









David Sproat

and

Naval Prisoners in the War
of the Revolution

With Mention of

William Lenox, of Charlestown

By

James Lenox Banks

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David Sproat and Naval Prisoners

THE LATE DR. JOHN FISKE in his essay on the "Old and New Ways of Treating History" says:

The old-fashioned historian was usually satisfied with copying his predecessors and thus an error once started became perpetuated; but in our time no history written in such a way would command the respect of scholars. . . . Our first rule then is never to rest contented with the statements of earlier historians, unless where the evidence behind such statements is no longer accessible.

The authority for many of the statements made in reference to the prison ships in the War of the Revolution and the treatment of the prisoners on those ships is largely the unproved charges of early writers and tradition founded on the bitter feeling of

the day. Feeling ran high at that time and many accusations were made which might have been tempered on second thought. Such indeed was the hostility felt towards those who had been employed in official stations here that many were not permitted to remain and sailed for England on the evacuation of the city.

That the guards on these prison ships at times exceeded their authority and abused the prisoners then, as guards do now, is more than probable but no instances have been found which show that the officers, in whose charge the prisoners were, used other than the best means obtainable to relieve their distress and promote their comfort. The British Government had made no other provision for the confinement of naval prisoners than on ships.¹ This method of confining prisoners instead of on shore has been severely criticised and the charge of economy may have been in part the motive for this mode of imprisonment. In doing so, however, the British authorities were acting within their rights, as prison ships at that time were in use by all civilized nations and

¹ Appendix, p. 56.

British prisoners were confined on American prison ships at Boston, in the harbors of Connecticut, and at Esopus on the Hudson.

While prison ships were in use by the British prior to 1779, little if any information is obtainable in reference to them up to that time and although many of the records since that year have been lost or destroyed sufficient information is accessible to disprove many of the assertions made. The purpose of this paper then is to treat of the prison ships from the Fall of 1779 to the close of the war while under the command of David Sproat, the Commissary of Naval Prisoners.

David Sproat was a native of Scotland who came to Philadelphia in 1760. As a resident of that city he was "in very good business as a merchant" and "bore an exceeding good character."¹ He remained loyal in his attachment to the English Government and in June, 1777, left Philadelphia and joined the British army in New York. As soon as his flight was made known, his house was ransacked by the Committee, his desks broke open, his books, papers and furniture

¹ Testimony of Daniel Cox and others presented with memorial, Appendix, p. 116.

much damaged, his clerk confined in a dungeon for refusing to give them information, his servants turned out of doors and his house converted into an hospital for the accommodation of the rebel soldiers.¹

Other losses followed these and that such would be the consequences of his act must have been anticipated by him.

On his arrival in New York he found Sir William Howe about to start on an expedition to Chesapeake Bay and under his command Mr. Sproat went as a volunteer, receiving the appointment of Commissary of Prisoners at the battle of Brandywine.

On October 13, 1779, he was appointed Commissary General of Naval Prisoners in North America and acted as such until the end of the war. On several occasions he occupied a similar position with reference to the prisoners of the army and it was he who received and exchanged the soldiers taken at Saratoga and Yorktown.² Upon his appointment he at once set to work to

¹ Appendix, p. 116; this house was a three story brick dwelling on the S. W. corner of Walnut and Front streets and in 1779 was confiscated and sold.

² Appendix, p. 118.

release the naval prisoners then at New York and by the following year had exchanged 3000 and had a balance of 800 due.¹ Shortly afterwards there was a dispute as to the appointment of his successor and he tendered his resignation to Rear-Admiral Arbuthnot, who was then cruising off Rhode Island.

This was the situation found by Lord Rodney upon his arrival with his fleet at New York and at whose request Mr. Sproat withdrew his resignation.

It was not without some intercession [writes Lord Rodney] which I made for the sake of the public, as this man is the only person I can find capable of managing the business properly that I prevailed on him to continue to act by order from me.²

The prison ships were anchored for a time in the North River and later in the Wallabout, East River, near the site of the present navy-yard, and were under the immediate care of a naval officer, the guard being composed of marines and soldiers.

¹ Appendix, p. 125.

² *Ibid.*

PROBLEM OF HOLDING PRISONERS AT
NEW YORK

The most important difficulty in the matter of naval prisoners was that of exchange. The men were not in the Continental service but were privateersmen and under the rules of war could only be exchanged for seamen and here the trouble arose. The American privateersmen upon capturing a ship neglected to turn their prisoners over to the proper authorities or landed them at insecure places permitting their escape—the result being that American seamen taken prisoners soon far outnumbered those of their opponents.

Congress had already requested the different States to oblige the captains of private vessels to deliver over their prisoners to the Continental Commissioners but it was seldom done. In December, 1781, General Washington in a letter to Congress requesting that this rule be enforced says:

In addition to the motives above mentioned for wishing that the whole business of prisoners of war might be brought under one general regulation, there is another of no small consideration, which is that it would probably put a stop to those mutual complaints of ill treatment

which are frequently urged on each part. For it is a fact that for above two years we have had no reason to complain of the treatment of the Continental land prisoners in New York neither have we been charged with any improper conduct towards those in our hands. I consider the sufferings of the seamen for some time past as arising in a great measure from the want of that general regulation which has been spoken of and without which there will constantly be a great number remaining in the hands of the enemy.¹

To relieve the ships of this constantly increasing number the British authorities had released many prisoners for whom no return was made at the time and in December, 1781, there was a balance due the British of 698 naval prisoners² which in June of the following year it was claimed had increased to upwards of 1300.³

To Mr. Skinner, the American Commissary of Prisoners, Mr. Sproat writes:

Have not I for humanity's sake told you

¹ Appendix, p. 60.

² Appendix, p. 62. By cartels settled at Elizabethtown during the year 1780 the balance due the British on two occasions was as high as 743 and 722 respectively.—Treasury Records, London.

³ Appendix, p. 77, note.

that I would for the present let the balance stand and send you man for man for as many as you would send within the British lines, in order to free as many as possible from the hardships of the then approaching winter?¹

And again to Captain Griffin, an American officer:

You have too long been a witness of the distress and misery attending on imprisonment. . . . You will therefore use your endeavors to get as many released as possible. . . . I mention this to you because I believe you to be a man of humanity.²

Mr. Sproat's proposition for the exchange of naval prisoners for British soldiers, there being at the time no British seamen, was declined by General Washington, as was the offer made later by the British authorities for liberating prisoners by pecuniary compensation. To Mr. Sproat's proposition General Washington replies:

Mr. Sproat's proposition of the exchange of British soldier's for American seamen, if acceded to will immediately give the enemy a very considerable reinforcement and will be a constant

¹ Appendix, p. 45.

² *Ibid*, p. 33.

draft hereafter upon the prisoners of war in our hands.

It ought also to be considered that few or none of the naval prisoners in New York or elsewhere belong to the Continental service.

I however feel for the situation of these unfortunate people and wish to see them relieved by any mode which will not materially affect the public good.¹

Even had the seamen enlisted in the Continental service, as some promised to do upon obtaining their freedom, it would have been an exchange of raw recruits for seasoned soldiers. No criticism should be had of General Washington's refusal—it was a war measure which he considered necessary and his explanation is sufficient reason for his action.

The fault lay to a large extent in the neglect and indifference of American seamen to turn over their prisoners to the proper authorities and so permit the exchange and freedom of their own countrymen.

QUESTION OF DIET AND CARE

The question of feeding not only the many prisoners in their keeping but also

¹ Appendix, p. 64.

their own soldiers and sailors must have often taxed the abilities of the British authorities. Their situation here prevented the purchase of meat and provisions from the surrounding country. It became necessary then to ship from England most if not all the food consumed and that which was fed the naval prisoners was repeatedly stated to be similar in all respects to that fed the sailors in the navy. That the food was in some cases spoiled and unfit for use is indeed most probable considering the time consumed in its shipment and the possibility of deception in its sale to the Government. That the serving of damaged provisions was intentional, as charged, cannot be believed. In a letter from Mr. Sproat to Mr. Skinner he says:

Upon the first complaint being made to me with respect to provisions I went on board the prison ship and wrote down in a large hand on a folio sheet of paper the quantity of each species of provisions allowed by the king to prisoners of war and pasted it on a board provided for that purpose and caused it to be hung up in the most public place of the vessel, in order that every prisoner might see it and requested their own officers that they would take in rotation

the trouble to see that they got the full quantity of good wholesome provisions; and that when a cask happened to prove damaged or otherwise bad it should not be served to them but headed up again, surveyed and condemned according to the custom of the navy.¹

In 1781, in answer to an inquiry from General Washington as to the treatment of naval prisoners and quality of food supplied to them,² Captain Dawson, the commanding officer then stationed at New York, writes that he and other officers of the navy and army went on board the prison ships. That he ordered all prisoners on deck and examined them upon both subjects. That they testified they believed their situation was made at all times as comfortable as possible and that they received their allowance of food similar in quality to that served to the officers and privates of the guards placed over them. The prisoners further testified they were not crowded on the prison ships and "that two or three of each rank are now and have ever been permitted daily to go on shore to New York to purchase for themselves or on the part of the rest of the prisoners

¹ Appendix, p. 41.

² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

whatever they might be in need of." These statements the British officers "declare on our honours" are confirmed and corroborated by every individual on the prison ships and they "declare and implicitly believe that the sickness at present among the prisoners arises from a want of clothing and a proper attention to their own cleanliness."¹

Some weight must be given such a statement as it cannot be lightly assumed these officers deliberately signed a report which they knew to be untrue or the testimony in support of which was obtained by promises or threats.

Another report, made in 1782, signed by a committee of prisoners consisting of twelve captains of American vessels and one surgeon, certifies that they had gone on board five of the prison ships. That they found the prisoners in as comfortable a situation as it was possible for them to be at that season of the year and any report to the contrary was "false and without foundation"; further they do declare "in justice to Mr. Sproat and the gentlemen acting under him in his department that they conscientiously do their

¹ Appendix, pp. 49-54.

duty with great humanity and indulgence to the prisoners and reputation to themselves.”¹

Mr. Sproat, in referring to this report in a letter to Mr. Skinner, says: “surely no one will be so hardy as to contradict what they have said in the matter,”² and so far as known it was not contradicted by any American officer. The signers of this report were on parole and for this reason it has since been stated their evidence is of little value. That they signed the report in return for parole is of course possible and freedom may have been the reward for signing a statement alleged to be untrue. It must be remembered however that these men were officers and probably part owners of the ships which had been captured and presumably in most cases held higher positions in their respective communities than did the unfortunate prisoners who composed their crews. That these thirteen officers, for their own freedom, should leave these men behind in captivity on the prison ships after having given out for publication³ a

¹ Appendix, p. 83.

² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

³ Among the newspapers in which this *Report* was printed were the *Connecticut Gazette*, July 26, 1782; *Pennsylvania Journal*, July 20, 1782; *Royal Gazette*,

report which they knew to be false is if true hard to believe. If these statements had been untrue it would seem they could easily have been disproved by the prisoners who were being exchanged and it is difficult to understand how these officers could have benefited by a parole to return home under such circumstances.

That attempts were made to supply the naval prisoners with fresh food is evidenced by the request to Congress for permission for a boat to fish near Sandy Hook for their benefit.¹ A request was also made to Congress by Mr. Sproat for permission to purchase wood within the American lines as it could be procured much cheaper in that way and would enable him to afford the prisoners a greater supply.²

On the occasion of a meeting at New York between the American and British commissaries, in June, 1782, the former reported to General Washington that many of the prisoners were put on two of the islands in the harbor of New York and "some

N. Y., June 26, 1782; *New York Gazette* and the *Weekly Mercury*, N. Y., July 1 and 8, 1782; *New York Packet* and the *American Advertiser*, Fish-Kill, July 18, 1782.

¹ Appendix, p. 99.

² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

pains taken for the treatment of the sick”¹; but his assertion that he was not permitted to visit the prison ships was at once denied by Mr. Sproat. “This I deny. On the contrary, sir, when it was proposed you declined it.”²

It had been Mr. Sproat’s custom to ask subscriptions from the charitable people of this city with which to purchase clothes and bedding for the prisoners and he said he never failed in obtaining the amount wanted until the fall of 1782. It was upon this occasion he personally paid out upwards of £550 currency in their behalf,³ which Congress, in 1784, upon the recommendation of Mr. Morris,⁴ Minister of Finance, directed to be returned to him.⁵

The “services and civilities” shown by him to the French prisoners were appreciated and acknowledged.⁶

To the Governor of Pennsylvania he writes:

Since my appointment to be Commissary of Prisoners your Excellency may easily be

¹ Appendix, p. 79.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

informed that I have at all times contributed as much as it has been in my power to relieve their distress and make confinement as comfortable to them as possible.¹

THE COMPLAINT OF CROWDING

The charge that the prisoners were habitually crowded on the prison ships was denied by the British authorities and such occasions must have been the exception when the number of ships used for the purpose is considered.

