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THE ROYAL NAVY IN NORTH AMERICA, 1774-1781: A STUDY IN COMMAND

The Ohio State University

Ph.D. 1980

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THE ROYAL NAVY IN NORTH AMERICA, 1774-1781:
A STUDY IN COMMAND

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

John Andrew Tilley, B.A., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1980

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                           Department of History
To the Memory of

PHILIP P. POIRIER

Professor of British History at
The Ohio State University,
1952 - 1978.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I fear this will be a long list, for I have partaken of the time, knowledge, and good nature of many people. At the top must come my adviser, Professor Harry Coles, who was a source of encouragement and sober advice from the beginning of the project to the end. The others members of the reading committee, Professors Paul Bowers and Clayton Roberts, offered numerous helpful suggestions and gave freely of their time during a season of the year in which I had no right to ask them to do so. My good friend and colleague Dr. John Rowland read the early chapters of the manuscript and offered ruthlessly constructive criticism as well.

My research trips were enjoyable not only for the information they produced but for the opportunity they gave me to become acquainted with so many knowledgeable and outgoing people. At the Clements Library in Ann Arbor I was received with the greatest possible cordiality by the Curator, Mr. John C. Dann, the Curator of Manuscripts, Mrs. Arlene Shy, and her assistant, Mrs. Barbara Mitchell, even when I was so indiscreet as to arrive on the eve of
the OSU/Michigan football game. Mrs. Shy's husband, Professor John Shy, frequently stopped by to offer encouragement, as well as advice on the use of the manuscript collections with which he was so familiar.

At the Naval Historical Center in the Washington Navy Yard I received the valuable help of Dr. William J. Morgan, the Director of the great Naval Documents of the Revolution project, and his staff, including Dr. William S. Dudley, Mr. E. Gordon Bowen-Hassell, and Chief Yeoman George K. McCuistion. All of them went beyond the call of duty in providing me with space and equipment to do research in the midst of their office facilities, and taking time away from their own work to offer expert advice. The staff of the Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, also was most helpful, not only in making my visit productive but in making many of the important transcripts available to me through the Inter-Library Loan Service when my teaching duties kept me in Columbus.

In London the staff of the Public Records Office was cheerfully tolerant of my bumbling efforts to sort out the intricacies of that great and highly computerized repository, the atmosphere of which might be oppressively mechanical were it not for the informal courtesy which seems to characterize everyone who works there. At the National Maritime Museum the staff of the Caird Library,
including Mrs. Jacqueline Skidmore, Mrs. Lynne Bland, Mrs. Vanessa Elsworth, Mr. Malcolm Barr-Hamilton, Mrs. Kay Chapman, and Mrs. Mary Allard, provided every possible courtesy and convenience, including "electric fires" for American researchers unaccustomed to working in the absence of central heating. My friends Noel and Brenda Smith, Roger and Jo Chesnau, and Ray Rimell took me in tow throughout my stay in London. I hope the pleasure I derived from my visit to England will be noticeable in the pages that follow.

The last debt to be acknowledged is the one I owe to my father. I hope he already knows what his contribution was, as I am incapable of describing it.
VITA

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Major Field: American Military History

American History, 1763-1815. Professor Paul C. Bowers
British History Since 1714. Professor Philip P. Poirier
Modern Chinese History. Professor Samuel C. Chu
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PREFACE

Historians give no indication, even in the wake of the vainglorious bicentennial celebration of 1976, that they are tired of writing about the American Revolution. The events leading up to the creation of the United States seem to be irresistibly attractive. Novelists, poets, artists, dramatists, and the public as well as professional scholars have considered literally thousands of aspects of the subject, and undoubtedly will continue to do so indefinitely. There is no reason why they should not. The Revolution is an ideal topic for study in that, besides offering a vast amount of material to the researcher's perusal, it is susceptible to examination from a virtually limitless number of directions.

The Revolutionary War, as distinct from the Revolution as a political or ideological phenomenon, has received its share of attention. The peace treaty scarcely had been signed when the heroes of Bunker Hill, Trenton, Saratoga, Valley Forge, and Yorktown were installed among the ranks of the legendary, and the American military tradition began to trace its history to 1775. The war's
intimate scale and awesome consequences made it into an epic, an almost biblical pageant played out by men in red coats on one side and men hiding behind trees on the other. In the past few decades such exemplary historians as William Willcox, John Shy, and Piers Mackesy have made the military phase of the Revolution the subject of dignified scholarship, and the stream of documentary collections being published in this country and in England undoubtedly will stimulate the writing of many other distinguished books. So far, though, one basic point about the war generally has been overlooked, or at best has received a deferential nod from an author writing about something else. The War of American Independence was, to at least as great an extent as it was anything else, a naval war.

It is understandable that the two countries most interested in the Revolution, the United States and Great Britain, should have paid so little attention to this particular subject, for the former participated in the naval war only inconsequentially and the latter lost it. The modern United States Navy, though it resolutely venerates a character of dubious historical importance named John Paul Jones, cannot claim direct descent from the American ships that fought in the Revolution; the Continental Navy ceased to exist in 1785. To the British Navy the war of 1775-1783 is an embarrassment, worthy
of interest mainly because it exemplified the hoary traditions that naval heroes like Nelson exorcised during the wars with Napoleon. While he may trouble himself to read something about Sir George Rodney, perhaps for no better reason than that a remarkably ugly battleship was named after that admiral, the British naval history buff generally is content to begin his study of the sailing navy with the 1790's.

This indifference is unfortunate, for the naval war of 1775-1783 was an interesting and important one for several reasons. The Royal Navy was intimately involved in the fighting from the very day of Lexington and Concord, and in more than one instance naval affairs exerted a decisive influence on great events. From the navy's viewpoint the conflict had two phases. In the first it was a struggle between rebels and government, with the navy assigned the unenviable task of trying to squelch revolutionary impulses that seldom drifted within range of the guns that were the only weapons at its disposal. The second phase began in 1778, when France entered the war. The French had a battle fleet of their own, and that fact turned the war into the sort the Royal Navy was used to fighting. The entry of France, and later of Spain and Holland, also made the conflict into a world war in which North America was only one theater—and, the British government insisted, far from the most important one. In
the period between the skirmish on Lexington Green and the signing of the Peace of Paris the Royal Navy fought the great prototypical eighteenth century naval war. British naval power was put to every test it had been designed to meet, and several more besides. The war had great sea battles, great convoys, great administrative scandals, great combined operations in which the navy, with varying success, tried to cooperate with the army—almost all that was necessary to constitute a classic study of naval warfare in the age of sail.

The only element it lacked was great admirals. The heroic individual who seemed to surface in most naval wars—the Francis Drake or Robert Blake or Horatio Nelson—was conspicuous by his absence from this one. Rodney, it is true, made for himself an image whose tarnish can be overlooked, and Lord Howe survived a controversial tenure in command in North America to become one of the navy's more important personages in the next war. But during most of the period leading to the creation of the United States the Royal Navy's North American Squadron was commanded by the likes of Samuel Graves, Molyneux Shuldham, James Gambier, Marriot Arbuthnot, and Thomas Graves. None of theirs became household names (though the second Graves did achieve a certain notoriety as the admiral whose failure to win the Battle of the Chesapeake led to the fall of Yorktown), yet they were on hand for
some of the most important events of their time. That fact alone would be sufficient to warrant their being given more attention than they have received.

The present work is an effort to redress the grievance. It does not pretend to be an all-embracing narrative history of the Royal Navy between 1774 and 1783; to examine that subject in the detail it deserves would take the reader to such diverse sites as the islands of the English Channel, the straits of the Mediterranean, and the coast of Java, and would consume a tome several times larger than this one. My interest lies rather in the naval events that led directly to American independence, and more specifically with the admirals whose decisions, or indecision, helped to bring those events about. My subject is the admirals because I believe that those characters' actions, their personalities, and their relationships with the generals, the government, and each other were vital components of the war in North America. The War of American Independence was an immensely complicated conflict, and the failure of the Royal Navy was but one aspect of the monumental failure that cost Britain her colonies. To the charge that my emphasis on the navy has distorted the story, however, I believe I may reply that the distortion is compensatory.

The citing of the sources proved unexpectedly complicated. Many of the relevant documents have been
published, some of them more than once. On a disconcerting number of occasions I went to see the original letters, only to discover that the staff of one of the publishing projects (usually the Naval Documents of the Revolution series) had been there first. To mention all the published locations of every document would be both cumbersome and impractical, for I cannot claim to have made note of every book in which a particular letter appears. To cite only the location of the original, on the other hand, might make the notes more impressive but would be a discourtesy to the various editors and to the reader, who would be led to believe the sources to be less accessible than they are.

In the cases of documents which have been published more than once, therefore, I have cited the collection which I believe to be most readily available. In references to unpublished documents the notes employ the following abbreviations:

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<tr>
<td>CL</td>
<td>William L. Clements Memorial Library (Manuscripts Division), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.</td>
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<td>LC</td>
<td>Library of Congress (Manuscripts Division), Washington, D.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHC</td>
<td>Naval Historical Center (Research Division), Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.</td>
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I have attempted to preserve all the idiosyncrasies of spelling, capitalization, grammar, and punctuation that appear in the original documents. Exceptions have had to be made, however, in those cases in which the originals were not available and the only copies were those whose editors had "modernized" them. This regrettable practice, which was common during the early decades of this century, is especially prevalent in the otherwise excellent publications of the Navy Records Society, and in the typed transcripts of the Sandwich Papers in the National Maritime Museum.
INTRODUCTION

The navy that constituted Britain's principal instrument of foreign policy was a complex and ponderous institution. Nearly 200 years of wars with the Spanish, the French, and the Dutch had dramatically increased its mechanical sophistication on the one hand and burdened it with traditions on the other. When the eighteenth century fleet sailed into battle it did so in ships that made their sixteenth century ancestors look like ornate toys, but the efficiency of the philosophies and regulations governing the ships' behavior had deteriorated as their complexity increased.

Most tactical considerations emanated from a single fact of naval architecture: a warship's guns had to be arranged in rows along her sides. As the guns became heavier it became physically impossible to mount more than a few of them in the bow and stern. The central tactical objective therefore was to place one's vessel on a course that lay at 90 degrees to that of the enemy, "crossing the 'T'" and firing at him while he was unable to fire back. When a ship was "raked" by enemy broadsides from
ahead or astern the carnage was awful. The wooden hull, its ends more vulnerable than its sides, disintegrated under the impact of iron cannon balls into a mass of flying splinters that cut down human beings, closely packed around their own guns, with grisly efficiency; masts, yards, and sails fell to the deck, and the ship was reduced to an unmaneuverable hulk. Naval thinkers on both sides of the Channel experienced such revulsion at the prospect of having their "T's" crossed that their tactics came to be dominated by the desire to avoid such a fate. By the middle of the seventeenth century they had developed a rigidly standardized formation called the line of battle, which was to remain the universally accepted mode of fighting sea battles until Nelson discarded it early in the nineteenth.

When the fleets sighted each other they would form themselves into long, straight lines, each ship following so closely in the wake of her next ahead that the enemy could not pass between them. The fleet to windward was said to have the "weather gauge," a priceless commodity in that he who held it could decide whether or not to engage the enemy; a square-rigged sailing ship could not sail directly into the wind. The lines would steer parallel courses, gradually easing toward each other until they could exchange broadsides. Each ship would engage her counterpart in the enemy line and, in theory at
least, the fleet with the heavier armament and the better trained gunners would win the battle.

The vessel designed to fight such battles was called a ship-of-the-line. She was an imposing and malevolently beautiful creation; few man-made objects of the eighteenth century were larger. She was about 200 feet long, and the top of her mainmast stood almost that high above the water. The barrels of her great guns, which fired shot weighing 18, 24, or 32 pounds (the standard field artillery piece used in land warfare, by contrast, was the 6-pounder) projected through square ports arranged in two or three tiers along her sides. A ship-of-the-line, by definition, carried between 60 and 100 guns, the most popular design being the 74-gun ship.

The ships-of-the-line were supported by a variety of lesser warships, the largest and most romanticised of which was called a frigate. The frigate carried between 20 and 36 guns, but was not supposed to fight battles. While her physical dimensions approached those of the ships-of-the-line she was much lighter and faster. Frigates were attached to the battle fleet to seek out and maintain contact with the enemy, and were used to attack his commerce.

Also operating in conjunction with the battle fleet were numerous smaller ships, designated sloops, brigs, schooners, cutters, and tenders according to size, function,
and rig. They served as dispatch vessels, carried supplies, and did the many other jobs necessary to keep the navy at sea.

To fire a warship's guns and work her sails simultaneously required a vast number of men, at least 600 in the case of the 74 and more in larger vessels. England, with nearly 300 ships in commission and an adult male population of 2 1/2 million, was unable to furnish the requisite number of seamen save by resorting to recruiting methods that bordered on barbarism. Nearly every ship was perpetually shorthanded, and the captains' only recourse was the despised press gang. A boat load of sailors led by an officer would descend on a seaport town or merchant ship and enlist, if necessary by means of a belaying pin applied to the skull, every able-bodied man in sight. The warship's berthdeck became notorious as the abode of the lowest and most resentful elements of humanity. The men lived amid conditions that the twentieth century mind scarcely can conceive, and "did their duty" only because they were forced to do it by a disciplinary system that relied not on psychology but on brute force. A man "pressed" into the Royal Navy was unlikely to leave it unless he were killed or peace were concluded; in either case the navy unceremoniously cast him aside and forgot about him.

In the after part of the ship lived the officers, in
quarters that were palatial by comparison. The navy drew a rigid and nearly inviolable distinction between officers and men, for a projection of the English caste system onto the sea was perceived as the only way to keep the fragile disciplinary structure from disintegrating. The navy, however, was not nearly so blatantly class conscious as was the army. In the army a man bought his commission; his rank was directly related to his wealth. Land battle tactics were so simple that a general could learn to understand them merely by memorizing a handful of maxims, and if he acted like a gentleman and displayed physical courage his men could be relied upon the respect him. To be a competent naval officer was another matter entirely. The mere act of getting a sailing vessel from one port to another required native intelligence and a number of skills that took years to acquire. In order to be an officer one generally had to come from a landholding family (though the sons of doctors and parsons were accepted for training as well), but the navy was no shelter for well-bred ignoramuses.

The budding naval officer usually signed on board his first ship as a midshipman, at the age of twelve or thirteen. After as few as two or as many as 10 years (here was an instance in which distinguished friends could help him) he took an examination and, if he passed it, became a lieutenant. Some men remained lieutenants the
rest of their lives. Others, either by performing some conspicuous service or through family connections, managed to convince an admiral that they deserved promotion to the next level, that of "master and commander." With that rank a man could command as large a ship as a sloop-of-war. Another promotion made him a captain, and from that point onward his career proceeded solely on the basis of seniority. The number of captains and flag officers in the navy varied according to the need of the moment, but an officer could ascend the "active list" only when someone above him died or retired. In peacetime, when there were no deaths in action and the government slashed the navy's budget, movement up the list virtually ceased.

If he lived long enough the captain progressed through the three grades of flag rank, rear admiral, vice admiral, and full admiral. Each grade was further divided according to the three colors of flags which the admirals flew at the main trucks of their flagships; an officer newly promoted from captain became a rear admiral of the blue, then a rear admiral of the white, a rear admiral of the red, a vice admiral of the blue, and so forth (there was no full admiral of the red). The active list determined who obeyed whose orders, any considerations of ability or experience being irrelevant. Most of the admirals who fought in the American war were men in their late '50's and '60's, whose professional experience had been gained
when they were captains in the war of 1756-1763.

A seagoing admiral lived a regal but spartan existence. His comings and goings were heralded by the squeeling of pipes and the firing of salutes. The suite of cabins he occupied seemed fantastically luxurious to the common seaman (who seldom was permitted to set foot in it), but a modern observer would regard the admiral's quarters as conducive to claustrophobia. In a ship-of-the-line at sea no one ever was physically comfortable, and the toll that a few weeks of the life took from a man past middle age could debilitate him. An admiral was a busy man, for the navy expected him to be a full-time administrator when he was not fighting battles. He kept a journal, wrote regular dispatches to the Admiralty, and tended to a mountain of tiresome correspondence with his officers.

The job had its compensations, though. An admiral who won a great battle became a national hero, and often a knight or a peer as well. Even those flag officers who retired without having fought a fleet action could provide handsomely for themselves and their families by means of the prize money system. British law held that ships and merchandise taken from the enemies of the realm were the property of the crown, but by long tradition formalized by order in council the king dispensed all booty taken on the high seas among the naval personnel who
had captured it. The commander-in-chief of a squadron received one-eighth of the cash value of whatever warships, merchantmen, and cargoes the vessels of his squadron captured. Even moderately good fortune during a three-year commission could make an admiral a wealthy man.

The eighteenth-century British admiral, then, was a man past his physical prime who had lived most of his life in a service that emphasized discipline, courage, bureaucratic routine, and money. The Royal Navy produced and rewarded admirals who possessed certain skills and clearly definable traits of character. Whether the same attributes fitted a man for the task of subduing a revolution no one in the navy, or for that matter the British government, had seen any reason to consider when, in the spring of 1774, one Samuel Graves was appointed Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels in North America.
On June 30, 1774, H.M. 50-gun ship Preston worked her way up the channel from Broad Sound and anchored in Boston Harbor. The arrival of one of the king's warships at an American port would have been an event of considerable interest under any circumstances, but the Preston attracted more attention than such a great vessel usually did. Anyone with even a casual knowledge of naval ceremonial could tell, from the heraldic symbols painted on her bulwarks, the long, blue pennant flying from her main flagstaff, and the 13-gun salutes with which the other warships in the harbor greeted her arrival, that the Preston was an admiral's flagship.

The object of all the pomp and circumstance was Samuel Graves, Esquire, Vice Admiral of the Blue Squadron. He had come to Boston to take command of the king's naval forces on the North American Station.¹

The new Commander-in-Chief was 61 years old. Of his early life little is known besides his birthdate of April 17, 1713, and the fact that his uncle Thomas was a naval
officer, which may well explain why young Samuel Graves picked the navy as his profession. His career had been long and active, if not exactly distinguished. Graves had served not only in European waters but in the Caribbean, where he had attracted the attention of Sir Chaloner Ogle. As a captain Graves had commanded the ship-of-the-line Barfleur under the illustrious Hawke at Basque Roads in 1757, and the Duke at Quiberon Bay two years later. His promotion to flag rank had come in 1762, the year before the Treaty of Paris ended the "Great War for Empire." Promotion in the peacetime navy was slow, but by October, 1770, Samuel Graves was a vice admiral and could reasonably regard himself as one of the service's more important personages. He also had managed to attract the notice of the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Earl of Sandwich, and their friendship probably had had as much to do as anything else with the Admiralty's choice of Graves to command the squadron in North America.  

Graves was, as of April 16, 1774, "Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels employed and to be employed in the River St. Lawrence and along the Coast of Nova Scotia, the Islands of St. John and Cape Breton, and thence to Cape Florida and the Bahama Islands." In wartime an officer with his seniority, with so imposing a title, could well expect to find himself in charge of a mighty fleet of ships-of-the-line, prowling the high seas in quest
of an enemy with whom to fight a decisive naval battle. In 1774, however, England was at peace, and the North American Squadron, to any man who had dreams of directing the maneuvers of a line of battle, had a decidedly motley aspect. Apart from his flagship, the Preston (another third rate, the Captain, was going home with the departing commander-in-chief, Rear Admiral John Montagu), the largest vessels under Graves's command were seven sloops-of-war. Four of these, the Mercury, Lively, Savage and Tartar, along with the schooners Halifax, Magdalen, and St. Lawrence and the converted merchantman Canceaux (temporarily diverted from her mission of conducting a geographic survey), constituted the naval force currently at Boston, the squadron's "rendezvous." Also under Graves's orders were ten more small vessels of various descriptions which, along with the sloops-of-war Active, Fowey, and Tamar, were patrolling various portions of the coast from the mouth of the St. Lawrence to the Florida Keys.

The officers of the North American Squadron were no band of aristocratic veterans, but a collection of young lieutenants and commanders generally in their twenties and thirties. Many of them owed their commands to naval relatives (the names Howe and Montague were prominent) and regarded their present positions as the stepping off points for their own careers. Graves, with so many nephews in the navy that his friend Sandwich couldn't keep their
names straight, had ideas of his own on that subject.  

Boston in late June of 1774 was, from the standpoint of a naval officer, a singularly dreary place. Located at the point where the Mystic and Charles Rivers emptied into Massachusetts Bay, it looked on a chart like a festering wound on the coast of New England. For countless decades the two rivers had been depositing nondescript chunks of geologic matter in various portions of Boston Harbor, with results that were even more nightmarish to seagoing navigators than they were to cartographers. The approaches to the harbor were cluttered with more than thirty "islands," most of them less than a mile square. When the tide went out additional plots of land appeared, providing endless headaches for any officer who had miscalculated his ship's position. The harbor was well protected from the weather, but getting into or out of it was a major undertaking. It would be even more difficult, as Graves was to discover, to prevent someone else from doing so.

The town of Boston itself lay on a balloon-shaped excrescence attached, by a narrow land bridge called Boston Neck, to the mainland just southeast of the mouth of the Charles. With its population of 15,000 it was the third largest city in North America. The shops, offices, and handsome townhouses that lined Boston's meandering streets made it the social and commercial center of New England. The workers on Long Wharf, a man-made peninsula that jutted
Figure 1. Map of the British Colonies in North America
500 yards into the harbor, had until recently been sending dozens of ships each week on their way to every port in the British Empire. By European standards, however, Boston was a provincial cesspit. The narrow streets were muddy when it rained and dusty when it didn't, and always were clogged by a squalorous mass of men, women, children, animals and garbage. Part of the side of the peninsula away from the harbor was given over to the picturesquely-named Boston Common, a gently undulating field of several acres where, since the founding of the town a century and a half earlier, the livestock belonging to the good folk of Boston had been grazing and defecating. At low tide the Common tapered off indistinctly into the stinking mud flats of the Back Bay, a tidal basin of the Charles that divided Boston from the mainland to the west.

The people of Boston, then, lived their lives amid an unpalatable mixture of noise, filth, and stench. Small wonder that they were susceptible to every disease that congestion and lack of sanitation could produce. One such affliction appeared to be running rampant in the city even as Samuel Graves took over the command of the North American Squadron. This particular illness, however, was not of the body, but seemed to be preying on the Bostonians' minds and spirits. It was the disease of rebellion.

The germ had infected the colonists long ago--so long age, and so subtly, that few people could remember just how
the trouble had started. In 1765 a slightly unsavory character named Samuel Adams, in an apparent attempt to compensate for his failure to live up to his family's expectations in the business world, had placed himself at the head of a mob he called the "Sons of Liberty." Relying on viciousness and terrorism, Adams and his gang had managed to persuade Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act, a measure which, as far as anyone in the government was concerned, had been intended merely to ensure that the colonists paid their share of the expenses incurred in protecting them from the Indians.

Americans, and Bostonians in particular, seemed unable to understand the necessity for taxes of any sort. In 1767 the brilliant Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Townshend, instituted a series of duties on all paint, paper, lead, glass, and tea entering the colonies, and sent a new Board of Customs Commissioners to Boston to make sure the money was collected. The colonists objected so strenuously to the new duties that the Royal Governor of Massachusetts asked the army's commander in chief in the colonies, General Thomas Gage, for help. The then-commander of the North American Squadron, Commodore Samuel Hood, convoyed two infantry regiments down from Halifax and saw them safely billeted on the Common, in the start of a military occupation of Boston that was to continue for eight years. The presence of the troops, coupled with Parliament's repeal of
all the Townshend Duties save the one on tea, seemed to calm the waters for the time being. The Bostonians, however, seemed to experience an almost pathological fear of, and a corresponding hatred for, the "redcoats" who had been sent to keep order in the city. On the night of March 5, 1770, a sentry in King Street was attacked by a mob of men and boys armed with snowballs and rocks. About ten additional soldiers came to his assistance, and in the ensuing disorder fired their muskets into the crowd, killing five people. The propaganda value of the "Boston Massacre" (some said the villainous Sam Adams had been behind the whole thing) outweighed the legal consequences, for the only two soldiers who were found guilty were released after being branded on the hand, the minimum punishment for manslaughter. The outcome of the trial seemed to dampen the enthusiasm of the rabble-rousers for a while; by 1772 New England seemed so peaceful that General Gage, having spent the previous seventeen years in the colonies, gave himself leave to go home to England.

On May 10, 1773, Parliament passed legislation permitting the East India Company to ship half a million pounds of its tea to North America, tax-free but for the three pence per pound required by the Townshend Act. The Honourable Company had been experiencing financial difficulties recently, and hoped, by undercutting the prices not only of its British competitors but also of the colonial merchants who
were illegally sneaking Dutch tea into America, to establish a highly lucrative monopoly. On November 27 three of the Company's ships arrived at Boston, only to find that the businessmen to whom the tea had been consigned were afraid to allow it on shore. Regulations required that after a cargo had lain unloaded for twenty days it would be confiscated by the Customs Commissioners. On the nineteenth day, December 17, a contingent of the Sons of Liberty boarded the three ships and threw the tea into the harbor.

The North Atlantic weather prevented news of the "Boston Tea Party" from reaching London in good time, and bureaucratic inertia delayed the government's response. On March 7, 1774, however, Lord North, the First Minister, read to the House of Commons a message from the king. His Majesty, Lord North announced, had concluded that the "outrageous Proceedings" in Boston had no less a purpose than "obstructing the commerce of this kingdom." Parliament therefore was to take whatever steps it thought necessary to "enable his Majesty effectually to take such measures as may be most likely to put an immediate stop to the present disorders."7

A week later, on the afternoon of March 14, North rose in the Commons and asked the House's leave to bring in a bill designed "to discontinue...the landing and discharging, lading or shipping, of goods, wares, and merchandise, at the town, and within the harbour, of Boston, in the province
of Massachusetts's Bay, in North America." An atmosphere of tension immediately settled over the House; everyone present knew a great debate was about to begin. The chamber galleries, along with the hallways leading to them, were ordered cleared of spectators, lest the ensuing proceedings offend the sensibilities of the ladies. Lord North then delivered a carefully prepared speech explaining the reasoning behind the bill.  

Boston, said Lord North, was the center of the problems in the American colonies that had been plaguing the government for several years. Boston "had been the ringleader in all riots, and had at all times shewn a desire of seeing the laws of Great Britain attempted in vain, in the colony of Massachusetts Bay." Some, at least, of the other colonies were more peaceably inclined; there could be no doubt, for instance, that the tea could have been landed safely at New York. Since "Boston alone was to blame for having set this example...Boston ought to be the principal object of our attention for punishment." That punishment, North had concluded, ought not to be "by way of tax, but by war of restitution to the injured [i.e., the Directors of the East India Company], who were our own subjects; and to let it go forth to the world, that the parliament of Great Britain will protect their subjects and property." A goodly portion of the trouble in the colonies was Parliament's own fault, stemming as it did from "our own ill
conduct in taxing and repealing."  Parliament must decide, once and for all, whether or not it had any authority in Massachusetts, for "it is very clear we have none, if we suffer the property of our subjects to be destroyed."  

The debate occupied three sessions, scattered over a period of a week and a half. Most of Lord North's Tory party seemed to favor the bill, suggesting merely that it might be appropriate to give the Bostonians the opportunity to make restitution for the tea before the port was shut down. Mr. John Montagu, the second son of the First Lord of the Admiralty, made his first speech, he being a "virgin orator" and the youngest member of the House. Mr. Montagu had nothing but contempt for the activities of such ruffians as the Sons of Liberty ("Was this filial friendship? Was this that debt of gratitude which was owing to this country? Or was this that bond of mutual connection which ought to have subsisted between the mother country and its colonies?"); the bill should be passed as quickly as possible, and those Members who opposed it constituted "a faction, whose very existence had arose merely as it were from the vilest excrement of the earth."  

That faction, Mr. Montagu's denunciation notwithstanding, was capable of expressing itself with considerable eloquence. Mr. Edmund Burke, a man long identified as an American sympathizer, already had warned the Commons that to use force in the colonies would be not only ineffective but
unconstitutional. "An English government," Mr. Burke said, "must be administered in the spirit of one, or it will that moment cease to exist. As soon, I say, as the civil government of these colonies shall depend for support on a military power, the former will be that moment at an end. The spirit of English legislation is uniform, permanent, and universal; it must execute itself, or no power under heaven will be able to effect it." If his Majesty's government wanted peace in the colonies it should recall that "all dissensions, occasioned by the attempt to levy a tax there, gave way to perfect tranquility on the repeal of the Stamp Act."¹⁶

Mr. Charles James Fox already had acquired, at the age of 25, a reputation as one of the most radical actors on the political scene, and as one of the few members of the House whose speeches could be relied upon to keep Lord North from dozing off. Mr. Fox suspected that the bill, in giving the king the power to determine when Boston would be opened again, was part of an ongoing ministerial conspiracy to rob Parliament of its lawful authority. He hastened to assure the House ("in a kind of sneer," the official record of the debate noted) that he saw no reason "to distrust his Majesty's ministers, that they will not restore the port when it shall be proper; but I want to hear the reason why this clause should be so left in the judgement of the crown."¹⁷
On March 25 Burke made a last-ditch effort to stop the bill from passing. The gentlemen of the House were ill-informed, he said, if they thought the rebellious impulses were confined to Boston:

...Shew me [he said, one port in all America where the goods have been landed and vended; the distemper is general, but the punishment is local, by way of exchange. Whether it will be effectual or not, I do not know; but Sir, let me paint to this House the impropriety of a measure like this;...give orders at once to your admirals to burn and destroy the town; that will be both effectual, proper, and moderate, and of a piece with the rest of your proceedings....One town in proscription, the rest in rebellion, can never be a remedial measure for general disturbances. Have you considered whether you have troops and ships sufficient to enforce an universal proscription of the continent of America; If you have not, the attempt is childish, and the operation fruitless.18

The words of Edmund Burke, like those of most moderate men on both sides of the Atlantic that year, were ignored. Later the same afternoon the "Boston Port Bill" was passed, and within a week it had been approved by the House of Lords and sent to the king. As of June 1 no goods would be allowed into or out of Boston Harbor, as demarcated by Nahant Point to the north and Alderton Point to the south. Any ship caught in violation of the Act would, along with its cargo, be seized and placed at the disposal of the crown. The only exceptions would be granted to merchandise destined for the troops of the garrison, and to food and fuel "for the necessary use and sustenance of the inhabitants." Any vessel delivering such stores must stop at
Salem, the new site of his Majesty's Customs Office, before proceeding to Boston with one of the customs officials on board. The restrictions would remain in effect until the king was satisfied that proper restitution had been made to the East India Company, and to anybody else who had "suffered by the riots and insurrections...in 1773 and 1774."\(^{19}\)

The ministry, thinking itself aware of the commotion the Boston Port Act would create in America, took steps to make the enforcement of the legislation as untroublesome as possible. General Gage, having enjoyed a peaceful ten months away from the colonies, was recalled to duty and given orders not only to command the British troops in America but to relieve the long-suffering Thomas Hutchinson as Royal Governor of Massachusetts. Another piece of legislation already before the Commons, the "Massachusetts Government Act," would make the new governor a virtual dictator. Gage's commission was dated April 7; two weeks later he, his baggage, and an entourage of aides and servants had been bundled on board H.M. sloop-of-war Lively and, along with a stack of printed copies of the Boston Port Act, were on their way across the Atlantic.\(^{20}\)

The Lively, after a remarkably quick passage, arrived at Boston on May 13. Her captain, Thomas Bishop, promptly had himself rowed over to the squadron flagship, to deliver a dispatch from the Admiralty informing Admiral Montagu of the terms of the Boston Port Act and ordering him "to pay
the strictest attention to what passes at Boston, & to give the Governor & Civil Magistrates every assistance in his power, when thereunto required...." Montagu had his clerks make copies of the Act for all his captains, stationed the eight vessels currently at Boston so as to seal up the numerous entrances of the harbor as effectively as possible, and hoped fervently that the few weeks remaining in his three-year commission would pass before his ability to enforce the new law was put to the test. By the middle of July Montagu, the last officer to survive the command of the North American Station with his professional reputation more or less intact, was on his way home, and the responsibility for overseeing the increasingly turbulent waters off the coast of New England had fallen onto the none-too-broad shoulders of Samuel Graves.

II

As the summer wore on the activities of the North American Squadron settled into a rather dull, if exasperating, routine. Graves, having rented a house in the city to accommodate Mrs. Graves and the various social functions in which a commander-in-chief was supposed to participate, attempted as best he could to cut off the various approaches to Boston Harbor. His flagship Preston was anchored off Long Wharf, from which position Graves could communicate easily with General Gage and, simultaneously, constantly
remind the inhabitants of Boston of the presence of the Preston's 50 guns. The ex-surveying ship Canceaux guarded the channel between Boston and the hilly peninsula of Charlestown to the north, while the schooner Halifax patrolled the shallows between Noddles Island and the mouth of the Mystic River. The rest of the little ships were stationed at various points along the main channel leading up from Broad Sound. On a chart this disposition looked sensible and thorough; it would be virtually impossible for any ship to pick her way up the channel and unload her cargo at any of the Boston wharves without passing within pointblank range of one of the warships. Graves was quickly finding out, however, that enforcing the Port Act would be considerably more difficult than his Majesty, Lord North, or the House of Commons had imagined.  

Part of the trouble lay in the verbiage of the Act itself. Parliament apparently thought that, by prohibiting the "landing and discharging, lading or shipping, or goods, wares, and merchandise," it had crippled Boston's economy. A substantial portion of the city's population, however, made its living not through commerce but in various trades relating to the shipbuilding industry--and the Act referred strictly to cargoes, not ships. Graves became aware of this loophole shortly after his arrival, but John Sewall, the provincial attorney general, declared that the terms of the Act did not allow the warships to seize vessels travelling
in ballast. This decision meant that about 3,000 sailors, carpenters, caulkers, riggers, and other laborers could remain at work, and, Graves lamented, "evidently prevents that general distress among the lower class seemingly intended by the Act as one means the sooner to bring their Rulers to a proper sense of their Duty."  

The "lower class," in fact, seemed to be not only undistressed but downright comfortable. The British officers were surprised to discover that a number of wealthy merchants in the colonies to the south, contrary to the ministry's expectations, had taken such offense at the news of the Port Act that they had decided to go to the Bostonians' aid. Around the end of July several ships loaded with Carolina rice arrived at Salem, and their masters, adhering strictly to the letter of the Act, announced their intention to land their cargoes in Boston and distribute them free of charge to whoever wanted them. The Attorney General ruled that, since the rice clearly was intended "for the necessary use and sustenance of the inhabitants," Graves would have to allow it ashore.  

The individuals most inconvenienced by the Port Act were, in fact, the harassed naval officers and seamen who were trying to enforce it. They kept close watch on the tide tables and took their ships as far into shallow water as they dared. Every merchant vessel coming up the channel in daylight was intercepted and, unless she already had
received a dispensation from the Customs Commissioners, ordered to put about and head for Salem. Each day at sunset the warships hoisted out boats which, under the command of junior lieutenants and midshipmen, spent the night rowing quietly about the shallows in hopes of encountering one of the little coasting sloops and schooners that waited, just over the horizon, until dark before trying to run the blockade. Graves, he assured Mr. Stephens, the Secretary to their Lordships at the Admiralty, was executing his orders as diligently as he possibly could. He did, however, have to acknowledge that "notwithstanding the utmost attention I find that our Numbers are too few to guard all the small Channels, and that many Vessels pass unseen and supply the Town and neighborhood with smuggled [sic] and other Goods.... I have been...credibly informed that small Vessels creep up and down to and from Boston, in and out of the harbour in the night." 25

The squadron's material condition compounded the problem. The health of the crews was, considering the oppressive summer weather, remarkably good; only 15 seamen and one of the Lively's marines had had to be sent to the naval hospital at Halifax, and the surgeon there regarded only three of them as "very ill." 26 The ships themselves, however, were in considerably worse shape. Many of them had been on the station for several years, and since the start of the troubles on shore had not been able to go to Halifax
for the annual refits authorized by the Admiralty. On July 20 Captain Nicholson Bromedge, of the sloop-of-war Savage, convinced Graves that her bottom was so fouled and leaky that she would not be able to survive the coming winter. Graves sent the Savage off to Halifax, assigning her station between Deer and Long Islands to Captain Edward Meadows and the Tartar. The latter vessel had herself been in the water for a year and a half and was "in great want of repair and of all kinds of Stores," but, Graves told Mr. Stephens, "I have not a Ship to relieve her who has Boats and Men enough to examine the great number of Vessels continually passing where she is stationed."27

Graves, with almost half his force engaged in the blockade of Boston, was finding it increasingly difficult to assert his authority over the rest of the seacoast that lay within his command. On August 7 he received a letter from Governor Legge of Nova Scotia, complaining that ships habitually were entering the ports of that province from every nation of Europe, in clear violation of the Acts of Trade and the very essence of the mercantile system. The only vessel the admiral could spare for that region was the brig Gaspee (namesake of a revenue schooner which a party of rebels had captured and burned in Rhode Island two years earlier), and she was responsible for the entire American coastline from the St. Lawrence to Cape Ann, just north of Boston. Graves could only assume that the Gaspee was on
her station; her commander, Lieutenant William Hunter, had not sent in a report since the admiral's arrival. The colonies of Rhode Island and Connecticut were completely unguarded, as would be the River Delaware and the great port of Philadelphia when the little schooner Hope left for England, as she was scheduled to do at the end of the summer. Graves was of the opinion that three more schooners and either a frigate or a sloop-of-war would be needed just to stop up all the entrances to Boston. He had understood that reinforcements would be sent to him as soon as they were available; as of the first of August, however, the only additional warship to arrive at Boston had been the sloop-of-war Scarborough. Her captain, James Chad, had delivered a packet of dispatches to General Gage, along with several bags of money to pay the troops, and, pursuant to his instructions from the Admiralty, prepared to sail for England as soon as the two commanders-in-chief prepared their correspondence for him to carry. Graves pointed out to Mr. Stephens that plenty of suitable little ships were available. The fishing schooners built by the craftsmen at Marblehead, just north of Boston, were famous throughout the Empire for their great speed and fine workmanship, and three or four of them "would do considerable Service in the present Weak state of the Squadron." The Admiralty's instructions to Graves, however, had laid great stress on frugality ("you are...never...to cause or suffer the Crown
to be put to any extraordinary Expence of any kind what-soever, unless upon very urgent occasions, where the King's Service may render it absolutely necessary for you to do so”), so he hesitated to buy any such vessels without specific authorization.  

If news from London was scarce, though, that from the immediate vicinity was distinctly unpleasant. Letters came to the Preston every few days describing new and ominous developments both in the colonies and abroad. The Customs Commissioners had learned that a ship was headed for America from one of the German ports carrying firearms, gunpowder, and Copenhagen tea; her master was reported to have boasted that he didn't care on what part of the coast he landed, since every colony now had a faction that would be glad to pay whatever price he asked for his wares. Graves could respond to this intelligence only by promising to pass it on to his captains to the south—an empty gesture, considering how old the news would be by the time they got it. On August 30 a marine private who had deserted from the departed Admiral Montagu's flagship two and a half years earlier turned up at Boston and surrendered himself to the first naval officer he encountered, preferring the discipline of the Royal Navy to life in Connecticut where, he reported, "it is very dangerous to express the least attachment to His Majesty, or Great Britain."  

Commodore Joseph Loring, a retired naval officer whom General Gage had recently
appointed to the provincial council in accordance with the Massachusetts Government Act, left his country estate and brought his family to Boston after a "disguised mob" surrounded his house one night and threatened his life. "There is," Graves wrote to Mr. Stephens on the last day of August, "great reason to apprehend every extravagance of behavior from these misled violent people."\(^{31}\)

Two days later a mob gathered at Cambridge, the little college town some three miles to the west, seized the High Sheriff of Suffolk County, and forced him to sign an oath to the effect that he would "desist entirely from any execution of his office under the New Laws."\(^{32}\) That night the army pickets on Boston Neck barely managed to rescue one of the Customs Commissioners, he having been chased to the very gates of the city by a gang of thugs. The Governor wanted a frigate to anchor within range of the Neck to prevent such incidents, but Graves had no such vessel at his disposal. On the morning of September 2 every lawyer in Boston awoke to find, nailed to his door, a printed notice reading:

ANY One, and every One of the Bar, that shall presume, after this Day, to appear in Court, or otherwise, to do any Business with the Judges, shall assuredly suffer the Pains of Death.\(^{33}\)

A number of prominent Bostonians became so worried by these developments that they asked Graves for help in getting out of America altogether. The admiral ordered Captain
Chads to take as many single men as he could back to England with him in the Scarborough, and arranged with General Gage for the married men and their families to take passage in the next homeward bound troop transport. Graves continued to beg the Admiralty for reinforcements; "an effectual interposition of the Military Power," he asserted, "is I am afraid the only means left to restore these deluded people to the right Use of their reason."34

The first indication that the Admiralty had not forgotten about Graves completely arrived on September 7, in the form of the schooner Diligent, Lieutenant John Knight. The admiral stationed her, in response to General Gage's request, as close to Boston Neck as she could get--so close, in fact, that she found herself stuck in the mud every time the tide went out. Gage's troops, meanwhile, were industriously throwing up earthworks on the Neck itself. The British were not, however, the only parties engaged in such activities. Several pieces of artillery had been removed from the public magazine at Charlestown, and were rumored to have been taken to some sort of "camp" that Sam Adam's people were setting up in the countryside to the west. A couple of weeks later the boats of the Preston and Lively encountered and seized a raft loaded with six 6-pounder gun barrels in the channel between Boston and Charlestown.

As the weather turned cooler Graves began to worry about the squadron's safety over the winter. Several of the
ships, including the Preston, were short-handed; he already had had to order Captain James Montagu, of the sloop Kingfisher, to turn his press gangs loose on the fishing fleet when it returned to Quebec at the end of the season. Within a few short months Boston Harbor would be frozen solid, and the squadron would be immobilized. Rumor had it that, when that happened, the Sons of Liberty were going to conduct an expedition across the ice to capture Castle William, the army's island fortress off Dorchester.  

On October 12 help arrived from an unexpected quarter, Commodore Molyneux Shuldham, the commander of the little naval squadron patrolling the Newfoundland fishing grounds, had heard of Graves's predicament and, the fishing season being over, had sent the 28-gun frigate Rose to Boston. The Rose was a fine, handsome vessel, and her captain, James Wallace, was a young man of conspicuous vigor and ambition. Shuldham's action had been strictly unofficial, but if the Admiralty disapproved their Lordships would be unable to divert the Rose to another station for several months. Graves therefore ordered Wallace to spend the rest of the good weather cruising off the long-neglected coast of Rhode Island.  

By the beginning of November the Charles had frozen, and Graves was making plans for the squadron's disposition over the winter. Several of the ships were to take station elsewhere: the Magdalen off Philadelphia; the Kingfisher
at New York; the Diligent in the Bay of Fundy; the Savage, which had returned from the Halifax dockyard with new main and mizzen masts, in the Bahamas.37

Some two weeks later Graves was reporting that "the Winter is now set in pretty severely and very few Vessels can move...."38 The ships blockading Boston lay to their anchors, with their gunports caulked and their topmasts housed, like miniature islands amid the ice floes; Graves dared not let them tie up to the wharves lest their crews desert. General Gage's troops left their encampment on the Common and took up residence wherever temporary quarters for them could be arranged. The cold appeared to have a stultifying effect on the rebellious faction ashore as well. The number of riotous incidents seemed to go down with the temperature, and the colonial merchants were content to wait for better weather before resuming their harassment of the naval forces. One of Graves's officers did, however, bring him a pamphlet describing the activities of what its author referred to as a "Continental Congress," which had met the previous September in Philadelphia.39

In early December the long awaited reinforcements from England began to arrive. The sloop-of-war Scarborough returned on the third, this time with orders attaching her to the squadron permanently. On the fifth the 64-gun ship-of-the-line Asia, Captain George Vandeput, worked her way up the channel, to be followed four days later by another
third rate, the Boyne, 70, Captain Broderick Hartwell. The two great ships carried, in the intolerable congestion of their 'tween deck spaces, the vanguard of a battalion of extremely seasick marines, commanded by the veteran Major John Pitcairn. A dispatch from Mr. Stephens delivered by Captain Hartwell informed Graves that these "supernumerary marines" were to be put to use as he and General Gage thought best to keep order in the colony. Graves told Pitcairn to take them ashore for the time being, so they could stretch their legs and recover their equilibrium. The Admiralty dispatch also authorized Graves to purchase two of the Marblehead schooners he had been admiring, and informed him of Parliament's having passed, in October, a new law making it illegal for "any Sort of Arms or Ammunition" to be shipped into the colonies without the specific approval of the Privy Council.40

Whatever complacency Graves derived from the new arrivals was shattered by a disaster on December 10. Before dawn on that date the sloop-of-war Glasgow, fresh from a refit at the dockyard at Halifax, tried to beat her way into Boston against a contrary wind. Her Captain, William Maltby, was unfamiliar with the harbor approaches, having spent the preceeding cruising season off the coast of North Carolina. The Glasgow was two leagues south of Lighthouse Island, where the published "Nautical Remarks and Directions" suggested officers not acquainted with the harbor
should anchor until daylight, when she ran aground in the midst of a poorly-charted hazard called Konohasset Rocks. Graves sent some tenders to pull her free and tow her into the harbor, but her rudder had been torn off, her hull badly damaged below the waterline, and her stores contaminated by seawater. While the facilities at Boston would be able to repair her, the Glasgow would be out of service for four months.  

A third ship-of-the-line, the 68-gun Somerset, arrived on December 19; she had encountered rough weather during her crossing, and her captain, Edward Le Cras, had his men constantly at the pumps. On the same day the post brought Graves a letter from Captain Wallace, of the Rose. Wallace had learned, on one of his periodic visits to Newport, Rhode Island, that a party of "Inhabitants" had stolen 44 cannon from the island fortress guarding that town and hauled them off, for reasons no less obscure than ominous, to the provincial capital at Providence. Wallace, regarding these proceedings as "extraordinary," called on the governor, Mr. Joseph Wanton, to demand an explanation. The governor "very frankly told me, they had done it to prevent their falling into the hands of the King, or any of his Servants; and that they meant to make use of them, to defend themselves against any power that shall offer to molest them." When Wallace asked Wanton where he himself stood on the matter, "He answered as to himself he had no Power, and
A few evenings later Wallace attended a social function at the home of Mr. George Romes, a gentleman of Newport. Word quickly spread that the captain of the British frigate was ashore, and the disturbing news reached Mr. Romes's house that a mob was gathering with, as Wallace later remarked, "an Intent to tarr and feather" not only him but his host as well. Wallace, "determin'd to defend Myself like an Officer and an Englishman," summoned the crews of his pinnace and cutter and barricaded the house for six hours. While the expected "attack" did not materialize, Governor Wanton assured Wallace that the mob had indeed been in earnest. Wallace, understandably upset by the experience, sent the governor a letter demanding to know "whether it is War or Peace, or whether I can have the Countenance and Protection of You and the Laws, as my behaviour and Character intitle me to...." There was no response.

John Wentworth, the Royal Governor of New Hampshire, was made of sterner stuff. Portsmouth, the capital of that province, relied for its protection on a fortress, called Castle William and Mary, on an island in the middle of the Piscataqua River. Like many such installations in the colonies, Castle William and Mary contained a substantial stockpile of cannon, small arms, and ammunition, but was
manned only by a token garrison. On December 14 a gang of about 400 men, aroused by some inflammatory literature sent by the "Committee of Correspondence" in Boston, commandeered several barges and attacked the fort. Having subdued the army captain, five soldiers, and six invalids who were the only defenders, the mob absconded with most of the contents of the powder house. Governor Wentworth immediately notified Graves and Gage, hinting that the presence of "some strong Ships of War in this Harbour" might have prevented the incident. Graves, as soon as he received the Governor's letter late on the evening of December 16, ordered Captain Barkley of the Scarborough and Lieutenant Mowat of the Canceaux to get under way and go to Wentworth's aid. By the time the two warships had anchored in the Piscataqua the industrious rebels had carried off 16 of the castle's 71 cannon and most of the small arms. The arrival of the Canceaux and Scarborough did, however, effectively cut off the barge traffic in the river, and Wentworth issued an official proclamation ordering the magistrates of New Hampshire "to exert themselves in detecting and securing in some of his Majesty's Gaols in this Province the...offenders, in Order to their being brought to condign punishment." The navy had come to the rescue—and as long as the navy was visibly present the king's servants and property in New Hampshire would be safe.

Back in Boston Samuel Graves and his officers were able
to enjoy the holiday season in about as much serenity as could be expected under the circumstances. The harbor, now dominated by the towering silhouettes of the three ships-of-the-line, was peaceful; the ice could be relied upon to enforce the Port Act at least as efficiently as the warships had been able to during the summer. With the maritime trade of New England, legal and illegal, at a virtual standstill, the only urgent matter claiming Graves's attention was the disposition of Major Pitcairn's marine detachment. The Admiralty's orders gave Graves and Gage complete discretion as to how and where the marines were to be put to use. Graves originally had intended to keep them on board the ships that had brought them, presumably so that they could be transported with a minimum of delay to wherever any situation might demand. Ordinarily the captains of the Boyne, Asia, Somerset, and Scarborough might well have welcomed such an arrangement; all those vessels had sailed under complement, and while marines were not seamen they could at least tail onto a halyard or push on a capstone bar. In a squadron wintering in harbor, however, 300 additional human bodies could only render the already congested and malodorous conditions in the ships' berth decks intolerable. General Gage, furthermore, wanted all the trained land forces in the city he could get, and he and Pitcairn both pointed out that the marines could be better drilled and disciplined on Boston Common than they could on
the narrow decks of the ships. After considerable discussion it was agreed that Graves would keep 50 of the marines on board the ships, but that the others, along with the rest of the 600-man detachment whenever it should arrive from England, would be billeted alongside the soldiers ashore. Gage, at Pitcairn's suggestion, arranged for his headquarters staff to issue the marines the same pay and provisions the army personnel were getting, on the grounds that, as the general put it, "As they are all employed in the same Service, if some are treated differently than others, it may Occasion Grumbling and discontent, which must be very prejudicial to the Service...." By Christmas the marines, along with a navy surgeon Graves had detailed to look after them, had been ferried ashore and were established in the barracks the army sappers had built for them.

One of the squadron's officers got an unusually handsome Christmas present. The admiral, in accordance with the Admiralty dispatch he had received on December 9, purchased, for £750, a schooner called the Diana which, he proudly told Mr. Stephens, "is allowed to be the best Vessel of the Kind that has been yet in the Kings Service." The squadron carpenters undertook the task of modifying the Diana to accommodate a big navy crew, as well as six light cannon that the schooner St. Lawrence had left behind in the autumn when she went home for her refit. The king's new schooner must, of course, have a commanding officer, and
there was no reason for Graves not to make use, for the first time in his current commission, of the navy's time-honored method of filling such vacancies. He therefore placed the Diana under the command of one of his nephews, Thomas Graves, who had been serving as first lieutenant of the Lively.  

The new addition to the squadron came at an opportune moment for, while the crews of the ships at Boston were still in far better health than Graves had any right to expect, several of the vessels themselves were in a sorry state. The Glasgow, with her sails and stores packed away in a warehouse on Noddles Island, was waiting for the spring thaw so the carpenters could repair her bottom. The Halifax, Graves reported, "is so very leaky and out of Repair, and is in such continual want of patching to make her swim, that she is totally unfit for any service but to be at Anchor," while the Hope "is in very little better Condition, and must go to England when the Season will allow me to venture her." The sloop-of-war Tamar was overdue for a refit as well.

The North Atlantic winter also was taking its toll. On January 3 the Rose encountered the frigate Hind, which was under orders to deliver a detachment of 200 more marines to Boston before proceeding to join Admiral Parry's squadron in the Leeward Islands. She was so leaky that Graves ordered her to transfer the marines to the Rose and
be on her way south without delay; Parry, with the dockyard at Antigua at his disposal, could deal with her better than the overworked Boston facilities could. Captain Wallace already was shepherding a hired army transport, the William and Ann, which had sustained so much damage during her passage from England that her captain dared not try to carry his cargo of ordnance stores on to New York for fear she might sink on the way.

On January 10 a court martial board convened in the great cabin of the Somerset to try Captain Maltby of the Glasgow. Maltby, already under a shadow as a result of his having run his ship aground, was accused of embezzling his crew's share of the prize money due them for two captures the Glasgow had made in 1772, and of treating his gunner, Mr. James Bignall, "in a cruel and oppressive manner." The court relieved Maltby of his command (and, for the sake of discipline, mulcted Mr. Bignall of 12 months' pay), thereby setting off a series of promotions. Captain Tyringham Howe moved from the Cruizer into the Glasgow, Lieutenant Francis Parry was promoted to Commander and given the command of the Cruizer, and, inevitably, Lieutenant John Graves, another of the admiral's nephews, relieved Parry as first lieutenant of the Preston.

About ten days later General Gage forwarded to Admiral Graves a petition from "a Number of Inhabitants of Scituate and Marshfield," two coastal villages about 20 miles
southeast of Boston. The petitioners, who included a local justice of the peace, complained of the behavior of "many ill disposed people, who declare their intention of Assembling in great Numbers to attack & destroy us and many others among us who are determined as far as in us lies to Support the Laws of the Realm, and repel by force every unlawful Attempt to destroy his Majestys good Government over us...." Gage promptly loaded 120 of his troops on board one of the army's hired transports and sent them, with Lieutenant Graves's Diana as escort, to Marshfield. The results of this little expedition were predictable: whatever illegal activity had been taking place ceased as soon as the soldiers arrived, and the newspapers used the episode as an excuse to discharge a volley of uncomplimentary language at the loyalists and the army. The Boston Gazette professed itself...

...at a loss for the Occasion of this extraordinary Manoeuvre, as all our Accounts from Marshfield agree, that the People in that Vicinity were peaceable and no Injury had been offered to any of the Tories....The Letters from thence agree that the Number and Quality of the Petitioners are despicable ....The sending the Soldiers alarms and irritates the Country; but what Service the Tory Cause is to receive from this step, Time will discover.62

It was difficult for the British officers to know how many of the stories floating about New England had at least some factual basis and how many were pure rumor. Captain Wallace, for example, received a letter from an Anglican clergyman in New Jersey warning him that certain rebels of
unknown identity were planning to lead an expedition of 100 men, concealed in one of the regular coastwise packet boats, to board and capture the Rose where she lay at anchor in Newport Harbor. The good rector was aware of the outlandish nature of the scheme, but reminded Wallace that "no project is too hazardous or too wicked for some of the Rebellious Fanatics of New England to attempt." In the middle of February an incident occurred that affected Graves personally—and which, though he regarded it as too trivial to mention in any of his dispatches, created something of an uproar. An English merchantman arrived at Marblehead bearing as part of her cargo two boxes of wax candles addressed to the admiral's purser. Before the merchant captain could deliver them, however, his vessel was boarded by several characters who identified themselves as the Marblehead "Committee of Inspection" representing the "Continental Association." The latter body, they announced with appropriate legalistic flourishes, had prohibited any sort of intercourse between the colonies and the Kingdom of Great Britain, unless Parliament should see fit to repeal the Boston Port Act. If, to put the matter in simple terms, the admiral persisted in his attempts to keep the merchants of Boston from making a living, the Committee of Inspection intended to keep the admiral from getting his candles.

When he received word of this development Graves found
himself in a predicament. Quite apart from his need for candles (an important commodity in view of the amount of correspondence that had to be written by candlelight every day on board a Royal Navy flagship), the actions of the Marblehead rebels were intolerable. The spectacle of the Royal Navy rendered incapable of wresting two boxes of candles from the clutches of the Committee of Inspection was precisely the sort that delighted colonial newspaper editors. In an attempt to suit the solution to the problem, and in the process to alleviate the squadron's manpower shortage, Graves ordered Captain Bishop, of the sloop-of-war Lively, to proceed to Marblehead and turn loose a press gang.

When the Lively anchored off Marblehead the town's populace took such offense at her appearance that Bishop was afraid to let any of his men go ashore. He did, however, send one of his officers, Lieutenant Lechmere, off in a boat to intercept a merchant vessel that was on her way into the harbor. When Lechmere, having impressed two members of the merchantman's crew, started to pull back to the Lively, he found himself surrounded by eight or ten whaleboats filled with armed men. The navy boat's crew, fortunately, had been issued muskets, and though one of the pressed men managed to jump overboard during the excitement, Lechmere was able to get the other one on board the Lively without a shot being fired. During the next few days
Bishop impressed several more seamen from incoming vessels, with the result that the businessmen of Marblehead began to suffer financially: no captain would bring his ship into the harbor for fear of losing his crew to the navy. The Committee of Inspection, under pressure from the town selectmen, sent Graves a letter apologizing for its earlier actions and offering to hand over the candles to any messenger the admiral might send for them. Graves indignantly demanded that the two boxes be delivered into the hands of his purser in Boston. The Committee, confronted by the guns of the *Lively*, had no choice but to comply.

