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The Burning of Falmouth, 1775 A Case Study in British Imperial Pacification

by Donald A. Yerxa

As Britain's colonial policy evolved from its emphasis on coercive legislation to forceful suppression, the Ministry increasingly turned to the Royal Navy as an instrument of implementation. In 1774 the government called upon the North American Squadron, which had policed colonial waters since 1763, to enforce the Boston Port Act. When Anglo-American relations worsened early in 1775, the Navy was charged with the additional task of blockading colonial trade with foreign nations. And when open hostilities commenced later that year, British naval forces were expected to take an active role in pacifying the rebellious colonies. As Commander in Chief of the Royal Navy's North American Squadron, Vice Admiral Samuel Graves had the unenviable responsibility of implementing these naval aspects of British imperial policy.

Admiral Graves was sixty-one years old when he was appointed to command the North American Squadron in March 1774. Although he had worked his way up in the service by regular promotion, his career to date had not been outstanding, and he did not have the reputation of a fighter or great administrator.¹ Graves did have, however, the support of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Sandwich. Theoretically, selection of the Com-

mander of the North American Squadron was a matter for Cabinet consideration, but Sandwich had far more influence in the selection than the other Cabinet members and was able to secure Graves' nomination over the doubts of some of his colleagues.²

Under Samuel Graves' leadership the North American Squadron had been totally ineffective in either isolating or pacifying the insurrection. Not only had the squadron failed to provide the British forces in Boston with sufficient provisions and supplies, but it had also been humiliated by rebel whaleboat activity in Boston harbor and by daring rebel attacks on His Majesty's vessels in other ports. The series of embarrassing incidents that occurred in the summer of 1775 finally convinced Graves that his 'semi-neutral' conduct had failed. The task of isolating and pacifying the colonial rebellion was both enormous and unique, and Graves had expected that the British government would supply him with detailed directives as to how to proceed under these difficult circumstances. But by late August he realized that waiting for specific orders was fruitless and that he had to resort to much more vigorous naval action.

Graves' orders to his captains reflect this change of attitude. On 10 September 1775, for example, he commanded Captain George Vandeput of the *Asia* to fire on the port of New York should its inhabitants refuse to supply British vessels. In order to demonstrate that British threats were not idle, Graves suggested that Vandeput fire first on the house of one 'Traitor Sear.'³ One week later he ordered Captain James Wallace of the *Rose* "to take, burn, sink, and destroy all and every Pirate or Rebel [vessel he encountered] . . . And . . . to lay waste and destroy every Town or Place from whence Pirates are fitted out."⁴ At last Graves had abandoned his 'semi-neutrality' in favor of an active role for the Navy in pacifying the rebellious colonies.

Feeling that the colonial insurgents had taken advan-

tage of his leniency, Graves initiated a plan to destroy some of the more delinquent coastal towns to the north-east of Boston.⁵ Writing in 1776, Graves stated that up until the end of August 1775 he had hoped that the American colonies might somehow be reconciled with Great Britain. This sentiment in addition to the lack of specific orders for his future conduct had caused him to confine the Navy's operations to intercepting rebel contraband, guarding supplies intended for British forces and convoying Army transports. By late August, however, he determined to wait no longer. Since the Admiral had experienced negligible success in apprehending smugglers and privateers in open water, he now decided to destroy their bases of operation—the coastal towns of central and eastern New England.⁶ More importantly, he decided to pacify the insurgency by means of what could be regarded as strategic naval bombardment, hoping thereby to destroy the colonists' will to resist.

Admiral Graves shared his plans with General Thomas Gage on 1 September. The Admiral listed his reasons for taking more vigorous actions: "repeated Insults and Losses His Majesty's Squadron has sustained . . . the King's People killed and made Prisoners; Light Houses destroyed, Commerce interrupted, And the Preparations for War Daily making in the different Towns." Graves then said that he wanted to "lay Waste such Sea Port Towns in the New England Governments as are not likely to be useful to His Majesty's Stores and to destroy all the Vessels within the Harbours." In order to carry out his ambitious design he requested troops, transports and artillery from Gage.⁷ The General displayed neither great enthusiasm nor hostility to Graves' plan, but promised to assist the Admiral as much as possible, also informing Graves that he could only spare two transports, the *Symmetry* and the *Spitfire*. Gage expressed his regret that "something of this kind" had not been proposed earlier, when he might have furnished substantial assistance.⁸

Graves later wrote that in September 1775 he was "impatient to revenge the Insults shown his Cruizers, and to scourge the Inhabitants of these Sea Port Towns."⁹ Yet he did not propose this pacification scheme merely out of revenge; he had additional motivation. Several times during the summer of 1775 the First Lord of the British Admiralty had sent Graves private memoranda recommending that his protégé assume a more vigorous role in pacifying the rebellion. In late July Lord Sandwich advised Graves to exert himself "to the utmost towards crushing the rebellion . . . [without] delicacies." The First Lord hinted that censure could easily result from inactivity but never from "doing too much."¹⁰ Other insinuations that Samuel Graves' position as commander of British naval forces in North American waters was in jeopardy continued that summer. In a private letter dated 25 August 1775 Sandwich bluntly informed Graves of the existence of numerous complaints, originating in the colonies but finding strong reverberations in Britain, that the North American Squadron was in essence doing nothing to suppress the rebellion. Lord Sandwich patronizingly reminded Graves that only through the former's efforts at persuasion and manipulation was the latter in retention of his command. Without suggesting any specific naval measures, Sandwich begged Graves to supply him with some evidence that he was making the insurgents feel "the weight of an English fleet."¹¹

News of Lexington and Concord had convinced all the Cabinet members, except Lord Dartmouth, of the necessity for vigorous use of military and naval force in pacifying the colonies. Although the strategic goals of Britain's policy of imperial pacification were still in the process of definition, the realization that a show of force would be necessary was now apparent.¹² Essentially, Sandwich was warning Admiral Graves of the new attitude in Ministry. Although impossible to document completely, the assumption that Graves' proposed expedition was in

large part a response to Sandwich's proddings seems reasonable. Naval bombardment of coastal towns was a means of implementing a 'get tough' approach to the problem of imperial pacification, while at the same time providing Lord Sandwich with the evidence necessary to secure the Admiral's command from the intentions of his critics.

Despite increasing lack of cooperation from General Gage and the absence of definite orders from the Admiralty, Admiral Graves proceeded with preparations for a coastal expedition.¹³ The transports *Symmetry* and *Spitfire* required considerable repair and carpentry work, since they were to be armed with mortars and howitzers. Graves assigned all the carpenters and caulkers of his squadron to work on these two ships.¹⁴ During this time of preparation the personal dispute between Graves and Gage flared up again. The Admiral complained that Gage interfered with the preparations by making it difficult for the Navy to obtain mortar shells and other stores.¹⁵ Writing to a relative in Parliament, Graves charged that General Gage desired "to stamp upon [him] . . . the imputation of negligence." Yet Graves assured his relative that for the sake of his country he would maintain the "Appearance of civility . . . with the Commander of Land if possible."¹⁶

Whatever fears and reservations Samuel Graves may still have had on the matter of exceeding his authority by sending out a coastal bombardment expedition were allayed on 4 October with the belated arrival of the British sloop *Raven*, which carried new formal directives from the Admiralty.¹⁷ The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty informed Graves of George III's "firm Resolution that every measure be pursued for suppressing by the most vigorous Efforts by Sea & Land, this unnatural Rebellion." They directed Admiral Graves to carry on such operations in New England waters as Graves deemed "most effectual for suppressing . . . the Rebel-

lion.” In addition to this broad, discretionary directive the Admiralty ordered Graves to signify publicly to all coastal towns that should violence be committed against any British official or loyalist, should men be armed and raised, should any military works be erected or should any attempt be made to seize or destroy British supply and ammunition magazines, “it will be the duty of [Graves’ squadron] . . . to proceed, by the most vigorous efforts, against the said Town, as in open Rebellion against the King.”¹⁸

This Admiralty Office communication, which originated from Lord Dartmouth, was strikingly similar to Dartmouth’s letter to General Gage of 27 January 1775, which Gage interpreted as his marching orders in Massachusetts. In the latter Dartmouth wrote some strongly worded passages but balanced them with ‘saving clauses,’ reminding Gage of the discretionary nature of his instructions.¹⁹ Likewise, Graves’ orders of 6 July contained some very severe directives, and certainly the spirit of his instructions was belligerent. Yet Graves also was left with a large degree of discretion as to how to implement these directives. To be sure, the fact that it would be impossible and even foolish for the Colonial Office to issue minutely detailed orders to commanders in distant North America would account for the discretionary nature of the orders to Gage and Graves. Yet these broad directives could also neatly be used to shift the blame for any unpopular action against the colonists from the Ministry to the Army and Navy commanders serving in America.