It is impossible [writes Commodore Affleck to General Washington] that the greater inconvenience, which people confined on board ships experience beyond those confined on shore can be avoided and a sudden accumulation of people often aggravates the evil. But I assure you that every attention is shown that is possible.²

New York was the headquarters for both the army and navy and for that reason many of the naval prisoners were sent to that port where they could be more con-

¹ Appendix, p. 104.

² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

veniently and securely held, but they were not all confined on the ships—some were in the Provost, many were put on Blackwell's Island and other islands in the harbor, and a large number permitted to go on parole.

Others were sent to Great Britain, Halifax, and Bermuda but Congress at first objected to this and directed that no exchange of naval prisoners take place until these seamen were returned to the British garrisons in America.¹ The English Government adopted this latter method during the Boer war and several thousand of her prisoners were sent to Bermuda—it was the only practical way to hold them. At one time five ships² were taken up for the reception of naval prisoners, two of which were hospital ships, being covered with awnings and every sick man was furnished with a cradle, and bedding, and surgeons were appointed to take care of them.³ The *Jersey*, the most widely known of all, was formerly a 64-gun ship carrying a crew of some 400 men—so dismantled and at anchor it was computed a

¹ Appendix, pp. 39 and 55.

² *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 43 and 83.

thousand men need not have been exposed to hardships on board of her. The *Good Hope*, another ship, was heated with large stoves and had separate quarters for officers and men, as had also the *Jersey*, but, says Mr. Sproat, "in this comfortable situation did the prisoners remain until the 5th of March, 1780, when they wilfully, maliciously and wickedly burnt the best prison ship in the world."¹

The following reports and estimates of the number of naval prisoners at New York, on the dates given, are a denial of many of the statements made on this question of crowding and show how exaggerated is the impression of the number confined.

Aug. 15, 1780. Capt. Grinnell, a prisoner, estimates the number on the *Strombolo* and *Scorpion* at 300.²

Oct. 14, 1780. Lord Rodney reports 800 on three ships on his arrival which had increased to 1200 at date of report.³

June 22, 1781. New London, Conn., letter to *Penn. Packet* says "about 600" on prison ships at New York.⁴

¹ Appendix, p. 43.

² *Penn. Packet*, Aug. 22, 1780.

³ Appendix, p. 125.

⁴ *Penn. Packet*, July 10, 1781.

- Aug. 27, 1781. Thomas Andros, a prisoner, in his narrative estimates 400 on the *Jersey* in August, which soon increased to 1200.
- Dec. 23, 1781. Mr. Skinner, the American Commissary, reports "near 500" on all ships.¹
- April 26, 1782. A prisoner in a letter written at that time estimates the total number at upwards of 700 exclusive of sick.²
- May 3, 1782. A prisoner in a letter written at that time estimates the total number at about 1000.³
- May 25, 1782. A prisoner in a letter written at that time estimates the total number at about 1100.⁴
- June, 1782. Thomas Dring, a prisoner, in his narrative says there was an average of 1000 on the *Jersey*.
- Oct., 1782. Alex. Coffin, Jr., a prisoner, in his narrative estimates "about 1100" on the *Jersey*.
- April 6-17, 1783. All prisoners were released.⁵

It will be noticed that the estimates given in the narratives place the number on the

¹ Appendix, p. 62.

² *Penn. Packet*, May 21, 1782.

³ *Ibid.*, May 14, 1782.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *Packet*, June 18, 1782.

⁵ *Ibid.*, April 17, 1783; Appendix, p. 102.

Jersey alone at from 400 to 1200, but it should be remembered that most or all of the narratives were written years after the war.

In June, 1782, General Washington and Mr. Skinner objected to confining as many as "800" on the *Jersey* at that season of the year.¹ As they obtained this information from prisoners, permitted to go out to ask the exchange of seamen for soldiers, it is fairly certain 800 was the highest number mentioned at that time—especially as the estimate given in a letter dated May 25th places a total of about 1100 on all ships. Mr. Dring's narrative was written in 1824, a few months before his death, and it is probable he was mistaken in his estimate as he was in the more important statement of the length of his imprisonment.²

How many were confined on the ships during the war is not known nor is information obtainable as to the number who died thereon.

¹ Appendix, p. 90.

² He states he was a prisoner on the *Jersey* for five months after his capture in May, 1782, but the records show he was exchanged in about two months.—*Recollections of the Jersey Prison Ship*, edited by H. P. Dawson, p. 23, note.

In a letter dated June 24, 1782, the American Commissary referred to the deaths on the prison ships as having been in the "hundreds,"¹ and this is the only estimate found on this subject which was made by any one in authority.

That many died there can be no doubt but the estimates of these numbers are without any foundation.

Even as early as 1783 a reckless newspaper writer estimated (on what authority it is not stated) that precisely 10,644 seamen perished on board the *Jersey* and this baseless conjecture has gradually passed into sober history for a well-attested fact, as if 10,644 men could have died out of one ship in the space of three years and been buried on the adjacent shore! The number that perished was doubtless fearfully great and needed no exaggeration.²

One writer in support of an estimate of 11,500 says:

David Sproat returned to America after the war and resided in Philadelphia where he died. The Commissary could not have been ignorant of the statement published here on this interest-

¹ Appendix, p. 93.

² Valentine's *Manual*, 1851, p. 417.

ing subject. We may therefore infer that about that number, 11,500, perished on the prison ships.¹

Even if silence be accepted as proof of such a conclusion it would fail in this instance, as Mr. Sproat did not return to this country and died in Scotland.

NARRATIVES OF THE PRISONERS

A few of the prisoners have left narratives describing what they say were their experiences on the prison ships.

While these narratives are no doubt in a large measure true, nevertheless allowance must be made for some of the statements published—such as to cause a doubt as to the accuracy of their authors or probability that the experiences related were those of many of their companions.

Notwithstanding the complaints of close confinement, escapes were many and the American papers frequently reported the return of these men—in some instances escapes having been accomplished by overpowering the guards and taking their arms.

Small-pox, yellow fever, and dysentery

¹ General Jeremiah Johnson—*The Naval Magazine*, 1836, vol. i., p. 467.

carried off many and the sufferings of the prisoners at times must have been deplorable.

Confinement, the want of proper clothing, and the neglect of personal cleanliness of many no doubt weakened their condition and made them an easy prey to disease. The difficulty of controlling these epidemics will be realized when it is remembered that in time of peace, in 1793, in Philadelphia, and in 1795, in New York, with committees of health appointed, in the case of New York by the Governor of the State with power to enforce the most rigid quarantine, some 4000 persons died of yellow fever in Philadelphia and over 750 in New York City.¹ The prisoners were "furnished with buckets and brushes to cleanse the ship and with vinegar to sprinkle her inside but their indolence and despair were such that they would not use them or but rarely."² They were the victims of war just as the thousands who perished in the Northern and Southern prisons eighty years later were victims.

In contrast to these tales of suffering may

¹ Minutes of the N. Y. Committee of Health; in the epidemic of 1798 more than 2000 deaths occurred in N. Y. City—Thos. A. Janvier.

² Narrative of Rev. Thos. Andros.

be mentioned the experiences of other prisoners who relate that friends were permitted to visit them and furnish them with such articles as promoted their comfort; correspondence with their families by letter was allowed and the prisoners were even permitted to visit their families in distant States on their simple word of honor to return to captivity within a specified time.¹

They were allowed to make purchases from the "bum boats" which came alongside the ship.² The drinking water so strongly condemned in one instance was declared good by others—one of whom states that a large boat was kept in constant employment to furnish the necessary supply.³ When desired the reading of funeral services was never interfered with.⁴

It must not be supposed that complaints of ill-treatment were made by American prisoners only—they were made by British prisoners on exactly similar grounds.⁵ Gen-

¹ Narratives of Wm. Drowne and others; *Recollections of the Jersey Prison Ship*, by Dawson.

² Sherburne's narrative.

³ Narrative of Rev. Thos. Andros.

⁴ Narrative of Wm. Drowne.

⁵ Appendix, pp. 44, 45, 97, etc.

eral Washington refers to these complaints as "mutual" and "frequently urged on each part." ¹

On April 9, 1783, all the men on the prison ships at New York were put on board other vessels and sent to their respective homes to save them the expense and fatigue of long marches. ²

It is interesting to note upon this occasion there were only eighteen or twenty sick and wounded who could not be removed with safety, and they were afterwards sent to Boston.

The mortality of the men on the prison ships was not the result of neglect or inhumanity of the British and such was never proved but was due to the causes herein stated. The British authorities repeatedly denied the truth of many of the statements made at the time and presented evidence to the American authorities in support of such denial.

The mere rejection of this evidence in later years as untrue does not prove the contrary.

Nor is it to be believed Mr. Sproat would

¹ Appendix, p. 61.

² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

write to American officers and Governors of the States of his endeavors to relieve the condition of the prisoners had such not been the truth. He did all in his power which the opportunities of the time permitted, conscious at least of the approval of his superior officers¹ and at the close of the war of his government.²

He sailed for England in December, 1783, and the following year was elected a member of the Town Council of Kirkcudbright, Scotland, of which Burgh he was afterwards twice elected Provost. He died in October, 1799, aged sixty-five years.

¹ Appendix, pp. 120-126.

² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

WILLIAM LENOX¹

After the capture of Charleston, S. C., by Sir Henry Clinton in May, 1780, that port was also used for the confinement of naval prisoners.

On May 21st William Lenox, a nephew of Mr. Sproat, was appointed Deputy Commissary of Naval Prisoners by Rear-Admiral Arbuthnot and was stationed at Charleston. He served as Commissary until his death the following year.

¹ A brother of Robert Lenox of New York and of Major David Lenox of the Continental Army.

CHARLESTOWN, S. C.

Vol. 1.

The Royal Gazette,

No. 23.

May 16-19, 1781.

CHARLESTOWN, MAY 19TH.

DEATHS. Last Wednesday evening, after a short illness, in the 29 year of his age, William Lennox, Esqr., Commissary of Naval Prisoners for the Southern District—Universally esteemed, beloved and lamented; a cheerful companion, a sincere, steady friend, and an honest man.

Inscription on tombstone, First (Scotch)
Presbyterian Churchyard, Charleston, S. C.:

ERECTED
IN MEMORY OF
WILLIAM LENOX, ESQR.,
LATE
HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S
COMMISSARY OF PRISONERS
WHO DIED
THE 16TH OF MAY, 1781,
AGED 29 YEARS.

A Brother's affection pays this last
Tribute at the Remembrance of a
Loving Relation, a Steady friend, a
Good member of Society, and a
Sincere Christian.

Appendix

LETTER FROM MR. SPROAT TO CAPT.
GRIFFIN.

(From the Washington Papers.)

NEW YORK 30th Decr 1780—

SIR,

You have too long been a witness of the distress and misery attending on imprisonment— You will therefore use your endeavours to get as many released as possible—Altho. you are greatly indebted—a number of our people are withheld from us, at Hartford in Connecticut— at East town in Pennsylvania and at Philadelphia, which for the good of the whole had better be sent in. I mention this to you because I believe you to be a man of humanity and am

Sir,

Your mo. huml Servt.

DAVID SPROAT,

Commissary Genl. N. P.

Capt. Griffin.

LETTERS, REPORTS, ETC.

(From the *New York Gazette* and the *Weekly Mercury*, February 12, 1781.)

I.

LETTER FROM MR. SPROAT TO MR. GAINÉ.

MR. GAINÉ,

As I apprehend the following affidavit of George Batterman and the report of Congress derogatory to the honour of the Commander in Chief of his Majesty's fleet in America as well as the reputation of my office I desire you will give both a place in your paper and also insert the copy of my letter to Mr. Skinner on the occasion.

II.

BATTERMAN'S DECLARATION.

The deposition of George Batterman passenger on board the brig *Providence*, from Turks Island bound to Rhode Island of lawful age, testifies and declares "that he was captured the 15th

day of September last by the *Intrepid* a 64 gun ship belonging to the British King, commanded by James Anthony Pic Mewloy, who with his own hands took every stitch of cloaths, the prisoners brought on board and hove them overboard on purpose to distress them, as they were of no service to him; and on the 28th of said month put us on board of the prison ship at New York where we were served about eight ounces of condemned bread per day and about eight ounces of meat per week; from thence transported on board the *Jersey*, a 64 gun ship, where there were supposed to be 1100 Americans on board, and we were told that we were now in a King's ship and that if we ran away we should be brought to the gangway and flogged, according to their articles of war; where we were supplied with the same quantity of bread and meat though neither of them fit to eat; and after we were on board a few days there came on board recruiting officers and finding that our officers persuaded our people not to enlist or enter into their service, they came on board and told all the officers to give in their names to be exchanged; the day following there came on board several boats and took them ashore; we were informed they were sent to the provost, then telling the people that they never would be exchanged, they enticed them to enlist; after they found that this

scheme would not take they took another method, made another draught of officers and sent them on board of the *Yarmouth*, a 64 gun ship, and they informed us that they were sent to England, also that all officers of commissioned vessels should be sent to England. The tenth day of December they made another draught to send in the fleet and they called their names over before we came away. On the 5th day of December we were served one pint of water when there were 75 puncheons in the hold. They have taken this method of starving us for the want of water to kill us or to make us enter into the service. They never allow a man that is sick to go to the hospital ship till they are so weak and low that they often expire before they get out of the ship. They never allow the sick to be mustered only when there is a wet or damp air. The commanding officer told us, that his orders were, that if the ship took fire, we should all be turned below and perish in the flames which we experienced one day; by accident the ship took fire in the steward's room; the commanding officer ordered the Hessian guards to turn us below and if we offered to resist that they should fire among us and if any of us should get into the water they should fire on us and kill us if possible.