When word of the episode at Marblehead reached Boston, as one of the army officers noted in his diary, "...the Congress at Cambridge had the assurance to vote Adml. Greaves a Traitor to his country and voted also to petition the King that He wou'd relieve him from this Station and dismiss him the service;...the Adml. wants to burn their Town, and it is with difficulty the Genl. can prevent him; they certainly deserve it for their insolence."^65

By this time New England was experiencing occasional days of mild weather. Major Pitcairn, concerned about the health and morale of his marines, made use of every opportunity to march them out past the fortifications on Boston Neck and along the many roads that ran through the Suffolk County countryside. The marines presented a brave spectacle, even with their winter overcoats covering their red
tunics, and the civilians they met offered no resistance beyond a few muttered oaths. Pitcairn was, nonetheless, disturbed about the appearance of his battalion. He complained to Lord Sandwich, who seems to have been a personal friend, that

...I have but a small battalion on shore: there were still fifty of the supernumeraries that were ordered out on board ship, this hurts the appearance of the battalion greatly, as they are the best of our men and ten of them belong to our light infantry company. I have spoken often to the Admiral about this, but to no effect; it was much against his inclination that he landed any of us. This distresses me greatly, as I have a great desire to convince everybody of the utility of keeping a large body of marines, who are capable of acting either by sea or land as the public service may require. One observation I beg leave to make to your Lordship at this place, which is that I am a good deal hurt and mortified to find the marines so much shorter than the men are in the [army] regiments--the men of the Plymouth division extremely short indeed. I wish the standard was raised: no marine, in my opinion, ought to be taken who is under five feet six inches, and even not at that size if above twenty years of age.66

On the last day of February, to Graves's delight, the schooner Hope arrived. She had sailed from Boston on Christmas day to join Captain Wallace off Rhode Island, but had not been heard from since; Graves had assumed that she had capsized in a gale that blew up shortly after her departure. In fact the Hope had been caught by a northwest wind off Nantucket Shoals, but her commander, Lieutenant George Dawson, had managed to save her by running before it all the way to Bermuda. Dawson and his crew had spent the
rest of the winter enjoying the balmy climate of that island while the damage to the little schooner was being repaired. 67

The pleasure Graves felt at the Hope's unexpected arrival was, however, lessened substantially later the same day by the news that the treacherous coast of New England had claimed another victim from among his squadron. Lieutenant Joseph Nunn and the crew of the schooner Halifax came into Boston by the undignified medium of a colonial wood sloop. The Halifax, Nunn reported, had been working her way carefully along the coast of Maine when the civilian pilot managed to run her onto a rock. The sea had pounded the ship to pieces, and Nunn and his men felt themselves lucky to have escaped with their lives and the clothes on their backs. 68

As the spring thaw approached, Graves found it necessary to concern himself again with the affairs of the colonies beyond his immediate vicinity. From Mr. Cadwallader Colden, the Lieutenant Governor of New York, came the news that all was not well in that province. The government in London regarded New York as a bastion of loyalty and good sense among the demented inhabitants of the other colonies, and indeed the New York Assembly had courageously refused to subscribe to the boycott of British goods initiated by the Continental Association. "Yet," Mr. Colden wrote, "we have among Us a set of violent Spirits of the lowest Rank, and desperate fortunes, countenanced by
a few of superior condition, who lay hold of every occasion to arouse Mob & excite Sedition." There were rumors that the city was going to be attacked by a band of armed rebels from the south, and while Colden did not "believe that there is any other design than to bully," he pointed out that "no man can tell which men in a Phrenzy may do (which seems to prevail over the Continent)...." Since the end of the last war with the French the army garrison had been progressively reduced, and now consisted of only 100 men. "Now Sir," Colden addressed Graves, "I must leave to your Judgement whether it may be for his Majts Service to send a large Man of War to this port, which can on occasion put two or three hundred men on shore."  

Over the past eight months Graves had become accustomed to receiving, and usually rejecting, letters begging him to send ships to almost every part of North America. New York, though, was a port of such importance to the British Empire that Colden's request scarcely could be ignored. The admiral therefore decided to send the Asia to confront the city with her 64 guns.

Colden's suggestion that the warship sent to New York be able to land a military detachment obviously was a sound one, but created unexpected problems. This was precisely the sort of duty for which the "supernumerary" marines had been sent out from England; a detachment of, say, 50, in conjunction with the Asia's normal marine
establishment, ought to be able to deal with any uprising of the sort that Colden seemed to anticipate. Graves therefore went ashore to discuss the matter with General Gage. The latter, much to the admiral's astonishment, refused to part with a single one of the marines who were billeted in the city. They had, he said, been formally attached to the army as soon as they had left the ships, and thus were under the army's jurisdiction. Gage, being a gentleman, was courteous but emphatic: none of the marines was going to leave Boston.

Graves, in other words, no longer had any authority whatever over the marines, whom he had previously regarded as "his." Reference to his orders provided him with no firm argument to the contrary: the Admiralty had said simply that the marines were to be employed as the admiral and the general thought best. Graves apparently realized that there was no point in pursuing the subject further with Gage, so he tried a more devious technique. By March 3 Major Pitcairn, who had the misfortune to be caught in the crossfire between the two commanders-in-chief, was lamenting to Lord Sandwich that

The Admiral distresses me much....Yesterday morning he sent for me and told me that I must embark such a number [fifty] of marines on board the Asia. I told him that I should do it with the utmost pleasure, if it was in my power, but I was absolutely under the command of General Gage and could order nothing but as he directed me; that if I did, I was liable to be tried and broke for it. It is
needless for me to tell your Lordship how he talked to me and what he said; but be assured that nothing he says or does shall make me deviate from the rules of politeness and the respect due to an admiral and the commander of a squadron. I waited on the General and told him what had passed: he was greatly surprised at it and could scarce believe me. He told me the Admiral was with him the day before, asking for those men; that he told him he could not spare them, administration had wrote to him that there were five hundred marines sent as a reinforcement to him, and that he had not got four hundred; and as he was every day threatened with being attacked by many thousands, he could not part with any of his troops. I should not have troubled your Lordship with this affair if the Admiral had not threatened to represent me to the Board; and as he may, I thought it necessary in this private letter to make you master of the whole story. Permit me once more, before I have done with this affair, to assure your Lordship that nothing shall make me behave with incivility or want of respect to any admiral or commanding officer.

Samuel Graves's short temper was acquiring a considerable reputation. That he should be in low spirits as the spring of 1775 approached was, however, understandable. The episode involving the supernumerary marines was only one of a staggering number of incidents, each seemingly trivial in itself, that were turning his tenure as Commander-in-Chief in North America into a nightmare of frustration. The increasingly warm March winds, furthermore, promised only to make the situation worse, as the melting of the ice in Boston Harbor permitted the rebels to resume their good-weather techniques of harassing the navy. They already were making use of their bullying tactics to try to keep
the harbor pilots from agreeing to serve on board the warships, and Graves suspected that someone in the postal service was opening his mail. The scanty communications from Whitehall solemnly repeated every rumor their Lordships had heard about vessels carrying contraband goods across the Atlantic, but the steady flow of reinforcements the squadron was supposed to be receiving from England still had not materialized into more than a trickle. Graves was, he wrote to Mr. Stephens on March 19, "extremely mortified that notwithstanding the King's Ships and Vessels have been very active all this Winter no seizures of any Consequence have been made. The variety of places well adapted for smugglers along this great extent of Coast, renders our Chance of intercepting them, with the few Vessels we have at present, very uncertain." The coming of the warm weather did, at least, give the carpenters the opportunity to do something about the condition of the ships. The little Glasgow still needed work done to repair the damage done when she had run aground in December, and all three of the ships-of-the-line were leaking. ("The sudden Departure of these ships from England," Graves judiciously hinted to Mr. Stephens, "prevented perhaps their being as well fitted and stored as they otherwise would have been." The Asia and Somerset, in fact, were in such condition below their waterlines that they had to be resheathed. The squadron's boats undertook
the herculean task of ferrying the guns and heavy stores ashore to expose the lower parts of the two great ships' hulls, so that gangs of men with crowbars could rip the old sheathing boards off and replace them with freshly sawn planks. The oakum caulking in the seams of the Somerset's also had to be replaced. Graves was proud of the speed with which these tasks, normally regarded as proper work for a fully-equipped dockyard, were accomplished. By April 11 the Somerset was back on her station in the Charles, covering Boston with one of her batteries and Charlestown with the other; the Boyne, her decks freshly caulked, would be ready for service in a few more days, and the Asia, with three months' fresh stores on board, was anchored in the roadstead awaiting the admiral's orders. The sloop-of-war Falcon was, according to the Admiralty's letters, due from England shortly; as soon as she showed up Graves, having been rebuffed in a last attempt to extricate 50 of the marines from the clutches of General Gage, would send Captain Vandeput on his way to New York.

The Falcon, in company with another sloop, the Nautilus, arrived on April 16. Captain John Collins, of the latter vessel, delivered an Admiralty dispatch, dated January 28, that gave Graves permission to buy three more American schooners and, if he thought it necessary, hire a further two or three on a temporary basis; six more sloops-of-war, meanwhile, were fitting out in the Royal Dockyards to
reinforce him.\textsuperscript{75}

The letter from Mr. Stephens was indeed heartening, and six schooners would be valuable additions to the squadron. Before Graves could start looking for suitable vessels, however, another matter demanded his attention. General Gage had received reports that a supply of guns and ammunition was being collected on a farm near Concord, a little village some 20 miles northwest of Boston. Just what the rebels intended to do with this warlike materiel was unclear, but their activities could not be tolerated. Gage therefore proposed to send an expedition composed of soldiers and marines, under the army's Lieutenant Colonel Francis Smith with Major Pitcairn as second in command, to find the arsenal and destroy it. John Hancock and Samuel Adams, two of Boston's most notorious agitators, were rumored to be staying at an inn at Lexington, which lay on the road between Boston and Concord; with luck, and if the troops could get out of Boston without arousing the populace, they might be able to arrest the two rebel leaders as well.

Gage had decided about two weeks earlier that the best route for such an exercise would be across the Back Bay and through Cambridge, since the road over Boston Neck would take the men several miles out of their way. He therefore asked Graves to make the naval squadron's boats, in addition to those of the army transports, available to carry 800 soldiers and marines across the bay.
At 8:00 on the evening of April 18, in accordance with the orders Graves had distributed to his captains the previous day, all the boats of the squadron converged on the Boyne, where she lay off the end of Long Wharf. One of her officers, Lieutenant John Bourmaster, gave the various midshipmen and coxwains their instructions, and the flotilla, making as little noise as possible, rowed around the northern end of the peninsula and across the Back Bay to the foot of the Common, where the troops were waiting. The marines had been exercised in amphibious operations before, but considerable time passed while the soldiers, encumbered by their muskets, cartridge boxes, and packs containing a day's rations, climbed awkwardly over the boats' gunwales and took their places in orderly rows on the thwarts. It was 10:30 before the entire 800-man force, along with the officers' horses, had embarked and was on its way across the mile or so of muddy water that separated Boston from the designated landing place at Phipps's Farm. The operation had been timed to coincide with high tide (the only time the Back Bay was passable), but many of the boats rode so low in the water that they ran onto the mud while they were still several yards out from the land. The troops therefore had to wade through knee-deep water to the marshes where their officers began the task of organizing the various units for the long march ahead of them. By the time the men had been properly formed
up it was midnight.  

Back on board the warships, once the bustle attending the hoisting out of the boats had subsided, the navy's peaceful routine went on as usual. All hands save those on watch retired to their hammocks, looking forward with little relish to the following day when, presumably, the boats would have to carry the soldiers and marines back to Boston. The officers standing watch on the quarterdeck of the *Somerset*, anchored as she had been for the past week in the Charles between Boston and Charlestown, idly observed the proceedings at Phipps's Farm through their telescopes. By the light of the full moon they could just discern the corpulent form of Major Pitcairn as he mounted his horse and, at the head of the advance detachment of the expedition, rode off at an easy pace down the road toward Lexington.

Had they happened to glance down at the water beneath the *Somerset*'s counter they also would have observed the progress of a little rowboat which, under muffled oars, was bearing one Paul Revere across the river to Charlestown.
NOTES: CHAPTER ONE

1. Adm. Samuel Graves to Philip Stephens, July 6, 1774, AMD 1/485, (LC Film).


3. Admiralty to S. Graves, April 16, 1774, ADM 2/99, (PRO).

4. S. Graves to Stephens, July 6, 1774, ADM 1/485, (LC Film); Adm. to S. Graves, April 16, 1774, ADM 2/99, (PRO).

5. Ibid.


7. Ibid.


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p. 1166.


15. Ibid., p. 1174.

16. Ibid., pp. 1161-1162.

17. Ibid., p. 1177.

18. Ibid., pp. 1183-1185.


22. S. Graves to Stephens, Aug. 8, 1774, ADM 1/485 (LC Film).

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.


27. S. Graves to Stephens, Aug. 8, 1774, ADM 1/485 (LC Film).

28. Ibid.


30. S. Graves to Stephens, Aug. 31, 1774, ADM 1/485, (LC Film).

31. Ibid.

32. S. Graves to Stephens, Sept. 3, 1774, ADM 1/485 (LC Film).

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.


36. "Grave's Conduct" (LC Trans.), I, pp. 32-34

37. S. Graves to Stephens, Nov. 3, 1774, ADM 1/485, (LC Film).

38. S. Graves to Stephens, Nov. 20, 1774, ADM 1/485, (LC Film).

39. Ibid.


42. Captain James Wallace to S. Graves, Dec. 12, 1774, NDAR, I, p. 15.

43. Ibid.


52. S. Graves to Stephens, Jan. 8, 1775, NDAR, I, pp. 59-60.

57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., p. 59.
59. "Results of a court martial held on board the Somerset," Jan. 10, 1775, ADM I/485, (LC Film).
63. Thomas B. Chandler to Wallace, Feb. 1, 1775, NDAR, I, p. 76.
65. Diary of Lieutenant John Barker, Feb. 8, 1775, NDAR, I, pp. 81-82.
68. Lieut. Joseph Nunn to S. Graves, March 1, 1775, NDAR, I, p. 117.
70. Pitcairn to Sandwich, March 4, 1775, NDAR, I, pp. 124-125.
71. "Graves's Conduct" (LC Trans.), I, p. 74.
72. S. Graves to Stephens, March 19, 1775, ADM 1/485, (LC Film).
73. S. Graves to Stephens, April 11, 1775, NDAR, I, pp. 176-178.


76. Gage to S. Graves, April 5, 1775, NDAR, I, pp. 168-169.

CHAPTER TWO
Samuel Graves, April–June, 1775

It was midafternoon before the news of what had happened to Colonel Smith's expedition reached Boston. Adams and Hancock had been warned and had disappeared into the woods somewhere near Lexington; a gang of rebels identifying themselves as a militia company had been waiting for Pitcairn's advance detachment on Lexington Green, and shots had been exchanged. Another rebel unit had fired on the British troops at Concord and, though Smith had managed to carry out his primary mission of destroying the illegal arsenal, his return to Boston turned into an agony of frustration. People with muskets appeared mysteriously all along the Charlestown road, crouching behind every piece of cover to fire on the troops as they passed. "The Rebels," as Samuel Graves later relayed the story to Mr. Stephens, "followed the Indian manner of fighting, concealing themselves behind Hedges and Trees, and skulking in Woods and Houses, where they galled the Soldiers exceedingly."¹

General Gage, fortunately, had expected that some such difficulty might develop and had sent a 900-man relief
detachment, commanded by Lord Hugh Percy, out over Boston Neck to meet Smith and Pitcairn on their way back through Lexington. By 5:00 a careful listener in Boston could hear, from far off to the west, the dull booming of Percy's two field pieces. Graves, not knowing precisely what was going on but anxious lest the navy be caught unprepared, ordered all the squadron's marines to the Somerset, she being the warship closest to the sound of the guns. Bringing the marines across from their respective ships involved considerable work for the boat crews—work that had to be repeated almost immediately when, at Gage's request, the admiral ordered the long-suffering marines back down the Somerset's side, into the boats, and across the river to land at Charlestown.

By 7:30 the first of the retreating British troops were making their way over Charlestown Neck. On the grassy northern slope of Bunker Hill, which dominated the peninsula, they hastily threw up a little fortification (soon to be labelled "Montressor's Redan," after the engineer officer who supervised its construction), in the hope that the pursuing rebels could be kept out of Charlestown long enough for the troops to get across the river to Boston. That precaution was, as it turned out, unnecessary, for the presence of the marines in Charlestown and the Somerset's 32-gun broadside just offshore served to ensure that the last phase of the unpleasant operation could proceed
without interruption. The soldiers and marines who came straggling down the beach and into the warships' boats scarcely resembled the column that had departed for Lexington less than 24 hours earlier. Smith's and Pitcairn's men had marched some 40 miles in the intervening period, and Lord Percy's relief detachment, having made its way to Lexington via the long route over Boston Neck, was nearly as exhausted. Red tunics and white crossbelts had been discolored by dirt, smoke, and, in a shocking number of cases, blood. Improvised litters carried the many wounded who were unable to walk.

Admiral Graves, having satisfied himself that the loading was proceeding as well as could be expected, had himself rowed over to Long Wharf and made his way through the streets of Boston to Province House, the governor's mansion. The extraordinary behavior of the colonials at Lexington and Concord, Graves had concluded, demanded an extraordinary response, and he had come to discuss with Gage just what that response should be. As far as Graves was concerned a war had started, and the military and naval forces at Boston were in serious danger. The disease that had been dormant in Massachusetts since his arrival had burst forth into a genuine epidemic, and had driven a substantial number of the inhabitants--just how many no one could tell--clean out of their senses. If these demented people should entrench themselves in Charlestown and Roxbury,
the village at the south end of Boston Neck, they would, in effect, have Boston in a state of siege. Their Lordships in London, even if they could be made to believe that the events of April 19 actually had taken place, would be unable to send a relief expedition for at least three months. There was a real possibility that, during that period, the garrison and loyal citizenry of Boston would starve to death.

Action, Graves asserted, must be taken at once. Charlestown and Roxbury should be evacuated and burned to the ground. The army should throw up major earthworks on Bunker Hill and Dorchester Heights. The marines still attached to the warships could be landed to reinforce the garrison, and if the general would withdraw the regiment from Castle William Graves would man it with seamen.  

The governor, attempting to maintain his equilibrium at the end of a nerve-wracking day, declined to act on any of the admiral's suggestions. Thomas Gage had spent most of his professional life in America, and was reluctant to treat as enemies the people of what he regarded as his country. The scheme of levelling Charlestown and Roxbury he rejected as "rash and sanguinary." Surely there was no need to turn Boston into a fortress by building redoubts all around it. Besides, Gage's 4,000 troops, even with the addition of the marines, would barely be enough to defend the city itself without his spreading them about the
When Graves left Province House on his way back to his flagship it was late at night, but most of Boston was still awake. The causeway over the Neck was clogged with wagons, animals, and pedestrians, the persons and possessions of hundreds of Massachusetts residents who, for one reason or another, had come to be labelled "Tories" and felt that the city was the only place left in the colony where respectable people need not fear for their lives and property. They told frightening and scarcely believable stories of how hundreds of filthy men and boys, most of them carrying weapons, seemed to have appeared from nowhere and were descending on Boston. Graves, as his barge carried him out to the Preston, could see that the rebels had built campfires on every hill in the neighborhood, making the tranquil Boston Harbor look like a pool in the midst of hell. The governor, Graves concluded, might well be making a mistake in not taking these people more seriously.

Gage's seeming complacency did not, however, prevent Graves from taking some warlike steps of his own. On April 20 the flagship secretaries and clerks had to contend with a veritable storm of orders. The Hope, with two confiscated lumber sloops in company, was to go to Marshfield and bring back the army detachment that had been keeping order there. Captain Le Cras was to inform the Charlestown Selectmen that the moment any armed rebels appeared there, or attempted to
fortify Bunker Hill, the *Somerset* would open fire on the town. Orders went out to the warship captains that all non-naval traffic (except fishing boats) in the harbor was to cease; the niceties imposed by the Port Act were to be abandoned. No boat was to be allowed across the Charles without a pass from either the admiral or the governor, and no boats at all were to be allowed to move anywhere in the harbor after dark. A new nighttime routine was to be observed throughout the squadron: the ships were to be kept cleared for action all night with their matches lit and their boats in the water ready to be manned. The number of boats rowing guard was to be doubled.\(^5\)

Graves realized that his ships, despite the comforting appearance they presented to the people in Boston, were terrifyingly vulnerable. Any of the sloops and schooners, manned by only a few dozen men, could be overwhelmed by a couple of boatloads of determined rebels if she were taken by surprise. Even the *Somerset*, whose presence off Charlestown Neck, Graves claimed afterwards, had kept the incident of April 19 from turning into a catastrophe, would find herself in a decidedly awkward position if the rebels did decide to fortify the heights above Charlestown. When the tide was out she could not move more than a few yards without running onto the mud, and at high water her boats would have to pull her out against the tide. With that point in mind Graves decided, with Gage's permission, to take steps
to protect the *Somerset*. On the morning of April 23 the Asia landed a lieutenant and a party of marines who, armed with shovels and carpenter's tools, started work on a redoubt at the top of a little promontory in northeastern Boston called Copp's Hill. One of Gage's artillery officers supervised the proceedings. The next day the *Somerset* herself landed an additional work party, and the sailors of the *Preston* and *Boyne* began the tricky chore of hoisting out two of each of these vessels' great 24-pounders and hauling them by boat to the foot of Copp's Hill. Within a few more days "the Admiral's Battery," as the amused soldiers called it, was finished, and the four big guns were pointing directly at Charlestown. The *Somerset* was now protected against any potential flanking fire from north of the Charles, and if the rebels should try to fortify the peninsula they would find themselves under fire from far heavier artillery than they could possibly bring to bear in response.6

The admiral had now deployed his squadron as effectively as possible and taken every feasible step to ensure the safety of his ships. That being the case there was little for him to do but pace his quarterdeck, glare at the shore through his telescope, and wait for either Gage or the rebels to take some offensive action. The New England spring brought with it pleasant weather and ever-increasing hours of daylight, which under normal circumstances would
have been exhilarating to the hundreds of naval officers and seamen who had been cooped up in their ships all winter. Yet the dominant emotion in the squadron was frustration, tinged with a reluctance to believe that the events of the last few weeks were not the figment of someone's imagination. Graves, while he could honestly tell himself that he had done his duty as well as any officer could have, was both exasperated and embarrassed. He knew full well that his powerful squadron, immobilized in this god-forsaken harbor and incapable of preventing a gang of ruffians armed with pitchforks and rusty muskets from making a mockery of the king's government, was presenting a spectacle that neither his brother officers nor their Lordships were likely to think tolerable.

The news from elsewhere on the American coast was scarcely such as to buoy the admiral's spirits. A dispatch boat from Newport (the regular overland mail service having, as far as the British were concerned, long since ceased to function) brought Gage a letter from the insufferable Governor Wanton, complaining that Captain Wallace and the Rose were interfering with the legitimate trade of Rhode Island. From Captain James Montagu, whose sloop-of-war Kingfisher was attempting to keep order at New York, came word that "The Major part of the People here are almost in a State of Rebellion, they have broke open the City Hall, and distributed the City Armes to the Mob, were it not for
the Assistance I have given the Transports, make not the least doubt but they would have burnt them agreeable to their determination." Graves, of course, had known for some time of the nervous situation in New York, but matters closer to home had been demanding his attention. The arrival of Montagu's dispatch refreshed his memory, and caused him at last to act on his old idea of sending the Asia to New York. Her departure would leave the squadron seriously depleted, but her 64 guns probably would be of more value in subduing the rebellious impulses of the New Yorkers than floating around the shallows of Boston Harbor, which was scarcely suited to the operations of a ship-of-the-line in any case. On May 1 Graves sent Captain Vandeput his orders, and on the eighth the Asia, having spent more than a week waiting for a fair wind, put to sea.

The letters trickling in from the distant parts of his command were an uncomfortable reminder to Graves of just how weak his squadron was. Captain Wallace sent a copy of a petition presented him by nine loyal citizens of Newport, reporting that the Rhode Island Assembly had voted to raise 500 men to fight the British. Lieutenant Mowat, whose Canceaux had been anchored off Falmouth, Maine, since the middle of April, had received a petition from the loyalists of that village: they had heard rumors that the Canceaux was going to sail back to Boston, leaving them "a prey to the Sons of rapine and lawless Violence." They begged
Mowat to delay his departure until they could notify Graves and Gage of "our deplorable Situation." Mowat, as it happened, could well appreciate what the loyalists were talking about. On May 9 he and his ship's surgeon, having gone ashore with no more militant purpose in mind than to stretch their legs, had been surrounded and taken prisoner by a band of armed men; only the sight of the Canceaux, with springs fitted to her cables, had persuaded the rebels to turn the captain and the doctor loose. Mowat promised to wait for further orders before leaving Falmouth.

Captain James Montagu, still waiting for the Asia to arrive at New York, reported that several of the prominent citizens of that port had been driven from their homes and forced to take refuge on board the Kingfisher. Nor was the panicky atmosphere confined to the northern provinces. A letter came from Lord Dunmore, the Royal Governor of Virginia, announcing that "The People of this Colony are taking up Arms in all Parts of it, and every Species of Violence is threatened to be executed upon me." Dunmore had been reduced to the indignity of issuing weapons to his own family, and had transferred the colony's store of gunpowder from the magazine at Williamsburg to the hold of the sloop-of-war Fowey. The governor had nothing but praise for Captain George Montagu of that vessel, and for Lieutenant Henry Collins of the schooner Magdalen, but was worried that, "as the Commotion is becoming hourly more general," the
naval force in Chesapeake Bay might prove to be inadequate. He therefore wanted Graves to send him a ship-of-the-line.\textsuperscript{15} That request, while extravagant, was by no means unreasonable; Dunmore had every right to think that the safety of Virginia was just as important as that of Massachusetts. Graves, however, had to refuse.\textsuperscript{16} After discussing the matter briefly with Gage he wrote a polite letter to Dunmore, explaining that the situation in Boston was such that "I could not without the utmost Risque send another large Ship [besides the Asia] from hence."\textsuperscript{17} As soon as reinforcements arrived from England Graves would try to send a ship-of-the-line or a frigate to Virginia; in the meantime he would add the little sloop Otter to the two vessels already stationed there, and Dunmore would have to make do with that force as best he could.\textsuperscript{18}

Not the least of Graves's problems was that of obtaining food and other necessities for the troops and civilians in Boston. Various supply and ordnance ships were expected from England at any time, but the government had no reason not to assume, in the absence of any knowledge of the events of April 19, that the great city was capable of providing for itself. Gage was unwilling to risk sending foraging parties into the countryside, and the rebel officials at Cambridge had decreed that anyone caught selling supplies to the British would be put to death. The responsibility for feeding both the garrison and the population therefore fell
to the navy.

The naval officers tried several tactics for procuring food by force, but that task proved difficult. Captain John Linzee of the Falcon, for instance, commandeered a pair of colonial sloops with the intention of using them to ferry some sheep into Boston from an island near Martha's Vineyard. (Many New Englanders used the little islands for grazing livestock.) The local rebellious faction got wind of Linzee's scheme, and not only intercepted the expedition but threw thirteen of the British sailors into jail.¹⁹

Sometime during the first week of May Graves learned of an unusual opportunity to frustrate the activities of the rebels and, at the same time, acquire for the use of the king's forces some much needed hard cash. A Spanish vessel had been wrecked somewhere off the coast, but before she had sunk two colonial schooners had happened upon her and relieved the wreck of a substantial amount of money. It was imperative that those funds not fall into the hands of the rebels, so Graves laid plans to intercept the schooners at Marblehead, for which they were said to be heading. The legal implications of the situation were complex, but there was a chance that the Admiralty would regard the cash on board the colonial ships as prize money. That fact probably had something to do with the admiral's choice of the warship he sent to Marblehead: the schooner Diana, commanded by Lieutenant Thomas Graves.
The *Diana* made a quick passage to Marblehead, only to find, to young Mr. Graves's disappointment, that she had been beaten to the punch. The sloop-of-war *Lively* was already anchored in the harbor, and her captain, Thomas Bishop, had seized the two American schooners and locked the money safely away in his cabin. Lieutenant Graves wanted to take the money back to Boston with him, but Bishop was reluctant to part with it without specific orders.

When young Graves told his uncle of this sequence of events the admiral was furious. He immediately sent the *Diana* back to Marblehead with orders that Bishop was not only to surrender the money but to hand over the command of the *Lively* to his first lieutenant and come to Boston himself to be court-martialled. 20

In yet another attempt to provide supplies for the people in Boston the admiral, in response to a request from General Gage, ordered all his captains to send to Boston every merchant ship they could catch off the New England coast. The authorities there would, depending on the political sympathies of the concerned persons, either buy or confiscate such a ship's cargo; the ritual whereby every vessel bound for Boston must stop at Salem was to be dispensed with. 21 Graves and the governor both wrote letters to the governors of Quebec and Nova Scotia, in the hope that those provinces would have some provisions to spare. Then came word that the rebellion had spread even to Canada:
in Nova Scotia someone had set fire to a supply of hay intended for the military garrison.\(^\text{22}\) By May 18 Graves was writing to Mr. Stephens that "the Rebellion begun in the province of Massachusetts Bay hath spread itself to the Colonies of New York, Pensilvania and Virginia: there is too much reason to apprehend the Infection is general, since even Nova Scotia has shewn symptoms."\(^{23}\) The admiral continued to plead for reinforcements. The squadron was sixty marines under complement, and there was a desperate shortage of boats. (He wanted the Admiralty "to give directions that each Ship and Sloop coming out in future may have an additional Boat for her own Use, and that a Supply be also sent to the Ships now in America."\(^{24}\)) The ships even had trouble getting firewood for their stoves: the rebels had posted sentries at all the likely spots to prevent the loyalists from selling it. Such reinforcements as had been sent had not been of much use, for the great ships-of-the-line were of such deep draft that they could do little but sit in the middle of the harbor. In order even to shift anchorage they had to rely on locally-trained civilian pilots, who were becoming scarce. Graves suggested that "a few of the old Fifty Gun Ships," like his flagship Preston the result of a less-than-successful building program the Navy Board had tried some years earlier, would, "from their easy Draught of Water," be able to "go in and out of Harbours without that great Risque and Delay which
constantly attends the piloting those now with me."^{25}

Graves knew full well that such requests would be of little practical value; even if their Lordships thought his idea was a good one and acted on it with as much speed as possible, the 50-gun ships could not reasonably be expected before September. For the time being he must make do with the ships he had, and with whatever other vessels had been sent to join him before London even had heard that the war in America had started. On the morning of May 25 Graves watched with a mixture of pleasure and despair as the first warship to arrive in America since the start of the fighting, the 28-gun frigate _Cerberus_, worked her way up the channel, fired her salute to his flag, and anchored off Castle William.^{26}

The _Cerberus_, in fact, was not going to join the squadron, but was under orders to return to England as soon as Graves and Gage could prepare whatever letters they wanted her to carry. Her captain, William Chads, came on board the _Preston_ with a bulky Admiralty dispatch packet containing several important pieces of information. Graves was pleased to learn that, in the last batch of routine promotions, he had been elevated to the rank of Vice Admiral of the White.^{27} Along with that announcement came 80 copies of a new set of Parliamentary decrees further restricting the trade of the American colonies; Graves drafted a letter to Mr. Stephens promising that these latest laws would be enforced as
efficiently as the admiral and his officers could manage. Of far more immediate importance was Captain Chads' revelation that the Cerberus was carrying three august personages as passengers. The government, in February, had decided to alter the chain of command in the colonies. The Boston garrison was to be strengthened by about 2,000 infantry, marines, and dragoons; their transports had sailed with the Cerberus and should arrive in a matter of days. Such a force would be too large for a Royal Governor to command, so Thomas Gage was to be favored with the assistance of a triumvirate of England's most distinguished soldiers: Major Generals Sir Henry Clinton, William Howe, and John Burgoyne.

While Graves was reading his mail the generals themselves, grateful to be liberated from their cramped quarters in the Cerberus after a passage of 34 days, were being rowed ashore to present themselves at Province House. In their scarlet dress coats and white silk breeches, and with their staffs of aides and secretaries in attendance, Clinton, Howe, and Burgoyne made a dashing spectacle as they climbed up the steps to Long Wharf and into the carriages the governors had sent for them. Hundreds of Bostonians turned out to watch the procession, hopeful that their deliverance had arrived at last. General Burgoyne, a particularly well-dressed character known in the army as "Gentleman Johnny," was heard to remark that the three generals, when the reinforcements arrived, would "soon find elbow room"
In England an anonymous Whig poet, noting that the frigate bearing the officers to America was named after the mythical hound who guarded the gates to the underworld, had provided what turned out to be a more fitting commentary. The Gentleman's Magazine had published an "IMPROMPTU on the sailing of the Cerberus with the three General Officers on the American Expedition":

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Behold the Cerberus th'Atlantic plow,
Her precious cargo Burgoyne, Clinton, Howe,
Bow! Wow! Wow! Wow! 29
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The impending arrival of the additional troops added new urgency to the supply problem. Graves therefore, on May 26, sent forth one of his schooners in an effort to deal with it. The Margaretta, under Midshipman James Moore, was to go to Machias, in company with five coasting vessels owned by a certain Mr. Ichabod Jones who claimed that his friends in that part of the province would be willing to sell the squadron some firewood. Moore was also to try to recover the guns which the rebels had taken from the wreck of the Halifax the previous winter. 30

Midshipman Moore pursued his mission with a youthful enthusiasm that led to tragedy. The Margaretta and her charges arrived at Machias on Friday, June 2, and Jones went ashore to begin his negotiations. The inevitable radical faction among the townspeople called a town meeting and tried to pass a resolution forbidding anyone from selling
wood to the Royal Navy; the move failed, but Jones primly refused to do business with those who had voted against him. Moore, in the meantime, had been surveying the hills around Machias with his telescope, and spotted one of the rebels' most obnoxious symbols, a liberty tree. He announced that unless the tree were removed the Margaretta would open fire on the town. Cooler heads dissuaded him from such rash behavior, and the tense situation seemed to settle, but the calm was deceptive.

On June 11 Jones and Moore went ashore with the innocent motive of attending the Sunday morning service at Machias's church. In the middle of the sermon Moore happened to glance through the window and saw a group of armed men heading for the church. He and Jones jumped out the window, and Jones took to the woods while Moore ran for the Margaretta.

The rebels failed to catch up with Moore but they did seize two of Jones's sloops and load them with men armed with muskets. There was a brief exchange of volleys between the sloops and the Margaretta before the latter, taking advantage of the rebels' clumsy seamanship, managed to get out of range. During the night the rebels made an unsuccessful effort to board the British schooner, and Moore, having concluded that discretion was the better part of valor, decided to return to Boston. On her way out of Machias harbor the next morning, however, the Margaretta was
thrown aback by a sudden gust of wind and ran aground on a sandbank. The two rebel sloops came alongside and, ignoring the puny broadside she fired at them, captured her in a few minutes. Moore went down with a musket ball in his chest and another in his belly, and died the next morning. 31

In Boston there were rumors that the rebels were planning to steal the livestock on the harbor islands, the owners having sold the animals to the army and the navy. For several days Graves had had his guard boats rowing as close to the islands as they could get, but the complicated geography of Boston Harbor made the place virtually impossible to defend; when the tide was out many of the channels were only two or three feet deep. Late on the morning of May 27 about thirty armed men waded across from the mainland to Hog Island, and set about either killing or driving off every horse and cow they could find.

Graves had just drafted a letter ordering the sloop-of-war Merlin to Marblehead in relief of the Lively, whose officers would have to be present at Boston during Captain Bishop's court martial, when the alarm was raised by the firing of the 40-man marine garrison on Noddle's Island. The admiral immediately ordered all the warships that were close by to send their marines to the garrison's aid, but by the time that operation was completed the rebels had set fire to a farmhouse and a barn full of hay. The marines, backed by two 3-pounders landed by Captain Chads
of the *Cerberus*, drove the provincials off Noddle's Island and across the channel to Hog Island with little difficulty, but then found themselves confronted by an additional force of some 600 rebels who were starting to clear out the Hog Island sheep pasture. In an effort to deal with this new threat the admiral ordered the *Diana* into the narrow channel between Noddle's and Hog Islands, cautioning young Thomas Graves not to linger in the shallows beyond the turn of the tide.

It was about 3:30 p.m. when the *Diana* picked her way carefully into the channel and started to bombard Hog Island with her four 6-pounders and twelve swivel guns. The combined fire from the *Diana* and Captain Chads's improvised battery quickly forced the rebels back to the mainland, and Lieutenant Graves, congratulating himself on having distinguished himself in action under his uncle's eye, put his ship about and headed for deep water. At that moment the wind died.

The *Diana* suddenly found herself in a precarious situation, becalmed in shallow water just as the tide was beginning to ebb. The admiral sent the squadron's boats to pull her out, but by the time they had passed their tow lines the sun had set and neither the boat coxwains nor Lieutenant Graves could get their bearings. To make matters worse the rebels, with 300 reinforcements newly arrived from their main headquarters at Cambridge, set up two field
pieces on Chelsea Neck and subjected the little schooner to both musket and cannon fire. One of the rebel officers (the newspapers identified him afterwards as General Israel Putnam) strode down to the beach and offered the British the opportunity to surrender; Lieutenant Graves replied spunkily with a two-gun broadside. Both sides then opened fire in earnest, and continued shooting at each other in the dark until, shortly before midnight, the boats pulled the Diana solidly into the mud. Lieutenant Graves tried every means he could think of to get the schooner loose, but the tide was exposing more of her bottom every minute. At three a.m. she rolled over on her side, and Graves and his crew, unable to work the guns or even stand upright on the sloping deck, had to take to the boats and save themselves. The rebels boarded the Diana and took off her guns and swivels, along with the contents of her sail locker and what clothing and money her crew had left behind. Then they piled up some hay on the mud under her stern and set fire to it. By daybreak the Diana was a smoldering wreck. A few hours later 200 soldiers from Boston, along with some more cannon from the industrious Captain Chads, landed on Noddle's Island.32

Though the military consequences of the "Battle of Noddle's Island" were negligible, to the navy the episode was both irritating and humiliating. That sheer bad luck had brought about the loss of the Diana was obvious to every
qualified observer (a perfunctory court martial acquitted Lieutenant Graves and his men of any negligence), but the fact remained that the rebels had destroyed one of the king's warships, in the midst of the greatest naval concentration in North America and within sight of the admiral in command. The casualty figures also were embarrassing: three marines had died on Noddle's Island, and two sailors in one of the Somerset's boats had been killed while trying to tow the Diana out of the channel, while the rebels, if their gloating newspaper accounts were to believed, had not lost a man. An anonymous "Gentleman in Salem" remarked, in a letter to a friend in Philadelphia, that "It is galling to the surly old Admiral, who, it seems, growls like a cur dog, that our people should burn one of his cutters under his nose, and take all the STOCK off the Islands, and burn the houses, barns, &c."34

The Noddle's Island affair did at least have the effect of emphasizing to the army officers just how serious the situation in the city was. After the soldiers and marines had ferried the remaining stores and livestock across from the island to Boston, Gage summoned Howe, Clinton, and Burgoyne to a council of war. Most of the army's reinforcements had now arrived; surely the time had come to break this preposterous and undignified siege and restore the people of New England to their senses. The plan the four generals devised for taking the offensive was, as it
happened, remarkably similar to the one Graves had proposed just after Lexington and Concord. On the morning of June 18 Howe would lead an amphibious assault on Dorchester Neck and throw up two redoubts, from which his artillery would open fire on Roxbury. Burgoyne was to bring the guns already on Boston Neck into action at the same time, and Clinton would lead an infantry detachment out through the gates of Boston to drive the rebels out of Roxbury. With the southern approaches of the city thus secured, Howe and his troops would be able to land at Charlestown (which the rebels still had not bothered to fortify) and march overland to the principal rebel troop concentration at Cambridge. The plan seemed a sound one in that it utilized the two great British advantages: the army's numerical strength and the navy's control of the harbor. The clerical staffs of both services set to work drafting and copying the hundreds of orders that would put the complex scheme into action. Inevitably, but unbeknownst to any of the high-ranking officers, at least one of those orders fell into the wrong hands.

In the midst of the preparations for the offensive Admiral Graves found time to resolve a matter which had been vexing him for nearly a month: the case of Captain Bishop, whom the admiral had placed under arrest following the Lively's seizure of the two schooners at Marblehead. On June 5 Captains Hartwell, of the Boyne; Chads, of the
Cerberus; Robinson, of the Preston; and Howe, of the Glasgow, all wearing their best uniforms, came on board the Somerset to try Bishop for insubordination. The Somerset's Captain Le Cras, who as senior captain on the station had the duty of serving as president of the court martial board, found himself in a delicate position. It was obvious that Bishop had not disobeyed the admiral's orders deliberately, and had not transferred the Spanish money to the Diana simply because he had thought the Lively would be a safer place for it. Yet any charge brought by an admiral was a serious matter, particularly when the members of the court deliberating on it were faced with the prospect of serving under that admiral for the foreseeable future. After considering the testimony of Bishop and Lieutenant Graves the five captains came to a decision clearly designed to satisfy the demands of both justice and prudence:

The Court...is of Opinion the Charge is proved in part, but do acquit Captain Bishop of acting intentionally to the prejudice of His Majesty's Service, or with disrespect to the Admiral, and impute it entirely to an Error in Judgment for which he ought to be reprimanded and he is here reprimanded accordingly.36

Two days later Captain Bishop carried his belongings back on board the Lively, which was guarding the ferry route between Boston and Charlestown.

Bishop's encounter with the admiral's temper probably caused him to be awake at odd hours; perhaps he was looking
consciously for a chance to redeem himself. At any rate it was he or one of his officers who first noticed, by the first light of dawn on June 17, that something unusual was happening on Breed's Hill.

The American officers at Cambridge, having heard reports of the army's intended breakout from Boston, had decided to seize the initiative themselves by fortifying the peninsula. The rebel troops had started across Charlestown Neck shortly after dark on June 16, and had made their way over the higher promontory of Bunker's Hill and begun digging trenches on top of Breed's Hill. By the time the dawn disclosed the scene to the Lively's officers the hill, until the previous day the domain only of a handful of Farmer Breed's livestock, was occupied by about 2,000 armed men. Captain Bishop perused the scene briefly through his telescope, summoned all hands to quarters (half the Lively's crew, in accordance with the admiral's standing orders, had been up all night beside the guns anyway), and at 4:00 a.m. ordered his starboard battery to open fire.37

The shattering noise of the Lively's first broadside woke up everyone within a considerable radius, including Admiral Graves. After a glance at the situation in Charlestown Graves called for his coxwain and barge's crew so he could go ashore and consult with the governor.

At Province House the admiral found not only Gage but Burgoyne, Clinton, and Howe. The four generals, all of
them experts on such matters, were less impressed by the speed with which the work over on Breed's Hill was progressing than by the stupidity of the rebel officers: those characters, apparently in a typical fit of lunacy, had led their men into an untenable position. The little hill the rebels had chosen as the centerpiece of their maneuver was too low to form the basis for a proper redoubt, and was flagrantly exposed to the fire of all the warships in the Charles. In exposing themselves so conveniently to destruction the rebels had done the British a favor; it remained to be decided only how the act of destruction best could be carried out. Sir Henry Clinton suggested (or so he claimed afterward) an immediate assault on Charlestown Neck, before the rebels had time to finish their fortifications, but the other generals dismissed that idea as impractical and wasteful: to get the troops organized, into the navy's boats, and across the river would take several hours, and in any case the rebel works scarcely warranted the dignity of an encircling movement.\textsuperscript{38} Better to let the people on Breed's Hill experience the navy's broadsides for a few hours, while the British soldiers had their breakfast and a proper amphibious attack was organized. Gage would superintend the complicated logistics; General Howe would be in direct command of the assault while Burgoyne and Clinton, being junior in rank to the other two generals, would observe the proceedings from the
While the preparations for the troops' embarkation were going on, Graves and Howe went out to the Somerset, which was anchored off North Battery. Her 24- and 18-pounders would serve admirably to cover the army's landing if she could work her way far enough up the Charles to bring them to bear on Breed's Hill. Captain Le Gras's expositions and the recollection of what had happened to the Diana were, however, enough to convince Graves that taking a ship-of-the-line into the river would be sheer folly. He assured Howe that the big ships would place their boats at the army's disposal and lend men and ammunition to the sloops-of-war, but the latter would have to suffice for direct fire support. Captain Le Cras detailed twenty seamen to reinforce the crew of the Falcon, which had her topsails set and was approaching the river entrance, and thirty more to the transport Symmetry. Howe, satisfied that the navy would support the army as best it could, returned to Boston.

By now it was mid-morning, and the rebels on the peninsula were under fire from several directions. Bishop had taken the Lively around to the west of Charlestown and was systematically raking the Neck with his 9-pounders. The Glasgow and Falcon, with springs on their cables to keep them from swinging in the current, were firing on Breed's Hill from their anchorages in the Charles, and the
"Admiral's Battery" on Copp's Hill (the only shore installation in Boston to take part in the action) was contributing the considerable weight of its four 24-pounders. A little sloop called the *Spitfire*, manned by some sailors from the *Preston*, added six 3-pounders; one of Gage's artillery colonels hurriedly fitted out two harbor scows with 12-pounder fieldpieces in their bows and, with the help of some more of the squadron's seamen, took them into the shallows near Charlestown Neck in the hope of heading off any rebel reinforcements. The governor himself, meanwhile, from the security of his office in Province House, was appropriating every boat he could find in the city of Boston, while his staff attended to the hundreds of details involved in sending 2,000 men, with a battery of artillery and sundry other items in company, across a third of a mile of water.40

It was afternoon before all the preparations were completed and the infantrymen, in full marching kit and with packs weighing as much as sixty pounds on their backs, were ready to file down to the embarkation points at Long Wharf and North Battery. Most of the soldiers and marines had experience in amphibious operations by this time, so the process of getting the men into the 24 boats was considerably less laborious than the previous April's undertaking had been. At about 1:30 the boats shoved off and, in accordance with the orders passed down to the coxwains
by Graves and Howe, formed themselves into two neat lines abreast. Less concerned with speed than that the boats should reach Charlestown Beach simultaneously, the flotilla crept slowly across the river. The sky was clear, and the sun so brutally hot that most of the troops were soaked with perspiration long before they reached the shore.

Graves, as soon as he saw that the boats had gotten away from Boston in good order, had himself rowed over to the landing site at Morton's Point. He found General Howe, surrounded by his staff (which included an aide armed with a wine bottle to satisfy the general's thirst at crucial moments), standing on the beach amid the orderly confusion of the landing. Howe's left wing, commanded by Brigadier General Robert Pigot, already was under fire: the rebels had posted snipers in the houses of Charlestown. Graves, tactfully refraining from any mention of his having warned Gage of just such an eventuality on the first day of the war, asked if Howe would like the place burned down. Howe replied that he would. Graves thereupon sent one of his midshipmen out to visit the sloops-of-war and tell their captains to start bombarding the town with hot cannon balls. (That that tactic was possible is a tribute to Graves's foresight: heating shot required a rather elaborate apparatus that was not standard equipment on board sailing warships.) The battery on Copp's Hill was to add to the conflagration by firing incendiary projectiles called
carcasses. Before long Charlestown was thoroughly ablaze, the flames providing an eerie but not inappropriate background to the assault Howe was about to launch on Breed's Hill.41

Between sunrise and the time Howe's first wave started up the slope the rebels had had some ten hours in which to prepare their works. The American commander, Colonel William Prescott, had blundered in choosing Breed's instead of Bunker's Hill to make his stand, but having picked his ground he defended it as well as anyone could. The redoubt on top of the hill was protected on both flanks, on its right by the town and on its left by a crude rail fence that stretched from the base of the hill to the bank of the Mystic River. The rebel infantry had spent the morning throwing up earthworks to strengthen the fence and fill in the few gaps in the system. Numerous critics contended afterwards that Howe should have regarded the defenses as impregnable and attacked Prescott from the rear; just why he did not he never explained. Instead he organized his soldiers and marines into neat lines and, in the best tradition of the frontal assault, ordered them straight up the face of the hill.

The observers on board the warships, and on the rooftops of Boston, had expected Howe to drive the rebels out of their fortifications in a matter of minutes. What happened turned out to be one of the most gruesome episodes
in British military history. The warships had to cease firing when the first wave started up the hill, and the infantry had to attack unsupported; only after the 6-pounder field pieces had been painstakingly unloaded from the boats was it discovered that Gage's supply officer had sent only 12-pounder ammunition. Howe's first assault was horribly repulsed fifty yards short of the rebel works, and the boats' crews resting on the beach found themselves faced with the hideous task of carrying the wounded back to Boston. The Charles quickly became a mass of traffic moving in both directions, the casualties being exchanged for the reinforcements Gage was throwing into the fight. Sir Henry Clinton, unable to restrain his impatience, left Burgoyne at the Copp's Hill battery and commandeered a boat to take him to Charlestown. 42

Samuel Graves, standing helplessly on the beach hoping that he could find some way to help, had a fine view of the carnage. Howe, convinced that the failure of his first attack had been a fluke, wasted no time in launching a second. Again the rebels in the redoubt and behind the fence threw back the British troops, sending the redcoats down the hill among the corpses and wounded who lay by the score amid Farmer Breed's hay.

Gage's 400 reinforcements, in conjunction with the exhaustion of the rebels' ammunition, eventually won the day for the British. When Howe assaulted the hill a third time
the rebels, after firing a few rounds apiece, began to fall back—though again with considerably more dignity than any British officer would have expected. By late afternoon both Howe and Clinton were on the summit of Breed's Hill, and the rebels, under fire from the Lively and the artillery colonel's scows, were trying to make their way back over Charlestown Neck to the mainland.

The army and navy spent the rest of the daylight hours trying to clean up the debris the battle had left behind. Stretcher parties continued to bring the casualties down to the waiting boats. A shocking number of the dead and wounded were officers who, in their scarlet coats and gold braid, had made excellent targets among the dull red uniforms of the enlisted men. Graves's old nemesis Major Pitcairn was carried down the hill by his son, a marine lieutenant; the major had been in forefront of the last assault when his chest was shattered by a musket ball, and he was to live only a few hours longer. The first counts indicated that nineteen officers and more than 200 other ranks had been killed, and many of the 800 wounded, subjected to the barbaric ministrations of the army surgeons, would not survive more than a few weeks.

Another casualty of the fighting around Breed's Hill was the confidence of the British senior officers. For two months they had been assuring themselves that their humiliating position in Boston was the result of freakish
circumstances that were strictly temporary. The rebel "army," after all, merely had made a nuisance of itself at Lexington and Concord; all four of the British generals had yearned for the day when the king's troops could confront the undisciplined rabble on the battlefield. Now that day had come but, while the British had achieved a tactical victory, they still were the besieged and the rebels the besiegers. That nearly one-fourth of the troops in Boston, over a thousand fine, well-trained soldiers and marines, had been sacrificed without altering the basic position of either side in the least gave horrible emphasis to the irrationality of the situation.

June 17 ended with a brassy, cloudless sunset typical of late spring in New England. The army medical orderlies and burial parties were still picking their way through the hay on the face of Breed's Hill, with the flames from the last remnants of Charlestown adding to the ghoulish atmosphere, when Samuel Graves returned to the Preston. As his barge carried him away from the horrible sights and sounds of the battlefield and into the quiet solitude of Boston Harbor he could derive but small solace from the clean, black silhouettes of the vessels of the North American Squadron where they lay at anchor, the last visible remnants of order and sanity in a world gone mad.
II

Spring was the most pleasant time of the year in London. Some, at least, of the smoke haze from the fireplaces and furnaces dissipated with the coming of the mild weather, and in the weeks before the winter's fog and mud were replaced by the disease-laden heat of summer the great city's more pensive residents could reassure themselves that London was, for all its faults, the most civilized place in the world. The opulent patrons of the concert halls and theatres and the denizens of the government office buildings could, albeit with difficulty, close their ears to the wails of the beggars and gin vendors and rejoice in the knowledge that this was the very heart of that grandest of all monuments to human achievement, the British Empire.

London had been expanding, like some ponderous organism gradually emerging from the depths of the Thames, into the English countryside for over a thousand years. Streets meandered in every direction, rarely straight for more than a few blocks. Neighborhoods half a mile apart possessed characters so different that they might have been on different planets; handsome stone-fronted row houses co-existed more-or-less peacefully with squalorous acres of shacks that even an eighteenth-century doctor would have labelled unfit for human habitation.

The greatest and most vigorously pulsating of all
London's arteries was the Thames, so intimately associated with the city that many people referred to it simply as London River." From its mouth at the Nore, where the navy maintained one of its largest fleet anchorages, the river was always the scene of activity that seemed to increase in intensity as one drew nearer to the city. Literally thousands of British and foreign ships made their way up the Thames every year, each waging a private battle with a diabolical combination of tide and current. Government regulations, inspired by the humiliating events of 1667 when the Dutch navy had bombarded London, specified that every vessel navigating the river must be conned by one of the certified pilots of Trinity House, the august body which guarded the soundings tables like some manual of medieval sorcery.

A passage up the Thames provided the most graphic demonstration possible of the workings of British sea power. Some four miles east of London the river contorted itself into a series of sharp bends, defining miniature peninsulas with such picturesque names as Blackwall Point, Rotherhithe, and the Isle of Dogs. On the southern bank opposite the latter was the town of Greenwich, its waterfront dominated by the handsome twin buildings of the Royal Naval Hospital. On a hill behind the Hospital stood the Royal Naval Observatory whose astronomers established the time that was supposed to be kept by every clock and new-fangled
chronometer on board every British vessel in the world. Just upstream from Greenwich was Deptford, the site of one of His Majesty's great dockyards and, like Woolwich Dockyard a few miles down the river, the lair of some of the most notoriously corrupt officials in the public service. This stretch of the Thames was called Limehouse Reach, and was lined on both sides by the elaborate paraphernalia that kept the world's largest navy in operation. Barges hauled huge balks of lumber between the Timber Yard and the row of shipwrights' yards, while on the opposite bank gangs of laborers in the Rope Walk spun individual strands of hemp into the miles of cordage that manipulated the fleet's spars and sails.

One last shallow bend in the river brought the incoming vessel into the Pool. Every English author of the sailing ship period was fascinated by the hundreds of vessels that were always tied up at the London Docks; so confused was the mass of spars in the Pool that an observer could scarcely believe that individual ships could extricate themselves. Daniel Defoe summed up the futility of describing the spectacle when he asked, "...in what Manner can any Writer go about it, to bring it into any reasonable Compass? The Thing is a kind of Infinite, and the Parts to be separated from one another in such a Description, are so many, that it is hard to know where to begin."43

The activity of the seagoing vessels terminated
abruptly at London Bridge, an ancient stone structure that always seemed to be on the verge of disintegration but nonetheless denied passage to ships that were too large to slip through one of its twenty arches. Many of the latter were occupied by waterworks and corn mills; those remaining open were so narrow that even the smallest boats had to ship their oars in order to pass through. The river upstream of the Bridge was the domain of assorted rowboats, wherries, and distinctive Thames barges with their spritsails and leeboards.

In this part of London the river was the main conveyor of traffic. Hundreds of people made their living rowing passengers up-and-downstream for a few pence a trip (the possibility that another bridge might someday be built struck terror into the heart of the Thames wherryman), and dozens of little docks and flights of stairs jutted out from both banks. One of the busiest of these protrusions was called Whitehall Steps. Several times daily a boat would pull up to it and discharge a naval officer, wearing his best uniform and a nervous expression and usually carrying a pretentious-looking canvas envelope under his arm. He would make his way up the river bank and into the broad avenue of Whitehall (on the far side of which stood the barracks of H.M. Horse Guards), turn right, and walk 150 yards up the street to a high wall on the left side, heavily ornamented with statues and pseudo-Greek columns. The
decorations on the wall camouflaged its purpose, which was to protect the people on the other side of it from the mobs that sometimes formed in the street. A narrow gateway led into a small cobblestoned courtyard surrounded on three sides by a rather dreary looking building which, though by no means one of London's most imposing edifices, reasonably could claim to be one of the most important. It was the Office of the Board of Admiralty.

That the Admiralty Office should be dull in appearance was appropriate, for the majority of its denizens were engaged in singularly monotonous work. Most of the building's interior was divided into the offices of the Admiralty Clerks, young and middle-aged men who spent long, ill-paid days filling out forms and copying letters. The Admiralty staff had, in fact, grown so since the Office was designed in the late seventeenth century that several structures on either side had been appropriated for additional work space. Many of the junior clerks occupied gloomy, damp crannies in the basement, which they had to evacuate at least once a year when the Thames rose to flood level.

Presiding over the army of stenographers was one Philip Stephens, Esquire, the First Secretary. A rather dour-looking man who celebrated his fiftieth birthday in 1775, Stephens was an excellent representative of that species of individual that was playing an ever more prominent role in British public affairs, the professional civil
servant. He was the son of a village rector and, following the example of his eldest brother, had started his career as a lowly clerk in the Navy Victualling Office. His diligence and intelligence had attracted the notice of Lord Anson, who engineered Stephens's move to the Admiralty. Stephens was appointed First Secretary in 1763, and was to hold the post for more than thirty years. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and represented the Borough of Sandwich in the House of Commons.  

The First Secretary was responsible for most of the day-to-day processes that made the navy function. Whereas Lords of the Admiralty came and went in accordance with the nation's political whims the Secretary always remained, providing a desperately needed stability that the office otherwise would have lacked. Stephens and the Second Secretary, George Jackson, also acted as respected advisers to their Lordships, maintaining an intimate knowledge of the details of the fleets, the dockyards, the officer corps, and every other facet of the service. Since the days of Samuel Pepys the Secretaries of the Admiralty had been among the most influential figures in the Royal Navy.

On the ground floor of the Admiralty was the notorious Waiting Room, in which unemployed officers on half-pay spent a substantial portion of their lives; the record was held by a midshipman who, lacking a patron to secure his future in the navy, attempted to obtain an audience with
the Lords of the Admiralty every working day for three years. Those officers who had "interest," or for some other reason had been summoned by their Lordships, were ushered up the staircase to the Board Room.

From this frugally-appointed chamber, in 1775 still in the infancy of its legendary history, emanated the decisions that determined the course of naval affairs throughout the Empire. The white and gold ceiling gave the room a breezy atmosphere in the best tradition of Restoration architecture, while the walls were handsomely panelled in light oak. The principal attraction to visitors was the fireplace, which was surrounded by carved wood replicas of navigational instruments attributed to Grinling Gibbons. A relatively recent addition over the fireplace was a map of the British Isles, equipped with a rotating pointer geared to a weather-vane on the roof so that their Lordships could tell the direction of the wind. In the center of the room stood a long mahogany table, around which the Board held its almost-daily meetings.

In 1775 the Lords Commissioners for Executing the Office of the Lord High Admiral were seven in number. It was traditional that most of them be statesmen rather than seamen, though several of the most distinguished First Lords, notably Anson and Hawke, had been naval officers. At the moment the only "professional" on the Board was Rear Admiral Sir Hugh Palliser, whose distinguished naval
background nicely complemented his Tory political tendencies. Lord Charles Spencer, the Viscounts Palmerston and Lisburne, and Messrs. John Buller and Henry Penton were wealthy landowners and politicians.

The First Lord was John, Fourth Earl of Sandwich. The Earl, a large man in both height and circumference, was one of the most controversial public figures of the age. A member of the great Montagu family, whose tentacles had been twining about almost every branch of the government for generations, he was reputed in various quarters to sum up in his person the best and worst of the patronage system upon which so much of the government was based. Utterly without seagoing experience (save for the traditional "Grand Tour" of Europe he had taken in his youth), Sandwich owed his position to his noble ancestry, his wealth, and his stature as one of the leading "King's Men" in the House of Lords. Some years earlier he had packed his wife off to live with an entourage of servants and a handsome annuity on an estate in the country, and had taken up residence with a voluptuous young actress and harpsichord player named Martha Ray. Sandwich's fondness for gambling almost had bankrupted him on more than one occasion, and accounts of his amorous escapades filled the pages of the lower sort of London periodicals. He and some of his friends (the papers called them the Order of the Medmenham Monks) had purchased an abandoned abbey on the Thames west of London and were
reputed to have stocked it with high-priced prostitutes.

