

Continental Ship Alfred

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Alfred, King of the West Saxons, realized that a navy was necessary to defend his realm. He became "Father of the Royal Navy," and the overall success of his almost three decades of rule has caused history to remember him as "Alfred the Great."

Other Names: *Black Prince* (merchant service) HM Armed Ship *Alfred* (Royal Navy Service).

L/B/D: unknown

Tons: 450

Comp.: 220

Arm.: 20-9pdrs 10-6pdrs

Des.: Designer:/builder: unknown/ Philadelphia commercial yard.

Authorized: 30 October 1775

Laid down: 1774

Launched: Autumn 1774

Commissioned: 3 December 1775

Disposition: 9 March 1778, near Barbados, captured by British warships *Ariadne* and *Ceres*. Taken into Royal Navy service as HM Armed Ship *Alfred*, sold out of service 1782.

Black Prince was a ship-rigged merchant vessel built at Philadelphia in 1774. No record of her builder seems to have survived, but it is possible that John Wharton may have constructed the ship. John Barry served as the ship's only master during her career as a Philadelphia merchantman.

As relations between the American colonies and the mother country grew increasingly tense, *Black Prince* was fitted out quickly, loaded with goods and sailed for Bristol on the last day of 1774. She returned to Philadelphia 25 April 1775, six days after the battles at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts.

Fearing that American commerce would soon be interrupted, her owners were eager to export another cargo to England, so they again raced to load and provision her. *Black Prince* sailed on 7 May, this time bound for London, arriving 27 June. The ship left the Thames on 10 August, but encountered contrary winds during much of her westward voyage and finally returned to Philadelphia on 4 October 1775.

While the ship had been abroad, much had happened to deepen the American conflict with England. The Battle of Bunker Hill had been fought, the other colonies acting in Congress had pledged to support Massachusetts in its struggle for freedom, and George Washington had taken command of the American Army besieging British-occupied Boston. Moreover, private correspondence, which *Black Prince* had brought from England to members of the Continental Congress, reported that the British Government was sending to America two unarmed brigs heavily laden with gunpowder and arms.

This intelligence prompted Congress on 13 October to authorize the fitting out of two American warships, of 10 guns each, to attempt to capture these ships and divert their invaluable cargoes to

the ill-equipped soldiers of Washington's army. Additionally Congress decided on 30 October to add two more ships to the navy, one of 20 guns and the other slightly larger, but not to exceed 36 guns.

The Naval Committee purchased *Black Prince* on 4 November 1775, renamed her *Alfred* four days later, and ordered her fitted out as a man-of-war. Her former master, John Barry, was placed in charge of her rerigging; Joshua Humphreys was selected to superintend changes strengthening her hull, timbers, and bulwarks as well as the opening of gun ports; Nathaniel Falconer was made responsible for her ordnance and provisions.

Esek Hopkins, a veteran master of merchantmen from Rhode Island, was appointed commodore of the flotilla. *Alfred* was placed in commission on 3 December 1775, the Commodore went on board the Continental Colors were hoisted by Lieutenant John Paul Jones for the first time on any regular naval vessel of the United States, and were properly saluted. This was a yellow flag bearing "*a lively representation of a rattlesnake,*" with the motto "*Don't tread on me.*" Captain Dudley Saltonstall then assumed command of the ship, and she was designated the flagship of the flotilla.

The flotilla was comprized of the ships *Alfred* (24), flagship, *Columbus* (20), brigs *Andrew Doria* (14) and *Cabot* (14), sloops *Providence* (12), *Hornet* (10), and the schooners *Fly* (8), and *Wasp* (8).

Moving down the Delaware River on 4 January 1776 the flotilla's progress was checked at Reedy Island for some six weeks when the river froze over. A thaw released Hopkins' warships from winter's icy grasp in mid-February, and they sortied on 17 February for their first operation. The Marine Committee had ordered Hopkins to sail for Hampton Roads to attack British warships, which were harassing American shipping in Virginia waters; then to render similar service at Charleston, S.C.; and, finally, to head for Rhode Island waters. He was given the discretion of disregarding these orders if they proved impossible and planning an operation of his own.

It is evident that several days before sailing Hopkins had determined to disregard his instructions and, taking advantage of the discretion allowed him in case of unforeseen difficulties, to abandon the projected cruise along the southern coast. In his first orders to his captains, dated February 14, three days before his departure, he says: "*In Case you should be separated in a Gale of Wind or otherwise, you then are to use all possible Means to join the Fleet as soon as possible. But if you cannot in four days after you leave the Fleet, You are to make the best of your way to the Southern part of Abaco, one of the Bahama Islands, and there wait for the Fleet fourteen days. But if the Fleet does not join you in that time, You are to Cruise in such place as you think will most Annoy the Enemy and you are to send into port for Tryal all British Vessels or Property, or other Vessels with any Supplies for the Ministerial Forces, who you may make Yourself Master of, to such place as you may think best within the United Colonies.*" At the same time the Commodore furnished the Captains with a very complete set of signals. In appointing a rendezvous at Abaco, Hopkins had in mind a descent upon the island of New Providence in the Bahama group, in an attempt to seize a quantity of powder known to be stored there. Scarcity of powder was a cause of the greatest anxiety to Washington, especially during the first year of the war. Congress in secret session had considered the feasibility of obtaining powder from New Providence.

In his report of the expedition, addressed to the President of Congress and dated April 9, 1776, Hopkins says: "*When I put to Sea the 17th Febry. from Cape Henlopen, we had many Sick and four of the Vessels had a large number on board with the Small Pox. The Hornet & Wasp join'd me two days before. The Wind came at N. E. which made it unsafe to lye there. The Wind after we got out came on to blow hard. I did not think we were in a Condition to keep on a Cold Coast and*

appointed our Rendezvous at Abaco, one of the Bahama Islands. The second night we lost the Hornet and Fly." From this it would seem to have been the Commodore's purpose to give the impression that the state of the weather after he got to sea had caused him to change his plans; whereas he had fully made up his mind in advance.

