

Colonial Irregulars of the Navy

1756 - 63

The war that was to decide the fate of the French possessions in America was publicly declared on August 9th, 1756, at Halifax. The issues at stake on this side of the Atlantic were of greater moment than those affected by the conflicts on European battle fields during the same period of hostilities.

Shortly after the public declaration of war, royal instructions were received in the colonies authorizing the issue of letters of marque and reprisals against the enemy. In compliance with royal command to fit out privateers to distress and annoy the enemy. Malachy Salter and Robert Saunderson, merchants of Halifax, fitted out the schooner "Lawrence" of 100 tons burthen; and on the 16th November, 1756, she sailed from this port on a six months cruise in the West India waters against the enemy. The Lawrence was commanded by Captain Joseph Rous, with Robinson Ford, as 1st lieutenant, and Andrew Gardner as sailing master, and her crew consisted of 100 men. As an instance of how this mode of harrassing the enemy recommended itself to the colonials, the single port of New York, fitted out during the French war of 1756-63, no less than forty-five privateers carrying 695 guns and manned by over 5000 men. Seamen for this mode of distressing the enemy could more readily be obtained than for the Royal Navy, because on board of privateers the distribution of prize money was more equitable, the pay was better and more regularly paid, the food was also better, the disciplin less severe, and the cruises short. As an illustration of the difference between the share of prize money falling to the lot of an officer and a common jack tar, it is stated that at the capture of Havana the admiral's share was £122,677, and a seaman's £314 Os. 9½d.

The armament of the Lawrence consisted of 14 carriage 4 pounders and 20 swivel guns besides small arms. Besides the schooner Lawrence the ships Hertford and Musket