

## The British Fleet in Rhode Island

By George C. Mason

*Rhode Island Historical Society Collections*, Volume VII. (Providence: Kellogg Printing Company. 1885), pp.299-326. On-line at <https://www.google.com>.

(Spelling regularized, footnotes completed into page of origin, author text in Arial, quotations in Time New Roman)

But little information has been gathered in regard to the vessels of "His Majesty's Navy," that were stationed in the waters of Rhode Island during the years preceding the Revolution. The names of some of the vessels are known to us, and we have a general knowledge of the high-handed acts of their commanders — of the cutter *St. John*, the ship *Maidstone*, the schooner *Gaspee*, and the sloop *Liberty*; and, later, of the exacting demands of Wallace, of the *Rose*, and Ayscough, of the *Swan*; but there is yet much to be learned in relation to these and other vessels that were stationed here — their size, their armament, the number of men they carried, and the manner in which they were victualed. For years the people bore with them, but there came a time when the feelings of the inhabitants were so embittered, by frequent acts of injustice and high-handed measures, that they utterly refused to provide anything further for their sustenance, and it was not till they themselves were nearly reduced to the point of starvation, and were threatened by the guns of the enemy, that they were willing to listen to a compromise. In 1775 no vessel could enter Narragansett Bay without being robbed of her stores and cargo; and every farm on the sea-board was stripped of its flocks and herds, by the boats that scoured the shores for this purpose.[1] It was, therefore, an act of necessity, one of self-preservation, that led the inhabitants, at that time, to furnish such articles as they had previously supplied, and for which there was a constant demand. To save the town from bombardment, permission was granted by the General Assembly to the inhabitants of Newport, to feed the enemy; they appointing some one person for this purpose, and the ships agreeing, in turn, to permit the coasting vessels, engaged in bringing in provisions, to come and go without interruption.

- 
1. The following extracts, from two letters, written by William Vernon, illustrate the text. William Vernon was, in 1777, elected by Congress a member of the Eastern Navy Board, established at Boston, and was its presiding officer, from its organization to its dissolution.

Newport, Aug't 23, 1775.

George Hailey, Esq., London

Sir:

The *Venus*, *Othello* and *Hampden* are all safely arrived at Montego Bay, Jamaica. The oppression of the British Parliament, or rather of the Ministry is felt in every port of America, truly felt in North America, by some Individuals sensibly so, indeed Tools of Government, of the Navy, especially, I am sorry to say, many of them are most glaringly partial in doing what they are pleased to call Duty; by taking possession of those persons' Vessels with whom they are not intimately or somehow connected, other Persons' property they seize and send to Boston coming from any part of the World. Our Brig Royal Charlotte, John Knowles, Master, from Jamaica, loaded with Rum and Sugar, Cap'n Wallace, of his Majesty's Ship *Rose*, on the 19<sup>th</sup> June, seized and sent to Boston, notwithstanding the condition of the Port Bill, and of any Ports being free and open, is that they continued their Trade to Great Britain and the British Islands in the West Indies, yet we say in direct violation of the Act, he sent our Vessel and Cargo to Boston, where she now remains in possession of Admiral Greaves, Illegally held, to our prejudice, upwards of £2000 sterling. Whereas between the 19<sup>th</sup> of June and this Date, the said Wallace hath released and given up above Ten Sail of Vessels from Hispaniola and other Ports, loaded with Molasses, Sugar, Coffee, Wine &c. &c. This partial conduct of Cap'n Wallace we cannot account for, certainly we must recover adequate Damages of him, if all Law and Justice is not abrogated with you, for which purpose, we have made a legal protest, and perhaps may be the subject of Litigation in your Courts of Law. \* \* \* \* \* The Depredations committed by this petty Tyrant upon our Trade and the defenseless Town of Newport is shocking to human Nature, he is a savage beyond belief and description; you know we have three other Vessels at Jamaica that it's probable will fall into his hands, as we daily expect them. We do not expect any favour, as we have no connection with Scotch Men, whose influence entirely governs him, and whose principals are notoriously abhorrent to the present Family, at least those who reside with us are peculiarly so. \* \* \* \* \*

Y'r H'ble Serv'ts

S. & W. VERNON.

Newport, February 22, 1776,

Mr. Josiah Hewks, at Philadelphia,

Sir: \* \* \* \* \*

you will not be surprized, when I tell you, that last Sunday, Wallace, the Infernal Pirate, sent the Bomb Brig'te and Three Arm'd Cutters into the Harbour, and after stripping the Brig'te *Venus*, which lay aground just within the Lime Rocks, of Sails, Colles, Anchors, Cordage and Yard, Topmasts, in one word everything, and then set Fire to her, which burnt

to the water's edge— this was a fine Vessel of about 170 tons—Good God, where is our American Navy?

I am, Dear Sir,

Y'r H'mble Serv't;  
WM. VERNON.

---

It was an unusual thing to see a vessel of war, other than a privateer, in the waters of Rhode Island prior to 1764 and 1765. At that time, the growing discontent was becoming more and more marked, owing to the determined efforts of the Crown to enforce the stamp act; and to support the officers of the customs, in their effort to collect the revenue, a number of vessels, under Lord Colville, Rear Admiral of the white, &c., were sent here. These were the ships *Squirrel* and *Maidstone*, and the cutter *St. John*. The *Squirrel* was commanded by Captain Richard Smith, the *Maidstone* by Captain Antrobus, and the *St. John* by Captain Hill. The presence of these vessels, under the circumstances, did not tend to conciliate the people, but, on the contrary, they helped to strengthen a feeling of opposition, which was heightened by the injudicious acts of their commanders. It is a matter of history that their officers frequently went beyond the letter of their instructions, and this finally led the exasperated people to measures that were clearly acts of insubordination. The schooner *St. John* had the guns of Fort George turned upon her, the sloop *Liberty* was burnt by an excited crowd of sea-faring men, and a boat of the *Maidstone* was wrested from the crew, and openly burnt in one of the streets of Newport.

