

THE 1794 WRECK OF THE TEN SAIL,  
CAYMAN ISLANDS, BRITISH WEST INDIES:  
A HISTORICAL STUDY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Volume I

A Dissertation

by

MARGARET ELAINE LESHIKAR

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 1993

Major Subject: Anthropology

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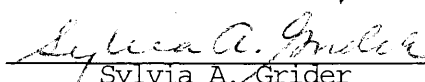
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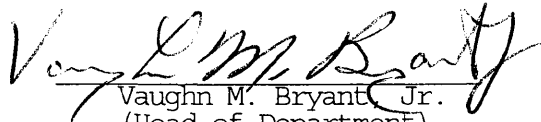
  
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## ABSTRACT

The 1794 *Wreck of the Ten Sail*,

Cayman Islands, British West Indies:

A Historical Study and Archaeological Survey. (December 1993)

Margaret Elaine Leshikar, B.F.A., University of Texas;

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The French Revolution had begun in 1789 and by 1793 Britain and France were engaged in war. Hostilities extended to their world-wide possessions, and to the high seas where each nation strived to capture the other's naval and merchant ships as prizes. In November 1793, the French Navy's 12-pounder frigate *l'Inconstante* was captured off the French West Indian colony of St. Domingue, taken to Jamaica and sold into His Majesty's Service as the *Convert*. The Royal Navy frigate was to escort and protect a produce-laden convoy of 55 merchantmen from Jamaica to ports in Britain; three vessels bound for America would join them. The greatest danger to the fleet, however, was not to be the French, for on 8 February 1794 the *Convert*, together with nine of the merchant ships, wrecked on the windward reefs of Grand Cayman.

This dissertation investigates the history and archaeology of the shipwreck disaster which has survived in Cayman Islands folklore as the legend of the *Wreck of the Ten Sail*. But current research indicates that the incident has historical significance that exceeds the bounds of Cayman's national attention. It is tied to the history of Britain and France in the French Revolutionary Period, and is evidence of the wide geographical distribution of European war and trade at the close of the eighteenth century.

This study is a presentation of history, archaeology and folklore. Research entailed archival work in Jamaica, Britain and France; archaeological survey and mapping of shipwreck sites scattered



over the reefs of Grand Cayman's East End; and oral history interviews with older Caymanians whose parents and grandparents told them the story of the *Wreck of the Ten Sail*.

Results of the investigation include a better understanding of the historical and geographical context of the shipwreck disaster; a more thorough and accurate account of the event; specific knowledge of the locations and nature of archaeological remains; recovery, conservation, and analysis of artifacts; and an awareness of the enduring effects of the *Wreck of the Ten Sail* on the Cayman Islands.

For  
All the Volunteers

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MEL

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AN *Archives Nationales*, Paris, France
- AR *Archives du Port de Rochefort*, Rochefort, France
- CINA Cayman Islands National Archive, Cayman Islands, B.W.I.
- CINM Cayman Islands National Museum, Cayman Islands, B.W.I.
- HL Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, U.S.A.
- JA Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica
- MDHD Ministry of Defense, Hydrography Department, Somerset, England
- NLJ National Library of Jamaica, Institute of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica
- NMM National Maritime Museum, London, England
- PRO Public Record Office, Kew, England
- SHM *Ministère de la Défense, Service Historique de la Marine*, Château de Vincennes, France

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Caymanians say that a long time ago, in their islands, a great shipwreck disaster occurred. Passed from one generation to the next over the course of two hundred years, their tale varies from one narrator to the next, but all agree that this momentous event was the *Wreck of the Ten Sail*. Surviving historical documents and vestiges of the shipwrecks in the sea confirm that the story is more than a colorful incident woven into the tapestry of Cayman Islands folklore. It is a legend based on a true historical episode that involved ten British ships, in a convoy numbering 59 vessels, that sailed from Jamaica and wrecked on the eastern reefs of Grand Cayman in 1794.

Until recently, the calamity survived largely as a Caymanian story, but current research indicates that the incident has historical significance that exceeds the boundaries of the Cayman Islands. It is tied to the history of Britain and France in the period of the French Revolution, when these European nations were competing for military and commercial dominance around the globe. The *Wreck of the Ten Sail* is testimony to the world-wide distribution of European war and trade at the close of the eighteenth century (Figure 1).

#### Historical Overview<sup>1</sup>

The French Revolution erupted in 1789, and by 1793 France had declared war on Britain and other European powers. Hostilities extended to French and British possessions in the New World and to the seas around the West Indies as each nation strove to capture the other's naval ships and merchantmen as prizes (Figure 2). In November 1793, the French experienced a setback when their 12-pounder frigate

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The journal used as a model for the style and format of this dissertation is *The Mariner's Mirror*.



Figure 1. The World, circa 1789 (drawn by R.L. Craig).

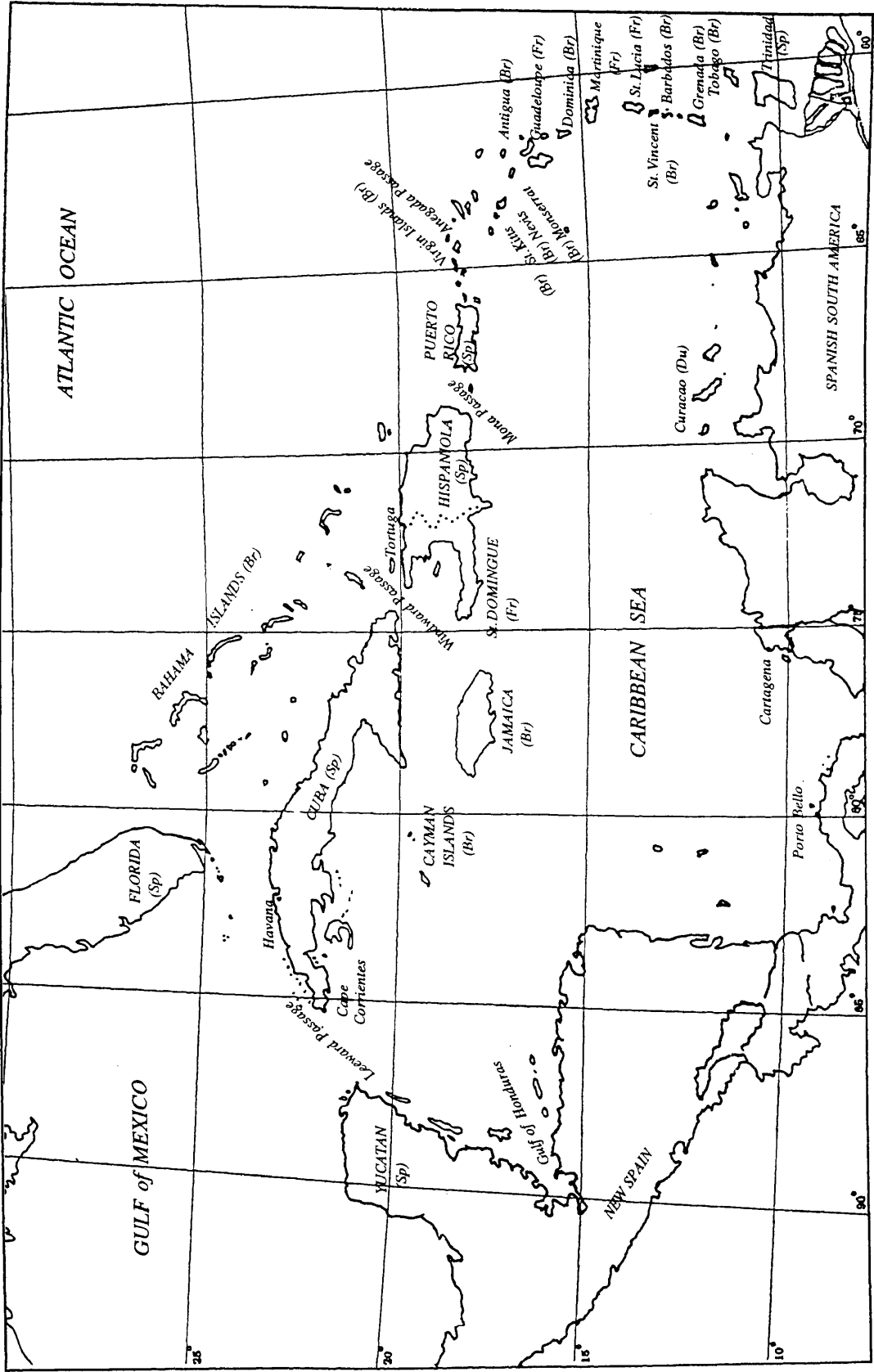


Figure 2. The Caribbean, circa 1793 (drawn by R.L. Craig after map by R. Wilkinson, 1794, Cayman Islands National Archive).



*l'Inconstante*, one of the principal ships protecting the interests of France in St. Domingue, was captured off the coast of St. Domingue by His Majesty's Ships *Penelope* and *Iphigenia* commanded by Captains B.S. Rowley and Patrick Sinclair.<sup>2</sup> Captain Joseph Riouffe, among other *l'Inconstante* officers and seamen, was mortally wounded in the engagement.

Following its seizure, the prize was taken from St. Domingue to Jamaica, and sold into His Majesty's Service as the *Convert* under the command of Captain John Lawford. As a British ship of war, the fifth-rate frigate *Convert* was to escort and protect a produce-laden convoy of 55 merchantmen on their winter journey across the Atlantic to ports in England, Ireland and Scotland; three vessels bound for America would join them. Ironically, the greatest danger was not to be the French, for on 8 February 1794 the *Convert*, together with nine ships of the fleet, wrecked on the perilous eastern reefs of Grand Cayman (Figure 3). (See Appendix A for the historical and geographical background of the Cayman Islands.)

