That Mischievous Holker
The Story of a Privateer

British newspapers recording their ship losses called her "that mischievous American, the Holker." "1 Rebel printers chronicling her deeds extolled her as "the noted privateer Holker." "2 And Blair McClenachan, Irish-born Philadelphia merchant, considered her the most profitable of all the letters of marque and reprisal he employed during the American Revolution.3

The Pennsylvania privateer brig Holker was as trim a craft as ever sallied forth a-commerce-raiding from the port of Philadelphia. Long, rakish, tall-masted, and of about one hundred tons burden, she was designed for speed—to overhaul a fleeing merchantman, or show a clean pair of heels to a pursuing frigate. Even the enemy admitted her to be "the swiftest sailing vessel that ever sailed from America." "4 Pierced for eighteen guns, she carried sixteen 6-pounders during most of her career, a right heavy metal for so small a craft. Supplementing her main armament were a tier of swivels and two coehorns.5

Continuous success attracted the ablest seafaring men to her rendezvous. Her recruiting officers thus could have their pick, and she became probably the best-manned privateer out of Philadelphia. Maximum crew strength was one hundred and thirty officers and men. With the constant drain of prize crews, however, her complement was not stable.6

Her name was Blair McClenachan's shrewd tribute to John Holker, the French Consul to Pennsylvania, who controlled the pur-

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1 Quoted from an Antigua newspaper in the Pennsylvania Packet, Jan. 10, 1782.
2 Dispatch from St. Pierre, Martinique, Mar. 1, 1781, ibid., Apr. 24, 1781.
4 Quoted from a Basseterre dispatch of Apr. 13, 1781, in the Pennsylvania Packet, May 15, 1781.
6 In November, 1779, the Holker's bond specified a crew of one hundred, which was increased to one hundred and twenty in July, 1780, and to one hundred thirty in June, 1782. Papers of the Continental Congress, 196, VII, 84, 85, 86, Library of Congress, hereafter cited.
chase and shipping of supplies for His Christian Majesty’s fleet and West India garrisons. Any merchant aspiring to some of this lucrative trade cultivated the good will of Monsieur Holker. So, when bonds for the new vessel were duly signed and delivered on April 14, 1779, the brig was recorded officially as the *Holker*. 

For himself, or jointly with one or two other Philadelphia merchants, McClenachan had sent a score of vessels to sea under letter-of marque commissions. During the earlier years of the war he had been content to put enough guns and men in each merchantman to insure safe passage with cargo, barring the misfortune of running afoul of a British frigate or sloop of war. On her maiden voyage in the spring of 1779, the *Holker* sailed as a letter of marque with but ten guns and thirty-five men, far fewer than she carried subsequently. Conversion to privateering came some months later, after her sailing qualities had been tested.

George Geddes, an experienced seaman who had sailed ships for McClenachan before the war, was the *Holker*’s first commander. He was just back from captivity in New York, having been taken by a British privateer in January in another of McClenachan’s vessels. A short, stocky man, skin weathered by salt air, dark hair turning gray, Geddes had a virility belying his forty-eight years. The first

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as Papers CC. Her actual complement in March, 1782, however, was one hundred five officers and men. Samuel E. Morison, ed., *Log of the Pilgrim, 1781–1782,* *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, XXV (1924), 113. When she was lost a year later the crew numbered but ninety-four. Captain’s log, H.M.S. *Alcmene*, Mar. 2, 1783, Admiralty, Class 51, No. 24, Public Records Office, London. This source is hereafter cited as Admiralty, PRO.

7 Minutes of Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, Aug. 23, 1779, *Colonial Records*, XII, 80, 81, hereafter referred to as *Colonial Records*.

8 Papers CC, 196, VII, 83.


10 George Geddes was master of the ship *Augustus*, of one hundred and fifty tons, in 1774. *Pennsylvania Archives, Second Series*, II, 667. In 1775, he joined the Captains of Ships Charitable Club. “A List of Names and Times of Entrey from the Year 1768 to October, 1776,” Captains of Ships Charitable Club records, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP). He was commissioned master of the sloop *Hope*, of eight guns and twenty-five men, on Dec. 24, 1778, and was taken a few days out of the Delaware capes bound for Hispaniola by the British privateer *Mars*. Papers CC, 196, VII, 97; *New York Gazette*, Feb. 15, 1779.
lieutenant was Matthew Lawler, a Philadelphian, twenty-three years of age, five feet ten inches tall, with brown hair and a "fresh complexion." Lawler recently had returned from two years of exciting service in European waters under Gustavus Conyngham, and had a reputation for ability and bravery.

An embargo upon the produce of Pennsylvania had been laid by the General Assembly in November, 1778, and, at the time the Holker was commissioned, still had about five months to run. Articles which could not be shipped—provisions of every description—represented a major percentage of the export trade of Philadelphia. Hence, when McClenachan's brig sailed for St. Eustatius in late April, 1779, she had a slim cargo and much ballast. At her destination she replaced the ballast with rum and sugar, and heard tales of French successes. Heading homeward in June, the Holker, off the Delaware capes, took her first prize, the snow Friendship, from Georgia for New York. Geddes removed the captured crew and sent the snow into Egg Harbor, on the Jersey coast. There she was found to have a valuable assorted cargo of molasses, tobacco, rice, fustic, deerskins, barrel staves and tar. All of these, and the vessel, were condemned and sold, bringing a satisfactory return to Blair McClenachan and the officers and mariners of the Holker.

But the profit to all was imperiled by Geddes' failure to observe the law. Congress had directed that all captives be turned over to the

11 The pen pictures of Geddes and Lawler are drawn from the "minute description of the persons of the captain and his lieutenant, with their age, stature, complexion, &c.," which Congress on Nov. 10, 1780, requested should be entered upon the backs of commissions by the issuing officers. This was to avoid British abuse of papers found in American prizes. Journals of the Continental Congress (Washington, 1910), XVIII, 1043, hereafter referred to as Journals of Congress. Geddes' description is upon the back of his commission of May 18, 1781, to the ship Congress, and Lawler's upon the back of his commission of June 18, 1781, to the ship Philadelphia. Papers CC, 196, III, 39; XI, 81. Both are printed in Pennsylvania Archives, Fifth Series, I, 630, 631, 634, 635.


13 The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania, from 1682 to 1801 (Harrisburg, 1903), IX, 294, 295.

14 The news was the capture of the island of St. Vincent on June 16, 1779. W. M. James, The British Navy in Adversity (London, 1926), 145.

15 Pennsylvania Packet, July 13, 1779.

16 Libel against snow Friendship, ibid., July 15, 1779; sale of Friendship and cargo, ibid., July 24, 1779.
Commissary General of Prisoners for exchange. When the deputy commissary for Pennsylvania sent for the crew of the *Friendship*, the captain had liberated them.\(^7\) The deputy appealed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council, which ordered the $10,000 bond posted by the owners of the *Holker* prosecuted unless Geddes appeared promptly with a satisfactory explanation.\(^8\) The captain hurried to the Council Chamber next morning to protest that all the seamen taken had proved to be Americans and had entered on board the *Holker*. His story being accepted, he was dismissed with orders to turn the master and mate of the snow over to the deputy commissary.\(^9\)

The sailing qualities demonstrated by the *Holker*, and continuance of the embargo, now determined McClenachan to send her out as a privateer. During July and early August, her conversion proceeded; more gunports pierced her bulwarks, a half dozen 6-pounder carriage guns were added to bring her battery to sixteen, gunners' stores and provisions were taken in for a three months' cruise, and ten tons of disabled cannon for ballast were purchased from the Pennsylvania naval stores.\(^{10}\) Recruiting was no problem, since shipping articles provided crew participation in half the net proceeds of all prizes taken. A rendezvous in the city, therefore, soon attracted the required number of seamen, landsmen, and marines to bring her complement to one hundred.\(^{11}\) "I have a very fine vessel," Geddes commented as the *Holker* dropped down the Delaware in mid-August.\(^{12}\)

In her initial privateering foray eastward off the Jersey coast, the *Holker* took three small sloops in the course of four days. The six-gun

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17 Thomas Bradford to President of Supreme Executive Council, July 16, 1779, Thomas Bradford, British Naval Prisoners, Correspondence, I, 7, HSP, hereafter cited as British Naval Prisoners; *Colonial Records*, XII, 49-50.
18 *Ibid.*.
21 An accounting by the marshal of the admiralty covering the *Holker'*s cruise in August and September, 1779, shows payment of one hundred and seventy-three prize shares. Following the distribution specified by Congress for Continental prizes, these would indicate twenty-five commissioned, warrant, and petty officers, and seventy-five seamen, landsmen, marines and boys. "The Officers and Crew of the Privateer Brig Holker in A/c with the Marshal of Admty 1779," Admiralty Papers, HSP, hereafter cited as Admiralty, HSP.
British privateer *Prince of Wales*, cruising out of New York, was manned and sent into the Delaware, her officers being landed at Little Egg Harbor. The *Recovery*, with rum and sugar from the Bahamas for New York, taken while in company with the Pennsylvania privateer schooner *Mars*, was also ordered for the Delaware. She was recaptured by a British privateer, but again taken and carried into Egg Harbor by a New Jersey armed boat. The third prize, the *Sall*, with an assorted cargo of food and finery from New York for His Majesty's garrison at New Providence in the Bahamas, was convoyed to the Delaware by the *Holker*. Information gleaned from her master prompted Geddes to write from the capes to John Jay, president of Congress, that a large fleet was expected out from England and, if he fell in with it, he would "Endeavour to Destroy as many of them As I possibly Can." Before putting to sea, he turned twenty-one prisoners over to the authorities at Lewes, Delaware.