The flotilla arrived at Abaco March 1, Hopkins wrote: *"I then formed an Expedition against New Providence which I put in Execution the 3rd March by Landing 200 Marines under the Command of Captn. Nicholas and 50 Sailors under the Command of Lieutt. Weaver of the Cabot, who was well acquainted there."* Two sloops from New Providence had been seized and were used for transporting the landing party. They embarked Saturday evening March 2. The next morning the flotilla got under way and at 10 o'clock and came to some distance from the island. It had been intended to take the place by surprise, but the flotilla had been seen and the forts fired alarm guns. *"We then ran in,"* says Lieutenant Jones of the *Alfred*, *"and anchored at a small key three leagues to windward of the town, and from thence the Commodore dispatched the marines, with the sloop Providence and schooner Wasp to cover their landing. They landed without opposition."*

Samuel Nicholas, captain of marines on the *Alfred*, in a letter dated April 10, stated that on March 3, at two o'clock he *"landed all our men, 270 in number under my command, at the east end of the Island at a place called New-Guinea. The inhabitants were very much alarmed at our appearance and supposed us to be Spaniards, but were soon undeceived after our landing. Just as I had formed the men I received a message from the Governor desiring to know what our intentions were. I sent him for answer, to take possession of all the warlike stores on the Island belonging to the crown, but had no design of touching the property or hurting the persons of any of the inhabitants, unless in our defence. As soon as the messenger was gone I marched forward to take possession of Fort Montague, a fortification built of stone, about half way between our landing place and the town. As we approached the fort (within about a mile, having a deep cove to go round, with a prodigious thicket on one side and the water on the other, entirely open to their view) they fired three twelve pound shot, which made us halt and consult what was best to be done. We then thought it more prudent to send a flag to let them know what our designs were in coming there; we soon received an answer letting us know that it was by the Governor's orders that they had fired. They spiked up the cannon and abandoned the fort and retired to the fort within the town. I then marched and took possession of it."* In the fort were found seventeen cannon, 32-pounders, 18's and 12's, from which the spikes were easily removed. Nicholas and his men spent the night in the fort. In the evening Hopkins, hearing that there was a force of over two hundred men in the main fort at Nassau, published a manifesto addressed to the inhabitants of the island declaring his intention *"to take possession of the powder and warlike stores belonging to the Crown and if I am not opposed in putting my design in execution, the persons and property of the inhabitants shall be safe, neither shall they be suffered to be hurt in case they make no resistance."* This had a good effect and no opposition was met with.

"The next morning by daylight," says Nicholas, *we marched forward to the town, to take possession of the Governor's house, which stands on an eminence with two four pounders, which commands the garrison and town. On our march I met an express from the Governor to the same purport as the first; I sent him the same answer as before. The messenger then told me I might march into the town and if I thought proper into the fort, without interruption; on which I marched into the town. I then drafted a guard and went up to the Governor's and demanded the keys of the fort, which were given to me immediately; and then took possession of fort Nassau. In it there were about forty cannon mounted and well loaded for our reception, with round, langridge and cannister shot; all this was accomplished without firing a single shot from our side."* The flotilla, which had been lying behind Hog Island, soon afterwards came into the harbor; the Commodore and captains then landed and came up to the fort. In Fort Nassau were found great quantities of military stores, including seventy-one cannon - ranging in size from 9-

pounders to 32's, fifteen brass mortars, and twenty-four casks of powder. The governor had contrived to send off a hundred and fifty casks of powder the night before, thereby defeating in great measure the main object sought in taking the island. The value of the property brought away, however, largely made up for this disappointment. About two weeks were occupied in loading the captured stores on board the ships, and it was necessary to impress a large sloop in order to carry everything. This vessel, called the *Endeavor*, was put under the command of Lieutenant Hinman of the *Cabot*. During this time the *Fly* rejoined the fleet and "*gave an Account that he got foul of the Hornet and carried away the Boom and head of her Mast and I hear since she has got into some port of South Carolina.*" It afterwards turned out that the *Hornet* was driven off the coast of South Carolina by bad weather and finally succeeded in getting back into Delaware Bay about April 1.

Hopkins took on board the fleet as prisoners the governor and lieutenant-governor of New Providence and another high official, and the flotilla set sail on their return voyage March 17. The next day Hopkins issued orders to his captains: "*You are to keep company with the ship I am in if possible, but should you separate by accident you are then to make the best of your way to Block Island Channel and there to cruise in 30 fathom water south from Block Island six days, in order to join the fleet. If they do not join you in that time, you may cruise in such places as you think will most annoy the Enemy or go in Port, as you think fit.*"

The *Wasp* parted from the flotilla soon after sailing. For over two weeks, the voyage to Rhode Island was uneventful. On April 4 the British six-gun schooner *Hawk*, belonging to the British fleet at Newport was captured by the *Columbus*. Captain Nicholas says: "*We made Block Island in the afternoon [of the 4th] ; the Commodore then gave orders to the brigs to stand in for Rhode-Island, to see if any more of the fleet were out and join us next morning, which was accordingly done, but without seeing any vessels.*" At daylight, the brig *Bolton* was taken by the *Alfred* after firing a few shots; she was a bomb-vessel of eight guns and two howitzers. The squadron cruised all day in sight of Block Island, and in the evening took a brigantine and sloop from New York.

The night of 6 April 1776, the flotilla engaged the HMS *Glasgow* a ship of twenty guns and a hundred and fifty men, commanded by Captain Tyringham Howe.