Inhabitants of Grand Cayman helped in the rescue of survivors but had little to offer the shipwrecked mariners. The population of the island numbered under a thousand persons and was still suffering from a lack of provisions caused by a hurricane the previous October. Representatives of the Caymanian people, therefore, begged Lawford to remove the crews who came from the wrecks as soon as possible. Captain Lawford, the officers of the *Convert*, and some of Lawford's best seamen stayed to salvage what they could from the frigate, while the remainder of the ship's complement was sent off on other vessels in the convoy. Aware that the loss of His Majesty's ship and nine merchantmen would adversely affect the security and commerce of Britain and her colonies, Lawford dutifully sent letters back to Jamaica and on to Europe alerting his superiors to the disaster. Meanwhile, he camped with his men in tents on the beach opposite the wreck site and began a salvage

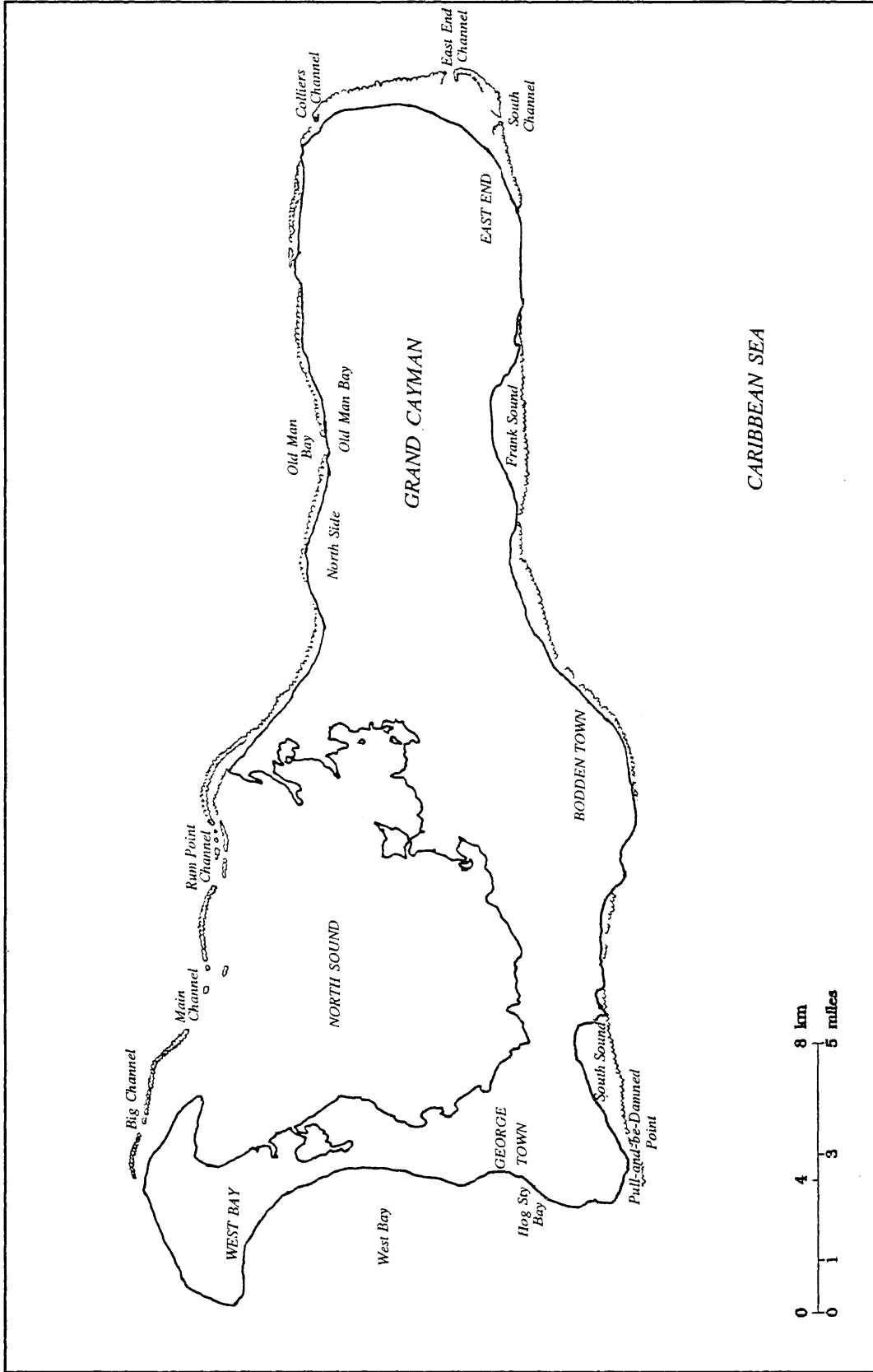


Figure 3. Grand Cayman (drawn by R.L. Craig) .

attempt. After receiving news of the shipwrecks via First Lieutenant Joseph Bradby Bogue of the *Convert*, Commodore John Ford sent Captain Francis Roberts in HMS *Success* to Grand Cayman to assist in the salvage. At the end of March the *Success* transported Lawford, his officers and the remaining crew back to Jamaica. Before Captains Lawford and Roberts left Grand Cayman, they signed an agreement with Robert Knowles Clarke and William Bodden Senior, two prominent Caymanians, giving them permission to continue the salvage of the *Convert* for which they would be compensated. To date, contemporary official documents have not been found that reveal how much of the authorized salvage by Clarke and Bodden was carried out.

All the captains except one who perished during the wrecking, along with the small crews of the merchantmen, are assumed to have stayed to salvage merchandise and ship's equipment from their vessels. Attempts to rescue the cargoes, however, were mostly unsuccessful because the ships broke apart quickly and because they carried perishable goods such as rum, cotton, sugar and wood.

Upon his return to Jamaica, Captain John Lawford of the *Convert* faced a court martial for the loss of the frigate. After hearing evidence that included testimonies from Captain Lawford, First Lieutenant Bogue, Second Lieutenant William Earnshaw, Third Lieutenant John Allen, Master Thomas Popplewell, Master's Mate James Hutchins and Midshipman Colin Campbell, all of the *Convert*, and from Master Richard Davy of the *Success*, the court recommended acquittal.

Sometime after 1794 interest in further salvage of the shipwrecks waned, and their locations were forgotten. The story of the *Wreck of the Ten Sail*, however, continued to be told and is still told in the Cayman Islands, almost two hundred years after the event. Not surprisingly, the tale has come down to the present generation in several colorful versions.

## Previous Research

Until 1979 little archival research had been conducted on the *Wreck of the Ten Sail*. Two Cayman Islands histories, one by George Hirst published in 1910 and the other based closely on Hirst by Neville Williams in 1970, contain brief descriptions of the event.<sup>3</sup> While the two versions bear some resemblance to historical fact, even the name of the naval escort, given as HMS *Cordelia*, and the date as 1788, are not correct. The accounts are based largely on an oral history narrative that Commissioner Hirst recorded, prior to 1910, from a man whose grandfather was alive when the shipwrecks occurred.

While the Caymanian story is valuable as a traditional version, there are also surviving eighteenth-century accounts in archival repositories in Europe and the Caribbean. Several documents regarding the wrecks of HMS *Convert* and nine of her convoy were discovered by Roger Smith, director of the *Cayman Islands Project*, an archaeological survey conducted by the Institute of Nautical Archaeology (INA) in cooperation with the Cayman Islands Government in 1979-80. These records, which provide details about the shipwrecks, the shipwreck victims, and the islanders who responded to the episode, are referenced in Smith's Texas A&M University M.A. thesis.<sup>4</sup>

Archaeological evidence of the shipwrecks was also found by the 1980 INA survey.<sup>5</sup> The field investigation was a reconnaissance to locate and record shipwrecks situated around all three of the Cayman Islands, but a month was spent surveying the reefs of Grand Cayman's East End. The INA team assessed that several sites they documented might be related to the *Convert* and the wrecked merchantmen of her convoy. Data on these sites will be discussed in detail in Chapter IX.

In the mid-1980s, Indiana University's Department of Physical Education, Scuba Research and Development Group (SRD), carried out additional underwater survey work at East End. Project director Charles Beeker corresponded with individuals and archival repositories

in Europe and discovered additional clues to the *Wreck of the Ten Sail*. The SRD information will also be discussed in Chapter IX.

### **Current Objectives**

Investigations were initiated into the *Wreck of the Ten Sail* in the 1980s, but none of the studies focused exclusively on the ships, the people or the wrecking event. A review of the data from these survey projects revealed the significance of the disaster, and suggested the value of an extensive inquiry.

In 1990 the present investigation into the wrecks of HMS *Convert* and the nine merchantmen was initiated with an eye to securing this historical episode in Caymanian, Caribbean and European history. Major goals of the research were to discover the historical and geographical context of the *Wreck of the Ten Sail*; to provide an accurate account of the calamity; to locate or relocate archaeological sites related to the event; to document and assess these archaeological remains; to make recommendations regarding future investigation and management of the resources; to recover, conserve and analyze samples of artifacts encountered during the survey; and to explore the enduring effects of the shipwrecks on the people of the Cayman Islands.

### **Research Methods**

Research was conducted into historical documents, archaeological sites and memories of living individuals. It entailed archival work in Great Britain, Jamaica and France; archaeological survey and testing of shipwreck sites scattered over the reefs of Grand Cayman's East End; and oral history interviews with elder Caymanians whose parents and grandparents had told them the story of the *Wreck of the Ten Sail*.

#### Archival Research

Archival research revealed specific details about the ships and people associated with the *Wreck of the Ten Sail* as well as about the broader history and significance of the late eighteenth-century era.

Research trips in 1991 and 1993, to the Public Record Office and the National Maritime Museum in London, revealed eighteenth-century documents that pertain to the capture of *l'Inconstante* and the frigate's wrecking as *HMS Convert*. These repositories also hold key data about the merchant ships, as well as naval and biographical details about the *Convert's* captain, John Lawford. Lloyd's Register of Shipping provides contemporary published information about the merchantmen in both *Lloyd's Register* and *Lloyd's List*, and the College of Arms and Whitehall Library have data on Lawford. Through phone calls, letters and a 1992 visit to Jamaica, High Court of Vice Admiralty records regarding the prize, *Inconstante*, and the subsequent sale of the vessel and her stores came to light in the Jamaica Archives in Spanish Town, and eighteenth-century periodical data was found in the National Library at the Institute of Jamaica in Kingston. Copies of vital documents were obtained through correspondence with individuals at three archives in France: the *Archives de France* in Paris, the *Service Historique de la Marine* in Château de Vincennes and the *Archives du Port de Rochefort* in Rochefort where *l'Inconstante* was built. Communication with Jean Boudriot, a renowned expert on the history of French shipbuilding, and with David H. Roberts, who has translated from French to English several of the works of Boudriot, was extremely beneficial. Many other people assisted in accessing sources which were available in diverse repositories.