While she missed the main fleet coming in from England, the *Holker*, off Sandy Hook, picked up a laggard brig. Geddes was in possession of a rich prize, the *Diana*, Captain John Cobb. Her cargo included eighty iron carriage guns—from 2-pounders to 6-pounders—one hundred and fifty-five half barrels of powder, and an "elegant, well chosen and very general Assortment of European and East-India Goods." She carried no letters, but Geddes interrogated her captain and imparted more news of the fleet in a letter to President Jay, entrusted to the prize master who carried the *Diana* up to Philadelphia.

"They was Convoy'd from England near the Western Islands, by 24 Sail of the line," he wrote Jay on August 24. "They Devided on

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24 Richard Westcott to Thomas Bradford, Aug. 17, 1779, British Naval Prisoners, Correspondence, I, 50.


26 Clearance and manifest of sloop *Sall*, Aug. 4, 1779, Admiralty, HSP.


28 Henry Fisher to Thomas Bradford, Aug. 24, 1779, British Naval Prisoners, Correspondence, I, 54; J. Patten to Bradford, Sept. 9, 1779, *ibid.*, 57.

29 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Sept. 1, 1779. The captain's name was given in a parole he signed on Oct. 10, 1779. British Naval Prisoners, Paroles, 28.


the Passage, according to their Destination, Quebeck, Halifax, Georgia, but no troops but what Came to New York—the fleet Consisted of about 250 Sail, but he [Captain Cobb] Could not ascertain the Number of troops, they are Chiefly foreigners."

An unusual experience followed in September. The Holker, still cruising along the Jersey coast, had just taken, manned, and sent in the brig Ellen, New York for Cork in ballast. A strange sail was observed off the lee bow, and as they neared, it was apparent she was in distress. Night came on before Geddes was close enough to hail and to hear her piteous tale. She was the remains of a Boston-bound brig, loaded with lumber from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, which a week before had had her mainmast and part of her weather quarter carried away in a storm. The plucky crew had filled up the gaping hole with shingles, stuffed oakum in the crevices, and rigged a jury mast. One of the pumps had gone by the board and the other had become clogged, so they had bailed continuously for forty hours, working up to their necks in water. Several men were washed overboard and one was drowned. Books, quadrant, and other navigating instruments had been swept into the sea. All provisions had been lost, save a few biscuits that had soaked several days in salt water. Some hogsheads lifted from the hold had lightened her, and they were able to make a little headway, but, suffering from violent attacks of dysentery, they had about given up hope when the Holker hove in sight.

"We gave them every article which they required," one of the Holker's officers reported, "and would have had them remain with us till we went into port, being apprehensive that they were in a dangerous situation, but the Captain, anxious to preserve his vessel and cargo was determined to venture in her again. He acknowledged with a grateful heart the kindness he received from Captain Geddes, and took his leave."

Two days later the Holker captured the brig Richmond, Jamaica for New York with rum, and the following day, the brig Two Friends, New York for St. John's, Newfoundland, with salt. With provisions

32 George Geddes to John Jay, Aug. 24, 1779, Papers CC, 78, X, 157. The fleet was under command of Vice-Admiral Marriot Arbuthnot, who was arriving to take over direction of His Majesty's ships and vessels on the North American station. New York Gazette, Aug. 30, 1779.
33 Pennsylvania Gazette, Sept. 8, 1779.
34 Pennsylvania Packet, Sept. 11, 1779.
depleted by his generosity to the men on the wreck, and his complement reduced by those sent off in prizes, Geddes considered the cruise well ended, and steered for the Delaware capes. He came up the river to Philadelphia on September 7. Two of the prizes followed him in, but the third, the Two Friends, unfortunately ran ashore on Cape May.35

As each prize, beginning with the Prince of Wales, reached port she had been libeled against in admiralty court, with trial set for about thirty days after publication of the libel.36 Legally, no sales could be made before condemnation, but the rich brig Diana proved too much of a temptation for Matthew Clarkson, marshal of the admiralty. He advertised sale of her cargo to begin at the city vendue store on September 13, although her trial was not scheduled until September 22.37 This was no innovation. The law had been ignored frequently in similar cases.38 Francis Hopkinson, judge of the admiralty, winked at the marshal’s act; then, when too late, forbade the sale. Whereupon Blair McClenachan stepped in, seeking to thwart the marshal by seizing the keys to the Diana’s hatches.39 His effort failed, but it sent Clarkson off to the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council with a memorial representing “that he was opposed in the Execution of his office by a Merchant in this City.” A writ of assistance was issued by the Council, with instructions to the marshal “to proceed with firmness and regularity.”40

The sale took place as advertised and continued for more than a week. Timothy Pickering, a member of the Continental Board of War, described the amazing consequences to his brother. “The rich prize to the Holker laded with dry goods & said to be worth 1,200,000 pounds, has raised the price of all dry goods,” he wrote on September 24. “I am told the goods were sold at vendue at higher prices

35 Pennsylvania Journal, Sept. 8, 1779.
36 Libel and trial dates for the six prizes were: Prince of Wales, Aug. 20, Sept. 18; Sall, Aug. 26, Sept. 20; Diana, Aug. 30, Sept. 22; Richmond and Ellen, Sept. 17, Oct. 14; and Two Friends, Sept. 25, Oct. 16. Pennsylvania Packet, Aug. 26, 28, and 31, Sept. 21 and 25, 1779.
37 Advertisement of sale of Diana’s cargo. Ibid., Sept. 10, 1779.
38 Two previous instances in 1779 of sales before condemnation were those of the cargo of the schooner Sally, sold May 1, although trial was set for May 18, and the ship Poole, sold June 24, with a trial date of July 8. Ibid., Apr. 20 and 29, June 17 and 22, 1779.
39 Colonial Records, XII, 531–533 (Nov. 7, 1780).
40 Ibid., 105 (Sept. 15, 1779).
than you might have bought at retail in the shops—Blair McClennaghan is a principal owner of the Holker privateer. I heard lately he wanted to lay out about 500,000 pounds currency he then had by him [and] but a small part of the rich prize is yet sold. He has made an incredible estate during the war.”

George Geddes, meanwhile, was busy reprovisioning the Holker for another cruise to augment the merchant’s wealth. Officers and men were ordered to repair on board by nine o’clock on the morning of September 27, and “Whoever neglects or disobeys . . . shall be deemed deserters, and not be admitted after that time.” Before the Holker sailed, Geddes was cheered by the sight of the Two Friends, last reported ashore at Cape May, coming up the river undamaged, and by news that the wreck he had befriended had been towed into Great Egg Harbor with all hands in good health.

The Holker’s second privateering cruise began in company with the Pennsylvania State ship General Greene, met with off the Delaware capes. The Holker was in sight when the latter retook an American vessel on October 5, but the prize did not reach port and profited neither. A week later, this time with her consort in sight, the Holker recaptured the sloop Generous Friends, taken in her passage from Cape François to New London by a New York privateer. The sloop had a cargo of rum, sugar, coffee and molasses, and was sent off for Philadelphia. Thereafter, the brig parted from the General Greene and cruised alone. Her reward was another rich prize, but again a recapture. She was the ship Golden Rose, Amsterdam to the island of Tenerife, with anchors, cables, cordage and great quantities of cloth. She had been taken by a British letter of marque and ordered for New York. Geddes removed the British prize master and crew, put his own hands on board, and convoyed her in, concluding his cruise at Philadelphia on October 29.

41 Timothy Pickering to John Pickering, Sept. 24, 1779, Pickering Papers, V, 125, Massachusetts Historical Society.
42 Pennsylvania Packet, Sept. 11 and 25, 1779.
44 Deposition of Timothy H. Bigelow, Oct. 22, 1779, Admiralty, HSP.
45 “Blair McClennachan in a/c with the Marshal of the Admiralty, 1780,” ibid.
The *Generous Friend* had preceded him in, and had been turned over to the marshal without untoward incident. Not so the *Golden Rose*. For reasons not divulged in the record, McClenachan, "aided by a Number of armed Sailors," took the ship out of Clarkson's possession. Despite the previous writ of assistance, "the said Blair McClenachan, in a riotous and Tumultuous manner, assaulted the said Marshall," Clarkson averred to the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council. That body transmitted the complaint to the chief justice of the state, directing an investigation, and, if found true, the issuance of a warrant against the merchant, "and all others Concerned in the riot and affray."\(^47\) The matter concluded with a conviction and stiff fines for McClenachan and his henchmen, and with increased friction between the merchants of the city and the marshal.\(^48\)

Both prizes were duly libeled against, condemned, and sold.\(^49\) Being recaptures, the *Holker* was entitled to but one quarter of the value of the *Generous Friend*—the other quarter going to the *General Greene*—and to one half the value of the *Golden Rose*. When all charges and commissions against the eight prizes of both cruises had been paid, Blair McClenachan could reckon a net profit of £1,100,000. George Geddes, who relinquished command when the *Holker* came up to Philadelphia, collected two twentieths of the crew's share, or better than one hundred thousand pounds.\(^50\)

McClenachan's choice to succeed Geddes was the latter's first lieutenant, Matthew Lawler. Selection of another commander necessitated a new bond for the *Holker* and a captain's commission for the appointee. These were secured on November 15. Bonders were McClenachan and Patrick Moore, another Philadelphia merchant. The brig's complement was given as one hundred officers and men, and her armament, sixteen guns.\(^51\)

Because of wintry weather along the north Atlantic coast, the merchant ordered his privateer off for a cruise in the West Indies.

\(^47\) *Colonial Records*, XII, 155 (Nov. 3, 1779).

\(^48\) Matthew Clarkson to Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council, Sept. 14, 1780, Revolutionary Papers, XXXIX, 27, Division of Records, Harrisburg.

\(^49\) *Pennsylvania Packet*, Oct. 23 and Nov. 6, 1779, Mar. 21, 1780.

\(^50\) McClenachan's exact net profit was £1,127,812 7s. 8d. "The Owners of the Privateer Brig Holker in a/c with the Marshal of the Admiralty, Octo' 22, 1779"; "Mr Blair McClenachan in a/c with the Marshal of the Admiralty, 1780," Admiralty, HSP.