Yet Georgian society perceived no incongruity in the proposition that a 57-year-old rake could be a competent public servant. The Admiralty had had more knowledgeable First Lords than Sandwich but none more conscientious. Unlike the other members he scarcely ever missed a Board meeting, and the stacks of correspondence that came out of his office every week testified to the time he spent at his desk. Sandwich involved himself in every phase of Admiralty business, which encompassed such diverse subjects as the disposition of the fleets, the need to ensure that the sons of prominent Tories were promoted with sufficient rapidity, and the metallurgists' latest opinions on the virtues of the copper-sheathed hull. Far into the night Sandwich would remain in his office, passing freshly-written letters to the copyists and sustaining on his own culinary innovation, a slab of meat between two pieces of bread.  

The Board of Admiralty met for at least a few minutes almost every day; Sunday meetings were not uncommon. Regulation and tradition demanded that their Lordships take part, officially if not actively, in nearly every detail of the navy's affairs, from the appointment of flag officers to the censuring of midshipmen who had lost their personal journals. Sometimes one of the Cabinet members would send over a letter announcing "his Majesty's pleasure" on some matter of naval policy (protocol dictated that the king
communicate directly with the Board only on extraordinary occasions, though he and Sandwich carried on a lively and cordial private correspondence); on other days the members would discuss various means by which they might persuade the House of Commons to accept the latest Navy Estimates. Among the most important and serious moments in the Board meetings, however, were those when Mr. Stephens brought up sets of dispatches he had just received from overseas commanders-in-chief.

The first accounts of the fights at Lexington and Concord reached London, after a typical trans-Atlantic passage of five weeks, at the end of May. The news was received with a mixture of shock (the stock market, according to the Chronicle, dropped a point and a half on May 29) and buoyant confidence that the king's forces would be able to dispose of the rebels with little difficulty.\(^7\)

When Samuel Graves's dispatch of April 22 reached the Admiralty on June 12 the Board clamly directed Stephens to inform him, in accordance with the usual formula, "that their Lordships very much approve" of his conduct.\(^8\) The Board appreciated Graves's complaint that he did not have enough ships or men, and immediately took steps to solve the problem. The sloops-of-war Raven and Hunter were on their way to Boston by the middle of July, and orders went out to the captains of four frigates to get their ships ready for sea as quickly as possible.\(^9\) On June 15 the Board called
in the Commissioners of Victualling and arranged for "a
Four Months supply for 5,000 Men, of all Species except
Spirits" to be sent to Graves's force; the Commissioners
were further directed to find a private merchant who would
be willing "to contract for a Quantity of Rum to be deliver­
ed safe at Boston." When the king learned of the North
American Squadron's manpower shortage he gave the Admiralty
permission to let Graves's captains impress as many seamen
as they needed.

The Admiralty's efforts to send Graves more ships were
hampered by an unfortunate coincidence: when the news of
the outbreak of the fighting in America reached London a
vicious strike was in progress in all the Royal Dockyards.
("I am sorry the shipwrights are not yet returned to their
work," the king wrote to Sandwich on July 1, "but doubt
not you will soon bring them to their senses." George III,
like so many of his ministers and officers, regarded diso­
bedience as a manifestation of mental instability.) It
being peacetime nearly all the navy's warships were "laid
up in ordinary," manned only by skeleton crews and with
their masts and yards stored in sheds on shore; even after
the strike was settled it would take several weeks to get
a vessel in that condition ready for sea. Nonetheless the
Admiralty forged ahead with a scheme to reinforce the North
American Squadron. The king himself heartily endorsed
Graves's request for 50-gun ships, and proposed that six
such vessels be fitted out at once. Their arrival in America should make it possible for the admiral to send home his three ships-of-the-line, the maintenance of which imposed a constant drain on the Treasury. His Majesty was convinced "that when once those rebels have felt a smart blow, they will submit; and no situation can ever change my fixed resolution, either to bring the colonies to a due obedience to the legislature of the mother country or to cast them off!"  

The Admiralty thereupon directed Sir Hugh Palliser to determine just how large a naval force would be necessary to administer the "smart blow" the king had in mind. Some-time in July Palliser produced a document whose very title, "A disposition of the force necessary to be on the coasts of America to annoy the rebellious provinces, to awe those that are refractory, to enforce the Acts for restraining their trade, and to countenance and protect the friends to Government," suggested the enormity of the task the navy had set for itself. Palliser had concluded that Graves would need no fewer than 50 ships, to be disposed as follows:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At Boston</th>
<th>3 ships of 50 guns</th>
<th>1 frigates</th>
<th>6 sloops</th>
<th>4 schooners</th>
<th>22</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>To lie before the town, attend the operations of the army, secure the transports, guard the passes, and cruise off the port and coast.</td>
<td>44</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

53

54
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Frigates</th>
<th>50 Guns</th>
<th>Sloops</th>
<th>Schooners</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>New York</td>
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<td>Delaware River</td>
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<td>Virginia</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carolinas</td>
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<tr>
<td>River St Lawrence</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
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Those 50 vessels, Palliser warned, would be adequate only to deal with the situation as the Admiralty's out-of-date information described it; "in case the other colonies should become in the same state of rebellion as New England is," he wrote, "it will then be necessary to increase the above force considerably."55

Their Lordships solemnly agreed that Palliser's conclusions were reasonable, and set into motion the administrative machinery which would send the additional ships on their way to America. Such an enormous fleet obviously would be too large for one officer to command, so an order went out to Rear Admiral Molyneux Shuldham to hasten to Portsmouth,
hoist his flag in H.M. 50-gun ship **Chatham**, and "hold yourself in constant readiness to proceed to Boston," and serve as Graves's second-in-command. Several months would elapse, of course, before all the reinforcements could be dispatched, but the Admiralty was doing its best. On July 30 Sandwich wrote to Graves, assuring the latter that "You are going to be greatly reinforced, and to have a very able rear-admiral to command under you; with his assistance, I think you will show the rebels the weight of an English fleet before the campaign is ended." As for the period before Shuldham's arrival, Sandwich offered "my earnest recommendation to exert yourself to the utmost towards crushing the daring rebellion that [has] now extended itself almost over the whole continent of America....you may be blamed for doing too little, but can never be censured for doing too much."57

That last observation had special significance to Sandwich himself, and to his fellow Board members. During the summer of 1775 their Lordships, determined that neither the government nor the public should have reason to charge the Admiralty with inefficiency or inactivity, fired off an unceasing barrage of orders. Since the great fleet going off to North America would impose unusual demands on the naval facilities there, Captain Marriot Arbuthnot was given an appointment as "Commissioner of the Navy" and ordered to take charge of the dockyard at Halifax.58 Graves had written
that he needed boats; the Navy Board was directed to supply
every warship going to Boston with at least one extra
cutter or yawl. The Cerberus, which had arrived in Eng­
land bearing some of Graves's dispatches, was to be sent
back and attached to his command permanently, and was to take
with her 200 pounds of "Portable Soup for the use of the Sick at Boston." The Navy Board was to see to the con­
struction of several "flat bottom'd Boats," which would accompany the next contingent of troop reinforcements sent
out by the army. Shuldman's ship, the Chatham, was to have her sides "friezed and trophied" as befitted an admiral's flagship. The warships going to America were to be supplied with "Instruments for clearing away Ice," and with "a Swivel & Bridle to moor by, as it is possible that in severe weather the Men may not be able to go over the Ships Sides to clear hawse." The troop transports were to carry "Packages of Indian Presents" for the use of General Gage.

On July 6 the Admiralty sent Graves a long letter descri­
bining in considerable detail how he was to "carry on such Operations upon the Sea Coasts of the Four Governments in New England, as you shall judge most effectual for suppressing, in conjunction with His Majesty's Land Force, the Rebellion which is now openly avowed & supported in those Colonies." He was to
make such a disposition of your Fleet as that, without crippling the Force necessary for the Service upon the Station where you Command in person, a small detached Squadron, under the Command of an Able & discreet Officer, may be stationed (and to station the same accordingly) at each of the following Places, Vizt at New York, In Delawar Bay, In Chesapeak Bay, And within the Bar of Charles Town;...To search every Vessel going into, and coming out of, any of the Ports of those Colonies, & to seize and detain them in every case in which they shall make any discovery of Contraband Trade, or Conveyance of Arms and Ammunition or Military Stores of any king; To receive on board His Majesty's Ships, & to afford every reasonable accommodation to, the Governors or other Officers of the Colonies,...who may be compelled by the Violences of the People to seek such an Asylum, & generally to afford every protection...to any of His Majesty's Subjects who may require it.65

How Graves was to accomplish all those feats with the 27 warships he then had at his disposal was left to his imagination.

On July 24 the Admiralty, at the request of the Earl of Dartmouth, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, ordered Graves to direct his captains to "stop & search all Merchant Ships & Vessels bound to, or from, North America" for any "Letters as shall in your opinion, contain any matter tending to aid, abet, or advise the Rebellious proceedings of His Majesty's Subjects in North America."66 When word reached London that several of the colonial governments had refused to sell goods to the army and navy, Graves was ordered to send transports (with naval escorts, of course) to each of the offending colonies and, if he could not obtain the merchandise he and the generals wanted,
"to proceed hostily against such Towns as [though they were] in open Rebellion." The Admiralty learned that "the Congress of Delegates from the twelve associated Colonies at Philadelphia" had called for an embargo against British shipping, and their Lordships astutely (and correctly) concluded that the American ships thus laid idle might be fitted out with guns. Graves was therefore to order his captains "to visit, on their respective Stations, every Harbour within the said Colonies, where such Ships may be laid up, and either to take away their Masts & Rudders, or otherwise so disable them that they may not be fitted & employed for the purpose abovementioned."68

The most eloquent testimony of the Admiralty's attitude toward the North American Squadron appeared, however, in the correspondence of September 19. The Earl of Dartmouth had received intelligence of "Attempts having been made by the Masters of Ships bound to North America, to carry Flint Stones thither by way of Ballast."69 That news had ominous implications, since the stones in question must be destined to be made into musket flints. Admiral Graves therefore was

...hereby required & directed to instruct the Commanders of all His Majesty's Ships & Vessels under your Command to examine all such Ships & Vessels as shall arrive in the different Ports in North America from Great Britain or Ireland, and in case they find the Ballast, or any part of it, to consist of Flint Stones, to cause such Flint Stones to
be taken out & thrown into deep Water. That may well have been the most ridiculous order ever given a naval officer.


4. Ibid.


15. Lord Dunmore to S. Graves, May 1, 1775, NDAR, I, pp. 257-258.


18. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.


41. Ibid.


44. DNB, XVIII, pp. 1066-1067.


48. Stephens to S. Graves, June 24, 1775, NDAR, I, pp. 491-492; Adm. Minute, June 12, 1775, ADM 3/81, (PRO).

49. Ibid.; Stephens to S. Graves, June 1, 1775, NDAR, I, p. 480; Stephens to S. Graves, June 15, 1775, NDAR, I, p. 487.


51. Stephens to S. Graves, June 24, 1775, NDAR, I, pp. 491-492.


53. Ibid.


55. Ibid.


65. Adm. to S. Graves, July 6, 1775, NDAR, I, pp. 1316-1317.


68. Ibid.
70. Adm. to S. Graves, Sept. 19, 1775, ADM 2/100, (PRO).
On June 30 Mr. G. Gefferina, Admiral Graves's secretary, carefully recorded the "Disposition" of the North American Squadron. Apart from his flagship and the two ships-of-the-line Graves had only four warships in the Boston area: the sloops-of-war Glasgow and Lively in the harbor itself, the schooner Hope at Salem, and the sloop Merlin at Marblehead. The Cerberus had left for England with the admiral's and governor's dispatches, but without the guns that previously had been mounted on her quarterdeck. The Falcon was on her way northward to the Penobscot River. The energetic Captain Wallace, with the sloop Swan as well as his own frigate Rose under his command, was terrorizing the seafaring population of Rhode Island, while Captain Vandeput, with the 64-gun Asia and the sloop Kingfisher, was attempting to keep order at New York. The Mercury was on her way to Virginia to relieve the Fowey, which was serving as the temporary residence of Governor Dunmore; the sloop Otter also was in Chesapeake Bay. The schooner Magdalen was supposed to be off the Virginia
Capes as well, but Lord Dunmore, using as an excuse the need "that I should transmit the most speedy Account" of "the present distressful situation of His Majesty's Government in this Colony," had sent her to England with Lady Dunmore and the rest of his family on board. The Tartar was "At Halifax for its protection," and three warships were in the hands of the dockyard at that port: the erstwhile surveying ship Canceaux was hove down having her bottom cleaned, and two recently purchased schooners, the Halifax (named after the vessel that had run aground off the coast of Maine the previous winter) and the St. Lawrence, commanded by Lieutenant John Graves, were fitting out. The other eight warships, in accordance with the Admiralty's orders, were patrolling various sectors of the American coast from East Florida to the Bay of Fundy.

Graves, assured by both the dispatches from the Admiralty and the personal letters Lord Sandwich had sent him that more ships were on the way, was confident that he could at least maintain the British center at Boston until the reinforcements arrived. He had purchased another schooner, the Hinchingbroke, and had arranged with one of the Boston shipyard owners to have a new brig, named the Bolton, turned over to the navy. This vessel had been intended for the rebel leader John Hancock, but would make a fine command for young Thomas Graves.

Until his force was increased the admiral could do
little more than nurse the frustration engendered by the rebels, whose deviousness and insolence actually seemed to have been bolstered by the events of June 17. The officers in the guardboats reported that literally hundreds of rebel whaleboats were hidden in the creeks and inlets around Boston. On July 6 two companies of the rebel army burned the lighthouse on Thatcher's Island, whose location just off Cape Ann made it a key landfall for merchantmen bound to Boston, and five days later a "whaleboat expedition" carried off the livestock from Long Island, just outside Boston Harbor. The rebel boats were so fast, and of such shallow draft, that the clumsy Royal Navy boats could not catch them. At dawn on the last day of July 23 boatloads of rebels landed at Lighthouse Island, and having driven off the small marine garrison, burned Boston Lighthouse itself and absconded with its supply of oil. As each of these incidents occurred Graves could only publish warnings that the navigational aids were gone, move one of his ships to the trouble spot, and wait to see where the rebels would strike next.

A seemingly petty series of events in Boston added to the admiral's frustration. Mr. Benjamin Hallowell, one of his Majesty's Commissioners of Customs, signed a contract with the proprietor of Gallop's Island, one of the specks of land in the entrance to the harbor, whereby Hallowell would be permitted to cut the grass on the island. Hay was
so valuable a commodity in Boston that Hallowell was willing not only to pay handsomely for what he could find but to hire a gang of men to harvest it. The only obstacle to the enterprise was the regulation regarding boat traffic in the harbor. He therefore paid a call on Admiral Graves.

Hallowell was one of the city's more prominent Tories and therefore not a man to be trifled with, but Graves had been planning on having the hay on Gallop's Island cut himself. Hallowell protested that, while the Royal Navy with its warships to cover its working parties could harvest hay anywhere it chose, Gallop's Island had the only supply left that was far enough from the mainland to be reasonably safe from the rebels. The Lively, whose captain, Bishop, happened to be Hallowell's brother-in-law, was anchored nearby in Nantasket Road and could provide covering fire if an incident did develop. Graves said he would discuss the matter with the governor and give Hallowell an answer in two days; the grass would be longer by then anyway.6

The next day Hallowell called at Province House himself, and General Gage assured him that there would be no official objection. Hallowell thereupon hired his work force, and was about to apply for a pass to get his boats past the warships when a Mr. Thomas, who had been hired by the government to supply hay to the army and navy, told him that the admiral had forbidden any hay cutting expeditions until further notice. Indignant over having paid his men
for a day's work and watched them spend that day in idleness, Hallowell wrote a letter to Graves asking "where the difficulty lays of my sending the men hired by me to cut the grass and make my hay that I may remove it."\(^7\)

Neither that letter nor a personal messenger Hallowell sent out to the Preston brought any response. He therefore called on the admiral again, and this time was able to work out a compromise: the working party would be allowed to go to Gallop's Island, but would have to turn half the hay over to the navy. Hallowell regarded that as a "heavy Contribution," but again made arrangements for his men and boats.\(^8\) On July 19 the little expedition got under way, but was only a few yards out from shore when it was intercepted by a guardboat from the Boyne. Captain Hartwell explained that the admiral had issued orders for Hallowell's men to be stopped.\(^9\)

By this time Hallowell's temper was beginning to fray. "Are we not sufficiently oppressed by the enemies without," he demanded in another letter to Graves, "but must suffer by those who are sent for our protection?--as an officer of the crown...I demand by what right you thus Continue to deprive me of my property?"\(^10\) When after a week the admiral had not responded Hallowell filed an official complaint with General Gage, begging "Your Excellency's interposition that so I may obtain common justice which I[is] now denied me."\(^11\)

On Friday, August 11, Graves was walking through Boston
on his way from Long Wharf to Province House when Hallowell ran across the street and asked (at least this is how he recounted the incident; the admiral never mentioned it in any of his correspondence) whether Graves had received Hallowell's four letters. Graves replied that he had, but had chosen not to answer them. Hallowell said, "When one gentleman writes to another some kind of answer is expected." When Graves ignored that remark Hallowell cried, "You are no gentleman but a scoundrel." There is some disagreement over what happened next; Hallowell said he "was advancing to whisper the Admiral in the ear--but was prevented by the Admiral's throwing both his fists in Mr. Hallowell's face," while an anonymous witness said Graves gave Hallowell "a very slight slap in the face, drew his sword, and Mr. H---ll cried out, 'what draw a sword upon a naked man, give me a stick, a stone,' and made a noise to bring people round him." Graves then returned his sword to its scabbard and tried to go on his way. Hallowell either "asked him what occasioned all this abuse" or "in a low whispering voice said 'you are a damned scoundrel,'" whereupon Graves, despite the fact that he was 62 and Hallowell in his mid-thirties, hit the customs commissioner in the face and gave him a bloody nose. In the ensuing scuffle Hallowell yanked the admiral's sword out of its scabbard again. A soldier who had stopped to see what was going on tried to grab the sword, and he and
Hallowell managed to break it. By now quite a number of spectators had gathered, and cooler heads soon prevailed; otherwise, the anonymous author witness reported, "the Admiral...would have drubbed M. H---ll confoundedly, notwithstanding he is a stout young man of 34 or 35 years of age; as it was, he was blind for a week as they tell me."\(^{14}\)

The hay on Gallop's Island had been forgotten; Graves and Hallowell were involved in an affair of honor. A fist fight between an admiral and a customs commissioner was precisely the stuff of which gossip was made, and everyone in Boston quickly took one side or the other. Hallowell's friends called Graves an uncouth bully; others criticized Hallowell for trying to use his position to get a supply of hay that ought to have gone to the army's horses. There were rumors that the court martial of Captain Bishop, Hallowell's brother-in-law, had something to do with the dispute; that Hallowell, in accosting the admiral in the street, had been attempting to provoke a mob scene.

Hallowell discovered that he had made more than one formidable enemy. Within a week he had received a formal challenge from Lieutenant Thomas Graves, who had just finished commissioning the Bolton and was determined to defend his uncle's honor. On the afternoon of September 1 Hallowell was walking along Rowe's Wharf when he was confronted by the lieutenant himself, "accompany'd," as Hallowell recounted the episode, "by the Boatswain of His
Majestys Ship Preston, with two or three other decently dressed persons, and several Sailors." Young Graves "besides his Sword had a large bludgeon in his hand and some of the others had sticks." When Hallowell refused to go with him on board the Bolton, which was tied up at the next pier, Lieutenant Graves "began to insult me with abusive language." Hallowell asserted in no uncertain terms that his dispute with the admiral was no concern of the admiral's nephew. After some more heated words from both parties young Graves "thought proper to withdraw towards his Vessel with his adherents."15

Less than an hour later Hallowell and a friend were strolling along Cornhill Street when they encountered Lieutenant Samuel Graves,

who passed me with a lowering look, and without speaking or the appearance of an intention to do my mischief, came behind me, and struck me a violent blow on the back part of my head, with a bludgeon which he had in his hand--the blow for a time stunned me and deprived me of the power of immediate reply--I recovered soon, and found him drawing his Sword, and retreating as I advanced. Being unarmed, I reproached him with his cowardly behavior and desired him to throw aside his Sword, asking him the cause of his ruffian treatment,--he said it was because I had insulted the Commander in Chief of the Squadron. --The High Sherriff and others coming up and interposing,--we were parted,--but not without an apparent disapprobation and indignation at his conduct by all the standers by, both military & civil, and this morning I received a Challenge from him by a lieutenant of the Preston.16

Hallowell, now faced with the prospect of fighting two
duels, appealed to the governor to intercede. Gage, wisely refusing to involve himself in the affair, merely forwarded Hallowell's letter to the admiral on the grounds that "his Complaints are entirely of Officers in your Department...I am very certain you know nothing of them." Graves apparently told his nephews to let the matter drop, and Hallowell was sensible enough not to pursue it further. It was too late in the year to harvest the hay on Gallop's Island, and in any case all the parties concerned had more important things to worry about.

Graves, despite the continued absence of any explicit instructions from the Admiralty, had decided to take the offensive against the rebels. As early as April 19 he had wanted to use his warships to chastise the towns that seemed to be the centers of the rebellion, but General Gage, always reluctant to inflict injury on innocent Americans, had regarded the admiral's ideas as unnecessarily bellicose. The events of the summer of 1775, however, had caused the governor's pacifist tendencies to evaporate, and by the end of August Graves was able to persuade him that a brutal campaign against the American populace was the only means left by which the siege of Boston might be broken. The general in fact wrote that he "wished that something of this kind had been proposed at an earlier Period, when it would have been more in my Power to have furnished the Supplys."
The expedition was going to put a severe strain on the army's resources. Graves, having observed for more than a year how ineffective traditional naval weaponry was against the American rebels, was determined to employ no more half measures. The British warships had fired broadsides at the colonial waterfronts on more than one occasion, but never with any more effect than to provide grist for the rebel propaganda mill. (Early in July Mercy Warren, the wife of a rebel leader who lived in Plymouth, wrote contemptuously of "the once formidable navy of Britain now degraded to a level with the corsairs of Barbary.") The Admiral therefore decided to organize and fit out a special naval force that would do the job with grisly efficiency. The army would supply a battery of howitzers and mortars, a detachment of artillerymen to man it, and a work force of carpenters under Mr. Husten, Gage's Artillery Master Carpenter. Captain Le Cras, who was taking the Somerset to Halifax for the winter, would ask Governor Legge and Admiral Duff to loan Graves as many men as they could spare. The old surveying ship Canceaux, the army transport Symmetry, and the little sloop Spitfire, which had been requisitioned on the morning of the fight on Breed's Hill, would be modified to accept the new ordnance, which would convert the three vessels into a floating siege train. Lieutenant Henry Mowat, whose work in the surveying service before the war had acquainted him intimately with the New England coast,
would be in command of the expedition. With such a force at his disposal, as Graves explained the plan to Gage, Mowat would be able to "lay Waste such Sea Port Towns in the New England Governments as are not likely to be useful to His Majesty's Stores and to destroy all the Vessels within the Harbours."  

Graves hoped that his raiding expedition would not only reverse the military situation but provide an outlet for his own frustration. Unfortunately, however, the task of reinforcing the decks of the Canceaux, Symmetry, and Spitfire so they could absorb the strain imposed by the mortars and howitzers proved to be barely within the capacity of the Boston shipyards. More than a month was to elapse before Mowat could get under way, and in the meantime a seemingly endless series of minor irritations continued to erode the admiral's temper.

Lord Dunmore, the governor of Virginia, had been nursing a grudge against the Royal Navy since he had been forced out of his palace at Williamsburg and into virtual exile on board the Fowey in June. Dunmore, convinced that the navy's absence from Chesapeake Bay had been largely responsible for his downfall, found a target for his wrath in the person of Captain John Macartney, the commanding officer of H.M. sloop-of-war Mercury. Graves had sent the Mercury to relieve the Fowey, with whose captain, George Montagu, Dunmore had gotten along reasonably well. The
Mercury joined the Fowey and the sloop-of-war Otter in the York River in early July, and Captain Macartney, bearing in mind the admiral’s rejoinders about keeping on good terms with the loyalists, applied himself to the task of ingratiating himself with the Virginia authorities. When a group of escaped Negro slaves swam out to the Mercury, having heard the rumors that the Royal Navy would welcome them as recruits, Macartney righteously handed them over to their masters. He thereby earned a vote of thanks from the local government and some pleasant words from the newspapers.23

The tense political situation in Virginia, unfortunately, was so complicated that an unsuspecting naval officer could find himself on the wrong side before he knew what was happening. The governor had been working on a scheme for promoting a pro-British slave uprising, and in fact was to issue a proclamation freeing the slaves of rebels in Virginia a few months later. He thus was less than delighted with Macartney's behavior, and began to experience doubts about that officer's loyalties. Dunmore saw those doubts confirmed when, on the evening of July 12, disregarding the advice of both the governor and Captain Montagu, Macartney went ashore and had dinner with the President of the Virginia Council, Thomas Nelson, at the latter's house in the village of Yorktown. Macartney apparently intended merely to pay his respects to one of the local dignitaries, but overlooked the fact that Dunmore detested Nelson and
regarded him as one of the leaders of the rebellion.24

During the next few days the Fowey completed her stores for her voyage to Boston, and Dunmore, sufficiently incensed at Macartney to eschew the slightly more roomy accommodations offered by the Mercury, transferred his belongings to the Otter. When the Fowey departed she carried with her a letter from the governor to Admiral Graves, requesting that Macartney be relieved of his command. The latter officer, according to Dunmore, seemed

to have principally at heart the making Friends among his Majesty's greatest Enemies in this Country. Hitherto instead of aiding me, he has very much prejudiced all the Measures which I have thought requisite to adopt for restoring his Majesty's lost Authority in this Government; and his Conduct has been of such a Nature that I foresee it will be impossible for me ever, with propriety to apply to him for any Assistance if I should require it of him; And...I think him utterly unfit for such a Command.25

Admiral Graves thus found himself confronted by yet another awkward predicament. He must, of course, comply with Dunmore's request; the Admiralty's instructions had been explicit regarding the necessity for cooperation with the royal governors.26 Yet to relieve Macartney would wreck his career. The governor of Virginia was one of the most unpopular crown officials in North America; the number of worthy people who had had arguments with him was legion. Graves himself, when he learned that the Magdalen had carried Lady Dunmore to England without his orders, had been so furious that Captain Montagu, having been the senior officer
present at the time, begged Dunmore to write to the Admiralty lest Montagu be blamed for the incident. At length Graves decided to send the Kingfisher to Chesapeake Bay (since Dunmore had approved of Captain George Montagu he would, presumably, get on just as well with the latter's brother James, the Kingfisher's commanding officer), and have the Preston's first lieutenant, Alexander Graeme, bring the Mercury back to Boston so Macartney could give his own version of what had happened. In Boston, with the governor of Virginia a comfortable 650 miles away, the problem could be solved with a minimum of discredit to anyone involved.

When the Mercury had sailed off with her captain under arrest Dunmore began to realize that he had acted rashly; on September 12 he wrote to Graves that

I really did not mean or wish that Captain Macartney should be brought to a Court Martial ....[he] is I really believe as you describe him a most exceeding diligent, punctual good Officer... and I really believe the imprudencies he has been guilty of proceeded more from a want of knowledge of Mankind than from any bad intention, this being the case I hope you will not only reinstate him in his Ship but also in your former good Opinion.

When Macartney announced that he was in ill health and not up to the strain of defending himself at a court martial Graves seized on the excuse to send the unfortunate captain home to England. If their Lordships wanted to pursue the matter further they were welcome to do so.
On September 26 the frigate Cerberus returned from England. Her new captain, John Symonds, had brought no Admiralty dispatches, but he did have a stunning piece of news: General Gage had been relieved. His orders said he was being recalled to London to offer his expert advice concerning the next year's campaign, but it was obvious to everyone in Boston that Gage was going home in disgrace. The general himself took the news as graciously as could be expected, handing the command of his Majesty's land forces in North America over to General Howe while, with the aid of the Preston's barge which Graves courteously had placed at their disposal, Gage's staff loaded his baggage on board one of the army's transports. No naval vessel was available to carry Gage and his retinue to England, but Graves promised to give the general a convoy until the transport was out of the waters frequented by the rebel privateers.

The admiral's sentiments as he watched Gage's ship, with the Mercury as escort, drop over the horizon two weeks later can only be guessed at. The popular contention among the British officers in Boston was that many of the general's problems were of his own making: he was a decent, honorable man whose humanitarian impulses had kept him from making the best use possible of military force. Graves consistently had urged that the army take a more belligerent stance, and he probably blamed Gage for at least some of the difficulties the navy had been experiencing for the
past six months. On the surface all had been well between
the two commanders-in-chief; no hint of anything but an
exemplary professional relationship ever appeared in their
correspondence. But for several months there had been
gossip in the city about the state of affairs between the
general and the admiral. Their families, it was said, had
been feuding for at least a generation. On one occasion
Sir Henry Clinton, in an attempt to serve as peacemaker,
invited Gage and Graves to dinner at his Boston townhouse.
It was a nerve-wracking evening during which, as Clinton
related it, "I was obliged to cajole them both," but they
"parted the best of friends, which was the great object
of my bringing them together."32 As late as August Captain
George Montagu wrote that "The G----l and Ad----l [were]
on bad terms."33 Graves undoubtedly experienced some
relief at Gage's departure, and hoped that Howe would
prove to be a more aggressive commander. Yet at the same
time the admiral must have wondered whether anything the
army could have done during Gage's tenure would have made
any difference. If Gage had fortified Dorchester Heights
in April would the rebels outside the city have been any
less numerous? Could any general with 6,000 troops at
his disposal have broken a siege that was being carried out
by an army which, despite its lack of uniforms and its
mediocre leadership, was at least twice as large? Above
all, would the government that had cashiered Gage be
likely to show any more mercy to an admiral who had no better performance to his credit?

On October 4 the sloop-of-war *Raven* arrived, and her captain, John Stanhope, presented Graves with a packet of official letters. Among them was the Admiralty dispatch of July 6—the first order Graves had received that had been written after their Lordships knew the war had started. Graves found himself "required & directed to carry on such Operations upon the Sea Coasts of the Four Governments in New England, as you shall judge most effectual for suppressing, in conjunction with His Majesty's Land Forces, the Rebellion which is now openly avowed & supported in those Colonies." As it happened the admiral had been preparing for several weeks to do precisely that, and the Admiralty order removed from his mind any reservations he had had about the project.

Lieutenant Mowat, finished at last with the task of fitting his ships with their exotic new armament, reported on October 6 that his little squadron was ready for sea. Graves gave him a long set of instructions describing how Mowat was to "proceed along the Coast, and lay waste burn and destroy such Seaport Towns as are accessible to his Majesty's Ships." In addition to the *Canceaux, Symmetry*, and *Spitfire* the schooner *Halifax* was to be at Mowat's disposal, and the four vessels were to carry 100 troops (all Gage had felt he could spare) as well as the ordinary marine
complements. "My design," Graves wrote, "is to chastize Marblehead, Salem, Newbury Port, Cape Ann Harbor, Portsmouth, Ipswich, Saco, Falmouth in Casto Bay, and particularly Mechias where the Margueritta was taken." Mowat obviously lacked the force necessary to take possession of all those places, but he was to "make the most vigorous Efforts to burn the Towns, and destroy the Shipping in the Harbours." 

The "small armament" got under way on October 8. Mowar's initial destination was the village of Cape Anne, but Mr. Grant, the army artillery officer attached to the Canceaux, was of the opinion that the buildings on the waterfront there were too widely scattered to be bombarded effectively. The four little vessels thereupon set their course for Falmouth, a particularly satisfactory target since Mowat and the Canceaux's surgeon had been imprisoned there briefly just after the start of the war.

The British squadron anchored in Falmouth Harbor at four o'clock on the afternoon of October 18, and Mowat sent his highest ranking officer, an acting lieutenant named Fraser, ashore to announce what was about to happen. Fraser made his way to the town hall, where a crowd had gathered, and read a proclamation his commander had given him. The people of Falmouth had "been guilty of the most unpardonable Rebellion," and the admiral had sent the king's ships "to execute a just Punishment." Mowat would allow
the local authorities two hours "to remove without delay
the Human Species out of the said town."\(^{38}\)

Mowat, though he was to be denigrated as the first
great villain in the history of Maine, was behaving in a
far more humane manner than his orders demanded. He watch­
ed impassively as the terrified colonists gathered what they
could of their belongings and, by whatever means they could
find, started to evacuate the village. A committee of
leading citizens came out to the Canceaux to beg for mercy;
Mowat agreed that, if the five carriage guns Fraser had
seen and all the muskets and ammunition in the town were
handed over by nine o'clock the next morning, the navy would
hold its fire until the admiral had been informed and new
orders had been received from him. When the appointed time
arrived, and his demand had been ignored, Mowat scanned the
shore with his telescope and discovered that some women and
children still were visible. He therefore allowed an extra
forty minutes, after which the waterfront seemed to be
deserted. At 9:40, satisfied that he had given the towns­
people every conceivable opportunity to save themselves,
Mowat gave the order to open fire.\(^{39}\)

Falmouth was a small village, containing fewer than
200 buildings and inhabited by about 300 families. It was,
however, distributed over almost a mile of waterfront, and
several of the buildings, such as the church and the little
fort, were stoutly constructed of stone and brick. It took
over eight hours for the British squadron, firing round shot, shells, and flaming carcasses, to set most of the structures on fire. Much of the work the shipwrights had done on the Canceaux, Spitfire, and Symmetry proved to be inadequate: all the howitzers shook themselves out of their carriages after the first few salvoes, and Mowat complained later of "the insufficiency of the artillery stores, not only in goodness, but in quantity...which I am sorry to observe will not reflect great credit on the ordnance store at Boston."40 The buildings at the south end of the town refused to catch fire until a party of soldiers and marines under Messrs. Grant and Fraser landed and threw torches among them. By 6:00, however, as Mowat reported to the admiral, "Flamouth, with the Blockhouse and battery, the principal wharfs and storehouses, with eleven sail of vessels," were "all laid into ashes, including a fine distillery."41 Four more ships in the harbor were captured. The only British casualties were a single marine and one of the Canceaux's midshipmen, both slightly wounded when the Falmouth militia company tried to resist the shore parties.42

According to Graves's orders Mowat was now to proceed to one of the other towns on the admiral's list, but the destruction of Falmouth had been so difficult that the squadron was almost out of ammunition. Mowat thus had no choice but to return to Boston.

Graves was surprised to discover his "armament," upon
which he had based such high hopes, anchored off Hog Island on the morning of October 19, after only eleven days at sea. He could not, however, voice any criticism of Lieutenant Mowat, who obviously had carried out his orders as best he could. The admiral was confident that the burning of even one port would have a considerable effect on the rebel war effort. In a letter to Mr. Stephens he called Mowat's action "a severe stroke to the Rebels Falmouth having long been a principal Magazine of all kinds of Merchandize, from whence...large Quantities of Goods were usually transported in small Vessels to Newbury Port and from thence to the Rebel Army round Boston...." Graves reminded the Admiralty that the raid on Falmouth was only "our first Essay, we shall in a little time be better provided, and you may be assured we shall not allow the Rebels to remain quiet." 43

In fact the rebels had no intention of being quiet. Their remarkably efficient communications system ensured that word of the Royal Navy's behavior at Falmouth was heard all along the coast within a few weeks, and the episode quickly became a favorite topic of conversation and correspondence. James Warren, in a letter to his friend John Adams, described the actions of "the pirates on the Eastern shore" as savage and barbarous in the highest stage. What can we wait for now? What more can we want to justify any step to take, kill and destroy, to refuse them any refreshments, to apprehend our enemies, to confiscate their
goods and estates, to open our ports to foreigners, and if practicable to form alliances, etc., etc." 

The delegates to the congress in Philadelphia received letters from all directions condemning "the British Barbarians' and their "malicious Purpose...to execute, their unrelenting Vengeance by every Means in their Power." 

George Washington, the former British army officer whom the congress had placed in command of the troops besieging Boston, recounted to one of his subordinates how the raid on Falmouth had been "Effected with every Circumstance of Cruelty and Barbarity, which Revenge and Malice could suggest. We expect every Moment to hear other Places have been attempted." 

Graves's plan to follow up the Falmouth expedition with a series of raids on the other New England seaports went completely awry. Preparing Mowat's force in the first place had strained Boston's construction and repair facilities, along with the ordnance stores, to the limit, and the action of October 18 had revealed that the preparations had been barely adequate. It gradually became obvious that the approaching winter would immobilize the squadron before a new "armament" was ready to sail. Any further offensive action would have to wait until spring, if the city could hold out that long. For the time being the admiral must reconcile himself to the fact that his grand scheme to "lay waste the seaport towns" had misfired. By expending so much energy on the destruction of a single village he had
demonstrated not his strength but his weakness.

Nor was criticism of Graves the exclusive preserve of the rebels. Boston had been under siege for over six months, and the prospects for the city's relief seemed no brighter than they had been in April. That there should be short tempers among the garrison and the inhabitants was inevitable; it was almost as natural that the senior naval officer should be the target of much of the blame for the city's misfortune. British minds, long accustomed to regarding the great warships of the Royal Navy as the pre-eminent symbols of royal justice and authority, were increasingly puzzled by the sight of the vessels of the North American Squadron lying at anchor with their gunports shut while every vestige of order and decency in New England disintegrated. The supplies of foodstuffs in the town were diminishing so fast that doubts arose as to whether the population would live through the winter. General Howe's troops were numerically inferior to the besieging army, but the rebels had no navy. Surely the admiral could do something.

One anonymous letter-writer complained that "there is nothing to prevent the rebels taking every vessel bound for this port; for though there are near twenty pendants flying in this harbour, I cannot find that there is one vessel cruising in the bay." He described Graves as "a curse upon the garrison. We used to say here that the suite of our former General were intent on nothing but profit, but
we have more reason to complain of our sea commander....his own wife says that a fit which he had on his arrival here has rendered him good for nothing." The rumor mill continued to disgorge stories about the admiral's corruption: he had seized a shipload of turtles and pineapples from under the noses of the army officers; the restrictions on boat traffic in the harbor were the result of a conspiracy involving the admiral and his despised secretary to monopolize the fishing rights. An army lieutenant complained that Graves was "the most improper person to Act in Conjunction with land forces in this important Ocasion, and believe no General in his Majesty's Navy is less Respected, tho nobody Doubts his courage, but in Judgement...."

The most damning criticism, however, came from General Burgoyne, whose experience as a playwright had refined his wit as well as his literary talents. In a letter to his friend Lord George Germain, Burgoyne asked

--what [is] the Admiral doing? I wish I was able to answer that question satisfactorily. But I can only say what he is not doing.

That He is not supplying the troops with sheep & oxen the dinners of the best of us bear [me] ager testimony--the want of broth in the Hospitals bears a more melancholy one.

He is not defending his own flocks & herds, for the enemy has repeatedly and in the most insulting manner, plundered his own appropriated islands.

He is not defending the other islands in the harbour; for the enemy landed in force, burned the lighthouse at noon day, & killed & took a party of marines almost under the guns of two or three men of war.

He is not employing his ships to keep up
communication & intelligence with the servants & friends of Government at different parts of the Continent, for I do not believe Genl Gage has received a letter from any correspondent out of Boston these six weeks.

He is surely intent upon greater objects you will think—supporting in material points the dignity & terror of the British flag—& where a number of boats have been built for the rebels, privateers fitted out, prices carried in, the King's armed vessels sunk, the crews made prisoners, the officers killed—He is doubtless enforcing instant restitution & reparation by the voice of his Cannon, and laying the towns in ashes which refuse his terms—Alass! He is not—the British thunder is diverted or controlled by pitiful attentions & quaker-like scruples; & under such influence Insult [and] Impunity, like Righteousness & peace, have kissed each other.

II

The reports on what was happening in Boston were beginning to make the Earl of Sandwich feel as though he were under siege as well. The dockyard strike and various other irritations had impeded the progress of the great fleet the Admiralty had promised to send to North America. Graves's melancholy reports and his pleas for reinforcements had been arriving at Whitehall regularly, and Sandwich was convinced that most of the admiral's complaints were justified. But the fact remained that the rebellion had been going on since April, and the government and the public were growing vociferous in their demands that the Admiralty do something about it.

Many of the cabinet ministers and members of Parliament had friends and relatives serving in America, and were receiving personal letters regarding the situation there.
Through all the correspondence from Boston there ran one theme: the city was starving because the admiral in command was not doing his duty. Criticism of Graves began to be heard in all parts of fashionable London, from the ale houses and theaters to the corridors of the House of Lords. Mr. William Eden, an undersecretary in the Southern Department of the Ministry of State, called Graves "a corrupt admiral without any shadow of capacity." The rumors about the Graves-Gage feud led Sandwich, as early as July, to caution the admiral "to allow no grounds for your enemies to have anything to say upon that subject; if you do, the most disagreeable consequences both public and private will happen." Within a month the First Lord, in a letter he revised twice in an effort to achieve a delicate combination of forthrightness and congeniality, was reminding Graves that

...you will be liable to universal censure for doing too little, though I should be greatly surprised if you incurred any blame by rather overdoing your part in the other extreme.

I think I should not perform the part of a friend, if I endeavoured to conceal from you that the world in general is full of complaints that the fleet does nothing...they say that you do not consider America as a country you are actually at war with...

Though this language is chiefly in the mouths of those who are unacquainted with your force and of the extensive services that your fleet is to be employed in,...it is with great difficulty that I have been able to resist the general cry for another commander. I have however resisted it hitherto; and I am persuaded that you will give me fresh materials before the end of the campaign to confirm what I have asserted, namely
that you will exert every nerve in support of the important business you are engaged in.\textsuperscript{53}

The only "fresh materials" Sandwich received were more complaints of Graves's inertia and corruption. On September 8 Lord Rochford, the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, wrote to Sandwich that "The King...has authorized me to tell you that he does not see, after every letter laying such blame on him (the Admiral), how the command can any longer be left in such improper hands."\textsuperscript{54} Against such pressure even the powers of the First Lord's patronage had to yield. Nine days after he received Rochford's letter, Sandwich undertook the unpleasant task of telling Graves of the government's decision:

\begin{quote}
Sir--It gives me great concern to be obliged to inform you that I have received his Majesty's commands for your returning home at the close of this year....General Gage's return to England has made my resistance to your being recalled utterly ineffectual: the torrent has been too strong for me to be able to withstand it.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

The only consolation Sandwich could offer was the remarkably perceptive observation that, in his opinion "it has been more owing to accident than to misconduct that the operations of the fleet during this summer have not carried that importance with them the nation expected."\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{III}

Winter had come to New England, and had brought with it such weather as none of the British naval officers had ever seen. The winter of 1774-75 had seemed harsh enough
to men accustomed to the temperate climate of England, but by the standards of Massachusetts Bay had been mild.

By December most of Boston Harbor was covered by several inches of ice; only in the channel leading out of the Charles was the current strong enough to keep the water clear and allow navigation. From the seaman's viewpoint the weather was dangerous because of its inconsistency: a morning of clear blue skies frequently gave way to a snow storm in the afternoon. Admiral Graves himself, in the memoirs he wrote during his retirement, described how

...This sort of storm is so severe that it cannot even be looked against, and by the snow freezing as fast as it falls, baffles all resistance, for the Blocks become choaked, the Tackle encrusted, the Ropes and Sails quite congealed, and the whole Ship before long one Cake of ice. And at times of less inclemency the Sea freezes upon whatever part of it falls and soon covers the forepart of a ship with ice. So that whenever there be occasion to form another route by changing the course, or from the violence of the tempest to hall up a lower Sail, it is necessary to pour boiling water upon the tacks and sheets, and with clubs and bats to beat off the Ice, before the cordage can be rendered flexible.57

In spite of the weather Graves's sloops and frigates managed to maintain a patrol of sorts in Massachusetts Bay, hoping to snap up a rebel prize and to escort any British reinforcements into Boston. The Cerberus was on her way to Halifax when she encountered a most welcome arrival, an English brig, called the Nancy loaded with ordnance stores including small arms, shells, carcasses, and a 13" brass mortar. Captain Symonds reversed his course and kept the
brig under convoy for several days, but parted company with her in a gale. Then the Nancy fell in with Lieutenant Graeme's Mercury, only to lose sight of her as well. A week later word came that the brig, mortar and all, had been taken by one of General Washington's schooners that had been lurking just outside the harbor. Graves was "of opinion she [the Nancy] was lost by the Treachery of the Master or Pilot," but the episode touched off a new round of criticism of the admiral. One army officer gloomily predicted that the rebels would set up the mortar at Phipp's Farm, so that

in spite of her capture, we are likely to be complimented with the contents of her lading: for all this we will be indebted to our worthy Admiral. This vigilant officer...for some time past...has never sent a single ship to cruise off Cape Ann, because the Rebels have had some cannon mounted upon it: no doubt the Parliament will thank him on his glorious return for so effectually preserving his Majesty's ships.

Lord Rawdon, one of General Clinton's staff officers, complained that, while the rebel privateers seemed able to operate with impunity, "we have a fleet lying inactive in the harbour, one ship of which would be sufficient to destroy any of the little miserable ports into which the rebels carry their prizes....Graves deserves to be made an example of much more than ever Byng did."

On December 30 the 50-gun ship Chatham picked her way delicately through the ice and anchored off Long Wharf. She had encountered a gale in her crossing of the Atlantic,
and so much ice had formed on her bow that several of her headrails had fallen off; her figurehead was suspended by a rope lashing from her bowsprit. The Chatham's bizarre appearance, however, was of less interest to Graves than was the blue rear admiral's pennant flying from her mainmast. Admiral Shuldham, the long-awaited second-in-command, had arrived.

The salutes to Shuldham's flag scarcely had been completed when the admiral himself came on board the Preston. Graves, welcoming the sight of an unfamiliar face and the prospect of news from England, greeted him cordially. All pleasant thoughts of entertaining the new arrival at dinner in the Preston's great cabin were shattered, however, when Shuldham, noticeably embarrassed, presented his credentials: he was to take command of the North American Squadron. Graves had been relieved.

A lifetime of naval discipline helped Graves deal with the situation with as much dignity as possible. He wrote a dispatch to Mr. Stephens, acknowledging the Admiralty's orders and promising to leave for England as soon as he finished "the Business necessary to be done upon leaving this station." During January the Preston's crew prepared accommodations for Mrs. Graves, and lowered the furniture and other belongings from the admiral's house into the flagship's hold. At eight a.m. on February 2 Samuel Graves received the squadron's salutes for the last time, and the
Preston, with Lieutenant Mowat and the tired old Canceaux in company, left Boston Harbor for the first time in nineteen months. By sunset, with decidedly mixed emotions, Graves had watched the coastline of North America disappear beneath the horizon.

The Admiralty's decision to sack Graves was, according to the logic by which such decisions had to be made, the correct one. Graves had been given the task of ending the American Revolution and he had failed. In the eighteen months during which he had commanded on the North American Station one of his Majesty's fleets had done little more than make an embarrassing spectacle of itself, lying virtually immobilized in harbor while several thousand British subjects made a mockery of the king's government. The isolated revolt in the neighborhood of Boston had turned into a full-scale, continent-wide rebellion, and the admiral had done nothing about it. He had allowed a British army almost to starve to death in a fortified city, despite the fact that no enemy had contested the navy's control of the seas. Graves's one offensive action had been the raid on Falmouth, and that episode had provided the rebel propaganda machine with ammunition without accomplishing anything of military significance. Neither the government nor the British populace, accustomed to reading in their newspapers of England's great naval victories, was disposed to tolerate such a performance. The Admiralty, forced to
demonstrate its dissatisfaction with the situation in a way the public could understand, let the ax fall on the most logical neck. To have retained Graves any longer would have amounted to a public declaration that the Admiralty approved of his conduct, when not only politics but military discipline demanded that such conduct be labelled utterly unacceptable. The Royal Navy's very existence depended on every one of its officers' knowing that if he did not win victories he would be dubbed a failure. The career of a not-particularly-distinguished vice admiral, even though he was a friend of the First Lord, could not take precedence over the maintenance of service discipline.

Yet it is difficult to suggest how any other admiral could have done substantially better. The oafish performance of the North American Squadron was no more than a manifestation of a colossal ineptitude that the next six years were to expose throughout the British naval and military establishments. That ineptitude was not caused by clearly definable incompetence; Graves might well have been a first-rate admiral under other circumstances, just as Gage and Howe might have been able to win decisive land battles in Europe. It was Graves's misfortune rather to have placed in his hands an instrument ludicrously unsuited to the job.

The Royal Navy had been built, and admirals like Graves had been trained, to fight naval wars. The great event of
such a conflict was the sea battle, the climactic encounter of the ships-of-the-line that could determine the destiny of nations in an afternoon's work with the great guns. For over a century every phase of British naval affairs had been dominated by the concept of the sea battle. Ship design, gunnery, tactical and strategic thinking, the education of midshipmen—all had been based on the assumption that an engagement between battle fleets would be the decisive moment of the naval war. That was the sort of war the Royal Navy fought, and the sort that made and destroyed officers' careers.

Samuel Graves, to his credit, realized almost immediately upon his arrival in Boston that he was confronted by something entirely different. The situation in Boston did not call for a "fighting admiral" in the tradition of Hawke and Drake, for the simple reason that Graves was not being called upon to fight a naval war. His enemy had no battle fleet but fought him with newspapers rather than 32-pounders, and used mob violence and terror tactics to humiliate him and undermine his logistics.

Graves understood the peculiar demands made by the Revolution sooner than anyone else did. A truly incompetent admiral finding himself in the midst of such a war as the one in America might have begged for more ships-of-the-line, the classic weapons with which admirals were supposed to fight. When Graves asked the Admiralty to send him more
ships he asked for sloops-of-war and schooners, and for
the obsolescent 50-gun ships with their shallow draft.
The image of the Asia riding to her anchors month after
month in New York Harbor doing absolutely nothing was no
more pleasant to Graves than it was to the Admiralty, but
in North America there was no more constructive use to
which a ship-of-the-line could be put. Many an officer
would have regarded a command consisting of sloops, schooners,
and frigates as undignified. That Graves attempted to build
up just such a force demonstrates that, if he was unable
to figure out precisely how to deal with the Revolution, he
at least understood that the Royal Navy's traditional
weaponry was irrelevant to the situation.

Graves's correspondence describes his constant, for­
lorn effort to make his handful of little ships perform
the tasks that were thrust upon them. No British naval
officer ever had faced such a challenge, and the rewards
for meeting it were almost nil. Neither Graves's officers,
his superiors, nor the public would ever call his perfor­
mance any better than adequate, and yet his position made
him singularly vulnerable to criticism. The army officers
were in just as difficult a situation, but had the advantage
of being able to lay at least part of the blame for it on
Graves. Everyone in Boston knew that it was the navy's
responsibility to supply the city, and no one let slip
an opportunity to point out that it was the admiral's
responsibility to figure out how.

The admiral's supposedly abrasive personality seems to have acquired a reputation throughout New England. Just how much of that reputation was deserved must remain a matter for speculation. In his official correspondence Graves always came across as an officer and a gentleman; his writing contained none of the crude arrogance to be found in Sir George Rodney's dispatches, or the thinly concealed self-pity in Sir Henry Clinton's. If there was a feud between Graves and Gage it did not prevent those officers from remaining on as businesslike terms as ever were to exist between an admiral and a general in a war distinguished by miserable inter-service relationships.

Most of the criticism of Graves centered around his alleged laziness and inactivity. Between his arrival and his departure he never left Boston Harbor, and it was easy for the people on shore to believe that a British admiral ought to be doing something other than sitting in his cabin on board his securely anchored flagship. Historians have been equally critical. Allen French, for example, castigated Graves because he "remained a harbor-admiral, revolved between his flagship and his house ashore, and acted as a mere administrator." French suggested that Graves might have "accomplished something by himself taking the seas, attacking the enemy and giving an example to his captains and men."
The last sentence reveals a basic flaw in the argument, for Graves had no enemy on the seas. The image of the North American Squadron breasting the North Atlantic swells in quest of someone with whom to fight a sea battle undoubtedly was more attractive to Graves than the sight of the same vessels anchored amid the dreary surroundings of Boston Harbor, but to take the squadron to sea would have been preposterous. The American colonists had no battle fleet; at the time Graves left, their "naval force" consisted of six armed schooners hurriedly commissioned by George Washington. In any case Graves's warships were not so inactive as French and most other authors have implied. Between June 1 and December 31, 1775, the squadron captured 68 colonial vessels of various descriptions, and confiscated cargoes of such diverse commodities as molasses, flour, corn, sugar, coffee, pig iron, whale oil, and barrel staves. Furthermore, a great deal of Graves's responsibility as commander-in-chief in North America was indeed strictly administrative. By the nature of his position he spent much of his time on his correspondence—with the army officers, the civilian authorities, and his own officers, in addition to the government in London. On a station such as North America the transmission and answering of dispatches was vital, and the great distances involved (Lieutenant Hunter, whose Gaspee was responsible for the maintenance of order in the Bay of Fundy, never was less than 350 miles away from
Graves while the latter was in command) made the task of the commander-in-chief awkward at best. If Graves had gone charging about the American coast trying to prove that he was a dynamic officer his correspondence never would have caught up to him, and the squadron's barely adequate command structure would have been reduced to chaos. Graves "remained a harbor-admiral" because he had no choice.

He also came under attack for showing favoritism to his relatives. The fact that Graves had no children of his own may well have caused him to take an unusual interest in the careers of his nephews, and he does seem to have taken every opportunity to give them responsible commands. In a twentieth-century military force such behavior would be labelled inexcusable, but in the eighteenth-century Royal Navy nepotism was a fact of life. If all the Graveses, Montaguses, Howes, and Parkers had been removed from the fleet few officers would have been left. Every admiral used his authority to help his friends and relatives (Rodney tried to put his son in command of a 50-gun ship when the boy was 20); Graves's interest in his nephews was no more flagrant than normal. It should be noted that he never actually promoted any of them, but merely placed them in positions where they would have greater opportunities to gain experience, recognition, and prize money. There is no reason to doubt that the four Lieutenants Graves were competent officers. Young Thomas had a particularly
distinguished career, which culminated in his being knighted as a result of his service as Nelson's second-in-command at the Battle of Copenhagen.  

Sandwich and the other members of the Admiralty Board were by no means oblivious to Graves's problems. Palliser's memorandum of July demonstrated a remarkably clear conception of how large the North American Squadron should have been. Whether Graves would have been able to save Boston with the fifty warships the Admiralty decided to send him is debatable; it is a fact that he never had a chance to try. The reinforcements he did receive arrived so sporadically that they did little more than replace the vessels he was losing to attrition. Between the start of the war and the middle of September, when the government decided to relieve him, Graves was reinforced by five ships: the Otter (16), Merlin (16), Senegal (14), Scorpion (14) and Viper (10). During the same period he purchased five more vessels, but also lost five (the St. Lawrence and Magdalen sent to England, the first Halifax wrecked, the Diana burnt, and the Diligent captured).  

The captain's reports and records of carpenters' surveys Graves enclosed in his dispatches testify to the woeful condition of many of the warships he did have at his disposal. He complained that the big ships that arrived from England before the war started had not been fitted out properly; in view of the dockyard strike they may well not have been. Many of the
schooners and other small vessels had been on the North American Station for years, exposed constantly to the ravages of sea, ice, and radically changing weather. That so many of them had to be repaired so frequently is not remarkable.

Having declared its intention to increase his command to fifty ships the Admiralty treated Graves as though he already had them. When Graves came to America he had no orders about how to fight a war; when the war started the Admiralty gave him orders he could not obey. The stream of directives that emanated from Whitehall suggested that their Lordships had no understanding whatever of what was going on in Boston. Those orders did, however, make it possible for the Admiralty to claim that it was directing the war effort in an efficient and businesslike manner, responding to every piece of intelligence and every suggestion from the Cabinet by sending the appropriate orders to the man on the spot. If the rebels managed to smuggle a bushel of musket flints into some deserted American inlet, that must be the admiral's fault: he had been told precisely how to stop them.

The Admiralty realized that in cashing Graves it had punished him for, as one historian put it, "not succeeding under circumstance amid which success was impossible." As soon as the Preston arrived at Portsmouth Graves made his way to London with the intention of
launching a campaign to clear his name. He called at the Admiralty Office and demanded that his conduct be examined by a court martial; their Lordships suavely replied that it would be impossible to try him since he had not been charged with any offense. Graves visited several cabinet members, and through the good auspices of his friend Sandwich even obtained an audience with the king, but always received the same response: everyone appreciated the difficulties he had faced in America, no one was accusing him of any wrongdoing, and his best course would be to let the matter drop. Graves insisted that his honor could be restored only if he were given another command immediately. Sandwich replied that no position suitable for a vice admiral was vacant, but attempted to placate Graves with repeated promises that the admiral's nephews, all of whom had been left in North America, would be promoted.

Graves withdrew to his country estate, Hembury Fort, and proceeded to orchestrate his own scheme to restore his public image. He and his secretary, Gefferina, spent most of the remaining months of 1776 compiling a detailed account of the admiral's tenure in North America, complete with copies of most of his dispatches (but no mention of his dispute with Benjamin Hallowell). Graves felt that the publication of this document, which ran to several hundred manuscript pages, would convince the world that he had been wronged by a cruel ministry and an unappreciative Admiralty.
By December "The Conduct of Admiral Graves" was finished. Graves realized, however, that its appearance would bring to an end whatever amicability still existed between him and the government, so he decided to make a last-ditch effort to get another command before sending the manuscript off to the printer. Word came that the port admiral at Plymouth, which was a few miles from Graves's home, was due to retire, so Graves wrote to the Admiralty asking that he be considered for that position.

