

EXCERPTS FROM FRANK L. DENNETT'S

" PORTSMOUTH PRIVATEERS DURING WAR OF 1812 "

THE THOMAS

One of the few successful Portsmouth privateers was the THOMAS, under command of Thomas M. Shaw, for whom the vessel was named. Having been manned and provisioned, the THOMAS cleared port on her first cruise. Her only capture was the ship FALMOUTH taken without firing a shot and sent to Portsmouth. The FALMOUTH was sold for the pleasing sum of \$122,787.48.

The THOMAS returned to Portsmouth, reprovisioned and again sailed. Her second voyage netted four captures; the first two, the British brigs ANTHONY and WILLIAM PITT, were recaptured by the British before making haven. The two successful captures were a brig of unknown name and the ship DROMO, whose cargo, wrote Captain Shaw, was invoiced at "Seventy Thousand Pounds sterling" and he estimated that the two "prizes are worth upwards of Six Hundred Thousand Dollars".

The THOMAS began her third cruise on 21 April 1813, and captured the brig JOHN PITT and the ship DIANA; both were taken to Wiscasset. The prizes and cargoes were sold at Wiscasset on 13 July 1813, for \$227,735.17; the DIANA brought \$203,109.67 and the JOHN PITT, \$24,625.50. From the capture of these two vessels alone a seaman could expect a goodly sum for his efforts.

On her third cruise the THOMAS captured the scourge of New England coasting trade, the infamous, LIVERPOOL PACKET. This British privateer was reputed to have executed 481 captures in a seven month period and a few weeks before falling to the THOMAS had audaciously crept into Portsmouth Harbour and burned the fish flakes at New Castle during the night. She was undoubtedly the most successful of the enemy privateers in the New England area during the early stages of the War. The LIVERPOOL PACKET was sold at auction for \$3,349.87 and was outfitted as the YOUNG TEASER'S GHOST.

The THOMAS SAILED ON her last cruise in September, 1813. Six days after clearing port she was captured off Cape North by the British frigate NYMPHE. The THOMAS was renamed the WOLVERINE and saw service for the remainder of the war as a British privateer.

THE FOX

By far the most successful of all the private armed vessels to sail from Portsmouth was the FOX mentioned in many volumes dealing with privateering as the "million dollar privateer".

The FOX left Portsmouth in September, 1812 under the command of Elihu D. Brown and in the following month captured the barge FISHER. When the FISHER first made port it was rumored that she carried several boxes and a trunk of diamonds. So great was the faith in privateers that the story circulated to the newspapers of Portland and Boston! althou, greatly to the credit of the local presses, the stories were not exaggerated beyond the basic untruth. However, upon closer inspection, and much to the dismay of the crew and owners of the FOX, "they turn out - - - to be three small boxes of rock crystal, recently from the quarry".

The FOX made six other voyages under other captains and was successful in all of them. Then, having finished her career as a privateer, she was sold and entered into the West Indian Trade.

NOTE: Captain Elihu Dennett Brown was a Portsmouth native and a distinguished son, representing Portsmouth in the June session of the Legislature in 1812 and commanding the FOX and later the HARLEQUIN. During the Buenos Aries revolt against Spain, he was commander of the Buenos Aires privateer CONSTITUTION, 18 guns and 80 men. The CONSTITUTION was wrecked off the northeastern coast of Africa and while making for shore in boats, Captain Brown and 71 of the crew were captured by Spanish forces on 22 May 1819. Brown was taken to Cadiz as a prisoner of war and died in a Cadiz hospital on 20 September 1819 at the age of 42 years.

THE PORTSMOUTH

Portsmouth's ninth privateer was the brig PORTSMOUTH, of 270 tons and carrying 9 carriage guns and crew of 90, under command of Thomas M. Shaw, late master of the THOMAS. The PORTSMOUTH was quite successful and became known to the British as the "ally of the imp" and the "devil's ship invincible".

The PORTSMOUTH's first cruise, beginning in September, 1814, yielded three captures, the brig NANCY, a sloop of same name, and the schooner COLUMBIA. The brig was divested of about \$75,000.00 of cargo and ordered for Portsmouth, but was recaptured enroute. The COLUMBIA arrived safely at port and was sold at Shaw's wharf.

The PORTSMOUTH resailed the latter part of the same month and captured the schooner MARY, later recaptured, and the ship JAMES. The JAMES was sold with her cargo at Durham and realized the sum of \$242,445.21.

Sailing in November under John Sinclair, the PORTSMOUTH cruised near Nova Scotia and thence to the Western Islands. On this cruise, she captured the brigs OCEAN, LANGTON, and CROWN PRINCE. The crews from the OCEAN and LANGTON were paroled and the latter ship allowed to proceed, after making a note of 700 pounds sterling for ransom. The CROWN PRINCE was manned and arrived safely at Sedgwick and was later taken to Portsmouth. Her cargo was estimated to be worth \$300,000.00. Other captures were the schooner MARY and the transport brig JUNO, both of which were given up after portions of their cargoes were transferred to the PORTSMOUTH.