Of the events of the night, Hopkins gives a brief account in his report. "*fell in with the Glasgow and her Tender and Engaged her near three hours. We lost 6 Men Killed and as many Wounded; the Cabot had 4 Men killed and 7 Wounded, the Captain is among the latter; the Columbus had one Man who lost his Arm. We received a considerable damage in our Ship, but the greatest was in having our Wheel Ropes & Blocks shott away, which gave the Glasgow time to make Sail, which I did not think proper to follow as it would have brought an Action with the whole of their Fleet and as I had upwards of 30 of our best Seamen on board the Prizes, and some that were on board had got too much Liquor out of the Prizes to be fit for Duty. Thought it most prudent to give over Chace and Secure our Prizes & got nothing but the Glasgow's Tender and arrived here [New London] the 7th with all the Fleet. . . . The Officers all behaved well on board the Alfred, but too much praise cannot be given to the Officers of the Cabot, who gave and sustained the whole Fire for some considerable time within Pistol Shott.*"

Nicholas gives a more minute recital of the affair: , "*At 12 o'clock went to bed and at half past one was awaked by the noise of all hands to quarters; we were soon ready for action. The best part of my company with my first Lieut. was placed in the barge on the main deck, the remaining part with my second Lieutenant and myself on the quarter deck. We had discovered a large ship standing directly for us. The Cabot was foremost of the fleet, our ship close after, not more than 100 yards behind, but to windward with all, when the brigantine came close up. The ship hailed and was soon answered by the Cabot, who soon found her to be the Glasgow; the brigantine*

immediately fired her broadside and instantly received a return of two fold, which, owing to the weight of metal, damaged her so much in her hull and rigging as obliged her to retire for a while to refit. We then came up, not having it in our power to fire a shot before without hurting the brigantine, and engaged her side by side for three glasses as hot as possibly could be on both sides. The first broadside she fired, my second Lieutenant fell dead close by my side; he was shot by a musket ball through the head."

John Paul Jones's narrative of the action in the *Alfred's* logbook gives a few additional details: "At 2 A.M. cleared ship for action. At half past two the *Cabot*, being between us and the enemy, began to engage and soon after we did the same. At the third glass the enemy bore away and by crowding sail at length got a considerable way ahead, made signals for the rest of the English fleet at Rhode Island to come to her assistance, and steered directly for the harbor. The Commodore then thought it imprudent to risk our prizes, &c. by pursuing farther; therefore, to prevent our being decoyed into their hands, at half past six made the signal to leave off chase and haul by the wind to join our prizes. The *Cabot* was disabled at the second broadside, the captain being dangerously wounded, the master and several men killed. The enemy's whole fire was then directed at us and an unlucky shot having carried away our wheel-block and ropes, the ship broached to and gave the enemy an opportunity of raking us with several broadsides before we were again in condition to steer the ship and return the fire. In the action we received several shot under water, which made the ship very leaky; we had besides the mainmast shot through and the upper works and rigging very considerably damaged."

Captain Whipple of the *Columbus* reported to the commodore that when the *Glasgow* was sighted he was to leeward and "hailed up for her," but the position of the other ships "Instantly kill'd all the wind, which put it out of my Power to get up with her. I strove all in my Power, but in vain; before that I had got close enough for a Close Engagement, the *Glasgow* had made all Sail for the Harbour of Newport. I continued Chace under all Sail that I had, except Steering Sails and the Wind being before the Beam, she firing her two Stern Chaces into me as fast as possible and my keeping up a Fire with my Bow Guns and now and then a Broadside, put it out of my Power to get near enough to have a close Engagement. I continued this Chace while you thought proper to hoist a Signal to return into the Fleet; I accordingly Obeyed the Signal."

Apparently the *Andrew Doria* was less closely engaged than the others. One of her officers, Lieutenant Josiah, says that the *Cabot* having fired the first broadside at the *Glasgow*, "she return'd two fold, which oblig'd ye *Cabot* to sheer off and had like to have been foul of us, which oblig'd us to tack to gett clear; the Commodore came up next and Discharg'd several Broadside and received as many, which did Considerable Damage in his hull & Riggen, which oblig'd him to sheer off. The *Glasgow* then made all the sail she possible could for Newport & made a running fight for 7 Glases. We receiv'd several shott in ye hull & riggen, one upon the Quarter through the Netting and stove ye arm Chest upon the Quarter Deck and wounded our Drummer in ye Legg."

Captain Tyringham Howe, whose report of the engagement says: "On Saturday the 6th of April, 1776, At two A.M. Block Island then bearing N. W. about eight Leagues, we discovered a Fleet on the weather beam, consisting of seven or eight Sail; tacked and stood towards them and soon perceived them to be two or three large Ships and other Square Rigged Vessels. Turned all hands to Quarters, hauled up the Mainsail and kept standing on to the N. W. with a light breeze and smooth Water, the Fleet then coming down before it. At half past two a large Brig, much like the *Bolton* but larger, came within hail and seemed to hesitate about giving any answer, but still kept standing towards us and on being asked what other Ships were in company with her, they answered 'the *Columbus* and *Alfred*, a two and twenty Gun frigate.' And almost immediately a

hand Grenadoe was thrown out of her top. We exchanged our- Broad-sides. She then shot a head and lay on our bow, to make room for a large Ship with a top-light to come on our Broadside and another Ship ran under our Stern, Raked as she passed and then luft up on our Lee beam, whilst a Brig took her Station on our Larboard Quarter and a Sloop kept altering her Station occasionally. At this time the Clerk having the care of the dispatches for the So. Ward to destroy, if the ship should be boarded or in danger of being taken, hove the bag overboard with a shot in it. At four the Station of every Vessel was altered, as the two ships had dropt on each quarter and a Brig kept a stern giving a continual fire. Bore away and made Sail for Rhode Island, with the whole fleet within Musket shot on our Quarters and Stern. Got two Stern chase guns out of the Cabin and kept giving and receiving a very warm fire. At daylight perceived the Rebel fleet to consist of two Ships, two Brigs and a Sloop, and a large Ship and Snow that kept to Windward as soon as the Action began. At half past six the Fleet hauled their Wind and at Seven tacked and stood to the S. S. W. Employed reeving, knotting and splicing and the Carpenters making fishes for the Masts. At half past seven made a Signal and fired several guns occasionally to alarm the fleet at Rhode Island Harbour. The Rose, Swan and Nautilus then being working out. We had one Man Killed and three Wounded by the musketry from the Enemy."

An American prisoner on board the *Glasgow* says that the sloop *Providence*, joining in the attack, directed her fire at the *Glasgows'* "stern without any great effect. The most of her shot went about six feet above the deck; whereas, if they had been properly levelled, they must soon have cleared it of men. The *Glasgow* got at a distance, when she fired smartly, and the engagement lasted about six glasses, when they both seemed willing to quit. The *Glasgow* was considerably damaged in her hull, had ten shot through her mainmast, fifty-two through her mizen staysail, one hundred and ten through mainsail, and eighty-eight through her foresail; had her spars carried away and her rigging cut to pieces

After the *Glasgow* had arrived at Halifax, Admiral Shuldham, in command of the station, wrote to the Admiralty that he found her "in so shattered a Condition and would require so much time and more Stores than there is in this Yard to put her into proper repair, I intend sending her to Plymouth as soon as she can be got ready."