By this time the Admiralty, for reasons which will be discussed in the next chapter, had decided to recall Admiral Shuldham from North America, and Sandwich had arranged for Shuldham to take the command at Plymouth. The First Lord had not forgotten his friend Graves, however, and now that the uproar over the latter's recall seemed to be subsiding Sandwich felt safe in making a generous offer. Relations with France had been deteriorating, and the Admiralty had decided to increase the navy's strength in the Mediterranean. Would Admiral Graves be willing to accept that command? 70

When the offer of the Mediterranean Fleet reached Graves he scarcely could believe his good fortune. The Plymouth command would have been a handsome one, providing ample pay and the opportunity to oversee his domestic affairs as well. But in the Mediterranean he would be in command of a squadron of ships-of-the-line, with more to come if, as seemed likely, France were to declare war on
England. Graves laid aside his plans to publish his manuscript and began making preparations for going to sea. He would have to wait several months while his new flagship, the Panther, was put into commission; that would give Sandwich time to have the admiral's nephew Samuel sent home to command her. Then Sandwich summoned Graves to Whitehall for an interview. Exactly what went on in the First Lord's office on September 24, 1777 is unclear; Graves later said that Sandwich "appeared...greatly distressed," but Sandwich felt the admiral "must have exceedingly misunderstood my appearance...for I was under no sort of distress." Perhaps the First Lord had been feeling the pressure of the Opposition again, and was afraid that sending Graves to the Mediterranean would be perceived as a flagrant abuse of patronage. At any rate Sandwich announced that, in a dispatch Mr. Stephens had just received, Shuldham had expressed a desire to serve in the West Indies. The port admiral's spot at Plymouth therefore was vacant again, and the Admiralty, recalling Graves's earlier request for that command, had decided to give it to him. The Mediterranean Fleet would go to Vice Admiral Robert Duff, who was on his way home from the Newfoundland Station and had requested duty in a warm climate for the sake of his health.
So stunned was Graves by this development that he merely thanked Sandwich and went back to Hembury Fort. A few days' thought, however, convinced him that he had been insulted. He concluded, as he wrote to Sandwich on September 15, that

...at the Admiralty I was looked upon, at the eve of a French war, as an officer fitted to do port duty only upon these appearance I was fired with indignation...resolving rather to live on the produce of my own farm than accept of a command that would eternally stain my honour.... From your Lordship's friendship to me I hoped to obtain a splendid command to wipe off the unmerited disgrace of my former recall in that light I received your Lordships promise of the Mediterranean command and my heart overflowed with gratitude to your Lordship for the favors bestowed judge then how cruelly I was disappointed to have that command which I could not but look upon as the only reparation that could be made to me for my former hard treatment taken from me and given to a junior officer, and for still farther disgrace the leavings of another junior flag tired of the command put upon me. Your Lordship I am sure will when you seriously reflect upon these considerations not be displeased with me for absolutely refusing the Plymouth command holding myself always ready to serve my King and Government whenever I can do it with honour."

Sandwich's reply demonstrated his skill at smoothing the ruffled feathers of naval officers. "I cannot help telling you," he wrote Graves on September 18, "that of all the letters I ever received in my life, no one surprised me so much as that which I have before me dated the 15th instant." The Admiralty, he explained, had intended to do Graves a favor by giving him the Plymouth command; he had, after all,
indicated that that was his first choice, and had accepted the Mediterranean only because Plymouth was unavailable. Sandwich had gone to considerable trouble to work out the new arrangement: Duff had been destined for Plymouth and had had to be persuaded to exchange places with Graves. The latter had received nothing but good treatment from the Admiralty, as he would see if he would recall "my having taken all your recommendations of your numerous nephews, and having really in my opinion left you nothing to ask for your family, and as to the support I gave you before and since your return from America, I had rather you should hear it from others than from myself." While "Upon the whole I am truly concerned that you are not convinced that I am your friend," Sandwich concluded, "it is out of my power to give you further proofs of my being so, therefore all I can say is, that in consequence of your having signified your absolute refusal of the command at Plymouth, I will receive his Majesty's pleasure by the first opportunity for the appointment of another Admiral to command at that Port." 75

In fact the First Lord had decided to wash his hands of Graves once and for all. Sandwich had withstood a great deal of criticism for having stood by the admiral for so long, and had received scant gratitude in return.

Graves spent the rest of his life at Hembury Fort, "holding himself in readiness" for an Admiralty letter that
never came. He continued to write to London every few months, reminding their Lordships of his loyalty and putting forward the names of his nephews for every promotion he heard about. The old admiral's correspondence, which previously had demonstrated the grammatical perfection typical of his generation of naval officers, acquired a rambling, aimless quality. He never forgot that the Mediterranean had been taken away from him; he came to suspect that Duff, a Scotsman to whom Graves referred derisively as "the Northern Thane," was involved in a conspiracy with the Scottish politicians. Graves took every opportunity to point out that the officers who had followed him to North America had fared no better than he had. In August, 1778, he offered Sandwich an analysis of Lord Howe's campaign:

Although I am not employed and treated by Government as you well know how ill, yet I cannot see without pain our want of success in America and all owing to the quitting of Boston and leaving the four New England provinces uncurbed had they been unpeopled and suffered to return to a howling wilderness it would have been happy for this island we should thereby secured our Newfoundland fishery but the opportunity was lost by changing our position since our army landed at New York its motion may be likened to the passage of a ship through the sea whose track is soon lost. We saved our enemy the trouble, fatigue, and danger, of a long march by landing in the middle of them. I beg pardon my Lord for touching upon a subject that is painful to your Lordship's feelings as it is to mine. I only meant to remind your Lordship of your most obliging promise of giving me the chief command in the Mediterranean, which command Government means to reinforce, as I am informed, but that your Lordship best knows.
As the situation in America continued to deteriorate, and the Royal Navy gradually was engulfed in a world-wide naval war, Graves lived the quiet life of an English country gentleman. Convinced that Sandwich and the rest of the navy had cast him aside, he eventually gave up all hope of gaining another seagoing command or restoring his honor. "The Conduct of Admiral Graves" lay unpublished and forgotten, to be passed along as a curiosity by his descendents and finally deposited in the British Museum. His faithful secretary, Gefferina, in a postscript to the manuscript, described how the admiral "always lived in a very handsome manner, employing a number of people, and paying everybody punctually.... His death," on March 8, 1787, "was occasioned by a suppression of urine that brought on a mortification the very next day & very soon put an end to a man of great strength & health and temperance."

Thus did Samuel Graves become the first British admiral to see his career, his reputation, and his self-respect demolished by the American Revolution.
NOTES: CHAPTER THREE

10. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
16. Ibid.


25. Dunmore to S. Graves, July 17, 1775, NDAR, I, pp. 903-904.


32. Willcox, Portrait, p. 57.

33. G. Montagu to Dunmore, Aug. 9, 1775, NDAR, I, p. 1103.

34. Adm. to S. Graves, July 6, 1774, NDAR, I, p. 1316.


38. Mowat to the people of Falmouth, Oct. 16, 1775, NDAR,
II, p. 472.


41. Ibid.


49. Fielding to Denbigh, Nov. 20, 1775, Balderstone and Syrett (eds.), Lost War, p. 51.


64. French, *First Year*, p. 539.


66. DNB, VIII, pp. 440-441.


68. DNB, VIII, p. 438.


70. Sandwich to S. Graves, Sept. 18, 1777, *Sandwich Papers*, I, pp. 73-74.
71. Sandwich to Admiral Lord Howe, June 4, 1777, Sandwich Papers, I, pp. 42-43.

72. S. Graves to Sandwich, Sept. 15, 1777, Sandwich Papers, NMM; Sandwich to S. Graves, Sept. 18, 1777, Sandwich Papers, NMM.

73. Sandwich to S. Graves, Sept. 18, 1777, Sandwich Papers, NMM.

74. S. Graves to Sandwich, Sept. 15, 1777, Sandwich Papers, NMM.

75. Sandwich to S. Graves, Sept. 18, 1777, Sandwich Papers, NMM.

76. Sandwich Papers, I, p. 42.

77. S. Graves to Sandwich, Aug. 6, 1778, Sandwich Papers, NMM.

CHAPTER FOUR
Molyneux Shuldham, January - July, 1776

It was Rear Admiral Shuldham's fate to preside over a grim transitional period of the war. By the time Samuel Graves sailed for England the fate of Boston virtually had been sealed, and no one could blame Shuldham for being on hand at the time of its loss. The Admiralty regarded the abandonment of New England as the end of a phase of the war, and decided that the next phase called for a revamping of the command structure. During his six month tenure Shuldham made no noticeable mistakes, and when it recalled him the Admiralty went out of its way to emphasize that fact. Shuldham, ironically, was the only British admiral of the war to receive a peerage, or any other official commendation, for his service in North America.

Shuldham's professional pedigree was typical of officers of his age and rank. He had entered the navy as a captain's servant in 1732, at the age of 15. Promoted to captain in 1746, during the long series of wars with the French he had commanded several ships-of-the-line and had spent two years as a prisoner of war. His flag had
come in March, 1775, a month before the outbreak of the war in America.¹

Whatever slim chance Shuldham and General Howe had of breaking the siege of Boston was eliminated when the government in London decided to open what in twentieth-century parlance would be called a "second front." Lord Dartmouth, the Secretary of State for the Colonies at the beginning of the war, and Lord George Germain, who succeeded him in that post in November, 1775, attempted to direct the war effort in America with an attention to detail that the width of the North Atlantic, combined with the bad judgement of people on both sides of it, made preposterous and downright destructive.

Dartmouth, the victim of a misconception which had afflicted the government for years, believed that the impulses that had produced the Revolution had originated in, and were confined almost exclusively to, the city of Boston. He was convinced that the vast majority of the people of North America were loyal subjects, and his conviction was abetted by the letters he received from the Royal Governors of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. The fact that the rebels had run all four of those gentlemen out of their respective colonies only had intensified the governors' belief that the presence of a military force, even a small one, would solve all their problems. If a detachment of redcoats and a few of the
king's warships were to appear somewhere in the south the people would return joyfully to their allegiance, reinstate the governors, and re-establish a respectable civil government that would have no trouble keeping order after the troops left.²

The fact that the horde of loyalists awaiting only the appearance of the redcoats to spring forth from the woodwork was entirely mythical did not penetrate the psyche of the administration until the war was over. In the autumn of 1775 Dartmouth found it easy and pleasant to believe that a relatively small-scale military and naval expedition to the southern colonies would be able to administer the gentle nudge that would end the rebellion. He therefore concocted a scheme that called, not for a substantial reinforcing of the garrison at Boston, but for a complicated campaign in the south. For the modern student the story of the ensuing events has the effect of foreshadowing a number of spectacular blunders the British were to commit later in the war; Dartmouth, Germain, and Sandwich, unfortunately, failed utterly to learn from the experience.

The outline of the plan seemed simple enough. Commodore Sir Peter Parker was to escort a convoy carrying 250 troops under the command of Major General the Earl Cornwallis from Cork, Ireland, to the mouth of the Cape Fear River in North Carolina. There Cornwallis was to
place his force at the disposal of General Clinton, Howe's second-in-command, who by then would have brought another 1500 soldiers down from Boston. Somewhere in the Carolinas or Virginia Clinton and Cornwallis, with Parker's support, were to set up an enclave to which the loyalist population was to flock and which was to serve as the nucleus for the restoration of loyal civil government throughout the south. That process should take only a month or two, after which the expedition was to proceed to Boston in time to participate in whatever offensive operations Howe might have planned for the spring.3

Things went wrong from the start. Clinton left Boston on January 20 and, in accordance with his three-month-old instructions from Lord Dartmouth, began working his way in a leisurely fashion down the coast. He called on Governors Tryon of New York and Dunmore of Virginia, both of whom were living on board ships, before arriving in the Cape Fear on February 12. Parker, Cornwallis, and the "Cork fleet," having encountered the usual obstacles of red tape and bad weather, were not there. Clinton was received only by Governors Josiah Martin of North Carolina and William Campbell of South Carolina, two more shipboard exiles who were surviving on the fish their negro slaves were able to catch for them. The much heralded loyalist faction were conspicuously absent.

The first of Parker's ships arrived in the Cape Fear
in the middle of April—about the time when, according to the government's plan, the campaign was supposed to be ending. A month elapsed before most of the troops were on hand and the three senior officers could decide on the next move.

Sir Peter Parker was a veteran naval officer, and seems to have dominated the planning sessions despite his never having been involved in an amphibious operation—or, for that matter, any other sort of operation in North America. Clinton suggested that the expedition's target be somewhere on the shores of Chesapeake Bay; he already was exhibiting a peculiar fascination with that region, a fascination that was to lead to dire consequences five years later. Parker, probably under the influence of Governor Campbell, persuaded the army officers to opt instead for Charleston, South Carolina, the largest city in the southern provinces.

From the moment it aimed itself at Charleston the ill-conceived southern enterprise began to degenerate into a quixotic farce. The idea of establishing a haven for American loyalists seems to have disappeared from the minds of all the British participants; they knew full well that, with the puny force at their disposal, they had no real chance of taking Charleston. Just what they in fact intended to do in South Carolina is something of a mystery. The best explanation is the one offered
afterwards by Clinton: that he wanted to take and garrison one of the islands outside Charleston Harbor, and hold it until some unspecified future date when the government would send him enough additional troops to storm the city.

The assault that Clinton and Parker launched on Charleston was an exercise in recklessness, inexperience, and indecision. Clinton spent three weeks reconnoitering the place and establishing his troops on Long Island, just north of the harbor mouth. The rebels, many of whom had panicked at the sight of the British invasion forces, had plenty of time to recover their equilibrium and prepare their defenses. The most prominent of the latter was Fort Sullivan, a half-completed bastion which, under the energetic direction of a militia officer named William Moultrie, commanded the complicated channel leading into the harbor.

On June 28 Parker, with two 50-gun ships, four frigates, and two sloops-of-war, commenced a thunderous if largely ceremonial bombardment of Fort Sullivan. The spongy palmetto logs that Moultrie had had piled on the walls of the fort in lieu of any better material literally absorbed the British cannon balls, while the American gunners inflicted substantial damage to Parker's ships. His flagship, the Bristol, suffered some 60 casualties, and Sir Peter himself lost his breeches and was slightly
wounded when an ammunition store exploded. One of the frigates, the Actaeon, ran aground within range of the fort and had to be abandoned and burnt. During the night Parker let the rest of his squadron drift away from Charleston with the tide. When the navy's inability to penetrate the harbor defenses had been so clearly demonstrated to him Clinton had no choice but to give up his part of the expedition as well. He kept his troops on Long Island for three more weeks, making his preparations for the voyage back to the northern theater and hoping that some opportunity might yet turn up in the southern one. The general professed to appreciate the difficulties the commodore had faced, but the Charleston fiasco probably sowed the first seeds of the resentful attitude toward the Royal Navy that later was to consume Clinton's personality. By the end of July the demoralized southern expedition, save for several of Parker's warships that were staying behind to lick their wounds, was on its way to rejoin Howe and Shuldham—who by this time were headquartered not at Boston but in the vicinity of New York.  

II

While Clinton and Parker were becoming the laughing-stock of the Carolinas Admiral Shuldham was playing the role of helpless spectator to the last act of the siege of Boston. The stalemate there had been maintained for so
long only because the besiegers, numerically superior though they were, lacked the mechanical apparatus necessary to take a fortified city. That state of affairs began to change when, during the winter of 1775-1776, the rebels, in a remarkable feat of logistics, hauled a battery of heavy artillery over the snow from Fort Ticonderoga, the fortress in western New York that they had taken over shortly after Lexington and Concord. By February the guns were emplaced on Dorchester Heights, within easy range of Boston.

The presence of enemy siege artillery at Dorchester Heights was the last piece of evidence needed to persuade General Howe that there was no point in occupying Boston any longer. He and the ministry in London both had become convinced that there was no point in attempting any sort of breakout in New England, and that the army's best course would be to withdraw to Halifax to revive itself and, with the coming of the campaigning season, launch a fresh offensive in New York.

On March 17, 1776, a bizarre looking armada sailed out of Boston Harbor. Shuldham's flagship, the Chatham, with General Howe and most of the other senior army officers on board, led a naval escort composed of two other 50-gun ships, a frigate, five sloops-of-war, and a brig. A hoard of transports carried Howe's army, and around the fringes of the formation clustered over a hundred little sloops, schooners, and even open boats of every description, the
property of the pathetic collection of loyalists who preferred the unpredictable future they would find in Halifax to the fate awaiting them if they remained in Boston when the rebels occupied it. As his last act before departing Howe blew up Castle William, but he was leaving the city intact on the tacit understanding that if he did so he and the civilians would be allowed to withdraw unmolested.⁶

As soon as it cleared the channel the fleet turned south. From a hill near her house at Braintree Abigail Adams watched it pass; she wrote to her husband that "we have a view of the largest Fleet ever seen in America. You may count upwards of 100 & 70 sail. They look like a Forrest."⁷ Shuldham spent several days at anchor in Nantasket Roads, five miles south of Boston; he wanted to give as many loyalist vessels as much possible time to join him, and hoped to deceive Washington into thinking that the British were about to attack New York rather than withdrawing from the field in disgrace. On March 27 the fleet left Nantasket Roads, and five days later (after a passage during which, Shuldham wrote Mr. Stephens, "I have much satisfaction in acquainting you that not the least accident or loss happened") it anchored amid the dreary but delightfully friendly surroundings of Halifax.⁸

Shuldham was aware that he was functioning strictly as an interim commander. As early as February 13 the Earl
of Sandwich had sent him a letter designed, with the First
Lord's usual concern for politeness and diplomacy, to
lessen the shock that Shuldham must have felt when he
discovered that the Admiralty, even before it had received
his first dispatch from the station, had concluded that he
was not the officer best suited to command the North
American Squadron:

Dear Sir,—I am going to write to you
upon a disagreeable subject; but I flatter
myself you are so far convinced of my
friendship as to believe me, when I assure
you that any resistance I would have made
to the measure proposed would have been
ineffectual and would have had many un­
pleasant consequences both to you and to
myself. In short, in consequence of a
general opinion, it has been thought
proper that Lord Howe should come out to
take command of the fleet in America.

As this measure has been taken before
there was any account of your arrival at
Boston, there can be no possibility of
imputation with regard to your conduct;
and I shall always be ready to bear
testimony that in my opinion the King has
not in his service an officer more fit to
be employed in this or any command than
yourself.

I have taken effectual care that your
royal master's sentiments on your subject
shall appear publicly to the world, as I
have prevailed on the King to dignify you
with an Irish peerage and to promote you
to the rank of a vice-admiral; and it shall
be left to your option either to return to
England at the end of the Summer or to
continue in America as second in command.

I shall be very happy to hear that you
approve of what I have done on this
occasion. I am well assured that your
friends in England will tell you I have
taken every proper and practicable step that
could be executed in your favour, and that
I have been as attentive to the support of
your credit and character as if it was a
cause in which I was personally concerned. 9

One wonders what Samuel Graves would have thought of that letter.

In fact, as a result of a series of personal and political maneuvers the details of which remain obscure, the government had convinced itself that the Howe brothers, Richard the admiral and William the general, were destined to be the heroes of the war. England was about to put forth her ultimate effort to liquidate the American Revolution, and to direct that effort she would need her greatest naval and military leaders.
NOTES: CHAPTER FOUR


4. Clinton, Rebellion, p. 29; Willcox, Portrait, pp. 85-86.


CHAPTER FIVE

Richard, Lord Howe, John Byron, and James Gambier, 
July, 1776-April, 1779

The period during which Viscount Howe commanded on the 
North American Station was one of the most crucial of the 
war. For the historian it is one of the most frustrating. 
A fire at the Howe estate in the nineteenth century appears 
to have destroyed most of the personal papers of both the 
general and the admiral, leaving numerous and important 
questions about their conduct unanswerable.

The distinguished scholar Ira D. Gruber, in his book 
The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution, has made 
brilliant use of the available primary sources to construct 
a detailed analysis of the Howes' campaign in North America. 
The following brief account is included for the sake of 
continuity, and does not pretend to add substantively to 
Gruber's work.

I

When Richard Howe took over the command of the North 
American Squadron, on July 12, 1776, he was 50 years old 
and a vice admiral of the white. Though he never had
commanded a fleet at sea he was one of the most distinguished naval officers of his generation. His pedigree was both professional and social, for he had been a protégé of Admiral Anson and his mother, Mary Sophia Howe, was reputed to be an illegitimate daughter of George I. The admiral himself was a tall man of dignified bearing who possessed all the qualities of an eighteenth century British gentleman. In 1776 his naval career already had spanned three decades, during which he had acquired a reputation as an officer of courage and common sense. He sat regularly in Parliament, frequently speaking in favor of the naval interests, and for several years served as Treasurer of the Navy. He spent much of his time overseeing the personal and financial affairs of his family, of which, as holder of the hereditary title Fourth Viscount Howe of the Irish Peerage, he was the acknowledged head. Howe's most prominent physical characteristics were his height of five feet nine inches, a pair of protuding lips, and a swarthy complexion that led his sailors to call him "Black Dick." The nickname carried no negative connotation; Howe was regarded throughout the navy as a compassionate officer who took a rare interest in the welfare of his men.¹

With the naval and military effort in North America in the hands of Admiral Howe and his brother William the stage seemed to have been set for a decisive end to the Revolution. To the Howes, though, the situation was more complex than
a simple confrontation between two belligerents. The admiral, in particular, was at least as interested in bringing about a reconciliation as he was in winning a victory. He had opposed the government's anti-colonial measures as early as 1774, and had insisted that the ministry appoint him and his brother Commissioners for Restoring the Peace as well as commanders-in-chief. The Howes were both warmakers and peacemakers. If they themselves had a clear conception of how the two roles were supposed to interact they never explained it.

The Long Island campaign offered the first evidence that there would be something odd about the Howe brothers' conduct of the war. In the summer of 1776, for the only time in the war, Britain threw all the military and naval forces available into an effort to end the American Revolution by brute force. In New York Harbor Lord Howe had 10 ships-of-the-line, 20 frigates, and several hundred smaller warships and transports. The general commanded nearly 25,000 British and German troops. The means were available to conduct the most massive amphibious assault in history. Yet the Howe's first move was to try to open negotiations for a bloodless settlement. When the American commander, George Washington, refused to take the offer seriously the great British landing took place, and William Howe methodically drove the American troops off Long Island. But instead of pursuing their advantage and destroying
Washington's army, a poorly trained and disorganized collection of fewer than 20,000 men, the Howes called for another peace conference. The peculiar campaign dragged on through the autumn, with Washington's force constantly on the brink of destruction and the British repeatedly stopping short of administering the coup de grace. In the end Washington managed to defeat two of General Howe's detachments in the little battles of Trenton and Princeton, providing a boost to American morale and convincing even the Howes that a negotiated settlement, for the time being at least, would be impossible. As 1776 ended so did the best opportunity the British ever would have to win the war.²

If the British campaign of 1776 ended in an unsatisfactory stalemate, that of 1777 begat catastrophe. There is no space here for the details of the three-pronged offensive that led to the loss of General Burgoyne's army at Saratoga. The navy's contribution was the transporting of Howe's army to Philadelphia, and the forcing of a passage up the Delaware to the city. On the tactical level both Howe brothers again behaved in a thoroughly professional manner; the sequence of coincidences, misinterpretations, and misfortunes that led the offensive to go awry never has been completely unravelled. In the wake of Burgoyne's surrender Sir William Howe sent the government his resignation and, after the inevitable delay while it was accepted and the necessary orders were sent across the Atlantic, turned the
command of the army in North America to Sir Henry Clinton. The admiral was almost as disenchanted with the situation, and asked the Admiralty to name a successor in case his health should require him to resign as well.

The bollixed campaign of 1777 had even more disastrous consequences than at first were apparent, for the American victory at Saratoga provided the rebels with the means of bringing about a foreign alliance. On March 13, 1778, the French ambassador to London informed the British government that the court of France, having been presented with convincing evidence that the American cause was worth supporting, had decided to recognize the existence of the United States of America.

The entry of France, as far as the Earl of Sandwich's Admiralty was concerned, brought about a fundamental change in the character of the naval war. The French had a navy, a traditional battle fleet which, presumably, they would use to attack the king's possessions overseas and even launch an invasion of England herself. The Admiralty quickly reached the obvious conclusion that France would have to be treated as the Royal Navy's principal adversary. On March 22, 1778, their Lordships sent Admiral Howe a dispatch that, with unusual conciseness, established the terms on which the remainder of the naval war was to be fought:
We judge it necessary by this separate
Instruction to acquaint your Lordship that
the object of the War being now changed, and
the Contest in America being a secondary
consideration, the principal object must
be the distressing France and defending and
securing His Majesty's own possessions
against Hostile Attempts. 3

As the first move in accordance with the new strategy
Howe was to send most of his heavy ships to the West Indies,
where they were to launch an assault on the French base at
St. Lucia. Howe himself would be permitted to return to
England, leaving the North American Squadron in the hands
of his second-in-command Rear Admiral James Gambier. In
its reduced state the squadron no longer would be a large
enough command for a vice admiral. 4

Henceforth the Admiralty would insist on regarding North
America as the least significant theater of a world-wide
naval war. The important naval events would take place in
Europe and the West Indies. The admiral in North America
would come to be regarded as a caretaker, whose primary
function would be to assist the army in whatever operations
it chose to undertake in its effort to regain control of
the American colonies. The Admiralty would play as minor
a role in American affairs as it could, for it had more
important things to worry about.

The French gave early, if unheeded, notice that they
intended to take North America more seriously than did the
British. In the summer of 1778 a squadron of 11 French
ships-of-the-line, commanded by an army officer named the Comte d'Estaing, appeared off the coast of Delaware. When he discovered that the British had evacuated Philadelphia in response to the news of his coming d'Estaing set his course for New York.

There he encountered Lord Howe, who defended the approaches to New York Harbor with a skill which the performance of other admirals in similar situations was to prove remarkable. With only half a dozen 64-gun ships and a handful of lighter vessels Howe was grossly outgunned, but he possessed an unusual understanding that a fleet defending a geographic position could make use of certain advantages that were denied a fleet fighting a sea battle. When he learned that the French fleet was on its way up the coast Howe anchored his ships, with springs attached to their hawsers so they could fire their broadsides in any direction regardless of the wind, in a line across the channel that led into the harbor. D'Estaing, faced with the prospect of fighting his way into an unmarked channel with which his navigators were unfamiliar, prudently sailed away without firing a shot.  

The French squadron's next objective was the other British post in the colonies, Rhode Island. Howe, who had received word that a British battle fleet was on its way across the Atlantic to reinforce him, gallantly sailed in pursuit of d'Estaing with the intention of fighting some
sort of delaying action. At the crucial moment the weather intervened in the form of a violent storm that scattered both fleets and forced d'Estaing, who never had had the opportunity to replenish his ships after their passage from Europe, to withdraw to Boston for a refit. A few days later the British reinforcing squadron, 13 ships-of-the-line commanded by Vice Admiral John Byron, arrived. Howe, satisfied that the crisis was over, turned his command over to Byron on September 11 and shortly thereafter sailed for England.6

II

For two centuries historians, novelists, and romantics have taken delight in attempting to explain why the Howe brothers, two officers of unquestionable ability who had a preponderance of military and naval force at their disposal, failed to put an end to the American Revolution. The explanations have encompassed Whig politics, contempt for the Americans' military prowess, primitive strategic thinking, and Sir William's infatuation with a certain Mrs. Loring. Ira Gruber, who has studied the subject as thoroughly as the documentation will permit, attributes the Howes' attitude to their interest in trying to resolve the issues through reconciliation. The Howes, Gruber says, were not "so sympathetic with the colonists that they could not fight against them," but the admiral, abetted with slightly less
enthusiasm by the general, "did repeatedly allow concilia-
tory efforts to obstruct military operations; they did try
to minimize fighting in the interest of an armistice and of
a lasting peace." It was their very abilities and reputa-
tions that allowed the Howes to undermine the North
ministry's policy; they had "the competence and influence
to make their interest in conciliation truly destructive
of the ministry's plans," and "enough professional skill to
create the illusion of success, to mask the opportunities
they were losing in the cause of peace."  

The Howe brothers, according to Gruber, engaged in a
strange, benevolent conspiracy with the intention of making
their own foreign policy. Another modern historian, David
Syrett, asserts that such a conclusion largely amounts to
speculation. "Both Howes' [sic] were professional officers,"
Syrett points out, "with instructions from the government
in London calling in the strongest terms for the suppression
of the rebellion in America by force of arms. Nowhere is
there any clear-cut first hand evidence that the Howes'
wilfully refused to carry out their instructions to the
best of their ability." Syrett suggests that simple
cautions, based on the fear that even a minor British defeat
might galvanize the American military effort, is sufficient
to explain why the Howe brothers behaved as they did; he
admits, however, that "this line of reasoning...is also
speculative, for the lack of evidence defies attempts to
reconstruct conclusively the motivation of the Howes'. "  

The reasons behind the Howe brothers' strategic thinking belong in the realm of scholarly speculation. It does seem safe, however, to assert that Lord Howe was the best officer to command the North American Squadron during the Revolution. He left the strategic and tactical situation in at least as sound a condition as that in which he found it, and, though he refused to serve again while the Sandwich administration remained at the Admiralty, retained enough of his professional reputation to make it possible for him to attain fame and glory in the next war. During his tenure in North America Howe fended off a major thrust by a superior enemy, and the reforms he initiated in his squadron's communications system were to become the nucleus of a new signal book that was to be adopted by the entire navy. Howe lived to the age of 73, and in his last years was venerated as one of the great personages of the Royal Navy.

III

Vice Admiral Byron, to whom Howe handed over the North American command, retained it for only three months. Most of that time Byron spent in New York harbor, repairing the damage his fleet sustained in a series of gales that gave him the nickname "Foul Weather Jack." In November the Compte d'Estaing left North America for the West Indies, and a month later Byron, in accordance with his orders
from the Admiralty, sailed in pursuit. What was left of the North American Squadron thereupon passed into the hands of Rear Admiral Gambier.

James Gambier, though he was only 55, was in the process of establishing himself as one of the notorious "old women of the navy." He received the command by accident, and did not particularly want it; he spent most of the five months during which he held it complaining about his health, waiting for the Admiralty to send someone out to relieve him, and irritating his army counterpart, Sir Henry Clinton. Clinton described Gambier as "in every respect a horrid performer" and "the most impracticable man I every met with."

The Admiralty's policy of indifference was generating a predictable series of events and personality clashes. After Lord Howe's departure the naval forces in North America would be commanded by officers of nondescript reputations and little experience. When Gambier sailed for home in April, 1779, Clinton assured himself that no admiral possibly could be so difficult to get along with. He was mistaken.
NOTES: CHAPTER FIVE


3. Adm. to Adm. Richard, Viscount Howe, March 22, 1778, ADM 2/1334 (LC Trans.).

4. Ibid.

5. Gruber, Howe Brothers, pp. 306-309.

6. Ibid., pp. 310-324.

7. Ibid., pp. 359-360.

8. Ibid., p. 365.


10. Ibid.

CHAPTER SIX

Marriot Arbuthnot, August, 1779-July, 1780

I

In the galleries of the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich hang the portraits of Britain's naval heroes. The eighteenth century was a great age of portrait painting, and the admirals of that period, many of them posing in scenes representing their victories, all appear to be worthy guardians of the naval tradition. The museum, unfortunately, despite its enormous size (the guidebooks claim there are more than 1 1/2 miles of galleries), lacks the space to display to the public every painting in its possession. The question of which officers deserve the honor must have aroused considerable dispute over the years. One suspects, however, that few voices protested when the portrait of Marriot Arbuthnot was consigned to the storerooms.

The artist, a Mr. J. Rising, certainly earned his commission. Through the use of the bold colors and brushstrokes typical of the period he made Arbuthnot appear, if not exactly heroic, at least dignified. If the shoulders tend to droop the face has a distinctly likeable
aspect which is not offset in the least by a pair of heavy jowls and a double chin. The background, perhaps signifi- cantly, is blank; were it not for his uniform coat with its gold buttons and lace Arbuthnot could pass for the prototypical country squire. His eyes look noncommittally off to the side, as though in indifference to the opinions of the observer or anyone else on any subject. The most arresting feature of the painting is the mouth which, though only slightly wider than the nose, is surrounded by a pair of delicately curved lips that seem almost to be caricatures. The impression somehow is made, with only a gentle assist from hindsight, that their owner was not accustomed to keeping his mouth closed.

The first recorded event of Arbuthnot's life was his promotion, at the rather advanced age of 28, from midshipman to lieutenant in 1739. Eight years later he was promoted to captain, which rank he retained for more than three decades. He commanded the ship-of-the-line Portland in the great victory at Quiberon Bay in 1759, but seems to have been known as an administrator rather than a "fighting captain." Though his only claim to a distinguished pedigree lay in his possession of the same surname as the physician and humorist Dr. John Arbuthnot, Captain Arbuthnot somehow managed to penetrate the social circle of the Earl of Sandwich.¹

When in July, 1775, the Admiralty decided to send a
great fleet to North America, Arbuthnot was assigned the post of Navy Commissioner at the Halifax Dockyard. The responsibilities attendant upon that position were formidable, and he seems to have discharged them to everyone's satisfaction. In January of 1778, on the eve of the entry of France into the war, the Admiralty authorized a substantial increase in the list of flag officers, and Sandwich ensured that Arbuthnot was among those promoted. In one of his characteristically friendly letters the First Lord summoned Arbuthnot home from the dreary surroundings of Nova Scotia, congratulating "both yourself & the public, which I doubt not will hereafter be benefited by your service as an Admiral....I hope after you return to England, you will not remain long unemployed." Arbuthnot responded by telling Sandwich that

> Words cannot convey the sentiments of my heart for your condescending goodness.... Your Lordship's hand first lifted me into the world as a captain may I never forfeit it by any means one I am sure will always stand by me namely a grateful heart for favours received from a nobleman who could have no other inducement by his assistance to a man but who he conceived would endeavour to merit it by a faithful discharge of his duty.

Arbuthnot arrived in England in September, 1778, and sat on the court martial board that acquitted Admiral Keppel the following January. The furor surrounding the Keppel-Palliser feud focused the public's and the government's attentions on the French threat, and reinforced the
Admiralty's conviction that, as Lord Howe had been told almost a year earlier, "the Contest in America" was "a secondary consideration," while "the principal object must be the distressing France and securing His Majesty's own Possessions against any Hostile Attempts." Another great confrontation in the Channel was expected momentarily, and England needed all her distinguished admirals at home. Yet someone must be sent out to North America to replace Admiral Gambier, stories of whose incompetence were being circulated even by the prime minister. Arbuthnot, despite his involvement in the acquittal of the Whig Keppel, was politically inoffensive; although he had never commanded a fleet his long tour of duty at Halifax had given him at least some familiarity with the naval affairs of that part of the world, and in the ongoing flurry of promotions he already, a mere thirteen months after receiving his flag, was due to become a vice admiral of the blue. In February, 1779, Sandwich, apparently with no hesitation whatever, appointed Arbuthnot Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels in North America.

Arbuthnot hastened to Portsmouth, hoisted his flag in H.M. 64-gun ship Europe, and set about the business of preparing for sea. Sandwich appointed Captain Francis S. Drake, a great nephew of the Elizabethan sea dog, second in command. In a letter to the First Lord, Arbuthnot described Captain Drake as "brave, cool and good-humored; and a
person in whom I can repose the most confidential trust."  

In addition to the *Europe* and Drake's 74-gun *Russell*, Arbuthnot was to take with him to America five other ships-of-the-line, the 50-gun *Experiment*, and a frigate—all the force the Admiralty felt it could spare from home waters.

Fitting out the warships occupied several months, during which time at least one of Arbuthnot's officers appears to have experienced some doubts as to the wisdom of sailing for America under such an admiral. On April 10, when the rest of the little squadron dropped down the Channel to St. Helen's, the 74-gun *Monarch* remained at Portsmouth. Her captain, Adam Duncan, sent Arbuthnot a letter describing how her crew, voicing complaints that their wages were overdue, had refused to weigh anchor. No other reference to a mutiny on board the *Monarch* ever has been found, nor did Duncan mention such an event in his journal. He had sat with Arbuthnot on Keppel's court martial board, and the memory of that experience apparently induced him to invent the "mutiny" as an effective means of detaching himself permanently from the North American Squadron.

Arbuthnot's departure from Europe was not without incident. His warships, in company with an enormous convoy of nearly 400 victuallers, troop transports, and merchant vessels, got under way on schedule on May 1, but a day later the admiral learned from the captain of a British privateer that the French were attacking Jersey, one of
the Channel Islands. In a move that was to prove prophetic of his later behavior Arbuthnot, ordering the convoy to take refuge in Torbay, took his squadron off to the rescue. When he reached Jersey he found that a force dispatched by Sir Thomas Pey, the commander-in-chief at Portsmouth, had the situation in hand. Leaving the Experiment to reinforce the Portsmouth ships, Arbuthnot set his course for Torbay and rejoined his convoy.\(^\text{10}\) Amid the atmosphere of panic that pervaded England that spring his behavior looked dashing and heroic; the king himself directed Sandwich to "convey unto him [Arbuthnot] the fullest approbation of his conduct," and observed that the admiral had "conducted himself as every officer that feels what he owes to the service on critical occasions ought to do."\(^\text{11}\) But in charging off without orders to the relief of Jersey Arbuthnot had undermined his own mission, which was to escort his convoy to America as quickly as possible.

A series of contrary winds kept the fleet confined to Torbay for three weeks, and the businessmen who had insured the cargoes began to fret that the French would hear of the expedition and intercept it. At the behest of Lord North the Admiralty dispensed with the insurance altogether and ordered Admiral Sir Charles Hardy, with a dozen ships-of-the-line from the Grand Fleet, to escort Arbuthnot out of the Channel.\(^\text{12}\) The convoy finally left Torbay on May 22, and parted company with Hardy's ships on June 4. One of
Hardy's captains remarked that "we left Mr. Arbuthnot... with a foul wind and a very inattentive convoy. I fear his passage will be tedious."\textsuperscript{13}

Arbuthnot's Atlantic crossing in fact took thirteen weeks, nearly twice the usual time. When the fleet anchored in New York Harbor on August 24 it was, due to the combined influence of bad weather, recalcitrant merchant captains, and an over-enthusiastic admiral, more than two months overdue. The ships had suffered storm damage to their hulls and rigging, and scurvy had wrought a ghastly toll among the men. So many of the crew of Drake's Russell were down with the disease that she could not make sail, and a transport had an army lieutenant-colonel, one of the few men on board still able to stand upright, manning her helm. The soldiers crammed into the transports suffered horribly: of the 3,800 army personnel who had sailed from Torbay a hundred were dead and 700 more incapacitated.\textsuperscript{14}

The harbor into which Arbuthnot's beleaguered force made its way was one of the worst naval anchorages in North America. The city of New York lay at the southern tip of Manhattan Island, a long, narrow protuberance that separated the East and North, or Hudson, Rivers. To approach the town a ship must work her way up from the south, through a comfortably wide and deep channel between Staten Island and the western end of Long Island. It was the mouth of the channel that turned the harbor into a seaman's nightmare. Between Long Island and the lighthouse on Sandy Hook to the
Figure 4. Map of New York and Environs
south lay nine miles of what appeared to be open water, but just below the surface lurked a great sandbar called the East Bank. Only at the southern extremity of the harbor mouth was there sufficient water to allow a ship to pass, and at low tide even the narrow channel around Sandy Hook was only 3 1/2 fathoms deep. Since a ship-of-the-line drew at least twenty feet she could enter New York Harbor only when the tide was in and the wind was such as to allow her to steer due west past the Hook and then due north up the channel. A breeze blowing from the wrong direction could keep a fleet from entering the harbor—or, worse, from getting out of it—indeinitely. A ship caught by a squall or a change of wind direction could find herself aground in a matter of minutes. New York, like so many other places in North America, seemed to have been layed out as part of a diabolical scheme to create the worst possible environment for the fighting of a naval war.

Shortly after the Europe dropped anchor Arbuthnot sent a boat ashore to establish contact with the army's commander-in-chief, Major General Sir Henry Clinton. Sir Henry responded by sending out one of his officers, a Captain Chinery, bearing a courteous letter of welcome ("I beg leave most heartily to Congratulate you on your Arrival upon the Coast") and instructions to bring the admiral up to date regarding the military situation.  

Chinery's report did little to raise Arbuthnot's
spirits, for the war had been in a stalemate for more than a year. Clinton's army, some 15,000 strong, was firmly established in and around New York City. A smaller British garrison was scattered over the little colony of Rhode Island, and another army detachment held Savannah, far to the south. About twenty miles north of New York, around the village of White Plains, was the rebel general Washington's army. The British and American commanders had held their present positions, each general feeling himself too weak to attack the other, since their indecisive brush at Monmouth Court House, New Jersey, in late June of 1778.

Clinton repeatedly had asked the government either to send him enough additional troops to break the deadlock or to give him permission to resign his command; just as repeatedly he had been assured of the government's confidence in him, and that reinforcements were on the way. On the basis of those assurances Sir Henry had worked out an elaborate scheme by which he intended to use the campaigning season of 1779 to destroy the rebel war effort not only in New York but throughout the continent. Clinton was in the process of establishing himself as one of the most controversial characters of the war (William Smith, the royal governor of New York once called him "an arrant blockhead"), but no one ever contested his skill as a producer of large-scale, long-range military plans. His mind, infested though it seems to have been by a pathological desire not
to see those schemes brought to fruition, had the rare ability to grasp all the essentials of a complex situation. Clinton confronted the weaknesses of his own position without blinking, and sought to make decisive use of its strengths. In common with most of his superiors he took for granted as one of those strengths the Royal Navy's control of the sea.

Clinton's plan for 1779 had three phases, in all of which the services of the navy would be crucial. He would open the campaign in the spring by launching a series of amphibious raids against various widely scattered rebel outposts along the coast. By advertising his ability to take offensive action wherever he chose, Clinton hoped, he would dilute the rebels' resources, forcing Washington to defend the entire coastal region and inducing its inhabitants to stay at home and guard their property rather than join the army. Having thus brought about a dispersal of his enemies, and having received the additional troops the government had promised (6,600 from England and 5,000 from the West Indies), Clinton would concentrate his force for a voyage up the Hudson and an attack on the rebel outposts in the highlands just west of the river. The loss of those forts would compel Washington to abandon his sanctuary in New Jersey and meet the British somewhere near the river in a battle with the British, being numerically superior, would win. With Washington's northern army disposed of
Clinton would be free to undertake the third phase of his plan, a major assault on Charleston, the great port city in South Carolina. The loss of Washington's army in the north and of the commercial and population center of the south would be more than the rebel cause could withstand. The people of North America would recognize the error of their ways and the rebellion would end.  

The opening moves of the campaign ran precisely according to plan. On April 5 the bovine Admiral Gambier sailed for home, leaving the naval squadron temporarily in the hands of Commodore Sir George Collier. The change of command delighted Clinton, for in Collier he found, for the first time in the war, a naval officer who possessed the necessary skill to conduct combined operations and sufficient savoir-faire to cooperate with Sir Henry. Early in May Clinton dispatched an expedition, led jointly by Collier and Major General Edward Mathew, to Virginia. Collier took his ships into the Elizabeth River and landed Mathew near the town of Portsmouth, where the rebels were reputed to be collecting arms and recruiting men. The British troops roamed about the Tidewater region for two weeks, destroying a substantial quantity of stores and shipping and amassing a pile of booty to take back to New York. Most of the people of Portsmouth seemed to be loyalists, and Collier wanted to establish a permanent base there; Portsmouth was, he wrote to Clinton, "an exceeding safe
asylum for ships against an enemy, and is not to be forced even by great superiority." Mathew, however, was adamant in his insistence that his orders required the expedition to return to New York. By May 29 it had done so, and Clinton ecstatically asserted that "every object" of the venture "was fully attained even beyond my most sanguine expectations." On the following day Sir Henry himself took ship and, with Collier's Rainbow, three frigates, a handful of galleys and gunboats, and several transports full of troops in company, proceeded up the Hudson. Within a few days Clinton had taken the rebel outposts at Stony Point and Verplanck's Point, and was looking longingly at West Point, the key to the rebels' defenses in New York. Washington rushed his army to the Hudson and waited for the British to attack in full strength. While Clinton returned to New York to prepare for the next move Collier launched yet another series of raids, this time against the seaport towns of Connecticut.

Clinton was in a rare state of euphoria. For the first time since he had taken over the American command his army and the navy were working together effectively, and as soon as the additional troops arrived he would be able to move against West Point and force Washington onto the battlefield. Collier was equally ebullient. In a letter to Sandwich he boasted that "The most perfect Confidence and harmony subsists between Sir Henry Clinton and myself."
I receive the readiest compliance with every request of mine for the use of the Navy (frequently lending me detachments to serve on board ships where their complements are very deficient), and I flatter myself he has found me particularly attentive to second his exertions for the King's service." Collier was convinced, in fact, that "this campaign is the last, and that rebellion is at last fairly thrown on its back." Late in July the rebels undertook an attack on the loyalist settlement along the Penobscot River, but Collier, daringly commandeering every ship at his disposal and leaving New York undefended, sped to the rescue. He destroyed all the vessels he found in the river and drove the rebel expedition into the Maine woods.

The enthusiasm that pervaded the British garrison at New York gradually evaporated, however, as the summer dragged on and the reinforcements did not appear. Clinton had assumed that they would leave England in April and arrive by June. As June gave way to July and July to August, and the campaigning season in the northern provinces approached its end, Sir Henry's zeal was replaced by a resurgence of the character traits his acquaintances had come to know as typical of him: an all-pervasive pessimism, a conviction that the government had forgotten about him, and a distrust of the navy. Such was Clinton's state of mind when, on August 25, the great reinforcing contingent materialized
in the form of 3,700 emaciated soldiers, and the dynamic young Commodore Collier was superseded by Marriot Arbuthnot.

II

Arbuthnot not only bore bad tidings but by his own presence betokened worse ones. Clinton, having carried the cross of James Gambier for seven months, had thought his penance paid and had hoped that the Admiralty would send him a naval commander who possessed tact, ambition, and some experience in combined operations. Sir Henry even had gone so far as to suggest to Lord George Germain five distinguished officers, Admirals Roddam and Barrington and Commodores Elliot, Hoitham, and Jervis, as appropriate commanders of the North American Squadron. By ignoring Clinton's suggestions and sending out a 68-year old admiral who never had commanded a squadron and had flown his flag for little more than a year, the Admiralty had laid the foundation for one of the most miserable inter-service relationships in military history.

With characteristic enthusiasm Arbuthnot immersed himself in the duties of a commander-in-chief. Within four days of his arrival he and his secretary, William Green, had compiled the obligatory report on "The State and Disposition of the Ships and Vessels of the Squadron" and sent it, along with Arbuthnot's first dispatch, to Mr. Stephens. In the late summer of 1779 the North American
Squadron was in an even more disheveled state than usual. The men of the ships that had spent the wet season in America had suffered almost as much from disease as had those who had arrived with Arbuthnot, and nearly every vessel in the squadron was shorthanded. Many of the ships were in worse condition than their crews; in the list he sent to the Admiralty Green was forced to make such notations as "very foul," "condemnable," and "wants repair very much" beside the names of most of the frigates and sloops-of-war. The 20-gun *Vigilant* was anchored somewhere off the coast of Georgia, "so rotten that she cannot be trusted out of there," and the frigate *Flora* had "Sunk at Rhode Island," where her "People attempt to weigh her." The sloop-of-war *Scorpion* was maintaining her station in the Hudson north of New York only through the constant use of her pumps, which were expelling thirteen feet of water per day from her hold. Several ships were undergoing major repairs at the careening yard in New York, and the captain of one of those vessels, the Honourable George Keith Elphinstone of the frigate *Perseus*, wanted permission to resign his command and return to England for the sake of his health and financial affairs. Arbuthnot, in no mood to part with an officer as experienced as Elphinstone, forwarded the latter's request to the Admiralty and refused to act on it further until their Lordships responded.

Reports from various quarters convinced Arbuthnot that
all his ships and officers were urgently needed. Early in September one of the regular packets brought in the news that yet another European nation had decided to participate in the increasingly popular sport of tormenting the British lion: Spain had declared war on Great Britain on June 21. That development had little direct effect on Arbuthnot, who responded to it merely by ordering his captains to treat any Spanish vessels as enemies. Of more immediate importance were the latest rumors concerning the Royal Navy's perennial nemesis in the western hemisphere, the Compte D'Estaing. An urgent dispatch from the governor of Jamaica, General John Dalling, announced that the elusive French admiral was menacing that island, which neither Dalling nor the long-suffering Admiral Byron felt able to defend.

Arbuthnot, not only fearing for the safety of one of the British Empire's most valued possessions but desirous of putting an end to the French naval menace, wanted to dispatch most of his warships to the Caribbean. Clinton was less enthusiastic about sending Governor Dalling any troops: any weakening of the New York garrison, which already was suffering from the effects of the typhoid fever epidemic loosed on it by the reinforcements that had arrived with Arbuthnot, would bring to a halt Sir Henry's plan to campaign in the Carolinas. Clinton, however, allowed his mind to be changed by the Earl Cornwallis the army's
second-in-command. Cornwallis and Clinton were old acquain-
tances and, in 1779, still on more-or-less friendly terms; the earl, furthermore, would succeed to the command of the king's troops in North America if, as might happen at any moment, word arrived that the government had accepted Clinton's resignation. When Cornwallis requested permission to go to the relief of Jamaica Clinton yielded, and ordered 4,000 British troops (government regulations prohibited the use of Hessian or American Loyalist units elsewhere than in North America) on board Arbuthnot's transports.\(^3\)\(^2\)

Arbuthnot shifted his flag to the 44-gun ship *Roebuck* and placed the *Europe*, along with the ships-of-the-line *Russell*, *Robust*, and *Raisonable*, the transports, and the fireship *Vulcan*, under the command of Captain Drake.\(^3\)\(^3\)

Drake, having hoisted a commodore's broad pennant, worked his way over the East Bank late on the night of August 23 and headed for the Caribbean. Two days later he intercepted a Spanish ship which, her captain related, had encountered D'Estaing's fleet three weeks earlier off the coast of Florida. Drake immediately reversed his course and returned to New York, where both Arbuthnot and Clinton greeted his appearance with expressions of delight and relief. Word of D'Estaing's move toward North America had reached New York two days after Drake's departure, and the admiral hurriedly had dispatched one of his ships to call the British "armament" back. Clinton had been suffering from
visions of the entire force, ships-of-the-line, troops, Cornwallis, and all, falling into the hands of the French.  

Arbuthnot, not knowing where D'Estaing might strike, moved his baggage and entourage back on board the Europe and set up what he described as "a Chain of Ships" between Chesapeake Bay and New York. The latter port seemed to be the French admiral's most likely target, so Arbuthnot spent several days taking soundings at various points in an effort to determine how it should be defended. The evidence was discouraging: since the Hudson south of the city was too wide and deep to be blocked up effectively the British squadron would have to make its stand at Sandy Hook, as Lord Howe had done on the occasion of D'Estaing's previous appearance in 1778. Arbuthnot urged Clinton to fortify the Hook, but warned him to prepare for the worst: "if I do not stop the Enemy at the Entrance of the Port, it will be impossible to make any impression on them hereafter, except such Assistance as accident may put it in my power to afford you afterwards." The admiral reminded Clinton that "my situation is very different from Lord Howes, both from the Weakness of my command and the Strength of the Enemy." Such pessimism was conspicuously absent from the dispatch Arbuthnot sent the Admiralty a few days later. "I now await the arrival of the enemy," he told Mr. Stephens, "in the fullest confidence that if the destructive gales we have for some time past had on these Coasts, have not
frustrated their purposes by disabling their Squadron, its efforts here at least will be rendered ineffectual, by the skill and bravery of my Officers and Seamen." 

Arbuthnot did not explain why he assumed that the French must be heading for some point north of the Chesapeake. That assumption was both inexplicable and incorrect, for D'Estaing, having no taste for another encounter with the New York sandbars, was directing his efforts at the British stronghold in Georgia. While Arbuthnot was fussing over the defenses of New York the French admiral, with his fleet of 33 warships, was entering the harbor of Savannah. The French quickly snapped up the only British naval force in the neighborhood, the frigate Ariel and Sir James Wallace's Experiment, along with two storeships and £ 30,000 Sterling that Clinton had entrusted to Sir James for delivery to the British garrison. D'Estaing then landed 3,500 French infantry and a battery of artillery and, with the unamiably cooperation of 1,000 American troops, proceeded to lay siege to the city. The British commander, Brigadier General Augustine Prevost, defended his works with spirit, inflicting nearly 1,000 casualties while losing scarcely any of his own men. Poor relations among the besiegers added to D'Estaing's discouragement; by the end of October he had decided to leave Savannah to the British, and the awesome French armada, having occupied the mind of every British naval officer in the hemisphere
for more than a year, had sailed for home.39

D'Estaing had not lived up to the expectations of the observers on either side, but the furor that accompanied his move against Savannah did more damage to British naval strategy than his guns had done. Word that the French squadron had left for Europe did not reach New York until November, and by then Clinton and Arbuthnot had made a decision that was to have a momentous effect on the remainder of the war.

As September waned and the anticipated naval confrontation off Sandy Hook failed to materialize Arbuthnot gradually concluded that the French must be headed for somewhere else. There were only three logical targets; since he had not appeared at New York D'Estaing must be contemplating an assault either on Rhode Island or on Halifax, which, with its dockyard facilities, was indispensable to the Royal Navy. The thought that D'Estaing might take Halifax nearly induced Arbuthnot to take his entire squadron to its defense. When Clinton protested that such a move might cost the British New York Arbuthnot relented, but insisted on sending Commodore Drake to Halifax with six warships and 1,500 troops.40

The admiral and the general agreed that the British forces in the northern provinces were spread over more territory than they could defend. Rhode Island was of no particular value to the army; if the French did attack the
place its 4,000-man garrison would be sacrificed to no good purpose. Clinton had kept the troops at Rhode Island in deference to the navy, but when he broached the subject to Arbuthnot the latter indicated little interest. "As to Rhode Island," the admiral wrote, "while we retain Halifax, I never can think it of importance to lock up such a Number of Troops, when they are wanted to more important purposes." While D'Estaing was on the coast Clinton felt obligated to maintain Rhode Island in case Admiral Byron followed the French to New England and needed an anchorage. As the French threat evaporated, however, Clinton and Arbuthnot strove to reassure each other that Rhode Island was insignificant to British strategy. "I give you as my opinion," Clinton wrote on October 6, "that the Occupying that place is of no advantage to land Operations in the present Stage of the War, nor to judge from Appearances can become of any in the prosecution of it." Having established that the admiral would bear his share of the responsibility Clinton ordered General Richard Prescott, the Rhode Island garrison commander, to dismantle his works and bring his troops to New York.

The decision to evacuate Rhode Island was a far reaching one. From the army's standpoint the outpost was lonely, dirty, and, due to the amount of land that was exposed only at low tide, smelly; it was also difficult to defend. Arbuthnot, in a letter to Sandwich, pointed out that if the
French had attacked the navy would have been unable "to give the smallest assistance to Rhode Island, which must inevitably have fallen if attacked, and from which place there is no retreating." But in abandoning Rhode Island the two commanders-in-chief had placed the best harbor in the north at the disposal of the French, and simultaneously had sentenced the Royal Navy to be tortured indefinitely among the purgatorial sandbars at New York. If the evacuation was an understandable military move it was a naval blunder.

The consequences of that blunder, however, were not to be revealed for many months. With the campaigning season at an end in the northern provinces and D'Estaing removed from the scene Clinton felt able at last to direct his efforts toward Charleston, the centerpiece of his plan for what was to have been the campaign of 1779. Washington's army still was intact, but the removal of the garrison from Rhode Island, Clinton felt, had placed enough troops at his disposal to allow the British to maintain their hold on New York and campaign in the south simultaneously. The memories of his previous attempt on Charleston in 1776 intensified Clinton's determination to make the second assault a successful one. Charleston, Sir Henry had concluded, would be the key to British victory. "This is the most important hour Britain ever knew," he wrote to one of his friends. "If we lose it, we shall never see such another."
Arbuthnot, on the other hand, was reluctant to undertake an expedition to the Carolinas without first removing all doubt that the last remnants of D'Estaing's fleet had left America. The two British commanders briefly considered setting up a small post in Chesapeake Bay, but decided that such a plan would consume too much time; furthermore intelligence that reached New York in December indicated that the French had left only a ship-of-the-line and two frigates in the Chesapeake, and that a spell of unusually cold weather was liable to freeze the bay in any case. Eventually it was decided that the army should be taken to Savannah, the southernmost outpost that the British already held. When they had reached Savannah Clinton and Cornwallis would decide whether to advance on Charleston by land or by sea.

By late December great chunks of ice were floating on the Hudson, and the expedition must either get under way or risk being frozen up in New York until spring. On Christmas Day Clinton and his suite established themselves on board H.M.S. Romulus, and the fleet began the process of working its way over the bar. Captain Johann Hinrichs, of the Hessian Jäger Corps, noted in his diary that "It was a pleasant day, and we enjoyed the sight of the fleet, every ship anxious to get through the channel first." By the twenty-ninth the 90 transports, with 8,700 troops and their attendant baggage, horses, and artillery on board, were on
their way to the southward. Arbuthnot, in the Europe, led an escort consisting of four other ships-of-the-line, one ship of 50 guns, two of 44, four frigates, and two sloops. Remaining at New York were a garrison of 10,000, a single frigate, and seven transports which had been torn from their anchors and damaged by the ice floes.  

III

Clinton and Arbuthnot had tempted fate in setting out so late in the year, and paid a dreadful price for their recklessness. Even before all the ships had worked their way out of New York they were struck by the first of a series of winter storms. New Year's Day, 1780, found the fleet scattered over several hundred square miles of the North Atlantic. Many of the little transports, their holds packed with seasick troops, were fighting for life. Captain Hinrichs described how the Hessian infantrymen on board the 400-ton Apollo were thrown from their bunks (six soldiers had to share a berthing space that had been designed for four) in the middle of the night.

The rolling of the ship had caused four of the berths to come loose and collapse, so that the jägers in the upper berths had fallen, berths and all, upon those lying beneath. This crash had awakened the few still asleep. At this moment, with all wide awake and shouting, a big rude wave had rushed in through the opening above and a panicky, but easily excusable fear had spread over the entire ship.  