Examples of documents that were examined for the archival research include British Admiralty and French Navy correspondence, other official correspondence, Jamaica Vice Admiralty Court records regarding prize-ships and information gleaned in questioning prisoners, captain's letters, court martial proceedings, ships' logs, muster rolls, port and dockyard records, registers of ships, eighteenth-century periodicals, prize-ship inventories, shipwreck salvage accounts and draughts of ships. These documents provide historical data that

illuminate the epoch, reference the construction of the French frigate, describe the British capture of the prize and clarify events surrounding the multiple shipwreck event. They also contain information about equipment, stores, and the wrecking that facilitates the archaeology.

### Archaeology

Tangible evidence disclosed through archaeology can provide a physical link with the past and substantiate, dispute or clarify much of the written historical record. Therefore, under the auspices of the Cayman Islands National Museum, the author and a team of avocational archaeology volunteers conducted an investigation to locate HMS *Convert* and nine ships of her convoy. Following a background search on land, for previously salvaged cannons, the team carried out an underwater survey of the eastern reefs of Grand Cayman in the summer and fall of 1991. The research focused on several important sites thought to be associated with the *Wreck of the Ten Sail*. It thereby laid foundations for the protection of these resources, and for selective programs of excavation and recovery in the future. Results of the investigation have encouraged the National Museum to plan, and to acquire equipment for a conservation laboratory to process wet-site artifacts. Here finds from shipwrecks can be treated and stabilized for curation and exhibition.

### Oral History and Folklore

Between 1990 and 1993 the author interviewed elder Caymanians, and studied narratives that were recorded a decade earlier in the Cayman Islands, about the *Wreck of the Ten Sail*. The original intent was to seek oral history data that would facilitate archival and archaeological work. While some clues to history and archaeology emerged, it was discovered that rich and culturally valuable folklore surrounds the eighteenth-century episode. Thus, narratives of the

*Wreck of the Ten Sail* were documented to provide a background to remembrances and surviving tales. These stories demonstrate the lasting effect of the shipwrecks on the people of the Cayman Islands.



Footnotes for Chapter I.

1. General references are too numerous to identify in the historical overview. They are identified in detail in the body of the manuscript.
2. St. Domingue was the name of the western part of Hispaniola which was under French control throughout most of the eighteenth century. Today this region is known as Haiti.
3. George S.S. Hirst, *Notes on the History of the Cayman Islands* (Kingston, 1910), 115-116. Neville Williams, *A History of the Cayman Islands* (Grand Cayman, Government of the Cayman Islands, 1970), 28.
4. R.C. Smith, 'The Maritime Heritage of the Cayman Islands: Contributions in Nautical Archaeology' (unpublished MA thesis, Texas A&M University, 1981), 103, 108-109. Smith also mentions the *Wreck of the Ten Sail* in a revised version of his thesis, 'The Maritime Heritage of the Cayman Islands' (unpublished manuscript), 98-108.
5. Much of the information from the 1979-1980 survey is included in files that were created for each archaeological site recorded. These unpublished files are part of the National Shipwreck Inventory held by the Cayman Islands National Museum (hereafter CINM).

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

His Majesty's Ship *Convert* and nine of her convoy wrecked in the West Indies during the French Revolutionary Wars. This was an era of European discord marked by conflicts, on a world-wide scale, between Great Britain and France. To fully appreciate the *Wreck of the Ten Sail* it is useful to review the historical and geographical background.

#### **Great Britain and France in the Late Eighteenth-Century<sup>1</sup>**

In the late eighteenth century there were many nations, and several empires, in the geo-political world (Figure 1, p.2). Before the French Revolution in 1789, Britain and France were the most powerful and technologically advanced in Europe. Crises, both domestic and global, led them and other European countries into over twenty years of hostility, known to history as the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). Prior to the world wars of the twentieth century, these successive conflicts were collectively known as *The Great War*.<sup>2</sup>

To appreciate the commanding positions of late eighteenth-century Britain and France, it is useful to focus on the European countries that established broad seaborne trade networks and distant colonies, from the sixteenth century. They include Spain, Portugal, the United Provinces of the Netherlands, Britain and France. Affluence and dominance shifted among these nations over three centuries.

From her first encounter with the New World in 1492, Spain grew into a strong and wealthy power. This status peaked in the sixteenth century, and in the eighteenth, Spain still maintained a great empire that encompassed much of the Americas, West Indian islands and colonies in the Philippines. Spain's trade network was organized as a monopoly, based on the desire to transport gold and silver back to the mother country from the New World. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

Britain, France and other European nations challenged Spain's monopoly in order to weaken her trade with the Spanish colonies, and to establish their own presence in the New World. After the War of Spanish Succession (1702-1713), however, a family alliance was established between the Kings of Spain and France. Spain sided with France against Britain in the Seven Years War (1756-1763); she entered the conflict in 1761 and lost most of her navy. In the American War of Independence (1775-83), which she joined in 1779, Spain sided again with France against Britain. Her naval participation was minor in the conflict, but at the peace treaty she regained colonies she had lost.

In the late eighteenth century Portugal maintained a large part of her colonial empire, including Brazil, but she had been replaced in the Far East by the Dutch. Like Spain, Portugal had concentrated on the gold trade rather than industrial development at home. She kept an overseas empire largely by aligning herself with Britain.

The United Provinces of the Netherlands, homeland of the Dutch, became independent from Spain in the early seventeenth century. The nation resisted French attacks and was successful in agriculture and commerce. The Dutch, who were more interested in establishing trade networks than in founding colonies, organized a vast overseas trading empire, particularly in the Far East. In the seventeenth century they protected their interests with a strong navy, but the eighteenth century was an era of decline when the country was weakened by internal problems and wars.

When the Seven Years War ended in 1763 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris, Britain emerged as the world's dominant power. Britain, which included England, Scotland, and Wales, was unified under one king and parliament, and had organized a great colonial empire with possessions in North America, the West Indies, India and Australia. As a leader in world trade, Britain kept a powerful navy to protect her commerce and overseas territories, but lost her original thirteen

colonies in North America in the War of Independence. Although achievement of independence by the United States was an embarrassment, it was the French involvement in the conflict from 1778, followed by that of Spain from 1779 and the Netherlands from 1780, that posed the real threat. Britain was losing command of the seas. She was left with virtually no allies on the Continent, and a newly arranged empire to protect. In response to the danger of invasion at home and threats to her overseas colonies, a major shipbuilding program was initiated in Britain, and by the onset of *The Great War* in 1793 the Royal Navy was again a formidable opponent to any navy in existence.

A world-changing process began in Europe in the late eighteenth century. This was not a social or political upheaval, but rather a change in technology and methods of industry. Known as the Industrial Revolution, it began with the mechanized production of coal, iron and textiles, and was felt chiefly in Britain, but also in France. As a result, Europe was being transformed into an industrialized society.

Considered to be the leading power in Europe before the outbreak of civil unrest and revolution in 1789, France was the greatest catalyst in global conflicts of the late eighteenth century. Acclaimed for cultural advances, France was regarded as the leader of European civilization. The large, fertile country seemed stable with a monarchy extending back hundreds of years. Although she had lost much of her colonial empire to the British, and had seen the destruction of most of her fleet in the Seven Years War, she reacted with an intensive and well-funded shipbuilding program. France created a superb and powerful navy. By 1778, when the Americans asked for aid in the War of Independence, she was ready to challenge her traditional foe and regain colonies previously lost to the British. It was a successful war for France, but it was expensive and depleted a troubled public treasury. The cost of the American War and earlier wars, an inefficient system of taxation, and a pattern of extravagant spending during successive

reigns forced France into bankruptcy. The country experienced civil unrest, and by mid-June 1789 the States-General, which Louis XVI had summoned to address the country's financial problems, proclaimed itself the National Assembly. In July 1789 revolution broke out with the storming of the Bastille in Paris. Over the next two years the Assembly remained in power and reorganized civil, religious and military establishments, framed the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* and completed a constitution which the King was forced to accept in 1791. It was a middle class system which provided for a limited monarchy, and did not quiet the discontent of the poor. On 20 April 1792, extremist revolutionaries in the new Legislative Assembly, fearing invasion of France by Austria (whose monarchy was sympathetic to the French King), declared war. The event marked the beginning of the French Revolutionary Wars. At Austria's request, Prussia and Sardinia joined as allies; France's internal conflict was perceived in Europe as setting the dangerous precedent of war against a monarchy. Fueled by more civil unrest, the Assembly ordered an election for a National Convention in August. By the end of September the Convention abolished the monarchy and established the First Republic. Louis XVI was tried and put to death as a traitor by guillotine on 21 January 1793 and Marie Antoinette was executed later that year. These and similar atrocities caused terror among revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries alike. Abroad the situation provoked war with a growing European coalition, for between February and March of 1793 France declared war on Britain, the Netherlands and Spain. The spate of executions known as the *Reign of Terror* lasted in France until 1794, and was followed by an inefficient and corrupt Directory between 1795 and 1799. By 1797 all members of the First Coalition except Britain had consented to peace, but in 1798 a French strike against Britain in Egypt resulted in loss of the French fleet. Subsequently, the Second Coalition in opposition to France was formed, consisting of Britain,

Russia, Austria, Turkey, Portugal and Naples. In 1799 Napoleon Bonaparte overthrew the Directory and seized power in France. By 1801 the Second Coalition had totally collapsed, and once again only Britain remained in the war. In 1802 the Treaty of Amiens was signed and even Britain ceased to fight, thus ending the French Revolutionary Wars. However, this was a temporary peace which was followed by other European coalitions against Napoleon who, though extremely popular in France at the onset of his office and reign, was defeated by his enemies in 1815.

At the close of the American War of Independence, the United States had emerged as an independent nation. Although she maintained an active seaborne merchant trade, by 1785 the U.S. disbanded its navy and sold the ships. By 1794, however, plans were underway to create another small navy. From the beginning of the French Revolutionary Wars, and during the following decade, the Americans had sporadic conflicts with both the French and the British, generally arising from rights of American merchant ships. Friction was inevitable because the Americans attempted to carry on a neutral trade with two countries who were at war with each other. And both France and Britain were determined to halt such commerce with their adversary.

### **The British and French Colonies in the West Indies<sup>3</sup>**

Possession of colonies in the West Indies enabled Britain and France to lead the world in the eighteenth century's most lucrative international market, the sugar-producing industry (Figure 2, p.3). The magnitude and importance of sugar in this period cannot be overemphasized. In fact, it has been suggested that sugar was to the eighteenth century what steel was to the nineteenth and oil to the twentieth centuries.<sup>4</sup> In this light one can appreciate the value of these territories to Britain and France, a value that was out of proportion to the geographical size of the West Indian possessions. Sugar fueled the economy; the seaborne merchant trade provided a major

outlet for European export goods, while the steady supply of taxable sugar imports, many of which were re-exported, served national, as well as personal, interests. Britain and France protected their holdings in the West Indies with naval and military strength, during peace and war.

