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— The —  
**COLONIAL**   
**IRREGULARS**  
**OF THE NAVY**



*A thrilling narrative of the sea fights of  
the privateers of Nova Scotia in three Wars.*

This little booklet recounts for the first time  
the heroic deeds performed by the fisherboys  
of this province in West India Waters, and  
on the Atlantic seaboard of Nova Scotia.  
It's record also illustrates how Canadians  
can behave with that courage and spirit  
which British seamen always show when  
fighting the enemies of their country. . .

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**By GEORGE MULLANE.**

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## 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



received their commissions as private ships of war. The Hertford was a vessel of 300 tons, armed with 20 carriage guns, carrying a crew of 160 men. Thomas Lewis was her commander, John Bashard, 1st lieutenant, and John Thomas master. The Musket was 120 tons burthen and carried 80 men, Joshua Mauger and John Hale were sole owners, while Hale was a part owner in the Hertford.

These vessels sailed on their first cruise in November, 1756, and although the log of the Hertford has been preserved and is now in the possession of the Nova Scotia Historical Society, it contains no record of engagements or captures of the enemies ships. During the Seven Years war 15 privateers were armed and fitted out at this port. The names of these vessels have been preserved, together with their tonnage, armament, &c. We learn from the journals of the House of Assembly, 1758, that a charge was preferred against the chief official of the admiralty court. The judge of Vice Admiralty at Halifax during this period was a Mr. Collier, a member of H. M. Council. He was charged by Mr. Suckling, a member of the assembly, "with taking such fees as were grievous and oppressive, and such as the subject was unable to bear, which was highly reflecting on said court." If the records of this court had been preserved we, no doubt, would have a goodly list of prizes to the credit of the privateers which were condemned in this court.

Captain Joseph Rous, who was in command of the privateer Lawrence, was a brother of Captain Rous who appears in the annals of Nova Scotia shortly after the settlement of Halifax. ~~He~~ was a naval officer, and in 1755 was sent to the Bay of Fundy to aid Col. Moncton in his expedition against Fort Beausejour. After the fall of the French fort Capt. Rous and Mr. Brewse, the chief engineer at the time of the investment of the above named fortress, were both praised by Governor Lawrence. When it was decided that a light house should be built on the Isle of Sambro, Capt. Rous, who was the owner, deeded the Island to the province, and his brother Joseph was recommended to have the care of the light house if agreeable to him.

Captain Sylvanus Cobb, of New England, was another enterprising navigator who took part in the naval exploits of the seven years war. He was commander of an armed sloop fitted out by the province, and his deeds are recorded by Murdoch and Aitkin, historians of province and city of Halifax. During the seven years war, the Government of Nova Scotia had in its employ the following armed vessels

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which gave a good account of themselves: The sloop York, Capt. Sylvanus Cobb; the schooner Moncton, Solomon Phips, master; The Snow, Halifax, Captain Taggart, and the sloop Uiysses. A part owner of the Lawrence, was Malachy Salter, a merchant of Halifax, he is buried in St. Paul's cemetery, Pleasant Street. and the inscription on his tomb reads as follows:—

Here lies interred the body of

MALACHY SALTER, Esq.,

Who departed this life, Jan. 13th, A. D 1781,  
ætat 64 years.

“The wise, the good, the pious and the brave  
Live in their death, and flourish in the grave.”

Mr. Salter was a native of New England. He was extensively engaged in the fishery, and had frequently visited Chebucto harbor before the settlement. The old house, corner of Hollis and Salter Streets (now owned by the Telephone Co.), was built by Malachi Salter, and he resided in it at the time of his death. The late Benjamin Salter was a grandson, and some of his descendants still reside in Halifax. At the time of the American revolution, Mr. Salter and several natives of New England fell under suspicion of being in sympathy with the colonists then in arms against Great Britain. Their advocacy of the liberty of the people to control the fiscal policy of the province lead to this doubt of their loyalty.