GEORGE BATTERMAN.

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS. BOSTON,
December 19th, 1780.

The above named George Batterman came before me and being duly cautioned to declare the truth made solemn oath to the foregoing deposition by him subscribed.

S. HOLTON,
Justice of the Peace through
the Commonwealth.

True copy, attest JOHN AVERY, Sec.

III.

RESOLVE OF CONGRESS.

IN CONGRESS, January 5th, 1781.

The Committee to whom were referred the letter of Abraham Skinner Commissary General of Prisoners and other papers relative to the treatment of prisoners in the hands of the enemy delivered in a Report as follows:—

“That notwithstanding every effort of Congress to obtain for our people, prisoners in the hands of the enemy, that treatment which humanity alone should have dictated, the British commanders unmindful of the tenderness exercised towards their men prisoners in our hands and regardless of the practice of civilized nations have persisted in treating our people prisoners to them with every species of insult, outrage and

cruelty. Officers and men are indiscriminately thrown into the holds of prison ships and into loathesome dungeons and there deprived of fuel and the common necessaries of life by which means many of the citizens of these States have been compelled to enter into their service to avoid those distresses which a conduct so contrary to the law of nations have brought upon them. Our seamen taken upon the American Coast have been sent to Great Britain and other parts beyond Seas, to prevent their being exchanged or to force them to take arms against their Country.

That in the opinion of the Committee an exercise of the law of retaliation has become necessary as a justice due to those citizens of America whom the fortune of war has thrown into the power of the enemy"; whereupon

Resolved, That copies of the letter of Mr. A. Skinner and the other papers referred, be transmitted to the Commander in chief and that he be directed to enquire into the manner in which our people who are prisoners are treated by the enemy and that he give immediate orders to the commanding officers at the different posts to take particular care that the British prisoners receive the same allowance and treatment in every respect as our people who are prisoners receive from the enemy.

Resolved, That it be recommended to the

respective executives to take effectual measures for carrying into execution the Act of Congress of 13th Jan'y, 1780, respecting prisoners taken by the citizens, troops or ships of particular States.

That the Board of Admiralty, issue orders not to exchange any British sea officer or seaman until the enemy shall have returned to some of their garrisons in America such seamen as they have taken upon the American coast and sent to Great Britain or other parts beyond sea; and that the Board of Admiralty give orders for continuing the treatment of prisoners as herein directed until they receive orders to the contrary from Congress or the Commander in Chief.

Published by order of Congress.

CHARLES THOMPSON Sec'y.

IV.

LETTER FROM MR. SPROAT TO MR. SKINNER.¹

ABRAHAM SKINNER, Esqr., American
Commissary General of Prisoners.

SIR:

In a news-paper printed in Philadelphia by Mess. Hall & Sellers under the date of the 17th instant and No. 2,640 I observe inserted a

¹ This letter was also published in the *Royal Gazette*, February 7, 1781.—J. L. B.

declaration said to be on oath from George Batterman before Justice S. Holton, *Commonwealth of Massachusetts* and also a resolve of Congress "not to exchange any British sea officer or seamen until the enemy have returned to some of their garrisons in America such seamen as they have taken upon the American coasts and sent to Great Britain" which is preceded by the report of a committee of their own body full of declamation against the British Commander.

As these allegations reflect dishonor on the British Commander and department over which I am supposed to have the management I shall first take the liberty to prove that they are not founded on matters of fact but merely calculated to deceive the world into a belief of the necessity of using our people who fall into their hands ill and inflame the minds of those already wounded by such impressions—and then state what has been the custom and usage to the naval prisoners both here and with you; from which the people at a distance (for whom their publication seems to be prepared) will be enabled to draw just conclusions.

Mr. Batterman says that Captain Mewloy, with his own hands took every stitch of cloaths the prisoners had and hove them overboard *on purpose* to distress them.

That they were thrown out of a King's ship I can easily believe; for no dirty rags are suffered

to remain there to breed disorders amongst the ships company—Mr. Batterman went on board the *Jersey* prison ship the 28th September and was discharged for exchange the 10th day December during which time viz. the 5th of December *he says* they were served only one pint of water *that is each man*; and then concludes “they have taken this method of starving us for the want of water to kill us.”

This may go down in New-England but never can be believed in Old England or any other country.—That very many of them are sick and die is true; but I will not allow that their disorders proceed from any other cause than dirt, nastiness and want of clothing—he also says that they were abridged of the King’s allowance and the provisions bad.—that they “were served *about* eight ounces of condemned bread per day and *about* eight ounces of meat per week,” may I not suppose that with respect to meat the printer has made a mistake in putting the word week in place of day—and (without prejudice to the gentleman on oath) that he may also be mistaken with respect to the quantity which I am led to believe from the guardedness of his expression. I appeal to Mr. Batterman and every other prisoner whether or not I have not always redressed their grievances to the utmost of my power?—upon the first complaint being made to me with respect

to provisions I went on board the prison ship and wrote down in a large hand on a folio sheet of paper the quantity of each species of provisions allowed by the King to prisoners of war and pasted it on a board provided for that purpose and caused it to be hung up in the most public place of the vessel in order that every prisoner might see it and requested of their own officers that they would take in rotation the trouble to see that they got the full quantity of good sound wholesome provisions; and that when a cask happened to prove damaged or otherwise bad, it should not be served to them but headed up again, surveyed and condemned according to the custom of the navy.

The committee of Congress boldly asserts that the British Commander "unmindful of the tenderness exercised towards their men, prisoners in our hands and regardless of the practice of *civilized nations* has persisted in treating our people, prisoners to them with every species of insult, outrage and cruelty" that "officers and men are indiscriminately thrown into the holds of prison ships and into loathsome dungeons and there deprived of fuel and the common necessaries of life."

On my appointment to this office, the 13th of October 1779, I examined into the state and condition of prisoners and prison ships and reported the same to Admiral Arbuthnot who

ordered me to make every necessary regulation in order to accommodate the prisoners as well as circumstances would admit. Accordingly carpenters were sent from the King's Yard and a bulk head run across the prison ship *Good Hope*; the officers were berthed abaft this partition and the men before it and two excellent large stoves purchased with every appurtenance thereunto belonging and erected, one in the apartment of the officers and the other in the apartment of the men.

Was not the hospital ship equipped in the same manner and every sick or wounded person furnished with a cradle, bedding and surgeons appointed to take care of them?

In this comfortable situation did the prisoners remain until the 5th of March 1780 when they wilfully, maliciously and wickedly burnt the best prison ship in the world. The perpetrators of this horrid crime were not hanged but ordered to the provost.

The prison ship at this time lay in the Wallabough near to a number of transport ships; the people belonging to them were so alert in snatching the prisoners from the flames, that but two out of some hundreds were missing. That is what I suppose the Congress alludes to when they say that they "were indiscriminately thrown into the holds of prison ships":— They were indeed without distinction put on

board the nearest ship called the *Woodlands* where they remained for a short time until the ships *Strombolo* and *Scorpion* were got ready for their reception. But the officers were always admitted to parole on Long Island in that pleasant village Jamaica until the 10th of July last when many of them had broke their parole and otherways behaved so ill, that it was refused them.

This alteration had not taken place above two months when the prisoners were all moved on board the ship *Jersey* where there is a variety of apartments for officers and plenty of room between decks for the men.

I have now related to you what has been the state and condition of the naval prisoners here; and now shall proceed to ask what has been the state and condition of those with you—Did not the officers belonging to what are called the continental frigates in 1779 go on board the prison ship at Boston and press all the boys into their service? And when the poor little fellows cried at the insult and some of their captains complained at the usage, Mr. Williams late commander of the privateer sloop *Witch* in particular and some others were carried on shore thrown into jail and shackled with heavy irons?—Yet Mr. Batterman complains of the injustice of a recruiting serjeant going on board the prison ship here to enlist volunteers.

Have not many of the King's subjects who resided in this country prior to the declaration of independence that took shelter in New York to avoid oppression and afterwards went to sea for a living been taken and carried prisoners to Philadelphia and thrown into a dungeon and there "treated with every species of insult, outrage and cruelties" sufficient to disgrace any nation beyond the mountains? Have you not in that plentiful province Pennsylvania fed the poor prisoners who were confined in gaol last summer on dried clams fourteen or fifteen only to a ration and in the fall of the year when meat was plenty, on bread and water only? and all this under the nose of the very people who say that "an exercise of the law of retaliation has become necessary."—Have not I for humanity's sake told you that I would, for the present, let the balance stand and send you man for man for as many as you should send within the British lines in order to free as many as possible from the hardships of the then approaching winter? Did you insert this in your letter or any of the papers laid before Congress? Have you informed them of the great numbers due to us? Surely they have not made this resolve on purpose to cancel the debt? However if they will but stick to it, it will hurry on their misery and distress faster than they are aware of and in a short time put the honour

of every man to the test who is out on parole.

I sincerely sympathize with the poor prisoners on both sides in distress and am, Sir,

Your most obedient

And most humble Servant

DAVID SPROAT.

Commissary General for Naval

Prisoners in North America.

NEW YORK, 29th January 1781.

V.

LETTER FROM CAPT. DAWSON TO MR. GAINÉ.

IRIS OFF NEW YORK, Feb. 5th, 1781.

MR. GAINÉ:

During the present contest between Great Britain and the rebellious, in her North American Colonies, it has been the invariable practice of their leaders to misrepresent all facts, as might best serve their atrocious purposes, and prejudice or blind the minds of their fellow subjects, less violent, and more honest, or more candid than themselves.

Of this nature is the affidavit, lately published in a Boston News-Paper, respecting the treatment of the Naval prisoners in our possession—it has the same object—but it cannot be successful; because, an extensive and impartial Enquiry has taken place and the necessary measures

been adopted on our part, to avert its baneful and pernicious effects.

It is therefore become necessary, for the attainment of this valuable and important purpose, to publish to the world the enclosed papers; and I desire you will accordingly insert them in your paper.

I am Sir,

Your most obedient, humble Servant,
G. DAWSON.

VI.

LETTER FROM GENERAL WASHINGTON TO ADMIRAL ARBUTHNOT.

NEW WINDSOR, Jan. 25th, 1781.

(Received at New York, Feb. 1st, 1781.)

SIR:

Through a variety of channels, representations of too serious a nature to be disregarded have come to us, that the American Naval prisoners in the harbour of New York, are suffering all the extremities of distress—from a too crowded, and in all respects, disagreeable and unwholesome situation on board the prison ships; and from the want of food and other necessaries. The picture given us of their sufferings is truly calamitous and deplorable; if just it is the obvious interest of both parties (to omit the plea of humanity) that the causes should,

without delay, be enquired into and removed; if false, it is equally desirable that effectual measures should be taken to obviate misapprehension. This can only be done by permitting an officer of confidence on both sides, to visit the prisoners in their respective confinements, and examine into their true conditions: This will either at once satisfy you, that by some abuse of trust in the persons immediately charged with the care of the prisoners, their treatment is really such as has been described to us and requires a change, or it will convince us that the clamours are ill grounded.

A disposition to aggravate the miseries of captivity is too illiberal to be imputed to any but those subordinate characters who in every service are too often remiss or unprincipled. This reflection assures me that you will acquiesce in the mode proposed for ascertaining the truth; for detecting delinquency on one side, or falsehood on the other.

The discussions and asperities which have had too much place on the subject of prisoners are so irksome in themselves and have had so many ill consequences, that it is infinitely to be wished there may be no room given to receive them. The mode I have suggested, appears to me calculated to bring the present matter to a fair, direct, and satisfactory issue. I am sensible of no inconveniences it can be attended

with, and I therefore hope for your concurrence. I shall be glad, as soon as possible to hear from you on the subject.

I am Sir,

Your most obedient

And Humble Servant,

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

Admiral Arbuthnot or the
officer commanding the
British fleet at New York.

VII.

LETTER FROM CAPT. DAWSON TO GENERAL WASHINGTON.

IRIS OFF NEW YORK, Feb. 4th, 1781.