That the *Glasgow*, seriously crippled, still managed to escape from a superior force shows a lack of coordination on the part of the fledgling Continental flotilla, and perhaps excessive prudence in not carrying the pursuit farther towards Newport. It was an instance of the want of naval training and esprit de corps to be expected in a new, raw service.

Moreover, the American vessels, except the *Alfred*, were inferior sailing craft to begin with, and besides this were too deeply laden with the military stores brought from New Providence to be easily and quickly handled.

Hopkins took his flotilla and prizes into New London April 8, here over two hundred sick men were landed; also the military stores. The Commodore's report of April 9 was read in Congress and published in the newspapers. It caused great satisfaction, and Hopkins received a letter of congratulation from John Hancock, the President of Congress.

Commodore Hopkins received one hundred and seventy men from the army to take the place of those he had lost through sickness. He then sailed, April 19, for Newport, but "*the Alfred got ashore near Fisher's Island and was obliged to be lightened to get her off, which we did without much damage.*" They went back to New London and sailed again April 24; they went up to Providence the next day. There Hopkins landed over a hundred more sick men. Just at this time he received an order from Washington to send back to the army the men who had been loaned to

him, as they were needed in New York. It was practically impossible to get recruits in Providence, do to the attractions of privateering were so superior to those of the regular naval service. Delay in getting their pay for the first cruise also caused discontent and tended to make the service unpopular.

Alfred was inactive through the summer for a number of reasons, but high on the list of her problems were want of funds and a shortage of men.

On 7 August, Capt. John Paul Jones, who had helped to fit her out as a warship and had been her first lieutenant on the cruise to New Providence, was placed in command of the ship.

The Marine Committee send the Commodore a letter dated 22 August 1776 with instructions and urging action:

“Sir In Marine Committee Philadelphia August 22nd 1776.

As you are now about to return to Rhode Island where we Understand the Alfred and Cabbot remain inactive, We think proper you should exert your Utmost endeavours in Conjunction with the commanders of those Vessels to get them equipped and Manned with all possible expedition, for a six Months Cruize.

We think a Most important Service may be performed by the Alfred, Columbus, Cabbot, and Hampden (1) by dispatching them for Newfoundland with orders to destroy the British Fishery there. They must make Prize of every British Ship or Vessel they meet with. They must seize and destroy their Fishing Boats and stages and make prisoners of their fishermen, or such of them as will not freely enter into our service; and as it is highly probable they may take more prizes than they can conveniently spare Men to bring into port, it may be proper in such case to destroy them. The season is now come when the Newfoundland Men begin to load their Fish Cargoes. Consequently no time must be lost, and if the Columbus is not in port when you reach Rhode Island, you'll dispatch the Alfred, Cabbot and Hampden immediately appointing such place of rendezvous and Such signals as will enable them to Meet again in Case of Separation, and also enable the Columbus to follow and join them, and whenever she returns from her present Cruize, you must order her on this service giving the Commander of her a Copy of the instructions, Signals &c.

We doubt not there are Some British Ships of War on the Newfoundland station to protect their Fishery and of course our Commanders must act with Such caution as to avoid being taken themselves, but we hope this will not prevent a Spirited and resolute conduct in the execution of this expedition, which we flatter ourselves will in the event prove highly detrimental to our enemies- honourable and beneficial to the United States of America. These being the Objects we have in View we desire that your orders to the Commanders may be adapted in the best manner your knowledge and experience can devise to obtain the end proposed.

When this small Squadron have done the enemy as much mischief as they can in that quarter they must proceed into the Gulph of St Lawrence and there take Cruizing ground as may be Most likely to intercept the supplies of Indian goods and other stores that we suppose will be sent from England for Canada when they know that our Troops have evacuated that Country. There is another object well worthy of their Attention but we fear the acquisition of it is too uncertain to found A Cruize upon, we mean the Capture of the Hudsons Bay Ships which in their return must be very valueable. If the Captains should be of oppinion that by dividing their force they can accomplish both these services, we would submit that point to your and their determination. We have no doubt but they will take valuable prizes in the Gulph of St Lawrence if the Cruizing

ground is well chosen, and they must Send their prizes for Such of our ports as they will be most likely to reach with safety. We deliver you herewith Some of the Marine Books, List of Continental Agents in every state, and Several of the printed declarations of Independance. They may do well to notify the inhabitants of the French Islands of St Pierre & Miquelon of this declaration and sound how the inhabitants stand effected towards us, assuring them the French Government favour our Cause and will probably become our Allies by treaty. Perhaps our Ships may find shelter and protection on these Islands if the enemy have Ships in that quarter too Strong for us.

Should this Fleet take any prizes whose Cargoes might be particularly usefull to the inhabitants of these States, they may do well to convoy Such into port, and if they gain any intelligence that the Commanders think important they Must dispatch one of the small vessells with the account to us, putting into the first port and Sending an express with it to the General or to us. You will instruct the commander of each vessel to write us by all opportunities of their proceedings and of the Occurrencies they meet with. They must make us Monthly returns of their Crews, of the Supplies made to them, of the provisions, and make Copies of their Log Books and Journals to be transmitted to us at their return. They must be carefull of their Ships, stores and materials, use their officers and Men in Such a Manner as will recommend the service and at the same time preserve strict discipline. They will no doubt from principles of humanity and generosity treat their prisoners with all the kindness and attention their respective Situations and circumstances will admit of and we hope their conduct will in all things be such as to Merit the continuance of our Confidence.

You will direct the commanders of each Vessel to be very exact in keeping a List of all persons on board that are intituled to prize Money Mentioning their Names, stations, & Shares, Copys of which they must furnish the Agent or Agents that receive the prizes in order that just & equitable distribution of Prize Money may in due time be made.