The history of the Caribbean, after 1492, was closely tied to that of Europe until the early nineteenth century. Following is a brief chronology of three centuries of European control of land and commerce in the West Indies.

#### The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Within several decades of Columbus' first voyage to the New World, European seafarers learned that navigation to and from the Americas was facilitated by following prevailing wind and ocean currents that rotated in a clockwise direction in the North Atlantic Basin (Figure 4). It was also discovered that within the Caribbean the prevailing sea and air currents flowed east to west making it easy to enter the Caribbean between the Lesser Antilles, but extremely difficult to exit by that route (Figure 5).<sup>5</sup> Although ships could depart from the Caribbean Sea through the Windward, Mona and Anegada Passages in the Greater Antilles, the favored route was through the Leeward Passage, by which ships exited through the Yucatan Channel, entered the Gulf Stream in the Gulf of Mexico and followed the currents through the Straits of Florida out into the Atlantic for the return passage to Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Until the mid-seventeenth century, Spain claimed a monopoly on all the New World territories encountered during her voyages of exploration and discovery. Spain's initial quest was for precious metals, which were scarce and quickly depleted in the West Indies. The gold and silver resources of Mexico, Bolivia and Peru resulted in more intensive settlement of these regions. In the West Indies, Hispaniola, Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico and Trinidad were colonized. Of these islands, the mother country paid the most attention to Hispaniola, the

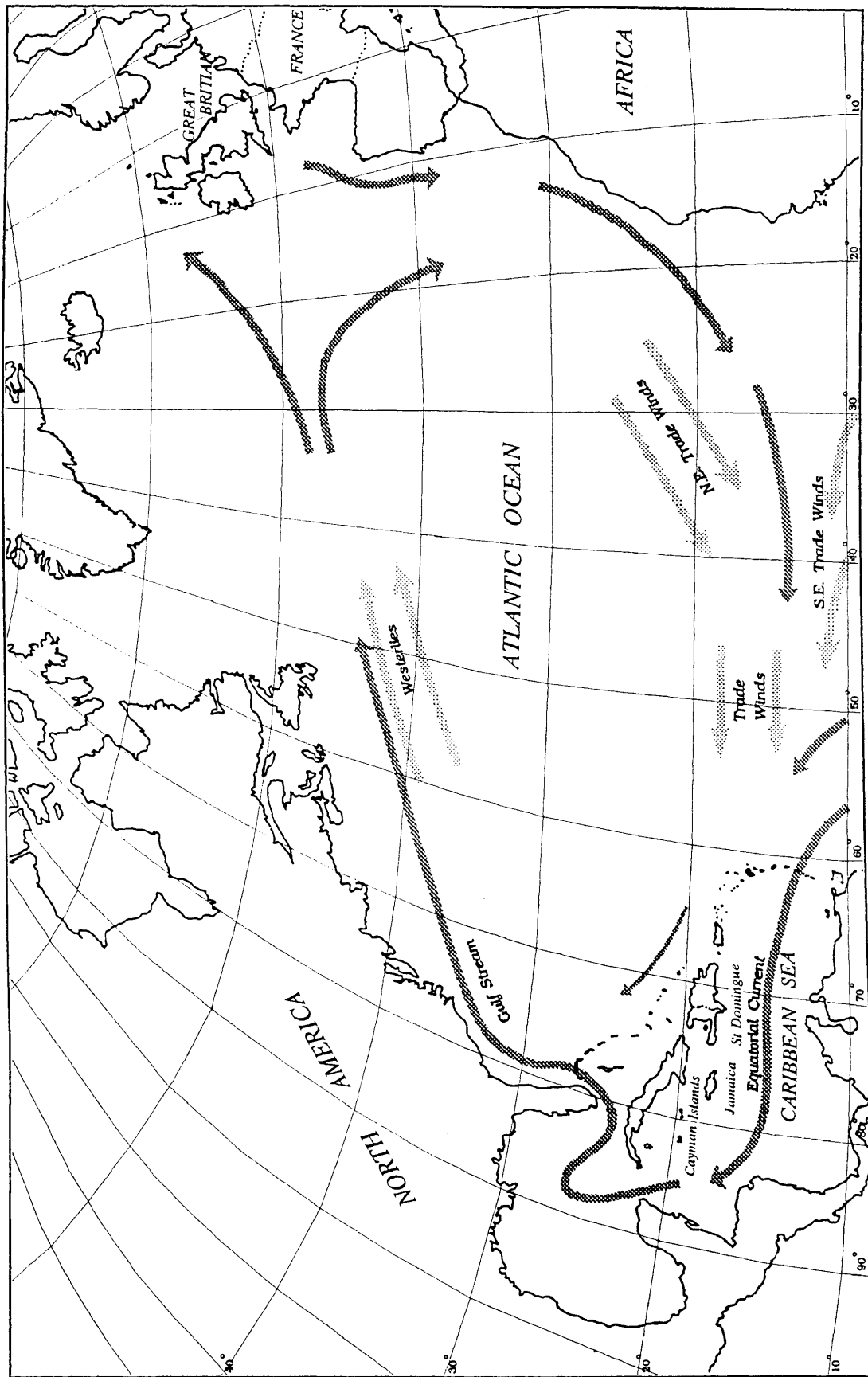


Figure 4. Winds and Ocean Currents of the North Atlantic Basin (drawn by R.L. Craig).



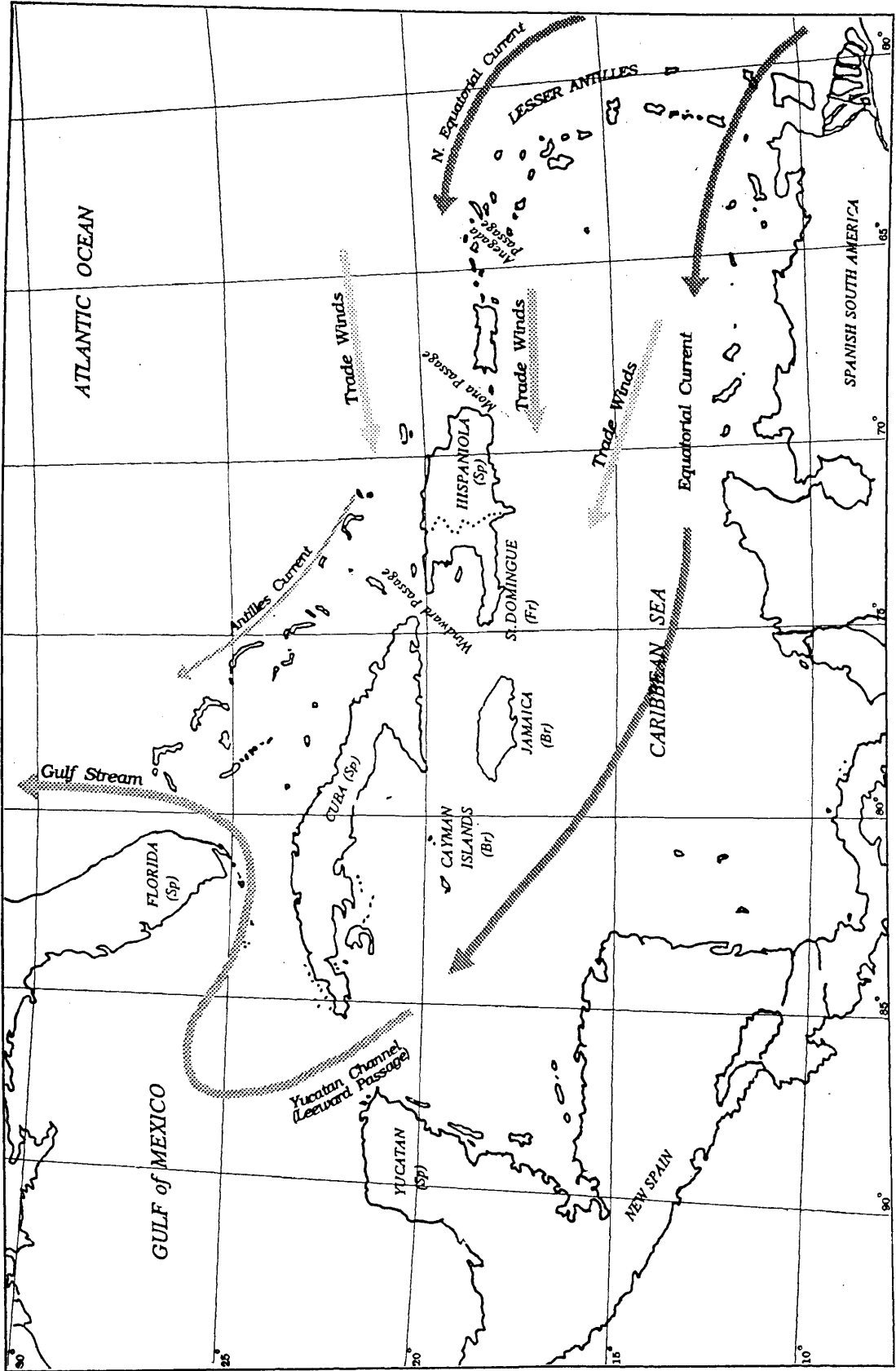


Figure 5. Winds and Ocean Currents of the Caribbean (drawn by R.L. Craig).

main administrative center, and to Cuba, which was strategically valuable because of its location at the exit of an important sailing route (the Leeward Passage) from the Caribbean. In spite of the focus on gold and silver extraction, Spain recognized in the early sixteenth century the potential value of cultivating sugar for sale in the European market. Because the labor-intensive production of this luxury crop required a large work force, and because Indian slavery proved impractical, the Spanish colonies engaged in the African slave trade, much of which was carried on illegally with merchants from countries other than Spain.

The Dutch, English and French were attracted to the Caribbean by Spain's loosely settled domain, vulnerable seaborne export of precious metals and her colonies' willingness to illicitly import African slaves and European products from foreign ships. All violated Spain's territorial claims and restrictive commerce, though none established permanent colonies before the 1600s. Initially, piracy and buccaneering occurred, but by the late sixteenth century European governments were formally sanctioning assaults on Spanish interests. England challenged Spain's claims by declaring freedom of the seas and promoting privateering.