\(^51\) Papers CC, 196, VII, 85.
She was gone about four months, in which time she “captured a privateer schooner of ten carriage guns and forty-eight men; a sloop bound to Jamaica in ballast, and a sloop loaded with rum and sugar” from Tortola. Further identification of the first two prizes, which were sent into Guadeloupe, a French island in the West Indies, is not available. The third, the Two Brothers, entered the Delaware capes about March 1, 1780, but ice in the river prevented her from reaching Philadelphia. Her prize master turned her over to the Delaware marshal of the admiralty at Wilmington, where her cargo, consisting of “Sugar in hogsheads and barrels, Rum in hogsheads, Coffee in bags, and a few boxes of Chocolate,” being presumed perishable, was sold before condemnation.

The Holker touched at St. Eustatius toward the end of March, and Lawler brought her home from that island in a passage of thirteen days, arriving at Philadelphia on April 3. She was badly in need of an overhaul, which consumed the balance of the month. What with provisioning and supplying warlike stores, it was mid-May before the brig again went to sea.

The waters southeast of Sandy Hook were her destination. Converging ship lanes to New York were the favorite, if hazardous, cruising ground for the privateers of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Connecticut. Lawler spoke two from the latter state the second day out of the Delaware capes: the schooner Bunker Hill, of ten guns and forty-five men, and the sloop Hancock, of ten guns and eighty men. Sailing in company they made a formidable little squadron.

The two-hundred-ton letter-of-marque ship Commerce, William Coram, master, bound from Barbados for New York, was their first victim. She mounted sixteen 6-pounders and had a crew of eighty,

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52 Pennsylvania Packet, Feb. 15, 1780.
53 Pennsylvania Journal, Mar. 8, 1780.
54 Pennsylvania Packet, Mar. 14, 1780.
55 Ibid., Apr. 4, 1780.
56 The privateers paid heavily at times for their temerity in venturing into that area. During the first five months of 1780, for example, His Majesty’s ships of war took or drove ashore on the Jersey or Long Island coasts nine of them. New York Gazette, Mar. 27 and May 1, 1780; Rivington’s Royal Gazette, Apr. 19, 1780.
but offered only token resistance. On board her were a captain and thirty men belonging to the Royal Emigrants, a Tory regiment recruited in Great Britain's maritime provinces. This particular detachment had sailed from Newfoundland for Halifax, had been blown off the coast, eventually reaching Barbados, and then had taken passage in the Commerce. Instead of landing at their intended destination, Lawler put them ashore at Lewes, Delaware, and on May 21 they were marched, a forlorn lot, into Philadelphia. The Commerce, with a valuable cargo of rum, cotton, and coffee, arrived two days later, the marshal paying an exorbitant figure for her pilotage up from the capes.

The second exploit of the joint cruise of the three privateers was to run the heavily armed British packet Cartaret ashore near the east point of Sandy Hook. They espied her some thirty-five leagues off the coast on the night of May 23 and set out in pursuit, the Holker's superior sailing qualities placing her well in the van. The Cartaret's captain, Charles Newman, had succumbed to rebel guns before, having been taken off The Lizard in the English Channel by the Continental ship Reprisal in February, 1777. This time, seeing he would be overhauled long before he could reach the protection of the British fleet within the Hook, he resolved to save the mail from London and sacrifice his ship. He drove the Cartaret hard and fast aground upon the Jersey rocks and sands, hove out his longboat, and set off northward in shallow shoal waters. The Holker, Hancock, and Bunker Hill kept up the pursuit, plying him with occasional round shot, but were fearful of grounding should they venture closer in. The long-distance bombardment did no damage, and the April mail from Falmouth, England, reached its New York destination safely.

When the privateers gave over the chase and returned to the beached packet, Lawler and his fellow captains tried to float the Cartaret. Dawn disclosed a British fleet of twenty sail coming out of the Hook, so the Holker and her consorts fled the scene, having taken

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60 "By Cash paid Piloting &c for Prize Ship Commerce, £13,087.10 -", Blair McClenachan's account current with the marshal of the admiralty, Apr. 7, 1781, Admiralty, HSP.
62 William Bell Clark, Lambert Wickes, Sea-Raider and Diplomat (New Haven, Conn., 1932), 128-130.
63 London Courant, Aug. 15, 1780.
but a few articles found in the cabins. The British tried later, but could not get the Cartaret off the rocks where she became a total loss to the enemy, and no profit to her pursuers.

Subsequently, the Holker cruised alone, and early in June recaptured the brig Charming Peggy, one hundred tons burden, with a cargo of tobacco and staves. A Tory whaleboat had cut her out of a harbor on the Virginia coast ten days before, and she had been headed toward New York with a prize crew. Lawler took off the Tories, manned the Charming Peggy, and escorted her into the Delaware, arriving at Philadelphia in mid-June. When the Holker docked, most of her crew vanished over the side without leave for the delights of water-front dens. Threat of loss of prize money was the weapon the captain used to get them back on board by June 28.

The Holker's third cruise under Matthew Lawler proved brief and sanguinary. She sailed through the Delaware capes on July 6, and in the late afternoon of the third day out, about twenty miles due east of Little Egg Harbor inlet on the Jersey coast, fell in with a British privateer brig of equal armament. The enemy was the Admiral Rodney, Captain Daniel Moore. She had sailed from New York on the same day the Holker had cleared the capes. Lawler and others recognized her as the former Pennsylvania letter-of-marque brig Active, Thomas Mesnard, master, which had been taken in late May by His Majesty's frigate Iris. The British captain supposed his opponent "to be the Kolker [sic] of Philadelphia."

They indulged in no amenities, but commenced "a very close and furious engagement." Within twenty minutes Captain Moore was mortally wounded in the head by a swivel shot, and in another half-hour the Holker's first lieutenant sustained two wounds which subsequently proved fatal. Lawler received a slight gash in the cheek, and the carnage grew heavy on both sides. Broadside after broadside was exchanged and both brigs received severe punishment. The Admiral Rodney was totally disabled in her rigging, her mainsail and boom

64 Pennsylvania Gazette, June 21, 1780.
65 London Courant, Aug. 28, 1780.
66 Pennsylvania Packet, June 20, 1780.
67 Petition of Matthew Lawler, June 16, 1780, Admiralty, HSP.
68 Pennsylvania Packet, June 27, 1780.
69 New York Gazette, July 10 and 17, 1780.
70 Ibid., June 5, 1780; Pennsylvania Journal, July 26, 1780.
had gone by the board, and she had not a single brace standing when the conflict ended. Two versions exist as to the termination. According to the British story, when the Admiral Rodney limped back to New York on July 9, the rebel crew “did not exhibit any symptoms of cowardice until half-past five o’clock; when, after receiving a well-directed broadside . . . they uttered a dreadful scream, made sail, and ran off.” Lawler’s account stated that the engagement was “very severe for one hour and a half, when the enemy sheered off twice, at the same time an armed schooner coming down.” So the Holker, in no shape to engage a second opponent, bore up and stood away.

Casualties were heavy on both sides. The Admiral Rodney lost her captain, a lieutenant, and six or seven men killed, and twenty wounded. A visitor to Philadelphia reported the return of the Holker on the night of July 11, “having lost Six men killed and fifteen wounded, the Cap’ slitly the Let’ Mortal.”

Such an abrupt ending to the cruise was not much to Blair McClenachan’s liking. True, the Holker received considerable acclaim in the Philadelphia newspapers, but the merchant, while outfitting the brig for fame and fortune, laid more stress upon the latter. Lawler had been successful, but not very profitable. Only one of the three prizes taken on his first cruise had reached Philadelphia. Returns from those taken in the West Indies and sent into Guadeloupe were problematical. The proceeds of the Commerce, a most valuable ship and cargo, had to be split three ways, and shared with two Connecticut privateers. The Charming Peggy had been a recapture, entitling merchant and crew to but “one half the appraised Value in Lieu of Salvage.” By contrast, another privateer, the Fair American, in which McClenachan had a major interest, between May 9 and June 24 had brought in nine prizes, four taken singlehanded, and

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71 Moore, II, 298, 299.
72 Pennsylvania Journal, July 19, 1780.
73 Pennsylvania Packet, July 15, 1780.
76 Endorsement of July 10 upon Matthew Lawler’s petition of June 17, 1780, Admiralty, HSP.
77 Bond and commission of the Fair American, Apr. 20, 1780, Papers CC, 196, IV, 105.
five in company with other armed vessels. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising to find the merchant seeking a new commander for the *Holker*, particularly as Lawler would be for a time incapacitated by his wound. The merchant and his captain parted the best of friends. Perhaps the latter initiated the move, for within a month he took command of a sixteen-gun privateer brig owned by his brother, Robert Lawler, and Samuel Inglis & Co., Philadelphia merchants.