From the time that the *Squirrel* was sent here, in the autumn of 1763, up to the opening of the Revolution, there was seldom a day when there was not one or more vessels of war on this station. How these vessels were victualed I have now the means of stating. When ships were sent to America, it was necessary to provide regular supplies of provision for them while on the coast. To this end a contract was made with some party, who was known as the Victualing Agent, and who had his assistants in the Colonies — one (general) in Boston, one in Halifax, one in Newport, and one in Charleston. The victualing agent, at the time of which I am writing, was Sir Alexander Grant, who soon after retired from the office, and the appointment was then given to his son, Robert Grant. There were two contracts, which were renewed from time to time; the one known as the "beef contract," and the other was for general ship stores; and the better to understand the nature of these obligations, I give copies of two that are in a perfect state of preservation:

"contracted And Agreed, this sixth day of July, 1772, with the Commissioners for victualing his Majesty's navy, for and on the behalf of his Majesty, by me, Robert Grant, of London, merch't: and I do hereby oblige myself timely and seasonably to furnish all such of his Majesty's ships and vessels, as shall come to New England, and be in want of provisions, with good wholesome sea victuals, fit in all respects for the service of his Majesty's navy, at and after the following rates and prices sterling, viz.:

- "bread, at sixteen shillings per hundred weight.
- "beer; at thirty-seven shillings and sixpence per tun of two hundred and sixteen gallons of beer measure: or, if more is demanded, fifteen gallons of rum of merchantable proof are to be furnished in lieu of and the same price as one tun of beer.
- "Beef; at eight pence per piece of four pounds.
- "Pork ; at six pence per piece of two pounds.
- "Pease; at 3s. per bushel.
- "Oatmeal; well and sufficiently bolted at 3s. per bushel.
- "Butter ; at 6 ½ d. per lb.
- "Cheese ; Cheshire, Gloucester, or Warwickshire, or cheese of equal goodness, at 4 and 7/8 d. per pound.
- "Vinegar; at 6d. per Gallon.

"Including new casks of all kinds (except for beer) that may be wanted for packing of said provisions, setting up and trimming of casks, cartage, labor, freight, boat hire, and all other charges whatsoever relating to the victualing, except necessary and extra necessary money to the Pursers, and in case there shall be a necessity for furnishing any new basket, bags, iron hoops, or tight butts or puncheons for beer or water to any of his Majesty's ships, I do oblige myself to furnish the same at the rate of 2s. per bag and 55s. per tun for the laid cask, reckoning two butts or three puncheons to a tun, and 2s. for each iron hoop, and I do agree and oblige myself that the said casks shall be made of good, sound, seasoned staves, free from sapp, and of ye following dimensions and gauge, viz: each butt to gauge one hundred and eight gallons, Winchester measure, to be 26 in. broad at the head and the staves 52 in. long and 1 and 1 /10 in. thick at the chime and 7/10ths thick at the bulge, and that each puncheon be 41 in. long, 25 in. broad at the head and to gauge 72 gal. W. M. and the staves 1 in. thick at the chime and 7/10ths in. thick at the bulge : and that each cask shall be marked with my name at length, with a burnt mark on the head and on the bulge stave, next the bung, that in case the said cask shall appear not to be answerable to the said conditions, a deduction may be made from my bill on discovery or proof thereof, on the judgment of two able and experienced coopers, of two-thirds the price I am allowed on this contract for the same, which abatement I do hereby consent may be made by the said Commissioners for victualing, or any three or more of them for the time being, or do otherwise agree to pay the am't thereof to the Treasurer of the Navy, if the said Commissioners shall think proper so to direct.

"And whereas no new bags, or casks for beer, or water, are to be furnished but on ye most urgent occasions, I am therefore, before I supply any, to receive a warrant from the commander of the ship for that purpose, and a certificate from the signing officers (which are the Captain, or, in his necessary absence, the next commissioned officers, Master or Boatswain) that all his Majesty's old casks belonging to said ship have been first trimmed and fitted up, w'ch order, together w'th the Purser's receipt, and a certificate from the signing officers that the bags and casks were actually delivered on board in kind, I am to produce to ye said Commissioners, and also my own, or agent's affidavit that the said bags, water or beer casks so supplied were actually sent on board in kind, and that the casks were not filled with rum when sent off, nor intended or designed to be made use of for rum casks

afterwards, to the best of my own or agent's knowledge and belief, and that no money or other consideration was paid or given, or is to be paid or given the Purser, or any person or persons in his behalf, or any other person whatsoever in lieu of all or any part thereof. And I do also oblige myself that the casks in w'ch the rum shall be sent on board his Majesty's ships and vessels, shall be equal in goodness to ye casks made use of in exporting rum for merchandize from New England to Great Britain.

"And I do further oblige myself that no rum or beer shall be supplied on this contract in any other casks than what shall be numbered and have the contents of the gallons in each cask marked on the head thereof, and that the beef shall not be delivered in any other manner than in pieces of 4 pound w't, nor pork than of two pounds, and that the said beef and pork shall always hold of such weight as that every twenty-eight pieces of beef, cut four pound pieces, taken out of the cask as they rise, and the salt shaken off, shall weigh one hundred pounds, neat avoirdupoise weight, and that every fifty-six pieces of pork cut for two pound pieces and taken out of the cask as they rise and the salt shaken off. as from the beef, shall neat 104 pounds, avoirdupoise w't, and that there shall not be put in at any time with the flesh any unusual pieces, such as leg bones, shins of oxen, or the cheeks of hogs, or ox hearts &c. And I do oblige myself that the casks containing the flesh shall be full bound and full of pickle.