The gales blew from the west and shoved many of the
helpless ships into the Gulf Stream, which carried them far
to the northeast before the weather moderated. One captain
gave up the struggle, and with his shipload of Hessians,
rang before the wind all the way to England. Several small
vessels laden with equipment for the cavalry were blown
away from the warships' protection and taken by rebel
privateers, and an ordnance storeship laden with the army's
siege artillery sank. A number of horse transports foundered
as well, and nearly all the horses in the vessels that
stayed afloat died.\textsuperscript{51}

Clinton, virtually incapacitated by seasickness through­
out the voyage, afterwards blamed Arbuthnot for much of
the fleet's misfortune. One of the \textit{Europe}'s backstays
parted, Sir Henry claimed, and when her captain put her
before the wind to make the necessary repairs the admiral
signalled the rest of the squadron to follow suit. "'Tis
owing to his [Arbuthnot's] obstinacy," Clinton wrote after
the war, "[that] we got into the Gulf Stream, and our
voyage was delayed, and we met with great losses."\textsuperscript{52}

Not until the end of January did the survivors begin
straggling into Tybee Inlet, at the mouth of the Savannah
River. The weather had moderated; Captain Hinrichs noted
thankfully that "the air was pleasant, as moderate as in
May in colder regions."\textsuperscript{53} Arbuthnot shifted his flag again
into the \textit{Roebuck}, whose shallow draft would make her a better
flagship than the ponderous \textit{Europe} for an amphibious
operation. The senior officers gathered at Savannah to plan the next move. Clinton, having no desire to subject either his army or his stomach to the open sea again, suggested that the expedition proceed to Charleston by way of the various rivers that ran parallel to the coast. Cornwallis, whom Sir Henry felt obliged to consult on such matters, felt that such an approach would be impracticable; it would consume a great deal of time during which the rebels would be able to strengthen their defenses. Clinton acquiesced: the navy would land the troops at some point within a few days' march of Charleston. Arbuthnot, on the basis of a study of his charts, suggested Stono Inlet, just south of the city, as the landing site. He deferred, however, to Captain Elphinstone, who, unlike the admiral, had sailed in the waters off South Carolina before. Elphinstone's choice was North Edisto Inlet, a considerably larger harbor which, though it lay a bit farther from Charleston, would provide shelter for all the transports.54

Arbuthnot, whether because he was miffed by Elphinstone's presumptuousness or out of simple respect for the latter's judgment and experience, gave him an unusual appointment as commander of the transports and whatever small warships might become involved in the direct support of the army.55 On February 10 Clinton ordered about 5,000 of his troops on board the transports; the remaining 1,400 infantry and all the cavalry (who would have to buy or otherwise
acquire new horses to replace those that had perished during the voyage) were to be left at Savannah under the command of Brigadier General James Paterson. The latter was to launch up the Savannah River toward Augusta, and join the main force outside Charleston later. Other support, Clinton hoped, would arrive from St. Augustine, the West Indies, and the Bahamas; he had sent letters to the respective commanders asking for all the stores and artillery they could spare.56

After an uneventful voyage of a little more than a day the transport flotilla, shepherded by the Roebuck and Elphinstone's Perseus, entered North Edisto Inlet and began unloading the troops. Elphinstone himself stood at the shoulder of the pilot on board the leading transport, while the warships stood guard outside the inlet.57 That evening a storm blew up, banging the ships about at the ends of their cables and drenching the soldiers—including Clinton, who, his headquarters tent not having been unloaded, had to spend the night under a tree.58 Sir Henry claimed afterwards that the change in weather offered proof of Arbuthnot's poor judgment; that "the expedition might possibly have been defeated had we been again entangled with the Gulf Stream, which would have been certainly the case had the Admiral persisted in his first design [i.e., landing at Stono Inlet]."59 Clinton's reasoning on that point is slightly obscure, for Stono and North Edisto Inlets were separated
Figure 5. Map of Charleston and Environs
by only eighteen miles.

Even in February the coast of South Carolina subsisted in a bizarre, almost tropical atmosphere, so distinct from the highlands of New York that the two provinces might have been on different planets. On a chart the entire coastal region resembled a child's puzzle whose pieces had been cut out with a thick saw blade, so that their edges did not quite touch. Most of what the cartographers solemnly labelled "rivers" had been formed where veinous tendrils of water pushed inland by the tide had chanced to encounter one another, thereby turning nondescript masses of spongy earth into "islands." The land consisted largely of swamps and marshes, and broad acres of rice fields that were covered by water nine months of the year. The inhabitants either grew rice or made their living by extracting tar and turpentine from the forests of pine trees that flourished a few miles inland. In the rice fields many of the British soldiers made their first acquaintance with the Negro slaves who, even in 1780, made up more than half the population of South Carolina. More menacing were the nauseus odors that arose from the stagnant water, and the crocodiles and poisonous snakes which were reputed to inhabit the swamps.

Its outlandish surroundings made the city of Charleston seem all the more incongruous. Located on a blunt-edged peninsula formed by the Ashley and Cooper Rivers, it generally was acknowledged to be the most beautiful city in North
America. Unlike European cities Charleston had been laid out according to a carefully-conceived plan, so that its streets intersected at right angles. The dominating impression on the visitor was one of spaciousness, for the city's founders and developers had realized that the congestion of such places as London and Boston would have been unliveable in the climate of the Carolinas. Charleston's streets were unpaved but their breadth, to the European observer, was scarcely believable: Broad Street, which ran straight across the city from the Ashley to the Cooper, was a hundred feet wide. Each of the thousand or so houses in the city presided over a spacious lawn, so the summer breezes were able to circulate. The wealthy citizenry constantly engaged in efforts to outdo itself in creating splendid new examples of the region's distinct architecture; along the streets and the waterfront were rows of palatial mansions, each with a portico supported by Ionic or Doric columns. Less conspicuous were the barred doors and windows in the cellars, where the slaves lived.

Charleston had a large, well protected harbor, but one that was only barely adequate to serve its commercial purposes. The edges of the city were defined by a brick sea wall, most of whose length performed its function only at high tide. At low water mud flats surrounded the entire peninsula save for a short row of wharves along the Cooper. Since most of the overseas trade of the southern provinces
had to pass through Charleston a crowd of merchant ships usually were anchored in the river, either ferrying their cargoes ashore in lighters or awaiting their turn at the docks.

The American commander, General Benjamin Lincoln, had set up a fairly sophisticated system of defenses. A narrow moat had been dug between the rivers, turning the city into an island. A masonry structure called "The Citadel" stood on Charleston Neck in the center of a network of trenches and abatis, stout barricades formed of felled trees. Rows of small forts along the rivers culminated in a "grand battery" of brass field pieces at the tip of the peninsula. Gangs of soldiers (most of Charleston's slave population had fled the city in reaction to rumors about a smallpox epidemic) had done their best to shore up Forts Johnston and Moultrie, two redoubts that had been built years earlier to guard the harbor approaches. Eight Continental warships, including four frigates, were in the harbor waiting to strengthen any point.

Charleston's most effective defense, however, was the great sand bank that not only lay directly outside the harbor mouth but stretched several miles to the north and south. There were five gaps in Charleston Bar, but even the deepest, the "Ship Channel," was so shallow that no vessel larger than a sloop-of-war could negotiate it without reducing her draught. To get a squadron of warships over
would have been a laborious project under any circumstances, and the defenders had made it more so. Charleston Light and "The Beacon," the two markers that identified the Ship Channel, had been put out of commission, while in Charleston itself the steeple of St. Michael's Church, a landmark called out on the charts as a point of reference on which the incoming navigator was to take his bearings, had received a coat of black paint.  

Clinton's intention was to make use of the navy in two phases of the siege operations. The transports, under Elphinstone's supervision, would maintain direct contact with the army as it worked its way up to Charleston from the south. A flotilla of locally-constructed galleys was on its way up the inland waterway system from Savannah to offer further support. While Elphinstone was chaperoning the army Arbuthnot was to get as many of his warships as he could over the Bar, dispose of the rebel naval forces in the harbor, and bombard the city. Unless Lincoln evacuated Charleston before the British invested it his army would be cut off, attacked from both land and sea, and unable to withdraw across either of the rivers due to the presence of the navy.

The army's approach was slow but relentless. Clinton, his perennial logistics problems exasperated by the shortage of horses and by the scanty roads that traversed the rice plantations, was determined to set up a reliable base from
which to conduct his formal siege operations. He spent more than a month occupying James Island, which formed the southern shore of the harbor, and establishing a firm line of communications between his advanced outposts and the beach head on Simmons Island. Elphinstone stationed a detachment of sailors at each of the river crossings, and was able to alleviate the supply situation somewhat by bringing a number of the victuallers into Stono Inlet. Reports from Charleston indicated that Lincoln intended to defend the city at all costs, and was calling in troops from all over the Carolinas to support him. Clinton, always receptive to evidence that his enemy was stronger than he was, thereupon summoned reinforcements of his own. He directed General Paterson's force to come up from Georgia, and sent a letter to Baron von Knyphausen, the Hessian general who had been left in command at New York, to send all the troops he could spare to Charleston as well. Until Paterson, at least, arrived, Clinton was willing simply to bide his time.

While the army was establishing itself on James Island Arbuthnot was bringing his warships up from Savannah and, with a noticeable and perfectly understandable lack of enthusiasm, contemplating the prospect of taking them over Charleston Bar. Fresh in his mind was an incident of February 15, when the 64-gun Defiance, on her way out of Tybee Inlet with a civilian pilot on board, had run aground. Her captain had saved some of her guns, sails, and boatswain
stores, but the Defiance herself had been pounded to pieces by the next storm.\textsuperscript{62} The loss of a ship-of-the-line under such embarrassing circumstances emphasized the dangers posed to a naval vessel by navigational hazards.

Arbuthnot quickly decided that his frigates, his two 44's, and his one 50 would have to suffice to support Clinton's land operations; the ships-of-the-line would stay outside the harbor. The crews of the Roebuck, Renown, and Romulus spent the first week of March transferring guns, water casks, and stores to the bigger ships, causing the three vessels to rise until each showed a broad belt of her copper sheathing above the water. As soon as the lightening process had been completed the wind, predictably, turned foul, and the ships bobbed about like corks ("on the open coast, in the winter season of the year, exposed to the insults of the enemy," Arbuthnot lamented) for sixteen days.\textsuperscript{63}

It was not until March 20 that the Roebuck, with the admiral nervously pacing her quarterdeck, her boats taking soundings ahead of her, and her sailing master carefully keeping her compass needle pointed at west-by-north and her bowsprit at the ruins of the lighthouse, worked her way through the Ship Channel and into the sanctuary of Five Fathom Hole.\textsuperscript{64} By sunset the Romulus and Renown, along with the frigates Richmond, Raleigh, Blonde, and Virginia and the armed vessel Sandwich, had joined her. During the next few days the squadron's boats replaced the 50- and 40-gun ships'
guns and stores, and all the ships-of-the-line but the *Europe* sailed back to New York under Commodore Drake.

Clinton, observing the proceedings from his headquarters on James Island, found himself addressing the admiral in terms that were, for Sir Henry, the ultimate in joviality. "Joy to you, Sir," he wrote to Arbuthnot, "to myself, and to us all upon your Passage of that infernal Bar. Your anxieties have been great, and I assure you I have not been without mine on your account." 65

On the same day the army pickets encountered the advance elements of General Paterson's force, suffering from what its commander called "monstrous fatigue" as a result of its forced march from Georgia. 66 With eight warships in the outer harbor, and 1,400 additional troops at his side on the south bank of the Ashley, Clinton at last was ready to launch his assault on Charleston.

Captain Elphinstone, who must have wondered about the progress of the request for permission to resign that he had sent to London the previous September, took command of a flotilla of 22 boats that was hiding in Wappoo Creek, waiting to carry the army across the Ashley. 67 Arbuthnot already had landed a battery of 32- and 24-pounders (enormous weapons by the standards of land warfare) from his ships-of-the-line to replace the siege artillery Clinton had lost in the Gulf Stream. To solve the problem of the horse shortage (Paterson's cavalrymen were mounted on a bizarre
collection of farm horses they had acquired on their way from Savannah) the boatswain’s mates had made up rope harnesses that would enable the guns to be pulled by a detachment of 120 sailors Arbuthnot had sent ashore for the purpose.68

Well after dark on March 28 the boats, their oars muffled, crept out of Wappoo Creek and up the river to a point opposite Drayton House, a mansion some fifteen miles from Charleston. Elphinstone had detailed several of his armed galleys to defend the crossing operation against a rebel counterattack, but none materialized: Lincoln had assumed that the British would cross at Ashley Ferry, some six miles downstream. By dawn Clinton's army, having passed unmolested over the river that constituted the Americans' best line of defense, was on the march down the peninsula. Sir Henry had outmaneuvered his opponent, and acknowledged that the navy had played its role to perfection. "A Million of Thanks to you for your Assistance in Boats," he wrote to Arbuthnot. "It is most ample indeed! And owing to the excellent Arrangements of Captain Elphinstone all passed thro' without the least Alarm."69

The next move was Arbuthnot's. To enter Charleston Harbor itself the warships must pass through the channel between yet another sandbar and Sullivan's Island. At the southern end of the latter stood Fort Moultrie, the same fortification which, under its original name of Fort
Sullivan, had repulsed Sir Peter Parker three and a half years earlier. The American naval commander, Abraham Whipple, originally had shown an inclination to make a stand at the mouth of the channel, but a careful study of Arbuthnot's two-deckers caused him to reconsider. The rebel vessels withdrew to the mouth of the Cooper, where Whipple ordered most of them scuttled as the basis of a log and chain boom between Charleston and a muddy island called Shute's Folly. The remaining Continental vessels, the sloop-of-war Ranger and the frigates Providence and Boston, stood guard at the northern end of the boom.

At one o'clock on the afternoon of April 8 Arbuthnot weighed anchor and formed his little squadron into line ahead, with the flagship Roebuck in the lead and the 50-gun Renown in the rear; the latter vessels' scantlings would best be able to withstand the more accurate fire that, presumably, would be aimed at her after the rebel gunners had found the range. A half dozen supply-laden storeships, whose shallow draft would let them bear closer to Lower Middle Ground, sailed alongside the column of warships.

In order to clear the sand banks the ships had to steer almost directly toward Fort Moultrie, which promptly opened fire on them. They were under fire constantly for the next two hours, as each vessel composedly worked her way up to within half a mile of the fort, came about, and presented her starboard broadside to it. Once the rebel gunners' fire
was returned their own standard of gunnery deteriorated; several of the warships sustained damage to their rigging and the Richmond lost her fore topmast, but scarcely a shot penetrated a hull and the British suffered only 27 killed and wounded.\textsuperscript{70} When the Renown arrived before the fort she hove to, took in her sails, and, as Captain Hinrichs told it, "gave such an unrelenting, murderous fire that the whole ship seemed to flare up."	extsuperscript{71} According to another Hessian officer "The rebels, having considered this place impassable, were so dumbfounded that they ceased firing."\textsuperscript{72} The most serious British casualty was the storeship Aeolus, which ran onto the sandbar within range of the fort and which, after the Renown had proceeded into the harbor, the rebels pounded into a wreck. An American who watched the action from the steeple of St. Michael's Church noted in his diary that the warships

...really make a most noble appearance and I could not help admiring the regularity and intrepidity with which they approached, engaged and passed Fort Moultrie. It will reflect great honour upon the admiral and all his captains, but 'tis pity they are not friends.\textsuperscript{73}

The diarist failed to specify whether he was lamenting the fact that the ships were British rather than French, or repeating one of the many rumors about Arbuthnot's relations with his subordinates.

By six-thirty Arbuthnot and his squadron had anchored off James Island, just out of range of the guns of Charleston itself. When the troops in the siege works on Charleston
Neck heard of that development, according to Captain Hinrichs,

The enemy suddenly stopped firing and, filled with amazement, saw the proud Briton, the master of the sea, meet and overcome every danger, every obstacle, with scorn and disdain. Horror, astonishment, fear, despondency, and shattered hopes seemed to befog their eyes, ears, and hearts to such an extent that they did not fire a single shot at our men, who had jumped upon the parapets of the works! 74

The American situation was indeed precarious. Clinton already was within 400 yards of the line of fortifications that protected the rear of the city, and the guns Arbuthnot had sent ashore had been set up in what the troops came to call "the sailors' battery." 75 With the Royal Navy in the harbor Charleston could be bombarded from the seaward side as well.

Clinton, confronted for once by an enemy who seemed willing to wait indefinitely to be defeated, was in his element. Of all forms of eighteenth-century warfare the siege of a fortified city was the most formalized, the most scientific, and, provided the besiegers were served by adequate logistics, the most assured of success. Unless the attackers committed a blunder only the timely arrival of relief from outside could save the defenders. Sir Henry may have lacked the decisive personality necessary to deal with unorthodox military situations, but he was perfectly capable of solving a textbook problem. Charleston had been doomed from the moment when the British had appeared on the horizon; Lincoln's decision to defend the city rather than
abandon it had condemned his army as well.

When Arbuthnot's ships entered the harbor the British and Hessian troops already had constructed their "first parallel"—a line of trenches and earthworks across the peninsula barely within musket range of the rebel defenses—and, protected by narrow ditches shooting obliquely forward, were at work on a second. The artillery batteries, most of them manned by sailors, fired over the heads of both armies and kept Charleston under fire day and night. On one occasion Arbuthnot and his flag captain, Sir Andrew Snape Hamond, noted that flames were visible. Inspired by the sight they sent a lieutenant ashore to urge Elphinstone to take advantage of the situation ("The Admiral and Sir A.S.H. begs their compliments to you and begs you will burn the Town as soon as possible and send 24 pound shot into the stomachs of the women to see how they will deliver them"), but Clinton was horrified by such suggestions. It was, he said, "absurd, impolitic, and inhuman to burn a town you mean to occupy!" On April 18 a convoy arrived from New York bearing 2,000 additional troops, sent by General Knyphausen in response to Clinton's summons. The siege works proceeded even faster.

Clinton's only fear was that, before he was close enough to attempt a general assault on Charleston itself, the American army would escape across the Cooper and disappear into the Carolina swamps. A British force already held the
opposite bank but Sir Henry repeatedly complained that no warships were to be seen in the river itself.

The admiral had been contemplating entering the Cooper, but the rebels, fully aware of its importance, were expending a great deal of energy in keeping him out. The boom and the scuttled warships between Charleston and Shute's Folly effectively sealed off the mouth of the river. Some of the British galleys might get beyond the boom by rowing through the narrow channel between Shute's Folly and Hog Island, but every time a boat tried to take the necessary soundings an American field artillery battery appeared on the mainland opposite Hog Island and drove her away.²⁹ Arbuthnot, as methodical an admiral as Clinton was a general, concluded that he must gain control of the shoreline east of Hog Island before proceeding further. The rebels had a small fort on Mount Pleasant; Arbuthnot resolved to take it.

At daybreak on April 29 a force of 500 seamen and marines, jointly commanded by Captains Charles Hudson, John Orde, and James Gambier (Admiral Gambier's nephew), landed near Mount Pleasant and marched on the fort from the rear. The defenders promptly bolted, leaving their stores and guns behind; in the course of the day the British guard boats captured more than 80 American soldiers who were attempting by various means to get across to Charleston.³⁰

At this point Arbuthnot's tactical reasoning had become so complicated that he himself appears to have lost
track of it. The three captains who had taken Mount Pleasant reported that they were being inundated by American deserters from Fort Moultrie, a little more than a mile away. Arbuthnot recalled the nuisance that that installation, inaccurate gunnery notwithstanding, had made of itself during his passage into the harbor. Always in the back of his mind was the fear that a French naval force would appear without warning, trapping the British warships in Charleston Harbor where they could be destroyed at leisure. If Fort Moultrie could be manned by Royal Navy gunners it would make the harbor secure against such a threat. Arbuthnot, forgetting that his purpose in attacking Mount Pleasant had been to gain control of the channel behind Shute's Folly so that the galleys could get into the Cooper, threw his energy into a plan to take Fort Moultrie. He emphasized, in his report to the Admiralty, that he had been careful to ensure that the scheme "should not interfere with the important operations the Army were carrying on." That the navy was supposed to be contributing something more substantial to the progress of the siege than "not interfering" with it seems to have escaped the admiral's attention.

The rebels were likely to put up an obstinate defense, so Arbuthnot arranged to attack Fort Moultrie from two directions at once. During the night of May 6-7 the boats quietly landed 200 seamen and marines on the eastern end of Sullivan's Island. A similar force crossed the channel
from Mount Pleasant, landed directly behind the fort itself, and overpowered the 20 soldiers who had been guarding the bridge to the mainland that constituted the Americans' only means of retreat. At two o'clock in the morning Captain Hudson sent a messenger to inform the rebel commander that at daybreak six warships would anchor below the fort and open fire on it. The garrison, vastly under strength since most of it had been summoned to Charleston weeks earlier, thereupon surrendered. 82

The occupation of Fort Moultrie made Charleston a secure naval base. Henceforth the British warships would be able to commute unmolested between the harbor proper and Five Fathom Hole, and any French relief expedition that managed to get over the Bar would have to contend not only with the guns of Arbuthnot's squadron but with the batteries at Fort Moultrie, Mount Pleasant, and Fort Johnston. Clinton, however, was less impressed by the navy's achievement than he was disturbed by the fact that, a month after Arbuthnot's arrival in the harbor, there still were no British warships in the Cooper River. During the admiral's prolonged campaign against the rebel fortifications Sir Henry repeatedly complained that Arbuthnot had forgotten him. In the memoirs he published after the war Clinton described how he

...made use of every argument I could think of to impress the Admiral with conviction of its [the Cooper's] importance, but I could
only obtain from him promises that he would very shortly comply with my desire—notwithstanding which I had the mortification to be disappointed, as no attempt was ever made by him to send ships into the Cooper to the end of the siege.83

On May 10 a ship arrived from England with dispatches. The government had received intelligence to the effect that a squadron of French ships-of-the-line, commanded by the Chevalier de Ternay, was on its way to North America. The Admiralty had dispatched a squadron of its own, under Rear Admiral Thomas Graves, in pursuit. The North American Squadron was ordered to assemble at New York and, when Graves arrived there, proceed to whatever point de Ternay chose to attack.84 Arbuthnot was confident that he could keep the French out of Charleston, if that was their destination; he proudly asserted that his decision to take Fort Moultrie had been proven correct. Clinton bluntly pointed out that if de Ternay were indeed heading for Charleston the rebels must have been expecting him for some time, and would not have reduced the fort's garrison to the skeleton force Captain Hudson had captured.85

The news of the French move emphasized to Clinton the fact that his southern campaign had been going on for too long. For four and a half months the British war effort had been divided between Charleston and New York; if the French chose to undertake a full-scale campaign in either the north or south the British land and naval forces would
be hard put to deal with it. If de Ternay appeared at New York while Clinton still was laying siege to Charleston the result would be calamitous. The operations in the south must be concluded at once, and the army freed to meet the French thrust wherever it materialized.

On Charleston Neck the troops were working on their third parallel, in increasingly hot weather that made the task of digging trenches and throwing up parapets more arduous every day. The "canal" across the peninsula was almost dry, due to the combined influence of the hot afternoons and the British engineers who had dug ditches to drain it. The American works were showing the effects of the bombardment, and the defenders were running so low on ammunition that they had started to load their cannon with scrap iron and broken glass.86

On the morning of May 11 the British artillery, emplaced a mere 30 paces from the rebel lines, began lobbing hot shot into the city, and Clinton's troops began massing in the trenches. At two in the afternoon, by which time several fires had broken out in the suburbs, an American drummer accompanied by an officer waving a white flag strode through the city gates. General Lincoln, having defended his works as vigorously as anyone could have expected, had decided to bow to the inevitable. During the next two hours representatives of both sides worked out the terms for the unconditional surrender of Charleston.
On the following day Lincoln's troops marched through the gates and laid down their arms, and the greatest British triumph of the war was complete. It had been a time consuming victory but, by comparison with its importance, not a particularly bloody one: each army had sustained about 250 casualties, while Arbuthnot's squadron had 23 killed and 28 wounded. The victors spent several days congratulating each other and writing their reports to their respective superiors. The most glowing kudos went to Captain Elphinstone, "whose professional abilities and indefatigable zeal," as Clinton put it, "greatly facilitated the approaches of the troops to the object of our attack." Arbuthnot added the names of Captains Hudson, Orde, Gambier, and H.F. Evans, who had supervised the landing of the artillery. In his hour of triumph Clinton even managed a word of praise for the admiral. Sir Henry's dispatch to Lord George Germain emphasized "how great a share Admiral Arbuthnot and the Fleet have had in every measure. I can add that had we been necessitated to make an assault, I am persuaded a very considerable part would have been taken by the ships to serve us at that important crisis."

The Charleston campaign had demonstrated what impressive results could be obtained when the army and navy cooperated with one another. Yet the relationship between the two commanders-in-chief, proper and above-board though they both professed it to be, was growing brittle. Clinton never
forgot the navy's failure to secure the Cooper—or, for that matter, what he perceived as Arbuthnot's failure to get the expedition intact from New York to Savannah. Sir Henry confided to his journal that "in appearance we were the best of friends. But I am sure he [Arbuthnot] is as false as hell, and shall behave in consequence." 91

On the basis of his correspondence, rumor, and, in some cases, sheer imagination Clinton had begun to construct an image of a Royal Navy that was fraught with incompetence and corruption and determined to frustrate the army's every move. The principal conspirators included two naval villains besides Arbuthnot himself. The first was Sir Andrew Hamond, who, as flag captain during the siege, surely must have had a great deal to do with the squadron's intractable behavior. The other was the admiral's secretary, Mr. Green.

William Green is an enigmatic character. His chief duty as flag secretary was to edit and copy Arbuthnot's letters; his name appeared in the official records only where "by command of the admiral," he signed a letter or order in the admiral's absence. The brief memoir he wrote long after the war is a curious blend of egotism, virulent self-pity, and historical inaccuracy. Green was 36 years old in 1780, and, like many another civil servant, seems to have been determined that he and his relatives should acquire some financial advantage from his appointment. He retained an unpleasant memory of his brother-in-law who, shortly
after Green managed to get him appointed purser of one of Arbuthnot's frigates, "caught the Carolina fever and died, a considerable sum in my debt. I was informed subsequently that he was idle, careless, and intemperate, and that his death was probably owing to the latter circumstance, and thus the first attempt by me to serve my family turned out a complete failure."92

Throughout Arbuthnot's tenure stories about his relations with his secretary circulated in the fleet and in Whitehall as well. Green was supposed to be embezzling funds and provisions (he would have been an unusual secretary had he not done so), and exerting some strange influence over nearly everything that went on in the squadron.93 Clinton on various occasions called him "that animal" and "that blockhead of a secretary [who] does all he can to keep us at variance, that his misconduct may not be discovered."94 In his autobiography Green denied all the allegations with a scornful vituperation that makes his behavior look even more suspect. Just how the secretary "manipulated" the admiral neither Clinton nor anyone else ever explained, but there does seem to be some basis for the belief that Green was a distinctly malignant power behind Arbuthnot's throne.

Clinton briefly considered following his victory at Charleston with an expedition to Chesapeake Bay, but Arbuthnot drew his attention to the Admiralty dispatch that ordered the naval squadron to join Admiral Graves at
New York. Sir Henry acquiesced; the British could not undertake another offensive in any case until the Frenchman de Ternay and his ships-of-the-line had been located and disposed of. Before the two commanders-in-chief could leave Charleston, however, they had to sort out several administrative matters associated with the conquest of the city.

There was, for example, the question of what sort of government Charleston should have when the British left. Clinton was leaving Cornwallis behind to conduct a "pacification" campaign in the Carolinas, and thought it logical that the Earl be made military governor as well. Arbuthnot, on the other hand, said he wanted to see Charleston's civilian government restored as quickly as possible. Since Whitehall had appointed the admiral one of its Commissioners for restoring the peace Clinton could not overrule him, and the issue went unresolved.

Even more vexing was the problem of apportioning the spoils. Elphinstonone had taken a French sloop-of-war and three Continental naval vessels in Charleston Harbor; these, of course, would be either sold to the highest bidder or bought by the Navy Board, and the proceeds shared by all hands involved in the captures. But in addition to the ships a great deal of other merchandise had fallen into the hands of the British forces. During their march from North Edisto Inlet the troops had crossed several deserted rice
plantations, and had seized what Clinton called "a considerable quantity of stores, of all sorts." Sir Henry, acting (he claimed afterwards) "from a desire of acting upon most liberal principle with the Navy," offered to divide the loot between the services. Arbuthnot thereupon sent Captains Barclay, Evans, and Orde (Elphinstone and Hamond already had sailed for England in the Perseus) ashore to discuss the details.

The naval officers suggested a simple solution: the navy should take half and the army half. Clinton's representatives, a major and two lieutenant colonels, were astonished: almost three times as many soldiers as sailors had participated in the expedition and, as Clinton pointed out, "the stores were not even on any branch of any river which had communication with the sea." The navy refused to compromise, and demanded that the issue be referred to the king for adjudication. All parties then withdrew in a huff.

Arbuthnot refused to get involved in the argument, asserting that, as a mere squadron commander, he lacked the authority to dispose of the spoils of war in any but the navy's traditional manner of dealing with prizes. The admiral would "only expect what the law justly entitles me to," but unless the army was willing to accept the navy's solution the goods from the plantations would have to remain on board the storeships until the government decided whose interpretation was correct. Arbuthnot was abetted in
his stubborness by William Green, who had concocted a line of logic by which the navy should be granted all the booty:

...no law of England authorizes an army to despoil her enemies, and all enemy property which the accidents of war may subject to its power of every description is deemed to belong to the King, and may subsequently be disposed of at his royal pleasure by Order of Council....But the case with the navy was altogether different: the course to be pursued was legally and distinctly marked out, the mode, extent, and proportion of distribution fixed from the Admiral to the cook's mate by laws and usages established for many years.101

The squabble over the spoils of Charleston was to surface again, but for the time being it had to be put aside. Arbuthnot was anxious to sail in pursuit of de Ternay, and the "sickly season" was about to begin in the Carolinas. By early June the laborious task of getting the Roebuck, Romulus, and Renown outside Charleston Bar had been completed, and Arbuthnot and his entourage had moved back on board the Europe. On the ninth the fleet weighed anchor and set a course for New York.102 Left behind were Lord Cornwallis, 8,345 troops, and most of Arbuthnot's frigates and sloops. Considerable time would elapse before the rebels and their European allies learned that Charleston was in British hands, and during the intervening period the cruisers would have the opportunity to make a prize of any unsuspecting merchantman that tried to enter the harbor.

After a pleasant voyage of ten days the squadron anchored in the familiar waters off Sandy Hook. Save for a
handful of transports New York Harbor was empty: there was no sign of de Ternay, Graves, or, to Arbuthnot's astonishment, Commodore Drake. Shortly after the latter's return from Charleston in March an Admiralty dispatch had arrived, and Drake, as senior naval officer at New York, had opened it. Their Lordships, knowing nothing of the attack on Charleston and assuming that Arbuthnot would be inactive over the winter, had directed him to send three of his ships-of-the-line to the Leeward Islands.\footnote{103} Three replacements would be sent out to North America in the spring. Drake, by coincidence, had had three ships-of-the-line, the \textit{Russel}, \textit{Robust}, and \textit{Raisonable}, at his disposal, and had been overcome by the temptation to transfer himself from the frustrating atmosphere of North America to the traditional site of the Royal Navy's great fleet actions. Laying out a course that gave a discreetly wide berth to Charleston, he had proceeded posthaste to the Caribbean. When Arbuthnot discovered that his second-in-command and three-fourths of his battle fleet had deserted him he sent a curt letter to Admiral Rodney, the commander-in-chief in the Leeward Islands: "I wish I could draw a Veil over Mr. Drakes conduct who having opened my dispatches from the Admiralty, instead of hisitating with respect to my order, or at least calling off Charlestown, has abided by the latter, and very impro- perly proceeded to join you who will keep him \\& Send any other Ships in his stead."\footnote{104}
The absence of Drake's ships made it even more vital that, when the reinforcing squadron under Admiral Graves arrived, it should be made ready for action with a minimum of delay. Arbuthnot therefore had the transports loaded with water, provisions, and "every necessary I can think of," and stationed them at Sandy Hook so that Graves would be able to replenish his ships without taking them over the bar. The commander-in-chief himself then went to New York and took up residence on shore. His health, never particularly good, had been taxed severely by the events of the past six months. Clinton, at his own headquarters nearby, was engaged in his favorite pastime of drawing up plans for his next campaign. He decided he could spare 6,000 men for the task of heading off the new French move, wherever and whenever it should come; the pestilential army, under George Washington in New Jersey might attack New York if the British garrison there were reduced any further. Until de Ternay and Graves brought their pieces onto the board, however, the other participants could do no more than mark time.

On July 6 the frigate Triton came over the bar and her captain, Skeffington Lutwidge, hastened ashore to meet with Arbuthnot. On the previous day Lutwidge, cruising off the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, had encountered a fleet of some 40 French vessels, including (he thought) nine ships-of-the-line and half a dozen frigates. Lutwidge was convinced that they
had not been bound for the Chesapeake: they had been out of sight of land and steering north-northeast. He had tried to maintain contact with the fleet, but a ship-of-the-line and two frigates had detached themselves from the main body and chased the Triton away. 107

That information was tantalizingly vague. Arbuthnot, after scribbling a note to Clinton, hastened back on board the Europe and ordered the other warships to prepare to go to sea, but he was no more capable of bringing the French to action than he had been for the previous month. Although de Ternay obviously had arrived on schedule his destination was mysterious as ever. Captain Lutwidge thought the French might be headed for the Delaware; Clinton had received a dispatch from London suggesting that their target was Canada. If the latter were the case, he pointed out, de Ternay would need a harbor to serve as a base of operations, and the logical site would be Newport. Sir Henry already had received, by way of the disaffected rebel general Benedict Arnold, word that a French fleet and army were expected there in the middle of July. 108 Clinton therefore plunged into a new set of schemes for the defense of Rhode Island, and presented Arbuthnot with no fewer than three such plans when the final principal actor of the upcoming campaign arrived on the scene. On July 13 six ships-of-the-line hove ponderously over the horizon, their blue ensigns identifying them as the squadron of Rear Admiral Graves. 109
NOTES: CHAPTER SIX

1. DNB, II, p. 65.
3. Sandwich to Admiral Harriet Arbuthnot, Feb. 4, 1778, Sandwich Papers, NMM.
4. Arbuthnot to Sandwich, March 19, 1778, Sandwich Papers, NMM.
5. Adm. to Howe, March 22, 1778, ADM 2/1334 (LC Trans.).
7. Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 21, 1779, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
8. Arbuthnot to Sandwich, March 10, 1779, Sandwich Papers, NMM.
9. Capt. Adam Duncan to Arbuthnot, April 11, 1779, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); Sandwich Papers, II, p. 247n.
14. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Aug. 29, 1775, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 140-141; Willcox, Portrait, p. 283.
15. Clinton to Arbuthnot, Aug. 24, 1779, Clinton Papers, CL.
17. Willcox, Portrait, p. 332n.
18. Ibid., pp. 271-272; Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 114-120.


22. Collier to Sandwich, n.d., Sandwich Papers, III, p. 120.


25. Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 142-143; Willcox, Portrait, pp. 273-274.

26. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Aug. 29, 1779, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

27. Ibid.

28. Capt. George Keith Elphinstone to Arbuthnot, Sept. 1, 1779, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); Arbuthnot to Stephens, Sept. 3, 1779, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).


33. Arbuthnot to Commodore Francis S. Drake, Sept. 19, 1779, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

34. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Oct. 8, 1779, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); Arbuthnot to Germain, Oct. 10, 1779, Stopford-Sackville Mss., II, pp. 146-147; Clinton, Rebellion, p. 144; Willcox, Portrait, pp. 289-290.

35. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Oct. 8, 1779, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

36. Arbuthnot to Clinton, Oct. 4, 1779, Clinton Papers, CL.
37. Ibid.
38. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Oct. 8, 1779, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
40. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Oct. 2, 1779, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 148-150.
41. Arbuthnot to Clinton, Oct. 23, 1779, Clinton Papers, CL.
42. Clinton to Arbuthnot, Sept. 26, 1779, Clinton Papers, CL; Clinton to Arbuthnot, Oct. 6, 1779, Clinton, Rebellion, p. 425.
43. Clinton to Arbuthnot, Oct. 6, 1779, Clinton Papers, CL.
44. Clinton, Rebellion, p. 146; Willcox, Portrait, pp. 290-292.
47. Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 152-153; Willcox, Portrait, p. 300-301.
49. Ibid.; Clinton, Rebellion, p. 158; Arbuthnot to Clinton, Dec. 25, 1779, Clinton Papers, CL; Clinton to Arbuthnot, Dec. 26, 1779, Clinton, Rebellion, p. 438; Arbuthnot to Stephens, Feb. 6, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film), Clowes, Royal Navy, IV, p. 48.
52. Ibid., p. 159n.
53. Hinrichs, Diary, Jan. 31, 1780, Siege of Charleston, p. 139.


58. Ibid., p. 484.


61. Clinton, Rebellion, p. 162.

62. Capt. Maximillian Jacobs to Arbuthnot, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); Clowes, Royal Navy, IV, p. 110.

63. Arbuthnot to Stephens, May 14, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

64. Ibid.; Clinton, Rebellion, p. 162.

65. Clinton to Arbuthnot, March 20, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.


68. Arbuthnot to Clinton, March 1, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

69. Clinton to Arbuthnot, March 28, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

70. Arbuthnot to Stephens, May 14, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

71. Hinrichs, Diary, April 8, 1780, Siege of Charleston, p. 241.

74. Hinrichs, Diary, April 8, 1780, Siege of Charleston, p. 53.
75. Ibid.
76. Lieut. James Duncan to Elphinstone, April 14, 1780, Keith Papers, I, p. 164.
78. Arbuthnot to Clinton, April 18, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL; Clinton, Rebellion, p. 167.
79. Capt. Sir Andrew Hamond to Elphinstone, April 14, 1780, Keith Papers, I, p. 166.
80. Arbuthnot to Stephens, May 14, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
81. Ibid.
82. Arbuthnot to Stephens, May 14, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); Hinrichs, Diary, May 7, 1780, Siege of Charleston, pp. 283-285.
84. Adm. to Arbuthnot, March 16, 1780, ADM 2/1337 (LC Trans.); Germain to Adm., March 15, 1780, Clinton, Rebellion, p. 439; Cabinet Minute, March 7, 1780, Sandwich Papers, III, pp. 243-244.
85. Willcox, Portrait, p. 308.
86. Ewald, Diary, May 2, 1780, Siege of Charleston, p. 77.
87. Arbuthnot to Stephens, May 14, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
88. Clinton, Rebellion, p. 172.
89. Arbuthnot to Stephens, May 14, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
90. Clinton to Germain, May 14 (?), 1780, Keith Papers, I, p. 142.
91. Clinton, Rebellion, p. 166n.
92. William Green (ed. Henry S. Fraser), The Memoranda of William Green, Secretary to Vice-Admiral Harriot


95. Clinton to Arbuthnot, May 18, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

96. Willcox, Portrait, pp. 312-313.


98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.


102. Arbuthnot to Germain, June 30, 1780, Stopford-Sackville MSS., II, p. 158.

103. Adm. to Arbuthnot, Sept. 24, 1779, ADM 2/1336 (LC Trans.).

104. Arbuthnot to Admiral Sir George Rodney, June 25, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

105. Ibid.

106. Clinton to Arbuthnot, June 28, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

107. Arbuthnot to Clinton, July 7, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.


109. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Aug. 9, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
CHAPTER SEVEN
Marriot Arbuthnot, July, 1780-July, 1781

I

Thomas Graves, Esquire, Rear Admiral of the Blue Squadron, was yet another of the conscientious, unspectacular Graveses who saturated the eighteenth century Royal Navy. The son and namesake of a naval officer and a cousin of the pathetic admiral who had presided over the defense of Boston, he, like nearly every other admiral of his generation, had seen considerable active service early in his career but had passed middle age in time of peace. As a lieutenant and frigate captain during the long wars with the French Graves had been present at a number of fleet actions and convoy battles; the only setback in his career occurred in 1757 when, while in command of the frigate Sheerness, he mistook a French Indiaman for a ship-of-the-line and refused to do battle with her. The resultant court martial convicted Captain Graves of an "error of judgment" and publicly reprimanded him, but Graves considered himself lucky: on the same day another court convicted Admiral John Byng of the same offense and condemned him to death.¹
During the long peace after 1763 Graves commanded a guardship at Plymouth and spent several years on shore. He enhanced his social status by marrying a sister of Lady North, the wife of one of the Tory party's most prominent statesmen. When the American war broke out he had gained sufficient seniority to command a ship-of-the-line, and as captain of the Conqueror he participated in the exasperating voyage of "Foul Weather Jack" Byron. Graves's flag came on March 19, 1779, when he was 54. He returned to England in time to command a division of Sir Charles Hardy's Grand Fleet during the invasion scare of the following summer.

When the Admiralty learned of the Chevalier de Ternay's departure from France their Lordships again decided to deal with the French threat by strengthening the North American Squadron to compensate. As Byron had chased after d'Estaing Graves would sail in pursuit of de Ternay. Graves was a logical choice for the command: he had seen service in America, he had encountered de Ternay once in a convoy fight 18 years earlier, and he shared with four other rear admirals who had been promoted on the same day the distinction of being at the bottom of the flag officers' list. The government, despite the French navy's repeated gesticulations to the contrary, persisted in regarding North America as the least important theater of the war. The perennial invasion threat, the fate of Gibraltar, and the great convoys from the West Indies were sufficient to
occupy the mind of every naval thinker in Whitehall. When North America intruded on their Lordships' consciousness their reaction was to send off to that part of the world enough ships-of-the-line to maintain the balance of force there, on the assumption that as long as the British maintained a slight numerical superiority the problem could be ignored.

The entire government seems to have become fascinated by a desire to ensure that the superiority would be no more than slight. The first intelligence reports from France indicated that de Ternay had 12 ships-of-the-line; since Arbuthnot was believed to have five (the loss of the Defiance at Savannah not having been reported yet) Graves could do with eight. When word was received that de Ternay had only eight the king himself entered the discussion with the suggestion that Graves's force be reduced to five. Several members of the Cabinet observed that, if he were given a few more ships, Graves would be able to engage the French even if he failed to make contact with Arbuthnot. The number finally was fixed at eight, but no one in the government seemed disturbed when the admiral sailed with six.  

On March 25, 1780, Mr. Stephens's clerks sent off the necessary orders to Portsmouth, where Graves was "holding himself in readiness for sailing" on board the 90-gun three-decker London. He was "required and directed to proceed, with his Majesty's Ships under your command, without
a moment's loss of time, to No. America, in order to join
and re-inforce the squadron under the command of Vice
Admiral Arbuthnot; ...and, putting yourself under his command,
follow his Orders for your further proceedings."^4

Getting a squadron of ships-of-the-line away from a
British naval base was an involved bureaucratic process
under the best of circumstances, but Graves had more trouble
than usual. He complained that the Admiralty had given him
only one frigate ("To have but one eye is certainly too
little; and to have but one scout deprives you of half your
active powers"), and that several of the ships-of-the-line
needed repairs to their masts.\(^5\) No fewer than 182 of the
Marlborough's crew were incapacitated, and the flagship
London herself was shorthanded; the Navy Board had fitted
her with eight additional guns but had not increased her
complement. To the admiral's complaint about the latter
point Mr. Stephens replied stonily that "their Lordships
cannot consent to the encreasing the Complement of Ships
of the 2d Rate."\(^6\) The Admiralty did, however, send the
Assistant Surveyor of the Navy to spur on the Portsmouth
dockyard authorities in their work on the ships' spars, and
agreed to replace the Marlborough with another 74, the
Bedford, Captain Edward Attleck. One of her lieutenants
was Thomas Graves, the enthusiastic young officer who, five
years earlier, had commanded the schooner Diana during the
siege of Boston and threatened to bludgeon Benjamin Hallowell.
Captain David Graves already had been given the command of the London, and on April 6 the Admiralty appointed Mr. Richard Graves her fourth lieutenant. Apparently the old admiral at Hembury Fort still had enough influence at Whitehall to ensure that the latest "armament for North America" would be a family affair.

In the spring of 1780 the Royal Navy's resources, emotional as well as physical, were strained to the bursting point. The Admiralty, struggling to cope with a war whose dimensions seemed to be expanding every few months, found itself compelled to make a few ships do the work of many. Most of Graves's ships-of-the-line had been attached temporarily to a fleet which, under the command of Sir George Rodney, had relieved Gibraltar before proceeding to the Caribbean. After two months at sea their crews, exhausted from fighting the Bay of Biscay in mid-winter, had looked forward to recuperating in Portsmouth and receiving their pay, meager though it would be, at the end of March. An act of Parliament that had been passed in 1758, when George Grenville was Treasurer of the Navy, stipulated that seamen be paid every four weeks. On this occasion the Navy Board, short of cash as it was short of every other commodity, either forgot about the act or chose to ignore it. A large draft of newly impressed sailors, arriving on board the ships just as the word came that the squadron was destined for North America, intensified the surliness that
already was permeating the several thousand men who were to be sent across the Atlantic without being given either a day's shore leave or the slightest monetary compensation for their exertions in the previous campaign. When, on April 8, Graves hoisted the signal to get under way, the Shrewsbury, Resolution, Invincible, Royal Oak, and America refused to comply.

Graves, hoping to set an example, took the London, the Prudent, and his one frigate, the Amphitrite. (The Bedford would have gone as well, but she still was provisioning) down the Channel to St. Helen's. Sir Thomas Pye, the Portsmouth port admiral, could be trusted to deal with the mutineers. Four of the ships returned to their obedience the following day, after their marines, with fixed bayonets, had forced their way through the berthing spaces and driven the recalcitrant seamen on deck. The crew of the Invincible whose captain was an invalid and incapable of dealing with the situation, remained obstinate until Pye surrounded her with boats full of armed men and ordered another ship-of-the-line, the Alexander, to be ready to open fire on her. When the Invincible's crew gave in on April 11 he arrested 16 of them; a court martial convicted two of the ringleaders, but refrained from imposing the capital sentence when a close check of the statutes revealed that the sailors' demands for their paychecks had been justified. The sentence thereupon was reduced to 500 lashes. Pye, "in hopes
to strike some terror in the fleet," ordered that each of
the convicted mutineers receive the first half of his
punishment on May 1, then recommended that the Admiralty
remitted the rest.⁹ According to one eighteenth-century able
seaman who wrote his memoirs 250 lashes with a cat-o'­nine­
tails made a man's back resemble "so much putrified liver."¹⁰
When the king learned of the details of the mutiny he label­
ed it "a very unpleasant circumstance, and an additional
proof of the evil of Mr. Grenville's Bill."¹¹

While all these developments were taking place Admiral
Graves, whom the king was moved to describe as "both a man
of sense and of resolution," was sitting impatiently at
Plymouth, waiting for the rest of his squadron and a fair
wind.¹² On May 13 the Admiralty sent him a copy of an
intelligence report that had come in from Paris: de Ternay,
having experienced his own series of frustrating delays,
had gotten to sea on May 2.¹³ On the seventeenth Graves
finally was able to get out of the Channel, hopeful that
his ships' coppered bottoms might enable him to pass the
French in mid-Atlantic. He had only six ships-of-the-line,
but the Admiralty would be able to put the Shrewsbury and
Invincible to constructive use elsewhere.

II

When Graves arrived off Sandy Hook on July 13, having
made one of the fastest Atlantic crossings on record, he was surprised to discover that his new commander-in-chief, Arbuthnot, had no clearer notion than himself of the French squadron's whereabouts. Five days later, after Graves had replenished his ships and landed his sick (he proudly reported that, by feeding the men wine and "essence of wort," he had kept the incidence of scurvy in his squadron remarkably low), the mystery was resolved. On July 10, a mere three days before Graves's arrival, de Ternay, as though attracted by some invisible force to the most vulnerable point in the British defenses, had anchored in the harbor of Newport. He thereupon had landed 6,000 troops, commanded by the Compte de Rochambeau, and they had established themselves in the siege works Clinton had ordered abandoned nine months earlier.

The presence of the French ships-of-the-line and Rochambeau's army in Rhode Island was to have a decisive effect on the remainder of the war in North America. In 1780 the two British commanders had devoted considerable thought to the evacuation of Rhode Island, and probably had been correct in their conclusion that they lacked sufficient strength to occupy it and New York simultaneously. The eighteenth-century military mind, imbued as it was with the presumption that a center of population must be a strategic center as well, could be forgiven if it failed to consider the possibility that Rhode Island's superb harbor
might make it more worth defending than New York. Less understandable was Arbuthnot's failure, though he and Clinton had been given hints of the French fleet's destination as early as the end of June, not merely to intercept it but to be aware of its arrival until Rochambeau had been ashore for more than a week.\(^{16}\) Clinton had been straining at the leash, unable even to load his troops on board the transports because the latter were sitting off Sandy Hook waiting for Graves. Arbuthnot never bothered to explain how 40 French ships got into Narraganset Bay without being noticed; his chronic shortage of frigates and other light vessels probably combined with the admiral's ill health to enable the French to make their landing not only unmolested but undetected.

Once Arbuthnot was aware of his enemy's whereabouts he heaved himself into action. His preparations to receive Graves, irritating though Clinton found them, had been professionally competent; within less than a week Graves's ships had made good all the damage they had suffered during their crossing and a draft of volunteers from New York had replaced his 400 sick. By July 22 the North American Squadron, its impressive strength now including seven ships-of-the-line, was cruising outside Newport.\(^{17}\) Clinton, his troops crammed into the transports at last, waited in Huntington Bay, on the northern coast of Long Island.

The topography of the Rhode Island coast was such
that, from their station some four leagues away, the British
lookouts could gain only a vague impression of the French
dispositions. Arbuthnot therefore decided to send one of
his officers to reconnoiter. At Charleston the British
had captured several French naval officers, and the supplies
they were consuming at New York were creating a nuisance
for the army's bookkeepers. Good manners demanded that
de Ternay bear at least some of the expense, so Arbuthnot
had an excuse to communicate with him.

Shortly after dawn on August 6 the Europe's first
lieutenant, Josias Rogers, climbed into Arbuthnot's barge
and set a course for the shore. An hour or so later the
barge, a white flag waving punctiliously in her bows, round-
ed Brenton's Point and sailed into Newport Harbor. Seven
two-decked ships-of-the-line lay at anchor in a crescent-
shaped formation before the town, their broadsides augmented
by artillery batteries on Rose Island, Brenton's Point,
and Goat Island. Behind the screen of warships was anchored
a veritable throng of frigates and transports, and among
the hills surrounding Newport countless tendrils of smoke
showed where Rochambeau's soldiers were cooking their
breakfast.

The French, astonishingly, were not rowing guard, so
Rogers had his coxswain lay him alongside the third vessel
from the head of the line, an 80-gun ship with an admiral's
flag at her truck and the name Duc de Bourgogne on her
Figure 6. Map of Rhode Island
counter. The young lieutenant climbed her side to her quarterdeck, and actually had to present himself to the officer of the watch before being noticed. After a prolonged display of Gallic politeness Rogers was escorted below and introduced to the admiral. The Chevalier de Ternay, though he was only 58 years old, was a sick man; he already was feeling the first effects of the undiagnosed fever that was to kill him four months later. He nonetheless received Rogers with perfect civility, and having worked out the necessary arrangements regarding the prisoners, invited the British officer to dinner and provided him and his boat's crew with lodgings for the night. Rogers even was allowed ashore, with a French officer in attendance, to visit some friends in Newport.  

When Rogers got back to the Europe he told Arbuthnot that the French fleet was considerably smaller than had been supposed, that the crew of de Ternay's flagship was in a wretched state of discipline, and that the French admiral himself was a physical wreck. William Green claimed afterwards that he had "no doubt, if we had gone in, the whole enemy's fleet must have surrendered or been destroyed." 20 Arbuthnot and Clinton were indeed being presented with a better opportunity than they ever would have again to dislodge the French from Rhode Island.  

Afterwards the general and the admiral blamed each other for the fact that the opportunity was not seized.
Clinton contended that Arbuthnot, as the man on the spot, should have either adopted one of Sir Henry's earlier plans for a coup de main at Rhode Island or produced a scheme of his own. Arbuthnot, on the other hand, derived nothing but exasperation from the army's repeated offers to cooperate with him. During the more than two weeks he spent in Long Island Sound, the admiral in a private letter to the Earl of Sandwich, wrote that Clinton, "amusing me with his situation in Huntington Bay, with his troops in transports and aide-de-camps dancing backwards and forwards with reports of intelligence with respect to the enemy, kept me in the constant hope of an éclaircissement one way or the other, till time slipped from under my feet...." Eventually both commanders lost their enthusiasm for the Rhode Island project. Clinton, who had heard rumors that Washington might be on the verge of attacking Manhattan, hastened back to New York with his troops. Arbuthnot, having blockaded Newport for 19 days, became worried about the squadron's health: the combination of congested living quarters and the summer heat had put 900 of his sailors out of action. Since the presence of the French made New York an unacceptable naval base Arbuthnot decided to take his ships to a desolate spot called Gardiner's Bay, near the eastern tip of Long Island. From that vantage point he would be able to keep his eyes on de Ternay while restoring his crews to health and making plans for the next move.
The squadron anchored in Gardiner's Bay on August 8. While the surgeons escorted the sick ashore and the pursers set about filling the water casks Arbuthnot sent one of his officers to New York, with instructions to inform Clinton of the fleet's whereabouts and invite him to come to Gardiner's Bay for a conference. \(^{24}\) Clinton, who prided himself on being receptive to such suggestions, hastened to comply. He rejected, however, the frigate Arbuthnot had offered as a means of transportation: "as I am an exceeding bad sailor," Sir Henry once admitted, "I dare not venture without the Hook." \(^{25}\) Instead he climbed into his personal coach and, with a squadron of mounted dragoons as escort, set out to travel the length of Long Island by land. The journey took three days and nights. By the end of that time Clinton was thoroughly exhausted, his temper was frayed, and his coachman was dead of sunstroke. \(^{26}\)

Arbuthnot, meanwhile, had received what he called "accounts (well authenticated) ...that the enemy had, with circumstances of hurry and trepidation, completed their water and provisions and prepared to sail." \(^{27}\) De Ternay had done no such thing, but the prospect of losing touch with him again provoked a typical Arbuthnot reaction. On September 17 he ordered the entire squadron to weigh anchor and sailed off in the general direction of Rhode Island, intent on catching up with de Ternay and fighting a battle with him. On the following day Clinton and his retinue
arrived on the shore of Gardiner's Bay to find it deserted.\textsuperscript{28}

The sight of the empty horizon caused Sir Henry's psychological equilibrium to collapse. Arbuthnot had departed almost immediately after inviting him to Gardiner's Bay, and had left behind him no more than a note to the effect that "as I am preparing to weigh to cruise for the enemy between Montauk Point and the southward of Nantucket Shoals, I do not think it proper to delay a moment."\textsuperscript{29} His previous grievances against Arbuthnot—the losses in the storm on the way to Charleston, the fleet's failure to enter the Cooper, the dispute over the booty, de Ternay's unmolested entry into Narraganset Bay—had increased the burden on Clinton's patience to the point where a seemingly trivial incident could not only cause him to lose control of himself but pulverize what little amicability remained between the British Army and Navy in North America. In the note he sent to Arbuthnot Clinton managed to recover sufficiently to remain within the bounds of civility, merely professing himself "exceedingly surprised" at having been left "at the extremity of this island, without a ship of force to receive me or even a boat to communicate with you."\textsuperscript{30} In a letter he wrote at about the same time to his friend William Eden, however, Sir Henry laid bare his soul:

I must refer you to the bearer, by whom I send all my Correspondence with our old Admiral, to shew you the difficulties I labor under with
him, & prove to you how impossible it is that we can go on longer together. Why would you not send me one of the five unexceptionable men I named? Is your Lord Sandwich, who, to my knowledge, has long since considered the American War as Secondary, for ever to send out Gambiers and Arbuthnots? If so, I intreat that I may return. With either of the five I have so often named, all might have been expected from this Campaign, but from this old Gentleman nothing can: he forgets from hour to hour, he thinks aloud—he will not answer any of my letters, holds conversations with my Aides de Camp, & afterwards denies it, as indeed he has done once or twice with myself. I will not accuse his heart, tho' perhaps I am the only Man who knows him that does not, but his head is in my opinion gone...

Well, I will endeavor to forget we have missed an Opportunity of attempting an important stroke, & in perfect good humour attend the Admiral, or at least send General Officers to him for that purpose, to consult on future Operations. For God's sake send us Money, Men, & Provisions, or expect nothing but Complaints. Send out another Admiral, or let me go home....my Wish is to retire from a Situation the most irksome that ever Man was placed in.  

The Clinton/Arbuthnot feud had been fermenting for at least six months; William Green even suggested that the latest incident had taken place almost by mutual consent. "They did not meet," he wrote later, "and God forgive me if I am wrong, but I had very great doubts then, and still have, that neither was serious or anxious on the subject, though both wished to appear so to be. I was chagrined to my soul at the profound and forcible impression which such an opinion irresistibly made upon me."  Yet Arbuthnot himself seems to have been unaware that anything untoward had happened. His attitude toward Clinton continued to be
one of mildly amused tolerance. In a letter he wrote to Lord George Germain the admiral dismissed the Gardiner's Bay episode by observing that "at so momentous a time it was impossible to attend to etiquette." Arbuthnot probably never felt much personal animosity toward Clinton or anyone else, but the same traits that made him impervious to the general's almost insolent behavior ensured that the relationship between the commanders-in-chief would remain under stress until one of them departed.

For the rest of the summer the North American Squadron cruised back and forth before Newport, occasionally putting into Gardiner's Bay or Martha's Vineyard for provisions or to escape the weather. The tactical situation was simple enough but the duty was taxing. By August 20 Arbuthnot's health was troubling him again; in the hope that a move to slightly more roomy quarters might provide some relief he shifted his flag from the 64-gun Europe to the Royal Oak, one of the 74's that had come out with Graves. Arbuthnot had not been confined to his flagship for so long a stretch in many years, however, and the experience was beginning to make him feel his age. In a private letter to Sandwich he acknowledged that

The constant fatigue of this command both of body and mind is almost too much for me. I have been ever since my arrival in one continual variety of fatigue. I know what I owe to your Lordship, I know what I owe to the favourable opinion of some other friends. I therefore beseech you not to impute this account to
ingratitude or chagrin. I can hold out a little longer, and hope so to demean myself to preserve your good opinion; and if I live to return home, as I shall then have nothing to ask but to retire after, I may say, 53 years' constant service.\(^3\)

Evidence from various quarters suggested that for Arbuthnot to "hold out a little longer" would be desirable indeed. By the end of August it had become obvious that, whatever de Ternay's long-range plans might be, an imminent departure from Rhode Island did not figure in them. There were indications that the initiative in the war might be passing to the British. According to the reports that came in regularly from the southward Lord Cornwallis was conducting a dynamic campaign through the Carolinas, causing the rebel commander in that theater, Horatio Gates, to fall back whenever they met. And not to be forgotten were the frigates Arbuthnot had left outside Charleston. If his cruisers had been only moderately successful the admiral, entitled by Order in Council to one-eighth of the value of any rebel, French, or Spanish ship they captured, soon would be a wealthy man.