SIR,

As commanding officer of his Majesty's ships at New York, I have received your letter of the 25th ultimo, and inclose you the result of a very particular examination of the treatment of the Naval Prisoners in our possession.

An old sixty-four gun ship is allotted for their reception in this harbour, and every possible check has been established to prevent any practices from creeping in, in violation of the laws and precedents of war in similar situations. The arrangement of exchange and parole is made by the Commissary-General, Mr. David Sproat.—Lieut. Sporne, of the Royal Navy, an

officer of experience and humanity, commands the prison ship, which is victualled by a purser, with the very same provisions that the officers and seamen in the Royal Service are supplied with, and it is issued to them in the same manner.

I have transmitted your letter to his excellency the Commander in Chief, who is at a distance from this port—if his Excellency allows one of your officers to come to New York—it is well. Whilst it depends upon me it is inadmissible.

I am Sir, Your most obedient
Humble Servant

G. DAWSON,
Captain of his Majesty's ship the *Iris*.

His Excellency General Washington.

VIII.

REPORT ON TREATMENT OF NAVAL PRISONERS.

Report of an enquiry made this day on board his Majesty's prison ship the *Jersey* under the command of Lieutenant John Sporne, of the Royal Navy, respecting the treatment and usage of the naval prisoners in all cases:

Present: — Captain George Dawson, Commander of his Majesty's ship the *Iris*.

Captain Rupert George, Commander of his Majesty's ship the *Avenger*.

Captain James Battersby, of the 29th Regiment of Foot and Ensign DeChambault of the 24th Regiment of Foot.

The object of the enquiry being considered was naturally found to divide itself into two points:

1st. Of the treatment of the prisoners with respect to good order and decorum.

2d. Of the administration of the King's allowance of provisions.

All the prisoners were ordered upon deck, mustered and examined upon these subjects. Six of the principal officers, of which viz.: Stephen Hopkins, late commander of the brigantine *Maryland*, Thomas Hardy, first lieutenant of the same, William Barrows 2nd lieutenant of the same, Dr. Clement Smith surgeon, Robert Duncan, sailing master and John Cook, late master of the schooner *Flying-Fish*, being witnesses thereto, attest this report.

The underwritten being the oldest prisoners in our possession, viz:

WILLIAM JOHNSON
DANIEL M'KIB
JOHN ROYSTER
LUZLY TURPIN
PETER DEAL
WILLIAM BEED AND
PATRICK DALEY

severally, collectively and voluntarily declare,

That they have been seven months prisoners in the Royal service, and at different periods confined in the prison ships *Scorpion*, *Strombolo*, *Hunter* and *Jersey*. That, with respect to the first point, They firmly believe their situation was made at all times as comfortable as possible, and that they were in no instance oppressed or ill-treated.

To the second point they declare, that they regularly received the under-mentioned weekly allowance of provisions viz:

Bread	sixty-six	ounces
Beef	forty-three	ounces
Pork	twenty-two	ounces
Butter	eight	ounces
Pease	one pint and one sixth of a pint	
Oatmeal	two	pints

That it is, and ever has been issued to them without drawback or deduction and of the very same species and quality with which the Commanders, Officers, Seamen and Marines, belonging to the said ships were victualled; as also the Officers and privates of the respective guards, that have been from time to time placed over them; and that they have at all times had fuel and every necessary convenience for cooking.

We the under-signed officers in his Majesty's

service declare on our honours, that the above testimony is confirmed and corroborated by that of every individual in the prison ship.

We also farther declare, and implicitly believe that the sickness at present among the prisoners, arises from a want of cloathing and a proper attention in themselves to their own cleanliness.

The prisoners close their general testimony with an affirmation that they have never been and are not now crowded in the prison ship; and that two or three of each rank are now; and have ever been permitted daily to go on shore to New York, to purchase for themselves, or on the part of the rest of the prisoners, whatever they might be in want of.

Given under our hands on board his Majesty's ship the *Jersey* in the harbour of New York, the second day of February 1781.

{ G. DAWSON
 { RUPT. GEORGE
 { JAS. BATTERSBY
 { DECHAMBAULT

attested { STEPHEN HOPKINS
 { THOMAS HARDY
 { WILLIAM BARROWS
 { CLEMENT SMITH
 { ROBERT DUNCAN
 { JOHN COOK

Note.

The affidavits of the persons named below, sworn to on February 3, 1781 before the Mayor of New York were sent to Gen'l Washington and formed a part of the foregoing correspondence.

Copies of the affidavits were printed in full in the *New York Gazette*, February 12, 1781 and stated in substance that "provisions of the same goodness, species and quality" were issued to the naval prisoners as during the same period were issued to the seamen in the Royal Navy.

Henry Davies, Esqr., agent for victualling his Majesty's fleet in North America.

Alexander M'Kean, Purser of his Majesty's ship the *Charlestown*.

Joseph Short, of the city of New York, Gentleman, clerk in the office of the agent for victualling his Majesty's fleet.

John Griffith, and 13 others, masters of ships and brigantines, navy victuallers.

John Drake of the City of New York, Gentleman, appointed to superintend the victualling of Naval Prisoners.

Peter Robertson, acting Purser of his Majesty's prison ship the *Jersey*.

Jeremiah Downer, late commander of his Majesty's prison ship the *Strombolo*.

J. L. B.

REPORT OF CONGRESS READ JAN'Y 29,

1781

(From the Papers of the Continental Congress.)

The Committee to whom was recommitted the reports on the Letter of Abraham Skinner Comm^y of Prisoners Report as follows: Jany 28, 1781:

Resolved, That that clause in the Act of Congress of the 5th of this Instant, which directs "That the board of Admiralty issue orders not to exchange any British Sea Officer or Sea man until the Enemy shall have returned to some of their Garrisons in America, such sea men as they have taken upon the American coast and sent to Great Britain or other ports beyond sea" be Repealed.

Resolved, That in retaliating for cruelties exercised by the enemy upon American Prisoners officers or privates where there shall not be a sufficient number of the Enemy in our Power, of the same line, Rank or character; no discrimination be made between Prisoners taken from the Enemy in the Land or Sea Service, but that those of either line and other subjects of the enemy be retaliated upon as occasion may require.

EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM COMMODORE AFFLECK, COMMANDING AT NEW YORK, TO GENERAL WASHINGTON.

(From *The Jersey Prison Ship*, Edited by Henry B. Dawson).

NEW YORK, 30 August, 1781.

SIR:

.

The Government having made no other provision for naval prisoners than shipping, it is impossible that the greater inconvenience, which people confined on board ships experience beyond those confined on shore, can be avoided, and a sudden accumulation of people often aggravates the evil. But I assure you, that every attention is shown that is possible, and that the Prison-ships are under the very same regulations here, that have been constantly observed towards the prisoners of all nations in Europe. Tables of diet are publicly affixed, officers visit every week, redress and report grievances, and the numbers are thinned as they can provide shipping, and no attention has been wanting.

The latter point cannot be admitted in its full extent; but if you think fit to send an officer of character. . . .

I have the honor to be, Sir,

With due respect, etc.,

EDM. AFFLECK.

NOTICE.

(From the *Royal Gazette*, New York, Dec. 8, 1781.)

WHEREAS, it is found by experience that indulgencies shewn to prisoners have often been abused by them and favored making their escape—I do therefore require all Captains, Commanders, Masters and Prize Masters belonging to the Royal Navy and private vessels of war who shall bring naval prisoners into this port; not to allow any of them to come on shore on any promise or pretence whatsoever, but immediately after their arrival to cause a report of them to be made at the Commissary's Office, No. 33 Maiden Lane, where they will be directed how to dispose of them. And if notwithstanding some may escape while in charge of the captors or afterwards from on board the prison ships—the person found harbouring or concealing them, may depend upon being proceeded against according to the Commandant's proclamation.

DAVID SPROAT,
Commissary General for
Naval Prisoners.

NEW YORK, 8th Dec., 1781.

EXTRACTS OF LETTERS FROM GENERAL WASHINGTON TO THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS, WITH ENCLOSURES.

I.

(From the Papers of the Continental Congress.)

PHILADELPHIA, 27 December, 1781.

SIR:

I have taken the liberty of enclosing the copies of two letters from the Commissary-general of prisoners, setting forth the debt, which is due from us on account of naval prisoners, the number remaining in captivity, their miserable situation, and the little probability there is of procuring their release for the want of proper subjects in our hands.

Before we proceed to an inquiry into the measures which ought to be adopted to enable us to pay our debt, and to effect the exchange of those, who still remain in captivity, a matter which it may take some time to determine, humanity and policy point out the necessity of administering to the pressing wants of the most valuable subjects of the republic.

Had they been taken in the Continental service, I should have thought myself authorized, in conjunction with the Minister of War, to apply a remedy; but as the greater part of them were not thus taken, as appears by Mr. Skinner's representation, I must await the decision of Congress upon the subject.

Had a system, some time ago planned by Congress and recommended to the several States, been adopted and carried fully into execution, I mean that of obliging all Captains of private vessels to deliver over their prisoners to the Continental Commissioners upon certain conditions, I am persuaded that the numbers taken and brought into the many ports of the United States would have amounted to a sufficiency to have exchanged those taken from us; but instead of that, it is to be feared, that few in proportion are secured, and that the few, who are sent in, are so partially applied, that it creates great disgust in those remaining. The consequence of which is, that conceiving themselves neglected, and seeing no prospect of relief, many of them enter into the enemy's service, to the very great loss of our trading interest. Congress will, therefore, I hope, see the necessity of renewing their former, or making some similar, recommendation to the States.

In addition to the motives above mentioned, for wishing that the whole business of prisoners

of war might be brought under one general regulation, there is another of no small consideration, which is, that it would probably put a stop to those mutual complaints of ill treatment which are frequently urged on each part. For it is a fact, that, for above two years, we have had no reason to complain of the treatment of the Continental land prisoners in New York, neither have we been charged with any improper conduct towards those in our hands. I consider the sufferings of the seamen for some time past, as arising in a great measure from the want of that general regulation, which has been spoken of, and without which there will constantly be a great number remaining in the hands of the enemy.

I have the honor to be,

Your most obedient servant,

G. WASHINGTON.

[ENCLOSURES:]

A.

MR. SKINNER TO GENL. WASHINGTON.

PHILADELPHIA December 23, 1781.

SIR,

At a meeting with the British Naval Commissary of Prisoners at Elizabeth Town for the settlement of our Accounts on the 18th. and 19th. instant I find a ballance due to the enemy

of Six Hundred and ninety eight Prisoners in the Naval line. From the large ballance that is due and the inconsiderable number of prisoners we now have, it is impossible for me to relieve those on board the Prison Ship at New York amounting to near 500 men and whose situation is really miserable.

I could wish to receive some directions from your Excellency relative to those unhappy men, or that I might be authorized and enabled to furnish them with some assistance as many of them are almost naked and have not a blanket to lay on.

I am Sir,

Yours &c.

ABR^M SKINNER

Comm^y Genl of Prisoners.

B.

MR. SKINNER TO GENL. WASHINGTON.

PHILADELPHIA December 24th 1781.

SIR,

In my letter to your Excellency Yesterday I mentioned the situation that the Naval Prisoners were in at New York and also my inability to afford them that relief they stood in need of;— In addition to that letter, I beg leave to inform your Excellency that those Prisoners are chiefly the sailors captured on board of Vessels be-

longing to the different parts of the United States employed by individuals of those States, and not in Continental service.

That the many partial Exchanges made by the several States individually have frequently deranged my accounts with the enemy and prevented my releasing those men whom a Seniority of Capture entitled to preference of Exchange, and consequently has obliged many of them to quit the Prison Ship and enter into the British Navy and Army.

That from the 19th. September 1780 I have endeavoured to have the whole of the Naval Prisoners thrown into one common stock, and from that I have released (as far as was within my power) the eldest Prisoners in the hands of the enemy.

That from the neglect of Officers and others who have frequently captured prisoners at Sea, landed them at insecure places, and permitted their escapes; I am indebted to the Enemy 698 men which I am unable to pay and which will always be the case unless some general and extensive plan is ordered to be pursued, the whole of the Naval Exchanges regulated through one office and Individuals effectually prevented from interfering in the release of a Prisoner belonging to any particular State.

Permit me, therefore, Sir, to suggest to you the foregoing facts and to beg, I may receive such

instructions relative to the receiving, Exchanging and supporting, the Naval Prisoners, as your Excellency shall think sufficient.

I am, Sir,

Your most ab^t Servant

ABRA^M SKINNER,
Comm^y Gen^l Prisoners.

His Excellency
Gen^l Washington.

II.

PHILADELPHIA, 18 February, 1782.