The Dutch approach to the West Indies differed from that of the English and French. The Dutch sought to trade with all of the colonies regardless of who controlled them. Only secondarily did they establish their own colonies. Much Dutch business was in the slave trade, which became lucrative when cultivation of luxury crops emerged as the principal Caribbean industry. By the early seventeenth century, the Dutch established an extensive commercial network and achieved additional wealth by encroaching on Spanish trade. These activities distracted Spain from ongoing English and French colonization of strategically valuable, but heretofore unsettled islands in the Lesser Antilles.

In the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the English colonized St. Kitts and Barbados, and the French also settled in St. Kitts. Barbados proved to be ideal for the cultivation of profitable luxury crops including tobacco, sugar, cotton, cacao, coffee and dyes. Although tobacco and cotton were among the most profitable, sugar topped them all. Sugar required large plantations, great capital expenditure and a huge labor force. As a result, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries marked the rise of a powerful and wealthy merchant class in the West Indies, paralleled by vast increase in the numbers of African slaves.

The French also recognized the value of growing and exporting luxury crops and by 1650 had established colonies in St. Lucia, Grenada, Martinique and Guadeloupe, while the English occupied Nevis, Antigua and Montserrat. At first the Dutch handled most of the seaborne commerce between the French and English West Indies and Europe. After the mid-seventeenth century, however, England and France saw that profits could be made by controlling the merchant trade, and passed navigation laws that restricted colonies to trade exclusively with the mother country. The Dutch fought wars over their right to trade with the British and French Caribbean, but never regained it. This signaled the decline of the Dutch as a leading power in the West Indies, and left only France and England to test Spain's authority.

In 1655 England directly challenged Spain's empire. After a failed attempt to capture Hispaniola, a small force sent by Oliver Cromwell instead seized Jamaica. In 1660 when Charles II was restored to power in England, the strategic and economic value of Jamaica was recognized and development of the island was encouraged; Jamaica was large, rich and fertile. In spite of the English occupation of several Caribbean islands, Spain would not relinquish her claims to the territory. As a result, loosely sanctioned, semi-piratical privateering was carried out against Spanish interests by individuals

such as Henry Morgan. In 1670, by the Treaty of Madrid, Spain recognized England's right to the colonies that she occupied, and both countries agreed to stop government-sanctioned piracy by revoking reprisals worldwide. By the close of the century planting interests and commerce developed in Jamaica to the extent that British naval squadrons were sent to protect the colony and its trade.

In 1655 the French took Tortuga, then occupied the nearby west coast of Spain's Hispaniola, where they established significant planting settlements. For decades Spain would not recognize France's rights in Hispaniola. Thus, the French government sanctioned privateering in order to weaken Spanish claims. It was not until the 1697 Treaty of Ryswick that the region the French called St. Domingue, encompassing the western third of Hispaniola, was acknowledged by Spain as belonging to France.

### The Eighteenth Century

By the turn of the century, Spain had been forced to recognize French and English rights in the West Indies and was weakened, though she still held Cuba, two-thirds of Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and Trinidad. The most powerful countries with interests in the Caribbean were now Great Britain and France.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century they vied for territorial dominance and a monopoly of trade with Spain's colonies. There was a succession of European wars involving these rival nations, and shifting ownership of West Indian colonies between them.

Conflicts in the first half of the eighteenth century resulted in no major exchanges of territory, but the wars after mid-century profoundly affected colonial possessions in the West Indies. The Seven Years War, from which Britain emerged as victor in 1763, was disastrous for France and her ally Spain. By the Treaty of Paris, however, the British returned Cuba to Spain in exchange for Florida, and Guadeloupe to France in exchange for Canada. Martinique and St. Lucia were

restored to France, and Britain added Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent and Tobago to her empire. The sugar colonies were important to Britain, for at the peace table it was difficult to decide whether to return the island of Guadeloupe to France or to keep Canada, and whether to return Cuba to Spain or to exchange it for Florida. The decisions to return the sugar islands to France and Spain were brought about partly by pressures put on the British government by influential West Indian planters who did not want added British competition in the sugar trade.

By the War of Independence, France had organized another powerful navy, and when asked by the Americans to join them in 1778 did not hesitate. France was followed into the war against Britain by Spain and the Netherlands, and challenges extended to the West Indies. There were major threats to British interests when French and Spanish fleets were sent to the Caribbean. Islands changed hands during the conflict, and Britain lost several of her Caribbean possessions (in addition to the thirteen American colonies). By 1782 French Admiral de Grasse planned to invade the important British possession, Jamaica. His campaign, however, was eclipsed when a British naval force under Admiral Rodney defeated the French fleet at the Saints, between Dominica and Guadeloupe. This triumph helped Britain regain, at the peace table, all of the West Indian islands she had ever possessed, except St. Lucia and Tobago. Even so, the war undoubtedly was more successful for the Americans, who achieved their independence, and for other European nations who regained some of their lost colonies.

During the eighteenth century, Jamaica and St. Domingue developed into their mother countries' most important colonies. Britain and France jealously protected these dependencies both for their strategic locations and in order to protect profits from sugar. Since sea power was essential to defending islands in the West Indies, Britain kept two permanent squadrons in the Caribbean which sailed north during

hurricane season; one was stationed in Jamaica and the other in the Leeward Islands for terms of two or three years. Additional fleets were sent out during times of crises. France sent new fleets to the West Indies in the spring, or for specific operations, rather than keep permanent squadrons on the station.<sup>8</sup>

West Indian sugar was produced for domestic use in Britain and France, but much was re-exported throughout Europe. France had more fertile, virgin land to cultivate in St. Domingue than the British had in Jamaica, and as the century progressed the French grew and sold larger quantities of high quality sugar at cheaper prices to the European market. The after effects of the American War of Independence adversely affected the sugar economy of the British colonies; Britain's mercantile policy restricted direct trade with the former thirteen colonies, now the United States, upon which they had always depended for provisions and essential items (like wooden staves to make barrels in which to ship the sugar, molasses and rum), while the French government had made colonial trade concessions. The British planters experienced hardships and resented the flourishing French competition. Meanwhile, St. Domingue became the world's premiere sugar producer.

In the eighteenth century the import of African slaves continued in the West Indies, particularly in the French and British islands. The slaves were essential to the sugar economy, and changed the balance of population until the white planters were greatly outnumbered by their forced laborers. Inevitably, slave uprisings erupted.

The next major European event to affect the West Indies was the French Revolution in 1789, which ignited another revolt in St. Domingue. In April 1792 the French Revolutionary Wars commenced and by February 1793 France had declared war on Britain. Strikingly different from the previous wars, this conflict was the first in which France no longer was ruled by a monarchy. A confusing succession of decrees from the unsettled government of the mother country, regarding the

recognition of equality in St. Domingue for free people of color (called *mulattoes*), inspired disloyalty to France among wealthy planters in the French West Indies. Many of these planters sought to shift the loyalty of the French colonies to Britain because the British attitude would perpetuate their rigidly-stratified society and slave-based plantation system. Conversely, the idea of social equality with whites initially aroused the mulattoes to the aid of France. It was, however, the mass and fervor of St. Domingue's slave population, who were promised emancipation, that eventually saved the colony for the French Republic. In these violent times, French officials and naval fleets were faced with divided and shifting allegiances in the French West Indies, particularly in St. Domingue. Meanwhile, British naval forces based in Jamaica and the Lesser Antilles launched attacks on French islands and patrolled the Caribbean in search of French prizes.

In St. Domingue the slaves sided with the French Republic against British troops and French planters. In 1798 after almost five years of war, complicated by disease, the British retreated from St. Domingue having been defeated largely by the slaves and yellow fever. The slave-born leader Toussaint L'Ouverture was loyal to France, but later informed Napoleon that the people of the French colony would die to maintain the freedom they had gained with the abolition of slavery. Regardless, Napoleon abandoned the principles of the French Revolution and tried to restore slavery and the slave trade to St. Domingue. His troops captured Toussaint and took him to France where he died in 1803. But the French, like the British, were defeated. On 1 January 1804 the region was declared a republic under its original Indian name, Haiti.

### **Summary**

By the end of the eighteenth century, the West Indies had been the seat of European rivalry in excess of three hundred years. Spain, the Netherlands, Britain and France had vied for land and commerce by establishing trade-links, promoting colonization and fighting wars.

Britain and France, having emerged as the most powerful nations with claims in the region, protected their interests with naval strength. The century was marked by successive conflicts, and prior to the French Revolutionary Wars challenges in the Caribbean had been decided between European powers by naval might. At the end of the century, however, naval power alone would not ensure European control of the West Indies.



## Footnotes for Chapter II.

1. Data presented in this section are compiled from general reference sources and the following books, to which the reader is referred for additional information: Keith Feiling, *A History of England* ([London?], Book Club Associates, 1974); William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990); Denis Richards, *An Illustrated History of Modern Europe 1789-1984* (Harlow, Longman Group U.K., Ltd., 1974); Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy, The Ships, Men and Organization 1793-1815* (London, Conway Maritime Press, Ltd., 1989).

2. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 11; Michael Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy 1793-1815* (London, George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1960), 15-17. British scholars have called the period between 1793-1815 *The Great War* because during this period Britain and France were engaged in almost continuous warfare.

3. Data presented in this section are compiled from general reference sources and the following books, to which the reader is referred for additional information: Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969* (London, Andre Deutsch, Ltd., 1989); Sir Alan Burns, *History of the British West Indies* (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1954); Captain Thomas Southey, *A Chronological History of the West Indies*, III (London, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968; reprint of the original edition: London, 1827); F.R. Augier, S.C. Gordon, D.G. Hall and M. Reckord, *The Making of the West Indies* (Trinidad and Jamaica, Longman Caribbean, Ltd., 1990); Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies 1739-1763* (London, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1963); Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (London, W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1973); George Wilson Bridges, *The Annals of Jamaica*, II (London, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968; reprint of the original edition: London, 1828); Clinton V. Black, *The Story of Jamaica from Prehistory to Present* (London, Collins, 1965); Sir James Barskett, *History of the Island of St. Domingo: From Its First Discovery by Columbus to the Present Period* (London, Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1972; reprint of the original edition: London, 1818).

4. Williams, *Columbus to Castro*, 121.

5. Placement of ocean currents in Figures 4 and 5 are based on: Paul Pinet, *Acetates to Accompany Oceanography: An Introduction to the Planet's Oceans* (New York, West Publishing Company, 1992), Acetate 8.