Although the orders brought by the *Raven* were not as specific as he had wished, Admiral Graves judged that their general spirit justified his coastal expedition. The Admiral expressed his pleasure that the Admiralty’s orders “coincided exactly with what was then doing.”²⁰ After the arrival of the *Raven* Graves’ tentative proposal

coalesced into a definite naval operation with specific objectives. Admiral Graves selected Lieutenant Henry Mowat of the *Canceaux* to command the expedition. At forty-one years of age, Mowat had about fifteen years experience in New England waters. Since 1764 he had been employed on a survey of the New England coast. Graves obviously chose Lieutenant Mowat to command the mission because of his intimate knowledge of the coast and his experience in dealing with some of the coastal towns.²¹

On 6 October 1775 Admiral Graves issued his orders to Lieutenant Mowat. Informing him that the expedition was designed to “chastize” the towns of Marblehead, Salem, Newburyport, Cape Ann, Ipswich, Portsmouth, Saco, Falmouth and Machias, Graves ordered Mowat to sail to as many of these communities as possible, making “the most vigourous Efforts to burn the Towns, and destroy the Shipping in the Harbours.” The Admiral indicated that Cape Ann and Machias, which had been the scenes of very embarrassing incidents involving Navy vessels, were especially to be objects of retribution.²² Graves cautioned Mowat not to risk the lives of his men by attempting an occupation at any of the towns. Rather, Mowat was to be content with “falling upon the Rebels, doing what [he could] with Expedition and coming away before they . . . [could] assemble to cut off your Retreat.” Graves told Lieutenant Mowat to differentiate, where possible, between loyalists and rebels, protecting and defending the former while punishing the latter. The Admiral added one last warning. The intent of the expedition was punishing the rebels and thereby hopefully breaking their will to resist, but under no circumstance was Mowat to permit plundering of any sort. Graves made it clear that he would deal harshly with anyone caught in such activity. As to the duration of the operation and the specific means of destruction, Lieutenant Mowat was given some latitude, but both men under-

stood that naval bombardment was the less risky and more spectacular means of making the population “feel the weight of an English fleet.”²³ Admiral Graves also issued orders to all other Navy captains stationed in New England waters, informing them of Mowat’s expedition and ordering them to assist it whenever possible.²⁴

Lieutenant Mowat’s squadron sailed from Nantasket on 8 October on what was to be Admiral Graves’ first and only significant naval operation during his eighteen month tenure as Commander-in-Chief of the North American Squadron. The small flotilla consisted of the flagship *Canceaux*, an armed ship of eight guns; the schooner *Halifax*, a newly-built vessel of six guns; the *Symmetry*, an armed transport outfitted with mortars and howitzers; and the *Spitfire*, an armed sloop also carrying mortars and howitzers.²⁵ The four vessels represented only a small increment of the total strength of the North American Squadron, which by this time consisted of between thirty and forty vessels.²⁶ Mowat also carried one hundred men commanded by Captain Forster of the Royal Marines.²⁷

Admiral Graves, attempting to keep the intention and destination of the expedition a secret, even ordered the stores for Mowat’s flotilla to be loaded quietly at night.²⁸ Nevertheless, the Americans received intelligence reports from Boston that an expeditionary force had been prepared and had sailed for some destination to the eastward. One Bostonian’s diary entry for 3 October mentioned the departure of several armed vessels from Boston’s inner harbor on a secret mission, which was rumored to be directed at Cape Ann.²⁹ George Washington, then commanding colonial forces surrounding Boston, received exaggerated intelligence that on 3 October a large fleet carrying six hundred men departed Boston. Since Washington’s informer made special note of the fact that the British vessels carried mortars, howitzers and other artillery, Washington concluded that the ‘fleet’

intended to bombard some coastal town. By 13 October Washington knew that the expedition's destination was some town or towns to the eastward of Boston.³⁰

Meanwhile, Mowat's squadron encountered very stormy weather during its first few days at sea, delaying its arrival at the first objective, Cape Ann, until 11 October. The Lieutenant maneuvered his vessels close to shore but did not attack the town. Lieutenant Grant, the expedition's artillery officer,³¹ felt that Cape Ann's buildings were too widely scattered for effective naval bombardment, especially considering the limited number of available carcasses—hollow iron cases filled with combustibles.³² Mowat, eager to make a smart showing on his first attempt and equally anxious not to supply the provincials with the further encouragement that an unsuccessful bombardment would provide, accepted Grant's advice and departed "not without reluctance" for another port.³³

The next morning a strong northwesterly wind carried the flotilla past Newburyport, Ipswich, Portsmouth and Saco to a point off Cape Elizabeth, just south of Falmouth in Casco Bay.³⁴ Once again stormy autumnal weather hindered the expedition's progress. The vessels were forced to seek shelter at Boothbay Harbor and remained there three days. On 16 October the small squadron left Boothbay Harbor and anchored at the mouth of Falmouth's harbor.³⁵

The objective now at the mercy of the British vessels was eastern New England's most important seaport and former site of the most remote of the British customhouses in New England. Falmouth was a small commercial town of two- and three-story buildings nestled closely together near the tip of a narrow three mile long peninsula that jutted out into island-dotted Casco Bay.³⁶ Her nearly two thousand inhabitants generally were connected in some manner with maritime enterprises: mast and lumber exporting, shipbuilding or maritime trade. In

1768, for example, Falmouth had exported over four million feet of pine boards, almost ten times that of Portsmouth-Kittery and Boston combined.³⁷ And in 1773 Falmouth residents owned 2,550 tons of shipping.³⁸

The town of Falmouth had long established itself as a community in opposition to the British metropolitan government. Such opposition had frequently been manifested in various overt acts of disobedience. Falmouth's militancy dated from January 1766, when a mob burned the town's allotment of stamped papers provided for in the Stamp Act.³⁹ In August 1767 Francis Waldo, a customs official, seized a quantity of rum and sugar belonging to a Falmouth resident because of a breach of revenue legislation. A mob soon gathered and attacked the house of the customs comptroller, Arthur Savage. Upon finding Waldo a guest in the Savage home, the mob detained the two men, while another group broke into the customhouse and removed the confiscated goods to safety.⁴⁰ Two men were jailed for their part in the proceedings, but once again a mob came to the rescue and aided them in their escape. Three years later a group of Falmouth inhabitants attacked the unpopular Savage because of his zeal in enforcing the despised revenue laws.⁴¹ When tea ships arrived in Boston in 1773, the people of Falmouth resolved in a town meeting not to buy or sell any East India tea until the duty was repealed.⁴² On 14 June 1774 bells tolled all day in a demonstration of Falmouth's sympathy with the plight of Boston with its port closed by the British.⁴³ Thus by 1775 Falmouth had acquired a reputation of being "Boston's younger sister in rebellion."⁴⁴

During the first half of 1775 two incidents had reinforced this reputation: The *Gaspee* desertion incident and Thompson's War. In February four seamen deserted the British Navy brig *Gaspee* which was anchored in Falmouth harbor. Lieutenant Hunter, commander of the brig, felt that sending a boat ashore to recapture these

men would be too risky, since some Falmouthers had threatened to destroy the *Gaspee* or any other British vessel that attempted to remove the deserters. Hunter thereupon sailed to Boston where Admiral Graves immediately ordered him back to Falmouth to obtain the sailors and to check “the Insolence of threatning the King’s Ships, by assuring them that if they committed any act of violence against . . . his Majesty’s Officers or Seamen or destroyed any of the King’s Stores, that . . . [Samuel Graves] would take the severest measures to distress them the Law would allow.” Hunter made Graves’ threat known to the people of Falmouth. They replied politely to Lieutenant Hunter’s communication and permitted British sailors to come ashore “without being insulted.” The deserters, however, had left the town.⁴⁵

The Thompson’s War incident in the spring of 1775 also magnified Falmouth’s revolutionary reputation, if not among other colonists, at least in Admiral Graves’ mind. This rather complicated incident began on 2 March 1775 when the merchant sloop *John and Mary* arrived in Falmouth, Maine, from Bristol, England, with rigging, sails and stores for a ship being built by Thomas Coulson, a Falmouth merchant. Since Coulson’s ship was being built for a Bristol merchant, the local Committee of Inspection convened to ascertain whether Coulson was violating the Continental Association.⁴⁶ The Committee decided that Coulson’s unloading of rigging and sails from the *John and Mary* and appropriation of them to outfit his new ship with the intention of sending that ship to England would constitute a violation of the Association. Consequently, the Committee ordered the Falmouth merchant to send the supplies back promptly.⁴⁷ Coulson stalled, maintaining that the *John and Mary* needed repairs and was unfit to put to sea. The Falmouth Committee consulted a group of ships’ carpenters, riggers and caulkers on the matter and, based on

their opinion, gave Coulson until 14 March to repair the sloop and send her back to Bristol. When on 15 March the *John and Mary* was still in port, the Committee, in accordance with the Continental Association, publicly proclaimed Thomas Coulson a violator of the Association.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, Falmouth's loyalist sheriff, William Tyng, had written to General Gage for assistance. Gage in turn handed the matter over to Admiral Graves.⁴⁹ Graves promptly ordered Lieutenant Henry Mowat in the armed ship *Canceaux* to Falmouth in order to assist Coulson.⁵⁰ Mowat arrived in Falmouth early in April. But despite Mowat's presence, Coulson could not hire enough men to help him unload the Bristol sloop. It therefore took over one month to prepare Coulson's new ship.⁵¹

During that month the *Canceaux's* presence in Falmouth harbor caused considerable uneasiness for the town's patriots. When a small tender arrived to supply Mowat, the town was thrown into panic.⁵² On 30 April a diarist wrote that Falmouth's inhabitants were "continually disquieted, apprehensive that [Falmouth] . . . and the whole country are inevitably and entirely ruined."⁵³ The sense of uneasiness was also experienced by the town's loyalist population. On 24 April several "Friends to the British Constitution," fearful of some rebel plot to confine them, sought refuge onboard the *Canceaux*. Falmouth's customs officials complained that as soon as Mowat left they would risk losing their records, effects, and quite possibly their lives. These officials begged their superiors in Boston to apply to Gage and Graves for protecting them when Mowat left.⁵⁴ And on 2 May a group of eighteen prominent Falmouth loyalists petitioned Lieutenant Mowat to remain in port until they could notify Gage and Graves of their situation. They too stated their profound fears that once Mowat left they would be "prey to the Sons of Rapine and lawless Violence."⁵⁵

To add to the tension, rumors circulated that a group of Brunswick radicals were preparing to come to Falmouth to attack the *Canceaux*.⁵⁶ The Falmouth Committee of Correspondence, feeling that any such attempt would lay “a foundation for the destruction” of the town, wrote to the Brunswick Committee, requesting that they prevent an attack on Mowat. In addition they wrote to Colonel Samuel Thompson, leader of the radicals, asking him to desist. Thompson replied that he had dropped his plans to come to Falmouth.⁵⁷

Contrary to his reply, Colonel Thompson landed with about sixty men on the back side of Falmouth Neck on 7 May. His band of backwoods patriots concealed themselves in a thick stand of trees for two days. But on 9 May they seized Mowat, Reverend Wiswell (the local Anglican minister) and a Navy surgeon as the group took a leisurely walk in the woods.⁵⁸ As soon as the *Canceaux*'s master, Ensign Hogg, heard of this, he informed the inhabitants of Falmouth that if Mowat and the others were not released shortly, he would fire on the town. To dramatize the ultimatum, Hogg fired two blank shots at the town. One witness recalled the effect of Hogg's ultimatum on the inhabitants of Falmouth:

You can hardly conceive the consternation, confusion, and uproar that immediately ensued. Our women were, I believe, every one of them in tears, or praying, or screaming; widows [were] hurrying their goods into countrymen's carts, never asking their names, though strangers, and carrying their children out of Town. Some persons bed-rid, or in childbed, were hastily removed, with no small danger of their lives.⁵⁹

Many Falmouth citizens begged Thompson to release the men. Some loyalists apparently even called for Falmouth's militia to rescue Mowat from the Brunswick men. Most inhabitants, however, tried to remain neutral and attempted to save their homes. Colonel Thompson was unwilling to deliver his prisoners, insisting that there

was “open and settled war between the Colonies and Britain.” But he soon realized that the whole town opposed his methods.⁶⁰ Thompson then consented to free Mowat and the others for the night, if they promised to return the next morning at which time some sort of settlement could be arranged.⁶¹ Promises were made, and Mowat, expressing his gratitude to the townspeople for their efforts on his behalf, returned to the *Canceaux*.⁶²

All through the night militiamen from outlying settlements converged on Falmouth. When Mowat failed to come ashore in the morning, these men became quite rowdy.⁶³ Lieutenant Mowat sent word that he had fully intended to honor his promise, but that earlier in the morning he had been informed of threats on his life.⁶⁴ The officers of the various militia companies formed a committee to plan their next move. The committee voted to destroy the *Canceaux*, but they remained undecided as how to do it. The militia officers then instituted a kangaroo court of sorts, hauling in suspected loyalists and extorting money from them. On 11 May a mob of militiamen broke into Thomas Coulson’s house and used it as a headquarters. Finding a quantity of New England rum in the cellar, a great many of them became drunk. One Calvin Lombard, “being raised with liquor,” went down to the wharves and fired a musket at the *Canceaux*. Mowat threatened to fire on the town because of this, and once again Falmouth’s residents panicked.⁶⁵ Not only was a British naval vessel threatening to bombard the town, but also Falmouth was host to several companies of rowdy and sometimes drunken militia.

By 12 May the rural militia finally drifted back home. The departing radicals had only unkind remarks for Falmouth’s inhabitants. Some militiamen apparently stated that Lieutenant Mowat should have bombarded the town. For their part, the people of Falmouth felt that Colonel Thompson planned the whole affair to humble Falmouth “for its arrogance in sending a message to

Thompson . . . to dissuade him from taking the ships [*Canceaux* and Coulson's new ship]."⁶⁶ The incident, known as 'Thompson's War,' ended on 15 May when Mowat received the following communication from the people of Falmouth: "the Town disapproved of the proceedings of the armed body, but . . . we were unable to resist them." The same day the *Canceaux* and Coulton's ship, the *Minerva*, weighed anchor and sailed for Portsmouth.⁶⁷

During Colonel Thompson's occupation the Falmouth Committee wrote to the Massachusetts Committee of Safety, complaining of Thompson's "rash and Injudicious, if not unjustifiable" attempt to take the *Canceaux*. The Falmouth Committee objected to the militia's rowdiness and their extortion of funds from local loyalists. Also the Committee advised that future operations against the British should be conducted by proper officers in an orderly fashion, "lest it should occasion a civil War Among ourselves." The Falmouth Committee mentioned that Thompson's action would probably arouse Admiral Graves.⁶⁸ This was indeed the case, for the *Gaspee* incident and Thompson's War, according to Graves, caused Falmouth's inclusion on the list of seaport towns to be 'pacified' by Mowat.⁶⁹

Despite the events of Thompson's War, Falmouth continued to uphold the patriotic cause. Falmouth raised a militia to fight for the revolutionary cause. In addition the town frequently shipped supplies on coastal schooners to Newburyport, avoiding Graves' blockade around Boston. From Newburyport they were transported overland to the insurgent forces surrounding Boston. This activity had not gone unnoticed, however, and the town of Falmouth would shortly pay a dear price for its patriotic inclinations.⁷⁰

The appearance of Lieutenant Mowat's vessels on 16 October 1775 did not create any great consternation in Falmouth. Because the inhabitants surmised that the

small squadron was merely on a foraging expedition in search of livestock and other stores for British forces in Boston, the only defensive measure taken was the dispatch of a good percentage of the Falmouth militia to islands in Casco Bay in order to protect the town's livestock and hay.⁷¹ The four British ships spent most of 17 October fighting a strong wind as they proceeded to form a line directly abreast of the compact part of the town. The sight of the squadron working its way opposite the town greatly alarmed the townspeople. Many began to transport their belongings to areas safely outside of Falmouth. Yet one resident, Daniel Tucker, recalled that this alarm subsided when Falmouth's residents learned that Henry Mowat commanded the force.⁷² They believed that Mowat would not forget the efforts they had made to secure his release during Thompson's War.

As soon as the flotilla anchored abreast of the town late in the afternoon, Lieutenant Mowat sent his junior officer, Lieutenant Frasier, ashore with a written message for the people of Falmouth. A crowd of curious residents met him dockside and followed the naval officer to the town's meetinghouse. There Frasier delivered the message to a lawyer who read it before a large audience.⁷³ This communication summarized the town's offenses and informed the townspeople of Admiral Graves' order to execute a "just Punishment."

After so many premeditated attacks on the legal Prerogatives of the best of Sovereigns. After the repeated Instances you have experienced in Britain's long forbearance of the Rod of Correction; and the Merciful and Paternal extension of her Hands to embrace you, again and again; have been regarded as vain and nugatory. And in place of a dutiful and grateful return to your King and Parent State; you have been guilty of the most unpardonable Rebellion, supported by the Ambition of a set of designing men, whose insidious views have brought the whole into the same Dilemma; which leads me to feel not a little for the Innocent of them, in particular on the present occasion, having it in orders to Execute a just Punishment on the Town of Falmouth. In the name of which Authority I previously warn you to remove without delay the Human Species out of the said town; for

which purpose I give you the time of two hours; at the period of which, a Red pendant will be hoisted at the Maintopgallant Masthead with a gun: but should your imprudence lead you to show the least resistance, you will in that case free me of that Humanity, so strongly pointed out in my orders as well as my own Inclination. I also observe that all those who upon a former occasion [during Thompson's War] fly to the King's Ship under my Command for Protection, that same door is now open and ready to receive them.⁷⁴

The people were stunned. Mowat's ultimatum was nothing less than a declaration of war. Reverend Jacob Bailey, a loyalist eyewitness, noted that "a frightful consternation ran through the assembly, every heart was seized with terror, every countenance change colour, and a profound silence ensued for several moments."⁷⁵ After a second reading Lieutenant Frasier, obviously cognizant of the delicacy of the situation, declared his willingness to convey any message to Mowat. The inhabitants of Falmouth decided to send an *ad hoc* committee of distinguished citizens—Jediah Preble, Nathaniel Coffin and Robert Pagan—to deal with Lieutenant Mowat personally.⁷⁶ Once on board the *Canceaux* the committee demanded to know the nature of the "just Punishment." Mowat, they claimed, informed them that his orders were to "burn, sink, and destroy." He asserted that the town's crimes did not give it "the least right to expect any lenity." Further, Mowat stated that in sending his communication to the people of Falmouth he risked his commission, since Admiral Graves did not authorize the giving of any warning to the townspeople. The three Falmouth men protested against the severity of Graves' orders and pleaded with Mowat to spare the town or at least grant additional time to allow the inhabitants to remove some of their effects. At length Mowat, out of the "known humanity of the British nation," offered a compromise. If the residents of Falmouth would deliver all their arms and ammunition to the British, he would defer from executing his orders until an express could be sent to Boston to obtain further instructions from Admiral Graves.⁷⁷

The *ad hoc* committee replied that they would communicate Mowat's offer to the town. Yet they added that to educate the whole town of Mowat's proposal and then to reach a decision was impossible all in the same evening. Realizing that the day was nearly spent, the Lieutenant agreed to postpone any action until 8:00 A.M. the next day, 18 October, if a token number of small arms were delivered to him presently. If his demand for the surrender of all arms and ammunition was not met at that time, he would commence bombardment promptly at 9:00 A.M. The British officer also warned that if he perceived "the lest hostile appearnce of any kind whatsoever" he could consider his offer void and act accordingly.⁷⁵