We also wish to have a full and just valuation of all the Cannon, Stores &c which you brought from Providence that have been appropriated to public use or that remain for that purpose, and we desire you would have the vessels you took and the property in them Libelled and tried, in order that Such part as is condemned may be sold, the accounts Settled and distribution of the Prize Money made. We are sir, Your very Humble servts,

*John Hancock Geo. Read
Geo Walton Robt Morris
Saml Huntington Step Hopkins
Fras Lewis Joseph Hewes*

P.S. We deliver you herewith a Letter to Nathaniel Shaw junr. Esqr. Of New London directing him to purchase the Armed Schooner You took in Your late Cruize. This Schooner Must be called the Hopkins and immediately fitted out as a Continental Cruizer and you are to add her to the Fleet destined against Newfoundland Fishery sending her away in Company with the Alfred &c. We deliver you herewith a blank Commission for the Captain and we choose the offer of it should be Made to Captain Chew of New Haven he being Strongly recommended by the Committee of that place, but if he refuses this appointment we hereby authorize you to put in a proper commander and fill this Commission with his Name. We also deliver you Some blank warrants which you will fill up with proper persons for the Master and other inferior officers for that Schooner.

Let it be an article of your instructions to all the Captains to be particularly carefull to Send all salt they may take to Some of these States as we expect it will be very Much Wanted. Should you think it adviseable to go upon the expedition to Newfoundland &c Your self You May do therein as you judge will be Most Serviceable to the Continent and hoist your Broad Pendant on board any of the Vessels you choose.

John Hancock, For the Come."

Alfred departed Providence, R.I., on 26 October 1776 in company with *Hampden*, but that vessel struck a "sunken rock" before they could leave Narragansett Bay and returned to Newport. Her officers and men then shifted to sloop *Providence*, which Jones had wished to take also, but could not enlist a crew for her. The expedition, with the *Alfred* and *Providence*, made a fresh start November 1 and reached the waters off Cape Breton Island by mid-November.

Jones issued instructions for Captain Hacker, saying: "*The wind being now fair, we will proceed according to Orders for Spanish River near Cape North on the Island of Cape Briton*"; and prescribing signals for foggy weather. On his way through Vineyard Sound, Jones boarded a Rhode Island privateer, acting under the orders of Commodore Hopkins, and impressed some deserters from the navy. Thence he proceeded directly for his cruising grounds and soon after his arrival, took three prizes off Louisburg. These were the brig *Active* on 11 Nov, bound from Liverpool to Halifax with an assorted cargo and snow *Kitty* -16 Nov, bound from Gaspe to Barbados with oil and fish., which were sent back to American ports, and a large armed ship called the *Mellish*, with so rich a cargo of soldiers' clothing that Jones kept her under convoy. He wrote to the Marine Committee, November 12: "*This prize is, I believe, the most valuable that has been taken by the American arms. She made some defence, but it was trifling. The loss will distress the enemy more than can be easily imagined, as the clothing on board of her is the Last intended to be sent out for Canada this season and all that has preceded it is already taken. The situation of Burgoyne's army must soon become insupportable. I shall not lose sight of a prize of such importance, but will sink her rather than suffer her to fall again into their hands.*" Jones afterwards recommended that the *Mellish* be armed and taken into the service.

A few days after this, during a stormy night, the *Providence* parted company and returned to Rhode Island; there had been discontent on this vessel among both officers and men, who represented that she leaked badly and was unsafe. Jones says that "*previous to this step there had been an Unaccountable murmuring in the Sloop for which I could see no Just foundation and in Vain had I represented to them how much humanity was concerned in our endeavours to relieve our Captive, ill treated Brethern from the Coal Mines. Since my arrival here I understand that as soon as Night came on they Put before the Wind. Being thus deserted the Epedemical discontent became General on Board the Alfred; the season was indeed Severe and everyone was for returning immediately to port, but I was determed at all hazards, while my provision lasted, to persevere in my first plan. When the Gale abated I found myself in sight of the N. E. Reef of the Isle of Sable & the wind continuing Northerly obliged me to beat up the South side of the Island. After exercising much Patience I weathered the N. W. Reef of the Island and on the 22d [of November], being off Canso, I sent my Boats in to Burn a Fine Transport with Irish Provision Bound for Canada., she having run aground within the Harbour; they were also ordered to Burn the Oil warehouse with the Contents and all the Materials for the Fishery, which having effected I carried off a small, fast sailing schooner which I purposed to Employ as a Tender instead of the Providence. On the 24th off Louisburg, it being thick weather, in the Afternoon I found myself surrounded by three Ships. Everyone Assured me that they were English Men of War and indeed I was of that opinion myself, for I had been informed by a Gentleman who came off from Canso*