For a successor to Lawler in the *Holker*, McClenachan selected a man little known in Philadelphia shipping circles. He was Roger Keane, whose reputation had been made as first lieutenant of the Massachusetts letter-of-marque ship *Charming Sally* during the ill-fated Penobscot expedition of the previous summer. By the time Keane's commission to the *Holker*, with the necessary new bond, had been issued on July 26, 1780, he had recruited his crew to one hundred and twenty and was fully armed and provisioned for a three months' cruise. When he dropped down the river at the end of July, it was in company with the *Fair American*, Captain Stephen Decatur, a brig of similar complement and armament, owned jointly by McClenachan and the Philadelphia mercantile house of Charles Miller & Co. McClenachan had directed the two privateers to sail in company, shrewdly considering that a joint cruise should produce more prizes, and that, while the crews might have to divide equally

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78 *Pennsylvania Packet*, May 9 and 13, June 3 and 27, 1780; *Pennsylvania Journal*, May 10, June 7, 14, and 29, 1780.
79 A clear indication that the parting was cordial is indicated by the fact that a year later Lawler was appointed commander of the letter-of-marque ship *Philadelphia*, owned by McClenachan and Matthew Irwin & Co. Papers CC, 196, XI, 81.
80 Bond and commission for the privateer brig *Ariel*, Aug. 28, 1780, *ibid.*, I, 81.
81 "Acco* of the Crew on board the Charming Sally, Alexander Holmes, Commander—her Valuation, &c., Boston 28th August 1779," *Massachusetts Archives*, 157, 247. Keane was one of thirty-two lieutenants and masters who petitioned Dudley Saltonstall, the naval commander of the expedition, to enter the harbor of Majabagaduce and attack enemy shipping. James Phinney Baxter, ed., *Documentary History of the State of Maine* (Portland, Me., 1910), XVI, 400, 401.
83 Bond and commission for the *Fair American*, Apr. 20, 1780, Papers CC, 196, IV, 105. Decatur was the father of Stephen Decatur, famous in the American navy during the Barbary Wars and the War of 1812.
their half of each prize, his own half (barring Miller's share) would always be assured. This would be far more satisfactory than having to split with the owners of other privateers, as had been the case with Lawler's richest prize, the ship Commerce.84

Immediate success inaugurated the cruise. Off Sandy Hook on August 2, the two Pennsylvania brigs intercepted the one-hundred-ton brig Gloucester, bound from Madeira for New York with three hundred and eight pipes (38,808 gallons) of that island's best wine.85 They escorted her to the mouth of the Delaware, and landed the prisoners at Cape May.86 There they were joined by a third privateer brig out of Philadelphia, the newly commissioned Enterprize, Captain Peter Day, in which McClennenachan had no interest. Owners' parts of future prizes would have to be shared after all!87

Another British packet, the ship Mercury, Captain Joseph Dillon, eight weeks from Falmouth with the June mail, fell afoul of the Holker and her consorts on August 7.88 This time the enemy vessel, unlike the Cartaret, could neither escape nor run ashore. Dillon, who had fought off a heavily armed American privateer on a previous voyage,89 was undaunted by the odds against him. He put up a stout resistance, but was taken by boarding, not, however, before he had sunk his dispatch bags. So the mail destined for New York reposed instead fathoms deep off the Jersey coast. On board the Mercury the captors found eleven passengers, including a Hessian and four British army captains and two officers' wives.90 The packet's cargo consisted of ten tons of English cheese, a large quantity of porter, and some dry goods.91 Keane manned the prize from the Holker, permitted the army officers to remain on board, and sent her for

86 William A. Patterson to Thomas Bradford, Aug. 5, 1780, British Naval Prisoners, Correspondence, II, 5.
87 The Enterprize, of twelve guns and eighty men, was owned by Thomas Learning and John Murray & Co., both of Philadelphia, and was commissioned on July 28, 1780. Papers CC, 196, IV, 79.
88 New York Gazette, Aug. 21, 1780.
90 Pennsylvania Packet, Aug. 15, 1780; Pennsylvania Gazette, Aug. 16, 1780.
91 New Jersey Gazette, Aug. 16, 1780.
Philadelphia with instructions to the prize master to turn his prisoners over to the Continental Board of War.\(^92\)

Still lingering southeast of Sandy Hook, the trio of Pennsylvania brigs picked up two schooners, the \textit{Nancy} on August 8, and the \textit{Arbuthnot} next day.\(^93\) The former was a recapture, a small vessel loaded with tobacco, which had been taken in Chesapeake Bay five days before by the British privateer \textit{Restoration} and sent for New York. Her prize master could supply no information about the former owners.\(^94\) The \textit{Arbuthnot}, with a cargo of ninety puncheons of rum, was from St. Kitts.\(^95\) The \textit{Nancy} was manned from the \textit{Holker}, the \textit{Arbuthnot} from the \textit{Fair American}, and both were ordered for Philadelphia.\(^96\) An unsuccessful effort to take a British cutter a short distance from Sandy Hook about August 10, in which they lost a boat and crew in a boarding attempt,\(^97\) concluded the \textit{Enterprize}'s participation in the cruise. She parted with them that day.

Goods removed from one of their prizes by the three captains during this period caused Matthew Clarkson to lodge charges of embezzlement against them in the Pennsylvania admiralty court. A month later, the grand jury returned the bills of indictment "ignoramus."\(^98\) Mounting friction between merchants and marshal brought retaliation, however, in a petition from the merchants to the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council containing numerous complaints against Clarkson and praying for his removal.\(^99\)

Meanwhile, several days after separation from the \textit{Enterprize}, the \textit{Holker} and \textit{Fair American} came upon another tobacco-laden American vessel in the hands of an enemy prize crew. She was the schooner \textit{Poplar}, which had been taken in the Chesapeake by the British privateer \textit{Fox}. The prize crew was removed, and the schooner, manned from the \textit{Fair American}, was sent off for Philadelphia.\(^100\)

\(^{92}\) Benjamin Stoddert to Thomas Bradford, Aug. 14, 1780, British Naval Prisoners, Correspondence, II, 10.
\(^{93}\) \textit{Pennsylvania Journal}, Aug. 23, 1780.
\(^{95}\) \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette}, Aug. 23, 1780.
\(^{96}\) \textit{Pennsylvania Journal}, Aug. 23, 1780.
\(^{97}\) \textit{New York Gazette}, Aug. 21, 1780.
\(^{99}\) \textit{Colonial Records}, XII, 478 (Sept. 9, 1780).
\(^{100}\) \textit{Pennsylvania Packet}, Aug. 26, 1780.
McClenachan's two brigs were not left alone for long. By August 15 they had been joined by the Pennsylvania privateer ship General Greene, Samuel Hollinshead commanding, of sixteen guns and eighty men.\textsuperscript{101} She was the former Pennsylvania State ship of the same name, and, as will be recalled, had cruised with the Holker for a short period the previous October. The General Greene had just convoyed a fleet of twenty-five sail out of the Chesapeake,\textsuperscript{102} and was headed for the favorite cruising spot off Sandy Hook when she met up with the Holker and Fair American. She was owned by James Ash and George Henry & Co., Philadelphia merchants.\textsuperscript{103}

Three more tobacco vessels, which had fallen into the hands of the refugees in Chesapeake Bay, were intercepted shortly thereafter.\textsuperscript{104} Two were schooners, the Gage and the Lewis,\textsuperscript{105} the third a sloop whose identity is not disclosed. While they were removing the prize crews from the recaptured vessels, a large letter-of-marque ship hove in sight. They ran down upon her and she offered no resistance to so formidable a trio of privateers. She was the Queen Charlotte, Captain Ridley, of eighteen guns, from New Providence, with a cargo of turtles, fruit, and sugar.\textsuperscript{106} The new prize and the recaptured tobacco vessels were manned from the three privateers. Some of the British masters, who had been held on board the Holker and Fair American, together with Captain Ridley of the Queen Charlotte, were placed in the sloop under what was considered an adequate prize crew. All four vessels were ordered for Philadelphia. The captive Britons, while ascending the Delaware, overpowered the hands on board the sloop, and carried her off to New York.\textsuperscript{107} The Queen Charlotte and the two schooners arrived safely at their destination.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{101} Pennsylvania Archives, Fifth Series, I, 619.
\textsuperscript{102} New York Gazette, July 31, 1780.
\textsuperscript{103} Sale of the General Greene to private owners in the fall of 1779 was so surrounded by suspicious circumstances that the Supreme Executive Council appointed a committee to investigate. After much controversy, the sale was allowed. Colonial Records, XII, 150, 155, 159, 161, 173, 175; Pennsylvania Archives, First Series, VIII, 3.
\textsuperscript{104} Pennsylvania Packet, Aug. 29, 1780.
\textsuperscript{105} "Owners of the Privateer Brig Holker in A/C with the Marshal of the Admiralty, October 3, 1780," Admiralty, HSP.
\textsuperscript{107} New York Gazette, Aug. 28, 1780.
\textsuperscript{108} Pennsylvania Packet, Aug. 26 and 29, 1780.
As August neared its close, the cruising privateers, still hovering off Sandy Hook, took the ship Lady Margaret, of two hundred and twenty tons burden, thirteen weeks from Glasgow, with one thousand barrels of flour, two hundred and fifty barrels of beef, and a large quantity of dry goods. She had a few passengers as well, and was the richest haul since the capture of the Gloucester at the beginning of the month.\textsuperscript{109} A brig from Antigua for New York was taken two hours later. Her identity is lost, for she fell into the clutches of His Majesty's sloop-of-war Savage while making for the Delaware.\textsuperscript{110} The Lady Margaret was kept under convoy, and, with the three privateers, sailed for the capes. Keane, Decatur, and Hollinshead were all short-handed because of the drain of prize crews. They had decided to escort the Lady Margaret in, and then run up the Delaware to a place where they could fill their water butts, pick up their men, and take on gunners' stores and additional provisions.\textsuperscript{111} Even so, their prize-taking had not ended, for, while standing down the Jersey coast, they intercepted the sloop Dispatch, of about ninety tons burden, carrying one hundred and fifty hogsheads of rum from Jamaica for New York.\textsuperscript{112} They took out her crew, finding a British naval lieutenant as a passenger on board, and carried her with them for port.\textsuperscript{113}

About abreast of Reedy Island in the Delaware, on the last day of August, the incoming privateers were hailed from the Continental frigates Trumbull and Deane and ordered to heave-to. They did so with no premonition of what was in store. Boat crews from each frigate boarded them, and, despite angry protests from Keane, Decatur, and Hollinshead, proceeded to impress as many seamen as they could lay hands on. With weapons locked away in the arms chest, the privateer crews had no opportunity to resist the musket- and-cutlass-bristling seamen. Nineteen or twenty cursing, struggling tars were hauled over the Holker's side into the boats. Twenty-one were seized on the Fair American, and a number not specified on

\textsuperscript{109} Pennsylvania Journal, Sept. 6, 1780.
\textsuperscript{110} New York Gazette, Sept. 4, 1780.
\textsuperscript{111} Petition of Charles Miller, quoted in Board of Admiralty to James Nicholson, Sept. 2, 1780, Marine Committee Letter Book, 323.
\textsuperscript{112} Pennsylvania Journal, Sept. 6, 1780; New York Gazette, Sept. 11, 1780.
\textsuperscript{113} Pennsylvania Packet, Sept. 2, 1780.
board the *General Greene*. The frigates’ boarding officers offered no explanation save that they were ordered out on a cruise and were short-handed.