6. Roger C. Smith, 'Treasure Ships of the Spanish Main: The Iberian-American Maritime Empires', in George F. Bass, ed., *Ships and Shipwrecks of the Americas* (London, Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1988), 85.

7. Since 1707 the name Great Britain has applied politically to England, Scotland and Wales.

8. Augier, et al., *West Indies*, 98-101.

## CHAPTER III

### *L'INCONSTANTE*

The Seven Years War largely destroyed the French fleet, and at its close, France embarked upon a massive program of naval expansion and re-equipment.<sup>1</sup> New scientific academies of naval architecture were created, a network of modern dockyards was established, and the country's best timber resources were reserved for the creation of a new French Navy.<sup>2</sup> The preeminent French naval scholar Jean Boudriot has stated that French naval architecture reached its pinnacle at about the time of the American War of Independence and that the era marked the last time that French naval strength equalled that of England.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the warships of the 1780s are representative of the shipbuilding achievements of France at the height of eighteenth-century French naval design. Ordered built by King Louis XVI and laid down in 1789, *l'Inconstante* was constructed according to a plan that was developed during this epoch.<sup>4</sup> She was a 12-pounder frigate, one of several vessel-types that made up the French Navy. To understand her place among the late eighteenth-century warships of France and Britain, it is helpful to view the basic anatomy of both navies.

#### **Ships and Navies**

Between 1793 and 1815, Great Britain and France were engaged in twenty-two years of virtually continuous struggle. Naval historian Brian Lavery points out that the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars were the last major wars to be fought by sailing navies.<sup>5</sup> It was the era in which heavily armed wooden sailing ships reached their zenith as weapons, particularly when organized in great lines of battle at sea. On the eve of the French Revolution, Great Britain and France had the world's supreme fighting navies, and France undoubtedly had many of the world's finest ships. However, the 1789 Revolution resulted in massive social, economic and military upheavals

which adversely affected the substance and organization of the French Navy, leaving it ill prepared for war in 1793. The British Navy, on the other hand, was perhaps never more ready for action.<sup>6</sup>

During the European conflicts of the late eighteenth century, each nation made use of ships captured from the naval and merchant fleets of its enemies, as had been the wartime practice for hundreds of years. Lavery emphasizes that the principal European powers shared common shipbuilding technologies which made it possible to assimilate foreign ships of comparable design and purpose into their own navies.<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that the French did not rely heavily on the influence of foreign vessels for the design of their own ships.<sup>8</sup> They depended almost exclusively upon French shipwrights who had received formal scientific training at the special schools of Paris.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, the British frequently sought knowledge about foreign ships and used the data to further develop their own shipbuilding efforts.<sup>10</sup> They conducted espionage and employed foreign designers (including several notable Royalist French shipwrights after the eruption of the French Revolution), but obtained their primary intelligence from captured French, Dutch, Spanish, Danish and American ships which were studied, and from which draughts were made, sometimes to be directly copied. Specifically, the British made extensive use of French prize ships to improve hull design significantly throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. However, not all innovations were inspired by foreign achievements. The British also generated original ideas and developed important technologies and designs, among which was the use of copper sheathing to increase speed and reduce hull maintenance for wooden ships, a practice which became widely adopted for naval and merchant vessels, including those of France.<sup>11</sup>

While many people assume that the French designed better ships than the British, Lavery concludes that each country built its ships for its own use, and thus for somewhat different purposes than the

other. French ships were often more lightly constructed than their British counterparts for increased speed in order to carry out timely expeditions in specific campaigns, whereas British ships were more heavily built for overall strength to achieve dominance and control of the seas, vital needs for an island nation.<sup>12</sup>

### French Ships

During the 1780s, and throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the French Navy was comprised of the following types of vessels. The two-decker and three-decker warships which were large enough and sufficiently strong to form part of the line of battle in major fleet actions were called *ships-of-the-line*. The largest was the three-decker of 110 or 120 guns which was usually commanded by an Admiral. Its primary ordnance was supported on three separate, unbroken decks, with additional guns on the forecastle and quarterdeck. Such ships had thicker and higher sides than two-deckers and carried more guns than any other vessels in the French Navy, qualities that were advantageous for close combat, but which made them less stable sailers than their smaller counterparts.

The standard two-deckers were built to carry either 80 or 74 guns, the main ordnance being located on two continuous decks with secondary guns on the forecastle and quarterdeck. The 80-gun ship was constructed with larger timbers and was more heavily armed than the ship of 74 guns, but the 74-gun ship became widely recognized for its balance of heavy broadside weight and good sailing ability.<sup>13</sup> It carried 36-pounder cannons on the gundeck (that is, guns firing 36-pound iron shot), 18-pounder cannons on the upper deck, and 8-pounder cannons on the forecastle and quarterdeck.<sup>14</sup> According to Jean Boudriot, the 74-gun ship "formed the backbone of the fleets, and thus the maritime power of nations".<sup>15</sup>

The 64-gun ship was also a two-decker but it was weak for the line of battle, and although such ships were still present in the

French Navy at the close of the eighteenth-century, they ceased to be built shortly after the American War of Independence. The 50-gun ship was also a two-decker, but its design had become obsolete as it was clearly too small for the line of battle.<sup>16</sup>

Smaller than the ships-of-the-line were the 8-, 12- and 18-pounder frigates which were medium sized warships designed for speed. The numerical designation indicated the size of the ordnance mounted on the gundeck. They were used chiefly for reconnaissance missions, patrolling cruises and as convoy escorts. Frigates carried their primary ordnance on a single unbroken gundeck, and the secondary armament on the forecastle and quarterdeck. By the 1780s the 8-pounder was no longer being built while the 12-pounder was renowned as the ideal size; during the Revolutionary Wars, the 12-pounder continued to be used, but by the Napoleonic Wars the more powerful 18-pounder frigate became the standard.<sup>17</sup>

A French corvette was any vessel smaller than a frigate. The sloop-of-war carried but a single tier of guns on its open main deck. Smaller than the ship-rigged vessels mentioned above (which carried three masts and square sails), were lightly-armed craft with two masts that commonly were identified by rig as snow, brig, and schooner, as well as those with a single mast classified as cutter or lugger. Other naval craft included gunboats, storeships, and transports.<sup>18</sup> At the onset of the Revolutionary Wars in 1792, there were 83 ships-of-the-line and 77 frigates in a French Navy of 241 ships and vessels.<sup>19</sup>

### British Ships

After the French, Spanish and Dutch joined the American War of Independence, Britain's naval strength and superiority were severely challenged. In response, a substantial shipbuilding program was undertaken which did not reach fruition until after the war ended in 1783, but which amply prepared Britain for the French Revolutionary Wars which would be ignited within the decade.<sup>20</sup>

At the commencement of the British involvement in the conflicts in 1793, the Royal Navy was made up of 498 ships and vessels.<sup>21</sup> For the major vessels that carried at least 20 guns, Britain had developed a classification scheme of six 'rates'. The scale was revised for ships built after 1792, but the Navy was composed of ships that were built both before and after that date.<sup>22</sup> While the system was used to define the numbers of officers assigned to various ships, as well as their pay scales, the rating system also suggested the size of a ship and its role or function.

First, second and third rate ships were ships-of-the-line, and although the fourth rate ship was officially considered within this class, it had become largely obsolete by 1793. First rate ships were three-deckers which carried 100 or more guns; the primary ordnance was located on three unbroken decks and the secondary artillery was located on the forecastle and quarterdeck. A first rate ship carried guns that generally ranged from 42- or 32-pounders to 12-pounders; it was commanded by an Admiral and also contained his staff. Second rate ships were also three-deckers, but they carried from 90 to 98 guns usually ranging from 32-pounders to 12-pounders. Third rate ships compared somewhat to the French two-deckers of 80, 74, and 64 guns, and mounted ordnance that varied from 32- to 6-pounders. Like the French ship of 74 guns, the British 74-gun ship was extremely successful because it embodied the perfect balance of good sailing ability, broadside strength and seaworthiness.

Fourth rate ships were two-deckers that mounted between 60 and 50 guns ranging from 24-pounders to 6-pounders, but the Royal Navy had few of these vessels. Fifth rate ships consisted of essentially outdated 44-gun two-deckers mounting ordnance that ranged from 18-pounders to 6-pounders, and frigates of between 32 and 40 guns that mounted ordnance ranging from 18-pounders to 6-pounders.<sup>23</sup> Frigates served as reconnaissance vessels for the fleet as well as cruisers, convoy

escorts and commerce raiders. Brian Lavery suggests that frigates were the most glamorous ships in the Navy because they carried significant gun power, and yet were fast enough to evade larger enemies; these ships were frequently given independent missions and often fought single ship actions against foreign frigates and privateers.<sup>24</sup> Sixth rates, the largest usually being 28-gun frigates, were the smallest rated vessels mounting between 20 and 30 guns. Unrated vessels included sloops that were ship-rigged with three masts and square sails, as well as small craft identified by rig or purpose as brigs, schooners, cutters, transports, bomb vessels and gunboats.<sup>25</sup>

In summary, the Royal Navy and the French Navy shared common shipbuilding technologies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but each country designed its ships for specific, and slightly different, functions. Nonetheless, variations in hull design, rigging and armament were not pronounced, and captured French and British ships were readily assimilated into the victor's fleet.