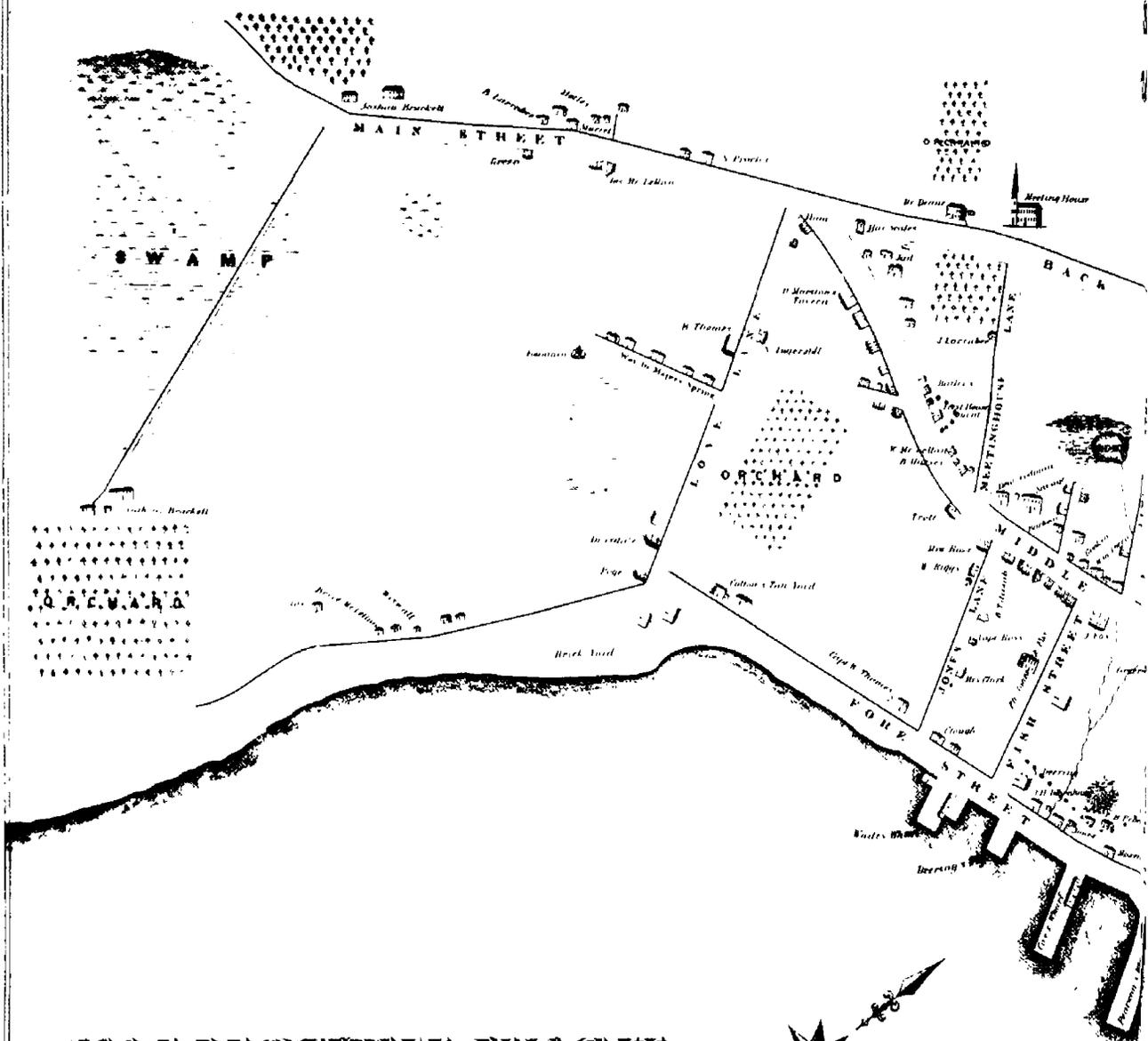
Preble, Coffin and Pagan returned to shore and informed the townspeople of Lieutenant Mowat's terms. The people of Falmouth unalterably opposed the surrender of all their arms and ammunition but also realized that expediency dictated the prompt delivery of a few muskets. The *ad hoc* committee sent the muskets to the *Canceaux* with a message that the town would meet early the next morning and would send their final answer to Mowat by 8:00 A.M.⁷⁹

The inhabitants spent the next twelve hours in frantic efforts to save as many personal possessions as possible. Reverend Bailey recalled that women and children ran out of town, and the aged and ill left their habitations.⁸⁰ The fortunate secured horse or oxen teams to haul their goods to neighboring towns or to a sheltered area on the far side of town, well out of range of the British guns. One merchant secured two teams of horses and loaded his wagons with as much as he could. He then loaded a barge with West Indian warehouse goods, sending it around Falmouth Neck to safety.⁸¹ But a shortage of available teams hindered the efforts of many.⁸² And to add to Falmouth's troubles, some companies of rural militia arrived in town during the evening hours, supposedly

announcing that if the town complied with the British, they would burn it to the ground themselves. In order to prevent any possible provocation by these militiamen a number of Falmouth volunteers policed the streets until daylight.⁸³

When the sun rose on the morning of 18 October, the task of removing possessions was far from complete. People trying to save what they could still scurried through Falmouth's streets.⁸⁴ Whether the people of Falmouth actually did meet that morning to consider Mowat's offer is impossible to ascertain from the extant accounts. The *ad hoc* committee's report stated that the townspeople did convene early in the morning and decided not to surrender their arms to the British.⁸⁵ Yet in Lieutenant Mowat's report to Admiral Graves this same committee allegedly reported to Mowat that "to their no small astonishment . . . no part of the inhabitants assembled in the morning and that the whole town was then in the greatest confusion with many women and children still remaining in it."⁸⁶ Other accounts do not mention such a meeting, but only relate the frantic efforts of the populace in removing their private effects.⁸⁷ At any rate, whether by default or formal decision, the people of Falmouth refused to surrender their arms. Preble, Coffin and Pagan once again visited Mowat and tried to stall for more time. They managed to remain onboard the *Canceaux* until 8:30 A.M., but Mowat finally tired of their delaying tactics and gave them one half hour to clear the town.⁸⁸

At 9:40 A.M. on the "calm clear and pleasant" autumn morning of 18 October 1775 a seaman hoisted a flag atop the *Canceaux's* maintopgallant masthead. The flag signaled the commencement of a severe naval bombardment which lasted about eight hours and left most of Falmouth in ashes. Despite Mowat's repeated warnings, many people remained in the town, risking their lives to save more of their belongings. The British aimed their



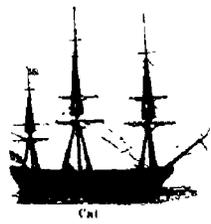
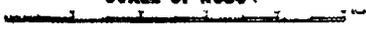
RALMOUTH NECK,

AS IT WAS
 WHEN DESTROYED BY MOWATT,
 October 18th 1775.

All the Buildings within the dotted line were destroyed
 except a few within the perfect line

Bailey and Survis Portland Me

SCALE OF ROSS

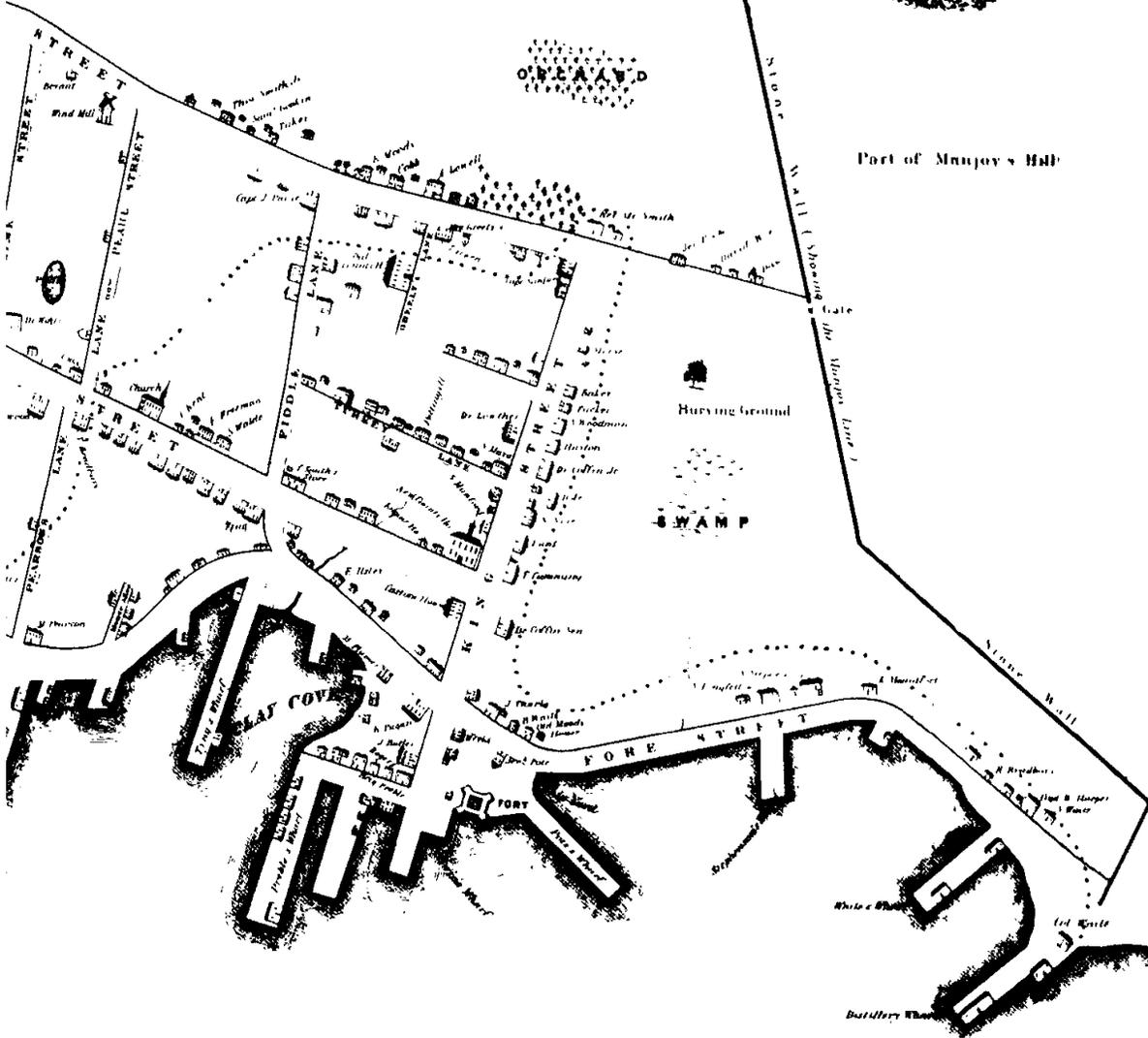


BACK COVE



O'LEARYD

Part of Manjoy's Hill



Linné

More Vessel

first shots high to further warn these inhabitants. The initial shots “struck . . . [the] multitude into instant alarm and amazement.” Oxen that were being used in these endeavors became “terrified at the smook and report of the guns [and] ran with precipitation over the rocks, dashing everything in pieces, and scattering large quantities of goods about the streets.”⁸⁹ The four British vessels then hurled a “horrible shower of balls, . . . bombs, carcasses, live shells, grapeshot, and [even] musket balls” from their howitzers, mortars and cannon.⁹⁰