"And I do further oblige myself and engage that all the provisions that shall be issued on this contract shall be sent on board his Majesty's ships in kind, and no money paid in lieu thereof, and that they shall be good, sound and sweet and in all other respects fit for his Majesty's service, and the best of each kind that New England does afford, and that the rum shall be none of it less than six months old at the respective times of supplying the same to his Majesty's ships, and that said provisions shall all hold good for six months after the delivery on board the respective ships, and in case any part of the said provisions delivered as aforesaid to any of his Majesty's ships or vessels shall be found defective and be cast by survey within the time of the said six months warranty, I do hereby consent and agree that it shall and may be lawful for the said Commissioners of the Victualing Office, or any three or more of them for the time being, to put a stop or make abatements out of any bill or bills of mine made out for the said provisions and signed or unsigned by said Commissioners for payment, to the full value and at the same price as I am allowed for the same, for indemnifying his Majesty, and in case any provisions are to be returned to me or my order, there shall remain no bill or bills to issue, or that the bill or bills so remaining shall not amount unto a sum sufficient to indemnify his Majesty as aforesaid, then I do hereby oblige myself, my heirs, ex'rs, and admin's to make good the same to his Majesty : and in case any provisions so cast by survey shall be returned from the ships to any of the agents for victualing his Majesty's Navy,- the said provisions are to be returned to me or my order if I shall think to demand the same or ye product thereof.

"And it is further agreed with said Commissioners that before I furnish any provisions to any of his Majesty's ships, I am to receive a warrant from the Commander thereof for so doing, and also a certificate from the signing officers of the ship, setting forth the particular occasion for such provision being wanted and the quantity thereof, and upon my producing

to said Commissioners the said warrant and certificate, together with the Purser's receipt and a certificate also from the signing officers, of the quantity and species of Provisions (expressed in words at length) received, and that the same were delivered on board in kind and were good and fit for his Majesty's service, together with my own or agent's affidavit, which is to be on the foot or on the back of the receipt signed by the Purser, that the said provisions (mentioning the quantity and quality at full length) were actually delivered on board in kind, as therein expressed, and that I or my agents neither have paid or given, or are to pay or give to the Purser, or any person or persons on his behalf, or to any other person whatsoever, any money or other consideration in lieu of all or any part thereof. I am to have bills made out for the same at the prices before mentioned and numbered in the course of the victualing, to bear interest at 4 per ct. after six months from the date thereof, and I do oblige myself constantly to take three receipts, signed by the Purser, for provisions supplied on this contract, and to send two of them to the said commissioners.

"And I do further oblige myself that on application being made to me or my agents by the Pursers of his Majesty's ships and vessels, to supply them with necessary money for their bills in ster'g on the said Commissioners, at thirty days after sight. And it is also agreed with the said Commissioners that they will discharge and pay the said bills when due, upon the following certificates from the Captain or commanding officer being transmitted at the foot of each bill, viz:

'This is to certify the Commissioners for victualing his Majesty's navy, that \_\_\_\_\_ months necessary money is due to Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ Purser of his Majesty's ship under my command, \_\_\_\_\_ since his last indenting or being otherwise supplied with necessary money, and that the sum of £ \_\_\_\_\_ drawn for in this bill does not exceed a proportion of two-thirds for the said time.'

And it is hereby understood and agreed by and with the said Commissioners that the aforesaid bills for necessary money, are to be for the proportion of two-thirds of what was actually due at the time of drawing of said bills, and not for any necessary money that may become due after the respective dates of ye bills.

"And I also engage that my agents for the time being, shall communicate a copy of this contract to the Captains or commanding officers, and to the Pursers of such of his Majesty's ships as shall from time to time apply to him, in order to peruse the same.

"And I do oblige myself to deliver weekly to the Admiral or commander in chief of his Majesty's ships in New England, or when the commanding officer for the time shall require it, during the continuance of this contract, an abstract of all the provisions remaining in my stores, and likewise an abstract of the several species and quantities of provisions issued to each of his Majesty's ships every week at New England.

"And it is hereby further agreed that I am to furnish rice in lieu of half the quantity of oatmeal that shall be demanded, after the rate of ½ pint of rice in lieu of a pint of oatmeal, and the quantity of rice that shall appear by ye vouchers to be supplied to his Majesty's

ships shall be paid for in the following manner, that is to say 321bs of rice shall be allowed to be equal and shall be paid for at the same price as 1 bushel of oatmeal.

"And for the due performance of this contract, I do bind myself in the penalty of £2,000 in case of my failure in any part thereof; and I do oblige myself to procure two able and sufficient persons, such as shall be approved by the said Commissioners, to be bound with me jointly in a bond to his Majesty, of £2,000, for the due and well performance of the said contract, which is to commence the thirtieth day of November next, and continue for twelve months certain, and further until six months warning shall be given on either side of the determination thereof.

"In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal, the day and year first before written."

ROBERT GRANT.

"Beef Contract. Contracted and agreed this twenty-seventh day of July, 1774, with the Commissioners for victualing his Majesty's navy, for and on behalf of his Majesty, by me, Robert Grant, of London, Merchant, and I do hereby bargain and sell to his Majesty, and oblige myself to deliver, free of all charges and risk, into the boats of his Majesty's ships and vessels at New England, that shall be sent for the same, all such quantities of fresh beef as shall be demanded for the use of his Majesty's ships and vessels at the said port, for one beef-day and one pork-day in each week, during the space of twelve months certain, from the eighteenth day of November next, and further, until six months warning shall be given on either side, at the rate of nineteen shillings and five pence and five-eighths of a penny per hundred weight, and I do agree and oblige myself that all the beef that shall be demanded as aforesaid, shall be delivered within forty-eight hours after each respective demand being made, and that all the beef that shall be delivered on this contract shall be good, fat, well-fed ox beef in all respects fit for his Majesty's service. And it is also agreed that before I furnish any fresh beef, to any of his Majesty's ships or vessels, I am to receive a warrant from the commander thereof for so doing, and also a certificate from the signing officers of the ship (which are the Captain, or in his necessary absence the next commissioned officer) Master or Boatswain, of the want thereof; and upon my producing to the said Commissioners the said warrant and certificate, agreeable to the forms annexed, together with the Purser's receipt and a certificate also from the signing officers of the particular quantity of Fresh beef (expressed in words at length) received, and that the same was actually delivered on board in kind, and was good and fit for his Majesty's service, together with my own or my agent's affidavit, which is to be at the foot, or on the back of the receipt, signed by the Purser, that the said fresh beef (mentioning the same and quantity in words at length) was actually delivered into the boats of his Majesty's ships in kind as therein expressed, and that I or my agent neither have paid or given, or are to pay or give the Purser, or any person or persons on his behalf, any money or other consideration in lieu of all or any part thereof, which said receipt from the Purser and a certificate from the signing officers, and affidavit from myself or my agent, are to be rendered according to the forms annexed, I am to be paid for the said fresh beef by bills made out at the price before-mentioned, and numbered in-the course of the victualing, to bear interest at four pounds per ct.

after six months from the dates thereof: And I do oblige myself constantly to take the receipts signed by the Pursers for fresh beef supplied on this contract, and to send two of them to the said Commissioners.