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### 1776.

Whilst the British army in Boston was closely invested by the Revolutionists, the Americans in the outlying ports, always active in maritime adventure, fitted out their trading and fishing craft, and converted them into privateers. These armed vessels made several attacks on this Province and seized and made prizes of our vessels. The unprotected ports on the Bay of Fundy suffered greatly from the depredations of the rebels

At Cape Forchu, Yarmouth County, the crews of two armed vessels captured four vessels and took some of the inhabitants prisoners. About the same time the town of Yarmouth was invaded by two rebel privateers carrying eight guns and 16 swivels; in this raid they carried off the militia officers.

Before the end of 1776, the rebels had captured nearly 350 prizes. The boldness of these raids caused widespread consternation along the western shores of the Province. The light draught of the rebel vessels allowed them to evade the King's ships, by taking refuge in the numerous shallow harbors along that portion of the exposed coast of Nova Scotia. Responding to the anxious petitions from the inhabitants for aid against these marauders, the Government purchased and fitted out a small armed schooner of 50 tons, carrying eight guns and a crew of 28 men, named the "Loyal Nova Scotian." Captain Cribben was appointed her commander. Subsequently, she was commanded by Captains John Strickland and Edward Rowe. The commanders of this vessel were directed to surprise, attack and take all ships belonging to the Americans, and to bring them to any port in His Majesty's Dominions.

Another letter of marque which was fitted out in 1777, was the "Revenge," commanded by Jonas Fawson, an naval officer, (Fawson Street was named from him). The above vessel and two others, the "Buckram" and "Insulter," commanded respectively by Archibald Allardice and John Sheppard, were commissioned by the Government and were frequently employed on special duty, such as acting as convoy between certain ports in the Province and carrying arms to the militia.

In 1789, the people of Liverpool, by memorial, represented to the Governor of the Province that they suffered great loss by the American privateers, and that they determined to fit out a vessel, and wished a letter of marque to be granted to them.

They also asked the Government to assist them, which it did. This first venture of the Liverpool merchants was called the "Enterprise," a schooner commanded by Joseph Barss. One of her owners was Simeon Perkins, who has left an interesting diary, from which considerable information respecting the privateers in two wars can be gained. On her first cruise, the "Enterprise" captured seven prizes. Early in the war of Independence the following stirring incident occurred:--

"On May the 21st, 1777, thirty rebels in a shallop, mounting one carriage gun and six swivels, with two armed whaleboats, came up the Bay of Fundy and took a schooner belonging to Captain Sheffield, laden with goods for the River St. John, and was pursued by Captains Bishop and Crane in a small schooner, with 35 men, which, after an

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engagement of twenty-five minutes, the rebels took and made prisoners; upon which Lieut. Belcher of the Volunteer Militia of Cornwallis, with 28 Volunteers, embarked on board an armed sloop at that place, and proceeded down the Bay after the rebels, whom they came up with and re-took Captain Sheffield's vessel, after killing one rebel. The rebels took their whaleboats and ran ashore at Cape Split, where Lieut. Belcher could not follow them. After which he gave chase to the vessel taken from Captain Bishop, upon which Captain Bishop discovered the vessel coming after them, rose upon the rebels and re-took the vessel." Shortly after this affair, the Charleston frigate, Captain Evans, came into Halifax in company with the sloop-of-war "Atlanta," which had been taken by the rebel frigate "Alliance." On the 16th of June she again sailed on a cruise, and captured the rebel privateers "Flying Fish" and "Yankee Horn." On the 19th of the same month, while convoying transports in company with the "Vulture" and an armed Nova Scotia ship, the "Jack," the "Charleston" discovered two French frigates near what is now named Sydney, Cape Breton. Captain Evans having signalized the transports to make for port, he most gallantly, with his inferior force, bore down upon the enemy. Sometime after the action began, Captain Evans was killed by a cannon shot. Mr. McKay, the next officer of the "Charleston," under the direction of Captain George, of the "Vulture," continued the action with the greatest coolness and bravery. On board the "Vulture" were the 70th Regiment. Notwithstanding the French were superior in weight of metal, men and size of the ships, they gave way to the obstinate defence of the English and sheered off. Captain Tonge, of the "Jack," the Nova Scotian ship, who was in this engagement, says in his log:—"I had John McKay killed, James Gormory, who was at the helm, mortally wounded upon the quarter deck; and William Clarke, wounded upon the main deck." Captain Tonge belonged to a well known Nova Scotia family. His father, Wicworth Tonge, Sr., is buried in St. Paul's Cemetery. He was an Irishman, and an officer of the Engineers at the siege of Louisburg. During the operations before this famous fortress, for his skill and bravery, he won the approbation of General Wolfe. After the Seven Years' war, he settled in Hants County, and was, until up to the time of his death, Naval Officer of the Province.