### **The 12-Pounder Frigate**

*L'Inconstante* was a French 12-pounder frigate mounting 40 guns, one of the medium sized warships designed for speed and used to escort convoys, to patrol and to conduct reconnaissance missions.<sup>26</sup> The ship was constructed at Rochefort, one of France's three great Royal Dockyards where most of the French Navy's warships were built. The other principal dockyards were at Brest and Toulon, although some warships were also produced at L'Orient (Figure 6). Other vessels, including frigates, corvettes and smaller craft, also were built in the ports of Bayonne, Bordeaux, Marseille, Nantes, Le Havre, St-Malo and Dunkirk.<sup>27</sup> Located up the River Charente and adjacent to the anchorages of Aix and Basque Roads, protected by the islands of Ré and Oléron, Rochefort was a principal base on the Atlantic coast of France. It was established by Jean-Baptiste Colbert in the late seventeenth century. Rochefort was one of Europe's few planned dockyard towns with complete

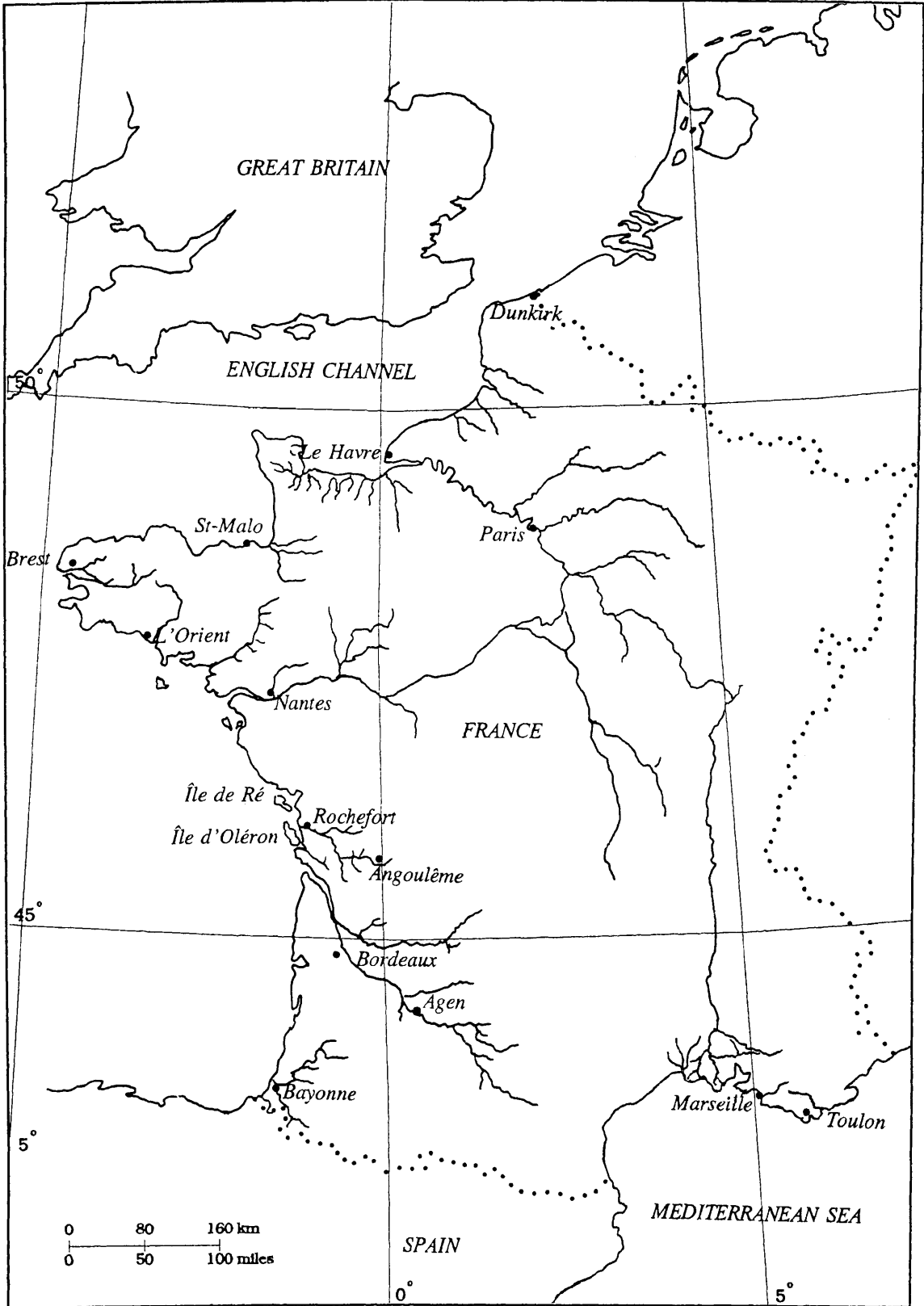


Figure 6. Late Eighteenth-Century France (drawn by R.L. Craig).



facilities.<sup>28</sup>

During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the term *frégate* was used in France to describe several types of armed vessels. One was a small two-decked ship; another was the *frégate légères*, which in 1660 carried eight to sixteen 3- to 4-pounder cannons on a single deck which was covered at the extremities with a small forecastle and quarterdeck.<sup>29</sup> Jean Boudriot suggests that the *frégate moderne* which emerged in the mid-eighteenth century was descended from the latter type of craft, and in some ways was born with the construction of *la Médée* in 1741; this frigate supported its primary ordnance of twenty-six 8-pounder cannons on a single deck and also had a small forecastle and a quarterdeck. The 12-pounder frigate was an adaptation of the 8-pounder vessel, but it carried heavier ordnance which made it stronger and more forceful; the first such frigate to be constructed was *l'Hermione* which was built in the dockyards of Rochefort in 1748 by the noted shipwright Morineau. The 8-pounder frigate continued to be built until about 1774 and the 12-pounder frigate was constructed until 1798, which was in turn superseded by the more powerful 18-pounder frigate.<sup>30</sup>

In the 50 years between 1748 and 1798, more than one hundred 12-pounder frigates were built in France. Boudriot has prepared a chart which includes information about 104 of these frigates. The locations of construction are known for 100 of the ships. The chart is based on evidence that is currently available, and may not be entirely complete.<sup>31</sup> Twenty-one 12-pounder frigates were built at Rochefort, 19 at Toulon, 16 at St-Malo, ten at Le Havre, nine at Brest, nine at L'Orient, seven at Nantes, five at Bordeaux and four at Bayonne. Forty-nine of these frigates were therefore built at the three major ports; the greatest number were launched at Rochefort, closely followed by those at Toulon. The smaller quantity of frigates constructed at Brest can be attributed to the fact that a large percentage of the Navy's ships-of-the-line were built in the dockyards of the country's

largest port. The remaining fifty-one 12-pounder frigates were built at the six secondary ports.

It appears that construction of 12-pounder frigates over the latter half of the eighteenth century occurred in clusters, especially around times of war. Before, during and just after the conclusion of the Seven Years War (1756-63) France built 23 such frigates; most were constructed at the conclusion of the conflict, suggesting that their superiority over the more common 8-pounder vessels was recognized during the war. In the years between 1768 and 1776 there was a lull in construction, but the American War of Independence prompted a surge in shipbuilding. During the conflict, forty-five 12-pounder frigates were constructed, suggesting their importance. Nine others were laid down in the dockyards in the post-war period, in the years between 1784 to 1786.

*L'Inconstante* was among nine frigates that were placed under construction between 1788 and 1790, the volatile era prior to, during and immediately after the 1789 Revolution in France. No frigates were laid down in 1791 or 1792, but during the early years of the Revolutionary Wars between 1793 and 1795, fourteen 12-pounders were started in the dockyards. The building of the last four 12-pounder frigates by the French Navy commenced between 1797 and 1798, several years before the conclusion of the French Revolutionary Wars in 1802. The 12-pounder frigate had proved its worth in the Seven Years War and was highly celebrated in the American War of Independence. In 1786 there were still 40 such vessels in the French Navy as compared to twenty of the newer 18-pounders. Nonetheless, the more powerful 18-pounder frigate gained preeminence during the French Revolutionary Wars and became the standard frigate of the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>32</sup>

During the second half of the eighteenth century, 12-pounder frigates changed relatively little and most shared common attributes, although they were built to draughts designed by at least twenty-one

different shipwrights.<sup>33</sup> The primary differences between frigates were in the underwater lines.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, although no surviving representations of *l'Inconstante* have been found, a series of engravings of 12-pounder frigates of the American War of Independence era by Pierre Ozanne are reliable illustrations of the sails, rigging and above-the-waterline features of French 12-pounder frigates (Figures 7-12). These engravings depict the frigate from several perspectives on differing tacks in various winds.<sup>35</sup>

According to naval scholars Jean Boudriot and David H. Roberts, *l'Inconstante* was built according to a design prepared by Jean Denis Chevillard, who was called *the Younger* to differentiate him from his elder brother Henri Chevillard, who was called *the Elder*. Born on 9 October 1738, Chevillard the Younger became an eminent designer-shipwright whose work contributed to the superb quality of the late eighteenth-century French Navy's ships. His career began in July 1755 when he entered the Navy as *Élève-constructeur* (Student Shipwright). In May 1757 he was promoted to *Sous-constructeur* (Assistant) and in April 1765 after the introduction of the *Regulations of 1765* his title became *Sous-ingénieur-constructeur* (Under Shipwright). By 1766 he was promoted to *Ingénieur-constructeur-ordinaire* (Ordinary Assistant). In July 1781 he became *Ingénieur-constructeur en Chef* (Master Shipwright) at the Rochefort Dockyard, a post that he held between 1781 and 1786, and again between 1792 and 1795 when he ceased to work. Jean Denis Chevillard died on 31 March 1804.<sup>36</sup>