Left in worse shape than when they had decided to come into port, the three captains sent a messenger posthaste to Philadelphia with an account of the outrage. Charles Miller, part owner of the *Fair American*, drafted a petition on behalf of himself and Blair McClenachan, and sent it off to the State House where it was read in Congress on September 2 and referred to the Board of Admiralty. Hoping that by this time the two frigates would be safely at sea, the Board addressed a letter to the senior captain, James Nicholson of the *Trumbull*, outlining the complaints and concluding: "If you or the Captain of the Deane should have pressed any men out of these three privateers, you are hereby directed to deliver them to the Officer or Officers of either of these privateers who may apply to you for them." To make certain the delay would be ample to ensure departure of both frigates, this letter was enclosed in another to Miller to be forwarded. The Board remarked, suavely enough, in this second letter, that the action was taken "agreeably to the request of the petition." How or whether the complainants could deliver the letter to Nicholson was of no concern to the Board of Admiralty.

Meanwhile, the *Lady Margaret* came up unmolested to Philadelphia, and an association formed by the Bank of North America contracted for most of her cargo of flour and beef for the army. A day or two later, a request from Washington for provisions reached the Supreme Executive Council. An agent was thereupon ordered to apply to the marshal for the *Lady Margaret*’s cargo at a price mutually to be agreed upon. That brought McClenachan to the Council Chamber next morning to explain that the flour and beef were already destined for the army, so the order was rescinded.

Despite the abrupt termination of the joint cruise, McClenachan could have no complaints about results. As prize after prize was sold

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114 Marine Committee Letter Book, 323.
115 Board of Admiralty to James Nicholson, Aug. 29, 1780, *ibid.*, 321.
116 *Journals of Congress* (Sept. 2, 1780), XXIII, 801.
118 Board of Admiralty to Charles Miller, Sept. 2, 1780, *ibid.*, 323.
119 *Colonial Records*, XII, 473, 474, 477 (Sept. 7 and 8, 1780).
and the proceeds divided, he became richer and richer.\footnote{Advertisements announcing readiness to distribute proceeds of prizes appeared as follows in the Pennsylvania Packet: brig Gloucester, Aug. 29; schooner Arbuthnot, Sept. 19; and ship Mercury, Oct. 17, 1780.} While it was some months before final accounting, the Holker's share of the ten vessels taken or retaken mounted to a total of £979,343 17s. That was McClenachan's share. An equal sum, of course, went to Keane and his crew. Most profitable of them all was the ship Lady Margaret, with the brig Gloucester a close second.\footnote{"The Owners of the Privateer Brig Holker in A/C with the Marshal of the Admiralty, October 3, 1780"; "Blair McClenachan in A/C with the Marshal of the Admiralty, February 17th, 1781," Admiralty, HSP.}

All had not been serene during these transactions. The dispute between the merchants and the marshal had grown more and more acrimonious, and Francis Hopkinson, judge of the admiralty, had been involved upon the side of the former. Clarkson had answered the merchants' petition to the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council on September 14 with a vigorous and vindictive defense, and the Council had the whole matter under consideration.\footnote{Colonial Records, XII, 482 (Sept. 14, 1780).}

The result could not be foreseen by McClenachan, who instructed his captains to consign future prizes sent into the Delaware to the New Jersey admiralty officers at Gloucester. Thus further altercations with Clarkson could be avoided.\footnote{This decision by McClenachan can be inferred only, but the evidence is rather conclusive with all three prizes to reach port in October being turned over to Zachariah Rossell, marshal of the admiralty for New Jersey. Pennsylvania Packet, Nov. 21, 1780; New Jersey Gazette, Nov. 22, 1780.}

By the time Roger Keane had recalled the men who had arrived earlier in prizes, replaced those who had been impressed by the Continental frigates, and taken in additional stores, September had passed. McClenachan's orders to the Holker were to join the Fair American, which had preceded her to sea by about a week, and to cruise between Sandy Hook and Charleston, South Carolina. That latter port had fallen into enemy hands in May. Thus the sea lanes connecting the two British-held cities were becoming constantly a most profitable area for prize-taking.\footnote{Board of Admiralty report, Aug. 24, 1780, Papers CC, 37, 299.}

The Holker went out between the Delaware capes about the first of October, and met her consort a few days later at an undisclosed
rendezvous. Decatur already had sent in a brig, a recapture from a New York privateer. Keane’s arrival was signalized on October 7 and 8 by the unusual coincidence of intercepting two English brigs named Rodney. Both were destined for Charleston. One was from Liverpool with Queen’s ware, dry goods, and hardware; the other, from Plymouth with brandy, wines, and cordage. They were sent for the Delaware with the prize masters directed to deliver the brigs to the marshal of the New Jersey admiralty at Gloucester. The same procedure was followed with the Richard, a provision brig from Glasgow to Charleston, taken October 14.

The joint cruise was productive of another odd coincidence, when their next prize turned out to be the fourth vessel with a name beginning with R—two Rodneys, a Richard, and now a Richmond. The latter, however, gave them a stiff battle. She was a ship from Glasgow, commanded by George Jameson, mounting two 9-pounders and eight 6-pounders, with a crew of thirty-four. They happened upon her on October 15 in nine fathoms of water off Charleston bar. Keane’s report of the encounter was brief: She struck after a smart action; he had one man killed and one wounded. The Scotsman, Jameson, gave more details: “A smart Engagement ensued, and the Richmond beat them off with the Loss of one Man killed and three wounded. They attacked her again the next Morning, and after a close Action of an Hour and twenty Minutes, were obliged to sheer off, after having received very material Damage. The same Day, at half past 11 o’Clock, the Rebels made the third Attack, and after a severe Engagement of Three Quarters of an Hour, obliged the Richmond to strike.”

The prize was sent off for the Delaware, but Keane and Decatur made the mistake of leaving eight of her hands, some of whom were wounded, on board with the prize crew. These eight shortly after seized the arms chest, and secured “such of the American crew as would not join them.” The Richmond reached Charleston on Octo-

126 New York Gazette, Nov. 6, 1780.
127 Pennsylvania Packet, Nov. 7, 1780.
128 Ibid., Nov. 21, 1780.
129 Royal American Gazette (N. Y.), Nov. 28, 1780.
130 Pennsylvania Packet, Oct. 31, 1780.
November 31. Long months afterward, two of the Americans returned to Philadelphia and were seized and tried for piracy. Nicholas Coleman was acquitted. Thomas Wilkinson was convicted of "joining with others of the crew in a revolt, subdued the prizemasters, and carrying the prize ship called the Richmond into Charlestown." He was sentenced to be hanged.

After capture of the *Richmond*, the *Holker* and *Fair American* had turned northward along the coast. On October 17 they were separated in a gale, and Keane, with the brig damaged by the encounter with the *Richmond* as well as by the storm, made for the Delaware. He came up to Philadelphia in the *Holker* on October 29 to find the quarrel between the merchants and the marshal rapidly nearing a climax.

The Supreme Executive Council sat on November 3 to inquire into Clarkson's conduct. It heard the judge of the admiralty and "divers other gentlemen" in support of the charges, and the marshal's defense, and took all the facts under advisement. Four days later, in a broad decision which exonerated him on most of the counts, the Council removed him from office. The reason given was lack of hope for harmony between the judicial and ministerial officers of the admiralty court, which meant that "the public interest will suffer by his continuance." Clarkson's moral character and abilities were not questioned, the Council affirmed.

The ousted marshal published the findings so that his fellow citizens could know why he had been superseded, and appended some notes in further explanation. Not content with this, he placed before the General Assembly several ridiculous charges against Judge Hopkinson. One was that Hopkinson had promised to appoint Blair McClenachan agent for unrepresented shares belonging to absent members of the crew of the *Holker*, if McClenachan would present him with a suit of clothes. Articles of impeachment of the judge were presented to the Assembly, and the Supreme Executive Council was directed to hear his defense. From December 13 until the

133 *The Freeman's Journal* (Phila.), May 9, 1781.
134 *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Nov. 1, 1780.
135 *Colonial Records*, XII, 523 (Nov. 1, 1780).
137 *Pennsylvania Packet*, Nov. 11, 1780.
day after Christmas these proceedings occupied the major attention of the Council. On December 26, by unanimous opinion, Hopkinson was judged "not guilty on all or any of the articles of impeachment exhibited against him." By the time the verdict was reached, Roger Keane in the Holker was on his way to the West Indies.

For the second winter McClenachan had sent his favorite privateer southward, and Keane rapidly established the wisdom of the move. The Holker reached Martinique in January, 1781, without incident. By the beginning of February she was reprovisioned and at sea, cruising among the British Leeward Islands. South of Antigua on February 10, a heavily armed cutter bore down and Keane feigned flight. He continued to run from the enemy until she came within hail. Then he rounded and saluted her with a broadside. For three quarters of an hour they engaged, when the cutter struck. She was the Hypocrite, of twelve 9-pounders and four 12-pounders, much heavier metal than the Holker's sixteen 6-pounders. She had sailed from St. Kitts on February 8 to carry to Jamaica news of the taking of St. Eustatius by Admiral Rodney. The Hypocrite lost her captain and three men killed and seven wounded. The Holker's casualties were three killed and seven wounded.