Because of the poor quality of the ammunition, a stiff wind blowing away from the town and the makeshift efforts of the inhabitants to extinguish fires, the cannon balls and carcasses had relatively little effect during the first several hours of the cannonade, outside of the tremendous and incessant roar of their report.⁹¹ This convinced Mowat of the necessity of sending landing parties ashore to set fire to the many structures and vessels that were escaping destruction. Mowat organized a few landing parties totalling thirty seamen and marines under the command of Lieutenant Frasier. These parties landed ashore at 3:00 P.M., set fire to a considerable number of buildings and rowed back to the flotilla by 4:00 P.M.⁹² One Falmouth resident recalled that the British “landed in their boats from all their vessels at the same moment and threw their torches into the doors and windows of the houses and stores.”⁹³

Although a considerable number of colonial militia had gathered in the Falmouth area, the British landing parties faced only unorganized skirmishing.⁹⁴ Small groups of militiamen ran down from positions of safety overlooking the town and fired a few shots at the British. For all its rhetoric of the last several months, the rural militia only wounded two of the attackers.⁹⁵ According to Falmouth’s selectmen this skirmishing saved from twenty-five to thirty-five percent of the town’s structures.⁹⁶ But undoubtedly, any form of concerted resis-

tance against the landing forces could have saved more. The defenders of Falmouth did not even attempt to attack Mowat's flotilla because of a lack of powder and usable artillery.⁹⁷

The effect of the landing parties, a change in the direction of the wind and the constant bombardment caused the conflagration to spread. Reverend Bailey wrote a vivid description of the scene:

Bombs and carcasses armed with destruction and streaming with fire blazed dreadful through the air, and descended with flaming vengeance on the defenceless buildings. The crackling of the flames, the falling of the houses, the bursting of shells, the heavy thunder of the cannon threw the elements into frightful noise and commotion, and occasioned the very foundations of surrounding nature to quake and tremble. Now lengthening pyramids of fire ascended horribly bright from the dissolving structures, and the inhabitations of pride, vanity, and affluence crumbled to ashes, while their late possessors beheld the shocking appearance with a mixture of astonishment and humble indignation.⁹⁸

By sunset when the firing ceased, "the body of the town was in one flame."⁹⁹ Mowat's flotilla then weighed anchor and departed the harbor, leaving Falmouth "a melancholy heap of ruins."¹⁰⁰ Since the wind had died down, the vessels' progress was slow. This afforded the colonials an opportunity to fire their muskets at the British ships. Although the vessels took a few hours to maneuver beyond the Americans' range, the musketry did no damage.¹⁰¹ Before he left, Mowat offered the town's loyalists free passage to Boston. None left because they feared being shot by the rebels if they attempted to board the British vessels. Also they were reluctant to leave behind whatever personal possessions survived.¹⁰²

Approximately three fourths of Falmouth's buildings were destroyed in the conflagration. The British completely devastated the lower and compact end of town; almost every store or warehouse was consumed. St.

Paul's Episcopal Church, a new courthouse, the old meetinghouse, the public library, a distillery and nearly all the wharves were destroyed. The town lost about 130 dwellings which had housed 160 families.¹⁰³ Few structurally sound buildings remained. Many were so damaged that they could not be occupied by their owners. The bombardment, for example, completely ruined the front of the town's new meetinghouse.¹⁰⁴

Falmouth lost more than buildings. Upon arriving in the harbor on the 16th, Mowat had trapped thirteen vessels in port, several having valuable cargoes onboard. Mowat captured two as they attempted to escape; the others were destroyed in the bombardment.¹⁰⁵ Despite their frenzied attempts to remove their belongings, the people of Falmouth also lost substantial amounts of personal possessions. The selectmen estimated that only one half of the town's movable goods survived the bombardment.¹⁰⁶ Although much of the loss was from the actual cannonade, some loyalists claimed that colonial radicals stole many of their personal effects. One loyalist stated that since wagon teams were unavailable, he spent the several hours before the bombardment removing his furniture and goods to his garden. He complained that "a good deal was Stole[n] and the most of the remainder broken or torn in pieces."¹⁰⁷ The loyalist Reverend Bailey claimed in his inimitable style that "a multitude of villains were purloining their [Falmouth residents', especially loyalists'] goods and carrying them into the country beyond the reach of justice." Bailey stated that more was ravished by the "hands of barbarous rapine, than consumed by the unrelenting rapacity of the flames"¹⁰⁸

Falmouth officials estimated the total loss in buildings, personal estate and cartage to be nearly £55,000.¹⁰⁹ This figure does not begin to measure the suffering and inconvenience. Even Reverend Bailey, who did not censure Mowat's action, lamented over the destitution of many

families “who twenty-four hours before enjoyed in tranquility their commodious habitations, [and] were now . . . destitute of a hut and as a tedious winter was approaching they had before them a most gloomy and distressing prospect.”¹¹⁰ In one instance twenty-three people were forced to inhabit a single small dwelling, with three beds in the kitchen.¹¹¹ The people of Falmouth were indeed destitute. Not only had they lost their homes and many of their possessions, but also their means of employment. Throughout the winter of 1775-1776 their very survival depended upon charity.¹¹²

During the course of the bombardment the British squadron had fired an estimated three thousand rounds of shot plus a number of carcasses and bombs into the town.¹¹³ Miraculously no one was killed on either side. The Americans claimed to have killed several men in the landing parties, but Lieutenant Mowat’s report to Admiral Graves revealed that none were killed and only two men were slightly wounded.¹¹⁴ Mowat did lose a few men by desertion. Stating that he chose to fight for the colonists’ cause, one member of a landing party, John Armstrong, voluntarily surrendered himself to a group of colonial militia.¹¹⁵ Three of the *Halifax’s* seamen deserted at North Yarmouth, Maine, while Mowat’s flotilla anchored there after leaving Falmouth. All three had been pressed into the Royal Navy and had eagerly awaited their first opportunity to desert.¹¹⁶

Lieutenant Mowat decided to terminate the coastal expedition after the destruction of only one of the nine designated towns. The prolonged cannonade caused considerable indirect damage to the British ships. One vessel, the *Spitfire*, sustained enough damage from the concussion of her howitzers to cause Mowat to fear for her seaworthiness. Moreover, the small squadron had expended nearly all its ammunition, and many of the men were ill and unable to perform their duties.¹¹⁷ In fact the master of the *Halifax* died of smallpox a few weeks after

the Falmouth affair, and Admiral Graves quarantined the whole crew as a precautionary measure.¹¹⁸

Before heading back to Boston, Mowat drafted a detailed report to Admiral Graves. In it he expressed no sympathetic emotions for Falmouth's inhabitants. Instead, he stated his deep concern and anger over the poor performance of the artillery stores and the condition of his ships and men. In fact a hint of an apologetic attitude for not having executed a more thorough 'pacification' of the Falmouth area is evident in the report. Mowat complained that the lack of a sufficient number of troops prevented his making an effective sweep of arms, ammunition and livestock in Casco Bay.¹¹⁹

Lieutenant Mowat's flotilla arrived in Boston harbor on the second day of November. Upon receiving Mowat's report, Admiral Graves seemed only mildly disappointed that deficiencies in the artillery stores and the condition of the ships had limited his ambitious coastal expedition to the destruction of only one town. Graves was genuinely proud of Mowat's accomplishment and attached greater significance to the results of the operation than was warranted. He proclaimed that the destruction of the town was a severe "Stroke to the Rebels, Falmouth having long been a principal Magazine of all Kinds of merchandize, from whence besides supplying the scattered Villages in . . . New Hampshire and Massachusetts Bay, large Quantities of Goods were . . . transported . . . to Newbury Port and from thence by land to the Rebel Army around Boston." Graves promised the Admiralty Office that other pacifying expeditions would follow and that he would "not allow the Rebels to remain quiet."¹²⁰

But the Falmouth affair was the last of such operations for Admiral Samuel Graves. Winter approached, and with it came news of Graves' dismissal from command of the North American Squadron. Lord Sandwich could not appease the critics who called for Graves' removal. Admiral Graves' attempt to answer the critics—the east-

ern New England coastal expedition—came too late to save his command.

The destruction of Falmouth received wide and extensive coverage in the American press.¹²¹ Throughout the colonies editors copied and printed two or three accounts of the affair from paper to paper. The most popular and complete account appeared in the 19 October issue of the *New England Chronicle* of Salem, Massachusetts. This version summarized events preceding the destruction, the bombardment itself and the extent of damage. Referring to Mowat as an “execrable Monster,” the account contained much patriotic rhetoric: “May heaven protect an innocent, distressed People; and may their implacable Enemies perish in the Fire they [Kindled] for others . . . no Mercy is to be expected from our savage Enemies.”¹²² Several papers printed verbatim Mowat’s communication to the people of Falmouth, while others carried brief sketches of the bombardment written by Pearson Jones, a Falmouth resident.¹²³

Extant private correspondence indicates that the Falmouth affair was a matter of some discussion among revolutionary leaders. George Washington termed Falmouth’s destruction “an Outrage exceeding in Barbarity & Cruelty every hostile Act practised among civilized Nations.”¹²⁴ In mid-November Washington stated that the Falmouth affair attested to the existence of “diabolical designs of [the British] Administration to prosecute with unrelenting Fury, the most cruel, and savage war that ever a Civilized Nation engaged in”¹²⁵ General Nathaniel Green, roused to great indignation because of Admiral Graves’ action, proclaimed in classic revolutionary rhetoric: “Fight or be slaves!”¹²⁶

John Adams, then attending the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, received numerous letters commenting on Falmouth’s destruction. James Warren told Adams that Admiral Graves’ action in ordering the coastal

expedition was in his estimation the last straw in a long succession of abuses: "What can we wait for now? What more can we want to justify any step to take, kill and destroy, to refuse them any refreshments, to apprehend our enemies, to confiscate their goods and estates, to open our ports to foreigners, and if practicable to form alliances . . ." ¹²⁷ Essentially, Warren considered the destruction of Falmouth and Graves' order for similar treatment of other New England coastal towns as a frank British declaration of war and suggested that the colonies react accordingly, even hinting at American independence.