"And I do oblige myself or my agent for the time being, to communicate a copy of this contract to the Captains or commanding officers, and to the Pursers of such of his Majesty's ships and vessels as shall from time to time apply to me or him, in order to peruse the same.

"And I do bind myself to the exact performance of every part of this contract, in the penalty of five hundred pounds in case of my failure in any part thereof; and I do also oblige myself to procure two able and sufficient persons, such as shall be approved of by the said Commissioners to be bound with me jointly in a bond to his Majesty, of five hundred pounds, for the due and well performance of the said contract. In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal the day and year first above written.

ROBERT GRANT.

In presence of John Watts,

Roger Southerton.

---

It was necessary that the contractor should have his agent in America, who, in turn appointed agents in different seaports. From 1763 to 1773 John Powell, who resided in Boston, was the general agent. January 1, 1773, the resignation of Powell, who was in poor health, was accepted, and Alexander Brymer, of Boston, was appointed in his place. Through Brymer all business of victualing the navy was carried on, from the time of his appointment to the final rupture between the two countries. Alexander Thompson was the agent at Halifax, Shirley and Price for South Carolina, and Christopher Champlin in Newport. In the many letters that passed between the agents, one finds frequent allusion to the troubles that were disturbing the country, and it is pleasant to a Rhode Islander to know that the agent in Newport, while faithful to his duties under the contract of Robert Grant, never allowed his interest to get the better of his patriotism, but uniformly sustained the cause of the country. This is the more marked in that the letters in which these expressions of fidelity are found, were in many instances addressed to Brymer, whose own letters show that he was wedded to the Crown. The latter wrote, under date of December 15, 1773:

"Although in my opinion the tea will not be sent home, yet as I presume it will be stored till the sense of the Ministry and the East India Company is known, it will in effect amount to the same. Whatever you may learn is done to the southward in respect to it, you may depend, like a dog in a mill, we will follow. Our blasts are too sudden to last any time. Dogs that bark loudest bite seldomest and are the least to be feared."

March 25, 1774, he writes:

"I am no politician; I meddle not in public measures; I am neuter. However, I must beg to differ in opinion on the effect of the resolves you may be preparing or have prepared to prevent the sale of tea if government should hereafter enforce the landing of it. If such a resolution should be adopted, which I by no means think likely under present circumstances, it would be to carry it with a high hand. Much is to be said on both sides. But why prevent the landing of it? If people think as they speak the tea would rot in store, not a pound would be sold, and would not this deter the sending any more more effectually than any resolutions the people could enter into?"

Again he writes:

"It is needless to say that the teas lately arrived, 28 and ½ chests, are destroyed, as you will have already heard. This is liberty indeed, big with the fate of every one's fortune, entirely at the disposal of the good people. Forbearance at a certain pitch ceases to be a virtue, so liberty, when strained, is downright licentiousness. What a man wills and cannot, and is obliged to do what he wills not, where is liberty? Where is the parallel? Behold it! View the times dispassionately and it is to be found easily. We may well say with Caesar, "the Rubicon is past. Farewell Peace!"

The Newport agent wrote, as early as November 3, '69:

"The grand attack of Britain on American liberty, by attempting to dragoon them into unconstitutional revenue laws has produced a general union of the colonies to fall on salutary measures to obtain relief. Among others, the non-importation of British manufactures is acceded to by the merchants till some relief is given us by Parliament."

December 31, 1773, in reply to remarks on the importation of tea, he writes:

"This intended monopoly, which would operate much against the merchants in London, and finally ruin the most of them in America in course of a few years, has fixed the minds of the trading part of the community, and should Government use any coercive measures to affect the landing any for the future, the asylum then remains with the people. They will enter into an association not to buy nor sell or consume any, and will break off all connection with any who attempt to deal in it. This I think can be read in the countenance of every one among us."

Of the vessels of war sent to Rhode Island and which are mentioned in the victualing papers, the earliest are the *Squirrel*, a ship commanded by Captain Richard Smith, the cutter *St. John* (a schooner) commanded by Lieutenant Hill, the sloop *Chaleur*, Thomas Langhorne, captain and purser, the *Maidstone*, a frigate, carrying twenty-eight nine-pounders, and commanded by Captain Charles Antrobus, and the *Cygnets* (always written *Cignets*) under Captain Charles Leslie in 1765—6, who was succeeded by Captain Duvill in 1768. These vessels were early stationed here. The *Garland* took in a small supply of provisions in Newport harbor, August, 1767, and shortly sailed up the sound. It was expected that she would winter here; but a letter from Boston, under date of November 4th, states that she had been ordered home. The ship *Senigal* and the cutter *St. John* wintered here in 1767. The *Senigal* was commanded by Thomas Cookson in 1768,

and by Thomas Rich, in 1769. The *Sultana*, Captain Ingles, was here for a short time in December, 1770.