Keane carried her into St. Pierre, Martinique, on February 10, where Samuel Parsons, acting Continental agent, sensed the importance of the intelligence learned from the cutter's remaining officers. He consulted the Marquis de Bouillé, the French general in command, and purchased the Hypocrite as "the fastest going Vessel known in this Port." He dispatched her for Philadelphia on February 15 with an account of Rodney's capture of the Dutch island, "to prevent Vessels from going to St. Eustatius as soon as possible."

No time was wasted by Keane in St. Pierre. He was out again on February 18, and two days later took an English brig from St. Lucia and sent her for Martinique. From her was gleaned more about Rodney's activities. The British admiral had left six hundred men at St. Eustatius, and was now at St. Lucia with thirteen ships of the

140 Public Advertiser, May 2, 1781, quoting the St. Lucia Gazette or General Intelligencer.
141 Samuel Parsons to Committee of Congress, Feb. 15, 1781, Papers CC, 90, 335-337.
line.\textsuperscript{142} To windward of Antigua two days after the dispatch of the brig, Keane intercepted a large ship and “took her after a single discharge of his musquetry, without the loss of a single man.”\textsuperscript{143} She was the \textit{Jessie}, Campbell, master, from the Clyde for Jamaica. She mounted sixteen guns and had a provision cargo valued at nearly three hundred thousand livres. The \textit{Holker} escorted the \textit{Jessie} into St. Pierre on February 26, where the ship was condemned and sold “for near 10,000 Half Joes,” a figure later to gladden Blair McClenachan’s heart.\textsuperscript{144} The privateer sailed again on March 1, and in rapid succession sent into St. Pierre a brig from Cork with provisions, a privateer schooner of eight guns from Antigua, and a schooner from St. Lucia for Antigua with a hundred half joes in specie on board. She returned to port on March 14, where a merchant captain, who reached Philadelphia in late April, reported her “hove down in that island, and since had sailed on another cruize.”\textsuperscript{145}

Thereafter a long silence was followed by a dispatch from the British island of St. Kitts, which Philadelphia newspapers sadly reprinted from the New York gazettes\textsuperscript{146}:

\begin{quote}
Basseterre, April 13. We have authority to assure our readers, that the rebel privateer Holker, which has been so successful in these seas, is at length safely come to her moorings in the Carenage of St. Lucia. She fell in with his Majesty’s ship the Fox, of 38 guns, convoy to the Corke fleet, which gave her chace, and coming up with her, she did not chuse to stand the Fox’s fire, but hauled her colours down. The Holker, it is said, has taken no less than seventy five prizes during her cruize. She is supposed the swiftest sailing vessel that ever sailed from America; but the Fox is a new frigate, constructed on the late Admiral Earl Ferrer’s plan, and, under her topsails, will out-run the swiftest going vessel of our navy, though crouding all the sail they can carry. The Holker, depending on her heels, is brought to bed of a mistake.

The article seemed conclusive. McClenachan accepted it as such and sorrowfully sought to wind up the affairs of the \textit{Holker} with the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{144} Half joe (half Johannes), a Portuguese gold coin worth about $4.50, named for King John V (1706-1750).
\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Pennsylvania Journal}, Apr. 25, 1781.
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Pennsylvania Packet}, May 15, 1781. The Basseterre dispatch was widely printed in Continental and British newspapers in May and June, 1781.
former marshal of the admiralty, an account which rambled through
a dozen pages of debits and credits. Then, on Sunday, June 3, to
the astonishment and delight of all Philadelphia, and particularly of
McClenachan, the Holker came sailing up the Delaware. Roger
Keane brought news of the arrival of the grand French fleet at
Martinique, and told how he had paused on his way northward to
chase a British cutter into English harbor in Antigua. He did not
know that he had been "brought to bed," but he had heard that the
enemy now dubbed his little brig, "this mischievous Holker." John
Dunlap, printer of the Pennsylvania Packet, took up his pen to
pay his respects to the New York editor who had first printed the
dispatch from St. Kitts: "Our readers will recollect, that Mr.
Rivington, some time since, announced the capture of the Holker,
by the Fox frigate; but we will simply relate, that the Holker, after
a successful cruize in the West-India seas (in which she was a terror
to the British commerce) has returned home in good condition to her
native port."

By mid-July the Holker again was ready for sea and she went
out through the Delaware capes in company with the Fair American,
now commanded by Phineas Eldridge, Stephen Decatur having
taken over a larger privateer. They gave convoy off shore to three
armed merchantmen, and on the night of July 18, while still in com-
pany with the letters of marque, espied a large snow. She was over-
taken at dawn and proved to be Spanish, the St. Joseph and Joachim,
sailing as a cartel for New York with one hundred and sixty British-
ers taken at Pensacola. Normally, she would not have been molested,
but the terms of the surrender of the Pensacola garrison to the flag

147 "Blair McClenachan in Account Current with the Marshal of Admiralty," Admiralty, HSP.
148 Pennsylvania Journal, June 6, 1781.
149 Dispatch from St. Johns, Antigua, June 5, 1781, quoted in Pennsylvania Packet, Aug. 11, 1781.
150 James Rivington, Tory printer of the New York Royal Gazette.
151 Pennsylvania Packet, June 5, 1781.
152 The will of David Forsyth, a mariner on board the Holker, was executed on July 9, 1781, just before the departure of the brig. Will Book (1781-1784), No. 310, 425, 426, Register of Wills, Phila.
153 Eldridge was commissioned to the Fair American on May 22, 1781, and Decatur to the ship Royal Louis, of twenty-two guns and two hundred men, on July 23, 1781. Papers CC, 196, IV, 106; XIII, 75.
of Spain rankled in American minds. The capitulation had specified that the British troops should not again serve against Spain or her allies. As there had been no alliance between the United States and Spain, these Britishers, upon arrival in New York, immediately could be used to oppose the American army. Keane and Eldridge determined to avert this contingency by sending the snow into Philadelphia as a prize.\textsuperscript{154}

The first lieutenants of the two brigs, John Quinlan of the \textit{Holker} and Uriah Swaine of the \textit{Fair American}, were the first to board the \textit{St. Joseph and Joachim}. A prejudiced British officer described their advent: “One of them named S[wayne]. of the Fair American, a New England Man, his Behaviour was extremely insolent and abusive, often times declared, that if he had the liberty to treat what Prisoners he may take as he would chuse, he would hang them all. The Other employed himself in filching and pilfering.”

The lieutenants were replaced after a few hours by a prize master and seventeen men from the \textit{Holker}, and a prize master and thirteen men from the \textit{Fair American}. Keane and Eldridge boarded the snow briefly and, again to quote the prejudiced Britisher, “strutted about the Quarter-Deck, asked several immaterial Questions, and then returned on board again, carrying with them the two Officers that were sent on board us, when we were brought to.”

The Spanish vessel headed for the Delaware, but on July 20 was retaken by the British privateer \textit{Surprise}, which took out twenty-eight of the men from the \textit{Holker} and \textit{Fair American}, and sent her for New York.\textsuperscript{155} Off Sandy Hook, the Connecticut privateer brig \textit{Favorite} stopped the snow, but permitted her to proceed after removing the remaining four Americans of the original prize crew.\textsuperscript{156}

McClenachan’s two brigs separated after the capture of the \textit{St. Joseph and Joachim}, and the \textit{Holker} stood northward along the Jersey coast. She cruised without success for several weeks, and on August 12, encountered His Majesty’s brig \textit{Swift}, of fourteen guns and sixty men. The meeting was recorded only by the enemy. The \textit{Swift} was carrying dispatches from Cornwallis, beleaguered at York-

\textsuperscript{154} Diary of Frederick Mackenzie (Cambridge, Mass., 1930), II, 578.

\textsuperscript{155} “Extracts from the Journal of the Spanish snow St. Joseph . . . ,” Public Advertiser, Sept. 11, 1781.

\textsuperscript{156} Pennsylvania Packet, Aug. 16, 1781.
town, Virginia, to New York. She had "proved so leaky," Admiral Thomas Graves reported, "that in order to bail at the Hatchways, they had taken their Lumber and Stores upon Deck. in so distresful a situation they found themselves attacked by the Holker Privateer carrying 18 guns and full of Men; it was impossible to stand a Cannonade, they therefore with great spirit boarded the Enemy twice, but the Privateer having greatly the advantage in sailing, disentangled and made away. . . . she [the Swift] had two Men killed and two wounded."\(^{157}\) The Swift reached New York on August 13.\(^{158}\)

Subsequently the Holker, in company with the Rhode Island privateer sloop Hope,\(^{159}\) took the British privateer schooner Fame, Captain William Neilson, and retook the sloop Betsey, which the Fame had captured a few hours earlier. The latter had been bound from Virginia to Boston with a cargo of tobacco.\(^{160}\) Keane ran into Cape May and sent a member of his own crew under guard to Philadelphia, a William Broune, who had been taken sometime before in a prize and had entered on board the Holker. The captain reported his reason to the deputy commissary of prisoners: "on account of his Conduct & particularly his Desire of wishing to get taken that he may have the pleasure of Stretching our Necks I am Certain he is a dangerous Man." Broune did seem to be a character well rid of.\(^{161}\)

The prize crews which took the Fame and Betsey to Philadelphia returned to the capes on September 4 to be picked up by the Holker.\(^{162}\) The Fair American touched at Cape May at about the same time, and the two brigs remained in company for a few days. About September 9 they took the sloop Phoenix, bound from New York to Quebec\(^{163}\) with a variegated cargo of tobacco, rum, coffee, mustard, "an Assortment of Gauzes, Shaving and Writing Equipages and Candlesticks for Camp, Fifes, Plumes, Toys, elegant Steel and plated Spurs, China Bowls, Dishes and Plates, a large and neat


158 Diary of Frederick Mackenzie, II, 587.

159 William P. Sheffield, "Rhode Island Privateers," an address before the Rhode Island Historical Society (Newport, R.I., 1833).