Josiah Quincy, William Tudor and Reverend William Gordon, acquaintances of Adams, shared similar sentiments in their correspondence with him. Quincy saw Falmouth's destruction as a demonstration of Britain's intention "to execute . . . unrelenting Vengeance by every Means in their Power."¹²⁸ Tudor passionately proclaimed that popular opinion demanded that the colonies "throw open . . . [their] Ports wide to all the World If we must be Slaves, Let us be the slaves of France[,] Spain[,] Turkey, rather than slaves of ungrateful Britain."¹²⁹ Gordon pointedly asked Adams how many more towns were to be sacrificed to "the British Barbarians" before the Continental Congress made "every exertion of power & wisdom . . . in opposing . . . [its] Enemies."¹³⁰

A Salem woman, Elizabeth Smith, most perceptively evaluated American reaction to the Falmouth affair when she questioned whether the British really thought that actions such as Falmouth's destruction could ever serve to reconcile the colonies with the metropolitan government. She expressed her profound doubts as to whether it was possible to believe Britain's claims of being desirous of reconciliation, when such a "Wonton abuse of Ministerial power [is] exerted against Millions . . . who are condemned unheard . . ." ¹³¹

The burning of Falmouth resulted in more than mere rhetoric. Many seaport communities, particularly those

along the central New England coast, became very uneasy, daily expecting a visitation from British naval vessels.¹³² Portsmouth, New Hampshire, especially feared an attack. When rumors circulated that Lieutenant Mowat would return to Portsmouth after his squadron repaired and resupplied at Boston, many of Portsmouth's inhabitants transported their possessions safely inland to Dover.¹³³ The town petitioned General Washington for soldiers and powder, but he could only spare the services of Brigadier General John Sullivan, who organized Portsmouth's defenses.¹³⁴ The inhabitants of Cape Ann and Salem reacted in a similar manner. Cape Ann's residents went so far as to remove the glass windows from their meetinghouse and many dwellings. They fortified their harbor, and took measures "to give the enemy a warm reception."¹³⁵ Salem residents decided to block the harbor channel with hulks and repaired the town's forts.¹³⁶ All along the New England coast defense preparations continued throughout the remainder of 1775. By January 1776 British intelligence sources reported that all the port towns from Boston to Portsmouth were strongly defended, and from Portsmouth to Casco Bay "every harbor and Creek has some insignificant Redoubt, Logwall or other defence, and upon the least alarm, the Country people came in"¹³⁷

British reaction to the destruction of Falmouth was both mild and unbelieving. First news of the affair reached England in mid-December 1775. Since these reports originated from colonial sources, many Britishers viewed it as revolutionary propaganda or, if true, as justified by the circumstances.¹³⁸ The editor of *Gentlemen's Magazine* refused to comment on the matter until it was authenticated but added that "it cannot be true, or the reasons for this severe order are concealed."¹³⁹ French sources stated that English gazettes placed the Falmouth affair in the context of the particular circumstances leading to Graves' orders.¹⁴⁰ Admiral Graves' official report did not arrive at the Admiralty Office until the first of

January 1776,¹⁴¹ and it apparently satisfied the major British periodicals, for they printed nothing more on the matter. Lord George Germain, the new Colonial Office Secretary, however, raised the question as to whether Graves was justified in destroying the town. Germain demanded an explanation from General William Howe, who had replaced Gage as overall commander of British forces in North America. Thomas Hutchinson mentioned in his diary that Lord Germain stated that Admiral Graves had been admonished about his “remissness” in failing to command his forces vigorously and that Germain imagined Graves would “run to the other extreme.”¹⁴² But even this critic remained silent once he received General William Howe’s factual account of the affair.¹⁴³

The French government, which carefully watched every development in the widening Anglo-American conflict, was highly critical of the Falmouth affair.¹⁴⁴ Count de Guines, the French ambassador in London, informed French Foreign Minister Vergennes of the town’s destruction on 22 December 1775.¹⁴⁵ About one week later Vergennes replied that such an action was “absurd as well as barbaric” on Britain’s part, especially since Graves intended to burn all the major maritime communities to the eastward of Boston. The Foreign Minister asserted that the destruction of Falmouth could conceivably be understood as an act of “furious and boundless despair” had the British resolved to abandon the colonies. But since he knew that Britain intended to send a large army to America to pacify the colonies, the destruction of the New England coastal towns would only destroy places for shelter and storehouses which were essential if the British desired to penetrate into the countryside.¹⁴⁶ The French, therefore, regarded Graves’ coastal bombardment scheme as a strategic absurdity.

As a demonstration of the quandary of British imperial policy formulation and implementation, the destruction

of Falmouth was significant from a strategic point of view. Admiral Graves' attempt to pacify the central New England coast by what could be regarded as strategic naval bombardment was a unique case. Graves intended that the Navy would destroy the morale of the coastal population by leveling their towns. Falmouth never really recovered during the course of the Revolution, and the town still looked like a ruin in 1781.¹⁴⁷ But like recent attempts at strategic morale bombardment from the air, Graves' plan produced the opposite effect. Far from surrendering or abandoning their revolutionary zeal, the inhabitants of Falmouth petitioned General Washington for troops and defensive supplies to protect the remnant of the town. They also made known their determination "to Exert the Utmost of their power in the Great cause in which all America is . . . Engag'd."¹⁴⁸ The Royal Navy's strategic bombardment only generated increased hostility and resolve to resist to the end.

The Falmouth affair therefore contributed to the desire for independence from Britain. As early as one week after the town's destruction some colonists remarked that independence was now necessary. Writing on 12 November, a prominent Portsmouth resident, William Whipple, stated that news of Falmouth's destruction and the threat of similar measures caused "everyone to risque his all in Support of his Liberties & privileges . . . the unheard of cruelties of the enemy have so effectually unified us that I believe there are not four persons now in Portsmouth who do not justify the measures persuing in opposition to the Tyranny of Great Britain."¹⁴⁹ An article in the 23 November issue of the *New England Chronicle* eloquently connected the Falmouth affair with the need to break with England:

The savage and brutal barbarity of our enemies in burning Falmouth, is a full demonstration that there is not the least remains of virtue, wisdom, or humanity in the British court; and that they are fully

determined with fire and sword, to butcher and destroy, beggar and enslave the whole American people. Therefore we expect soon to break off all kinds of connection with Britain, and form into a Grand Republic of the American Colonies, which will, by the blessing of heaven, soon work out our salvation, and perpetuate the liberties, increase the wealth, the power and the glory of this Western world.¹⁵⁰

NOTES

¹ Allen, French, *The First Year of the American Revolution* (New York, 1968, reprint of the 1934 edition), 349.

² Clifford August Morrison, "The Earl of Sandwich and British Naval Administration in the War of the American Revolution" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1950), 80, 98; Alan Valentine, *Lord North* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1967, 2 vols.), I, 431.

³ Graves to George Vandeput, 10 September 1775, in "The Conduct of Vice-Admiral Samuel Graves:" Gay Transcripts, Massachusetts Historical Society, II, 207-08. Graves wrote the "Conduct" in 1776. It contains copies of Graves' correspondence with naval officers in North America and with the Admiralty Office. The "Conduct" also includes Graves' personal narrative of events as he recalled them in 1776. Hereafter cited as "Conduct."

⁴ Graves to James Wallace, 17 September 1775, in *Ibid.*, 222-23; Graves to Stephens, 26 September 1775, in Public Record Office, Admiralty Papers (Class I: Secretary's Department, In-Letters), Vol. 485, p. 364. Hereafter cited as Adm. I/485.

⁵ See Graves' summary of the decision to launch a coastal expedition in Graves to Stephens, 9 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 401.

⁶ Narrative of Graves, 29 August 1775, in "Conduct," II, 190-91; Allen French, *The First Year of the American Revolution* (New York, 1934), 539.

⁷ Graves to Thomas Gage, 1 September 1775, in "Conduct," II, 192-93.

⁸ Thomas Gage to Graves, 4 September 1775, in *Ibid.*, 197-98.

⁹ Narrative of Graves, 1 September 1775, in *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁰ Lord Sandwich to Graves, 30 July 1775, in G.R. Barnes and J.H. Owen (eds.), *The Private Papers of John Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1771-1782* (Navy Records Society, *Publications*, LXIX, LXXI, LXXV, LXXVII, London, 1932-38), LXIX, 66-67. Hereafter cited as *Sandwich MSS*. In this memorandum Sandwich refers to other letters written earlier which contain similar recommendations and warnings.

¹¹ Lord Sandwich to Graves, 25 August 1775, in *Ibid.*, 70-71. A news item printed in the *Virginia Gazette* 26 August 1775 revealed the nature of some of the complaints referred to in Sandwich's letter. The article noted the existence of numerous complaints against "Admiral G____, for not shewing a proper alacrity They even go so far

as to accuse him with assisting the people of America and talk loudly of Byng's fate "

¹² Ira D. Gruber, *The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution* (New York, 1972), 22-23.

¹³ Sandwich had only privately advised Graves to take a more vigorous, belligerent stance. Officially, Graves had received no specific orders regarding a coastal expedition.

¹⁴ Narrative of Graves, 4 September 1775, in "Conduct," II, 198.

¹⁵ Narrative of Graves, 6 October 1775, in *Ibid.*, 248.

¹⁶ Graves to William Graves, 1 October 1775, quoted in Allen French, "The Hallowell-Graves Fisticuffs, 1775," (*Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, LXIII, 1931), 37.

¹⁷ The *Essex Journal* of 13 October 1775 reported that the *Raven* had been in a violent storm, "which split her sails to pieces."

¹⁸ Lords Commissioners of the British Admiralty to Graves, 6 July 1775, in Clark, William B., and William J. Morgan (eds.), *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*. 6 vols. (Washington, U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1964----), I, 1316-17. Hereafter cited as *NDAR*.

¹⁹ Lord Dartmouth to Thomas Gage, 27 January 1775, in Clarence E. Carter (ed.). *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage, 1763-1775*. 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), II, 181-82; B.D. Barger. *Lord Dartmouth and the American Revolution*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1965), 161, 165.

²⁰ Graves to Stephens, 9 October 1775, in *Adm. I/485*, 401.