The hazards that lay in the path of a naval commander-in-chief, however, were both copious and unpredictable. On September 18, just as Arbuthnot had finished moving his suite to the Royal Oak, a frigate sailed into Gardiner's Bay with a dispatch:

You are hereby requir'd and directed to put Yourself under my Command and follow such orders as you may from time to time
In 1780 Sir George Brydges Rodney, Bart., Admiral of the White and Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels in the Leeward Island, was the most famous officer in the Royal Navy; since then he has become one of the most controversial. In the 62-year-old Rodney the "sea dog" archetype was alive and well. Alone among the British naval officers who were to be involved in the last phase of the American war Rodney had been an admiral for a substantial portion of his career, his promotion to flag rank having come in 1759. He had commanded in the Leeward Islands during the Seven Years' War, and in 1779 had been so obviously qualified for that post that the government had re-appointed him to it despite his openly expressed dislike of the Earl of Sandwich.

In addition to his naval service Rodney had enjoyed a long, if frequently interrupted, career as a Tory member of Parliament. His political career and his love of high society almost had bankrupted him more than once; at the time of Lexington and Concord, in fact, he and his family
were living in Paris, having been chased out of England by the admiral's creditors. Only a loan from a magnanimous French nobleman enabled Rodney to return home before France and Britain went to war.

In his private as well as his professional life Sir George consistently behaved in a manner that his admirers labelled dynamic and his detractors insufferable. A debilitating case of gout, aggravated by the Caribbean climate, frequently rendered him into an old man before his time. The son of an impoverished captain of marines who had lost his money in the South Sea Bubble episode, Rodney owed much of his success in the navy to the good auspices of distant relatives. He reciprocated by playing the patronage game with a zest that even the eighteenth century British government found excessive. In 1774 he attempted to promote his son James, who was 20 years old at the time, from junior lieutenant of a 50-gun ship to captain of another, and barely was able to smother his outrage when the Admiralty refused to confirm the appointment.37

Rodney's successful relief of Gibraltar on his way back to the West Indies in January, 1780, excited the imagination of England, and left the press and the public breathlessly awaiting news of his next exploit. Having been reinforced by the detachment under Commodore Drake that the Admiralty had sent down from New York he spent several months sparring with the French admiral De Guichen,
finally bringing him to an indecisive battle off the island of Martinique. When de Guichen disappeared shortly after the action Rodney concluded that he might have gone to America to join de Ternay. That assumption, coupled with the approach of the Caribbean hurricane season, resulted in Rodney's taking eleven ships-of-the-line and three frigates, the bulk of the Leeward Islands Squadron, to New York.  

Rodney and Arbuthnot knew each other only through their correspondence about the unpleasant episode involving Commodore Drake. As Rodney's first act upon his arrival at Sandy Hook he sent five of his ships-of-the-line to join Arbuthnot at Gardiner's Bay and, whether in an artistically subtle attempt to irritate his North American counterpart or as a result of poor memory, put Drake in command of them. Rodney himself, wanting to get ashore as quickly as possible for the sake of his health, then proceeded over the bar and up the river to New York. Deliberately or otherwise he avoided making Arbuthnot's acquaintance; in fact they never were to meet. But when Rodney went ashore he encountered, almost immediately, the two men who could be relied upon to give him the worst possible impression of the naval situation in North America: Sir Henry Clinton and William Green.

Arbuthnot's secretary, by coincidence, had come to New York to transact some personal business on the very day of Rodney's arrival. When Green stopped in at Admiralty House,
the residence-cum-office the navy maintained in the city, he was amazed to discover that Rodney had taken possession of the place. The admiral was cordial enough; he spent an hour or so chatting about the tactical situation (and, Green recalled, "much miscellaneous matter, for he was as usual in his general discourse flighty and digressive") and invited the secretary to return the next morning for breakfast. When Green showed up on schedule, however, he found no table set and Rodney standing up drinking his coffee. "Being seated and in expectation of the déjeuner which did not appear," Green

intimated with some hesitation that I had waited upon him agreeably to his invitation or commands. He then asked me if I had breakfasted; [on Green's] answering in the negative, he directed a look to his man and some tea was brought in a salver. But his manner was wholly changed from at least the appearance of a cordial suavity of the evening before. He had become distraint, cold, or abrupt, and I was led to conclude from hence that he was under the influence of some earwig after our last meeting, which had excited a dislike or prejudice which occasioned this alteration.

Clinton welcomed Rodney as his savior. Sir Henry had been spending a considerable portion of his time constructing an image of the ideal admiral, and found it easy to believe that Rodney met the specifications. Where Arbuthnot was a man of bluster Rodney was, or at least seemed to be, a man of action—precisely the sort of officer, in fact, that Clinton believed he would have been himself had he
not been surrounded by incompetents. The Sandwich scarcely had anchored off Staten Island when Clinton penned a letter enthusing over the military consequences of Rodney's coming: "The Arrival of so respectable a Force at New York under your Excellency's Command could not fail of giving the greatest Effect to the Affairs of Great Britain in this Country, and certainly has thrown the Rebels into a Consternation." 41

Sir Henry, true to form, bombarded Rodney with a series of plans for joint actions by the army and navy. For some time there had been rumors that yet another French fleet was on its way to Rhode Island, but Clinton had concluded that the reports were "groundless and false;" he therefore hoped it would be possible to launch an attack on de Ternay and Rochambeau. Sir Henry took pains to phrase delicately the matter that was uppermost in his mind:

Should Admiral Arbuthnot, so considerably reinforced by you, sir, think any attempt still practicable, he will of course report it. And in that case I offer to Your Excellency, as I did to him, every possible secondary assistance of the army. But if Admiral Arbuthnot, reinforced so considerably by you, sir, does not alter his opinion, I am persuaded you will agree with me in mine.42

Sir George took to the role of seagoing messiah with gusto. When some of the army officers invited him to attend a play they had been rehearsing he curtly refused, telling Clinton that "I came to act and not to amuse myself with the diversions of New York; that I owned myself hurt at his
permitting the officers of the army to act plays at a season when their arms might have been employed against the public enemy." When he discovered that several sheds in the navy yard had been allowed to deteriorate to the point where sails no longer could be stored in them Rodney asked Clinton for the use of a building that was occupied by the army's quartermaster general. Clinton, chortling that "It always gives me pleasure to render any Service in my Power to the Navy," complied. He was overjoyed by Rodney's assurance that "I shall be most happy in seeing You and consulting with You in what Manner I can best second your Efforts towards the Reduction of His Majesty's Rebellious Subjects--the Sole Motive for my coming on this Coast."

Some 80 miles away from the "diversions of New York" the commander-in-chief of the North American Squadron was reacting with a mixture of consternation and suspicion. Arbuthnot's disgust at seeing Commodore Drake again was mollified only slightly by the fact that Drake had brought five ships-of-the-line with him to Gardiner's Bay. When he discovered that Rodney had adopted the title "Commander-in-Chief of H.M. Ships and Vessels employed or to be employed at Barbados, the Leeward Island, and on the seas adjacent, and superior officer of all H.M. Ships and Vessels employed on the Coast of North America," Arbuthnot took umbrage. The idea that a stranger could take over the direction of naval affairs in an entire theater on his
personal whim was repugnant, but even more objectionable was the possibility that Rodney might claim the commander-in-chief's share of whatever prizes the squadron took while he was on the station. The whole navy knew about his financial problems; Arbuthnot found it easy to believe that Sir George's decision to come to America had been prompted by a desire to get out of debt. The suspicion was confirmed when Rodney announced that he was sending Captain Philip Affleck (the younger brother of Edmund Affleck, of the Bedford), with a detachment of ships-of-the-line and frigates, to cruise off the coast of South Carolina. "I am told," said Rodney, "the Privateers of the Rebels swarm off Charles Town Bar." So much for the prize money Arbuthnot had planned to use to finance his retirement.

In the letters he wrote to Rodney Arbuthnot was punctilious if far from cordial. In his next dispatch to Mr. Stephens, however, he complained that Sir George was acting "from a Spirit of unauthorized interference," and "attempting to deprive me of the rank conferred by the Right Honourable Board, subverting its powers, and altering or suspending the arrangements I have judged it necessary and conducive to make, for the conduct of the war." Rodney, confined to his bed at Admiralty House, was indulging his own penchant for criticism. To his friend George Jackson, the Second Secretary at the Admiralty, he wrote:
I have the Curses of the Congress and the Blessings of all the Loyal Americans....

But I am sorry to say that jealousy has risen in the Breast of V.A. Arbuthnot, who has been absurd enough to write to me to give up my Authority and permit him to continue as Commander-in-Chief, using the most ridiculous Arguments.

You may be sure I answer'd him as I ought, and let him know I knew my Duty and did not come to America to be an Idle Spectator--but while I remained on the Coast would Commander-in-Chief and take care the Orders I gave were obey'd.

...Mr. A----t, is govern'd by an Artfull fellow, which makes him do things that will sully his Rep----n, tis inconceivable the number of memorials I have against him, all of which I return, letting them know, I did not come to enquire into Mr Ar----ts Conduct. Every thing is in the greatest confusion not the least Order, and tis impossible but Sir H Clinton, or Mr A----t must be recalled--I have had more trouble and fatigue in putting things in Order and Stationing Ships properly, than I had with the Great Fleet I Commanded in the West Indies.49

In a private letter to Sandwich Rodney bemoaned the fact that "the happy moment of destroying the French squadron [at Rhode Island] had been lost, owing to the differences between the two commanders in chief.... When commanders in chief differ, how much do nations suffer; it is their duty to agree."50

Clinton, for the time being at any rate, had lost interest in any sort of move against Rhode Island, and was devoting his attentions to other projects. In October the army's headquarters was pre-occupied with the celebrated case of Benedict Arnold, the rebel general who offered to change sides and help the British seize the fortress at
West Point. Clinton, envisioning a grand amphibious cam­
paign in the Hudson Valley, sent his adjutant general, 
Major John André, up the river in the sloop-of-war **Vulture** 
to contact Arnold and make the final arrangements. But 
the plan led to tragedy: when the **Vulture** returned to New 
York she bore not André but Arnold himself, who had been 
forced to flee for his life when the rebels discovered what 
was afoot. Clinton and Rodney (Arbuthnot had not been let 
in on the scheme) had to stand by in shocked frustration 
while André, one of the most popular young officers in the 
army and almost the only one Clinton could number among 
his genuine friends, was charged by Washington with espion­
age, put on trial, and hanged.

The rebels' uncovering of the Arnold plot caused 
Clinton to lose his taste for a campaign in the Highlands, 
and so unnerved him emotionally that he was unable to think 
about any other military action for several weeks. On 
October 15, however, a convoy arrived from England bearing 
3,000 British and Hessian recruits. Upon receipt of such 
evidence that Whitehall still considered the American war 
worth winning Sir Henry speedily worked out a plan to direct 
a thrust at a geographic point whose strategic importance 
had suggested itself to him long before: the western shore 
of Chesapeake Bay. The reinforcing contingent scarcely had 
come ashore when it was replaced on board the transport by 
2,500 veterans under General Alexander Leslie. On October
17, with Captain George Gayton in the 44-gun Romulus leading an escort of eight smaller naval vessels, all Rodney had been able to scrape together at New York on such short notice, Leslie sailed for the Chesapeake. His instructions from Clinton spelled out the "principal object" of the expedition: "to make a diversion in favor of Lieutenant General Earl Cornwallis, who by the time you arrive there will probably be acting in the back parts of North Carolina." Clinton suggested that the best way for Leslie to achieve that end would be to establish himself at Portsmouth, Virginia, and work his way up the James River to Richmond. The precise direction of Leslie's force, however, was to be left to Cornwallis. After five and a half years of waging a war under orders from superiors several thousand miles away Clinton believed he thoroughly understood the nature of independent command.

He was wrong. Captain Gayton landed the troops at Portsmouth two days after the expedition left Sandy Hook, and Leslie energetically threw up a series of works along the Elizabeth River. Then the Iris, one of the frigates Arbuthnot had left outside Charleston, arrived with a message from Cornwallis. The British southern army was not faring so well as Clinton had been led to believe, and in fact it had suffered a major reverse when the rebels had caught up with and defeated one of Cornwallis's detachments at a place called King's Mountain in North Carolina. When
he learned of Leslie's presence in Virginia Cornwallis was retreating to the southward, and found Clinton's "diversion" scheme less attractive than the prospect that Leslie's troops could be used as reinforcements. The Earl therefore ordered Leslie to abandon his post at Portsmouth and take his expedition to South Carolina as quickly as possible. Leslie complied; and the force Clinton had hoped would disrupt the rebel line of communications between the northern and southern theaters was swallowed up by Cornwallis's army. When Sir Henry learned of that development he was disappointed, but remained convinced that the idea of establishing a post on the Chesapeake was sound. Making a note that Cornwallis could not be trusted to act with prudence in the absence of detailed orders, Clinton resolved to try again.

In and near New York, meanwhile the triangular struggle among the British commanders-in-chief was attaining awesome proportions. On October 2 Arbuthnot, styling himself, "Stationary Commander in Chief in North America," had Green draft a "Circular" for distribution to the appropriate civil and military authorities:

As it is the intention of Vice Admiral Arbuthnot to Claim...the share of all Prizes taken by his own Squadron as Commander in Chief accordingly I am directed to require all the Agents for Prizes in New York to reserve in their hands such share and to pay it to none until any other pretences that may be made shall be legally decided on. In that Line of Employ I take the liberty to acquaint you therewith that you may not be
drawn into a dangerous pensibility.

Inclosed is a list of the Kings Ships under the Vice Admirals Command.\textsuperscript{53}

The list included 44 vessels. Rodney noted on his copy of it that "Mr. Green in his eagerness to serve his Admiral forgot that the Russel, Centaur, Culloden, and Savage, were not part of Mr. Arbuthnot's Squadron but came from the West Indies."\textsuperscript{54}

Arbuthnot, insisting that his presence was required in the squadron blockading Newport, refused to visit Rodney at New York. By the middle of October the division of command between two admirals, each of whom had precise ideas of where the other's authority ended and his own began, was not only straining tempers but threatening to undermine the British war effort. For several weeks the army's ubiquitous logistics problems had been growing critical. A great convoy from Cork that was supposed to include several army victuallers was overdue, and Clinton pressed Arbuthnot to send to Halifax (where, according to Sir Henry, "the Garrison had a greater Supply than they wanted") for relief. Arbuthnot obediently arranged for several of the troop transports, escorted by the frigates \textit{Rainbow} and \textit{Camilla}, to go to Halifax and bring back whatever the army needed.

Matters stood at that point when the convoy bearing the reinforcing British and German recruits was sighted on October 12. When Rodney, still in residence at Admiralty House, was informed that the convoy included three army
victuallers destined for Halifax he seized on a convenient solution to the army's problem: the victuallers could come to New York instead. Since that arrangement would make the mission of the Rainbow and Camilla superfluous, Sir George countermanded Arbuthnot's order and told their captains to remain at New York.

Unbeknownst to Rodney, unfortunately, Arbuthnot, cruising back and forth in Long Island Sound, had chanced to encounter the inbound convoy. Assuming that the Rainbow, the Camilla, and the transports already were on their way, he had detached the three victuallers from the convoy and sent them to Halifax. That development caused Clinton to experience what he variously described as "the most anxious concern" and "the greatest Distress." Sir Henry jumped to the conclusion that the mixup had been Arbuthnot's fault, and fairly wept in describing it to Rodney: "You will I am sure lament with me that the Admiral has taken this fatal Step without ever consulting you, Sir, or your humble servant....the Consequences may be most dreadful; without you, with your usual Goodness will assist us as far as you can with Propriety."

It took Arbuthnot a week and a half to figure out what had happened. On November 1 he gently pointed out to Clinton that "Had my Orders to the Camilla been permitted a prompt Execution, the Provisions your Excellency desired from [Halifax] might have been on its way to you." Arbuthnot
assured Sir Henry that "When the Army is in Want of any Articles of Comfort or Convenience that I can Communicate, I consider myself as a Brother. And Your Excellency will do me the Justice to be persuaded that I will with pleasure share the last Biscuit with you." Clinton did not deign to answer that letter, but he filed it away carefully for publication with his memoirs.

The long-distance quarrel between the admirals proceeded on several fronts simultaneously. Rodney was infuriated to learn that, upon his having sent one of his ships-of-the-line, the Raisonable, to join the ships blockading Newport, Arbuthnot had declared her unfit for service and sent her to England. Sir George, as though in retaliation, ordered several of the North American Squadron's frigates off on independent cruises. Before he left to return to the Caribbean he had his secretary, William Pagett, send Arbuthnot a list of the ships in question and where they had gone--but no indication of when, if at all, they would return to New York.

In addition to assuming responsibility for the containment of the French in Rhode Island while he was on the American coast, Rodney felt obliged to make plans to deal with them if they managed to escape after he left. De Ternay, Rodney assumed, would head for the West Indies, where his presence would give a decided numerical advantage to the French. To guard against such an eventuality
Rodney drew up a set of secret orders to Rear Admiral Graves: if the French escaped from Newport Graves and his squadron were to follow them. In accordance with standard service protocol Rodney sent the sealed orders, with a polite covering letter, by way of Arbuthnot. 61

Arbuthnot replied with a long, bristling letter that enumerated the grievances he had been compiling for more than a month. Rodney's orders to Graves, as it happened, were superfluous, as they duplicated those that Arbuthnot already had received from the Admiralty. Arbuthnot had not gone to New York because his duty was to keep de Ternay blockaded at Newport or, if the French should escape, to ensure that "not a moment might be lost in the pursuit.... How far Sir your own Conduct...has been praise worthy and proper consequences must determine." Lest Rodney miss the point Arbuthnot threw down the gauntlet: "Your partial Interference in the Conduct of the American War, is certainly unaccountable upon principals of reason and precedents of Service." 62

That letter might have been, and probably was, expected to cause Rodney to lose his temper. To his credit, it did not. Perhaps Rodney realized that antagonizing Arbuthnot, no matter how justified it might seem, would have a harmful effect on the war effort; perhaps Sir George was not as certain as he seemed to be that his temporary seizure of the command in North America would be approved by the
Admiralty. At any rate he responded with an equally lengthy letter that, if it was not apologetic, certainly was conciliatory:

I...am sorry that my Conduct has given you Offence, none was intended on my part. Every respect due to you as an Officer and a Gentleman my Inclination as well as my Duty led me to pay you in the strictest sense. If any designing men by their insinuations have led you to deviate from that good sense and politeness which Mr. Arbuthnot was always known to have, I am sorry for it....

Your Anger at my partial interfering (as you term it) with the American War not a little surprizes me. I came to Interfere in the American War, to Command by Sea in it, and to do my best Endeavours towards the putting an End thereto.

...Your having detached the Raisonable to England without my Knowledge...is I believe unprecedented in the annals of the British Navy. My Duty will oblige me to report it to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty....

You must excuse me Sir, if I think myself in a great measure responsible for the Disposition of His Majesty's Ships on the Coast of America during my Continuance thereon....And as the Superior Officer of His Majesty's Ships on this Station have taken upon me to dispose of them in such a manner as appear'd to me most conducive to His Majesty's and the Public Interest. Copies of which disposition, when I leave this Station, will be delivered to you.

In no one Instance have I had the least intention of shewing disrespect to you or your Orders, or deviating from them, but when I found it immediately necessary for His Majesty's Service....

Rodney's slightly gnarled olive branch caused Arbuthnot to withdraw into a sullen silence for the remainder of the Leeward Islands Squadron's sojourn at New York. In the end it was the weather that brought an end to the feud
between the admirals. As the campaigning season in New York ended that in the Caribbean was beginning, and Rodney was anxious to return to his proper element. He spent the early part of November refitting his ships (in the process, Arbuthnot complained, reducing the navy yard's stores to a dangerously low level), and awaiting a wind that would carry him down the Hudson and around the Hook. On November 12 the Cork fleet, complete with army victuallers, arrived; the knowledge that his troops would have enough to eat through the winter softened the bitterness Clinton felt at the thought that Arbuthnot soon would become the naval commander-in-chief again. Sir Henry, when he learned that Rodney was about to leave, lamented that "'tis probable I may not have it in my Power once more to take you by the hand before you go, and thank you for all your Goodness to us....by day the Wind says no--by Night I am told my Boat is too small. If you leave us without my seeing you, I heartily wish You Health, Happiness, and, if possible, more Honor."  

An awkward incident developed when some of the Leeward Islands captains turned their press gangs loose on the victuallers' crews, but Rodney, in response to a plea from Clinton, graciously ordered that the sailors be released. On November 13, two months to the day after Rodney's arrival, the wind blew from the west. The admiral bade the general a hurried farewell:
...not one Moments delay must now be, when the Wind will permit us to go over the bar. God bless you and send me from this cold Country, and from Such Men as Arbuthnot. Adieu, my dear Sir Henry....

IV

At Whitehall the summer and fall of 1780 were tense seasons. Early in June, in reaction to the passage of an Act of Parliament that eased certain legal restrictions on the lives of English Catholics, a wealthy eccentric named Lord George Gordon placed himself at the head of a protestant mob that ran unrestrained through London for a week. The War Office had to call in troops from the countryside to restore order, and the Admiralty put the naval forces in the Downs and at Portsmouth on alert lest the French "be thereby encouraged to throw over some Forces from the neighboring Ports on the Continent to infest our Court." The "Gordon Riots" threatened to bring down Lord North's government, and made the announcement of the British triumph at Charleston seem like divine intervention. When Sir Andrew Hamond brought Arbuthnot's dispatches to the Admiralty he was given an audience with the king, who directed Sandwich to put Hamond in command of a 74.

The admiral who had commanded at Charleston was the hero of the hour. His dispatches, always couched in language that emphasized the navy's successes and glossed over his quarrels with the army, strengthened Sandwich's conviction
that the appointment of his friend Arbuthnot had been a wise move. The First Lord may have felt that he owed a debt to the admiral whose victory had helped keep the government in power; certainly Arbuthnot made a better hero than Rodney, with whom Sandwich barely was on speaking terms. The government and the public knew that Arbuthnot was Sandwich's man and Rodney (who privately described the Earl as "totally ignorant of the Duty of the First Lord of the Admiralty") was not. 70

Sandwich therefore was resolute in his insistence, despite mounting pressures, that Arbuthnot be retained in the command of the North American Squadron. It had been obvious for several years that no naval officer ever would be able to work effectively with Sir Henry Clinton; if Arbuthnot succeeded in making Clinton resign, so much the better.

Clinton, however, had his own patrons. Sir Henry was not a popular general by any means, but the cabinet's determination not to show any more concern than necessary with North America had led to a conviction that scarcely anything in North America was worth being concerned about. The king and Lord George Germain treated Clinton as though they were patient parents, and he a slightly unruly child whose tantrums must not be permitted to divert his elders' attention from more important matters. For several months the government's reaction to Clinton's heart-rending ultimatums was to ignore them, on the assumption that after he got his
whinings about Arbuthnot out of his system he would be able to deal with the rebellion in America as well as any other general.

Whitehall continued to take it for granted that, since North America played a minor role in British strategic thinking, it must not be important to the French either. Before Thomas Graves even had arrived at New York their Lordships concluded that his squadron was too large. De Ternay must merely have stopped at Rhode Island on his way to the West Indies; a British battle fleet could not be tied down in a backwater of the war where the only enemy it had to face was a transient. On August 24 the cabinet directed the Admiralty to transfer Graves and his six ships-of-the-line from Arbuthnot's command to Rondey's, "so soon as he [Arbuthnot] shall receive certain intelligence that the French fleet under M. de Ternay has left the coast of North America, and that he has no longer any prospect of falling in with them in those seas."71 Three weeks later another order reduced the number of ships Graves must take with him to five, but decreed that he was to go to the Leeward Islands "even if the French fleet under M. Ternay should winter in North America."72

Eventually it became obvious that something had to be done about the quarrel between the general and the admiral. Sandwich, presented with a barrage of anti-Arbuthnot letters not only from Clinton but from Rodney as well, realized
that to back his elderly protégé any longer might jeopardize his own political future. The First Lord's solution to the problem was typical: Arbuthnot, lest he think he was being punished for any professional inadequacy, must be given another command of as much stature as the one he was leaving. Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Parker, Sandwich noted, already had spent more than the usual two years as commander-in-chief at Jamaica. Arbuthnot could be given that post, Parker could come home, and another admiral could be sent out to North America. On October 11 the cabinet concurred with Sandwich's proposal. To prevent Clinton from thinking that he had forced his superiors' hands, however, one of his other demands was rejected: the new naval commander-in-chief would join Sir Henry on the peace commission. If Clinton found that arrangement, "together with assurances of such a reinforcement of troops as can be spared from this country," unacceptable, he could turn over his command to Cornwallis. In the same meeting, as an afterthought, it was decided that the orders sending Graves to the Leeward Islands should be revoked.73

So far as Sandwich was concerned the Clinton/Arbuthnot issue was not dead. "I am very much inclined," the First Lord wrote to Arbuthnot five days after the cabinet made its decision, "to think that Sir Henry Clinton will resign the command, as most of the points he has urged as a condition of his remaining have been refused; but as it is
evident that you and he cannot serve together, it will probably be thought advisable to employ you elsewhere in a command at least equally honourable and advantageous." Sandwich then undertook the delicate task of explaining the situation to Sir Peter Parker. In a private letter he sent to Parker the First Lord demonstrated not only a consummate skill at human relations but a clearer understanding of their potential impact on national affairs than he showed on any other occasion:

I take this early opportunity of apprising you of the real reasons of this change in case it should be made, and at the same time assuring you that there is not the most distant idea of disapprobation of any part of your conduct....

The fact upon which this proposed arrangement is founded is the state of things in America between Sir Henry Clinton and Admiral Arbuthnot, who are under such violent animosities against each other that the very important service entrusted to them, and on which the fate of this kingdom very probably depends, cannot go on under their joint command....There is no intention of giving way to Sir Henry Clinton's claims...but at the same time, it has been thought for the good of the King's service to take away from him the pretext of saying the campaign was thrown away by our keeping the command at sea in the hands of a person with whom he was at the utmost variance.73

The question of who was to relieve Arbuthnot could be put aside. If Clinton should resign (Germain admitted that, as Sir Henry was "acting more from caprice than common sense, it is impossible to guess what effect the concessions made to him will have on his mind") Arbuthnot could stay.76 The arrangements the government had made would satisfy the
demands of protocol while Clinton digested the proposition and his reply made its way to London—and that might take three or four months.

V

One of the naval commanders-in-chief in North America barely was able to survive the winter of 1780-1781; the other was not. The Chevalier de Ternay died shortly after Christmas, leaving the French squadron at Rhode Island in the hands of his second-in-command, Captain Sochet des Touches, for as long as it took the Ministrie de Marine in Paris to send out a replacement. Where de Ternay had been an invalid des Touches was a younger man who possessed considerable skill and a desire to distinguish himself before the new admiral arrived.

While de Ternay was suffering through the last stages of the unidentified illness that had afflicted him throughout his stay in North America Arbuthnot was concluding that the climate in Long Island Sound was more than his own health could tolerate. Leaving Rear Admiral Graves in command of the nine ships-of-the-line which, in the intervals between the winter storms that periodically forced them into Gardiner's Bay, were trying to maintain the blockade of Newport, Arbuthnot took up residence at Admiralty House in New York. Since Rodney's departure the city had become a tolerable place again, but Arbuthnot was conscientious
enough to realize that a man confined to his house could not command a seagoing naval squadron. Initially he told the Admiralty that he had come ashore to discuss some details of the peace commission with Clinton, but in a private letter to Sandwich on December 16 Arbuthnot asked permission "to return home in the spring for the recovery of my health." The war did not pause at the inducement of the weather or sick admirals. Clinton's fascination with Chesapeake Bay had resurfaced; winter was a good time of the year to campaign in that part of the continent, and Sir Henry hoped that the unexpected availability of a new brigadier general would enhance the prospects of Virginia's becoming a crucial theater of the war. Benedict Arnold would be an inspiration to the thousands of loyalists who were reputed to inhabit the Tidewater region, and a clearly worded set of orders to Cornwallis would ensure that Arnold did not disappear into the deep south as Leslie had done the previous October.

The presence of the seven French ships-of-the-line at Newport, where they had been riding to their anchors for five months, continued to loom over British strategy. A new expedition to the Chesapeake must be able to rely on the bay's being under British control; if des Touches found out what was going on and escaped from Newport Arnold and his troops would be hideously vulnerable. Clinton once again found that the success of the best plans he could
devise depended on the Royal Navy; and on the admiral he had come to detest.

By coincidence Arbuthnot had a new reason to be intratable. In the midst of Arnold's preparations there arrived at New York the Admiralty's dispatch of October 3, directing Arbuthnot to send Graves and five ships-of-the-line to the Leeward Islands. A flurry of letters between Admiralty House and army headquarters ensued, with Clinton begging Arbuthnot to ignore the dispatch and Arbuthnot insisting that the Admiralty knew best how to dispose of its fleets. Finally the admiral gave in: the squadron, intact, would remain in Gardiner's Bay. One suspects that much of the resistance was strictly for show; in December of 1780 Arbuthnot could have found few things less attractive than the prospect of depleting his battle fleet, such as it was, to reinforce Sir George Rodney's.

Arnold and his 1,800 men, with a naval escort commanded by Captain Thomas Symonds in the 44-gun Charon, got over the bar on December 20 and headed for the Chesapeake. Save for three of the transports, which were blown away from the main body and delayed for three days, the expedition arrived at Hampton Roads ten days later. Arnold immediately went ashore at Portsmouth, and established his force in the works Leslie had thrown up the previous autumn. This time Clinton's orders dictated that the post be maintained under any but the most extraordinary circumstances.
When the rebels discovered that Arnold, whom they regarded as their most despicable enemy, was in the Chesapeake, they descended on it like maggots on an open wound. A series of mutinies led by the rank and file of the Pennsylvania Line Infantry prevented Washington from moving south in force, but the German drill master Von Steuben appeared in Virginia to mobilize the local militia. Arnold, literally in danger of finding a noose around his neck, pleaded for reinforcements and prayed that Arbuthnot and Graves were keeping the French bottled up at Newport.

The British high command at New York, attempting to conduct a war on three fronts where two had been exasperating enough, tried to react promptly and correctly to intelligence that came in from all directions. Clinton sent some troops up the Hudson in the hope of distracting Washington's attention, and distributed offers of clemency to the mutineers of the Pennsylvania Line. All was for naught; word came that the recalcitrant soldiers had returned to their duty; and the Marquis de la Fayette was on the march for the Chesapeake with 1,200 men.

On January 20 Thomas Graves and his ships-of-the-line were riding out a storm in Gardiner's Bay when one of his frigates came charging into the anchorage with the news he had been dreading: three of the French ships had made sail and escaped. Graves sent a message to Admiralty House, but dared not wait for a reply. Three ships-of-the-line easily
could be carrying enough troops to destroy Arnold while the ships themselves dealt with Captain Symonds' escort. Since the French had divided their force Graves, albeit reluctantly, must divide his as well. He ordered the America, Bedford, and Culloden to weigh anchor and sail in pursuit.  

Graves was playing into his enemy's hands. The wily des Touches, having concluded that the weather would not permit him to take his squadron to the Chesapeake, had sent forth the three ships-of-the-line in a feint. After Graves's frigate spotted them they reversed their course and returned to Newport, leaving their British pursuers to do battle with the storm. The ruse was spectacularly successful. The wind blew the America so far south that it would take her more than two weeks to make her way back. The Bedford, trying to ride out a gale in the middle of the night of January 22-23, came so near to capsizing that Captain Affleck had to order her top hamper cut away. She crawled back to the anchorage a dismasted hulk. The captain of the Culloden, George Balfour, valiantly tried to run before the storm and enter Gardiner's Bay in the dark. He almost succeeded, but in Portpong Bay, just to the east, the Culloden ran aground. The sea pounded her so high onto the rocks that she could not sink, and Balfour managed to save himself and his crew, but the Culloden's hull was a loss.  

When Arbuthnot learned what had happened he heaved himself out of his bed and commandeered a ship. The foul winds
in the Sound kept him from reaching Gardiner's Bay for eight days. The spectacle he found there was depressing in the extreme, for with three of his ships-of-the-line out of action he had lost his numerical superiority. There was, in fact, a danger that des Touches would take the offensive. The admiral briefly considered making a stand at Gardiner's Bay, and asked Clinton to send an army engineer who could help set up a shore battery at the entrance. A quick survey, however, convinced Arbuthnot that the bay was indefensible. There was nothing to do but "put on a bold Countenance," wait for the storm to end, and hope it had done at least some damage to the French.

It had not, but des Touches regarded Arbuthnot's incapacitated fleet as a less tempting objective than the British army in Virginia. When the gale subsided early in February the copper-sheathed, 64-gun *Eveille*, with two frigates in company, slipped out of Narraganset Bay and, this time in earnest, headed for the Chesapeake. Detaching only one ship-of-the-line was a clever stroke, for it left the French squadron and its besiegers equal at six apiece; Arbuthnot dared not send any of his own ships-of-the-line in pursuit. Instead he dispatched a frigate to Charleston with orders that whatever naval force was there proceed to the Chesapeake immediately.

Incredibly bad timing continued to work against the British. The *Eveille* and her consorts, for some reason,
reamined in the Chesapeake for only a few days, and had disappeared from the scene by the time the ships from Charleston arrived. On their way out of the bay, however, the French stumbled upon the 44-gun Romulus which, in response to an order Arbuthnot had sent weeks earlier, was on her way up from Charleston to relieve the Charon as flagship of Arnold's transport flotilla. Faced by such an overwhelming enemy the Romulus had to surrender, and the French triumphantly took her to Newport with them.89

When the weather moderated the damage to the squadron in Gardiner's Bay looked a bit less catastrophic. On February 8 the America came in, her crew hard at work at the pumps and, as Arbuthnot put it, "her Rigging & Sails terribly destroyed;" she would have to go to the caulker's yard at New York, but she would stay afloat. The Bedford presented a more serious problem: not only had all the oakum worked out of her seams but all her masts and yards were gone--and Rodney had taken all the available replacements to the West Indies.90 Arbuthnot conceived a novel solution. The Culloden, with her hull gradually being shattered by the surf, had suffered negligible damage to her rigging. It was Navy Board policy that all the components of all ships of the same rate be interchangeable; by dint of herculean effort it should be possible to take the Culloden's masts out and put them into the Bedford.

Gangs of men were dispatched to Portpond Bay; whenever
a spell of relatively mild weather let them they swarmed over the Culloden and disassembled her top hamper piece by piece. At Gardiner's Bay Arbuthnot supervised the construction of a new set of fighting tops, the large wooden platforms that were to rest on the heads of the Bedford's lower masts; removing the Culloden's tops and hauling them from Portpond Bay would be impractical. The admiral's "bold countenance" seemed so far to be having its intended effect, but the wretched weather was taking its toll on his health. On February 16 he sent Mr. Stephens a formal request for permission to resign, and four days later wrote a private letter to the Earl of Sandwich:

My Lord--I will pass by all other consideration and come to the point. I am flattered with the accounts that my Royal Master, his confidential friends, and my country have been satisfied with my endeavours to serve it. But such have been the fatal consequences to myself in the pursuit, that my constitution is destroyed. I have lost almost totally the sight of one eye, and the other is but a very feble helpmate, constantly almost obliging me to call in assistance to its aid in discovering particular objects. Besides this I have lately been seized with very odd fits, resembling apoplexy, because almost instantly I faint, remain senseless and speechless sometimes four hours and sometimes longer, and when I recover am ignorant of the past, but remain very low with cold sweats for two or three days after; and yet, if I have the honour ever to make my bow, you will not think that I am much altered.

I hope, my Lord, I believe, that you cannot suppose that I would, if it was possible to avoid, give up my duty to my Sovereign, my country, and so ill repay your Lordship's goodness. Upon my honour I would not, but the fatigue of this command as I have performed had undone me; nine months have I been constantly employed
on salt water, and my head and heart at work, without regard to any consideration but the errand I was sent upon. I beseech you, Sir, to use your influence and apologize to the best of Sovereigns for my requesting to be permitted to retire before the summer begins, or I fear it will be too late. It is not 54 years' service that makes me repeat the request of delivering up the King's ships to the second in command, perhaps pro tempore, but the absolute debility of [etc.].

--I humbly beseech your Lordship to hasten my leave.92

By the first of March a complete set of masts and yards for a 74-gun ship was lying at Gardiner's Bay, and the Bedford, having returned from the caulkers' yard, was ready to be re-rigged.93 Arbuthnot was at his best, relying on his decades of practical experience as he directed a challenging feat of pure seamanship. Even William Green, who rarely had praise for anyone, stated that "on this occasion and crisis Admiral Arbuthnot appeared to resume the ardor and energy of his ancient character as an officer and to exert himself with a zeal, promptitude, and activity suitable to the call of his country, and he was nobly seconded by every officer and man in the remaining ships."94

On March 5 David Graves eased the London alongside the hull of the Bedford. Extra ropes in crucial positions already had strengthened the three-decker's lower yards so they could be used as derricks. Block and tackle extracted the stumps of the Bedford's lower masts like rotted teeth, and gently slipped the undamaged spars from the Culloden through the holes in the decks and into the sockets on the keelson.
The carpenters of the other ships had finished work on the tops; these were hoisted over the new lower mastheads and eased into position. Within five days topmasts, topgallant masts, yards, and all the hundreds of pieces of standing and running rigging had followed, and the Bedford was ready for sea. It had been a magnificent performance.\(^{95}\)

The French had been watching the proceedings at Gardiner's Bay with considerable interest. Commodore des Touches had no desire or reason to take on a battle squadron that was equal to or larger than his own, but the loss of the Bedford and Culloden, together with the capture of the Romulus, had given him a numerical superiority. After listening to Washington's pleas for several weeks des Touches acceded: he would embark as many of Rochambeau's troops as he could and sail for the Chesapeake. On March 8 the seven French ships-of-the-line, accompanied by the Romulus, two frigates, and the Fantasque, a 64 converted to a transport by the removal of her upper deck guns, weighed anchor, rounded the eastern end of Long Island, and set course to the southward.\(^{96}\)

Intelligence reports regarding the movements of the French in Rhode Island sent Sir Henry Clinton into a state of indecision that bordered on panic. The enemy obviously was preparing to launch an assault on some point, but which one? Arbuthnot seemed convinced that des Touches' destination was the Chesapeake, but Clinton was not so sure:
the target might just as well be New York or even Charleston, or perhaps a British convoy that was due to arrive on the coast. To Clinton the situation seemed precisely the sort to provoke the admiral into one of his periodic bursts of aimless aggressiveness; at any moment he might go charging off to the Chesapeake in pursuit of an adversary who was poising to strike a blow somewhere else. In fact Arbuthnot was demonstrating sound strategic sense. While his able seamen were putting the finishing touches to Bedford's rigging he was digesting the reports that were making their way to him from Newport. Des Touches had embarked 1,300 troops, and more than a thousand extra small arms for the rebel militia. The objective of the French expedition could only be the Chesapeake. Arbuthnot urged Clinton to prepare a force of his own to send to Arnold's rescue; Sir Henry agreed to put a detachment on board the transports, but begged the admiral to keep his ships-of-the-line in Gardiner's Bay until no doubt whatever remained about des Touches' plans.  

So far as Arbuthnot was concerned that point had passed long ago. On March 11 the frigates Iris and Pearl returned to Gardiner's Bay from Newport with the news that the French warships had left. Arbuthnot, seething with impatience, moved his ships-of-the-line from the back of the bay to the entrance, so they could get out the instant the Bedford was ready. Captain Balfour of the Culloden, hoping
desperately for an opportunity to remove the stain that the loss of his ship had put on his record, asked for and received permission to sail in the flagship **Royal Oak** as a supernumerary. Not wanting his progress to be slowed by the troop transports the admiral sent Captain Charles Hudson, of the frigate **Richmond**, to New York with orders to escort them to Virginia whenever they were ready. On the twelfth Captain Affleck reported that the repairs to the **Bedford** were complete, and the eight British ships-of-the-line with the **Iris**, **Pearl**, and **Guadeloupe** in company, put to sea.98

The French had a substantial head start, but a fortunate slant of wind and Arbuthnot's copper-bottomed ships nullified it. Within four days the British were less than a hundred miles northeast of the entrance to the Chesapeake. At dawn on March 16 the **Iris**, scouting to the rear of the squadron, signalled that she had sighted the enemy astern of her. Arbuthnot not only had caught up with des Touches but had passed him.

At the moment when the fleets sighted each other they both were steering slightly west of due south, the French almost precisely in the wake of the British. The all-important wind was blowing from the west. As soon as he discovered that eight enemy ships-of-the-line lay in his path des Touches reversed his course. Arbuthnot, still out of sight of the French but with the **Iris**'s signals to guide him,
ordered his fleet to follow suit.99

Slowly, and with a ponderous majesty suggestive of the
decades of tradition that encumbered it, the great fighting
machine that was the Royal Navy lumbered into action. The
Royal Oak hoisted a blue flag with a red cross to her mizzen
peak, and fired off one of her guns. On each British
quarterdeck a signal midshipman noted the precise time,
rooted through his stack of "Fighting Instructions By Day,"
and relayed the meaning of the flagship's signal to his
captain: the admiral wanted the squadron to form a line of
battle, with one cable's length between ships.100 Just
before the frantic departure from Gardiner's Bay each cap­
tain had been given a document that established his place
in the line: since the fleet was on the port tack the
Robust was to lead, followed by the Europe, Prudent, Royal
Oak, London (Arbuthnot, a disciple of Kempenfelt, believed
in concentrating the three-decked ships—or in this case
ship—in the middle of the line), Adamant, Bedford, and
America. A massive display of slapping canvas, rattling
blocks, and profane language brought each ship's bowsprit
in line with the masts of the vessel preceding her. The
Guadeloupe and Pearl took station alongside the line, so as
to be ready to repeat Arbuthnot's signals for the benefit of
any ship whose view was obscured by powder smoke. The
captains of the ships-of-the-line backed and filled their
mizzen topsails occasionally to keep the interval between
Figure 7. Battle of Cape Henry: First Phase
them at around 240 yards.

The sight of Arbuthnot's line of battle, even though it consisted of only eight ships, was enough to stiffen the spine of any naval officer. Here was the ultimate moment of naval warfare, the moment for which navies had been built and officers and sailors trained. Far over the horizon were the filthy harbors and impossible generals who had indignant the naval war in North America for six years; the god of battles finally had left an issue to be decided by the ships-of-the-line on the open sea. The god of the weather, alas, had not been so generous. A heavy sea was running, and a thick grey haze, refusing to be burned off by the morning sun, kept the lookouts of the Robust from seeing the America, at the rear of the line about a mile away. Just discernible ahead was the Iris, which continued to signal that she had the enemy in sight.101

As the morning progressed the wind veered toward the north, forcing the ships, on their northerly course, to swing their yards to starboard until they were close-hauled --sailing as close to the wind as they could. In such conditions Arbuthnot, with his better-maintained ships and five copper-sheathed bottoms to his enemy's three, held a slight advantage. By 8:15 the Royal Oak's lookouts could see on the northern horizon the topsails of the rearmost French ships, which were scrambling to form their own line.102

Des Touches initially had attempted to avoid action in
the hope that the thickening weather might shake the British loose and let him proceed to the Chesapeake. When he discovered that Arbuthnot could outsail him close-hauled, however, the French commodore decided to do battle. At 9:20, having spent an hour watching the British line appear over the horizon astern of him, he ordered his squadron to come about in succession and form line on the starboard tack.

The approach phase of the battle thereupon turned into a race between des Touches and the veering of the wind. The fleets were approaching each other at a highly obtuse angle; if the British could remain on the port tack long enough, or if the wind swung sufficiently to let them receive it on their starboard sides without making the angle acute, they would be able to pass ahead of the French and gain the weather guage. A rain squall intruded, forcing Arbuthnot to increase the distance between his ships to two cables' lengths. When the squall had passed he noted with satisfaction that the wind had veered well past due north. At 10:15 the signal to tack in succession went up in the Royal Oak. The British line obediently bent itself to the westward.

The angle between the opposing fleets now was slightly greater than ninety degrees, and he who reached the apex first would have the weather guage when the firing started. In an hour is had become clear that the British would win the race, but des Touches, with the wind almost directly
Diagram not to scale; positions of frigates not indicated.

Figure 8. Battle of Cape Henry: Second phase
behind him, was in a position to change the rules before Arbuthnot could claim the prize. At 11:15 the French came about again, this time onto a course that would take them prudently out to sea, away from the shallows of Capes Henry and Charles just over the western horizon. Des Touches timed the maneuver perfectly, setting his course in such a manner that if Arbuthnot held to his the British van would have its "T" crossed by the French rear. Arbuthnot concluded that he must abandon his quest of the weather gauge, and ordered his squadron to assume a course parallel to the one des Touches had chosen. The seas had become so high that tacking was impractical—in the last maneuver one of the French ships had been caught in irons momentarily—so in coming about Arbuthnot resorted to the more time-consuming but safer method of wearing. As the British line doubled back on itself the leading ship, the Robust, came within hailing distance of the Royal Oak. By means of his speaking trumpet Arbuthnot relayed his decision to Captain Cosby: in the present weather conditions, and with the wind having settled in the northeast, there was no hope of getting the windward of the French. The British would accept the lee­ward position and hope for the best. 105

In wearing Arbuthnot had lost so much ground that, by the time he had attained the same course as des Touches, the latter was well ahead of him. The battle turned into a simple stern chase again, with the slightly faster British
ships gradually catching up. By 1:00 the Robust was almost within long cannon shot of the last ship in the French line, the Romulus. Des Touches, however, had one more trick left. In his present situation his ships were heeling toward the enemy, and dared not open their lower deck ports on their starboard, engaged sides. The French commodore was sufficiently flexible of mind to recognize that the weather gauge, which Arbuthnot had spent the morning trying to wrest from him, had been turned into a liability by the rising seas. At 1:30 the French wore in succession, pivoting impertinently around the Robust's bow and bearing down on the leeward side of the British line. As each French ship heeled to port her starboard gunports opened, revealing the muzzles of her great 24-pounders.

Arbuthnot was caught unawares. The disadvantage of the weather gauge had been revealed to him, but des Touche's move prohibited any further maneuvering: the French line was pointed toward the Virginia coast, and if the British spent any more time trying to attain a superior tactical position des Touches might beat them to the Chesapeake. Arbuthnot had no choice but to do battle on his adversary's terms. He signalled his fleet to wear as the French had, and shortly the two lines were sailing side-by-side, head-to-head, the French to leeward and the portside lower deck ports of the British ships buried in the sea.\[106\]

The elephantine ballet of the morning had resolved itself
into a situation of classic simplicity. Each line consisted of eight vessels, but Arbuthnot's, if he could find a means of neutralizing the effect of the sea, was substantially more powerful. Des Touches had one ship of 80 guns, two of 74, and four of 64, with the little Romulus added to extend his line. The British, with one 98, three 74's, three 64's, and one 50, held the windward position that would let them open the action at their convenience. Well might Arbuthnot conclude that "nothing could bear a more pleasing prospect than my situation." Logic and tradition agreed that, when confronting an enemy line of equal length but inferior weight of metal, the admiral to windward should force the issue by causing all his ships simultaneously to fall off the wind and bear down obliquely on their opposite numbers in the enemy line. The battle then would turn into a mêlée, and the fleet with the greater firepower and better gunnery would win.

Arbuthnot's "Fighting Instructions By Day" contained an article precisely suited to the occasion: a blue and yellow checkered flag at the flagship's fore topmast head meant that "every ship is to engage the enemy as close as possible." Before making that signal, however, he felt he should take some time to put his line in better order. The series of complicated maneuvers in the morning had combined with the dirty weather to stretch the British formation out farther than the French; it was essential that each
vessel be able to descend on her opposite number in the enemy line simultaneously, lest a single British ship find herself fighting two French ones. The Royal Oak continued to steer a course parallel to the enemy's, and the signal for the line of battle remained at her mizzen peak. The ships in the rear were carrying all the sail they could in an attempt to restore the interval of one cable's length.

Afterwards Arbuthnot blamed Captain Cosby for what happened next. Shortly after two o'clock the Robust suddenly swung out of the line to port and steered directly towards the Neptune, the ship at the head of the French line. Within a few moments they were exchanging broadsides.

Cosby's enthusiasm forced the hands of both commanders-in-chief. Des Touches' flagship, the Duc de Bourgogne, was the second ship in his line; she and the ship astern of her, the Conquerant, promptly bore down on the Robust. Captains Childs of the Europe and Burnett of the Prudent, apparently thinking that Cosby was obeying an order they were unaware of, put their helms to port and entered the fray. The vans of both fleets disappeared in a cloud of powder smoke that quickly was dispersed by the wind, only to be replaced almost instantly as each ship fired her next broadside.

Arbuthnot, from his vantage point on board the Royal Oak, could see that the Robust was taking a beating. The French, following their usual practice of firing high, quickly succeeded in knocking down enough of her spars and
rigging to cause her to swing off the wind out of control. With 21 wounded and 15, including one of her lieutenants, dead, she drifted to the south before the wind and out of the fight. With his van already in action Arbuthnot concluded that the time for signals and subtle course changes had passed. He ordered his flag captain, William Swiney, to take the *Royal Oak* into the fight. In the excitement of the moment, perhaps abetted by his defective vision, the admiral forgot that the signal for the line of battle still was at the flagship's mizzen peak, and the blue and yellow flag that meant "engage the enemy as close as possible" remained in the flag bag.

When the *Royal Oak* sailed into the smoke flying an incomprehensible signal the battle became chaotic. The opposing lines pinched together at their heads dissolved, as one ship after another engaged whatever enemy vessel happened to cross her gunners' sights. In the enormous *London* Rear-Admiral Graves, who was being given the opportunity to learn a lesson that, if he took the time to pay attention to it, would be useful to him six months later, blithely followed his superior. The last three captains in the British line, still struggling to catch up with the rest, were unsure of what they were supposed to do. From their vantage point Arbuthnot seemed to be trying to engage the French van with his entire squadron; if the *Adamant*, *Bedford*, and *America* followed the usual procedure and took on their
opposite numbers at the enemy's rear they might find them­selves grappling with his center as well. Since the signal for close action was not flying and the signal for the line was, the safest move for the last three ships was to hold their course.

The Royal Oak was receiving the fire of des Touches' flagship and two 74's. The French practice of firing at the rigging produced dramatic results: while she sustained only three casualties and no fatalities in the battle, Arbuthnot noted that the Royal Oak's foresail "was so torn with shot that it hung to the yard by four cloths and the earrings only, the maintopsail halliards, braces, ties, also the foretopsail and fore braces and bowlines, and in short (for a little space only) the ship was ungovernable." Something fell from aloft and onto the head of Captain Balfour, erstwhile of the Culloden, who had been pacing the quarterdeck with the Admiral and William Green. When Balfour felt the blood running down his forehead he exclaimed "I wonder what the devil brought me here?" That remark, Green theorized later, was occasioned not only by the peculiar circumstances that had put Balfour on board the Royal Oak, but by the fact that, "poor fellow, he had a mistress and ten natural children to provide for, all of whom, if he had fallen, would have been left in a state of great poverty."

The British practice of firing into their enemy's hulls was producing effects as well. Des Touches's ships,
crammed with the soldiers he had intended to land in Virginia, were ideal targets for the broadsides that were being aimed at them. One of the French army officers on board the Duc de Bourgogne described the suffering of the vessel next astern of her:

The Conquerant...had, for its part, to sustain the attack of three of the enemy's ships, and fought hand to hand with the ship of three decks; it had also three officers killed, among others M. de Kergu, a young man of promise and of the most brilliant courage, with whom I was intimately acquainted. A hundred soldiers or sailors on board of it were hit, among whom forty were killed on the spot and an equal number mortally wounded. The greatest carnage was on the deck; the boatswains, the captain at arms and seven steersmen were among the dead, its tiller and the wheel of the helm were carried away; notwithstanding which it held out.\textsuperscript{14}

Such a spectacle was not to des Touches' liking. Having been forced into a battle he had no desire to fight he seized the earliest opportunity to bring it to a halt. Shortly after 3:00, less than an hour after the beginning of the firing, he directed his ships to come about and reform their line, in reverse order, heading southeast. Arbuthnot attempted to follow, and had Captain Swiney put the Royal Oak on a parallel course, but shortly discovered the skill with which the French gunners had done their work. The Europe, Prudent, and Robust were drifting off to leeward out of control, and a lucky shot had brought down the London's main topsail yard. As the French wore round the three-decker managed to loose a parting broadside at the Romulus, but could not join in the pursuit.
With half his ships out of action Arbuthnot scarcely could renew the engagement. Des Touches' behavior suggested that he had abandoned his scheme to enter the Chesapeake, for the moment at any rate, so the British could claim a strategic victory. Arbuthnot, having detailed one of his frigates to follow the French into the haze and ascertain what they intended to do next, would remain on the battlefield to lick his wounds.

Two days later the squadron, with the Robust and Prudent under tow by the undamaged ships, limped into Lynnehaven Bay, a little anchorage just inside the entrance of the Chesapeake. Arbuthnot took ship to Portsmouth and conferred with Benedict Arnold, whose delight upon his sighting the British ships can be imagined. The Battle of Cape Henry, as it came to be known, had thrown the French-American moves against Arnold into disarray. Young la Fayette was far up the bay at Annapolis, where two British sloops-of-war were keeping him from taking to the water; none of the enemy units showed any inclination to attack Arnold in the absence of the reinforcements they had expected from Rhode Island.

The possibility remained that des Touches would reappear and attempt to force his way into the Chesapeake. Arbuthnot therefore hastened to make temporary repairs to his ships, and on March 24 took them to sea with the intention of patrolling between Capes Charles and Henry. He was out only a day before the weather drove him back into Lynnehaven
Figure 9. Map of Chesapeake Bay
Bay, but on the twenty-sixth the last of his fears was laid to rest. Captain Hudson and his transport convoy arrived from New York with 2,000 troops under General William Phillips. Thus reinforced the British would be able to hold Portsmouth against any French force that was likely to oppose them.

Arbuthnot had a vague notion that he ought to be doing something, but in the absence of any knowledge of the French fleet's whereabouts he knew not what. By the end of March he had concluded, correctly, that des Touches had gone back to Rhode Island. That being the case the British ships-of-the-line could serve no purpose in the Chesapeake. On April 3 Arbuthnot led his ships out of the bay, and a week later they arrived off Sandy Hook. The Royal Oak, Robust, Prudent, and Bedford went over the bar and up the river to New York; Graves kept the others off the Hook.

It was the beginning of the campaigning season, and Clinton had numerous schemes for the conduct of the war in both north and south, but the old admiral took little interest. He moved into Admiralty House again and supervised the repairs to his ships from a distance. Having been physically enervated by what obviously would be the only fleet action of his career he was content to wait for the Admiralty to act on his numerous letters of resignation.

Arbuthnot, though he realized his victory had been less than complete, was proud of the way his fleet had behaved
off Cape Henry. If he had taken no enemy ships he had achieved the monumental strategic result of frustrating des Touches' plans against Arnold; the British fleet, the admiral told Sandwich, had reached the Chesapeake "in time, I am bold to say, to save both Mr Arnold's forces...and also Lord Cornwallis." Some, at least, of the British naval officers were less pleased by what had happened. When the captains of the damaged ships went ashore at New York they were heard to complain that the rearmost ships had not done their duty; that if the entire line had gotten into action the French would have had to surrender. One rumor had it that des Touches had fired into two of his own ships to prevent them from striking their colors, and that the two British admirals, for reasons unexplained, had fired at each other. Arbuthnot seems to have made no effort to refute such stories. Before leaving the Chesapeake he had written up his official accounts of the action and sent Captain Balfour to England with them; unless their Lordships found reason to inquire into any of the participants' conduct the matter could rest.

The only news that came from London was depressing. As of the end of March the sole response to the admiral's complaints about his health was Sandwich's letter of October 16, tentatively offering him the command at Jamaica. The vague tone of that epistle made Arbuthnot's position even more awkward: under normal circumstances he could declare
himself too ill to continue in command, turn the squadron over to Graves, and sail for England, but mind-boggling bureaucratic consequences might ensue if he turned up in London while Sir Peter Parker was waiting to be relieved. For the time being Arbuthnot would have to wait for the next packet.

In the meantime there was Sir Henry Clinton. The general and the admiral scarcely saw each other any more; Clinton, who had been informed by Germain of Sandwich's plan to send Arbuthnot to Jamaica, was putting off as much official business as he could until the happy day when Graves would become commander-in-chief. If the absence of a definite statement on Arbuthnot's status demoralized the admiral it infuriated Sir Henry. On one occasion he presented himself at Admiralty House, with one of his officers on hand to serve as a witness, and, "in the civilest manner I was capable of,... requested that the Admiral would inform me whether he proposed leaving us soon, and gave him my reasons." Arbuthnot replied that he felt obligated to remain on the station until he received definite orders either to relieve Parker or to return to England. That exchange prompted Clinton to send Germain an ultimatum: if the next packet did not bring irrefutable word of Arbuthnot's recall he, Clinton, would resign and turn over the command of the army in North America to Cornwallis.

The quarrel between the commanders-in-chief was to
flare up once more. In the warehouses at New York lay most of the "quantity of stores of all sorts" that had been taken at Charleston nearly a year earlier. The officers of the army and navy still were awaiting the Cabinet's decision as to who was entitled to what share; Clinton's memorials on the subject had brought no response. Sometime in May the army officers got wind of a rumor: William Green, in the course of his frequent visits to certain nefarious New York businessmen, was selling the booty and putting the proceeds into his pocket. Clinton, in the name of "justice for the poor soldiers," protested to Arbuthnot, who claimed that the navy had disposed of only the American and French ships it had captured. Green indignantly denied having taken anything but his legal commission of two and a half percent. Clinton had no choice but to let the matter drop; he still was attempting to resolve it thirteen years later.

In the middle of May Arbuthnot put to sea briefly, in response to intelligence that des Touches was preparing to sail for the Chesapeake again. The reports were correct, but the French commodore's sortie was stopped at the last minute when he received a letter from the West Indies. A great fleet of 20 ships-of-the-line had arrived there, and would come to America during the summer. The new French admiral, the Comte de Grasse, had ordered the Rhode Island force to stay where it was until then. Arbuthnot, after
cruising for 16 days in the hope of encountering a French convoy that was rumored to be on the coast, returned to New York.124

On June 26 a ship arrived from England with the long-awaited dispatch from Mr. Stephens: the Lords of the Admiralty, though they professed themselves "sorry the Country should at this time be deprived of his Services," on May 3 had granted Vice Admiral Arbuthnot permission to resign the command of the North American Squadron to Rear Admiral Graves.125 Arbuthnot had made most of his preparations long before; it took him only a few days to settle his affairs, send Graves the necessary official documents, and move his own and Green's belongings to the Roebuck, which was due to go to England for a refit. Graves politely, if ungrammatically, expressed "my real concern at the State of health which has made such a Step necessary—as also from a consciousness of my own inferior abilities in the conduct of so complicated a Scene."126 On July 4 the Roebuck got over the bar, rounded Sandy Hook, and disappeared over the horizon. It was one of the minor ironies of the war: in 1781 Sir Henry Clinton had a better reason than anyone else in North America to celebrate the Fourth of July.