161 Roger Keane to Thomas Bradford, c. August, 1781, British Naval Prisoners, Correspondence, I, 91.

162 Pennsylvania Packet, Sept. 1, 1781.

Assortment of Ironmongery, Cutlery and Hard Ware . . . a Cask Hair-Powder . . . a Quantity of Soal Leather, and a few Casks of Bread, Beef, and Pork.”¹⁶⁴ Most desirable items, these, whose sale would enhance the already overflowing coffers of Blair McClenachan.

Keane escorted the Phoenix in. He turned the crews of the Fame and Phoenix over to the deputy commissary of prisoners about September 12,¹⁶⁵ and begged the latter’s civilities to Captain Neilson as “a Person who deserves all possible Indulgence, for his favours to several of our people whom have been taken by him.”¹⁶⁶ Perhaps, too, the captain of the Holker, along with McClenachan, attended the sales of the cargo of the Phoenix, which began September 24 and continued each morning and afternoon for several days.¹⁶⁷

For the third successive fall, McClenachan directed the Holker to the West Indies for the ensuing winter months. She sailed from Philadelphia on November 2, and heralded her arrival amid the British Leeward Islands by taking a number of prizes. In rapid sequence she nabbed a brig from Cork, a sloop from Barbados, two schooners from the Demerara, and the privateer schooner Flying Fish from Antigua.¹⁶⁸ The editor of the Antigua Chronicle wailed that “that mischievous American, the Holker, had been on the coast of Antigua for some time past; that she had taken several prizes within a fortnight.”¹⁶⁹ Climaxing his cruise, Keane chased the British packet Lord Hyde back into St. Lucia,¹⁷⁰ then proceeded for St. Pierre. He put into that Martinique port with three of his prizes, worth three hundred thousand livres, on December 5, thirty-three days after his departure from Philadelphia.¹⁷¹ The Holker’s latest successes took on human guise in London, where a newspaper gravely informed its readers: “One of the most famous Marine Rebels that ploughs the American or European Seas, is named Holker. This

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., Sept. 27, 1781.
¹⁶⁵ British Naval Prisoners, Lists of Prisoners (1778–1782), 34.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid., Correspondence, II, 79.
¹⁶⁷ Pennsylvania Packet, Sept. 18, 22, and 27, 1781.
¹⁶⁹ Pennsylvania Packet, Jan. 10, 1782.
¹⁷⁰ Ibid., Jan. 1, 1782.
man has, by Dint [of] Plunder, acquired a considerable Fortune, and is at this Time disposing of some Prizes at Martinico."\(^{172}\)

During January and February, 1782, Keane sallied forth from St. Pierre several times and, in the course of the two months, took seven prizes. All were sent into Martinique or Guadeloupe, but their identities are lost in the elapsed years.\(^{173}\) In March the *Holker* joined with four Massachusetts privateers in a predatory raid aimed at Tortola, the largest of the British-owned Virgin Islands. Tortola, onetime rendezvous of the buccaneers, had no military importance, but it did have some wealthy planters, and its Road Town wharves held much cotton and sugar awaiting export. Plans for the expedition were laid as carefully as if the objective were a heavily guarded port. John Carnes, captain of the twenty-two-gun ship *Porus*, was selected as commodore.\(^{174}\) In addition to the *Porus* and *Holker*, the squadron consisted of the ships *Junius Brutus* and *Pilgrim*, of twenty guns each, and the *Franklin*, of sixteen guns. More than five hundred seamen and marines were on board the five vessels\(^ {175}\) when they sailed out of St. Pierre on the evening of March 1.\(^ {176}\)

The squadron passed to the westward of Dominica on March 2, sighted St. Eustatius and Saba to starboard next day, and on March 4 ran in among the Virgin Islands, where, at sunset, the captains were called to a council of war on board the *Porus*. A surprise landing under cover of darkness by two hundred sailors and marines commanded by Major William Courtis, formerly of the Continental army but now captain of the *Pilgrim*’s marines, was agreed upon.\(^ {177}\) "But the last cheering glass of vin du pays (which constituted a necessary part of the warlike stores taken on board at Martinique) was so well relished and so frequently repeated, that the awful hour of descent was postponed until about three or four in the morning." Such was the unfeeling comment of an unfriendly inhabitant of Tortola, who

\(^{172}\) *Public Advertiser*, Mar. 8, 1782.

\(^{173}\) The number of captures is deduced from a final accounting for the cruise made by Keane upon his return to Philadelphia in the following May. He reported fourteen prizes. Five were taken in December and two subsequent to the January-February period. *Freeman’s Journal*, May 15, 1782.


\(^{175}\) Papers CC, 196, V, 97; IX, 1; XI, 89; XII, 15.


\(^{177}\) Morison, "Log of the Pilgrim," 113-116.
later interviewed some of the participants. The reason for delay, however, seems to have been the incompetence of a pilot who had professed a thorough knowledge of the spacious Road Town harbor. As an officer of the Pilgrim explained it, "By accident, the night being dark, we passed the place of our destination & ran 3 or 4 leagues to leeward, by which we were kept beating to windward thro' the night." 179

By the time the squadron was before the town, alarm guns were firing from five small forts, spaced at two-mile intervals around the harbor edge. No chance for surprise then, so, at eight o'clock on the morning of March 5, another council of war convened aboard the Porus. It was decided to summons the island. The captains returned to their commands, but before a flag of truce could be sent off to the governor, three brigantines under one of the forts suddenly crowded on sail and could be seen endeavoring to escape through the channel dividing Tortola from the Danish-owned island of St. John. 180 Signals from the Porus sent the Holker and Junius Brutus in chase.

Roger Keane was on the western flank of the squadron and closest to the fleeing vessels. The pursuit quickly carried him around a headland and out of sight of his consorts. Two of the brigantines escaped, but the Holker overhauled the hindmost in mid-channel. She was the Delight, of fourteen guns, formerly a Salem privateer called the Macaroni. She offered no resistance. From the prisoners Keane learned that eight or ten Liverpoolmen had run out of Road Town harbor the evening before at first sight of the rebel fleet, and had headed westward. This news was passed to the Junius Brutus, which had just rounded the headland astern. The Holker and Junius Brutus set off in quest of the merchantmen. 181 Their consorts back in Road Town harbor after a futile bombardment "gave over the enterprize," and headed for Martinique. 182 "Tortola is indebted to Providence for averting the intended calamity," was the pious conclusion of an inhabitant.

178 "An Inhabitant of Tortola to the Printer of the Antigua Chronicle, April 6, 1782," Public Advertiser, Aug. 16, 1782.
180 "An Inhabitant of Tortola to the Printer of the Antigua Chronicle," Public Advertiser, Aug. 16, 1782.
182 Pennsylvania Journal, Apr. 13, 1782.
The Holker and Junius Brutus, having flushed no quarry, worked back through the channel on the night of March 5 to find the Porus, Pilgrim, and Franklin departed. Keane and Nathaniel Brookhouse, captain of the Junius Brutus, elected to cruise amid the islands. On the morning of March 6 they espied a British sloop of war at anchor off Spanish Town on the southwest coast of Virgin Gorda, another of the British Virgin Islands. She lay under the guns of a fort, so they abandoned any idea of attacking her, and continued eastward through Dead Man’s Passage, separating Virgin Gorda from the island to the south. The enemy sloop of war Experiment, of sixteen guns, Edward Herbert, commander, elected to put to sea, however, rather than rely upon the protection of the fort, which boasted but a two-gun battery. She stood northward, and the Holker and Junius Brutus, having weathered Virgin Gorda, gave chase. Versions of the subsequent encounter are so widely divergent as to be reconcilable. According to Captain Carnes of the Porus, who spoke the Holker two days later, she had “been engaged with a Ship of 16 Guns, which beat her off with considerable damage. The [Junius] Brutus was in sight, but could not get to her assistance.” A British prisoner on board the Holker reported that the brig overtook the Experiment, and “a smart engagement ensued.” Continuing, the prisoner stated:

The Junius Brutus soon after came up under English colours, and fired several broad sides at the Experiment, while under her quarter, with an intent to rake her; but the Holker having, in the mean time, been most severely handled, and having had her rudder dangerously wounded, and part of her cabin stove in, and being otherwise much crippled, fortunately enabled the Experiment, in a very short time to give the noble Roman so warm a reception, that she and the Holker willingly took their leave.

Perhaps the true story is contained in the report Commander Herbert made to his superior officer at Antigua eleven days later. He set forth that the enemy, flying English colors, were within

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random shot of him at three o'clock in the afternoon of March 6, with Virgin Gorda six or seven leagues to the southeast. With action unavoidable, since they outsailed him, Herbert prepared to give battle:\footnote{Edward Herbert to John Linzee, Mar. 17, 1782, Barck, I, 300–302.}

... at 3½ past three shorten'd Sail and bore away in order to the better fighting my guns at the same time both vessels plac'd themselves the Brig on the Starboard Bow and the Ship on the Larboard Quarter. I spoke the Ship who after a few of the usual Questions shifted her Colours to those of America and directed ours to be struck. I gave my Broad Side to the Ship and the Action commenced at the distance of about Twenty Yards. We continued our position for half an Hour the Brigg keeping up a constant and heavy fire of Musquetry Grape and Langridge. At half past four the Ship having Slack'd her fire and the Brigg endeavouring to get on my Starboard Bow, I haul'd up and in so doing ran on board her quarter, by which she received much damage. ... At a Quarter before five the Brigg put before the Wind and our Topsails taking full we again stood for the Ship who immediately wore gave a few guns in return to ours and made Sail after the Brigg, which lost her Foretopmast and Boom soon after. Not being able to command the Ship in consequence of the damage done to the Masts Yards standing and Running Rigging &c. which were in general Shot away and a Gun dismounted, I got the Courses set as soon as geer could be got ready and stood to the Northward. At Six lost sight of the Enemy.