SIR:

I do myself the honor to enclose copies of the reports of the Commissary-general of prisoners, who has just returned from New York, with copies of the papers to which he refers. . . . Mr. Sproat's proposition of the exchange of British soldiers for American seamen, if acceded to, will immediately give the enemy a very considerable reinforcement, and will be a constant draft hereafter upon the prisoners of war in our hands. It ought also to be considered, that few or none of the naval prisoners in New York and elsewhere belong to the Continental service. I however feel for the situation of these unfortunate people, and wish to

see them relieved by any mode, which will not materially affect the public good. In some former letters upon this subject I have mentioned a plan, by which I am certain they might be liberated nearly as fast as captured. It is by obliging the Captains of all armed vessels, both public and private, to throw their prisoners into common stock under the direction of the Commissary-general of prisoners. By these means they would be taken care of, and regularly applied to the exchange of those in the hands of the enemy. Now the greater part are dissipated, and the few that remain are applied partially. I shall be obliged to your Excellency for obtaining and transmitting to me the sentiments of Congress upon these subjects as early as convenient.

I have the honor to be,

Your most obedient servant,

G. WASHINGTON.

[ENCLOSURES:]

A.

MR. SKINNER TO GEN^L. WASHINGTON.

PHILADELPHIA, Feb^y 18th 1782

SIR

The enemy at New York being desirous to exchange Military for Naval prisoners of war— I have taken the liberty to enclose Copy of the

Naval Commissary's letter to me on that subject
—to which I have returned no answer.

I am Sir

Y^r most ob^t and most humble
Servant

AB^M SKINNER
Comm^y Gen^l pris^r

His Excellency
General Washington.

B.

MR. SPROAT TO MR. SKINNER.

NEW YORK 25th January 1782.

SIR

Motives of humanity have induced the Commanders of His Majestys Fleets upon this Coast, from time to time, to permit a greater number of American Naval prisoners to be sent out to you, than the British prisoners you, or your Deputies, had to send in return, which makes the difference in account, at this time, upwards of seven hundred Men—The same principle, which has been so bountifully extended to the Americans, actuates His Excellency Rear Admiral Digby to feel for the distressed situation of the British subjects, prisoners with you, at this inclement season. Therefore, he has been pleased to direct me

to offer to discount with you Five hundred of that number, in exchange for an equal number of Soldiers now in your hands—reserving the remainder of your debt, for the releasement of such seamen as may be in the different Gaols in America.

This proposal being equitable, I hope you will lose no time in laying it before His Excellency General Washington or Congress, in order to enable you to send me an answer.

I am Sir

Your most ob^t humble serv^t

DAVID SPROAT

Comm^y Gen^l for

Naval prisoners

Abr^m Skinner Esq:

C. G. P.

LETTER FROM ADMIRAL DIGBY TO
GEN^L WASHINGTON.

(From the Papers of the Continental Congress.)

NEW YORK 5th March 1782.

SIR

I have just received your Excellency's Letter of 26th February, and will agreeable to your Proposal authorize Major General O'Hara and Brigadier General Abercrombie to treat concerning the Exchange of American Sea Prisoners for the British Prisoners in your Possession, which is the only Point I know of, that wants regulation with respect to the Naval Prisoners.

I have the Honor to be

Your Excellency's

Very obedient Servant

ROB^T DIGBY

His Excellency Genl. Washington

Extracts from Minutes of the Proceedings of the Commissioners mutually appointed for the "purpose of obviating all difficulties in Exchanges, for liquidating the Expenses of maintaining Prisoners and for making Solid arrangements for providing for them in future."

(From the Papers of the Continental Congress)

Brigadier General Henry Knox and Gouverneur Morris, Esq^{re} appointed by General Washington.

Major General William Dalrymple Quarter Master Genl. to Sir Henry Clinton's army and Andrew Elliott Esq^{re} Superintendent General of the Police of New York appointed by Sir Henry Clinton.

Commissioners met at Elizabeth Town, March 31st,—April 19, 1782.

[From Washington's instructions.]

And whereas, numberless inconveniences and distresses have mutually arisen and happened for want of some permanent Establishment for the safe-keeping, subsisting, and Exchanging marine Prisoners. I have by letter of the 26th. of February last, proposed to his Excellency Robt. Digby Esq^{re} at present commanding his Britannic Majestys Ships of War upon the American Station to send commissioners at the time and to the place before mentioned, properly authorized and empowered to treat, confer, determine and conclude upon a Cartel for the Exchange and accommodation of all persons in the Naval Line—Should therefore Commissioners come properly authorized and empowered by him the said Robert Digby Esq^{re} or other Senior officer commanding His Britannic Majes-

ty's Ships of War upon the American Station, you are authorized to treat, confer, determine and conclude upon, with them, a Cartel or agreement either general or special for the subsisting, safe-keeping and Exchanging all Marine Prisoners of War, provided such Cartels or Agreements establish rules for the similar Treatment of Marine Prisoners captured by either Power in all Cases whatever.

Whereas General Washington has empowered Commissioners to treat for the Exchange of Prisoners—

I do therefore hereby authorize you to treat with the said Commissioners for the Exchange of any British Prisoners now in their possession in lieu of those indebted to the Navy; and further after such account is settled, for such as are now in my possession at New York and for that purpose I inclose you an account of the State of Prisoners as it now stands.

Given under my Hand at New York the 18th. of March 1782

ROBERT DIGBY

(From the meeting of April 7.)

The Undersigned Commissioners having transmitted to Admiral Digby the proposition which they had the honor to receive from the Com-

missioners of General Washington respecting the collecting Naval Prisoners at certain places and establishing a Tariff to regulate their Exchanges have received for answer that if General Washington's Commissioners consent to pay the debt to the Navy—which they acknowledge by giving British Soldiers in exchange, the Admiral will not object to the Tariff proposed. The undersigned therefore as Commissioners from Rear Admiral Digby declare their readiness to proceed immediately to the liberation of all Naval American Prisoners, either owing to or actually in the possession of Admiral Digby, by accepting British Prisoners of war in Exchange.

The Commissioners from General Washington produced the following paper,—

“In the actual situation of affairs, the undersigned Commissioners etc. must decline Exchanging Seamen for soldiers. They conceive that any Convention for liberating prisoners by pecuniary compensation would only form part of a general Cartel, the obstacles to which, they must lament, but cannot remove.”

Under date of 14th. of April the American Commissioners repeated that a proposal on the part of the British to give seamen for soldiers, or money for the latter could not be acceded to.

LETTER FROM A COMMITTEE OF THE
PRISONERS TO MR. RIVINGTON,
WITH ENCLOSURES.

(From *The Royal Gazette*, New York, Wednesday,
June 12, 1782.)

On board the prison ship Jersey, June 11, 1782.

SIR:

Inclosed are five letters, which if you will give a place in your news-paper, will greatly oblige a number of poor prisoners who seem to be deserted by our own countrymen, who has it in their power and will not exchange us.

In behalf of the whole, we beg leave to subscribe ourselves,

Sir,

Your much obliged Servants,

Signed in behalf of the whole { JOHN COOPER,
JOHN SHEFFIELD,
WM. CHAD
RICH. ECCLESTON,
JOHN BAAS.

To Mr. James Rivington, Printer.

I.

MR. SPROAT TO THE PRISONERS.

NEW YORK, 11th June, 1782.

This will be handed you by Captain Daniel Aborn, and Doctor Joseph Bowen, who, agreeable to your Petition to his Excellency Rear-Admiral Digby, have been permitted to go out, and are now returned from General Washington's Head-Quarters, where they delivered your petition to him, represented your disagreeable situation at this extreme hot season of the year, and in your names solicited his Excellency to grant you speedy relief, by exchanging you for a part of the British soldiers, prisoners in his hands, the only possible means in his power to effect it.

Mr. Aborn and the Doctor waits on you with his answer, which I am sorry to say is a flat denial.

Inclosed I send you copies of three letters which have passed between Mr. Skinner and me, on the occasion, which will convince you that every thing has been done on the part of Admiral Digby, to bring about a fair and general exchange of prisoners on both sides.

I am, Your most humble Servant,

DAVID SPROAT,
Commissary-General for
Naval Prisoners.

To the Prisoners on board
his Majesty's prison-ship Jersey.

MR. SPROAT TO MR. SKINNER.

NEW YORK, 1st June, 1782.

SIR:

When I last saw you at Elizabeth-Town, I mentioned the bad consequence, which in all probability would take place in the hot weather, if an exchange of prisoners was not agreed to by the commissioners on the part of General Washington.

His Excellency Rear-Admiral Digby has ordered me to inform you, that the very great increase of prisoners and heat of the weather now baffles all our care and attention to keep them healthy: Five ships have been taken up for their reception, to prevent being crowded, and a great number permitted to go on parole.

In Winter, and during the cold weather, they lived comfortably, being fully supplied with warm cloathing, blankets, etc., purchased with the money which I collected from the charitable people of this city; but now the weather requires a fresh supply—something light and suitable to the season—for which you will be pleased to make the necessary provision; as it is impossible for them to be healthy in the rags they now wear, without a single shift of cloathing to keep themselves clean. Humanity, sympathy, my duty and orders obliges me to trouble you again

on this disagreeable subject, to request you will lose no time in laying this their situation before his Excellency General Washington, who, I hope, will listen to the cries of a distressed people, and grant them (as well as the British prisoners in his hands) relief, by consenting to a general and immediate exchange.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,
DAVID SPROAT,
Commissary-General for
Naval Prisoners.

ABRAHAM SKINNER, Esq. ;
Commissary-General for Prisoners.

3.

MR. SKINNER'S REPLY.

NEW YORK, June 9th, 1782.

SIR:

From the present situation of the American naval prisoners on board your prison ships, I am induced to propose to you the exchange of as many of them as I can give you British naval prisoners for; leaving the balance already due to you to be paid when in our power. I could wish this to be presented to his Excellency Rear Admiral Digby, and that the proposal could be acceded to, as it wou'd relieve many

of those distrest men and be consistent with the humane purposes of our office.

I will admit that we are unable at present, to give you seaman for seaman and thereby relieve the prison ships of their dreadful burthen; but it ought to be remembered that there is a large balance of British soldiers¹ due to the United States, since February last, and that as we have it in our power, we may be disposed to place the British soldiers who are now in our possession in as disagreeable a situation as those men are on board the prison ships.

I am, Sir, your most obedient humble servant,

ABM. SKINNER,

Com. Gen. for Prisoners.

DAVID SPROAT, Esq.;

Com. Gen. for Naval

Prisoners, New York.

4.

MR. SPROAT'S REPLY.

NEW YORK, June 9, 1782.

SIR:

I have received your letter of this date, and laid it before his Excellency Rear Admiral Digby, commander in chief, &c. &c. &c. who has directed me to give for answer, that the

¹About 250 men who Mr. Sproat offered to discount if a general exchange took place.—Ed. of *The Royal Gazette*.

balance of prisoners,¹ owing to the British having proceeded from lenity and humanity, on the part of himself and those who commanded before his arrival, is surprised you have not been induced to offer to exchange them first; and until this is done cannot consent to your proposal of a partial exchange, leaving the remainder, as well as the British prisoners in your hands to linger in confinement.

Conscious of the American prisoners under my direction, being in every respect taken as good care of as their situation and ours will admit; you must not believe that Admiral Digby will depart from the justice of this measure, because you have it in your power to make the British Soldiers who are prisoners with you, more miserable than there is any necessity for.

I am, Sir,

Your humble Servant.

DAVID SPROAT,

Commissary-General for

Naval Prisoners.

ABRAHAM SKINNER, Esq.;

American Commissary-General

for Prisoners, at present

in New York.

¹ Upwards of 1,300 Naval Prisoners have been sent more than we have received.—Ed. of *The Royal Gazette*.

5.

ADDRESS BY THE COMMITTEE OF PRISONERS.

On board the Prison Ship Jersey,
NEW YORK June 11. (1782.)

Friends and Fellow Countrymen of America.

You may bid a final adieu to all your friends and relations who are now on board the Jersey prison ship at New-York, unless you rouse the government to comply with just and honourable proposals, which has already been done on the part of Britons, but alas! it is with pain we inform you, that our petition to his Excellency General Washington, offering our services to the country during the present campaign, if he would send soldiers in exchange for us, is frankly denied.

What is to be done? are we to lie here and share the fate of our unhappy brothers who are dying daily? No, unless you relieve us immediately, we shall be under the necessity of leaving our country, in preservation of our lives.

Signed in behalf of prisoners,	{	JOHN COOPER,
		JOHN SHEFFIELD,
		WILLIAM CHAD,
		RICHARD ECCLESTON,
		GEORGE WANTON,
	{	JOHN BAAS.

Mr. James Rivington, Printer, New York.

LETTER FROM MR. SKINNER TO GEN^L
WASHINGTON.

(From the Papers of the Continental Congress.)