VI

It may be assumed that none of the British participants
in the American war regretted Arbuthnot's departure. Some of them despised him, and others held him in contempt or pitied him; still others, including Clinton, did all three, but the contemporary evidence is barren of any indication that, in the summer of 1781, Arbuthnot was respected by anyone. He left behind him in New York an atmosphere of relief, for all the army and naval officers on the station could assure themselves that neither Graves nor any other flag officer the Admiralty might send out could be so intractable an admiral. The Arbuthnot/Clinton and Arbuthnot/Rodney feuds caused the dubious victory off Cape Henry to seem trivial. As far as his contemporaries were concerned Arbuthnot was welcome to gather up whatever money he could extract from the prize courts and enjoy a peaceful but innocuous retirement.

That, apparently, is precisely what he did. He lived another 13 years but, apart from accepting the usual "yellow squadron" promotions the Admiralty conferred on him periodically, Arbuthnot played no further role in naval affairs. In the years immediately following his resignation the other protagonists in the last phase of the war thundered into print: Clinton and Cornwallis traded volleys in the form of pamphlets; William Graves jumped to the defense of his brother Thomas, while the Earl of Sandwich was forced to explain himself before a commission of Parliament. Arbuthnot, whether by choice or because of his health,
remained silent, the one figure in the disaster upon whose culpability everyone could agree.

Historians, when they have noticed Arbuthnot at all, generally have confirmed the verdict. William Willcox was more charitable than most modern authors when he described Arbuthnot as "a pompous weathercock, well-meaning, perhaps, and given at times to odd outbursts of friendliness, but never predictable....the only constants in his character were slowness to take responsibility and quickness to take alarm." In the entry on Arbuthnot in the Dictionary of National Biography Sir John Knox Laughton labelled him "a coarse, blustering, foul mouthed bully," who was "ignorant of the discipline of his profession," and "a sample of the extremity to which the maladministration of Lord Sandwich had reduced the navy."

Arbuthnot's tenure in North America has to be described as one of the drearier episodes in British naval history, but Laughton's vitriolic attack on the man's professional conduct and personal integrity should not go unchallenged. While no purpose would be served by an attempt to turn Arbuthnot into a naval hero, to treat him as a buffoon seriously distorts the case.

If Arbuthnot was not one of the navy's most distinguished admirals let it be noted that he was one of the most hard-working. When the psychotic vituperations of Sir Henry Clinton are removed from the evidence there emerges
an Arbuthnot who always was conscientiously, even pathetically, attentive to what he perceived to be his duty, under extraordinarily trying circumstances. In certain aspects of his profession he was an expert. He understood that intricate wood, canvas, and rope contraption, the eighteenth-century warship, better than most admirals did. Under Arbuthnot the North American Squadron's material condition was as sound as it had been at any time during the war. When he left only three of the 53 naval vessels on the station were out of commission; the tired old sloop-of-war Fowey was "irreparable," the 14-gun Beaumont "repairing," and the tiny galley Philadelphia "unserviceable," 129 In getting his ships over the Bar at Charleston, refurbishing Graves's squadron off Sandy Hook, and replacing the Bedford's spars and rigging with the Culloden's Arbuthnot demonstrated a degree of professional skill that should absolve him of any charges of incompetence.

As navy commissioner at Halifax, the post in which he made most of the reputation that earned him the North American command, Arbuthnot was at home. The unending task of keeping the king's warships fit for action demanded technical knowledge and a willingness to spend vast amounts of time on pedantic administrative detail. Those traits he possessed in abundance. His superiors erred, however, when they assumed that he must possess all the other qualitites of a naval officer as well. Arbuthnot was an
excellent dockyard commissioner and probably would have made a good port admiral, but as a squadron commander he was out of his depth.

When he took over the North American Squadron Arbuthnot never had held a seagoing command of more than one ship, and had not seen action in twenty years. In confronting the myriad difficulties that were presented by the American war he was expected to rely on the British naval tradition and native ingenuity; the former proved inadequate to the occasion, and the latter Arbuthnot did not possess. His strategic sense, based as it was on severely limited practical experience, was at best simplistic. To Arbuthnot the public criticism of Gambier, Howe, and Samuel Graves seemed to have revolved around one fact: those admirals, perpetually occupied with their administrative responsibilities, had not fought naval battles. Only in a confrontation with the enemy's ships-of-the-line on the open sea could a naval war be won, and an admiral's position in naval history consolidated. The decisive—and therefore mythical—sea battle became an obsession. When Clinton sought his opinions regarding combined operations or long-range planning Arbuthnot was obscure and indecisive; when he was presented with an opportunity, however slight, to exchange broadsides with the French he behaved like a bull in a china shop. At the beginning of his commission Arbuthnot deserted his convoy to "save" Jersey. At Charleston he
gave the seizure of Fort Moultrie, his defense against an attack by a French battle fleet, precedence over the army's pleas that he send a naval force into the Cooper. In the Gardiner's Bay episode the mere rumor that de Ternay might be going to sea was enough to send Arbuthnot charging off on a wild goose chase, leaving Clinton to shake his fists at the horizon. His desire to fight a traditional naval battle rendered Arbuthnot incapable of fighting in any other manner.

Having decided that the fleet action would be the centerpiece of his naval war Arbuthnot prepared for the great moment as best he could. The fighting instructions he distributed to his captains contained nothing tactically revolutionary, but did demonstrate a deeper concern for tactics and efficiency than regulations demanded. When, off Cape Henry, he finally got to fight his battle, he fought it in the usual, unimaginative, eighteenth-century manner. Laughton labelled Arbuthnot's tactics in that engagement "absurd"; it is difficult to see why. Cape Henry was a thoroughly typical battle of its time, and more decisive than many. Des Touches was a skilled adversary who did not want to fight—the most difficult sort of opponent to defeat.

If Arbuthnot failed to take full advantage of the best opportunity the British ever would have to destroy a French fleet in North American waters, no other admiral of the 1775-1783 war gave irrefutable proof that, under the same
circumstances, he would have done any better. One may ask, in fact, how much difference the presence of a Nelson rather than an Arbuthnot would have made. In his 22 months on the station Arbuthnot shared in a major victory at Charleston and won a partial one off Cape Henry. The suspicion that another victory was waiting to be won sometime during that period may be enticing, but is difficult to sustain on the basis of either logic or evidence. To assert that a more attractive admiral would have made 1780 a more profitable year for the British is to assert a great deal.

The feud between Arbuthnot and Clinton provided a classic example of the degree to which personality clashes could undo a nation's military effort. To assign all the blame for the situation to either party would be inaccurate; both men were guilty of, if nothing else, inertia and insensitivity. But the two officers' correspondence, both with each other and with neutral parties, suggests a marked difference in attitudes. Whereas the general perennially was on the verge of losing his temper the admiral always maintained firm control of his. Arbuthnot undoubtedly disliked Clinton, but seems never to have regarded him as worse than a nuisance. The possibility that the feud might be undermining the British war effort did not enter Arbuthnot's mind. Much of his indifference may have been due to senility, or to the fact that all the correspondence between admiral and general had to pass through the decidedly
greasy hands of William Green. Perhaps, on the other hand, at least part of the feud existed only in Clinton's imagination—as the naval officer with whom he would be able to cooperate certainly did.

That Arbuthnot was perfectly capable of throwing his own fits of temper and writing his own nasty letters is demonstrated by his correspondence with and about Rodney. Clinton did not anger Arbuthnot; Rodney did. And much of the anger was understandable. Sir George may have been legally justified in usurping the command in North America, but his manner of doing so was tactless and unprofessional. For all his talk of "getting things in Order and stationing ships properly" Rodney turned into a British d'Estaing: his visit to North America was full of sound and fury, but signified nothing beyond a means of bolstering his own ego and irritating the people on whose side he was suppose to be fighting. His brutally frank written appraisals of the situation in North America, accurate though they were, contributed nothing to the progress of the war. Rodney possessed a clearer conception than did most of his contemporaries of what it took to be a Great Admiral, but came only slightly closer than they did to possessing the necessary attributes himself.

Most authors have accepted Laughton's assertion that the Admiralty's backing of Rodney in the prize money dispute led Arbuthnot to resign. Such cannot have been the case;
Arbuthnot penned the first of his many resignation letters on December 16, 1780, a mere month after Sir George left the station and long before their Lordships even considered the matter. The feud with Rodney was an embittering experience for all parties, and Arbuthnot certainly resented the decision when the Admiralty finally made it, but he gave up his command because he was a sick man. If even a few of his complaints about his health were legitimate Arbuthnot's life, particularly during the months he spent in the blockade of Rhode Island, must have been one of sheer misery. It may be argued that a man so near to physical collapse should have resigned sooner. Why he retained the command for so long is unclear; the hope of acquiring more prize money undoubtedly was not far from his mind. But neither was a stubborn conviction that his duty required him to stay on as long as he could.

For all Arbuthnot's virtues his command of the North American Squadron was an embarrassment, the majority of the responsibility for which must rest with the men who appointed him. Any defense of the Sandwich administration collapses when it attempts to explain why a newly-appointed admiral of advancing years and scarcely any experience was assigned one of the most complex, physically demanding, and important duties a British naval officer ever had faced. Politics and a peculiar manifestation of friendship were permitted to interfere with national policy, and to do so for an
unconscionably long time. How the government should have reacted to the Clinton/Arbuthnot feud is debatable, but to ignore it was inexcusable. The First Lord of the Admiralty apparently thought that, in turning a blind eye to the mountainous evidence that the North American command was in the wrong hands, he was doing his protégé a favor; in reality no greater disservice to Arbuthnot could have been devised. Upon the Earl of Sandwich must rest most of the blame for destroying the reputation of a decent man.
NOTES: CHAPTER SEVEN


3. George III to Sandwich, March 6, 1780, Sandwich Papers, III, p. 243; Cabinet Minute, March 7, 1780, Sandwich Papers, III, pp. 243-244; Germain to Sandwich, March 11, 1780, Sandwich Papers, III, pp. 244-245.

4. Adm. to Admiral Thomas Graves, March 25, 1780, ADM 2/1337 (LC Trans.).

5. T. Graves to Sandwich, March 21, 1780, Sandwich Papers, III, p. 245.


12. Ibid.

13. Sir Joseph Yorke to Lord Stormont, May 9, 1780, ADM 2/1338 (LC Trans.).


17. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Aug. 9, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).


20. Ibid., p. 19.


25. Clinton to Sir George Rodney, Sept. 14, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

26. Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 204-205; Green, Memoranda, p. 17; Willcox, Portrait, p. 334.


28. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Aug. 25, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).


30. Clinton to Arbuthnot, Aug. 18, 1780, Clinton, Rebellion, p. 451


32. Green, Memoranda, p. 17.


35. Rodney to Arbuthnot, Sept. 15, 1780, ADM 1/311 (NHC Film).


37. Ibid.


40. Ibid., pp. 23-24.


42. Ibid.


44. Clinton to Rodney, Oct. 19, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

45. Rodney to Clinton, Sept. 14, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.


48. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Sept. 30, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

49. Rodney to George Jackson, Oct. 12, 1780, British Museum Additional Mss., 9344 (LC Trans.).


52. Clinton, *Rebellion*, pp. 220-221, 228-229; Willcox,
Portait, p. 350.


55. Clinton to Arbuthnot, Oct. 29, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

56. Clinton to Rodney, Oct. 18, 1780; Clinton to Arbuthnot, Oct. 19, 1780; Clinton to Arbuthnot, Oct. 29, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL; Clinton, Rebellion, p. 220.

57. Clinton to Rodney, Oct. 18, 1780; Clinton to Arbuthnot, Oct. 19, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

58. Clinton to Rodney, Oct. 18, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

59. Arbuthnot to Clinton, Nov. 1, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL; partially printed in Clinton, Rebellion, p. 471.


64. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Oct. 29, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

65. Clinton to Rodney, Nov. 10, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

66. Clinton to Rodney, Nov. 12, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL; Rodney to Clinton, Nov. 13, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

67. Rodney to Clinton, Nov. 13, 1780, Clinton Papers, CL.

68. Adm. to Pye and Adm. Francis W. Drake, June 11, 1780, ADM 2/1338 (LC Trans.).

69. George III to Sandwich, June 15, 1780, Sandwich Papers, III, p. 247.
70. Rodney to George Rodney, March 7, 1781, Spinney, Rodney, p. 367.


73. Cabinet Minute, Oct. 11, 1780, Sandwich Papers, III, p. 255.

74. Sandwich to Arbuthnot, Oct. 16, 1780, Sandwich Papers, III, p. 256.

75. Sandwich to Adm. Sir Peter Parker, Oct. 16, 1780, Sandwich Papers, III, p. 257.


77. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Dec. 14, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

78. Arbuthnot to Sandwich, Dec. 16, 1780, Sandwich Papers, III, p. 265.

79. Arbuthnot to Clinton, Dec. 9, 1780; Clinton to Arbuthnot, Dec. 9, 1780; Arbuthnot to Clinton, Dec. 12, 1780; Clinton to Arbuthnot, Dec. 12, 1780; Clinton to Arbuthnot, Dec. 13, 1780, Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 479-481.


81. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Jan. 20, 1780, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); "Copy of the proposals made by Sir Henry Clinton to the Pennsylvania revolters," Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 484-485.

82. Arbuthnot to Clinton, Jan. 21, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL; Arbuthnot to Clinton, Jan. 29, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL; Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

83. Arbuthnot to Clinton, Feb. 9, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL.

84. Arbuthnot to Clinton, Jan. 29, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL; Arbuthnot to Stephens, Feb. 15, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
85. Arbuthnot to Clinton, Jan. 29, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL; Clinton to Arbuthnot, n.d., Clinton Papers, CL.

86. Arbuthnot to Clinton, Jan. 29, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL.

87. Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

88. Ibid.

89. Clinton, Rebellion, p. 253; Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); James, Navy in Adversity, p. 270; Mahan, Major Operations, p. 170.

90. Arbuthnot to Clinton, Feb. 9, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL.

91. Arbuthnot to Stephens, Feb. 16, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).


93. Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

94. Green, Memoranda, p. 31.

95. Arbuthnot to Sandwich, March 30, 1781, Sandwich Papers, IV, p. 167; Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).


97. Clinton to Arbuthnot, Feb. 23, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL; Arbuthnot to Clinton, Feb. 25, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL.

98. Arbuthnot to Clinton, March 11, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL; Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); Arbuthnot to Sandwich, March 30, 1781, Sandwich Papers, IV, p. 167.

99. Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

101. Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
102. Ibid.
105. Arbuthnot to Sandwich, March 30, 1781, Sandwich Papers, IV, p. 168; Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
106. Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); Blanchard, Journal, p. 96.
110. Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
111. Ibid.; Mahan, Major Operations, p. 172; James, Navy in Adversity, p. 272.
112. Arbuthnot to Sandwich, March 30, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
113. Green, Memoranda, pp. 36-37.
115. Arbuthnot to Sandwich, March 30, 1781, Sandwich Papers, IV, p. 169; Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
116. Arbuthnot to Sandwich, March 30, 1781, Sandwich Papers, IV, p. 169; Arbuthnot to Stephens, March 20, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); Willcox, Portrait, p. 377; Mahan, Major Operations, p. 174.
117. Arbuthnot to Stephens, April 14, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); William MacKenzie, Diary of William MacKenzie,
Giving a Daily Narrative of His Military Service as an Officer of the Regiment of Royal Welch Fusiliers During the Years 1775-1781 in Massachusetts Rhode Island and New York (2 vols., Cambridge: 1930), II, pp. 506-507.

118. Arbuthnot to Sandwich, March 30, 1781, Sandwich Papers, IV, p. 169.


120. Clinton to Germain, April 30, 1781, Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 516-517.


122. Green, Memoranda, p. 12.

123. Willcox, Portrait, p. 393; Arbuthnot to Stephens, July 4, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

124. Arbuthnot to Stephens, June 12, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).

125. Arbuthnot to Stephens, July 4, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film); Adm. Minute, May 3, 1781, ADM 3/92 (PRO).

126. T. Graves to Arbuthnot, July 4, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).


128. DNB, I, pp. 537-538.

129. Arbuthnot to Stephens, June 12, 1781, ADM 1/486 (LC Film).
CHAPTER EIGHT
Thomas Graves, July-October, 1781

I

In the eighteenth century mention of the West Indies called forth a number of violently contrasting images. The world held few more visually attractive scenes than the thousands of square miles of translucent blue water of the Caribbean, or its scores of lushly foliated islands with their white beaches and green forests. The sugar planters and rum distillers of the West Indies enjoyed a life that seemed almost paradisical, a lazy existence fraught with dinner parties, romantic horseback rides over the plantation, and evenings spent watching the sunsets from the veranda. But anyone who had spent a few months in the West Indies knew that appearances deceived. The same forests and expanses of sugar that looked so innocent from a distance were held to spew forth mysterious substances (medical science had only a vague notion that the lowly mosquito might be more than a nuisance) that contaminated the air, arbitrarily striking down men and women of the hardiest constitutions by the hundreds in a few weeks. The sun that seemed to shine almost incessantly begat temperatures which,
as far as any civilized Englishman was concerned, were substantially higher than the human body had been intended to tolerate. He who chose a life in the West Indies did so because he preferred it to a prison sentence, or because he was the type who was willing to risk his health for a chance to make a fortune.

The weather seemed to confirm the suspicion that supernatural forces were in residence. The trade winds, blowing constantly from the southeast to the northwest, made the Caribbean simultaneously the most reliable and one of the most frustrating places on earth from the standpoint of the sea-going navigator; a ship might be able to sail from the naval base at Barbados to the one at Jamaica in a week, but it could take her three months to get back. At the end of each summer (such as it was: 20 degrees north of the equator the distinction between the seasons meant little) nature forsook her predictability and, for a quarter of the year, ran amok. Hurricanes, springing forth without notice from any point of the compass, descended on the region and flippantly demolished whatever man-made objects lay in their paths. Several decades of experience had taught the human beings who presided over the puny contrivances known as warships that, between August and November, they must assert their own destructive tendencies somewhere else.

In its opening phases the American Revolution largely had left the West Indies to themselves. The issues being
Figure 10. Map of the West Indies
contested were remote and not worth understanding, though both British and rebels seemed anxious to spend as much money as they could in the Caribbean. Save for the activities of the occasional privateer little of a military nature took place.

With the entry of France in 1778 the Caribbean suddenly became one of the major theaters of the war. Both sides held valuable possessions among the islands (the West Indies were more vital to the British economy than was North America), and both periodically sent great fleets out from Europe to do battle with each other. It was a strange, complicated war, with the armies fighting repeatedly over the same real estate and the navies supporting the armies, escorting and pursuing convoys, and occasionally fighting sea battles that, usually, ended before either admiral could claim victory. And every autumn the war took a recess, as the fleets either returned to Europe or moved to the more congenial waters off North America.

One of the most obnoxious thorns in the side of the British was the island of St. Eustatius. A five-mile-long chunk of volcanic rock just west of St. Kitts in the Leeward Islands, its military significance was negligible but it was, in a perverse way, a commercial center of the West Indies. Since 1632 St. Eustatius had belonged to the Dutch, who had turned it into an island warehouse. In the American war it became the connecting link between the colonies and their
overseas suppliers. American merchant captains would deposit their tobacco, lumber, and indigo on the waterfront, with its mile-long row of stone warehouses, and return to Philadelphia or Charleston or Boston with muskets or ammunition or hard French cash. The Dutch inhabitants grew exhorbitantly rich on their commissions; Frenchmen, Spaniards, and even certain unscrupulous Englishmen participated in the game as well.

Into the harbor of St. Eustatius on February 3, 1781, came Admiral Sir George Rodney, with fourteen ships-of-the-line, a frigate, two bomb ketches, two fireships, and 3,000 troops. Six days earlier Rodney had learned that, in the previous December, the States General of Holland had gone to war with Great Britain. The same ship that had brought the news of that development had brought Rodney orders from the Admiralty to attack the Dutch settlements in the West Indies, and a suggestion that St. Eustatius would be among the most appropriate victims.

Sir George and his army counterpart, General John Vaughan, undertook their assignment with a determination which, like the amount of force they utilized, was excessive to the point of absurdity. The defenses of St. Eustatius consisted of fewer than 100 Dutch soldiers, a Dutch ship-of-the-line, a Dutch frigate, and a handful of light warships commissioned by the Continental Congress. Upon the appearance of Rodney's armada and the arrival of a British officer
with the announcement of the declaration of war the governor surrendered; the only shots came from two of the ships-of-the-line whose gunners (in what Sir George called "an Insult to all order and Discipline") opened fire without orders.  

When Rodney went ashore as conqueror of St. Eustatius he found himself beset by a wicked combination of gout, prostatitus, and temptation. His personality, mercurially irascible under the best of circumstances, lacked the resources to withstand all three simultaneously. Never far from Rodney's mind was his indebtedness; he had begun to worry about the financial well-being of his second wife and four daughters. At St. Eustatius he found the opportunity to rest more-or-less comfortably ashore and acquire an unimaginable sum of money, all the while assuring himself as well as his superiors that his motives were strictly patriotic. As the story of what had been going on in the warehouses revealed itself to him Rodney became progressively more outraged. The British merchants, he told Lord George Germain, had "meanly condescended to become Dutch burghers (and as such they shall be treated).... Thank God that Providence has ordained General Vaughan and myself to be the instrument of a great, powerful, but injured nation to scourge them for their perfidy, and scourged they shall be." Rodney set himself up as judge, jury, and Admiralty court; he held auctions, condemned merchandise, and divided the
spoils among the victors. The scourging took three months, during which Sir George missed an opportunity to play a decisive role in the most important campaign of the American war.

The French were about to make their supreme effort to win the naval war. On March 22 a great fleet of ships-of-the-line, accompanying a convoy of 150 merchantmen and commanded by Rear Admiral Francois Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse-Tilly, sailed from Brest for the West Indies.

The British arrangements to receive de Grasse were thwarted by poor communications and the lure of St. Eustatius. As early as February 11 Rodney received word that nine or ten French ships-of-the-line had been sighted in the South Atlantic. The inference that those vessels were destined for the Caribbean was incorrect (in fact they were the squadron of Commodore Pierre de Suffren, on its way to conduct a classic campaign in the East Indies), but spurred Rodney to take action. Sir George himself could not leave St. Eustatius ("there is an absolute necessity for General Vaughan and myself to remain some little time at this Island to settle all matters relative to the conquest"), so he decided to entrust the defense against the new French threat to his second-in-command, Rear Admiral Hood.  

Among eighteenth century admirals Sir Samuel Hood was a remarkable character: he made his name one of the most famous in British naval history not by commanding a fleet
in a great sea battle but by convincing historians that he had been cheated out of the opportunity to do so. In 1780, at the age of 56, he was Governor of the Naval Academy and Navy Commissioner at Portsmouth—important posts, but ones that generally terminated the careers of the officers who held them. The Admiralty, however, was finding it, in Sandwich's words, "difficult, very difficult," to find a second-in-command for Rodney. Part of the trouble was with Rodney's reputation and part was with that of the First Lord himself, under whom many of the navy's most respected officers refused to serve. By process of elimination Hood became the most attractive candidate; he was only a captain, but he and Rodney had sailed together twice and were reputed to be friends. Sandwich arranged for a massive promotion: on September 26, 1780, Sir Samuel became one of six new Rear Admirals of the Blue, and five captains of greater seniority were advanced directly to the White. When he was offered the post in the West Indies Hood protested that "those bodily infirmities, with which I have been afflicted for near twenty years, are of late become so very heavy and severe that I have no spirits left and can scarce keep myself upon my legs, and should be only the shadow of a flag officer." A few days' thought convinced him, though, that "a warm climate will tend more towards removing my complaints than any assistance I can get at home."

His health, and the knowledge that the navy had worked
so hard to persuade him to be second-in-command in the Leeward Islands, may explain some of the attitude Hood brought with him to the station. He seems to have regarded the evaluation and criticism of every admiral with whom he came into contact as a liturgical rite. To his friend George Jackson, the Second Secretary, he wrote a series of letters that, according to the nineteenth-century historian who edited them, sprang from "a fund of natural censoriousness." While he was second-in-command Sir Samuel's considerable abilities found few constructive outlets; he became convinced that he was commanded by incompetents, and he lashed out at them in his correspondence with a righteousness that was both resentful and enthusiastic.

When Rodney learned of the imminence of the French squadron's arrival he directed Hood, with 18 ships-of-the-line, to cruise to the windward of Martinique, the easternmost of the Leeward Islands and the site of the principal French naval base in the theater. Hood and the much-travelled Rear Admiral Drake, who also had received his flag in the previous September's promotion, beat back and forth before Martinique for more than a month, during which time 2,000 of their men were laid low by the scurvy (though Hood's flagship, the 90-gun Barfleur, was spared: Sir Samuel explained that "I have got Lemons and Limes for my Poor fellows from every place I could"). There was no sign of the French; by the middle of March Rodney was
convinced that they had "gone to some other part of the world." The conviction was intensified by the fact that Commodore William Hotham was about to take the treasure of St. Eustatius home, in a meagerly-escorted convoy that included the more than 100 prizes the navy had taken. Four French ships-of-the-line were at Fort Royal, the harbor on the western side of Martinique; they might descend on Hotham's convoy before Hood, cruising on the other side of the island, knew what was happening.

Rodney therefore ordered Hood to move from the windward of Martinique to the leeward. Sir Samuel protested that "I do not feel myself at all pleasant in being to leeward; for should an enemy's fleet attempt to get into Martinique, and the commander of it inclines to avoid battle, nothing but a skirmish will probably happen, which in its consequences may operate as a defeat to the British squadron." Rodney was unimpressed: Hood's squadron was stationed off Fort Royal, and Hotham and his convoy sailed for England. On the morning of April 29 Hood's fears were realized in an even more spectacular fashion than he had imagined, when 20 French ships-of-the-line, escorting no fewer than 150 merchantmen and transports, rounded the northern end of Martinique.

De Grasse, having been dealt a strong hand by Rodney, played it conservatively and skillfully. The French had the advantage in numbers (20 ships-of-the-line to Hood's 18), but for the moment De Grasse was less interested in doing
battle than in seeing his convoy safely into Fort Royal. He therefore directed the merchantmen to sail as close inshore as they could, while his warships formed line of battle to protect them. From his leeward position Hood could do little but gnash his teeth. He formed his own line and exchanged broadsides with the French at a distance of more than a mile, and ordered his captains to shorten their canvas to the topsails and heave to in a hopeless effort to entice de Grasse to close the range. The action was unusual in that all the ships on both sides became engaged, but the British were unable to prevent the French from entering Fort Royal.  

Hood's position after the action off Martinique was one that appealed to his nature: he had warned that disaster was coming, and disaster had come. He meticulously recorded his opinions about what had happened and, changing the language only slightly between epistles, told at least three of his correspondents. The letter Hood wrote to Jackson was typical:

I am perfectly conscious of no one omission in the whole of my conduct, and of having done everything that was in my power for the support of the honour of the British flag.... But doubtless there never was a squadron so unmeaningly stationed as the one under my command, and what Sir George Rodney's motive for it could be I cannot conceive, unless it was to cover him at St. Eustatius; and it is equally as difficult to be accounted for by Mr. Drake and every captain.  

De Grasse, with a hesitancy reminiscent of d'Estaing,
took the offensive against the British possessions in the Leeward Islands. No sooner had the French anchored at Fort Royal than they sent forth two expeditions with the intent of taking the islands of St. Lucia and Tobago. Rodney, having been extracted at last from the land of the syrens at St. Eustatius, sallied forth to join Hood, but was delayed by the necessity of watering and replenishing the latter's ships. St. Lucia was saved only by the timely arrival of three British frigates, whose captains landed enough seamen to man the shore batteries. When Rodney learned that Tobago was under attack he sent Drake, with six ships-of-the-line and a detachment of troops, to its defense, assuming that the main French thrust had been aimed at St. Lucia. Drake arrived at Tobago in time to collide with de Grasse's twenty ships-of-the-line, and beat a hasty and perfectly understandable retreat. The governor of the island, with only 400 militia to oppose a French landing force of 1,300, surrendered. 16

On their way back to Martinique the French encountered Rodney, but he refused to do battle: he was, he explained later, afraid of being trapped leeward off the Spanish Main at a time when an important convoy from England was due at Barbados. 17 When de Grasse anchored at Fort Royal again Rodney split up his force into small squadrons to ensure that any French attempt against the incoming merchantmen could be thwarted. By late June it had become obvious that
no great sea battle was going to take place in the West Indies until after the hurricane season.

At the beginning of July de Grasse sailed from Martinique with his entire naval force and the annual French homeward-bound convoy. Following the usual route dictated by the tradewinds, he escorted the merchant ships as far as the Mona Passage into the Atlantic just west of Puerto Rico. De Grasse and his warships then put into the harbor of Cape François, on the northern coast of Haiti. There he found the frigate Concorde, and a packet of letters addressed to him by the Comte de Rochambeau, commander of the French troops in North America.  

Rodney, directing the activities of his far-flung ships from his base at Barbados, was attempting to anticipate the next French move on the basis of logic and sketchy intelligence reports. He knew that de Grasse had left Martinique, and had gone off to leeward with his convoy; that implied that the French admiral had ended his campaign in the Leeward Islands for the season. De Grasse therefore must be intending either to return to Europe (an unlikely alternative: the French government scarcely would send such an enormous fleet to the West Indies only to have it return after three months) or to spend the hurricane season in North America. On July 7 Sir George wrote a protentous letter to Admiral Arbuthnot:

As the Enemy has at this time a fleet of
28 Sail of the Line at Martinique, a part of which is reported to be destined for North America, I have dispatched his Majesty's Sloop Swallow to acquaint you therewith, and inform You that I shall keep as good a look out as possible on their motions, by which my own shall be regulated.

In case of my sending a Squadron to America I shall order it to make the Capes of Virginia, and proceed along the coast to the Capes of the Delaware, and from thence to Sandy Hook, unless the intelligence it may receive from you should induce it to act otherwise.

You will please order Cruizers to look out for it, off the first mentioned Capes, giving orders to hoist a Dutch Ensign reversed at the fore-top-gallant-mast-head and an English Jack at the mizen-top-mast-head, and firing two guns, which will be answered by a Blue Flag pierced White at the main-top-gallant-mast-head, and three guns.

The Enemy's Squadron destined for America will sail I am informed in a short time, but whether they call at Cape Francois, I cannot learn: however, you may depend upon the Squadron in America being reinforced, should the Enemy bend their forces that way. 19

Rodney, then, had deduced that some of de Grasse's ships would go north; the others, presumably, would try to weather the hurricane season in the Caribbean. Of what the French intended to do in North America Sir George had no idea, but if the focus of the naval war were to shift in that direction he would adjust his own dispositions accordingly. For a time he contemplated going to New York himself again, but his health, as usual, caused him to hesitate; Hood complained that "it is quite impossible from the unsteadiness of the commander-in-chief to know what he means three days together." 20 Rodney was experiencing an intense desire to go to England, which he had not seen in 19 months. The waters at Bath might
cure his gout, and as a result of the capture of St. Eustatius his financial affairs demanded his attention. (Rodney could not know that, in a magnificent stroke of poetic justice, Commodore Hotham's convoy had been intercepted by a French naval squadron at the mouth of the Channel.)

The prospect of spending another autumn in the wretched climate of New York and the company of Harriot Arbuthnot was less than enticing. Hood suggested another reason for Rodney's vacillation:

The truth is I believe he is guided by his feelings on the moment he is speaking, and that his mind is not at present at all at ease, thinking if he quits the command he will get to England at a time that many mouths may perhaps be opened against him on the top of Tobago, and his not fighting the French fleet off that island after the public declarations he made to every one of his determined resolution to do it; and again, if he stays much longer, his laurels may be subject to wither.21

By the end of July Sir George had made his decision. Sending his tired flagship Sandwich to Jamaica to have her leaky bottom caulked, he moved his belongings and his retinue (which included the three sons of Benedict Arnold) to the Gibraltar, a magnificent 74 that had been captured from the French and whose draft was too great to let her pass over the bar at New York. On August 1 Rodney, with two other ships-of-the-line, a frigate, and a convoy of more than 100 merchantmen in company, left St. Eustatius for England, and Sir Samuel Hood became Commander-in-Chief of the Leeward
Islands Squadron.\(^22\)

Rodney had ordered Hood to go to Antigua and rendezvous with Drake, who was at St. Lucia with four ships-of-the-line, before proceeding to New York by way of Chesapeake Bay and the Delaware. On his way from St. Eustatius to St. Lucia Sir Samuel encountered a British brig bound from New York with dispatches from Sir Henry Clinton and Admiral Graves, who, Hood thereby discovered, had succeeded Arbuthnot as naval commander-in-chief in North America. The British headquarters at New York had come into possession of some rebel correspondence implying that "Le Grasse," as Sir Henry called him, "may be expected on this Coast in the Hurricane Season (if not before) with all the Sea and Land Force he can assemble." Clinton believed that the French and the rebels were preparing to make a major attempt on New York. The campaign in Virginia and the Carolinas had been called off; General Cornwallis had been directed to send all the troops he could spare to New York, and to "occupy defensive Stations in York and James River untill the Season for Operation in that Climate shall return." Assuming that Rodney still commanded in the Leeward Islands, Clinton begged for his support: "Let me therefore hope My Dear Sir George, that if Le Grasse comes, or even detaches in force (which Authentick Intelligence from other Quarters confirms he will) You will come here if possible in person as we have all confidence in you."\(^23\)
Hood was not a man to loiter when his enemy was on the move. After waiting a few days for Drake at Antigua he became impatient, and sailed on August 10; Drake, fortunately, arrived from St. Lucia with his four ships-of-the-line just as Hood was getting under way. In accordance with Rodney's instructions Sir Samuel set his course for Chesapeake Bay. He was taking every warship he could to North America with him, but the events of the preceding few weeks had eroded his strength considerably. The Russel, 74, had been damaged in the fight off Martinique and was laid up at Antigua. Rodney's former flagship, the Sandwich, was at the dockyard in Jamaica. Rodney had taken three ships-of-the-line, the Gibraltar, Triumph, and Panther, to England, and Sir Peter Parker insisted on detaining two more, the Torbay and Prince William, at Jamaica until the next convoy was ready. When Hood and Drake sailed for North America they had but 14 ships-of-the-line.

On August 25 Hood's squadron arrived off the capes of the Chesapeake. The only ships visible in the bay were a handful of British transports and light naval vessels, commanded by Captain Thomas Symonds of the 44-gun Charon, that had been attending the army's Virginia expedition since the previous December. Hood stopped only long enough to ensure that no French ships were in the neighborhood, and to send the frigate Nymphe to New York to announce his coming. He then proceeded to the mouth of the Delaware, and
satisfied himself that de Grasse was not there either. On August 28, a mere 18 days after leaving the West Indies and only two hours behind the Nympe, Hood's ships arrived at New York. Disdaining to take them over the bar Hood ordered them to anchor off Sandy Hook; he then got into his barge and had himself rowed ashore.  

II

Thomas Graves was a competent, methodical man, and he assumed the command of the North American Squadron with a quiet dignity that the military authorities in New York found refreshing. While his clerks assailed the stack of paperwork Arbuthnot had left them Graves's frigates and sloops patrolled the coast, taking prizes and keeping a weather eye on the eight French ships-of-the-line that still were anchored at Rhode Island. A new French commodore, the Comte de Barras, had arrived in May to take over the command from des Touches, but showed no more inclination than the latter to undertake any sort of offensive operations. ("It is a principle in war," Barras once wrote, "that one should risk much to defend one's own positions, and very little to attack those of the enemy.")

Graves was willing to leave de Barras at peace, for the British squadron was in no condition to fight another battle. The Royal Oak, Arbuthnot's former flagship, had run aground in New York Harbor shortly after her return from the
Chesapeake, and had gone to Halifax to have her bottom caulked; the Robust, Prudent, and Europe needed repairs as well. On July 20 the new commander-in-chief warned Sandwich that "your Lordship must only expect a defensive, if we can do that [we] will."  

The correspondence he had received from London was causing Graves to fear that he was out of favor at the Admiralty. During his voyage from Portsmouth to New York he had taken a French East Indiaman. Rumors, perhaps motivated by the admiral's relationship to Lord North, had circulated in Parliament: in shepherding his prize across the Atlantic Graves had wasted so much time that de Ternay's squadron had beaten him to America. The Admiralty, despite the fact that Graves's passage had been one of the quickest on record, had directed Arbuthnot to inquire into the matter. Graves's assertion that he had left the prize in the hands of his only frigate was accepted; Sandwich assured him that "it was necessary that your friends should have authentic materials in their hands to silence the malice of the disturbers of the public welfare. This was the sole object of the inquiry." Graves professed himself satisfied with that explanation, but he remained convinced that someone in the administration disliked him. Somehow he learned, even before the appointment had been made official, that Rear Admiral Robert Digby was to be sent out to relieve Arbuthnot; Digby's name was immediately below Graves's on the flag
Graves's lame duck status contributed to a generally stultifying atmosphere that permeated the British military and naval forces at New York in the summer of 1781. Clinton, having been assured by Lord George Germain that a substantial troop reinforcement was on the way, was content to plan for the moment when it arrived. Sir Henry had a number of ambitious projects in mind: a raid on Philadelphia, a large-scale campaign throughout Pennsylvania, a revival of the old coup-de-main scheme against the skeletal defenses Rochambeau had left in Rhode Island. When the general presented his plans to the admiral the latter responded with letters that, whether positive or negative in their content, were written with a distinctly un-Arbuthnot-like directness. Clinton and Graves were in a situation that permitted them to plan for the distant future, unencumbered by any necessity for immediate action. Under those circumstances the two commanders-in-chief got along famously.

Even before Arbuthnot's departure the center of the war, partly by Clinton's and Germain's design and partly by accident, had shifted to the south. Lord Cornwallis's campaign in the Carolinas gradually had degenerated into what, from Sir Henry's viewpoint, had come to look like an aimless and expensive wandering through the wilderness.
The anticipated loyalist support had not materialized, and the rebels had found two generals, the Marquis de la Fayette and Nathanael Greene, who had the tactical skill to keep Cornwallis on the defensive. By the spring the Earl had decided to forsake his ambitions in the Carolinas and take his army into Virginia, the site of the "diversionary" expedition under General Phillips.

On May 12, shortly before Cornwallis's arrival, the unfortunate Phillips died of an undiagnosed fever. After combining Phillips's troops with his own Cornwallis had a total of about 7,000 men in Virginia. Precisely what he intended to do with them there he never explained, perhaps even to himself. One of the many explanations Clinton offered afterwards was that Cornwallis, having heard of Clinton's threats to resign if Arbuthnot did not leave for England, wanted to be as close to New York as possible in case he had to take over the command there on short notice. In any case, Clinton became convinced that the Tidewater was no place for such a sizable contingent of the British army.

Sir Henry, on the basis of several intercepted letters as well as the dispatches he had received from London, was convinced that a great battle was about to be fought near New York. Washington's and Rochambeau's armies were massing on the east bank of the Hudson, waiting, presumably, for de Crasse to arrive with whatever naval force he was going to
bring from the West Indies. If Washington enlisted the aid of all the available militia his forces might total 20,000 men; the British at New York could muster about 10,000.

Clinton, on June 11, therefore wrote to Cornwallis, instructing the latter to send as many troops as he could spare to New York. Sir Henry maintained his desire to conduct a major offensive in the Chesapeake, but that project would have to be put aside until the thrust against New York had been warded off.34

Clinton probably would have liked to abandon the Tidewater altogether until after the rainy season, and re-open the campaign there afresh later. There was, however, a pressing reason to maintain a British presence in the Chesapeake through the summer. The events of the past year had taught the British authorities at least one lesson: they sorely needed a decent naval base. New York, with its contorted channel and awkwardly located sand bar, did not answer the requirements even in good weather; in the winter both the Hudson and the harbor at Halifax froze solid. The weaknesses of Gardiner's Bay had been demonstrated graphically by the accidents that had befallen the Culloden and Bedford, and the French still held Rhode Island. Arbuthnot, on hearing the first hints that de Grasse was coming to North America, had announced his intention to maintain a strictly defensive posture until the end of the hurricane season. He would take his ships-of-the-line as far up the
Hudson as they could go, and direct the few vessels that were in Chesapeake Bay to congregate at Charleston; "should they be left in Virginia," Arbuthnot had told Clinton, "they must inevitably be lost." Graves's outlook, bolstered by the promise of reinforcements from the Leeward Islands, was more aggressive. He rejected the option of keeping the fleet at New York or, for that matter, at Gardiner's Bay, during the winter, and cast about in search of a harbor that would not be likely to freeze. During his brief visit to Virginia after the Battle of Cape Henry Graves had seen the fine harbor of Hampton Roads. "The more I reflect upon the Importance of Hampton Roads to the Navy," he wrote to Clinton on July 12, a mere eight days after Arbuthnot's departure, "the more I am convinced of the Necessity of securing that Post to enable the Kings Ships to stay the Winter in this Country. For I think they had better be in the West Indies than frozen up at Halifax during the Winter."  

Graves's opinion dovetailed with a letter Clinton had received from London. Lord George Germain, having read with "great mortification" the accounts of the half-hearted expeditions under Leslie, Arnold, and Phillips, had gone to the Cabinet and then to the king in an effort to clarify precisely what the strategy in North America was supposed to be. 

And I am commanded by His Majesty to acquaint you that the recovery of the southern provinces and the prosecution of the war by pushing our conquests
from south to north is to be considered as the chief and principal object for the employment of all the forces under your command which can be spared from the defense of the places in His Majesty's possession until it is accomplished.37

The reasoning behind that order was obscure, but the intent hardly could be misinterpreted. The combination of Cornwallis's presence in Virginia, Graves's desire to winter at Hampton Roads, Germain's dispatch, and the rebel and French threat to New York forced Clinton into a compromise. In June, July, and August he and Cornwallis engaged in voluminous correspondence, the complexity of which was to be the subject of controversy for years. The gist of Clinton's decision was simple: Cornwallis was to set up, somewhere in the vicinity of Hampton Roads, a "post" suitable for the protection of a squadron of ships-of-the-line. He then was to decide how many men would be necessary to hold the base until the ships arrived (presumably when the campaign in the north ended), and send the rest of his troops to New York.38

Hindsight makes it difficult to understand how Clinton could not see in advance the calamity that such a plan invited. He, of all people, should have understood the stupidity of letting a field commander decide how much strength he needed to defend a position. The near disaster of the previous March had demonstrated the inherent vulnerability of any land force that attempted to sustain itself in the Chesapeake: on that occasion only des Touches'
failure to defeat Arbuthnot had saved Benedict Arnold. In the summer the risks were even greater than they had been in the spring, for the approach of de Grasse had introduced an additional, and unpredictable, element into the situation. Clinton did not know for certain where de Grasse was going, or how large was his force, but there was no reason to assume that, at some point during his campaign in America, the French admiral would not sail to the Chesapeake. If he did, and if Graves and whatever ships Rodney sent failed to keep the French out of the bay, Cornwallis would be doomed. The Earl, perfectly aware of the danger he was in, insisted on keeping his entire 7,000-man army intact. Neither he nor Clinton seems to have realized that to expose a force of that size in the Chesapeake was to present the French and the rebels with the opportunity to win the war.

Since Clinton and Graves had not had an opportunity to examine the Hampton Roads vicinity in detail they had to rely on Cornwallis to pick the site of the naval base. The centerpiece of the various earlier Chesapeake expeditions had been the town of Portsmouth, on the Elizabeth River, but Cornwallis abandoned it on the grounds that "it cannot be made strong without an army to defend it," and "it is remarkably unhealthy, and can give no protection to a ship of the line." Clinton suggested Old Point Comfort, which overlooked Hampton Roads and the entrance to the James. One of Cornwallis's engineers and the three ranking naval
officers, Captains Symonds, Hudson, and Everitt, conducted a survey of that spot and pronounced it unsuitable as well: Old Point Comfort rose only two feet about the high water mark, and was so close to the deep channel in front of it that any enemy vessels would be able to blow to pieces whatever works the British erected. Finally Cornwallis discarded the idea of defending Hampton Roads and decided to establish his fleet anchorage in the York River. For about two miles inland the York was wide and deep enough to accommodate ships-of-the-line; then it narrowed abruptly and turned to the north. Directly opposite each other at the kink in the river were two villages where the army could construct its works: Gloucester on the north bank and Yorktown on the south.

One of several bewildering features of the Yorktown campaign is the fact that the two British commanders-in-chief failed to realize where the most important events were taking place until the campaign was almost over. The function of the army in the Chesapeake, so far as Clinton and Graves were concerned, was to hold the anchorage in the York until such time as the navy might need it. That a naval squadron might be needed to protect Cornwallis does not seem to have occurred to any of them.

The admiral, in fact, was willing to ignore the
Chesapeake and concentrate on matters that seemed to be of more immediate importance. On July 19 the sloop-of-war *Hornet* arrived from England (having taken precisely as long to cross the Atlantic as he himself had, Graves observed to Sandwich) with dispatches. The Admiralty, according to a letter from Mr. Jackson dated May 22, had received intelligence regarding a large French convoy that had sailed from Brest bearing "Money, Clothing, and Military Stores" for North America. Graves, despite the fact that the damage several of his ships had sustained off Cape Henry still had not been made good, decided to take his squadron to sea in pursuit of the convoy. He sailed on July 21 for Boston Bay, which seemed the most likely hunting ground. Left in command at New York in the squadron's absence was Commodore Sir Edmund Affleck; giving him a broad pendant had provided a convenient means of appointing young Thomas Graves captain of Affleck's ship, the *Bedford*.

Six days after the admiral's departure there arrived at New York the sloop *Swallow*, with Rodney's dispatch announcing that some of de Grasse's ships were headed for North America with a British detachment in pursuit. Affleck made a copy of the letter and sent the *Swallow* after Graves. Unfortunately neither Rodney nor Affleck gave the sloop's captain, a young man named Wells whom Sir George had promoted on the recommendation of the Earl of Sandwich, any inkling of what was inside the envelope he was carrying. Just after the
Swallow left New York she encountered a rebel privateer, and gave chase in the hope of making a prize. Three more privateers appeared, and managed to force the British ship onto the rocks. Wells, in accordance with the dicta all officers were instructed to follow on such occasions, ran to his cabin, grabbed the dispatch envelope, and heaved it, unopened, into Long Island Sound.  

On August 18 Admiral Graves and his squadron, having spent more than three weeks blundering about amid an unseasonable fog in Boston Bay, returned to New York. With them came the Royal Oak, fresh from her refit at Halifax; the already damaged hull of the Robust, however, had been strained so badly during the cruise that she would have to have her seams caulked before she could go to sea again. Graves read the copy Affleck had made of the dispatch from Rodney, but was not unduly impressed by it. Sir George said that some French ships were coming to America during the hurricane season; Graves had known that for more than a month. De Grasse surely would send only a fraction of his fleet north, and his intention probably was to do no more than shore up de Barras's squadron, which must have suffered severally off Cape Henry. If a British reinforcement was on its way from the Leeward Islands Graves's logical move was to wait for it at New York.  

Since nothing of any urgency seemed to be happening the admiral devoted his efforts to the repairing of the
Robust and the Prudent, whose masts and rigging were in need of attention, and to the problem of the Swallow, whose hull was stuck on the Long Island rocks somewhere to the east. The attempts to salvage her turned into a comedy of errors. The frigate Solebay and the sloop Rover were sent out on the rescue mission, only to find that the remains of the Swallow had been burned by the rebels. On the way back to New York the Rover became entangled in a current and ran aground herself; the seas quickly ruptured her hull and her crew set fire to her to prevent her from falling into enemy hands. Another of the squadron's light vessels, the brigantine Swift (Richard Graves, Esquire, Master and Commander), had a fight with a rebel privateer just outside New York and barely made it over the bar with a packet of dispatches from Cornwallis. So much of the Swift's planking had been eaten by the worms in the Chesapeake that she had to be run onto the beach to keep her from sinking. 47

On Tuesday, August 28, there occurred a series of extraordinary events that roused Admiral Graves out of his complacency. Clinton had invited him to come to the army headquarters at Denizes Ferry in order to discuss Sir Henry's latest scheme for attacking Rhode Island; the recent arrival of 2,400 German recruits had put the general in the mood to take the offensive, at least on a small scale. As Graves was preparing to leave the London, which was anchored in the Narrows, he caught sight of the
silhouettes of several large ships outside the harbor. Leaving word with his cousin David, the flagship's captain, to have someone set out buoys to help the newcomers over the bar, Graves climbed into his barge and proceeded to his meeting with Clinton. Shortly after the admiral reached Denizes the frigate *Nymphe* came flying over the bar under all the sail she dared carry. When she reached the Narrows her captain, John Ford, put off in his boat and brought Graves a dispatch, dated August 25, from Sir Samuel Hood. "There is Sir Samuel himself," said Ford, gesturing toward Sandy Hook, "now come to an anchor without the bar."48

The newly-arrived admiral behaved in an astonishing manner. He refused to bring his squadron into the harbor, despite Graves's courteous offer to provide him with pilots to guide him in and transports to unload any of the ships that might otherwise draw too much water to let them pass over the bar.49 Instead Hood had his barge bring him all the way from Sandy Hook to Denizes Ferry, a distance of some ten miles. Sir Samuel knew no more than did Graves or Clinton about the whereabouts of the French naval forces; the prevalent opinion in the Leeward Islands Squadron was that de Grasse was bringing a dozen or so of his warships to North America, and sent the rest with a convoy to Europe.50 But where Graves was inclined to wait at New York for news of the French Hood's instinct was to go and look for them. He urged Graves to bring the North American
ships out over the bar, "for whether you attend the army to Rhode Island, or seek the enemy at sea, you have no time to lose; every moment is precious." To Graves this was strange language, especially in view of its source: he was senior to Hood by a year and a half, Hood's flag having come on the same day Graves had been advanced directly from the blue squadron to the red. Confronted by a junior officer who cried for action Graves became meek; he promised to take his squadron to sea the next day, and returned to his flagship to make his preparations. Later the same evening a messenger arrived at Clinton's headquarters with a piece of intelligence from Rhode Island that might have galvanized Graves even had Hood not been present. Three days earlier, on August 25, the Comte de Barras, with all seven of his ships-of-the-line escorting a flotilla of transports and storeships, had put to sea.

Graves's new-found exuberance was frustrated by the weather; for two days the wind refused to blow from a direction that would let him take his ships out of the harbor. He used the intervening period to prepare his plans for the moment when he and Hood encountered the French. The Robust was at the carenage and one of the Prudent's masts was awaiting replacement. The North American Squadron therefore would be able to contribute only five ships-of-the-line, the London, Bedford, Royal Oak, Europe, and America, to the expedition—and the Europe was so leaky that
Graves arranged for the 50-gun Adamant to take her place in the line if she had to drop out. Hood had brought 14 ships-of-the-line from the Leeward Islands, so the line of battle, which Graves as commander-in-chief, would consist of 19 vessels. Since three admirals were on hand the line must be divided into three divisions. Hood would command the van (though the entire line would reverse itself, of course, if the situation demanded that it do so), with the Alfred, Belliqueux, Invincible, Barfleur (Hood's flagship, commanded by his brother Alexander), Monarch, and Centaur. Graves, in the center, would have under his immediate jurisdiction the America, Resolution, Bedford, London, Royal Oak, Montagu, and Europe. Drake, with the Terrible, Ajax, his flagship Princessa, Alcide, Intrepid, and Shrewsbury, would be in the rear.

The two junior admirals would have to take orders from a commander-in-chief whom they had just met, who had never commanded a fleet in battle, and with whose tactical thinking they were utterly unfamiliar. Just as awkward was the fact that the North American and Leeward Islands Squadrons used different signal books. Rodney had adopted the standard Admiralty signals with a few modifications; Graves used the set Arbuthnot had issued in 1779 and had used off Cape Henry. Since Graves was the senior officer his book inevitably took precedence. His secretaries spent August 29 and 30 making the necessary copies for Hood's signal officers, whose task
in the event of an action would be formidable. The Rodney and Arbuthnot signal books described the same series of basic evolutions, but in a different order and with different flags representing the maneuvers.

On August 31 the wind finally turned fair and, at 3:30 p.m., Graves's London led his other four ships-of-the-line and the Adamant over the bar. When Hood, at his anchorage off Sandy Hook, saw that they were under way he ordered his ships to make sail as well. The two squadrons exchanged 13-gun salutes, and set a course to the southward.

The precise destination Graves and Hood had in mind is unclear, largely because by the time either of them got around to recording his thoughts on the subject a number of events had made the reasons for the fleet's departure from New York seem irrelevant. On the day before he sailed Graves told Mr. Stephens that, since De Barras and "all the French fleet from the Cape were sailed, I immediately determined to proceed with both squadrons to the Southward, in hopes to intercept the one or both if possible." He wrote two weeks later that his intention in heading south had been "to go to the Chesapeake, as the Enemys views would most probably be upon that part." Why he had come to that conclusion, if indeed he had, Graves did not explain. He had in his possession only three pieces of hard information: de Grasse (with how many ships no one knew) was due to arrive sometime at some point on the American coast; de
Barras had sailed from Newport; and, according to the captain of the frigate Richmond, which had come into New York on August 29, there had been no enemy ships in the Chesapeake as recently as the twenty-fifth. Clinton, who had more reason than most to be less than candid about the matter, admitted that he did not know until after the fleet had sailed that anything untoward was happening in Virginia. The inescapable conclusion is that Graves put to sea with no more firmly defined intent than to intercept at least one of the two French squadrons he knew were at large and to fight a battle with it. He headed south because he thought that doing so would give him his best chance of catching de Barras, as Arbuthnot had caught des Touches five months earlier. Graves's objective was neither Chesapeake Bay nor any other geographic point; his objective was his enemy's ships-of-the-line.

During the brief voyage down the coast Graves discovered that, for all Sir Samuel Hood's ebullience, the material condition of the Leeward Islands ships was no better than that of Graves's own. The London had to transfer some of her precious fresh beef to the other two flagships; the Terrible's pumps had been working steadily since her departure from the West Indies, and several of the other ships-of-the-line had sprung masts. One of Graves's relatives claimed afterwards that Hood's squadron "came to America in a state more proper to have entered the port of New York
for re-equipment than to be led forth directly against a powerful enemy."

After an uneventful voyage of four and a half days the British fleet arrived off the capes of the Chesapeake early on the morning of September 5. At 9:30 a.m. the lookout at the masthead of the frigate Solebay announced that he could see Cape Henry on the horizon, and that there were ships at anchor in Lynnhaven Bay. The Solebay's captain, Charles Everitt, had spent considerable time in the Chesapeake; he was one of the officers who had advised Lord Cornwallis against fortifying Old Point Comfort. Everitt knew that the people of the Tidewater were in the habit of burning live pine trees to make tar, and his initial conclusion was that his lookout had mistaken a line of tall tree stumps for ships' masts. When he climbed the Solebay's rigging to see for himself, however, Everitt's optimism was dashed: the "trees" were flying white banners ornamented with the Bourbon lilies. The Comte de Grasse had brought his entire fleet to Chesapeake Bay, and Thomas Graves had brought his to one of the worst catastrophes in the history of the Royal Navy.

IV

When Graves and de Grasse sighted each other they reacted in a manner paradigmatic of eighteenth-century admirals. Not once during the Battle of Chesapeake did
either commander-in-chief demonstrate a perception that the object they were contesting was geographic. Graves was not attempting to seize the command of Chesapeake Bay, nor was de Grasse trying to stop him from doing so. When the French admiral saw the British topsails poke over the horizon his instinct was to get under way and out to sea, where he could fight a traditional naval battle unencumbered by the land; Graves's instinct was to accept the challenge. As though by agreement the two fleets became arrayed in a manner that would let the admirals pay no attention to anything but what they conceived to be the task at hand, which was to destroy each other's ships.

De Grasse had anchored his 24 ships-of-the-line in three irregular rows in Lynnehaven Bay, where Arbuthnot had taken refuge after his battle of the previous March. The French flagship, the 90-gun Ville de Paris, was a handsome vessel only four years old; the others were two-deckers of 80, 74, or 64 guns. Graves had two 90-gun ships, his own London and Hood's Barfleur, but with a total of 19 ships he was inferior by five. To a man brought up on the doctrine that any numerical difference between opposing fleets could be decisive that was a significant discrepancy, but in his approach Graves showed no hesitation. A fresh, steady breeze was blowing from the north-northeast, almost directly from behind the British as they formed their line of battle and bore resolutely down on Cape Henry. Graves would have
the weather gauge, and in the moderate sea that was running there would be no reason for him to give it up.

It happened that when the British fleet came within view of Cape Henry the tide was coming in. To get out of Lynnehaven Bay and around the cape de Grasse would have to work slightly to windward; the incoming tide and the tricky current coming out of the James River would throw his closely-packed squadron into disorder; he therefore decided not to get under way until high water. For nearly three hours the French watched impatiently as the British drew closer to the mouth of Chesapeake. At noon de Grasse, having concluded that the tide had turned, finally hoisted the signal to set sail. There was no time for the lengthy process of weighing anchor; the admiral ordered the ships' hawsers cut. There was a mad rush for the channel between Cape Henry and Middle Ground, the sand bank that lay in the middle of the entrance to the Chesapeake. Since each French captain wanted to advertise his enthusiasm the ships-of-the-line straggled around Cape Henry in no recognisable order. Four or five of them, including the Auguste, flagship of Commodore the Comte de Bougainville, quickly became isolated from the rest.

While de Grasse was attempting to get his squadron out of Lynnehaven Bay Graves was meticulously adjusting his line of battle—a nerve-wracking task, since his ships were progressing at slightly varying speeds and fourteen of his
nineteen captains were wrestling with signal books they had received less than a week earlier. The delay in de Grasse's emergence gave Graves a period of grace which he used to advantage; none of his numerous critics ever questioned that the British line was in good order when it finally went into action. Since the wind was blowing from slightly to starboard of dead astern the fleet was on the starboard tack and, in accordance with the previously distributed instructions, Hood's division was in the lead.

As the neatly-formed British line drew closer to the disorderly mass of French ships off Cape Henry Graves found himself in what one historian called "a position almost beyond the wildest dreams of a sea-commander." The enemy van was offering itself up for destruction; Hood, who was in a good position to judge, claimed afterwards that if Graves had broken his line and attacked de Bougainville an hour and a half would have elapsed before any more of de Grasse's ships could work their way around the cape and join the fight. According to Sir Samuel, Graves should have hauled down the signal for the line and hoisted the one for "general chase."