that three Frigates on that Station had been Cruising for [me] ever since my expedition there in the Providence. Resolving to sell my liberty as dear as possible, I stood for and . . . Took the nearest; I took also the other two, tho' they were at a Considerable distance assunder. These three Ships were . . . Transports Bound from the Coal Mines of Cape Briton for N. York Under Convoy of the Flora Frigate; they had Seen her a few hours before, and had the weather been clear she would then have been in sight. They left no Transports behind them at Spanish River, but they said the Roe Buck man of War was stationed there and that if there had been any Prisoners of ours there they had entered [the British service]. I made the best of my way to the Southward to prevent falling in with the Flora the next day, and on the 26th I fell in with and took a Ship of Ten Guns from Liverpool for Hallifax." She was a letter of marque called the John. "I had now on Board an Hundred and Forty Prisoners, so that my Provision was consumed very Fast; I had the Mellish, the three Ships from the Coal Mines and the last taken Ship under Convoy; the best of my Sailors were sent on Board [these] Five Ships and the number left were barely sufficient to Guard the Prisoners. So that all circumstances considered, I concluded it most for the interest and Honor of the Service to Form the Prizes into a Squadron and proceed with them into Port. I was unfortunate in meeting with high Winds and Frequent Gales from the Westward. I however kept the Squadron together till the 7th of December on St Georges Bank, when a large Ship [the frigate Milford] Gave us chace. As she came so neare before Night that we could distinguish her as a Ship of War, I ordered the Mellish . . . and the rest of the Fastest Sailors to Crowd Sail and go a Head. I kept the Liverpool Ship with me, as She was of some Force and her Cargo by invoice not worth more than £1100 Sterling. In the Night I tacked and afterwards carried a Top light in order to lead the Enemy away from the Ships that had been ordered ahead. In the Morning they were out of Sight and I found the Enemy two points on my lee Quarter at the same distance as the night before. As the Alfred's Provisions and Water were by this time almost entirely consumed, so that She sailed very ill by the Wind, and as the Ship I had by me, the John, made much less lee way, I ordered her to Fall a Stern to Windward of the Enemy and make the Signal Agreed on, if She was of Superiour or inferiour Force; that in the one Case we might each make the best of our way, or in the other come to Action. After a considerable time the Signal was made that the Enemy was of Superiour Force, but in the intrim the wind had increased with Severe Squalls to a Hard Gale, so that in the Evening I drove the Alfred thro' the Water Seven and Eight Knots under two Courses, a point from the Wind. Towards Night the Enemy Wore on the other Tack, but before that time the Sea had risen so very high that it was impossible to Hoist a Boat, so that had he been near the John it would have been impossible for him to have Taken her, unless they had wilfully given her up and continued voluntarily by the Enemy through the whole of the very dark and Stormy night that ensued." Yet the John, however unnecessarily, surrendered to the Milford. Admiral Howe in reporting this affair says that the Alfred was chased "without effect, by means of the thick weather that critically happened and secured her Escape." According to the log of the Milford a boat was lowered from the frigate and took possession of the John The report of Captain Jones goes on to say that in the evening of December 14, being then in Massachusetts Bay and fearing to be driven out, "I resolved to run into Plymouth, but in working up the Harbour the Ship missed Stays in a Violent Snow Squall on the South side, which obliged me to Anchor immediately in little more than three Fathom. She grounded at low water and Beat considerably, but we got her off in the morning and Arrived the 15th in the Nantasket Road with a tight ship and no perceptible damage whatever. I had then only two days provision left and the Number of my Prisoners brought in equalled the Number of my whole Crew when I left Rhode Island." The John was apparently the only prize lost. The Mellish ran through Nantucket Shoals and got safely into Port Bedford. It was fortunate for Jones and for his valuable prize that fate did not lead them to Rhode Island, for a powerful British fleet had taken possession of Newport December 7. Alfred eventually arrived at Boston on 15 December. and began a major refit.

On April 23 the Marine Committee ordered to sea the *Alfred*, Captain Elisha Hinman, then at Boston, and the sloop *Providence*, which, after returning from her eastern cruise, had been put under the command of Captain John P. Rathburne. The vessels were to cruise separately "*in such Latitudes as will be most likely to fall in with and intercept the enemies Transport vessels coming to reinforce or supply their Army at New York.*" Continuing their instructions the Committee wrote: "*You are to use your true endeavours to take, burn, sink, or destroy as many of the enemies Vessels of every kind, as it may be your good fortune to fall in with. The Prizes you may be lucky enough to take you will send into such Ports of the United States as you shall think will be the safest and most convenient . . . It is expected from every Commander in our Navy that he use his officers and people well, still preserving strict discipline and decorum; that Prisoners be treated with humanity; and that great care be taken of the ships, their materials and stores, all which we desire you will carefully observe and advise us of your proceedings by every opportunity. We expect your most dilligent exertions will be used to execute these orders with all possible dispatch and in the best manner for the service of your Country.*" The *Alfred* was to return to port by July 1 and then receive fresh orders.

Captain Elisha Hinman became *Alfred's* commanding officer in May 1777, but she did not get underway until 22 August when she sailed for France with *Raleigh* to obtain military supplies.

The third day after sailing for France a small schooner from New York was taken by the *Raleigh*, on board of which Captain Thompson found "*275 Spanish milled dollars, 137 counterfeited bills of 30 dollars each, in imitation of the bills emitted by Congress May the 10th, 1775, and 40 counterfeited bills of seven dollars each, imitating the Massachusetts sword-in-hand money; the whole making 4390 dollars which I shall commit to the flames after preserving samples. The schooner being of little value we burnt her.*" The most important events of the passage are told in Thompson's report, dated at sea September 28, 1777, in latitude 49° 35' north, longitude 13° 13' west: "*At daylight Sept. 2 we took a snow called the Nancy . . . being part of the Windward Island fleet, which had outsailed her the day before. Having by this capture discovered the situation of the fleet and found that they were convoyed by the Camel, Druid, Weazel and Grass. hopper ships of war, the former a very large, lofty ship, carrying twenty-two 12-pounders . . . we made sail in quest of the fleet and next morning discovered them from the mast head. At sun-set we were near enough to distinguish the leading ship as well as their number, which was sixty sail, bearing East by North; the wind being then west, I made a signal as being one of the fleet left astern, for I had possessed myself of the signal from the prize. I hailed Capt. Hinman and told him my intention was to run into the fleet in the morning and attack the convoy, which I thought we were able to destroy; I therefore ordered him to keep close under the *Raleigh's* stern until we come alongside the Commodore, which ship we would both attack. Unluckily in the night the wind shifted to North; the fleet then hauled up close to the wind, which brought us to leeward; in the morning it came to blow fresh. At daylight we saw the body of the fleet bearing about N.E. at two or three leagues distance, steering East North East. We made sail and the *Raleigh* soon fetched up to the fleet under double reefed topsails, but the *Alfred*, being tender-sided, could not carry sail and therefore fell a great way to leeward and astern. I could not take in any sail for fear of being discovered to be a strange ship; we therefore kept our sails shaking in the wind, thinking the *Alfred* might come up, but Capt. Hinman made signal that his ship was overpressed with sail. Seeing no chance of his coming up and being fearful of being discovered, I determined to make sail and stand into the fleet and take my chance alone. While we were laying to, most of the merchant ships had got ahead into the fleet; however, I hauled in and passed a few of them and desired them to go under the Commodore's stern. By this they took us to be some British frigate which had joined the fleet. I stood on close to the wind, making for one of the ships of war which was to the windward of all the fleet, repeating the Commodore's signals. Our ports were down and our guns housed and we shot up alongside within pistol shot; then we up sails, out guns,*