The earliest demands that I have are those of Captain Richard Smith, of the *Squirrel*, May 19 and August 20, 1764. With these there are the receipts of the signing officers, John Bell, Jr., being the purser, for provisions from June 30th to September 30th. The *Squirrel* had been ordered to this station by Lord Colville in the autumn of 1763, "for the encouragement of fair trade by the prevention of smuggling." The *Maidstone*, Captain Antrobus, made demand for provisions in Newport, July 1760. On the 19th of the following September she was in Halifax. December 31st, the same year, she was again in Newport, when further calls were made for provisions, and also in March, June and July of 1766. These demands were usually made by Jno. Williams, Purser. The *Maidstone* was ordered home the same year, and sailed for London July 8th. The cutter *St. John* was a thorn in the flesh to Rhode Islanders. She was in these waters as early as 1764, but there is no record of her in the victualing papers earlier than 1768. She was commanded by Captain Thomas Hill, son of Dr. Hill, of London. He was his own purser, and not only caused a great deal of trouble to the commercial interests, but also ruled it with the contractor's agents with a high hand. Being his own purser, it rested with him to sign his own vouchers. How he availed himself of the opportunity this afforded him to promote his own interest, may be gathered from the following extract from a letter dated at Newport:

"Captain Hill has made a demand upon me for fresh beef. I have let him have two quarters. I mentioned his supplying himself; his answer was, he has no money to do it, besides, he shall make a demand in such for four months' beef, pork, butter, bread, &c. If you don't supply it he must draw on the Navy Board for it and charge to y'r acct. As to the beer affair, he will not give it up as long as he was victualed for. He has a right to brew, and at the expiration thereof he shall make a demand for four months' more of such articles as he thinks proper, leaving out the rum, which you must deliver, and he will sail immediately where he can brew by his instructions. Upon the whole he seems to be far from wanting to be unreasonably troublesome, and finally is willing to do this—to take of you 1500 or 2000 lbs. of bread, 5 or 6 barrels of beef and pork, 5 firkins of butter, change the fresh beef into salt, and barter for some oatmeal and pease, and will give you a voucher for near five hundred gallons of rum, you allowing him two shillings sterling for each gallon."

The difference in exchange was a fruitful cause of many disputes. The agents were required by the contract to cash the bills of officers for necessary money, which was paid in New England currency and not in sterling. This created great dissatisfaction. The grievance dated back to the time when ships were first sent to the American coast. In 1761 it resulted in the following correspondence:

"Halifax, 16th February, 1761.

"My Lord. Frequent controversies have arisen between the Pursers of and the agents for victualing his Majesty's ships at this place, and a dispute now subsists on the following article of the victualing contract, viz.: 'And I do further oblige myself, that on application being made

to me or my agent by the Pursers of his Majesty's ships or vessels, to supply them with necessary money for their bills in sterling on said commissioners at thirty days sight &c.'

"The pursers explain it in their own favor, so far as to insist that by it the contractor is bound to pay them sterling money for their bills, without regard to the currency or rate of exchange in this Province; the agents, on the other hand, allege that it is incumbent on them to pay the Pursers at the current exchange of bills in London, and no more: It has heretofore been determined in favor of the latter by every commanding officer to whom the same has been referred ; and the gentlemen who now insist so strenuously on that point, I think do either quite mistake or willfully pervert the meaning of the words, for they imply no more than that the bills shall be drawn in sterling money.

"At the present rate of exchange, which, within three months past, has arisen from five to seven and a half and eight per cent premium, I should have no manner of objection to pay them sterling for sterling and be a gainer thereby, but as no such thing is stipulated in the contract, I most industriously avoid giving up such a point, and thereby establish a precedent which may prove disadvantageous in future, when exchange is fluctuating in all countries, and none more than this, may probably fall back to its former standard of 5 per cent and under. Therefore, I shall endeavor to demonstrate that the Pursers have no manner of right to complain of the present exchange, which I am now ready and willing to pay them on their necessary bills.

"It is a fact well known that for many years past, and at present, the lowest price of silver is and has been five shillings and four pence per ounce, that a Spanish dollar is or ought to be seven-eight parts of an ounce; and is intrinsically worth  $\frac{4}{8}$  in London. All his Majesty's officers, troops and servants abroad are paid at that rate, and I do not see nor can believe that it was ever intended, or that any provision has been made for paying his Pursers in particular, in any other manner.

"When I am called upon for necessary money, on a Purser's bill for £100 stg. I will tender him the highest exchange I get for my own bills, or have ever yet been given for any bills in this province, being 8 per cent, or 432 Spanish dollars for his bill of £100, which at  $\frac{4}{8}$  each is £100.16, so that instead of being sufferers by the exchange, I think it will appear from the foregoing calculation that they gain sixteen shillings on every hundred pounds sterling. If they will not be convinced of this they are at liberty to protest, as they have menaced, against the contractor for non-performance, and appeal to the Commissioners for victualing, who are certainly the proper judges of their own contract (or to any other board in England they please), and if I am found delinquent let them exact the penalty.

"I am sorry to give your lordship this trouble, but am under a necessity of doing it or giving up my right. As I avoid entering into litigious debates or altercations in your lordships presence, I take this method of stating in writing, and submit it with all deference and respect to your better judgment, having the honor to be, &c."

To the above Lord Colville made answer:

"Sir. What you have wrote to me about the exchange and value of money is, I think, as clear as anything can be on the subject. I understand your quotation from the victualing contract exactly as you do ; and if the Pursers refuse their necessary money on the terms you offer to them. I am clearly of opinion that no breach of contract can be imputed to you on that account. I am, &c.

COLVILLE. To Alexander Grant, Esq.

Halifax, 16th Feb'y, 1761."

The matter was then carried before the Commissioners who confirmed the decisions of Lord Colville. But it was not allowed to rest here, for the Pursers from time to time revived it, and in 1773 the action of some of the officers of the fleet called forth the following letter:

Victualing Office, 22d Nov., 1773.

"sir. We received your letters of the 1st past and 1st instant, with extracts of one from your agent in Boston relating to a dispute which he represents has happened between him and the Pursers of his Majesty's ships on that station,, touching necessary money. And agreeable to your desire we herewith send you copy of a letter from the late Sir Alexander Grant's agent at Halifax to Lord Colville, of the 16th of February 1761, upon the like subject; also a copy of his lordship's answer to it, and a copy of our letter to Sir Alexander Grant in consequence thereof. We are, sir, your most H'ble servants

James Wallace. Thos. Colby. Robert Pett.