NEW BURG^H JUNE 11th. 1782

SIR

In obedience to your Excellency's Commands of the 6th inst.—I have had an interview with the British Commissary on the Subject of the situation of the american naval Prisoners at New York, and proposed to him to Exchange those now in our hands, for an equal number of those on board the Enemy's prison Ships—

This proposal he will not accede to, as appears by his Letter in answer to one I wrote him; copies of which I inclose for your Excellency's perusal.¹

The Enemy Still continue their designs to oblige our Seamen to enter into their service— I was not permitted to visit their Prison or Hospital Ships, but I am authorized to say, That their situation is truly deplorable, and tho' many of them are put on two of the Islands in the Harbor of New York, and some pains taken for the treatment of the Sick, yet from

¹ See letters Nos. 3 & 4, pages 75 and 76.—J. L. B.

the nature of their disorders (being of a putrid kind and very similar to the plague) the greatest part of those unhappy Men must die in a very Short time.—

I have the honor to remain

Your Excellencys

Mo Obt. Servt.

ABM. SKINNER.

Com. Gen. pris.

His Excellency

GENERAL WASHINGTON.

LETTER FROM A COMMITTEE OF CAPTAINS, NAVAL PRISONERS, TO MR. RIVINGTON; WITH A REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF THE PRISONERS ON BOARD THE PRISON-SHIPS.

(From *The Royal Gazette*, New York, Wednesday,
June 26, 1782)

NEW YORK, 22d June, 1782.

SIR:

We beg you will be pleased to give the inclosed Report and Resolve of a number of Masters of American vessels, a place in your next Newspaper, for the information of the public. In order to undeceive numbers of our countrymen without the British lines, who have not an opportunity of seeing the state and situation of the prisoners in New York, as we have done,

We are, Sir,

Your most obedient humble servants,

ROBERT HARRIS,
JOHN CHACE,
CHARLES COLLINS,
PHILEMON HASKELL,
JONATHAN CARNES.

To Mr. Rivington.

(Report)

We, whose names are hereunto subscribed, late Masters of American vessels, which have been captured by the British cruizers and brought into this port, having obtained the enlargement of our paroles from his Excellency Rear Admiral Digby, to return to our respective homes, being anxious before our departure to know the true state and situation of the prisoners confined on board the prison ships and prison hospital ships, have requested and appointed six of our number, viz.; Robert Harris, Charles Collins, John Chace, Philemon Haskell, Jonathan Carnes, and Christopher Smith, to go on board the said prison ships and prison hospital ships for that purpose, and the said Robert Harris, Charles Collins, John Chace, Philemon Haskell, Jonathan Carnes, and Christopher Smith, having gone on board five of those vessels, attended by Mr. David Sproat, Commissary General for Naval Prisoners, and Mr. George Rutherford, Surgeon to the prison hospital ships; do report to us that they have found them in as comfortable a situation as it is possible for prisoners to be on board of ships at this season of the year, and much more so than they had any idea of, and that any thing said to the contrary, is false and without foundation: That they inspected their beef, pork,

flour, bread, oatmeal, pease, butter, liquors, and indeed every other species of provisions which is issued on board his Britannic Majesty's ships of war, and found them all good of their kind, which survey being made before the prisoners, they acknowledged the same and declared that they had no complaint to make but the want of cloaths and a speedy exchange: We, therefore, from this Report, and what we have all seen and known, DO DECLARE, that great commendation is due to his Excellency, Rear-Admiral Digby, for his humane disposition and indulgence to his prisoners, and also to those he entrusts the care of them to; viz. the Captain and officers of his Majesty's prison ship Jersey, for their attention in preserving good order, having the ship kept clean and awnings spread over the whole of her, 'fore and 'aft: To Doctor Rutherford and the Gentlemen acting under him as Mates, for their constant care and attendance on the sick, whom we found in wholesome clean ships; also, covered with awnings, 'fore and 'aft, every man furnished with a cradle, bed and sheets, made of good Russia linen, to lay in; the best of fresh provisions, vegetables, wine, rice, barley, &c. which was served out to them. And we further do declare, in justice to Mr. Sproat, and the gentlemen acting under him in his department, that they conscientiously do their duty with great humanity and indulgence

to the prisoners, and reputation to themselves: And we unanimously do agree, that nothing is wanting to preserve the lives and health of those unfortunate prisoners but clean cloaths, and a speedy exchange, which testimony we freely give without constraint, and covenant each with the other, to endeavour to effect their exchange as soon as possible: For the remembrance of this our engagement, we have furnished ourselves with copies of this instrument of writing.

Given under our hands at New York, the twenty-second day of June, 1782.

Captains.	{	ROBERT HARRIS,
		CHARLES COLLINS,
		JOHN CHASE,
		PHILEMON HASKELL,
		JOHN CARNES,
		CHRISTOPHER SMITH,
		JAMES GASTON,
		JOHN TANNER,
		DANIEL ABORN,
		RICHARD MUMFORD,
		ROBERT CLIFTON,
		JOHN M. KEVER,
		J. BOWEN, Doctor.

LETTER FROM MR. SPROAT TO MR.
RIVINGTON WITH ENCLOSURES.

(From *The Royal Gazette*, New York, Wednesday,
July 3, 1782)

NEW YORK, July 2, 1782.

SIR:

Inclosed I send you a letter from Abraham Skinner, Esq.; for publication, which you will observe is by his own request; therefore be pleased to give it a place in your newspaper tomorrow, as well as the other two letters herewith inclosed the one from his Excellency General Washington, to his Excellency Rear-Admiral Digby, and the other the Admiral's answer to him, which I have been allowed also to publish, to shew the public, that the evils brought on the prisoners proceed from want of being regularly exchanged.

I am, Sir, your most obedient servant,

DAVID SPROAT,
Commissary General for
Naval Prisoners.

Mr. James Rivington,
Printer, New York.

I.

GENERAL WASHINGTON TO REAR-
ADMIRAL DIGBY.

HEAD-QUARTERS, June 5th, 1782.

SIR:

By a parole, granted to two gentlemen, Messrs. Aborn and Bowen, I perceive that your Excellency has granted them permission to come to me with a representation of the sufferings of the American naval-prisoners at New-York.

As I have no agency on naval matters, this application to me is made on mistaken grounds—But curiosity leading me to enquire into the nature and cause of their sufferings, I am informed that the principal complaint is, that of their being crowded, especially at this season, in great numbers on board of foul and infectious prison ships, where disease and death are almost inevitable. This circumstance I am persuaded needs only to be mentioned to your Excellency to obtain that redress which is in your power only to afford, and which humanity so strongly prompts.

If the fortune of war, Sir, has thrown a number of these miserable people into your hands, I am certain your Excellency's feelings for fellow men, must induce you to proportion the ships (if they must be confined on board ships) to their

accommodation and comfort, and not by crowding them together in a few, bring on disorders which consign them by half dozens in a day to the grave.

The soldiers of his Britannic Majesty, prisoners with us, were they (which might be the case) to be equally crowded together in close and confined prisons, at this season, would be exposed to equal loss and misery.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your Excellency's most obedient

Humble Servant,

GEO. WASHINGTON.

His Excellency Rear-Admiral Digby.

2.

REAR-ADMIRAL DIGBY'S REPLY

NEW YORK, June 10, 1782.

SIR:

My feelings prompted me to grant Messrs. Aborn and Bowen permission to wait on your Excellency to represent their miserable situation. And if your Excellency's feelings on this occasion are like mine, you will not hesitate one moment relieving both the British and Americans suffering under confinement.

I have the Honour to be,

Your Excellency's,

Very obedient Servant,

ROBT DIGBY.

His Excellency General Washington.

3.

MR. SKINNER TO MR. SPROAT.

CAMP, HIGHLANDS, June 24th, 1782.

SIR:

As I perceive by a New-York paper of the 12th instant, the last letters which passed between us on the subject of naval prisoners have been committed to print, I must request the same be done with this, which is intended to contain some animadversions on those publications.

The principles and policy which appear to actuate your superiors in their conduct towards the American seamen, who unfortunately fall into their power, are too apparent to admit of a doubt or misapprehension. I am sorry to observe Sir, that notwithstanding the affectation of candour and fairness on your part, from the universal tenor of behaviour on your side of the lines; it is obvious, that the designs of the British is, by misrepresenting the state of facts with regard to exchanges, to excite jealousy in the minds of our unfortunate seamen, that they are neglected by their countrymen, and by attempting to make them believe, that all the miseries they are now suffering in consequence of a pestilential sickness, arise from want of inclination in General Washington to exchange them when he has it in his power to do it; in hopes of being able by this insinuation, and by

the unrelenting severity you make use of in confining them in the contaminated holds of prison ships, to compel them, in order to avoid the dreadful alternative of almost inevitable death, to enter the service of the King of Great Britain.

To shew that these observations are just and well grounded, I think it necessary to inform you of some facts which have happened within my immediate notice, and to put you in mind of others which you cannot deny. I was myself present at the time when Captain Aborn and Doctor Bowen (who were permitted by Admiral Digby to come out and represent their situation, and solicit the exchange of naval for land prisoners,) waited on his Excellency General Washington, and know perfectly well the answer his Excellency gave to that application;—he informed them in the first place, that he was not directly or indirectly invested with any power or interference respecting the exchange of naval prisoners; that this business was formerly under the direction of the Board of Admiralty, that upon the annihilation of that Board, Congress had committed it to the Financier (who had in charge all our naval prisoners) and he to the Secretary at War; that he (the General) was notwithstanding disposed to do everything in his power for their assistance and relief; that as exchanging seamen for soldiers was contrary to the original

agreement for the exchange of prisoners, which specified that officers should be exchanged for officers, soldiers for soldiers, citizens for citizens, and seamen for seamen; as it was contrary to the custom and practice of other nations, and as it would be, in his opinion, contrary to the soundest policy, by giving the enemy a great and permanent strength, for which we could receive no compensation, or at best, but a partial and temporary one, he did not think it would be admissible; but as it appeared to him, from a variety of well authenticated information, the present misery and mortality which prevailed among the naval prisoners, were almost entirely, if not altogether, produced by the mode of their confinement being closely crowded together in infectious prison-ships, where the very air is pregnant with disease, and the ships themselves (never having been cleaned in the course of many years) a mere mass of putrefaction; he would therefore, from motives of humanity, write to Rear-Admiral Digby, in whose power it was to remedy this great evil, by confining them on shore, or having a sufficient number of prison-ships provided for the purpose; for he observed, it was as preposterously cruel to confine 800 men at this sultry season, on board the Jersey prison-ship,¹ as it would be to shut

¹ Five ships were in use at this time, see page 74.
—J. L. B.

up the whole army of Lord Cornwallis to perish in the New Gaol of Philadelphia; but if more commodious and healthy accommodations were not afforded, we had the means of retaliation in our hands, which he should not hesitate, in that case, to make use of, by confining the land prisoners with as much severity as our seamen were held. The Gentlemen of the Committee appeared to be sensible of the force of those reasons, however repugnant they might be to the feelings and wishes of the men who had destruction and death staring them in the face.

His Excellency was further pleased to suffer me to go to New York to examine into the ground of the suffering of the prisoners, and to devise, if possible, some way or another, for their liberation or relief: With this permission I went to your lines; and in consequence of the authority I had been previously invested with, from the Secretary at War, I made the proposal contained in my letter to you of the 9th inst. Although I could not claim this as a matter of right, I flatter'd myself it would have been granted from the principles of humanity as well as other motives. There had been a balance of 495 land prisoners due to us ever since the month of February last, when a settlement was made; besides which, to the best of my belief, 400 have been sent in (this is the true state of the fact, though it differs widely from the account of

250 men, which is falsely stated in the note, annexed to my letter in the New-York paper): notwithstanding this balance, I was then about sending into your lines a number of land prisoners, as an equivalent for ours, who were then confined in the Sugar-House, without which (though the debt was acknowledged) I could not make interest to have them liberated; this business has since been actually negotiated, and we glory in having our conduct, such as will bear the strictest scrutiny, and be found consonant to the dictates of reason, liberality and justice. But, Sir, since you would not agree to the proposals I made, since I was refused being permitted to visit the prison-ships¹ (for which I conceive no other reason can be produced than your being ashamed or afraid of having those graves of our seamen seen by one who dared to represent the horrors of them to his countrymen). Since the commissioners from your side, at their late meeting, would not enter into an adjustment of the accounts for supplying your naval and land prisoners, on which there are large sums due to us; and since your superiors will neither make provision for the support of your prisoners in our hands, nor accommodation for the mere existence of ours, who are now languishing in your prison-ships, it becomes my duty, Sir, to

¹ Denied by Mr. Sproat, see p. 97.—J. L. B.

state these pointed facts to you, that the imputations may recoil where they are deserved, and to report to those, under whose authority I have the honor to act, that such measures as they deem proper may be adopted.