hoisted Continental colours and bid them strike to the Thirteen United States. Sudden surprize threw them into confusion and their sails flew all aback, upon which we complimented them with a gun for each State, a whole broadside into their hull . . . Our second broadside was aimed at their rigging, which had its desired effect . . . In about a quarter of an hour all hands quitted quarters, on board the British man of war, we cleared her decks totally; not a man was seen nor a gun fired on board her for twenty minutes before we left her. She lay like a log alongside of us entirely at the mercy of our shot, which flew very thick; we fired twelve broadsides, besides a constant fire from our musquetry. We were alongside of her forty-five minutes; when we left her she seemed to be water logged and in a most shattered condition. During this little engagement my officers and men behaved with the greatest fortitude and resolution, particularly the green hands . . . My intention was to sink the enemy's ship, if I could not bring her off, and I should have effectually sunk her in a few minutes more, could we have staid. Our firing had thrown the fleet into confusion. A squall prevented them from seeing us at first; when it cleared up, one was running one way and one another, some upon the wind and some before it. Their Commodore and the other ships of force tacked and stood right for us, but had not the wind favoured him and we drifted to leeward, he could not have fetched us and I should certainly have sunk the ship. However, I staid by her until he came pretty near, and we being in danger of being surrounded, I made sail and ran down to the Alfred, who was lying about four miles to the leeward . . . When we had got pretty near the Alfred, I took in top gallant sails and shortened sail to wait for the British Commodore, but he soon tacked and stood again into the fleet."

The vessel engaged by the *Raleigh* was the fourteen-gun sloop of war *Druid*. According to the report of Lieutenant Bouchier of the *Druid*, "on the 4th of September, in the latitude 40.33. N., longitude 50.17. W., at half past four in the evening, we discovered a strange sail on our larboard quarter, bearing West and steering for us. We were then (from the irregularity of the fleet) about five miles distant from the *Camel*, to windward, repeating the signal for the convoy to go under the *Camel's* stern and obliging those ships to bear down; the *Weazle* at a great distance to leeward and out of our sight. We cleared ship for action and turned all hands to quarters. At five o'clock she came within pistol shot, when I could plainly perceive her to be a rebel privateer mounting 38 or 40 guns, her decks and tops full of men. She hailed and desired us to strike to the honour of the Congress's colours, hoisted her ensign, and began to engage. The first broadside sent a shot through Captain Carteret's thigh bone and killed the master. I then took the command on the quarter deck and continued the action. At half past five she came close alongside and kept an irregular but very hot firing. At six she made sail ahead. I attempted to do the same and keep her broadside on, but the shattered condition of the rigging rendered the sails almost useless to the ship. As the head-sails only were of service, we edged away and kept her nearly on our bow till twenty minutes past six. She then had the wind abaft, sheared off, hauled down her colours, and made sail. I attempted to wear ship and rake her, but the rigging being entirely shot to pieces, could not bring her round. I then tried to make what sail I could and pursue the enemy, but found most of the masts and yards wounded . . . with four feet ten inches water in the hold. At half past seven we brought to, with our foresail and mizen on our larboard tack, to plug the shot holes between wind and water, clear the wreck and pump the ship out. I then perceived another rebel privateer laying to, bearing S.S.W. six or seven miles off, and by her appearance I suppose she mounted about 20 guns. The *Camel* was then in chace about two or three miles distant; soon after, the *Weazle* spoke to us and gave chace also."

Conditions on board the *Camel*, the British commodore's ship, are set forth in her log. "Fresh Breezes & Squally Wr. At 1 P.M. fired 2 guns & made the Signal for the fleet to come under our Stern; the headmost Vessels paying no attention to the Signal, Fired 3 Shott at them to bring them to. At 5 fresh Breezes & Hazy Wr. Heard the report of a No. of Guns fired in the No. Wt. Quarter, which we imagined was an Action, from the unusual quickness of their Firing. Wore Ship with all

possible speed & stood towards the report, when the Haze dispersing, we perceiv'd His Majesty's Sloop Druid in close engagement with a large Rebel Priva [teer] of 36 Guns, which she Beat off & upon perceiving us to be in chase of her, made off under all the Sail she could possibly Croud, as did another Rebel privateer which lay to Leeward of Her. Continued in Chase of them till Night, when we lost sight both of them & the Convoy."

The *Raleigh's* loss was one killed and two wounded. The *Druid* had six killed and twenty-six wounded, of whom five, including the captain, died of their wounds. The *Raleigh* and *Alfred* followed the fleet several days, but without again exchanging shots with the enemy. Thompson says: "*We have since challenged him for three days successively to come out of his fleet and engage us, but he declines the challenge. Himself and the other armed ships keep close together a little astern of the fleet and fine weather favours them; we wait for a storm and then, if any advantage offers, intend to make the best use of it, but we must not venture among them as they are now prepared, neither can we trust to the Alfred's sailing. Had she been a stiff ship and sailed equally well with the Raleigh, we should in all probability have destroyed the convoy and dispersed the whole fleet, badly manned as we are, having only 180 men, chiefly green hands. I cannot trust to working the ship were I to go into the fleet, but if the enemy will attack where we have room, we are able to defend ourselves or destroy them. I could at first have cut off several of the merchantmen, but must by that means have been discovered and thereby have lost our chance at the King's ships; and I am determin'd never to wax against merchantmen where I have an opportunity of waxing against the King. I should have preferred sinking that ship to the richest capture in the fleet.*" These excuses seem inadequate, John Paul Jones found the *Alfred* capable of giving excellent service. If Thompson had been an enterprising officer, it is difficult to believe that he would have allowed this rich fleet to get away without leaving a single prize in his hands.

As to warring against merchantmen, American commanders had express orders to pursue fleets under convoy and make as many captures as possible. The ships and cargoes were needed by the impoverished Continental government, and every blow struck at the enemy's commerce helped a little to turn the scale in this closely contested war. In due time the *Raleigh* and *Alfred* arrived in France.