Mr. Robert Grant."

It was the petty annoyances that he was subjected to, and the superciliousness of the men he had to deal with, quite as much as his ill health, which led the contractor's Boston agent, Powell, to resign; for he states in one of his letters referring to this matter, that, aside from the annoyance of having the officers in his house at times when it was often inconvenient to his family, he had no mind to turn butcher—alluding to the constant and heavy demand for fresh beef, which made it necessary for the contractor to scour the country for droves of cattle, which had to be brought in, slaughtered and served to the ships in the different harbors.

There was a regular stereotype form in which all demands for provisions were made; the blanks were printed in Boston and were furnished to the agents, who in turn gave copies to the officers of the ships when they came on the station. When provisions were wanted the blanks were filled by the purser, and the order was then signed by the commanding officer of the vessel, the master and the boatswain. When the order was filled and the articles were on board, the purser receipted for them; and, to complete the transaction, the agent had to make oath before a Justice of the Peace, that the articles

had actually been delivered on board said vessel, as set forth, that he had not feed the purser, nor had he given money in lieu of the said provisions.

The requisitions, the orders and the receipts were as follows, taking one ship, the *Rose*, as an example:

"We the signing Officers of his Majesty's ship, the *Rose*, do hereby certify that there is wanting for the refreshment of her Company, a Proportion of Fresh Beef, for one Beef Day and one Pork Day in each Week, during her stay in Port. Given under our Hands and dated on board the said Ship at Newport, this 22d day of July 1775.

Jas. Wallace. Captain,

Savage Gardner, Master,

J Axes Thompson, Boatswain

To Mr. Christopher Champlin, agent to the contractor for supplying his Majesty's ships and vessels with Fresh Beef at Newport.

Sir;

You are hereby required and directed to furnish His Majesty's Ship, the *Rose*, under my command, with a Proportion of Fresh Beef for one Beef Day, and one Pork Day in each Week, during her stay in Port, the same being actually wanted for the Refreshment of her Company. Given under my Hand, and dated on board the said Ship at Newport, this 22d day of July, 1775.

JAS. WALLACE, Captain.

"Received of Mr. Christopher Champlin, agent to the contractor for supplying His Majesty's Ships and vessels at Newport, Rhode Island, with Fresh Beef, between the 22d day of July, 1775, and the 30th day of September, 1775, six thousand and nine hundred and thirty-two pounds of Fresh Beef for the use of His Majesty's Ship, the *Rose*, and all which said Beef was actually delivered on board in kind, and was in all respects good and fit for His Majesty's Service, for which I have signed three receipts of this tenor and date. Given under my hand and dated on board the said ship at Newport, this 30th day of September, 1775.

Purser, absent without leave.  
And W. Collie. Pursers steward.

I Christopher Champlin do voluntarily make oath that Six Thousand Nine hundred and Thirty-two pounds of Fresh Beef, mentioned in the above receipt from Mr. William Lewis, Purser of His Majesty's Ship, the *Rose*, was actually delivered into the said ship's boat in kind, between the 22d day of July and the 30th day of September 1775, and that I neither have paid or given, or am to pay or give, the Purser or any other person or persons whatsoever, any Money, or other consideration whatsoever, in lieu of all or any part of the said Beef. .

CHRIST. CHAMPLIN.

Sworn before me, Martin Howard, Just'e Peace.

We the signing Officers of His Majesty's Ship, the *Rose*, do hereby certify the Commissioners for Victualing His Majesty's Navy, that there was received on board the said ship in kind, between the 22d day of July and the 30th day of September 1775, Six Thousand nine hundred and thirty-two pounds of Fresh Beef, from Mr. Christopher Champlin, agent to the Contractor for supplying His Majesty's ships at Newport, Rhode Island therewith. That is to say, on the 22d day of July 1775 Fresh beef 6841bs. issued as Beef and Pork to 200 men. [and then follow the issue of each day to the 30th of September inclusive] And further, that all the said Beef was good and fit in all respects for His Majesty's Service, and that the particular Quantities thereof were furnished and delivered on board said ship, and issued for Beef or Beef-Pork, as is against each day above expressed, and that the number of men to which the said Beef is mentioned to be issued as above said, were actually borne and mustered on board the said ship, as is particularly against each day above expressed. Given under our hands, and dated on board the said ship at Newport Rhode Island, this 30th day of September 1775.

Jas. Wallace, Captain.

Savage Gardner, Master.

Jam's Thompson, Boatswain.

We the signing Officers of His Majesty's Ship, the *Rose*, Capt. James Wallace, commander, do hereby certify that there is a want of the following Provisions, viz: Bread, fourteen thousand seven hundred and seventy-two pounds; Beer, four thousand three hundred and twenty gallons; Rum, three hundred and sixty-one gallons; beef, one hundred and sixty-eight pieces; Pork, thirteen hundred and seventy pieces; Pease, forty-one bushels; Oatmeal, thirty-nine bushels; Butter, sixteen hundred and seventy-three pounds (for butter and cheese); Cheese, twenty-seven pounds; Vinegar, two hundred gallons. For the use of His Majesty's said ship to complete our Provisions to three months. Given under our hands, and dated on board the said ship in Newport this 3d day of April 1775.

Jas. Wallace, Captain.

Savage Gardner, Master.

Jam's Thompson, Boatswain."

Here follows the order of the captain to the agent of the contractor, the receipt of the signing officers as above, and the certificate of the contractor's agent under oath.

Frequently it was necessary to send on shore for articles that were wanted immediately, in which case a written order was all that was necessary, it being understood that the articles so ordered would be included and make a part of the next general demand. When

these minor orders were written by the commanding officer of a vessel of any size, they were always dignified and courteous. Even Wallace, who had made such an unfavorable impression, never forgot the dignity of his position. A missive from him of this kind reads thus:

*Rose*, Newport the 23d Sept. 1775.

"Sr. Please to supply his Majesty's ship under my command with six hundred pounds of fresh beef.