²¹ Biography of Lieutenant Henry Mowat: Charles Edward Banks, Scrapbook on Captain Henry Mowat, Maine Historical Society. Mowat also had been stationed in the Portsmouth-Kittery area for several months.

²² Graves in the "Conduct" listed the nine towns with a sentence or two describing the particular offenses of each community. Narrative of Graves, 6 October 1775, in "Conduct," II, 250.

²³ Graves to Henry Mowat, 6 October 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 324-25. The quote on making the colonists feel British naval might is from Sandwich to Graves, 22 August 1775, in *Sandwich MSS*, I, 232.

²⁴ Graves to the Commanders of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels in North America, 6 October 1775, in Maine Historical Society (contemporary copy, one page folio).

²⁵ Graves to Stephens, 9 October 1775, in *Adm. I/485*, 401.

²⁶ This estimate is derived by interpolating from the lists of Graves' squadron for the dates 16 June 1775 and 27 January 1776. On the former date Graves had thirty vessels: thirteen ship-rigged (of third to

sixth rate), one brig, nine sloops and seven schooners. On 27 January 1776 Graves had a total of forty-one vessels: eighteen ship-rigged, two brigs, fourteen sloops and seven schooners. Disposition of the North American Squadron, 16 June 1775 and 27 January 1776, in *Ibid.*, 236, 531.

²⁷ Graves to Stephens, 9 October 1775, in *Ibid.*, 401.

²⁸ Narrative of Graves, 6 October 1775, in "Conduct," II, 248.

²⁹ Charles Edward Banks, Scrapbook containing Materials Pertaining to Captain Mowatt's Destruction of Falmouth, October 18, 1775, Maine Historical Society.

³⁰ George Washington to John Hancock, 5 October 1775, and George Washington to the President of the New York Provincial Congress, 13 October 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 301, 435.

³¹ Lieutenant Grant of the Royal Artillery consistently advanced in rank throughout and after the War for American Independence, reaching the rank of Major General on 25 June 1810. Banks, Scrapbook on Destruction of Falmouth. Maine Historical Society.

³² A carcass was fired from a howitzer and used to set buildings and ships on fire. Flames issued through holes pierced in the sides. Edgar K. Thompson, "Carcasses," *The Mariner's Mirror*, LVI (November 1970), 447.

³³ Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 443. A contemporary copy of Mowat's report is deposited at the Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine.

³⁴ Based on the *Canceaux's* log, extracted from the Admiralty Papers in Banks, Scrapbook on Destruction of Falmouth. The flotilla was on a northeasterly run. The strong northwest winds were such that these towns were undoubtedly too much to the windward. There is absolutely no evidence to warrant the old tradition that Mowat spared Portsmouth, New Hampshire, because he was in love with a young woman who resided there. For a discussion of this tradition see Banks, Scrapbook on Destruction of Falmouth.

³⁵ *Ibid.*; Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, Adm. I/485, 443.

³⁶ Nathan Gould, "Falmouth Neck in the Revolution," *Collections and Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society*, 2d ser., VIII (1897), 72-73.

³⁷ Joseph J. Malone, *Pine Trees and Politics: The Naval Stores and Forest Policy in Colonial New England, 1691-1775* (Seattle, 1964), 154.

³⁸ William Hutchinson Rowe, *The Maritime History of Maine* (New York, 1948), 55. Although Falmouth was a flourishing community and served as an entrepôt for Cumberland County, the town did not have a bank or newspaper and had only benefited from the services of a

post office since May 1775. Goold, "Falmouth Neck in the Revolution," 72-73.

³⁹ N. Goold, "Falmouth Neck in the Revolution," 88.

⁴⁰ William Goold, *Portland in the Past* (Portland, Maine, 1886), 332-33.

⁴¹ N. Goold, "Falmouth Neck in the Revolution," 88.

⁴² W. Goold, *Portland in the Past*, 335.

⁴³ *Reverend Smith's Journals*, 14 June 1774, 225. (see note 52 for complete citation.)

⁴⁴ William D. Williamson, *The History of the State of Maine* (Hallowell, Maine, 1832), II, 422.

⁴⁵ Graves to Stephens, 4 March and 11 April 1775, in Adm. I/485, 114-15, 128-29.

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Falmouth Committee of Inspection, 2 March 1775, and Message to the Public from the Falmouth Committee of Inspection, 10 April 1775, in Peter Force (ed.), *American Archives* (4th series; Washington, 1837-1853), II, 311-12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 311-313.

⁴⁸ Message to the Public from the Falmouth Committee of Inspection, 10 April 1775, in *Ibid.*, 312.

⁴⁹ Thomas Gage to Graves, 30 March 1775, in *NDAR*, I, 163.

⁵⁰ Graves to Thomas Gage, 30 March 1775, in *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Henry Mowat to Graves, 4 May 1775, in *Ibid.*, 277; Enoch Freeman to Samuel Freeman, 12 April 1775, in *American Archives*, II, 318.

⁵² Reverend Samuel Dean's diary entry, 24 April 1775, in William Willis (ed.), *Journals of the Reverend Thomas Smith and the Reverend Samuel Dean* (Portland, Maine, 1849), 336.

⁵³ Reverend Thomas Smith's journal entry, 30 April 1775, in *Ibid.*, 227.

⁵⁴ Falmouth Customs Officials to Boston Customs Commissioners, 29 April 1775, in Adm. I/485, 147. The Boston officials relayed this plea to Admiral Graves on 12 May. See Adm. I/485, 146.

⁵⁵ Petition of Falmouth loyalists, 2 May 1775, in *Ibid.*, 144. The group consisted of merchants, ship masters, customs officials, a physician, a housewright, the sheriff and the Anglican minister.

⁵⁶ Henry Mowat to Graves, 4 May 1775, in *Ibid.*, 143; Jediah Preble to Enoch Freeman, 14 May 1775, in William Lincoln (ed.), *The Journals of Each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 and 1775* (Boston, 1838), 217. Hereafter cited as *JEPCM*.

⁵⁷ Jediah Preble to Enoch Freeman, 14 May 1775, in *JEPCM*, 218n.

⁵⁸ Journal of Reverend Wiswell, *Maine Historical Society* (transcript), 5.

⁵⁹ Letter from Falmouth to a Watertown Gentleman, 11 May 1775, in *American Archives*, II, 552.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 553.

⁶¹ Jediah Preble to Enoch Freeman, 14 May 1775, in *JEPCM*, 218.

⁶² Letter from Falmouth to a Watertown Gentleman, 11 May 1775, in *American Archives*, II, 553.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Jediah Preble to Enoch Freeman, 14 May 1775, in *JEPCM*, 218-19.

⁶⁵ Letter from Falmouth to a Watertown Gentleman, 11 May 1775, in *American Archives*, II, 553-54.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 554-55.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 555; Wiswell's Journal, 5. For additional information regarding Thompson's War, see Charles Edward Banks, Scrapbook on Thompson's War in Falmouth, 1775, *Maine Historical Society*.

⁶⁸ Enoch Freeman to Massachusetts Committee of Safety, 10 May 1775, in *JEPCM*, 237n. Despite the Falmouth Committee's claims, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress concluded that "Thompson's conduct was friendly to his country, and the cause of liberty" *JEPCM*, 402-03.

⁶⁹ Narrative of Graves, 6 October 1775, in "Conduct," II, 250. For more on Graves' reaction to rebel activity in Falmouth during Thompson's War, see the deposition of Philip Crandell, 1 January 1776, in *American Archives*, III, 1170.

⁷⁰ Charles Edward Banks, "The Destruction of Falmouth and the Responsibility Therefor," *Collections and Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society*, 2nd ser., V (1894), 410-11; Graves to Stephens, 8 November 1775, in Adm. I/485, 438-39.

⁷¹ Letter from Reverend Jacob Bailey, *Collections of the Maine Historical Society*, 1st ser., V (1857), 442; Selectmen's Account of the Destruction of the Town of Falmouth, in *American Archives*, III, 1171.

⁷² Narrative of Daniel Tucker, 17 October 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 488.

⁷³ Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 443-44; Bailey's letter, 443.

⁷⁴ Mowat's ultimatum to the people of Falmouth, 16 October 1775, in Adm. I/485. Mowat drafted the letter the day before it was delivered.

⁷⁵ Bailey's letter, 443. Reverend Bailey had succeeded Reverend

Wiswell in the pastorate of Falmouth's Anglican church. Wiswell, who was kidnapped with Mowat during Thompson's War, resigned his Falmouth pastorate and departed to Boston with Mowat in May. General Gage then appointed him to the chaplaincy of a British regiment.

⁷⁶ Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 444-45; Selectmen's Account, in *American Archives*, III, 1171. Coffin and Pagan were loyalists and had signed the petition to Mowat on 2 May requesting protection during Thompson's War.

⁷⁷ Report of the Preble, Coffin, Pagan committee to the people of Falmouth, in *American Archives*, III, 1171; Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 445.

⁷⁸ Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 445.

⁷⁹ Preble, Coffin, Pagan Report, in *American Archives*, III, 1171-72.

⁸⁰ Bailey's letter, 444.

⁸¹ Tucker's Narrative in *NDAR*, II, 500.

⁸² Selectmen's Account, in *American Archives*, III, 1172.

⁸³ Bailey's letter, 446.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 447.

⁸⁵ Preble, Coffin, Pagan Report, in *American Archives*, III, 1171-72.

⁸⁶ Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 445.

⁸⁷ See Tucker's Narrative, in *NDAR*, II, 500-01; Bailey's letter, 446-47. Quite possibly, the town met as the committee stated, but decided that the committeemen inform Mowat that it had not met in an effort to gain more time.

⁸⁸ Preble, Coffin, Pagan Report, in *American Archives*, III, 1172; Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 445-46.

⁸⁹ Bailey's letter, 447.

⁹⁰ Selectmen's Account, in *American Archives*, III, 1172.