And now, Sir, I will conclude this long letter, with observing that not having a sufficiency of British seamen in our possession, we are not able to release ours by exchange; this is our misfortune but it is not a crime, and ought not to operate as a mortal punishment against the unfortunate—we ask no favour; we claim nothing but common justice and humanity, while we assert to the whole world, as a notorious fact, that the unprecedented inhumanity in the mode of confining our naval prisoners, to the amount of 800, in one old hulk,¹ which has been made use of as a prison-ship for more than years, without ever having been once purified, has been the real and sole cause of the death of hundreds of brave Americans who would not have perished in that untimely and barbarous manner, had they (when prisoners) been suffered to breathe a purer air, and to enjoy more liberal and convenient accommodations, agreeably to the practice of civilized nations, when at war, the example which has always been set you by the Americans: You may say, and I shall admit, that if they

¹ See note page 90.—J. L. B.

were placed on islands, and more liberty given them, that some might desert, but is not this the case with your prisoners in our hands? And could we not avoid this also if we were to adopt the same rigid and inhuman mode of confinement you do?¹

I beg, Sir, you will be pleased to consider this as addressed to you officially, as the principal executive officer in the department of naval-prisoners, and not personally; and that you will attribute any uncommon warmth of style, which I may have been led into, to my feeling and animation, on a subject, with which I find myself so much interested, both from the principles of humanity and the duties of office.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

ABRAM SKINNER,

Commissary-General for Prisoners.

David Sproat, Esq.

4.

MR. SPROAT'S REPLY.

NEW YORK, June 30, 1782.

SIR:

I received your letter, dated Highlands, the 24th instant, and in compliance with your

¹ Prison ships were used by the Americans, see p. 3.—J. L. B.

request, will send it to the press for publication.

The animadversions you have been pleased to make in the last letters which passed between us on the subject of exchange of prisoners, are exceedingly indelicate; many of them not founded on matters of fact, and therefore will not answer the purpose for which they seem calculated, viz. to shut the mouths of your injured countrymen from complaining against those in power amongst you.

Whether his Excellency General Washington Commander-in-Chief has agency on naval matters, or whether the exchange of prisoners comes under the immediate direction of the Financier or Secretary at War, is but small consolation for the poor captive to know, after the effects resulting from long confinement has brought on his ruin. In this manner, according to custom, it appears you are attempting to vindicate the character of those under whose authority you say you have the honor to act, by endeavouring to throw the blame off yourselves on my superiors here, as being the cause of the prisoners suffering in confinement; such doctrine from your side the lines brings nothing new. It is become quite common for your public writers, when Americans strike the blow, to attempt to cast the odium on the British, and trumpet the injury as received, when in fact themselves are the aggressors.

The present case is exactly in point.—In the beginning of April last, when the Commissioners met at Elizabeth Town, his Excellency Rear-Admiral Digby empowered those on the part of the British, to offer in exchange the American seamen for British soldiers man for man, because you had not a sufficient number of British seamen, or the least prospect of collecting as many, to give in exchange for your own who were then in confinement here; and because he foresaw the impossibility of keeping them healthy when the hot season of the year would come on; but this generous proposal was rejected by the Commissioners on the part of General Washington, in consequence of which many prisoners on both sides, have fell victims to your cruelty, in not suffering their exchanges to take place: And it is evident to the world, however you may gloss the matter, that the deaths of many may be altogether attributed to this cause. Read the declaration hereunto subjoined, of a number of old experienced Masters of American vessels;¹ surely no one will be so hardy as contradict what they have said in the matter; which is, that the best care possible is taken of them, and that nothing is wanted to relieve them, but the want of Cloaths and a speedy Exchange; which is clearly

¹ The "Report" of the Masters of American vessels, p. 82.—J. L. B.

proved lays solely with Gen. Washington to comply with or some other person in power amongst you.

Your not having a sufficiency of British seamen to exchange yours who are prisoners here, I never did allege was a "crime," but give me leave, Sir, to say, that I think it shews a very great want of humanity and certainly is a crime in you, not to make use of the British soldiers in your hands in exchange for your own seamen; however policy may dictate, every good man must shudder at the thought of devoting such a number of your fellow creatures to drag out life in confinement; it is really a wonder that they do not all enter into our service rather than submit to such treatment.

You may say that you was refused leave to go on board the prison-ships—This I deny, on the contrary, Sir, when it was proposed, you declined it—and I cannot help taking notice of your claiming the merit of shewing us the example of treating the prisoners well. Do but call to mind the numbers of British sailors and soldiers who have been coop'd up in the gaols, at Philadelphia at this season of the year, crouded as much as ever the prison ships here, and fed on a scanty allowance of dried stinking clams, and bread and water only,—in order to compel them to enter on board your privateers: Of the example set at Boston, and in other ports,

where your ships of war have been, in pressing the British subjects, who were prisoners at the time, on board of them, against their will, and this as often as they had occasion for their service. But our mission admits not of controversy, therefore I shall rest the merit of this cause on the following declaration of your own people.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient humble Servant

DAVID SPROAT,
Commissary-General for
Naval-Prisoners.

P. S.

The note respecting the balance of prisoners due you by Mr. Loring, which you have been disposed to call false, was taken from himself, who has since made a more particular inspection of the accounts as they stood at the time, and finds the balance to be no more than 245.

Abram Skinner, Esq., Commissary-
General, at Camp, Highlands,
or elsewhere.

LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY AT
WAR TO THE PRESIDENT OF
CONGRESS.

(From the Papers of the Continental Congress)

WAR OFFICE, June 28, 1782.

SIR,

The enclosed extract from the Commissary of Prisoners' letter to me represents the wish of our Marine prisoners in New York that a boat might be permitted to fish on the banks near Sandy Hook, for their benefit—and the request of the British Commissary that permission might be granted him to purchase wood, for the use of our prisoners, within our lines, where it can be procured much cheaper than with the enemy—and will enable him to afford the prisoners a greater supply.

The distressed situation of those prisoners—the little probability there is that all of them will soon be liberated and the necessity we are under, not only to do everything in our power to alleviate their sufferings, but to convince them that they are the objects of our attention, in order to reconcile them as much as possible to the miseries of a loathsome confinement until they can be exchanged—and to prevent them

—from an idea that they are neglected, engaging in the service of Britain, are considerations which will I think fully justify a compliance with their request.

Should His Excellency General Washington be directed to take order in the matter, he will have it under his immediate controul, and may suspend it whenever he finds that it is injurious or does not answer the good purposes intended, or he may indulge it under such limitations as shall appear necessary.

Should Congress be of these sentiments they will please to direct that General Washington take order in the matter.

I have the honor to be with profound respect
Your Excellency's most obedt. humble
Servt.

B. LINCOLN.

PETITION SIGNED BY 100 PRISONERS

(From Onderdonk's Revolutionary Incidents of
Suffolk and Kings Counties.)

Connecticut Gazette.

Aug. 15, 1782—We are now prisoners with the British, some in the New Jail or Provost, some in the *Jersey* ship, some in the *Falmouth*, others in the brig *Lord Dunlace* and others on Blackwell's Island—Though Mr. Sproat furnishes us with the King's allowance of choice beef, pork and bread yet we suffer for many things (not in the province of the Commissary) such as money and clothing but most of all our dear liberty. Let us urge our friends to think seriously of our situation and get us exchanged—We are well supplied with medicines and good doctors, yet so many of us are together this season, we are sickly and many die.

We must first look to our parents and connections, then to our employers, Captains and friends urging their doing every thing to get our releasement—do not mind the expense.

(100 signers).

LETTER FROM DAVID SPROAT TO MAJOR
MACKENZIE, SECRETARY TO THE
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF.

(London Papers. Royal Institution. Vol. 41. fo. 19.)

NEW YORK, May 10th, 1783.

SIR

In compliance with your request, I beg leave to inform you that, on Sunday the 6th of last month His Excellency Rear-Admiral Digby Ordered Captain John Beazley of His Majestys Ship *Ampheon* to go on board the prison Ships accompanied by me, and read the Proclamation which was accordingly done—The same day it was read to the Naval Prisoners in the Provost and a Circular letter sent off express to the prisoners who were on Parole on Long Island—informing them thereof, and desireing them to hold themselves in readiness to be sent out—The next day I had six Vessels in the Walabough under Flags of Truce, which on the 9th of April took the whole of the prisoners on board & carried them to their respective places of abode to save them expence and the fatigue of long Marches—excepting about 18 or 20

Sick & wounded who cou'd not be removed with safety—concerning them I wrote to Mr. G. Turner, Chief under Mr. Morris for Marine Prisoners, but received no answer—The poor people having got better they were delivered to Mr. Hopkins Intendant for pris—who sent them to Boston the 3d Instant.—

The Provost was cleared of the Marine Prisoners (without exception) on the 10th of April And on and after the 7th of same month Passports were granted to those who were on Parole to go out, as it suited their convenience.

I have the honor to be

Sir

Your most obedt humbl Servt

DAVID SPROAT

Commissary General for
Naval Prisoners.

Major Mackenzey

D A Genl.

N 25 Broad St.

Endorsed: Mr. Sproat. Com Gen N Pris^{rs} 10th May
1783.

LETTER FROM MR. SPROAT TO PRESIDENT DICKINSON OF PENNSYLVANIA.

(From the *Pennsylvania Archives*.)

NEW YORK, July 5, 1783.

SIR:

Since my appointment to be Commissary of Prisoners, your Excellency may easily be informed that I have at all times contributed as much as it has been in my power to relieve their distress, and make confinement as comfortable to them as possible. No fund being appropriated to furnish them with clothing, bedding, etc., which they stood very much in need of; every Fall of the year after making a requisition to the American Commissary to supply them, I set a subscription on foot to raise money for that purpose, and never failed in procuring the sum wanted until last year circumstances joined to prevent it. As no public charge was ever intended to be made, no particular account was ever kept of the individuals to whom the different articles were issued, some of the prison-

ers got more and others less according as their wants required, without regard to the County or State they came from.

In the month of January last, after the prisoners had been chiefly supplied with their winter clothing and bedding, a shallop arrived here from Philadelphia with about 180 Bls. of flour and some potatoes, addressed to a Mr. Robins of this place, with instructions to him to apply the proceeds in purchasing necessaries for the prisoners belonging as he said to that State only. I expected that he would have gone hand in hand with me in the business, however he has never paid me any part of that money which amounted to at least £800 the profits on which was sufficient to supply the whole of the Pennsylvania prisoners here at that time, but he objected to the greatest part of them, in particular to the whole of those taken in the So. Carolina who must have perished had I not supplied them, and they were chiefly belonging to your State, a circumstance which perhaps Mr. Robins constituents did not know when they gave him those orders.

Inclosed I send a copy of the account by Mr. Francis Gurney, who has seen the vouchers and will explain the matter more fully to your Excellency, who's known character leaves no doubt with me, that you will be pleased to take such steps for my reimbursement, of the part

David Sproat

you think equitable to pay for the honor of the State over which you preside.

With every sentiment of esteem and most perfect regard.

I have the honor to be,

Your Excellency's most obedient
humble servant,

DAVID SPROAT.

Directed.

His Excellency Govr. Dickinson.

LETTER FROM MR. SPROAT TO MR.
ROBERT MORRIS.

(From the Papers of the Continental Congress)

ON BOARD THE SHIP EARL CORN-
WALLIS OFF STATEN ISLAND,
December 10, 1783.

SIR,

The settlement of public business prevented my doing myself the honor prior to the evacuation concerning a matter which I wish to make you acquainted with.

No funds or Credit being established by the parties at war against Great Britain, for supplying the Naval Prisoners with Clothing, bedding and other necessaries; I have since my appointment, always furnished them, (here in New York) with every thing comfortable, and trusted to the benevolence of the people for my reimbursement, which prov'd sufficient till last year, my resources fell short £554.0.3 Currency, owing to unforeseen causes, and the great number who were supplied.

In the first place, the Legislature, the Executive Council of Pennsylvania, proposed to contribute a part provided the Admiral would grant

permission for produce to be sent round for that purpose,—that being obtained a Shallup arrived in the month of January with 180 barrels of flour, which was sold for between 8 or £900 Currency, but no sooner had the Consignee got the money into his hands than I was told that no part of it was to be applied towards payment of what was already furnished or for supplying the crew of the South Carolina, altho. they were chiefly Pennsylvanians.

In the second place Mr. Wheeler of Baltimore, who was in New York at that time, gave me assurances, that if I could procure for Maryland the same indulgence which had been granted to Pennsylvania, he would write to the Governor and cause produce to be sent here, sufficient to defray the expense incurred by their People. This was also obtained, and in consequence thereof, one or more cargoes arrived, with Governour Paca's special permission for that purpose but no part of the proceeds was ever applied for the benefit of the prisoners. I took the liberty of writing to their Excellencys the Governours of Pennsylvania and Maryland, and informed them fully of these matters: the former answered me by the Secy. Mr. Armstrong, corresponding with the distribution of their charity; but the latter has not honored me with any reply.

In consequence of many letters which I wrote to the Intendants in the New England States, they sent in money for their prisoners, but finding them already supplied with every necessary, and the winter near over, the Cash, was divided amongst them, and I left to continue in advance.