Capt. Evans, of the "Charleston," is buried under St. Paul's Church, where a tablet to his memory has been erected.

On the 28th of August, 1781, two rebel schooners, one of 12 and the other 10 carriage guns, surprised the town of Annapolis. After the close of the revolutionary war, for about ten years, our vessels had carried their cargoes unmolested by an enemy; but strained relations between England and France were soon to bring the existing state of affairs to an end.

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### 1793.

In April, 1793, official notification was received in Halifax that the French Republic had declared war against Great Britain on the first of February, 1793. And in accordance with instructions from England, Sir John Wentworth announced that letters of marque or commissions for privateers would be granted in the usual manner. The French lost no time in sending ships to cruise along our coasts in search of captures, for hard on the declaration of war came reports of privateers and frigates cruising in the Bay of Fundy and on the southern shores of the Province.

Several Halifax and Liverpool ships were taken by the enemy, and the captains and crews suffered imprisonment in the horrible prisons of the French West Indies. Among the number who suffered confinement in Gaudeloupe were Captains Pryor, Jacobs and Lloyd.

The most famous of Nova Scotia privateers of this period was the brig "Rover," commanded by Captain Alexander Godfrey, and owned by Messrs. Cochrane, Prescott and Lawson, of Halifax, and Messrs. Hallett Collins, and others, of Liverpool.

Captain Godfrey was a man considerably beyond the ordinary size, of an exceedingly quiet demeanor and retiring disposition.

At the close of the war he disarmed his privateer and entered into the W. I. trade. While on a trip to the West Indies in 1803, he died of yellow fever and was buried near Kingston, in the Island of Jamaica.

On the 10th September, 1800, as the privateer "Rover," of Liverpool, armed with 14 long guns, 4 pounders, 54 men and boys under Captain Godfrey, was cruising near Cape Blanco, she fell in with the Spanish schooner "Santa Ritta," mounting 10 long guns, 6 pounders, 2 English 12-pounder carronades, with about 125 men and accompanied by 3 gun boats also under Spanish colours.

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The schooner and gun boats had the previous day been equipped by the Governor of Puerto Caballo on purpose to capture the "Rover."

A light breeze which had been blowing having died away, the schooner and 2 of the gun boats, by aid of oars, gained fast upon the Brig; keeping up as they advanced, a steady fire from their bow guns, which the "Rover" returned with 2 guns pointed from her stern and as her opponents drew near, with her small arms also.

Seeing that the schooner intended to board on the starboard quarter, and 2 of the gun boats on the opposite bow and quarter, the "Rover" suffered them to advance until they got within about 15 yards of her.

She then manned her oars on the port side, and pulling quickly around, brought her starboard broad side to bear right athwart the schooner's bow, upon whose deck then filled with men ready for boarding the brig poured a whole broadside of round and grape shot.

Immediately after this her active crew manned the guns on the opposite side and raked the two gun boats in a similar manner.