⁹¹ Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 445-46; *Canceaux's* log, 18 October 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 502. Tradition has it that Widow Greele, owner of a popular Falmouth tavern, remained on her property during the bombardment and extinguished several fires, thereby saving her tavern. Supposedly, she removed a hot cannon ball that fell in her yard with a pair of tongs, remarking: "they will have to stop firing soon for they have got out of bombs, and are making new balls and can't wait for them to cool." John C. Warren, "The Burning of Falmouth, 1775," *A History of Maine: A Collection of Readings on the History of Maine*, ed. Ronald F. Banks (rev. ed., Dubuque, Iowa, 1971), 118.

⁹² Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 446; *Canceaux's* log, 18 October 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 502.

⁹³ Tucker's Narrative, in *NDAR*, II, 501.

⁹⁴ Reverend Bailey estimated that about one thousand "men in arms" witnessed the destruction. This figure, though probably inflated, indicates that a considerable number of militia were present. Bailey's letter, 449.

⁹⁵ Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 446; Bailey's letter, 449.

⁹⁶ Selectmen's Account, in *American Archives*, III, 1172. Allen French states that Captain Noyes, commander of a company of Massachusetts 'sea coast' troops, received conflicting directives from the individual members of a Falmouth committee responsible for ordering his force. The confused Noyes consequently did relatively nothing to defend the town. French, *First Year of the Revolution*, 542. See Jediah Preble's condemnation of the behavior of both the militia and the provincial troops in Banks, Scrapbook on Destruction of Falmouth.

⁹⁷ Jediah Preble's Account, in Banks, Scrapbook on Destruction of Falmouth; Tucker's Narrative, in *NDAR*, II, 501.

⁹⁸ Bailey's letter, 447-48.

⁹⁹ Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 446.

¹⁰⁰ Williamson, *History of Maine*, II, 438.

¹⁰¹ *Canceaux's* log, 18 October 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 502.

¹⁰² Anonymous letter on the Destruction of Falmouth, 16 February 1776, in Maine Historical Society, MSS Scrapbook, I, 54.

¹⁰³ Selectmen's Account, in *American Archives*, III, 1172; Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 447. See also Bailey's letter, 449; Tucker's Narrative, in *NDAR*, II, 501; *Reverend Smith's Journals*, 18 October 1775, 230.

¹⁰⁴ Bailey's letter, 449; Selectmen's Account, in *American Archives*, III, 1172.

¹⁰⁵ Selectmen's Account, in *American Archives*, III, 1172; Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 444. Mowat stated that he captured four vessels.

¹⁰⁶ Selectmen's Account, in *American Archives*, III, 1172.

¹⁰⁷ Anonymous letter, in Maine Historical Society. MSS Scrapbook, I, 54.

¹⁰⁸ Bailey's letter, 449. Bailey's accusation was no doubt an exaggeration. The Falmouth town officials, who had been most vocal in their protests against less objectionable behavior during Thompson's War, made no mention of such pilfering.

¹⁰⁹ James Phinney Baxter (ed.), *Documentary History of the State*

of Maine, XIV (Portland, Maine, 1910), 310. Hereafter cited as *Baxter MSS*.

¹¹⁰ Bailey's letter, 450.

¹¹¹ Anonymous letter, Maine Historical Society. MSS Scrapbook, I, 54.

¹¹² Samuel Deane to Benjamin Greenleaf, 4 November 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 878.

¹¹³ General Nathaniel Green to Governor Cooke, 24 October 1775, in *American Archives*, III, 1168.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Selectmen's Account, in *American Archives*, III, 1172; Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 447.

¹¹⁵ Reuben Fogg (militia colonel from Scarborough, Maine) to George Washington, 20 October 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 535-36.

¹¹⁶ Jeremiah Powell to Massachusetts House of Representatives, 24 October 1775, in *Baxter MSS*, XIV, 319-20.

¹¹⁷ Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in Adm. I/485, 447.

¹¹⁸ Graves to Stephens, 8 November 1775, in *Ibid.*, 438-39.

¹¹⁹ Henry Mowat to Graves, 19 October 1775, in *Ibid.*, 443-47.

¹²⁰ Graves to Stephens, 8 November 1775, in *Ibid.*, 438-39.

¹²¹ Not surprisingly, the affair received closer attention in the papers of coastal New England towns, which feared a similar visitation from the Royal Navy. See especially the *Essex Journal* and the *New England Chronicle*.

¹²² *New England Chronicle*, 19 October 1775. Though dated 19 October, this account must have been written a few days later, since it mentions events that occurred in Portsmouth, Salem and Newburyport on or after 20 October. The same article appeared in the following papers: *The Massachusetts Spy*, 27 October 1775; *Boston Gazette*, 30 October 1775; *Connecticut Courant*, 30 October 1775.

¹²³ Mowat's communication in the following: *New England Chronicle*, 26 October 1775; *Massachusetts Spy*, 10 November 1775; *Connecticut Courant*, 6 November 1775; *Providence Gazette*, 4 November 1775; *Rivington's New York Gazette*, 9 November 1775; *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, 6 November 1775; *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon and Hunter printers), 18 November 1775. The Jones account appeared in the following: *Providence Gazette*, 4 November 1775; *Rivington's New York Gazette*, 2 November 1775; *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney printer), 9 and 16 November 1775.

¹²⁴ George Washington to John Hancock, 24 October 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 501. See also George Washington to General Philip Schuyler, 26 October 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 668.

¹²⁵ George Washington to William Ramsay, 12 November 1775, in *Ibid.*, 998.

¹²⁶ Nathaniel Green to Nicholas Cooke, 24 October 1775, in *Ibid.*, 595. See also Nathaniel Green to Governor Ward, 23 October 1775, in *American Archives*, III, 1145.

¹²⁷ James Warren to John Adams, 22 October 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 569.

¹²⁸ Josiah Quincy to John Adams, 25 October 1775, in *Ibid.*, 603.

¹²⁹ William Tudor to John Adams, 25 October 1775, in *Ibid.*, 601.

¹³⁰ William Gordon to John Adams, 25 October 1775, in *Ibid.*, 603. Abigail Adams' correspondence with her husband, also written on 25 October, viewed the Falmouth affair in a different light. Abigail lamented over Falmouth's fate and searched her soul for reasons why God would permit such an "Evil to befall [this] city." She mused that the town's destruction might have been a punishment for some corporate colonial 'sin,' perhaps slavery. Abigail Adams to John Adams, 25 October 1775, in L.H. Butterfield, Wendell D. Garret, and Marjorie E. Sprague (eds.), *The Adams Family Correspondence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963), I, 313.

¹³¹ Elizabeth Smith to Reverend Isaac Smith, Jr., 28 October 1775, in Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings* LIX (December 1927), 132.

¹³² A Newport, Rhode Island man's diary entry for 26 October was typical of such reaction. He wrote that news of the Falmouth affair exited "a new & desponding Alarm through this Town lest it shd. be also fired." Diary entry of Dr. Ezra Stiles, 26 October 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 611.

¹³³ Minutes of the New Hampshire Committee of Safety, 23 October 1775, in *Ibid.*, 575; General John Sullivan to George Washington, 29 October 1775; in Otis G. Hammond (ed.), *Letters and Papers of Major-General John Sullivan* (Concord, New Hampshire, 1930), I, 118; Journal of Jeremy Belknap, 24 October 1775, in Banks, Scrapbook on Destruction of Falmouth.

¹³⁴ See George Washington to John Sullivan, 7 November 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 913.

¹³⁵ *Massachusetts Spy*, 3 November 1775.

¹³⁶ James Duncan Phillips, *Salem in the Eighteenth Century* (Boston, 1937), 370.

¹³⁷ Phillip Callbeck to Vice Admiral Molyneux Shuldham (Graves' successor), 10 January 1776, in *NDAR*, III, 711.

¹³⁸ Hutchinson's Diary, 18 December 1775 in Peter O. Hutchinson

(ed.), *The Diary and Letters of Thomas Hutchinson*. 2 vols. (London: Sampson Low, 1883-86), I, 583.

¹³⁹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, December 1775, XLV, 598.

¹⁴⁰ See County de Vergennes to Count de Guines, 31 December 1775, in *NDAR*, III, 468. Of the two English accounts the thesis writer used one was a reprint of Pearson Jones' account (*Gentleman's Magazine*, December 1775) and the other was a narrative of the affair, which viewed Thompson's War as the cause of Falmouth's destruction (*Annual Register*, 1776, 34-35).

¹⁴¹ Lords Commissioners of the British Admiralty to Lord George Germain, 3 January 1776, in *NDAR*, III, 471.

¹⁴² *Hutchinson's Diary*, 19 December 1775, I, 583.

¹⁴³ William Howe to George Germain, 7 May 1776, in *NDAR*, IV, 1436; Gerald Saxon Brown, *The American Secretary: The Colonial Policy of Lord George Germain, 1775-1778* (Ann Arbor, 1963), 76. Germain did not pursue the matter further.

¹⁴⁴ See *NDAR*, II, 669-70.

¹⁴⁵ Count de Guines to Count de Vergennes, 22 December 1775, in *Ibid.*, III, 443.

¹⁴⁶ Count de Vergennes to Count de Guines, 31 December 1775, in *Ibid.*, 468.

¹⁴⁷ William Willis, *The History of Portland: From 1632 to 1864* (2nd ed.; Portland, Maine, 1865), 549-50; N. Goold, "Falmouth in the Revolution," 43.

¹⁴⁸ Reverend Samuel Deane to Benjamin Greenleaf, 4 November 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 877-78; Memorial of the Committee of Falmouth, 1 November 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 851-52.

¹⁴⁹ William Whipple to John Langdon, 12 November 1775, in *NDAR*, II, 947.

¹⁵⁰ *New England Chronicle*, 23 November 1775. For other comments on the relationship between the Falmouth affair and the desire for independence, see the remarks of George Washington, 31 January 1776, quoted in James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington in the American Revolution* (Boston, 1967), 68; a Philadelphia merchant to Robert Herries, 15 February 1776, in *Stopford-Sackville MSS*, II, 21.



Lieutenant Henry Mowat 1734-1789

The map appearing in the centerfold is reproduced from *The History of Portland* by William Willis. For the likeness of Henry Mowat above, we are indebted to the U.S. Office of Naval History. It appears in the first volume of their *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*.