I am, sir, your Humb. obt. Servant,

JAS. WALLACE."

When the executive officer of a ship had to make a like demand, his note took the following shape:

*Arethusa*, At Newport, Rhode Isl'd.

30th March 1773.

"Sir. In the absence of Captain Hammond, I desire you will please to supply the Purser of his Majesty's ship *Arethusa*, with 15120 lbs. of bread, for the use of the said ship. I am sir, your obt. Humble Servant,

JAS. WATT, Lieut.

"To the contractor for victualing his Majesty's ships at Newport."

But when a call of this kind was made by a purser, it was as curt as it was clear and concise.

"A demand of provisions for the use of his Majesty's sloop *Swan*,

Captain James Ayscough, Commander, in Rhode Island Harbor, 6th April, 1773.

400 pieces of beef.

600 " "pork.

16 bush, pease.

20 bush, oatmeal.

450 lbs. Butter.

30 gals. Vinegar.

200 gals. Rum.

JAMES BATES, Purser."

The above is addressed to no one; but the bearer of such a missive knew where to carry it.

It was not always an easy matter, in a place like Newport, to supply a sudden demand, where the quantities called for were so large, and provisions, the fresh beef excepted, had to be brought from other places. When the *Senigal*, a sloop of war, and the cutter *St. John*, wintered here in 1767, the salt beef and pork, oatmeal and peas were sent round from Boston, the bread was brought from Philadelphia, and the rum was obtained wherever it could be found.

In 1773 the number of vessels on this part of the coast was increased. February 13th of that year, Brymer wrote that his uncle and Chas. Lyell had each taken a third of the victualing contract, Mr. Grant retaining the other third; and in a letter dated the 17th of the following May, he states:

"The *Tartar* is fully victualed for sea, and 'tis presumed destined for your port. Everything is kept so secret that there is no coming at the truth. \* \* \* I wish your Court was over and everything settled in an amicable way, which I hope and sincerely wish may be the case. The *Gibraltar* is in harbor, and I presume will be detained till it is over, in order to carry home the proceedings. This to yourself, as it is only a bare presumption."

The "Court" above referred to "was the one instituted to discover, if possible, who were concerned in burning the schooner *Gaspee*, on the 10th of the previous June. And here I may relate an interesting fact, of which, up to the present time, there has been no record, but of which there is ample evidence in the papers before me. It is well known that the *Gaspee* was burnt in June, 1772, as above stated, by a party of Rhode Islanders, chiefly residents of Providence, led by Abraham Whipple, who, later, was the first commodore of the American navy. The next year there was another armed vessel in these waters, a brig, named *Gaspee*, but no mention has ever been made of her. The officers of the navy were greatly incensed at the act of rebellion on the part of Rhode Islanders, and that the *Gaspee* might not be forgotten, they gave her name to a vessel which had recently been brought into the service—a brig, commanded by Captain William Hunter. The evidence that there was such a brig is found in Captain Hunter's demands for provision. One of these demands is quite lengthy and I will only give a copy of the shortest.

*Gaspee*, Rhode Island, 6th Oct. 1773.

Sir. Let the bearer have three hundred or four hundred weight of bread, for the use of his Majesty's brig under my command Yours, William Hunter.

There are three of these demands, one as above, one dated August 13, and one December 4, 1773. The latter calls for 2190 lbs. bread, 2160 gals, beer, 221 pieces of beef, 330 pieces of pork, 7 bush, peas, and 296 lbs. butter and cheese; all of which articles were delivered on board said brig *Gaspee*, as appears by the agent's acknowledgment before Martin Howard, Justice of the Peace.

The snow *Cruizer*, Captain Tyringham Howe, the ships *Mercury*, Captain Robert Kuley, *Arethusa*, Captain Andrew Snape Hamond, and *Lizard*, Captain Charles Inglis, sloop of war *Swan*, Captain James Ayscough, brig *Gaspee*, as above, and schooners *Halifax*, Captain Abraham Crespin, and *Magdalin*, Captain Henry Colins, were all here in 1773. To these vessels, between the 11th of February and the 10th of the following April, provisions were supplied in these quantities: Bread 76112 pounds; flour, 2622 pounds; beef, 2160 pieces; pork, 3300 pieces; peas, 152 bushels; oatmeal 147 bushels; Indian meal 216 bushels; butter, 6413 pounds; cheese, 280 pounds; vinegar, 192 gallons. From the 21st of September to the 4th of December, the *Cruizer*, *Gaspee* and *Magdalin* had the following articles served out to them; bread, 8597 pounds; flour, 1112 pounds; beer, 7560 gallons; beef, 336 pieces; pork, 990 pieces; peas, 28 bushels; oatmeal, 22 bushels; butter, 1047 pounds. The bread was divided very equally between these three vessels, although they were by no means of the same size. The *Mercury* and *Lizard* were twenty-eight gun frigates—the size of the *Maidstone*.

The *Mercury* left Rhode Island in August and arrived in Boston on the 15th of that month. Brymer at this time wrote to Newport; "There is no talk of any vessel being sent in the room of the *Mercury*, but the *Kingfisher* is to relieve the *Swan* and the *Cruizer*, who will soon be ordered to Halifax to char." While cruising off Brest, in 1758, the *Lizard* fell in with the French corvettes *Heroine* and *Due d'Hanovre*; the former escaped, but the latter, a vessel of fourteen guns, was captured. The *Arethusa* was a thirty-two gun frigate. In 1778, she fought the *Belle Poule*, a forty gun ship, close in under the French shore, when the latter vessel, working her way into a small bay, was towed into a place of safety. The same year the *Maidstone*, already referred to, then under command of Captain Gardner, closed with the French frigate *Lion*, off the Chesapeake, and after a severe fight of more than an hour, in which the *Maidstone* was a good deal cut up, the *Lion* struck her colors.