Graves did not. Perhaps he was worried lest he become embroiled in a battle in the shallows around Middle Ground; perhaps, on the basis of his experience of the morning, he feared that if he broke his line an hour and a half would not be enough to reassemble it. Perhaps, on the other hand,
Graves's mind, the mind of a rear-admiral who had never commanded at a fleet action, was so infested with the sanctified doctrine of the line of battle that he was incapable of imagining how to fight in any other manner. His own explanation, in a private letter he wrote to the Earl of Sandwich nine days later, was that "My aim was to get close, to form parallel, extend with them, and attack all together" — in other words, to set his own line on a course identical to that of the French, adjust the intervals between his ships so that the lines were of the same length, and then order his captains to bear down, simultaneously, on the enemy vessels directly opposite them.

Instead of descending on de Bougainville and forcing his way into the Chesapeake Graves did precisely what De Grasse undoubtedly would have asked him to do. At 2:11, just as the Alfred, the leading ship of Hood's division, was about to enter the channel between Cape Henry and Middle Ground, Graves ordered the fleet to wear together and form line on the port tack, heading due east. That maneuver reversed the order of the ships, placing Drake in the van and Hood in the rear. For an hour and 35 minutes the British lay nearly motionless, their main topsails aback, as the London signalled first one ship and then another to get into her precise station in the line. Graves, quite deliberately, was giving de Grasse time to get his fleet into order. Since Graves held the weather gauge he could choose for
himself what he called "the moment for successful attack" -- and that moment, in his mind, would come when the enemy's van was directly opposite his own. By the time the moment came all of de Grasse's 24 ships-of-the-line had rounded Cape Henry and formed line of battle -- an irregular line with some gaps in it, but one that contained five more ships than did the British one. At 3:46, according to the London's logbook, Graves "made the Sigl. for the Ships to bear down and Engage their Opponents." Of the flag officers who served on both sides during the Battle of the Chesapeake the only one whose contemporaries never found fault with his performance was Francis Drake. When he saw the signal for close action go up in the London Drake obeyed it without hesitating. The head of the line veered toward the French, and at 4:15 the leading British ship, the 74-gun Shrewsbury, opened fire.

Within a few minutes the vans of both fleets were hotly engaged. A French cannon ball tore off the left leg of the Shrewsbury's captain, Mark Robinson; another killed her first lieutenant, and her sails and rigging were so mutilated that she had to drop out of the line, with 14 killed and 52 wounded. No fewer than 65 shot struck the hull of the next ship, the Intrepid, and her rudder was so badly damaged that she scarcely could hold her course. Drake's flagship, the Princessa, suffered 17 casualties and lost her main topgallant mast, her driver, and fourteen
shrouds, the heavy ropes that held up her lower masts.

From the quarterdeck of the London Graves could see that the ships of his van were dealing out as much punishment as they were receiving, but he also was becoming aware that something was going wrong. He had spent the past seven hours maneuvering his ships into a position from which all 19 of them could open fire on their enemy counterparts at once. Until the moment when the signal for close action went up the battle had developed in textbook fashion, but by 5:00 only the first half of the line had gotten into action. Instead of turning into a disciplined mêlée the battle was beginning to bear an eerie resemblance to the one Arbuthnot had fought with des Touches: the opposing lines were squeezed together at their heads, the ships in the vans suffering dreadfully, the centers exchanging broadsides at long range, and the rears not engaged at all. The British rear, under the command of the outwardly belligerent Sir Samuel Hood, was sailing placidly along a course roughly parallel to that of the French, as though the signal for close action had not been hoisted.

Why Graves's carefully laid and completely orthodox battle plan went awry is a mystery. Hood claimed afterwards that Graves repeated Arbuthnot's mistake: the London flew the signal for the line and the one for close action simultaneously, putting the captains in the rear division in such a state of confusion that they feared to do anything
other than hold their course.  

The evidence regarding Hood's contention is ambiguous. According to the London's logbook Graves "haul'd down the Sigl. for the Line ahead that it might not interfere with the Sigl. to Engage close" at 4:11, a few minutes before the Shrewsbury opened fire. 

The Barfleur's log merely noted that Graves hoisted the signal for close action at 4:00, and at 4:11 fired a gun to call attention to it; the signal for the line remained up until 5:25. In his letter to Sandwich Graves stated that 

to prevent the signal for the line becoming an impediment to the rear, I took in the signal for the line before any firing began and urge the close action, and only resumed the signal for the line for about five or seven minutes to push the ships ahead of me forward, and who were some of them upon my beam. Unfortunately, the signal for the line was thought to be kept up until half after five, when the rear division bore down; but the fair occasion was gone.

It was indeed. By 5:30 the sky was darkening, and de Grasse was preparing to finish off the British van. The ships of his own van had been mauled brutally by the fire of Drake's division, but the French center and rear scarcely had been touched. De Grasse therefore ordered his damaged vessels to drop out of the line to leeward, allowing the fresh ships of the center to take their place. It was a simple, obvious maneuver, but the sails and rigging of the leading British ships were so mutilated that Drake could do nothing to prevent it.

Graves, whose London had sustained considerable damage
despite her being so far from the heat of the fighting (her fore topgallant mast had come down, and three of her guns were dismounted), could see that the battle was developing in his enemy's favor. The continued recalcitrance of his rear division continued to bewilder Graves, but neither de Grasse nor the waning daylight would permit him to make any major adjustments to his line. Though the wind was starting to veer toward the east the British still held the weather gauge, and thus the option of continuing or breaking off the action. At 6:25 the signal for close action came down; five minutes later it was replaced by a blue and yellow checkered pennant that meant "discontinue the engagement." The frigates Solebay and Fortunée ran along the disengaged side of the line, delivering to each captain Graves's orders for the night: the line of battle was to be maintained, parallel to and just out of range of the French. Sunset had arrived fortuitously; since de Grasse persisted in steering to the east it should be possible to renew the battle in the morning.  

During the night busy frigates brought Graves the reports of the damage sustained by the ships-of-the-line. The smoke of the battle, and afterwards the darkness, had prevented the admiral from appreciating the sufferings of the vessels ahead of him, but as he read the reports from their captains he slowly came to realize that his van nearly had been incapacitated. The Shrewsbury, Montagu, and
Princessa would be unmanageable for at least a day, and the Alcide, Ajax, Europe, Resolution, Bedford, and Monarch all had sustained such damage to their top hamper that to ask them to undertake any sort of maneuvers would be dangerous. The Shrewsbury, Intrepid, Alcide, and Europe were leaking. The vessel in the worst condition, though, was the 74-gun Terrible, which had entered the action with her pumps working and her mainmast sprung. Two French cannon balls had passed through her foremost; several more had struck her hull near the waterline. Her elaborate chain pump mechanism, having been kept in motion for at least three weeks, was about to expire, and the carpenters already had used up all the spare leather washers that made the pumps work. The Terrible was making more than two feet of water every half hour.  

When the sun rose on September 6 the long line of French ships was still visible on the southern horizon, but Graves had abandoned his thoughts of resuming the battle. Drake shifted his flag to the Alcide, the most nearly intact ship of his division, and Captain Colpoys, of the frigate Orpheus, went on board the Shrewsbury to take command of her in the absence of her captain and first lieutenant. While the crews of the damaged ships were weaving new shrouds and halyards and plugging shot holes Rear Admiral Hood was applying himself to a less constructive but, to him, more enjoyable undertaking. He was
sitting at his desk, dictating to his secretary a memoran-
dum regarding the events of the previous day. To Sir
Samuel the recording of his opinions was a serious matter;
with his own hand he edited the secretary's draft, changing
the paragraph structure and rendering some of the verbiage
slightly less obnoxious. The original document began:

Yesterday Rear Admiral Graves had a rich and
most delightful harvest of glory presented to
him, but he neglected to gather it, in more ways
than one---First in not ordering the ships of
the Enemy's Van, to be closely attacked as they
came out of Lynn haven Bay---Secondly when he
saw the Enemy's van was so greatly extended
beyond the Center & Rear, that he did not attack
it with his whole force, had he so done eight
or ten Ships, must inevitably have been demoli-
shed.  

When Hood rewrote the memorandum he changed "Rear Admiral
Graves" to "the British fleet," and some of the verbs from
the active voice to the passive. The central theme
remained intact: if Hood had been in command the British
would have won the battle. Later in the morning Captain
Everitt, of the Solebay, came on board the Barfleur with a
message from the flagship: Graves wanted Hood's opinion
as to whether the action should be renewed. Sir Samuel was
in no mood to reply civilly to such a query. He sent
Everitt back to the London with a terse note: "I dare say
Mr. Graves will do what is right; I can send no opinion,
but whenever he, Mr. Graves, wishes to see me, I will wait
upon him with pleasure."  

Throughout the day after the battle the weather
remained clear and the sea calm, allowing the repairs to the ships to proceed as smoothly as could be expected. Both fleets, their lines of battle some seven or eight miles apart, continued to head toward the southeast, away from the Chesapeake. Graves's only gesture in the direction of the bay was to send the frigates Medea, Iris, and Richmond to Yorktown with a message Clinton had asked him to deliver to Cornwallis. All the admirals still were too busy concentrating on their damaged ships and each other to spare a thought for anything else. With the battle over Graves was able to conceive of no more sophisticated plan than to stay in contact with the French for as long as it took him to repair his ships.

On the eighth the seas rose and the wind freshened, bringing down the Intrepid's main topmast and causing the Terrible to leak so badly that her captain, William Finch, hoisted the signal of distress. That evening the Medea returned from the Chesapeake. Her captain, Henry Duncan, reported that little was happening in the bay; he had seen half a dozen French ships, only one of which had seemed to be a ship-of-the-line. Graves summoned Hood and Drake on board the London to pass on the information the Medea had brought, but neither of the junior admirals seems to have suggested any action be taken on it. The way still was open for the British to enter the Chesapeake if they chose, but Graves could think of nothing but his damaged
ships and the enemy line of battle that still was visible on the horizon. His "repeated misfortunes," he told Mr. Stephens later, "in sight of a superior enemy who kept us all extended and in motion, filled the mind with anxiety and put us in a situation not to be envied."  

So filled was the admiral's mind with anxiety that he failed to appreciate a piece of information that luck put into his hands at what he could have turned into a crucial moment. On the evening of September 8 the frigate Pegasus joined the fleet. She originally had been part of the Leeward Islands Squadron, and had accompanied Sir George Rodney on the first leg of his voyage to England. Shortly after leaving St. Eustatius the Pegasus, with six victuallers and a storeship under her escort, had parted company with the rest of the convoy and headed for New York. Her captain, John Stanhope, was entrusted with a dispatch for Admiral Arbuthnot, who Sir George still thought was in command in North America. On his way to New York Stanhope lost his convoy to a squadron of French warships (probably those of the Compte de Barras). After showing Sir Henry Clinton the dispatch he had proceeded to the south to look for Graves. The dispatch, nearly four weeks old by the time Graves received it, read, in part, as follows:

Gibraltar, at sea, 13 Aug., 1781

Sir,

Herewith I have the honour to enclose you
intelligence which I received from St. Thomas's the night before I sailed from St. Eustatius, and to acquaint you that I left Sir Samuel Hood preparing to sail with all possible dispatch... for the Capes of Virginia, where I am persuaded the French intend making their grand effort. Permit me therefore to recommend it to you to collect all the force you can, and form a junction with Sir Samuel there.

The evidence from St. Thomas's consisted of a report that de Grasse, during his stop at Cape François before leaving for North America, had engaged the services of 30 pilots who were familiar with the Chesapeake. Graves, who doubtless had been awake for all but a few of the preceding 144 hours, seems to have failed completely to absorb Rodney's advice that de Grasse was making a "grand effort" in Virginia. The evidence Graves had before his eyes seemed to contradict such a theory: the French line of battle still pointed out to sea.

Throughout September 9 the fleets remained in contact. Graves continued to be preoccupied with the condition of his ships, and particularly that of the Terrible. Captain Finch reported that "Our Leaks since Yesterday have increased very much, to day we were alarmed when we came against a very trifling head Sea, with our Leaks gaining (over six hand Pumps kept briskly going) 2 feet 2 Inches in 25 Minutes, and we are all convinced that she will make much more in a gale of Wind, our Chain Pumps are very bad, should the least Accident happen, I am apprehensive the Ship cannot be saved, our Foremast is much wounded." Hood
(or so he claimed some days later) was paying more attention to the actions of the enemy. He observed that de Grasse's ships, though they showed no inclination to close the range, were carrying "a press of sail, which proved to me beyond a doubt that De Grasse had other views than fighting."

Hood professed himself "distressed that Mr. Graves did not carry all the sail he could also, and endeavour to get off the Chesapeake before him."¹⁰

When the sun rose on the tenth the French had disappeared. Hood, mastering the impatience he must have felt, sent a message to Graves:

Sir:—

I flatter myself you will forgive the liberty I take in asking whether you have any knowledge where the French fleet is, as we can see nothing of it from the Barfleur.

By the press of sail De Grasse carried yesterday (and he must even have done the same the preceding night, by being where [he] was at daylight), I am inclined to think his aim is the Chesapeake, in order to be strengthened by the ships there, either by adding them to his present force, or by exchanging his disabled ships for them. Admitting that to be his plan, will he not cut off the frigates you have sent to reconnoitre, as well as the ships you expect from New York? And if he should enter the Bay, which is by no means improbable, will he not succeed in giving most effectual succour to the rebels?¹¹

Sir Samuel, it seems, was the first officer in the British fleet to figure out what de Grasse was doing in North America.

Graves responded to Hood's note by summoning him and Drake to the London for a council of war. The meeting,
from Hood's viewpoint, was far from satisfactory; neither of the other admirals knew more than he did of de Grasse's whereabouts, no frigates had been detached to follow the French, and in any case several of the British ships-of-the-line still were in no condition to fight another battle. On the eleventh Graves called another council of war to decide the fate of the Terrible. Captain Finch already had completed the necessary formalities; the ship's lieutenants, sailing master, boatswain, gunner, and carpenter had certified in writing that "it is our opinions that it is absolutely impracticable to carry her into Port." The three admirals agreed that the only course was "to take out her people and sink her." For the rest of the day the boats of the fleet swarmed around the Terrible, transferring her crew, stores, and fresh water to the other ships. In the evening the wreck was set on fire, and the British fleet at last set a course for the Chesapeake.

Early on the morning of the thirteenth the Medea, which had been sent ahead to reconnoiter the bay, rejoined the fleet. Captain Duncan brought the worst possible news. The French ships-of-the-line, which seemed even more numerous than they had before (they were; de Barras's squadron from Rhode Island had arrived along with de Grasse's), were at anchor in a great crescent formation inside Horseshoe Shoal, in such a manner that they
effectively blocked the entrance to the York. On his way past the capes de Grasse had captured the Iris and Richmond, which had been industriously engaged in cutting loose the anchor buoys the French had left in Lynnehaven Bay on the day of the battle. The discovery that his enemy had beaten him to the Chesapeake, and therefore must have some pressing reason for wanting to possess it, left Graves at a loss. He sent a note to Hood, relaying the intelligence and soliciting "his opinion what to do with the fleet."

Sir Samuel's reply was characteristic of his behavior throughout the preceding two weeks: direct, intelligent, barely within the bounds of civility, and utterly useless:

Rear Admiral Sir Samuel Hood presents his compliments to Rear-Admiral Graves. Is extremely concerned to find by his note just received that the French fleet is at anchor in the Chesapeake above the Horse Shoe, though it is no more than what he expected, as the press of sail the fleet carried on the 9th and in the night of the 8th made it very clear to him what De Grasse's intentions were. Sir Samuel would be very glad to send an opinion, but he really knows not what to say in the truly lamentable state we have brought ourselves.

Graves, after sending the Medea back to the Chesapeake for a second look, called Hood and Drake to another council of war. With so many damaged ships in the fleet there was no point in attempting to dislodge de Grasse from his anchorage. Furthermore the equinox was approaching, and Graves, like most seamen of his generation, believed that
fact meant that a gale could be expected. Since the French obviously did not intend to come out of the bay and fight another battle, the presence of the British fleet off the capes of the Chesapeake could serve no further purpose. The three admirals therefore agreed that "the British Squadron...should proceed with all dispatch to New York, and there use every possible means for putting the Squadron into the best state for service."  

When the Medea returned and confirmed her earlier report the fleet set its course for New York. Graves, aware that an event of consequence had taken place and uneasy about the part he had played in it, prepared a dispatch to Mr. Stephens, enclosing with it the resolves of the councils of war and the various documents attesting to the damages his ships had sustained. Before sealing the packet and entrusting it to Captain Duncan, who was to deliver it to the Admiralty, Graves also wrote a private letter to the Earl of Sandwich. After summarizing the events of the battle the dejected admiral offered an apology:

The French line was twenty-four heavy ships, ours nineteen; yet I think that had our efforts been made together, some of their van, four or five sail, must have been cut to pieces. The signal was not understood. I do not mean to blame anyone, my Lord. I hope we all did our best.
While the Royal Navy was fighting the Battle of the Chesapeake Sir Henry Clinton was awakening, slowly and with great reluctance, to the fact that George Washington and the Comte de Rochambeau had outgeneralled him. On September 2, two days after the British fleet sailed for the Chesapeake, Sir Henry learned that a spectacular trap was being sprung: most of the French/American army had abandoned its positions before New York and was on the march to the southward. On the same day Pegasus arrived at New York with Rodney's dispatch postulating that the French were going to "make their grand effort" in Virginia. The outline of the enemy plan suddenly became clear: Cornwallis, with the little army he was supposed to be using merely to garrison the embryonic naval base at Yorktown, was to be the object of an offensive involving two battle fleets and nearly 15,000 men. The allied scheme was brilliant and the British situation horrifying. Cornwallis's force of 7,000 was too weak to defend itself against such an onslaught, but so big that its loss could end the war.101

Clinton immediately conceived two responses. Since Washington had left half of his American army behind Sir Henry dared not denude New York altogether, but he did pile some 4,000 of his troops into their transports with the idea of sending them to Virginia in support of Cornwallis. In
a forlorn attempt at a diversionary tactic Sir Henry sent
Benedict Arnold, who had returned from New York upon being
superseded by Phillips in the Chesapeake, on an expedition
against New London, Connecticut. Arnold, at the head of
some 1,500 men, carried out his mission with what Clinton
called "his usual spirit and address," but in putting New
London to the torch accomplished nothing of a substantive
nature beyond the further tarnishing of his reputation in
American history. 102

Sir Henry was attempting to maintain his equilibrium.
Cornwallis, after all, was a soldier of no small courage
and ability, and he had had two weeks to prepare his works
at Yorktown. Admiral Graves and Sir Samuel Hood, whose
astonishingly rapid arrival and departure had impressed
Clinton as the way a naval officer ought to behave, had
gone to the Chesapeake at precisely the right moment to
intercept de Grasse. If Cornwallis and the navy did their
jobs properly, Clinton was able to tell himself, the enemy's
scheme could be frustrated yet.

Then, on the thirteenth, came a letter from Graves.
"I am sorry to inform you," he wrote, "that the enemy
have so great a naval force in the Chesapeake that they
are absolute masters of its navigation....We met them the
5th coming out of the Chesapeake, and had a pretty sharp
brush with their van and part of their center; the rear on
neither side was engaged." Graves was trying to renew the
action, but for the moment it was virtually impossible for any aid to be sent to Cornwallis by sea. "How far a Diversion made in the Neighbourhood of York may effect any good Purposes your Excellency is by far the best Judge. All that I can say is that every resistance the fleet can make shall not be wanting; for we must either stand or fall together."\textsuperscript{103}

The idea that everyone on the British side "must stand or fall together" suited Clinton's mood of the moment. On receipt of Graves's letter he called the first of a series of councils of war, in which he formally described the situation to his generals and they agreed that the relief expedition should not proceed to the Chesapeake until further word came from Graves, or until the long awaited Admiral Digby arrived with naval reinforcements.\textsuperscript{104} Clinton seems to have sensed that the great catastrophe of his career was in the offing; henceforth he would make sure that the blame for every move he made was shared, preferably in writing, by every officer available.

On September 20 the first of Grave's ships-of-the-line, repleat with fished spars, spliced lines, and freshly-plugged shot holes, worked their way over the bar. Clinton's intention had been to proceed on his relief expedition as soon as the fleet was available to escort it, but the discovery of the damage the warships had sustained dashed his hopes. The admiral wrote that "I
should be greatly wanting were I not to apprise Your Excellency that the injuries received by the fleet in the action, added to the complaints of several very crazy ships makes it quite uncertain how soon the fleet can be got to sea."\(^{105}\) The military population of New York was aware that a great deal depended upon how quickly those ships could be repaired. Frederick MacKenzie, one of Clinton's officers, wrote in his diary that "The fate of America in a great measure depends upon our operations at this time. With 20 sail of the line, besides the 50's and 44's, something should be attempted by Sea, which is the only effectual way of raising the Siege. Should Admiral Digby, and the other ships that are expected, arrive within 6 or 8 days, there can be no doubt about this matter."\(^{106}\)

Clinton called another council of war on September 24, this time with the three admirals and Commodore Affleck present. It was decided that the troops for the relief of Yorktown should be put on board the ships-of-the-line, as the transports might retard the fleet's progress. All the generals and admirals signed a letter to Cornwallis, informing him that the expedition would get under way by October 5. Hood suggested that three fireships, in addition to the two already available, be prepared, in case de Grasse could be trapped in the mouth of one of the rivers.

As the council was breaking up word came that Admiral
Digby had arrived. In addition to his flagship, the 98-gun Prince George, he had brought with him the Canada, 74, the Lion, 64, and a frigate. When he learned of the tense situation at New York Digby declined to take his ships over the bar, but on the twenty-sixth he and one of his midshipmen came up the river in the sloop-of-war Lively. It was an event of some importance, for the midshipman was none other than Prince William Henry, the future King William IV. His Royal Highness, of course, had to be greeted with a 21-gun salute, and provided with suitable lodgings at the expense of one of the brigadier generals. On the following day the prince reviewed two infantry regiments, and went to dinner and a concert at one of Clinton's houses.\[107\]

Digby's orders, dated July 9, put him in command of the North American Squadron; Graves was to "proceed in the London to Jamaica in order to reinforce the Squadron on that Station."\[109\] The newly-arrived admiral, however, politely refused to take over, on the grounds that the London could not be spared and the current moment of crisis was no time for a change of command. Digby, deliberately or otherwise, thereby guaranteed himself historical anonymity, which was preferable to the fate that awaited Graves.

The fleet, now with four admirals directing it, was expanding to awesome proportions. The dockyard finally was finished with the Robust and Prudent, and the 50-gun
Warwick and the frigate Pearl, stopping at Sandy Hook on their way home from Quebec, were pressed into service as well. The Warwick was a particularly welcome acquisition, for her captain was George Keith Elphinstone, the hero of the siege of Charleston. The work on the ships that had been damaged off the Chesapeake, however, was proceeding with infuriating slowness. When William MacKenzie viewed the situation objectively he could not be optimistic:

The Officers of the Navy say they will be ready by the 5th October; but when it is seen, that the Montague has a Main Mast to get in, another a Bowsprit to be fished, most of them either Yards or top Masts to get up, and several of them much to do about their rigging, I think I may venture to say they will not all be ready to go down to Sandy Hook by the 10th—After that we may allow three days before the ships are all fairly over the bar, and Seven days more before anything can be effected for the relief of Lord Cornwallis. The Enemy, who are certainly well informed of our situation, and know how forward we are with our fleet, will doubtless make ever possible effort to effect the reduction of the post at Yorktown, before we are in a condition to attempt relieving it.

Delay followed delay. The London's gunner discovered that most of her powder was defective, and Graves had to apply to Clinton to make good the deficiency from the army's ordnance store. In a sudden squall the Alcide and Shrewsbury managed to collide with each other somewhere in the harbor approaches, tearing away the latter vessel's bowsprit and foreyard. By October 8 Graves himself was worrying that the relief effort might be too late. Taking a leaf out of Clinton's book he summoned a council of war.
As Hood related the episode,

Soon after we were assembled Mr. Graves proposed, and wished to reduce to writing, the following question, 'Whether it was practicable to relieve Lord Cornwallis in the Chesapeake?' This astonished me exceedingly, as it seemed plainly to indicate a design of having difficulties started against attempting what the generals and admirals had most unanimously agreed to.\(^{114}\)

Graves brought up another awkward point: if the expedition were not successful Hood would have to return to New York, in order to land the troops embarked in his ships-of-the-line, before he went on his way back to the Leeward Islands. Sir Samuel's answer, as Graves recorded it, was that "where much was at Stake, Something must be risqued; and the West India Islands in that Case must take their Chance in the general Event."\(^{115}\)

The council of war seems to have eradicated whatever respect Sir Samuel Hood had felt toward Thomas Graves. To his friend Jackson Hood confided that

I think very meanly of the ability of our present commanding officer. I know he is a cunning man, he may be a good theoretical man, but he is certainly a bad practical one, and most clearly proved himself on the 5th of last month to be unequal to the conducting of a great squadron....

I trust you will bear in mind that I write to you most confidentially. Desperate cases require bold remedies.\(^{116}\)

It had become clear that the fleet's departure for the Chesapeake would be at least two weeks overdue, but there seemed to be every reason to pursue the enterprise regardless. The letters that Cornwallis somehow managed
to send to New York showed that his army, having been assured that it was about to be rescued, was defending itself tenaciously. In what seemed like an omen one of the frigates brought in an invaluable prize, a French ship loaded with a cargo of masts. On the thirteenth the Torbay and Prince William, the two ships-of-the-line Parker had detained at Jamaica, arrived; Hood called them "a noble acquisition, and [one which] makes my heart bound with joy."  

The armada that sailed over the bar on October 19 was the greatest concentration of British naval forces ever seen in North America. There were 25 ships-of-the-line, three of them three-deckers. Digby commanded the van, Graves the center, and Hood the rear; the standard three division made no allowance for a fourth admiral, but Drake's flagship, the Princessa, was given the honor of sailing at the head of the line. The two 50-gun ships, the Adamant and Warwick, were assigned stations in the line along with the others; since de Grasse would be numerically superior no British gun could be wasted. Crammed into the warships' 'tweedeeck spaces were 7,149 troops, including Sir Henry Clinton and his headquarters staff. Fourteen frigates and sloops and four fireships sailed on the fringes of the formation. Everyone knew that the odds of the fleet's forcing its way into the Chesapeake and lifting the siege of Yorktown were slim, but the prevalent attitude was one
of determination. George Damer, an army officer who was billeted with half a grenadier battalion on board the Bedford, described to Lord George Germain "the general alacrity and cheerfulness with which everything is undertaken both by navy and army, which tends to the relief and support of so universal a favourite as my Lord Cornwallis.... My next letter to your Lordship will I hope and trust be dated from Yorktown, or at least at sea after a tough and decisive engagement in our favor."\(^{118}\)

With a little effort Graves and Clinton could convince themselves that their adventurous scheme had a fair chance of success. De Grasse, having been joined by the ships de Barras had brought from Newport, would have more than thirty ships-of-the-line, but in a pitched battle amid the complicated geography of the Chesapeake numbers might not mean much. If the troops could be landed Clinton and Cornwallis would have roughly the same strength as Washington and Rochambeau; the campaign in Virginia might actually be turned into a British offensive. And no matter what happened there would be some aesthetic satisfaction to be derived from the knowledge that the issue had been settled in the most massive land and sea battle of the war.

The great battle, alas, was not to take place. At four o'clock on the morning of October 24 the fleet encountered a tiny schooner called the Mary. Her crew consisted of a white man and two negroes, one of whom had
been hired once by Captain Symonds to serve as pilot of the 
Charon. When the men announced that they had "escaped"
from Yorktown a few days earlier Graves had one of his 
officers interrogate them.119 It took only a few minutes of 
questioning for one awesome fact to emerge, a fact the 
probability of which had been uppermost in the mind of every-
one in the British fleet, but which had been considered 
unmentionable. On the eighteenth, the day before the 
expedition's departure from New York, Cornwallis had 
surrendered.

VI

On September 5, 1781, Thomas Graves, accidentally and 
without knowing it, presided over the Royal Navy's most 
important strategic defeat of the eighteenth century.
Michael Lewis observed that "He had lost no engagement, no 
ships, none was lost on either side. He had merely lost 
America."120 The thrust of that statement, of course, is 
rhetorical; the loss of America was the product of a war 
that had been going on for more than six years, and of 
political, economic, and social phenomena whose roots 
could be traced through several decades. But the Yorktown 
campaign was the one that ended the war, and the naval 
officer whose failure made a British victory in that 
campaign impossible must be labelled one of the leading 
characters in the disaster.
The Battle of the Chesapeake, since it happened to occur between the departure of one naval commander-in-chief and the arrival of another, projected Graves into an historical conspicuousness which he otherwise would not have earned—and which, one somehow gets the impression, he did not want. He was a remarkably ordinary and not particularly ambitious admiral who by luck was present at one of the great moments of naval history. As such he deserves sympathy, but the decisions he made and the actions he took cannot be ignored.

Graves fought the Battle of the Chesapeake armed with only the haziest conception of the battle's strategic context. The perennial question of why, with the mouth of the Chesapeake open before it, the navy did not enter the bay and rescue the army at Yorktown has a simple answer: Graves did not know that Cornwallis had any reason to be rescued. When he sailed from New York the admiral's intention was to fight a battle with the French fleet. He did so, and when he realized that he could not win the battle he withdrew, as any doctrinaire admiral who held the weather gauge could have been expected to do.

It may be noted that de Grasse, who did know about the French/American expedition that was on its way down the Chesapeake from New York, fought the battle on terms that were just as simplistic. When he sighted the British fleet approaching his anchorage the French admiral did not know
how familiar his enemy counterpart was with the situation; Graves, for all de Grasse knew, might be intending to risk all in a reckless attempt to force an entrance into the Chesapeake. Yet de Grasse's response, even after he had had three hours to ponder the matter while waiting for the tide to change, was not to defend the channel between Cape Henry and Middle Ground but to sally forth and do battle on the open sea. The Battle of the Chesapeake was one incident in a classic campaign whose military and naval elements were intimately related, but the two admirals, as Alfred Thayer Mahan might have put it, were fighting a sea battle for the sake of fighting a sea battle.

When he undertook his second expedition to the Chesapeake Graves was in possession of the essential facts, and fully intended to fight his way through the French fleet and into the bay. There is no reason to doubt that he would have tried to relieve Cornwallis on September 5 as well, had there been any obvious reason to do so. The Yorktown campaign is riddled with irresistible "ifs." If word that the French and Americans were directing their main effort at Cornwallis had reached New York three days earlier the fleet that arrived off the capes on September 5 would have been loaded with troops. The ships-of-the-line would have sailed into the channel, and de Grasse, a tactician of demonstrated mediocrity, probably would have been unable to keep them out of the bay. Getting out again with Cornwallis's
army on board, of course, would have been another matter. Somewhere near the mouth of the York an epic battle would have been fought; ships would have been sunk and hundreds of men would have died. Such a scenario was what Graves and Clinton had in mind when they left New York on October 19, and they probably were correct in thinking that a gruesome action in the Chesapeake, whatever its outcome, would be less disastrous to England than letting Cornwallis surrender. Graves's failure to try to rescue Cornwallis's army on September 5 was due not to incompetence or cowardice, but to ignorance.

Any fair evaluation of Graves's conduct therefore must consider two matters independently: his failure to decipher the French/American scheme before he left New York the first time, and his failure, having incorrectly defined the terms on which the battle was to be fought, to win it. In both cases he demonstrated good intentions, conscientiousness, and a conspicuous lack of imagination.

That the intelligence reports about the allied offensive were inadequate and late obviously was not Graves's fault. That neither he nor anyone else on the British side understood how the campaign was developing until it was almost over was understandable, but a distinction could have been drawn between not knowing what was going on and assuming that nothing was. For more than a month Graves had been receiving hints that a large French naval force was
coming to North America. He reacted to the scarcity of more detailed evidence not by sending his ships out to get information for him, or even by risking his career and the British war effort by guessing at de Grasse's objective and preparing to defend it as best he could, but by doing nothing. The detail of the Yorktown campaign that redounds least to Graves's credit is the fact that he did not know that de Barras's squadron had left Newport until Clinton told him. That de Barras was not blockaded, or even closely watched, while the British knew some sort of enemy naval campaign to be in the works was inexcusable. It took Sir Samuel Hood to convince Graves of what should have been obvious: that simply to sit behind the bar at New York waiting for de Grasse's plan to be revealed was to invite calamity. There was an irony in the timing of Hood's arrival though; if he had been a few days later in jolting Graves into action the latter probably would have been at New York to receive the news that Rochambeau and Washington were marching south. No evidence suggests convincingly that any of the alternative moves the Royal Navy could have made in the weeks leading up to the battle would have had much effect on the outcome of the campaign. The fact remains, however, that Graves, in what he had plenty of reason to believe was a crucial period of the war, waited for his enemies to manipulate him.

The battle itself has to be labelled typical of its
species. Any condemnation of Graves for giving the French time to work their way out of Lynnehaven Bay and form line must be accompanied by a condemnation of every other admiral who believed in the line of battle. Graves's tactics off the Chesapeake were dull and inspired, as were the tactics of practically every other British naval officer before Nelson. The line of battle had been conceived as a defense against the crossing of the "T." It was a successful tactic in that it made defeat unlikely; Graves only committed the standard sin of his generation in failing to realize that the line also made victory almost impossible.

In one sense the Battle of the Chesapeake supported the theory that tactics should be simple and standardized. The bizarre collection of ships and officers Graves had at his disposal was barely manageable at best; to have attempted some original mode of attack would have begat chaos. Fourteen of the 19 captains had not met the commander-in-chief until a week prior to the battle, and most of them probably never did meet him personally. Tradition and tactical orthodoxy were all that enabled an admiral with such a fleet under his command to fight a battle at all. It is a tribute to the discipline of the Royal Navy that Graves's line functioned as efficiently as it did.

Why the entire British line did not get into action probably never will be known. The evidence regarding the crucial signal flags is directly contradictory: Graves
claimed that the signal for the line came down when the one for close action went up, while Hood contended that both were flying at the same time. There may have been a genuine misunderstanding; in the midst of a naval battle replete with excitement, noise, and powder smoke men's eyes frequently played tricks on them. But even the simultaneous presence of the two signals would not constitute an adequate explanation of why Sir Samuel Hood, the bellicose, forthright admiral who spent so much of his time prodding his superiors, did not take his division into action. He was thoroughly familiar with the standard evolutions that fleets made when they were in line of battle; that he did not understand what Graves was trying to do and was misled by an ambiguous signal is utterly inconceivable. Hood could not possibly have thought that Graves, having spent three hours dressing his line and waiting for the French to form theirs, did not want the British rear to become engaged. Yet if Hood's own explanation of his conduct is unsatisfactory it is difficult to suggest a better one. Sir Samuel's character contained a number of disagreeable and even repulsive traits, but cowardice and stupidity were not among them. His behavior at the Chesapeake is one of the mysteries of the American Revolution.

Hood's criticism of his superiors diverted their attention and the public's from his own questionable performance. As second-in-command to Rodney at the Saints, seven months
after the Chesapeake, he participated in a victory that was glorious enough not only to wipe clean his slate but to make him one of the navy's most distinguished personages. Graves was not so fortunate. On November 10 he obediently sailed for Jamaica, leaving to Admiral Digby the task of overseeing the Royal Navy's abandonment of North America. There already were two admirals at Jamaica; Sir Peter Parker had not yet departed despite the fact that his relief, Rear Admiral Joshua Rowley, had arrived. Rowley was two steps higher than Graves on the flag officers' list and Parker was a Vice Admiral of the White. Graves saw himself being thrust into a humiliating situation, which he outlined to the Earl of Sandwich:

My having been thirteen months second in command, and for the last three months nearly in the chief command (and at the most critical time ever known in this country), and then superseded by a junior officer [Digby] and ordered to go to a station where I can only act in a second or third rank, is so conspicuous a mark of the opinion formed of me at the Admiralty that no words can remove, for the public will ever form their opinion by the actions of men. This very hard happening, just after a general action wherein I had the command, is so unfortunately timed that it is impossible to draw any conclusion not to my disfavour.

For eight months Graves served as third in command at Jamaica, an island which the war, like the Admiralty, seemed to have forgotten. His own London and one other ship-of-the-line were the only vessels of force on the station; Graves had nothing to do but organize convoys and supervise the provisioning of the few warships that happened to come
Graves's predicament became even more embarrassing when, in February, 1782, Sir George Rodney returned from England and resumed the command of the Leeward Islands Squadron. Sir George had been taking the waters at Bath when the first reports of the Battle of the Chesapeake had reached England (the receipt of the news, he said, had given him an acute stomach ache), and he promptly had placed Graves alongside Arbuthnot on his list of contemptible North American admirals. Rodney, who undoubtedly sensed that some small share of the blame for the Yorktown disaster might find its way to his own shoulders, asserted that he had provided Graves with the means of foiling de Grasse. "In vain may plans be concerted to defeat the designs of the public enemy," Rodney wrote to his friend Jackson, "if inferior officers will take upon them to act in direct opposition to the orders and letters of their superiors, and lie idle in port when their duty ought to have obliged them to have been at sea to watch the motions of the public enemy, and prevent the junction of their squadrons." Sir George castigated Graves for failing to act more promptly on the intelligence from the West Indies, and threw a barb at Sir Peter Parker, who had kept the Torbay and Prince William at Jamaica. Graves's tactics off the Chesapeake, according to Rodney, had been inept:

His mode of fighting I will never follow. He
tells me that his line did not extend so far as the enemy's rear. I should have been sorry if it had, and a general battle ensued; it would have given the advantage they could have wished, and brought their whole twenty-four ships of the line against the English nineteen, whereas by watching his opportunity, if the enemy had extended their line to any considerable distance, by contracting his own he might have brought his nineteen against the enemy's fourteen or fifteen, and by a close action totally disabled them before they could have received succour from the remainder, and thereby gained a complete victory.

If some of Rodney's criticisms were self-serving and unjust, he did end his discourse with an observation of remarkable profundity: "I must conclude with saying that if they intend the war should be concluded, there must be but one General and one Admiral commanding in chief in America and West Indies."123

Rodney and Hood were abrasive characters whose personalities might have been expected to clash with disastrous results, but the war in North America had provided them with a common experience which, in their minds, had assumed the role of a form of shared penance. They treated Graves like a pariah, leaving him to sit at Jamaica while the Leeward Islands Squadron hunted down de Grasse and defeated him in one of the great naval campaigns of the war. On one occasion Sir George wrote the following to Sir Samuel:

Mr G----ves I shall instantly send to gaurd the North Coast of the Island, with orders to Cruize on the South Side of Cuba from Cumberland Harbour to St Iago---his Rendezvous at Port Antohio---he wants much to go home and has wrote for leave---tis impossible for him and you to
serve together. I therefore send him out of the way, that in case you choose to come into Port, there may be no disagreements.\textsuperscript{124}

Graves did indeed "want much to go home." The months of idleness at Jamaica were torture for him; he was convinced that his personal and political foes in London were trying to wreck his reputation. He begged the Admiralty to relieve him, on the grounds that "the many calumnies in the News-papers, and the injurious representations of my conduct, which pretend to derive their authority from the debates in the houses of Parliament, make it necessary for me to clear up this matter."\textsuperscript{125} In fact Graves's absence from the political arena may have saved him. William Graves, the admiral's brother, carried the family standard nobly in the pamphlet war, ferreting out what he suspected was a conspiracy involving Rodney, and, of all people, Philip Stephens to make it look as though Cornwallis's army had been lost only because Rodney's advice had been ignored.\textsuperscript{126} The Yorktown debacle obviously demanded scapegoats, but after destroying the careers of Lord North, the Earl of Sandwich, and Sir Henry Clinton the uproar subsided. Thomas Graves was permitted to fade into obscurity, a fate that, considering the alternatives, might have caused him to consider himself fortunate.

One of Sandwich's last acts before leaving office was to give Graves permission to come home. The First Lord felt guilty about what had happened, but professed always to
to have had the admiral's best interests at heart:

It was a measure of administration which nothing could prevent that Admiral Digby should have the chief command in America; in this situation I own I thought that it would have been very gratifying to you to be called home after you were relieved by a junior officer, and that it was necessary for your credit that your flag should remain flying in actual service....When you came to Jamaica, some subsequent events had happened since the orders you had received to leave the command in America to Admiral Digby, and then it appeared to me still more improper that you should be ordered home without your particular application for that purpose. In this, therefore, I have erred (if I have erred) from want of judgement....

Whether I shall, on your return, have it in my power to receive you as First Lord of the Admiralty is, I think, a very doubtful matter; but, be that as it may, I shall always be able to put my hand on my heart, and say that I shall receive you as a very cordial and sincere friend, which I have shown myself to be on some very trying occasions.127

Graves left Jamaica on July 1, 1782, escorting a convoy with his flag in the 74-gun Ramillies. Several of the other escorts were prizes Rodney had taken at the Saints; one was the great Ville de Paris, de Grasse's former flagship. The convoy's passage was laborious. On September 16, off the coast of Nova Scotia, the Ramillies was struck by a gale which blew down her mainmast, broke her tiller, and flooded Graves's cabin. The storm lasted several days; at one point the Ramillies's officers urged Graves to shift his flag to one of the 20 merchantmen that still were in company. He refused, saying, as his brother William told the story, "that 'his living a few years longer was of very little
consequence, and that his leaving the ship in the height of her distress might discourage and slacken the exertions of the people." When the heaving of the seas sent several round shot rolling into her pump wells, however, the flagship's fate was sealed. On the morning of the twenty-first her crew abandoned her; Graves chivalrously gave up his barge to some of the sailors, and set out in a leaky boat which he and the Ramillies's surgeon had to bail constantly. The former Commander-in-Chief of the North American Squadron reached Cork, Ireland, by the inglorious medium of a merchant ship called the Belle.

To Graves his series of misadventures after Yorktown must have seemed like some sort of spiritual trial which, he could only hope, was preparing him for professional salvation. But when he arrived at Portsmouth (having commandeered a frigate to provide him with dignified transporta-
appointment as port admiral at Plymouth, the post his cousin Samuel had rejected so indignantly 11 years earlier. In the spring of 1794, by which time he was an Admiral of the Blue and England was at war with France again, Thomas Graves, at the age of 69, arrived at his moment of redemption. He was second-in-command to Lord Howe when the Channel Fleet encountered a French squadron that was escorting a grain convoy from the United States. Howe's fleet captured four enemy ships-of-the-line, the government dubbed the action the Glorious First of June, and Graves, who had received a terrible wound in his right arm, was rewarded with a barony. The injury ended his career, but while he was recuperating he hired the distinguished artist James Northcote to paint his portrait.

A copy of the painting hangs in the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, next to a contemporary chart of Chesapeake Bay. Baron Graves, his arm in a sling, stands before a background depicting two lines of battle exchanging broadsides. The admiral's face is that of an exhausted man, old beyond his years. The eyes, which seem to squint slightly, glance off to the right in what probably is dignified indifference but might be suspicion. The overall expression seems to convey some remnants of amiability, a hint of concealed resentment, and a distinct sense of relief.
NOTES: CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Adm. to Rodney, Dec. 20, 1780, ADM 2/1338 (LC Trans.).


4. Rodney to Adm. Sir Samuel Hood, Feb. 11, 1781, Hood Papers, NMM.


10. Hood to Rodney, April 23, 1781, Hood Papers, NMM.

11. Rodney to Stephens, March 17, 1781, ADM 1/311 (NHC Film).


13. Hood to General (?), May 4, 1781, Hood Papers, NMM; Mahan, Major Operations, p. 165.


17. Rodney to Stephens, June 22, 1781, ADM 1/314 (NHC Film).


21. Ibid.


23. Clinton to Rodney, June 28, 1781, ADM 1/313 (NHC Film).


35. Arbuthnot to Clinton, June 27, 1781, *Clinton Papers*, CL.
36. T. Graves to Clinton, July 12, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL.
37. Germain to Clinton, May 2, 1781, Clinton, Rebellion, p. 519.
38. Willcox, Portrait, pp. 404-406; Clinton to Cornwallis, June 11, 1781, Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 529-532; Clinton to Cornwallis, June 28, 1781, Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 534-535; Cornwallis to Clinton, June 30, 1781, Clinton Rebellion, pp. 535-536; Cornwallis to Clinton, July 8, 1781, Clinton, Rebellion, p. 541; Clinton to Cornwallis, July 11, 1781, Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 543-544; Clinton to Cornwallis, July 15, 1781, Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 546-547; Cornwallis to Clinton, July 27, 1781, Charles Ross (ed.), Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis (3 vols., London: 1859), I, pp. 108-110.
40. Clinton to Cornwallis, July 11, 1781, Clinton, Rebellion, pp. 543-544.
42. T. Graves to Sandwich, Aug. 21, 1781, Sandwich Papers, IV, p. 180.
43. Adm. to Arbuthnot, May 22, 1781, ADM 2/1339 (LC Trans.).
44. Graves Papers, p. 24; DNB, I, p. 171.
47. Ibid.
48. W. Graves, "Two Letters from W. Graves, Esq.; Respecting the Conduct of Rear Admiral Thomas Graves, in North America, During his Accidental Command there for Four


60. T. Graves to Stephens, Sept. 30, 1781, Graves Papers, p. 53.


64. Larrabee, Decision, pp. 185-186.

66. Larrabee, Decision, pp. 192-193; James, Navy in Adversity, p. 290; Mahan, Major Operations, p. 179.

67. James, Navy in Adversity, p. 290.


70. Ibid.


72. Ibid.

73. "Damages received on board His Majesty's Ships Under the command of Rear Admiral Graves in an action with the French Fleet off Cape Henry the 5th Sepr. 1781," Graves Papers, pp. 69-71.


75. Logbook, H.M.S. London, Sept. 6, 1781, Graves Papers, pp. 182-183.

76. "Minutes of signals made on Sept. 5, 1781," Hood Papers, NMM.

77. T. Graves to Sandwich, Sept. 14, 1781, Sandwich Papers, IV, p. 182.


81. Hood, "Memorandum," Sept. 6, 1781, Hood Papers, NMM.

pp. 31-33.

83. Ibid., p. 33.


86. T. Graves to Stephens, Sept. 14, 1781, Graves Papers, p. 64.

87. Ibid.

88. Rodney to Arbuthnot, Aug. 13, 1781, Graves Papers, p. 76.

89. "Damages Received," Graves Papers, pp. 74-75.


94. Resolve of a Council of War, Sept. 11, 1781, Graves Papers, pp. 80-81.


97. T. Graves to Hood, Sept. 13, 1781, Hood Letters, p. 34.


99. Resolve of a Council of War, Sept. 13, 1781, Graves Papers, p. 84.

100. T. Graves to Sandwich, Sept. 14, 1781, Sandwich Papers, IV, p. 182.

101. MacKenzie, Diary, Sept. 3, 1781, p. 612; Clinton to
Cornwallis, Sept. 2, 1781, Clinton, Rebellion, p. 563.

102. Clinton, Rebellion, p. 331.

103. T. Graves to Clinton, Sept. 9, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL.


105. T. Graves to Clinton, Sept. 21, 1781, Clinton, Rebellion, p. 573.


111. Ibid., Sept. 27, 1781, p. 649.

112. T. Graves to Clinton, Oct. 5, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL.


115. T. Graves to Clinton, Oct. 8, 1781, Clinton Papers, CL.


117. Ibid.


122. T. Graves to Sandwich, Sept. 26, 1781, Sandwich

124. Rodney to Hood, May 5, 1782, Hood Papers, NMM.


127. Sandwich to T. Graves, March 13, 1782, Sandwich Papers, IV, pp. 210-211.


129. Ibid., pp. 44-47.

130. DNB, III, p. 40.
CHAPTER NINE
Conclusion

On the morning of April 12, 1782, near a little archipelago called the Saints, Rodney, Hood, and Drake finally caught up with de Grasse. The two commanders-in-chief prepared to fight in the manner to which they had become accustomed, drawing their fleets into parallel lines steering in opposite directions with the British to windward. A piece of luck, however, spared Rodney the indignity of joining the list of admirals whose reputations had been wrecked by their adherence to the line of battle theory. The fleets had been firing at each other for an hour and a half when a gap developed in the middle of the French line. Rodney (though some evidence suggests that it was his flag captain, Sir Charles Douglas, who suggested the maneuver) took his flagship, the *Formidable*, into the gap. The quick-witted Sir Edmund Affleck, in the *Bedford*, followed, and soon de Grasse's formation had been cut in two. By sunset five French ships-of-the-line, including the great flagship *Ville de Paris*, had surrendered.¹

Hood, true to form though not without justification, claimed that Rodney threw away the opportunity to capture at
least 20 of de Grasse's ships. Two weeks after the action
Sir Samuel complained to George Jackson that

Surely there never was an instance before of a great fleet being so completely beaten and routed and not pursued. So soon as the Ville de Paris had struck, Sir George's faculties seem to have been benumbed, farther than respected that ship alone....Had it been my lot, my dear friend, to have commanded his Majesty's fleet on the 12th, and have passed by so clear and favourable an opportunity of raising the glory of my country, as I am grieved to say was done, I should have thought my head would have been justly required for such a glaring and shameful neglect....Sooner than undergo a continuance what I have so very painfully done for several weeks past, I would be content to be placed on a Welsh mountain to gather buttons as they drop from a goat's tail.2

The Battle of the Saints promptly became one of the most controversial naval engagements of the age of sail. The British fleet had won enough of a victory to ensure that Britain would keep nearly all her West Indies possessions when the Treaty of Paris ended the war 10 months later, and to place Rodney and Hood on slightly shaky pedestals among the ranks of Britain's naval heroes. By ironic coincidence the battle ended Rodney's career. The debacle in the Chesapeake had brought down the Tory administration, and the Earl of Sandwich had left the Admiralty to Augustus Keppel. The new Admiralty Board wasted no time in replacing Sandwich's appointees with officers of acceptable political affiliations. The ship that brought the news of the Saints to England crossed paths with H.M.S. Jupiter, which was bearing Admiral Hugh Pigot, a loyal Whig who had spent 10
years on the beach and never had flown his flag at sea, to take over the command of the Leeward Islands Squadron. 3

Rodney's victory mercifully obscured, for the moment, the fact that the Royal Navy had fought and lost the great naval war of the eighteenth century. The seagoing fighting machine that Britain relied upon to protect her overseas possessions had been put to the ultimate test, and had failed.

For years it was taken for granted that most of the blame for the failure lay with the Admiralty, and more precisely with the Earl of Sandwich. To the next generation of naval officers and bureaucrats, and to several generations of historians, the Sandwich administration provided the classic paradigm of incompetence, corruption, and outright ignorance. One of Sandwich's contemporaries described the First Lord as "Too infamous to have a friend,/Too bad for bad men to commend." 4 Sir John Knox Laughton commented that during Sandwich's tenure at the Admiralty "his conduct was as great a scandal to public as it had all along been to private morality. Throughout his long administration he rendered the business of the admiralty subservient to the interests of his party, and employed the vast patronage of the office as an engine for bribery and political jobbery." 5

The pendulum began to swing in the other direction in the 1930's, when the Navy Records Society started publishing Sandwich's private papers. From that voluminous
correspondence the First Lord emerged as a hard-working, compassionate, and surprisingly likeable character, coping as best he could with problems that overwhelmed him no more decisively than they would have overwhelmed anyone else. Like most such pendulums this one swung to the point of extravagance, producing a pro-Sandwich cadre that not only defended the First Lord but sought to make him a hero. That trend approached absurdity when, in 1962, the novelist George Martelli published what unfortunately remains the only full-length Sandwich biography. Martelli presented his subject as an unappreciated martyr, mistreated by historians who accepted the vituperations of his contemporaries as truth.\textsuperscript{6}

An objective evaluation of Sandwich's Admiralty must conclude that it was conscientious but abysmally inept. It is reasonable enough to label Sandwich a competent administrator, and to credit his administration with such technical innovations as the copper-sheated hull and the carronade. The naval strategy that emanated from Whitehall in the years 1775-1783, however, was inadequate because it was virtually non-existent. Neither Sandwich nor any of his subordinates ever produced a coherent scheme for fighting a naval war. In their defense it must be acknowledged that, in its early stages, the American Revolution presented problems that even the most original naval thinking probably would have been unable to solve. But from 1778 onward the Royal Navy was fighting precisely the sort of
war it had been designed to fight, and proved itself just as incapable of winning a traditional naval war as it had been incapable of suppressing a rebellion.

The blame for the navy's failure on the strategic level, of course, must be shared by the rest of the government of which the Admiralty was but one branch. The German administration's decision to treat the American theater as secondary seemed a shrewd and dynamic move at the time, and was understandable in view of the relatively minor role the American colonies played in Britain's politics and economy. The government's mistake lay in its failure to realize that such decisions could not be taken unilaterally. The French, having entered into an alliance with the United States, made North America the center of their military effort because that was the only theater in which the alliance would benefit them. The British were content to let the French take and maintain the naval initiative in North America, and failed until the fact had been brought to their attention in the most brutal manner imaginable, to realize that giving up that initiative might well mean giving up the colonies.

Instead of developing a naval strategy for North America Whitehall relied on what may be called the "detachment theory." Whenever the French sent a fleet across the Atlantic a British squadron followed, the Admiralty having assumed that as long as the two belligerents had about the
same number of ships-of-the-line in the same hemisphere the problem would solve itself. Such thinking ignored the basic realities of naval warfare. A battle fleet moved fast and communications were slow; once the enemy had been handed the opportunity to take the offensive the only effective way to frustrate his designs was to defend every point at which he might strike, and that, obviously, was impracticable. Merely to chase him in the hope of catching him before he struck anywhere was to invite catastrophe. Thomas Graves's encounter with de Grasse was the product of a number of personality clashes and incredible coincidences, but it surely would not have taken a great strategic brain to figure out that something of the sort was bound to happen eventually.

Great brains of all varieties, in fact, seem to have been conspicuous by their absence from all levels of the Royal Navy. Whether a Great Admiral would have been able to extricate the war in North America from the parameters the Admiralty imposed on it must remain a matter for speculation, for no such personage was on the scene. Howe, the one admiral of the decade who may indeed have possessed the necessary attributes, was allowed to resign. The fact that an officer of his stature and ability was succeeded by Marriot Arbuthnot would be sufficient to condemn the Sandwich administration in the absence of any other evidence. That Arbuthnot was appointed in the first place is
inexplicable; that he was retained in the command for nearly two years was inexcusable. The administration's fondness for admirals of the Arbuthnot and Gambier stamp seems to have been a product of a patronage system run amok. Patronage was supposed to ensure that men of ability were recognized, and that their talents were used as constructively as possible. During the War of American Independence it rewarded mediocrity.

Mediocrity, in fact, became entrenched, not only in the navy but throughout the war-making establishment. When the war started the British army and navy in the western hemisphere lacked any sort of command structure suitable to the fighting of a war; that lack was understandable, since the system, such as it was, had not been set up for any such purpose. But an eight-year war failed to convince Whitehall that a clearly defined and understandable chain of command was necessary if the war was to be won. Rodney's assertion that the North American and Leeward Islands Squadrons should be commanded by the same admiral fell on deaf ears; throughout the war the two squadron commanders rarely even corresponded with each other. As early as 1775 there was evidence of a clash between Samuel Graves and Thomas Gage, yet no one in the government seems ever to have suggested that either the admiral or the general in North America be directed to take orders from the other. To ask two people whose professional reputations constantly were in jeopardy
to work together harmoniously under the sketchy orders of a government 3,000 miles away was to ask the impossible. Even when the two men in question were brothers the results of their collaboration were less than impressive. The Clinton/Arbuthnot feud redounds no less to the credit of those officers than to that of the government which was willing to tolerate such a situation.

Criticism of the Royal Navy should be accompanied by an acknowledgment that the task it faced, in both phases of the war, were herculean. To ask a navy to suppress a revolution was to ask a whale to catch a bird; the excess of brute force was ludicrous but the only possible outcome of the exercise was frustration. One suspects that the entry of France brought a sigh of relief in British naval circles, for the presence of an enemy battle fleet would allow the naval war to be fought on traditional terms. But the demands the "new" war imposed on the navy's human and material resources barely could have been met under the most favorable circumstances. Maintaining the supply lines between England and the West Indies, defending Gibraltar and India, fending off the French and Spanish invasion fleets, protecting British commerce from privateers—the Royal Navy was asked to do all that and simultaneously help the army conduct a military campaign in North America. The American war hung in the balance until the last moment, for the rebel military effort had its own problems. It is difficult to
escape the conclusion, however, that a final British victory would have occurred not because of the navy but in spite of it. To win the naval war of 1775-1783 would have demanded not a Great Admiral but a superhuman one.

But the war did perform an invaluable function in the history of the Royal Navy. The subordinate officers and administrators who fought in this war were to be the protagonists of the next one. When Britain confronted the forces of Revolutionary France and Napoleon she had at her disposal the most awesome naval weapon the world ever had seen, a weapon which, wielded by a handful of brilliant officers, proved barely adequate to defeat an equally powerful army led by a military genius. The generation of British naval officers who fought Napoleon learned a set of brutally instructive lessons during the War of American Independence.

By the end of the eighteenth century the navy had a sophisticated signal book that let an admiral tell his captains precisely how to fight, and by 1805 the line of battle had given way to tactical concepts that rewarded originality and made possible decisive victory. The navy came to venerate a simple doctrine, "no captain can do very wrong if he places his ship alongside that of an enemy," that would make it impossible for even the likes of a Samuel Hood to deprive a fleet of a victory for want of instructions. Where one war saw an Arbuthnot and a Thomas
Graves, who could not prevent their enemies from entering and leaving Narragansett Bay unnoticed, the next one begat Sir William Cornwallis, who blockaded Brest for two years without setting foot on land. From the wreckage of the Sandwich administration emerged one of the greatest of all First Lords in the person of Lord Barham. George Keith Elphinstone became Commander-in-Chief of the Channel Fleet, and accepted the surrender of Napoleon. Lieutenant Cuthbert Collingwood, who sat in the sternsheets of a boat carrying casualties from Breed's Hill to Boston, became a vice admiral, was second-in-command at the Battle of Trafalgar, and afterwards commanded the Mediterranean Fleet. The Hinchinbrooke, one of Sir Peter Parker's frigates on the Jamaica Station in 1780, was commanded by one Horatio Nelson. Twenty-five years later, just before leaving England to destroy the combined fleets of France and Spain at Trafalgar, he remarked to a friend that "Rodney broke the enemy's line in one place, I will break it in two."

Military institutions, like most others, tend to dwell on their victories and try to forget about their defeats. The Royal Navy scarcely can be blamed for regarding the War of American Independence as one of the less illustrious episodes in its history. Yet that war had at least as much to do as any other with the establishment of the British naval tradition.
NOTES: CHAPTER NINE


4. DNB, XXXVIII, p. 255.

5. Ibid.


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