Whether the \textit{Junius Brutus} engaged the \textit{Experiment} at twenty yards distance, as Commander Herbert stated, or was unable to come to the assistance of her consort, as Captain Carnes was told, may never be known. The fact that the \textit{Holker} was badly damaged, however, is indisputable. She limped into Martinique for a repair bill which later probably caused Blair McClenachan many a groan. Putting her in shape for sea consumed about a month. Keane sailed her out of St. Pierre on April 12, at a time when numerous reports of the major engagements of April 9 and 12 between DeGrasse and Rodney were in circulation, all favorable to the French and all erroneous. From the deck of the \textit{Holker} that first day out could be seen three or four dismasted British ships of the line being towed toward St. Lucia. Two days later they spoke a French cutter from Guadeloupe and were told "that one French ship of the line had blown up in the action, that the British fleet was so disabled as to be obliged to return into port."\footnote{Pennsylvania Journal, May 8, 1782.} Keane did not learn the true story of the terrible defeat administered to DeGrasse in the Battle of the
Saints until several weeks after the Holker reached Philadelphia. On her homeward way, some leagues off the Delaware, the Holker took the fourteenth prize of her eventful cruise, the privateer schooner Recovery, James Dowie, master, of eight 6-pounder carriage guns, out of New York. This last prize got safely up to Philadelphia on May 7, but the Holker was chased off the capes "by some hungry Englishmen" and did not arrive to make McClenachan happy until four days later. The Recovery was libeled against, tried, and condemned in four days. By June 3, Clement Biddle, the new marshal of the admiralty, had sold the schooner and was desiring all persons entitled to shares in the prize to make their claims promptly. By then also, Roger Keane, having sailed the Holker for twenty-one successful months, had resigned his command and retired from active sea duty.

The fourth captain of the Holker was John Quinlan, who had been her first lieutenant under Keane. He was now thirty-one years old, a medium-sized man of light complexion and hair. He assumed command in June, 1782, and that same month McClenachan, having sold a small interest in the privateer to Robert Morris, entered a new bond for her. She went through an extensive overhaul that summer and did not get to sea until late in September. Again, for winter cruising, she was ordered to the West Indies, where she arrived by mid-October, despite a report that she had been carried into New York by His Majesty's ship Centurion.

In sight of Barbados on October 28, Quinlan engaged and took, after an hour's engagement, the British letter-of-marque ship Molly. It was a bitter fight during which the Holker's captain was shot.

189 Ibid., May 25, 1782.
190 Pennsylvania Packet, May 9, 1782; Freeman's Journal, May 15, 1782; Pennsylvania Journal, May 15, 1782.
191 Pennsylvania Packet, May 9 and June 4, 1782.
192 The final record of Roger Keane during the war was his membership, taken out Oct. 7, 1782, in the Captains of Ships Charitable Club. "A List of Names and Times of Entry from the Year 1777 to the Year 1788," Captains of Ships Charitable Club records, HSP. Between 1784 and 1787 he commanded several vessels in the coastal trade, and, in the latter year, the brig Resolution on a voyage to the Cape of Good Hope and Canton, China. Custom House Books, Inward and Outward (1784-1787), HSP.
193 While the date of Quinlan's commission and bond was June 30, 1782, he was in command prior to that date. According to the will of David Leech of Baltimore, third lieutenant of the Holker, Quinlan was her captain on June 28. Papers CC, 196, VII, 87; Will Book (1781-1784), No. 273, 353, 354, Register of Wills, Phila.
194 Pennsylvania Journal, Nov. 9, 1782.
through the nose, and several of her men were killed or wounded. On board the Molly, which mounted sixteen 6-pounders, casualties were one killed and twelve critically wounded out of a crew of forty-three. The Britisher had been bound from Liverpool for St. Lucia with a valuable cargo. Quinlan ushered her into Martinique, where the Holker went through a month of repairs, and the captain had his wounded nose treated.

Around December 15, the Holker sallied out for a sensational and successful six weeks’ cruise, in which sixteen prizes were garnered. They included the privateer General Elliot, of fourteen guns, from Antigua, which had every man but four of her crew killed or wounded, and the ship Mary, a letter of marque of eighteen guns and fifty-seven men. On January 28, 1783, off Martinique, Quinlan topped off his series of brilliant exploits with the capture of the privateer schooner Lion, of ten 4-pounders, belonging to the island of Anguilla. He carried her into St. Pierre next day, where she was converted into a tender and renamed the Count Dillon.

The career of Blair McClenachan’s stout little privateer came to a spectacular end on March 2, 1783, one month less a day after the preliminary treaty of peace had been signed in Paris. Hostilities had ceased in European waters, but, because of the slow means of communication, still continued along the American coast and in the West Indies. The Holker had sailed from St. Pierre on February 10, and had taken, manned, and sent in “two English privateers, being of inferior force,” according to a British apologist. Twenty-six men had been placed in the prizes, so that her crew was reduced below the usual one hundred and twenty officers and men as she returned toward Martinique.

In the St. Lucia Channel—the broad span of water between St. Lucia to the south and Martinique to the north—around four o’clock in the morning of Sunday, March 2, a large ship, undoubtedly a British frigate, was discovered to leeward. Quinlan ordered all sail set, and the chase stretched away northward with the pursuer gaining steadily. The journal of Captain James Douglass,

195 Pennsylvania Packet, Feb. 18, 1783.
196 Pennsylvania Gazette, Dec. 18, 1782.
197 Connecticut Gazette, Feb. 28, 1783.
198 Pennsylvania Journal, Mar. 5, 1783.
199 Pennsylvania Packet, Mar. 18, 1783.
200 London Chronicle, June 3-5, 1783.
of His Majesty's ship Alcmene, tells the rest: "at 5 [A.M.] Saw a Sail to windw'd gave Chace At 6 Hard Squalls with heavy rain Perceived the Chace to oversett ½ P: 6 tacked at 7 Saw several men swimming hove to hoisted out the Boats to save them at ye return of ye boats found they had picked up several hoisted in ye Boats Bore up at 10 hove too mustered ye Prisoners found in N° 47 she proved to be the Hulker [sic] american Privateer mounting 16 Guns & 94 Men." 201

"The successful American brig Holker has at length ended her cruize," exulted an Antigua correspondent, and, at long last, he was right. 202 The sad news reached Blair McClenachan in April along with information that the captain and but nineteen men had been saved. According to the account published in Philadelphia, she "was chased by a British frigate in which chase she started some of her butts, filled and sank immediately." 203

Long before this, the Alcmene had anchored in Gros Inlet, St. Lucia, and the Holker survivors had been hustled ashore. 204 Four of them, having been British prisoners on board the privateer, were released. Ten, who preferred service in the English navy to confinement as prisoners of war, were sent to His Majesty's ships Princess and Royal Oak. The remaining thirty-seven, by order of Admiral Hugh Pigot, were consigned to the Peter, prison ship, lying at anchor there. Included among the latter were Quinlan and Thomas Baker, the first lieutenant. 205

Although the Holker was at the bottom of the sea, her affairs were not ended. Belated receipt of news of peace brought release to the men in the prison ship at St. Lucia. Most of them drifted back to Philadelphia. Relatives of some of those who had perished in the little brig filed suit in admiralty court to recover prize money due them. 206 Quinlan and Baker returned to command merchant vessels. 207 And Blair McClenachan, having obtained settlement for all captures brought into American ports by the Holker, sailed for the

201 Captain's log, H.M.S. Alcmene, Mar. 2, 1783, Admiralty, PRO, Class 51, No. 24.
204 Captain's log, H.M.S. Alcmene, Mar. 3, 1783.
205 Muster Book of H.M.S. Alcmene, March to May 8, 1783, Admiralty, PRO, Class 36, No. 9945.
206 Petition of John Connor, et al., Dec. 17, 1783, Admiralty, HSP.
207 Custom House Books, Inward and Outward (1785–1793), HSP.
West Indies in September, 1783, to recover the money due him from those who handled her prizes in Martinique and Guadeloupe. He was most successful, and returned in December of the same year, paying "a handsome compensation" to the young man whose fluent French had helped in the accomplishment of his mission.²⁰⁸

Apparently, the Philadelphia merchant had attained an opulence demanding expression. His choice of expression was to sail in April, 1784, in the ship Congress for a visit to northern Ireland, the country of his birth. The Congress anchored in the river Foyle, off Londonderry, a month later, and McClenachan, "lately returned to visit his native land, in possession of honour, independence, and wealth," invited the principal inhabitants of the city to a breakfast and dance on shipboard.

It was a grand morning, that first day of June, 1784, when some two hundred of the first rank of Londonderry folk found their way over the bulwarks of the Congress to a deck "covered over by a beautiful awning" and sat down "to an elegant breakfast." Tables were then removed, "and a dance, enlivened by good humour and a joyous innocence," began. Between sets, the band of the 1st Royal Regiment, whose officers graced the gathering, rendered a masterful concert of "well chosen pieces." Couples sauntered to the quarter-deck, where a table spread with cold meats "and a nameless variety of the richest wines" could sate the appetite of the hungry or the thirsty. Toward late afternoon, Londonderry's elite returned ashore, "vying with each other in praise of the elegance of their entertainment, and the true unstudied politeness of their respectable host."²⁰⁹

Neither Blair McClenachan nor the editor of the Londonderry Journal, whose superlatives sprinkled the account of the sumptuous affair, may have had this thought, but it is amusing to recall that most of the money for this lavish entertainment had come out of British, Scottish, and Irish pockets via the seventy or more prizes taken by the Holker during her four-year reign.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ The actual count of the Holker's prizes brought in, including those taken when in company with other vessels, but not including recaptures by the British, seems to total seventy-one: George Geddes, ten; Matthew Lawler, six; Roger Keane, thirty-seven; and John Quinlan, eighteen.