When Captⁿ. "Kergariom" was a prisoner here, he wrote to the Chevr. de Luzerne expressive of the services and civilities I had shewn to prisoners of his nation in consequence thereof, I was honored with a letter from his Excellency giving me to understand that I should be repaid what money I had laid out on their account but from a correspondence I have had lately with Mr. Marbois and Don Francesco Rendon assuming the business of their respective nations I am referred for payment when the Cartel is settled in Europe, which you know did not extend to America.

In the beginning of November 1782 I wrote to Mr. Turner, informing him of what was absolutely wanted for their immediate supply, but the season having advanced and no appearance of anything coming in, I waited on Lieutenant Colonel Wm. Smith the American Commissary General for Prisoners, and told him their situation, that they *would really perish with cold* unless something was done,

for to procure them Bedding & Warm Clothing at same time undertook to supply them on his assuring me that he would represent the matter to his Excellency the Commander in Chief, who I might depend upon, would not let me suffer by so humane an action.

As no public charge was ever intended to be made, no particular account was kept of the individuals to whom the different articles were issued, some of the Prisoners got more, and others less, in proportion to their wants without regard to the country or State they came from.

The accounts of the whole were transmitted to Mr. Marbois by desire of the Minister who will have the goodness to deliver them to you, provided you shall think it an object deserving the attention of the United States to order an Individual payment of a *small* sum of money disinterestedly advanced for the relief of their own Citizens and other unfortunate men, their Allies, whom the fate of war had deprived of the means of supplying themselves.

From the honor of a former acquaintance with you and knowledge of your sensibility I am led to believe that the same motive which induced me to advance the money will secure to me your interest in obtaining payment whatever may be the answer to this letter.

I beg leave to request it may be handed to Mr. David Lenox¹ who will forward it to me.

I have the honor to be

Sir

Your most obedient
humble servant

DAVID SPROAT.

The Honorable

Robert Morris,

Agent of Marine

Philadelphia

¹ Major Lenox, of Philadelphia, a nephew of Mr. Sproat.—J. L. B.

LETTER FROM MR. MORRIS TO THE
PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS

(From the Papers of the Continental Congress)

OFFICE OF FINANCE 16th January 1784.

SIR

I do myself the Honor to transmit to your Excellency the Copy of a Letter from Mr. David Sproat. I should not trouble Congress with it if the Supplies mentioned had been advanced to persons taken in the service of the United States. As it is I should suppose an express Appropriation of Money to this purpose to be necessary. Congress can best Judge whether that it be proper but if I were to express an Opinion it would be that the payment of such Debts is the most effectual Mode of providing against those disastrous Accidents which the Citizens of America are liable to in common with the rest of mankind.

I am Sir, with perfect Esteem and Respect

Your Excellency's

Most obedient

&

Humble Servant

ROBT MORRIS

His Excellency

The President of Congress

Indorsement]:

Letter 16 Jany 1784

Super: finance

Respect^g a claim of D. Sproat
for money advanced to naval
prisoners

Read 2 Feby

3 Feby Referred to

Mr. Ellery

Mr. Beatty

Mr. Forster

Reported—Feby 6th 1784—

Referred—to Comm^{ee} Feby 11th 1784

Reported—May 3, 1784—

REPORT OF FEB. 6, 1784

The Committee consisting of Mr. Ellery, Mr. Beatty and Mr. Foster, to whom the Letter of the Supt. of Finance of the 16th Jany 1784 respecting a claim of D. Sproat for money advanced to Naval prisoners with its enclosure was referred, report.

That if any supplies were furnished by David Sproat to any citizens of the United States while they were prisoners to the British during the late war, at the request of States to which they belonged, or at the request of such citizens; to such States or citizens he should apply for compension; but as it appears from his letter that no public charge was ever intended to be made by him, the United States in Congress assembled are not accountable.

REPORT OF MAY 3, 1784

The foregoing Committee report was read and recommitted to a Committee consisting of Messrs. Read, Spaight and Tilton, who reported the following resolve.

“That where it is impossible to discriminate between the Prisoners or to separate the charges, the said Superintendent of Finance of the U. S. do issue to Mr. David Sproat a certificate of the sums due for supplies of Clothing, Bedding and such other necessaries as he may have furnished and the situation and circumstances of the Naval prisoners that were in his charge warranted. Which Certificate shall bear an interest of Six per centum per annum and shall be paid in like manner as other sums due from these United States for carrying on the war may or shall be paid.

MEMORIAL OF DAVID SPROAT.

(From the papers in the Public Record Office of
England, Audit Office Division.)

TO THE COMMISSIONERS appointed by
Act of Parliament for enquiring into the Losses
and Services of the American Loyalists.

THE MEMORIAL of David Sproat, late of
Philadelphia, Merchant.

RESPECTFULLY SHEWETH

That your Memorialist at an early period in
the disturbances in America, left Philadelphia
where he had lived many years as a respectable
Merchant and joined the British Troops at New
York.

That as soon as your Memorialists flight
was made known, his House was ransacked by
the Committee his desks broke open, his Books,
papers & furniture much damaged, his Clerk
confined in a Dungeon for refusing to give them
information, his Servants turned out of doors,
and his House converted into an Hospital for
the accommodation of the Rebel Soldiers.

That your Memorialist came not to New
York, merely to take Asylum from the Usurped
hand of illegal power, but in order to aid in

Suppressing it, went as a Volunteer on the expedition to Chesapeak Bay, under the Command of Lord and General Howe, and having rendered services to the Army after their Landing, was appointed Commissary of Prisoners at the Battle of Brandywine—That in the Year 1779 when the British Seaman lay (much neglected) Prisoners of War almost in every Gaol in America, which obliged many of them to enter on board Rebel Privateers to the great detriment of our Trade, your Memorialist was appointed Commissary General for Naval Prisoners in North America by Vice Admiral Arbuthnot.

That your Memorialist with great fatigue & danger to which he was often exposed in going and coming from the Enemy's Country; persevered in the duty of his Office exchanged all the Seamen who were then in Captivity and paid such attention to their Exchange afterwards, when any of them were taken again, as soon restored their services to their Country and established their confidence in Government.¹

That your Memorialist not only acted in this Naval department till the end of the War but in the absence of Loring, had the Honor to be appointed Commissary of Prisoners for the Army also by Lord Dorchester under whose Command he received and exchanged the

¹ Exchanged 7760 Sailors.

unfortunate Soldiers taken at Saratoga & York Town in Virginia¹—for an equal number of American Naval Prisoners due by the States to the King, as P Accounts in Possession of your Memorialist.

That your Memorialists Conduct met with the warmest approbation of the Admiral's & General's under whom he had the Honor to serve, And altho' being recommended by them in a Memorial to Lord Sydney as a person "deserving every favor Government can bestow upon him" he hath not been able to procure half pay, Military Compensation, Pension, or other Emolument from Government whatever.

That your Memorialist in consequence of the part he had taken was attainted of High Treason and his Estate Confiscated and sold, for the Amount, or value whereof, he begs leave to refer to the Schedules hereunto annexed.

Your Memorialist therefore Prays that his case may be taken into consideration in order that he may be enabled under your report to receive such aid or Relief as his Losses & Services may be found to deserve. And Memorialist will ever pray—

DAVID SPROAT

March 23rd, 1784.

¹ Soldiers 6040.

May 17, 1787.

EVIDENCE ON THE FOREGOING MEMORIAL
OF DAVID SPROAT

The Claimant Sworn

Memorial read & sworn to
Certificates to Loyalty from
Lord Rodney
Admiral Digby
Admiral Affleck
Capt. James Duncan
& others

CERTIFICATE OF ADMIRAL RODNEY

These are to Certify, The Commissioners—appointed to enquire into the Losses & Services of the American Loyalists—

That on my arrival at New York in the year 1780 with the fleet under my Command I found a very great inconveniency likely to ensue from the resignation of Mr. David Sproat Commissary General of Naval prisoners; who had managed that Department as I was informed (and from the exactness of his acc^{ts} I entirely believed) with great propriety and credit. And it was not without some intercession which I made for the sake of the public, that I prevailed on him to continue to act by order from me.—This man being the only person I cou'd find capable of managing a business so complicated & extensive I wrote to the Commissioners of the Sick & Hurt office that he might be established. ¹

During twelve months then past it appeared he had exchanged 3,000 prisoners, had a balance of 800 due and 1,200 in the prison ships—which with the correspondence he was obliged to carry on required great assiduity and activity.

¹ Appendix, p. 125.

It is on that account as well as for the useful intelligence I received from him afterwards and for the losses he sustained by the Rebellion and his character as a respectable Citizen and a Loyal Subject that I take the liberty to recommend him, to your Board as a person deserving every favor Government may bestow upon him

Given under my hand

May 12th, 1787

RODNEY

CERTIFICATE OF ADMIRAL DIGBY

I do hereby certify that when I took the command of his Maj^s. Ships in America I found Mr. David Sproat acting as Commissary Gen^l. of Naval Prisoners at N: York & that he continued to act as such during the whole time I commanded there; that he was always very diligent & active and that I ever supposed him to be a Zealous Loyalist.

Given under my hand

this 10th day of May 1787

ROB^t. DIGBY

Harley St.

To the Commissioners for enquiring into y^e
Claims of the American Loyalists.

CERTIFICATE OF ADMIRAL AFFLECK

These are to certifie that Mr. David Sproat was employed as Commissary General of Naval Prisoners during my service in North America from 1780 to the End of the War, during part of which time I commanded in the Naval Line at New York and had frequent occasion to observe his attention to his Duty which was always very satisfactory by his strict obedience to my Orders; and I have every reason to conclude him perfectly faithfull & Loyal

Given under my hand

this 12th April 1787

EDM: AFFLECK

CERTIFICATE OF CAPT. JAMES DUNCAN

These are to Certify, the Honourable, the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the Losses & Services of American Loyalists; that Mr David Sproat served as Commissary General of Naval Prisoners in North America from the month of October 1779 to the end of the War, and that after my appointment as Superintendent to the Civil department of the Navy, Mr Sproat's assiduity and attention to the business of that important office merited my approbation and was highly satisfactory to all the Commanding officers at New York.—And I do also Certify that from Mr Sproat's public services, the loss of considerable property for his Loyalty and his general character there cannot appear before your Board a more deserving claimant of his Majesty's Bounty

Dated at London this 10th day
of April 1787.

JAMES DUNCAN

COPY OF LORD RODNEYS LETTER RE-
FERRED TO ON PAGE 120.

SANDWICH, NEW YORK 14th October 1780.

GENTLEMEN

I beg leave to represent to you that on my arrival here, I found a very great inconveniency in the management of the Department of Naval prisoners like to ensue from the Commissary General Mr David Sproat, who has managed it as I am most creditably informed (and from the exactness of his accounts I entirely believe) with great propriety and credit during a twelve month, having sent his resignation on account of some disagreement to Mr. Arbuthnot then and still cruizing off Rhode Island.

In that space it appears he had exchanged 3000 prisoners and had notwithstanding a balance of 800 due, a like number on three different prison ships, since my being here the number is increased to 1200.

It was not without some intercession which I made for the sake of the public (as this man is the only person I can find capable of managing the business properly) that I prevailed on him to continue to act by order from me—but whatever

competitorship there might have been for the employ, his character as a Citizen & Loyal Subject and as one that has lost considerably in this unnatural Rebellion should deservedly give him the preference. And on all these joint considerations it is that I recommend him to your Board for the appointment in a way that he may not be subject to being superseded. As this affair is of a very complicated & extensive nature & requires a correspondence to be kept up, and accounts adjusted with the different Rebel States—A Deputy is also necessary for him at Halifax & Charlestown subject to his inspection and settlement for which clerks will be likewise necessary—I make no doubt you will settle it on such a plan as to recompence him in some degree and at least give him that bread to eat which he has been deprived of by his attachment to Government and which I verily believe his attention & assiduity with a particular knowledge in this kind of employment will entitle him to.

I am with great Regard

Gentⁿ Your most obed^t Servt.

GEO. B. RODNEY

The Commissioners

for Sick and Hurt Seamen

London

Copy of the Certificate from the Commissioners for Sick and Hurt Seamen as to David Sproat's conduct during the time he was Commissary General for Naval Prisoners.

By the Commissioners for
taking Care of Sick and Hurt Seamen
and for Exchanging Prisoners of War.

These are to Certify that David Sproat, Esqr., has been employed in the Service of this Office as—Commissary General for Naval Prisoners of War in North America between the 13th October 1779 and 25th November 1783, and We do further Certify that his Accounts are passed and that he has conducted the Business entrusted to his Care to Our Satisfaction.

Given under Our Hands at Our Office
at Somerset Place the 31st Augst 1787

WALTER FARQUHARSON
VIN CORBETT
ROBT. LULMAN

By Command of the Commissioners
Nat^l. Crow

THE END.

C15 80





OCT 79

N. MANCHESTER,
INDIANA 46962





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