In 1774, there were but few ships of war in Newport Harbor, but even these were a continued source of trouble to Brymer and his agents. The question of the difference in exchange was again agitated. To the demands of this kind made upon him, Brymer wrote: "There can be no cavil about the Purser's necessary bills, as Mr. Grant's letter explains that they are to be paid at the current exchange, Lord Colville approves it, and the commissioners confirm Lord Colville's approbation," This was April 11, 1774. October 20th of that year he wrote: "The *Rose*, a twenty gun ship, winters with you and has sailed for your port. She is victualed till the last of December." It has been stated that the *Rose* was here earlier—as early as 1770—and in an imperfect list of vessels on this station at that time her name appears. In the past, there has been but little that could be relied upon under this head, and what we have known has been gleaned, little by little, from the scanty materials within reach of the historian. It is not surprising that there has been some confusion in dates, or that the names of vessels, in some instances, have not been preserved to us. It is stated, as above, that the *Rose* sailed for Newport in October, 1774, and on the 12th of December, I find her name first mentioned in the books of the agent, where a demand of the Purser for necessary money is entered. From this date, up to the time when all intercourse between the ships and the shore was brought to a close, her name frequently appears. In these papers there are a score of documents, demands and

receipts, signed by Captain James Wallace. Wallace was in command of this ship during the whole time that she was on this station, but in 1780 he was in command of the *Nonesuch*, a sixty-four gun frigate, in which vessel he chased a French fleet, under convoy of three frigates, and succeeded in capturing one of the latter—the *Belle Poule*, mounting thirty-two carriage guns. This was off Belle Isle.

In 1775 the ships here were the *Rose*, Captain James Wallace; *Glasgow*, Tyringham Howe (commander of the snow *Cruizer* in 1773), and *Hind*, Robert Boyle Nickols, lieutenant commander in the absence of the captain; sloop of war *Swan*, Captain James Ayscough; and schooners *Hope* and *Diana*, The *Rose* carried two hundred men, but at times that number was reduced to one hundred and thirty. The complement of the *Glasgow* was one hundred and thirty men, and of the *Hind* one hundred and sixty-five. There was great difficulty in getting crews on this station, and possibly the above figures are below the proper standard, but they represent the number of men who were provided for by the victualing agent.

As the times became more and more unsettled, and the breach between the two countries grew wider, there was less and less willingness to have anything to do with the ships; and it has been stated that so early as 1764, the agent was interfered with by the people—"was seized and forcibly prevented from supplying the ship"—the *Maidstone*. Of this I can find no evidence. If anything of the kind had taken place there would certainly have been some reference to it—some allusion to so unpleasant a circumstance—in the letters, if not in the books, of the agent. But nothing of the kind can be found in his frequent letters to and from Brymer. The whole thing, probably, grew out of a statement in a letter from Captain Antrobus to Governor Ward, to which the latter replied:

"Of the other tumultuous proceedings mentioned in the close of your letter, I can recollect nothing at present, except your representation of Mr. Champlin's being surrounded by a mob, &c, upon which I must observe that if that gentleman had been insulted and forcibly prevented from supplying the King's ships with provisions, and had made application to me on the occasion, I should have immediately have given him all necessary aid, protection and assistance; but as he never made any complaint to me; I conclude that he has received no injury, and that the behaviour of the persons concerned in the matter proceeded wholly from the resentment which they conceived, on the inhabitants of the town being impressed and detained on board the *Maidstone*, and not from any real design of distressing any of his Majesty's servants; and the uninterrupted manner in which the ship has been since supplied, confirms me in the sentiment I then entertained of the matter."

That there was in 1774 a growing determination to have nothing to do with the ships, though it had not then taken shape, may be gathered from a letter of Captain Wallace to Admiral Graves, written December 12, immediately after his arrival. In this letter, he gives an account of the seizure of the guns of Fort Island by the inhabitants, and his subsequent interview with the Governor.

"I then mentioned, if in the course of carrying on the King's service here I should ask assistance, whether I might expect it from him, or any others in the Government. He answered,

as to himself he had no power, and in respect to any other part of the Government, I should meet with nothing but opposition and difficulty. So much for Governor Wanton."

The agent, himself, found it necessary to send in his resignation the next year, not for the above reason, but for others that were quite as potent:

"The impossibility of negotiating bills here in a short time, the total stopping of trade, with every resource for obtaining provisions from the neighboring colonies being cut off, it puts it out of my power to support the contract any longer, for want of ready money, &c, &c, therefore must require you will, as soon as possible, fall upon some expedient to exonerate me from the discharge of the same. Should our next news from London carry with it the appearance of no accommodation, bills could not be negotiated here for any discount; nay, am doubtful if could raise money on them at 10 per cent, and most people of means would quit the town, as many have."

This was dated August 1, 1775.

The people had now reached a point where forbearance ceased to be a virtue, and they utterly refused to allow the ships to be provisioned longer. The consequence was, all the market boats and coasting vessels coming into the harbor with produce, were intercepted and robbed of everything on board. And to make the position of the inhabitants still more trying, Wallace threatened to turn his guns on the town. In this dilemma recourse was had to the General Assembly, which body was asked to sanction the supplying the ships with provisions, to save the place from destruction. The prayer was granted, with the understanding that the supplies were to be furnished by only one person, and Wallace was to keep his men on board ship. This was on the fifth of November, and the next day the following permit was given:

Headquarters, Middletown, 17th Nov'r, 1775.

"Gentlemen. I have just received a copy of your letter to Capt. Wallace and his to you, bearing date ye 16th instant, and also your request of this day that ye said Wallace may have delivered to him seventeen barrels of pork and five ditto of Calivance, now in store of Mr. Christopher Champlin.

"You have my permission under ye care and direction of Sam'l Dyre Esq. to deliver to Capt. Wallace ye above seventeen barrels of pork and five ditto of Calivance.

Signed,

ESEK HOPKINS, B. Gen'l.

To ye Worshipful Town Con'l of Newport."

The above is a true copy of a paragraph of a letter from Eseck Hopkins Esq. to ye Town Council of Newport. Witness my hand, Newp't, November 17th, 1775.

WM. CODDINGTON, Council Clerk