auction on Plumstead’s wharf. The proceeds, together with those derived from the sales of the other prizes, convinced President Reed that the purchase and outfitting of the State Ship had been so successful, “as, in a great measure to compensate the expence of the undertaking.”

From the arrival of the ship William and Ann until the middle of

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“*Ibid.*, 533.
*Journal of Assembly, Sept. 9, 1779."
September the whereabouts of the General Greene are doubtful. Probably she was on her station, standing between Henlopen and Sandy Hook, occasionally putting into the Delaware for water or supplies. These visits, brief though they must have been, afforded an opportunity for some of the seamen and marines to desert. In their defence, it must be admitted they had been goaded by the cruel treatment at the hands of the General Greene's officers, particularly the first lieutenant, John Cassin. No captures are reported to the ship's credit for the period, and, except for the desertions, all was quiet.

On Tuesday, September 14, while cruising off the capes, equinoctial gales swept down out of the north. For four days the wind tore at her shortened sail, and fight though the crew did, she was driven far to the southward of her station. Right in the midst of it, when the overworked men were most in need of all possible aid, the cook found that the provisions had spoiled. On the fourth day the gale blew itself out, and Montgomery, forgetting the part his own skillful seamanship had played in preserving the ship, piously "thanked God" for having "suffered very little" and headed back for his haven to get food for his starved crew. Early in the morning of September 18, the men on watch "Saw a Sail Cloas on Board." Although the hands were weak from hunger and exposure, all possible sail was set in chase. For sixteen hours the stranger, a brigantine, raced to escape. Even with her bottom fouled with barnacles from weeks at sea, the General Greene crept slowly up and in the evening came alongside the chase. With the crew standing by at the great guns, slow matches burning as they waited the command to send their broadside crashing into the enemy, not a sign of resistance showed from the vessel. Not a gun was run out of her ports. In answer to Montgomery's hail, the British flag came down. Small boats were manned and a prize crew sent on board. As the General Greene's men reached the decks of the prize, they saw why the enemy had given no opposition: behind each port stood a gun carriage, all in proper order, but not a single one bore its piece of ordnance. So badly had the gale buffeted the Tory privateer that her captain had been forced to heave overboard all his guns to lighten the vessel. When the prisoners were transferred, Captain Montgomery

46 State Library, Ms. Rev. Papers, Muster Roll, Sept. 9, 1779, General Greene.
learned he had taken the brigantine *Bayard*, Captain Benedict Byrne of New York, one of the fastest sailing vessels on the coast, and it will be remembered, the original captor of Montgomery's second prize, the schooner *Humming Bird*. Far more interesting to the General Greene's famished crew than the thoughts of prize money was the *Bayard's* well stocked hold with its tiers of provision barrels—salt beef and pork, flour and potatoes, ships bread and rum. Out came the casks. Into the small boats and over to Joseph Campbell, the cook, they went. Then for the first time in four days, all hands had a square meal.

Before a strong east north east wind the General Greene entered the Delaware on September 20. Again having many prisoners on board and being in sore need of repairs, she went up the river to New Castle. With no waste of time, more orders came down from President Reed directing Captain Montgomery to "Proceed again to Sea as soon as the ship is refitted." In a few days the General Greene was repaired and back at sea. In spite of a "Contuniel Gail of Wind," Montgomery managed to retake the sloop *Bedford*, of New Bedford, which, while on a voyage to North Carolina, had been captured by the British sloop-of-war *Weazel*. Then bigger game fell into the General Greene's hands—the Tory privateer schooner *Langolee*. Quickly following her came another prize, this time a joint re-capture by the General Greene and the famous Philadelphia privateer brig *Holker*, Captain Geddes. She was the richly-laden sloop *Generous Friend*, late Captain Giles Sage, loaded with a cargo of molasses, sugar, and other West India produce. Returning to New London from Hispaniola, she had been captured by the Lady Dunmore, of sixteen guns, one of Goodrich's privateers. All three prizes got safely into port.

On October 6, in a badly storm-wracked condition, Montgomery worked the General Greene into Cape May to set about repairing her as best he could. The ship had suffered much in her rigging. As for her hull, he thought that the fall gales were getting too "boisterous for our poor Egg shell to Cruize on this Coast," but he promised Reed

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49 Pa. Col. Recs., XII. III.
50 Ibid.
to do his best to have her back at sea in a few days. Before she could be put into condition, the Supreme Executive Council, on October 27, deciding that the "season of the year being come in which a vessel of her make is not able to keep the seas on our Coast," ordered "That the agents of the Ship General Greene be directed to sell her at Public Sale." A few days later, before she could be properly advertised and with one of her agents absent, in a transaction clouded with suspicions of fraud and corruption, William Bradford sold the General Greene under the hammer.

Notwithstanding her short career of only five months, the results accomplished by the General Greene were numerous. Financially the State's venture was highly successful. The ship, her entire outfit, and all her expenses had cost the government a total of £80,734.10.11; at the auction she sold for £67,450.0.0, and during the period of her service her prizes had brought into the state £462,680.0.4, a profit of £449,395.9.5. In addition there were many prisoners who were exchanged at various times for Pennsylvanians whom the British had confined in the prison hulks at Wallabout Bay. But far more important than these was the opening of the Delaware River. Food, commodities, and military supplies of all kinds once more entered the port of Philadelphia in a steady stream. Hunger, scarcity, and hysteria, all were alleviated by the work of the brave State ship General Greene.

Philadelphia

M. V. BREWINGTON

Pa. Col. Recs., XII. 150.