When it had become evident to the American Commissioners at Paris that the times were not propitious for the cruising of Continental ships in European waters, they had addressed a letter of advice, dated November 25, 1777, to Captain Thompson of the *Raleigh*, suggesting a circuitous passage back to America. "*As it is by no means safe to return into the ports of France, you will calculate your stores so as to have a sufficiency for your cruise, which we cannot indeed be particular in the direction of. It has been suggested that one or more of the India ships returning may be intercepted, that part of the West India homeward-bound ships may be expected about this time, as well as transports returning from New York and elsewhere in America, and that by cruising in the proper latitudes you may meet with them; that the British factories and commerce on the African coast at this time lie without any force sufficient to protect them, and that by running along that coast you may greatly annoy and distress the enemy in that quarter and afterwards go for the West Indies. As you and Captain Hinman have already considered these several plans for a cruise, we leave with you to determine which to prefer and the manner in prosecuting either, or any other that may appear more likely to answer the design of your commission. We are happy in observing the harmony and confidence which subsists between you and Captain Hinman and hope the same prevails between your officers and men, which we are certain you will cultivate through the whole of your expedition, in which we recommend to you to avoid giving any offense to the flags of neutral powers and to show them proper marks of respect and friendship . . . Whenever you judge it prudent to dismiss prisoners subjects of his Britannic Majesty, we advise you to take from them in writing an acknowledgment of their having been*

your prisoners, their quality, place of residence, and that they are dismissed by you in confidence that an equal number of the subjects of the thirteen United States of the same rank, that now are or may hereafter be prisoners to his said Britannic Majesty, will be set at liberty. You are also to deliver a copy of such writing to the prisoners, enjoining them to deliver the same on their arrival in Britain to the lords of the British admiralty, and by the first opportunity enclose a duplicate to the committee or board of marine in Boston and another to us, with an account of your proceedings."

On 29 December the two ships sailed for America, sailing for the West Indies by way of the coast of Africa, and captured a British vessel off Senegal. By March 9, 1778, according to Captain Thompson's report, they had reached latitude 16° 31' north, longitude 55° 40' west, and at Six A.M. two Sail to the west northwest were seen from the *Raleigh*. At half-past seven she hove to for the *Alfred*; the strange ships were then standing to the north, close-hauled. Captain Thompson directed Captain Hinman to run down and observe the sternmost ship. At ten o'clock, being within five or six miles, it was plainly seen that the strangers were armed. The *Raleigh* and *Alfred* then hauled on the wind on the same tack with the other ships, which were to leeward. Thompson thought that this manoeuvre would give him more time to discover their force and rate of sailing. The *Raleigh* sailed as well as they, while the *Alfred* fell off to leeward and astern. "*As the weathermost ship pass'd under the Alfred's lee, standing to the Southward on the third tack, Capt. Hinman hoisted his colours and fired several shot, which were returned under English colours. They were then two miles apart and the other ship four miles to leeward of her consort; the Alfred was about three miles astern of us.*" The *Raleigh* was about to tack and stand towards the *Alfred*, so as to attack the weathermost ship in company with her, before the other could get up; but just then, half-past twelve, the *Alfred* stood off before the wind, which was light from the east northeast, and set all her light sails in the effort to escape. The *Raleigh* had an equal chance to attack one or to escape from both ships, but "*the Alfred was neither able to engage one nor to escape by sailing.*" Thompson regretted that the *Alfred* attempted to escape, as it was evident that the leeward ship, then bearing southwest, would cut her off before she could pass her or the *Raleigh* give assistance. The *Raleigh* did not go about, but hauled up her courses, thinking the windward ship would stand for her; but "*they both made towards the Alfred. I then ordered the master to veer and make sail towards the Alfred and run between her and the other ship, to take off her fire and give the Alfred an opportunity to escape.*" The *Alfred* at first seemed to gain on the British, "*but in a few minutes the two got up and began a furious fire, which was return'd by the Alfred as fast as they could. Just as we had got studdingsails hoisted we had the mortification to see the Alfred haul down her colours. It was then one o'clock; the firing lasted about ten minutes. We were then within three miles of the ships.*" There was nothing then left for the *Raleigh*, in the captain's opinion, but to escape from a superior force, and she hauled to the north.

The sea being smooth the British soon finished taking possession of the *Alfred* and began to chase the *Raleigh*, and gained on her. When night came she edged away and set all her light sails. The British chased all night by a bright moon. At daylight they were four or five miles away and at seven o'clock seemed to be gaining. The *Raleigh*, by throwing overboard all she could spare and starting her water, was lightened about thirty-five tons and began to gain. At ten o'clock the British gave up the chase, after nineteen hours. One of them sailed faster than the other, but would not come up alone, often heaving to and waiting for her consort

These British ships were the *Ariadne*, 20, and the *Ceres*, 16. Captain Pringle of the *Ariadne* reported to Admiral Young: "*The two strangers at first shewed a disposition to attack us, but in consequence of the King's ships having brought the stern-most to close action about noon, the other made off. The ship in action, after having given to and received from the Ariadne and Ceres*

some broadsides, struck; and proved to be the rebel ship Alfred, of 20 nine-pounders and 180 men. Her consort was the Raleigh of 32 guns."

The *Raleigh* arrived at Portsmouth early in April. Captain Thompson's report no doubt put his conduct in the most favorable light, but did not save him from severe censure. By proper management it was believed that not only should the *Alfred* have been saved from capture, but both the British vessels, so inferior in force, should have been taken. Captain Hinman's judgment might reasonably be questioned on two points: first, his running off to leeward in a vain attempt to escape, thereby removing himself from the support of the *Raleigh*; second, his surrender after such a very brief resistance, while there was a chance of the *Raleigh's* coming to the rescue. As to the subsequent conduct of the *Raleigh*, it is not inspiring to think of her precipitate flight from two small ships mounting about the same number of guns that she did and probably lighter ones. Captain Thompson was doubtless a good seaman, not lacking in physical courage, and zealous in the cause; but without military sense and unequal to the responsibilities of the situation.

After surrendering, *Alfred* was taken to Barbados where she was condemned and sold. She was purchased and taken into the Royal Navy as H.M. armed ship *Alfred* (20 guns) and was sold in 1782.

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