The "Rover" then commenced a close action with the "Santa Ritta," and continued it for an hour and a half, when finding her opponent's fire grow slack, the "Rover" by aid of a light air of wind backed her head sails and brought her stern into contact with the schooner's side.

Captain Godfrey's crew rushed on board of and with little opposition carried the "Santa Ritta."

The two gun boats seeing the fate of their consort sheered off in apparently a very shattered state.

Notwithstanding this long and hard fought action the "Rover" had not a man hurt. Every officer on board the "Santa Ritta" was killed except the officers who commanded a party of 25 soldiers. Fourteen dead and 17 wounded were found on her deck. The prisoners, including the latter, numbered 71, while the enemy's total loss was said to be 54 killed. The prisoners being too numerous to be kept on board, Captain Godfrey landed them all save 8, having previously taken from them the usual acknowledgement not to serve again until exchanged.

As a reward for this gallant action and other services, Captain Godfrey was offered a commission in the Royal Navy and the command of one of H. M. Ships, which was declined.

Another Nova Scotia privateer which gained fame and considerable returns for her owners was the schooner "Charles Mary Wentworth," named after the son of the governor of the province. She was built in Liverpool. In May, 1799, the "Charles Mary Wentworth" returned from a cruise, bringing with her four valuable Spanish prizes, including a letter of marque brig mounting 14 guns, which had fought nearly an hour before striking her colours. The "Wentworth" was commanded by Captain Thomas Parker, and Enos Collins was 1st lieutenant, afterwards the Hon. Enos Collins, of H. M. Council, and who died at the advanced age of 96 years, the richest man of his day in the Province of Nova Scotia. Hon. Mr. Collins was the owner of Gorsebrook, on Tower Road, and all that property known as Collins' field, now used as golf links. The "Wentworth" while on the Spanish Main, spent the days in search and pursuit of the enemy's vessels, and at night stood in towards the land and sent off her cutter ashore to capture anything of value to be had on land. Lieut. Collins often commanded the cutter on her night cruises, and seldom returned empty handed. In conversation on this subject with a friend of his in later years he was wont to say: "You will observe sir, that there were many things which occurred on these visits we don't care to talk about."

Besides the "Rover" and "Wentworth," there were several other privateers of note, commanded by men of daring and enterprise, who gave a good account of themselves during this war. They are as follows:—The Lord Spencer, Duke of Kent, Lord Nelson, General Bowyer, and the brig Eliza, and the ship Aria.

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## 1812.

Strained relations between the governments of the United States and Great Britain culminated in a declaration of war by President Madison, on the 18th of June, 1812.

On the breaking out of the war of 1812-15, privateers were fitted out in Liverpool, N. S. Among them were the Liverpool Packet, Retaliation, Lively, Wolverine, Shannon, Sir John Sherbrooke, Saucy Sixteen, Rolla and a Sloop. The Liverpool Packet was owned by the Hon. Enos Collins of Halifax, and a number of Liverpool merchants. She was originally a tender to a slaver on the coast of Africa, but was captured

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by a British frigate and brought in to Halifax where she was sold, and for some years previous to breaking out of the war had run as a packet between Halifax and Liverpool. She brought the first news of the war to Liverpool, and had been made ready for cruising before leaving that first named port and had to come to Liverpool for hands. She was nicknamed the "Black Joke." She was commanded by Capt. Joseph Barss, and the crew principally fishermen. She made four cruises before she was captured by the Americans. During the first cruise she sent in two ships; the second one a ship and a valuable Spanish prize. The other two cruises about fifteen prizes. She was then captured by an American privateer the "Tom." This privateer was afterwards captured and was owned in Liverpool, and when refitted was known as the Wolverine. The Sir John Sherbrooke was formerly the American brig of war Rattlesnake, and was owned by the Hon. Enos Collins, of Halifax, and Joseph Freeman, Liverpool, and others. She was an eighteen gun vessel, and when she left Halifax, had two hundred men aboard. She made two cruises and captured a number of prizes. On the second cruise she brought in with others, a very valuable prize laden with cotton and indigo. She was in Boston Bay the day previous to the battle between the Shannon and the Chesapeake and the captain reinforced the crew of the Shannon by about forty men; they being Irish immigrants originally bound to New Brunswick, but had been captured by an American privateer and retaken by the Sir John.

I knew one of the Irish immigrants who were taken by Capt. Brooke to reinforce the Shannon. He was, at the time I knew him, near ninety years of age. He lived in a little cottage on Pleasant Street, opposite Smith Street. He told me that one of the pressed men during the fight killed four of the Americans with a boarding pike before he himself was slain. Scarcely was war proclaimed by the United States, when a fleet of privateer vessels infested the coasts of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Depending on their fleetness to get away from the heavy armed frigates and ships of war, they had the boldness to lay in wait for their victims within a few miles of Sambro light. Some of them carrying their temerity too far fell into the hands of H. M. Ships, making for Halifax after a cruise in search of the enemy's ships. On Friday, July the 17th, 1812, the barque William was captured by the American privateer Dolphin, and recaptured by the Indian, a sloop-of-war, which had its

rendezvous at Halifax. The brig *Enterprise* was sent into port by the brig *Ringdove*, also ship *Marquis Somerinous* (a Spanish prize) for it must be remembered that the Napoleonic war was still going on, when the United States thought fit to enter the arena on this side of the Atlantic, influenced by the party in that country who still nourished a deep hatred against England. The *Start* from St. Ubes, W. I., was captured by H. M. Brig *Plummer*, recaptured by the American privateer *Regulation* and taken again on the same day by H. M. *Spartan*, off Cape Negro, Shelburne County. Prizes in these times changed hands swiftly, and the harvest of the sea to be expected from these ventures were often of an illusive character. The following notice will illustrate the above statement.

"July 24, 1812, arrived this morning the American privateer sloop, *Gleaner*, (a very appropriate name for the calling she was engaged in,) 7 guns, 45 men, captured a short distance from the harbor by H. M. Brig *Colibri*,—she had taken the brig *George*, of Pool, England and ship *Mariner* from Glasgow, for St. Andrews, N. B. The *Gleaner* threw six of her guns overboard while being pursued."

To prove that these privateers met their fate quite often I will record some arrivals in the port of Halifax. On July 31st, H. M. S. *Acasta*, Capt. Kerr, from Portsmouth, arrived with an elegant privateer brig *Curlew*, *Weir*, 14 guns and 170 men, captured a few leagues from Sambro light house.

The Yankee privateers had a trick when pursued by British warships, when near Halifax, of hoisting the Union Jack, and making well in the bay so as to deceive the men-of-war into thinking they were Nova Scotian letters of marque, in this ruse they sometimes proved successful. Later on in the war two of the crew of the *Chub* lost their lives on account of that privateer being mistaken by one of H. M. Ships for a Yankee privateer.

In St. Paul's cemetery, opposite the government house, a head stone records the name of Ebenezer Harrington and John Scott, who were killed in this manner on board the *Chub*.

The *Chub* was commanded by Lieut. Demerq. He was a cousin to Gilbert Newton, R. A., a celebrated portrait painter. His most noted portraits are those of Sir Walter Scott, and Lord Lansdowne. The Newtons were an old Halifax family, the first coming to Annapolis from New England, before the settlement on Chebucto Bay. The

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family had been connected with the customs department of Nova Scotia for nearly a century.

Another privateer on the same day, was sent in by H. M. S. Maidstone. She was the ship Catherine, 14 guns and 96 men, captured off Cape Sable.

Here is a specimen of some of the advertisements of prizes, which appeared in the Halifax papers shortly after the declaration of war between the United States and Great Britain—

“To be sold at public auction, the brig Dart and her cargo, condemned by the court of vice-admiralty for breach of the laws of trade and Nova Scotia. God Save the King.

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