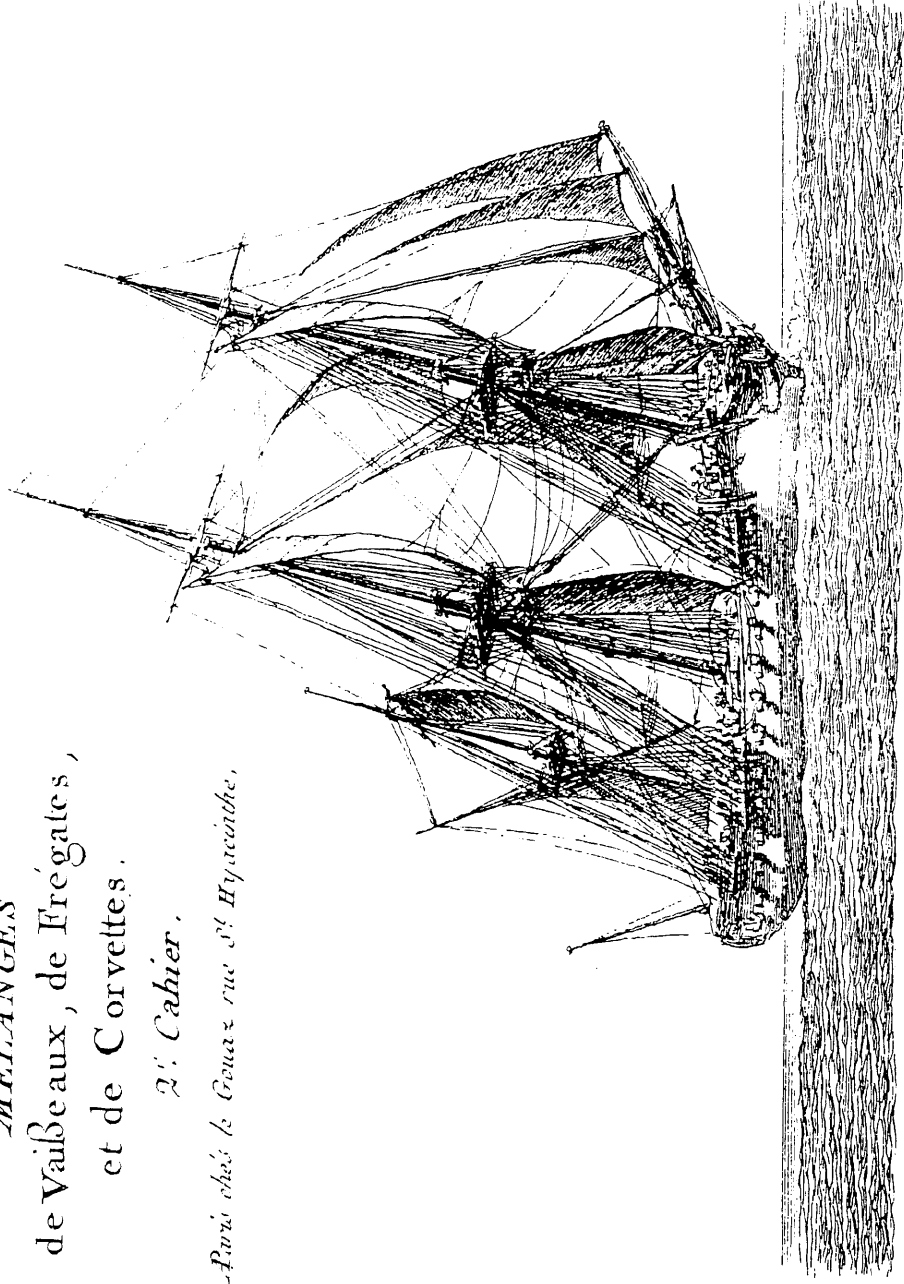
A number of ships were constructed at the Rochefort Dockyard according to the designs of Chevillard the Younger, and it is believed that eight of nine 12-pounder frigates whose construction began between 1777 and 1789 were fashioned according to identical draughts, with the following principal dimensions: length 136 *pieds* (44.2 m), breadth 34.6 *pieds* (11.24 m), and depth in hold 17.6 *pieds* (5.72 m).<sup>37</sup> This is fortuitous because the plans for *l'Inconstante* have been either lost or

B

*MELANGES*  
de Vaïseaux, de Frégates,  
et de Corvettes.

2.<sup>e</sup> Cahier.

*Paris chez le Graveur rue St. Hyacinthe,*



*Frégate vue par le Boussoir de Tribord au plus près* P. O

Figure 7. Frigate Seen from the Starboard Bow Close-Hauled (engraving by P. Ozanne, courtesy of Jean Boudriot).

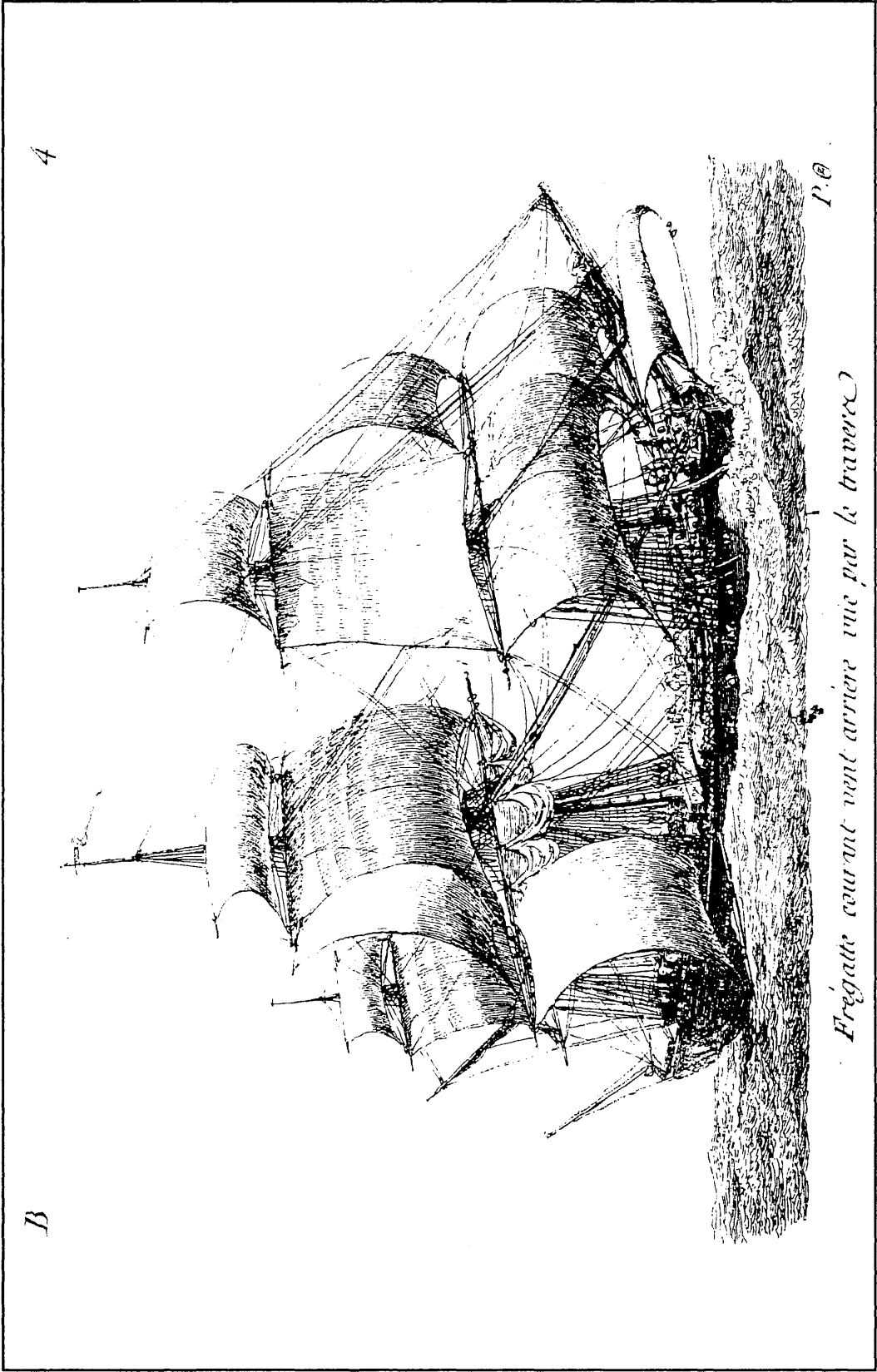
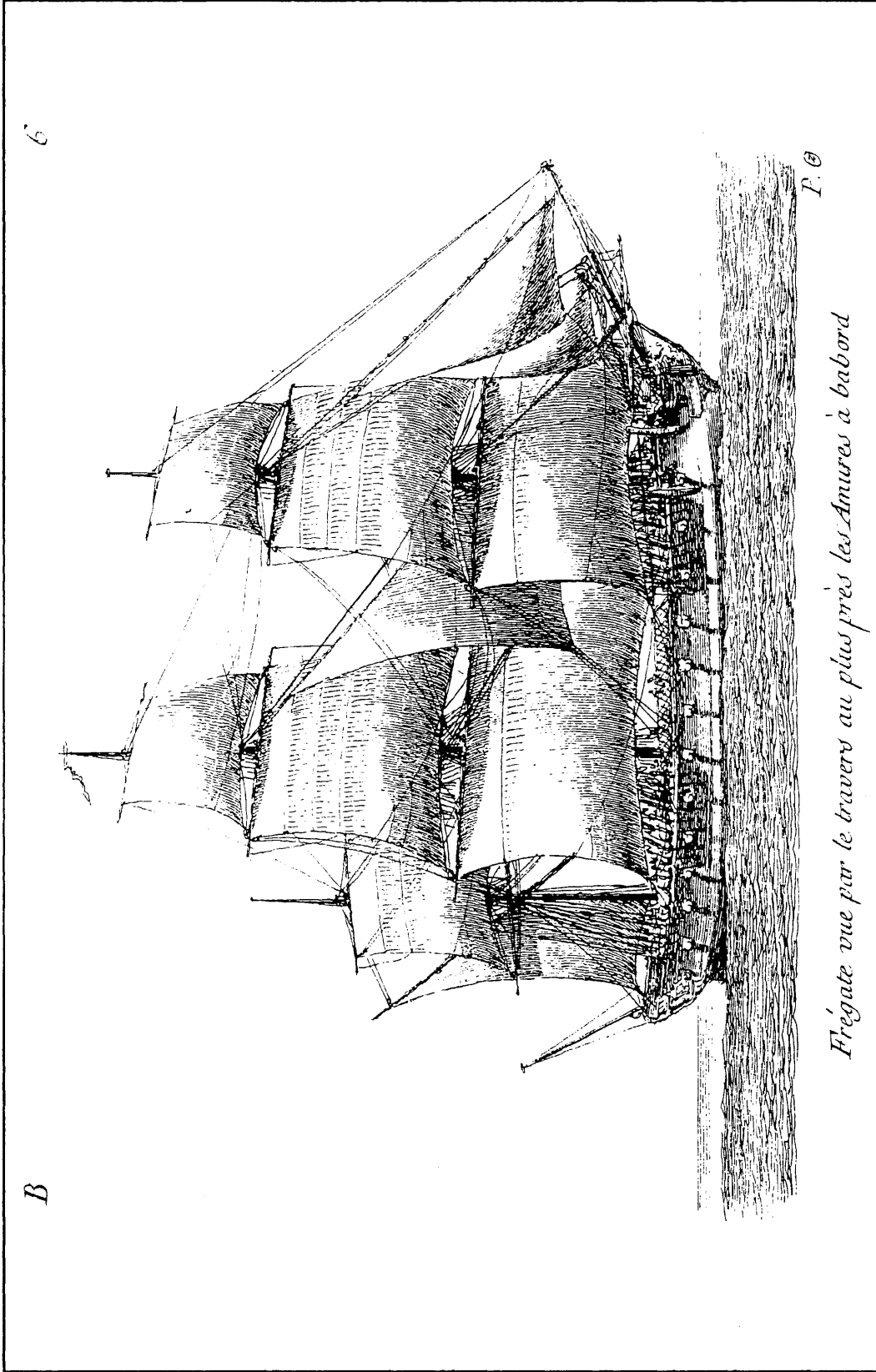
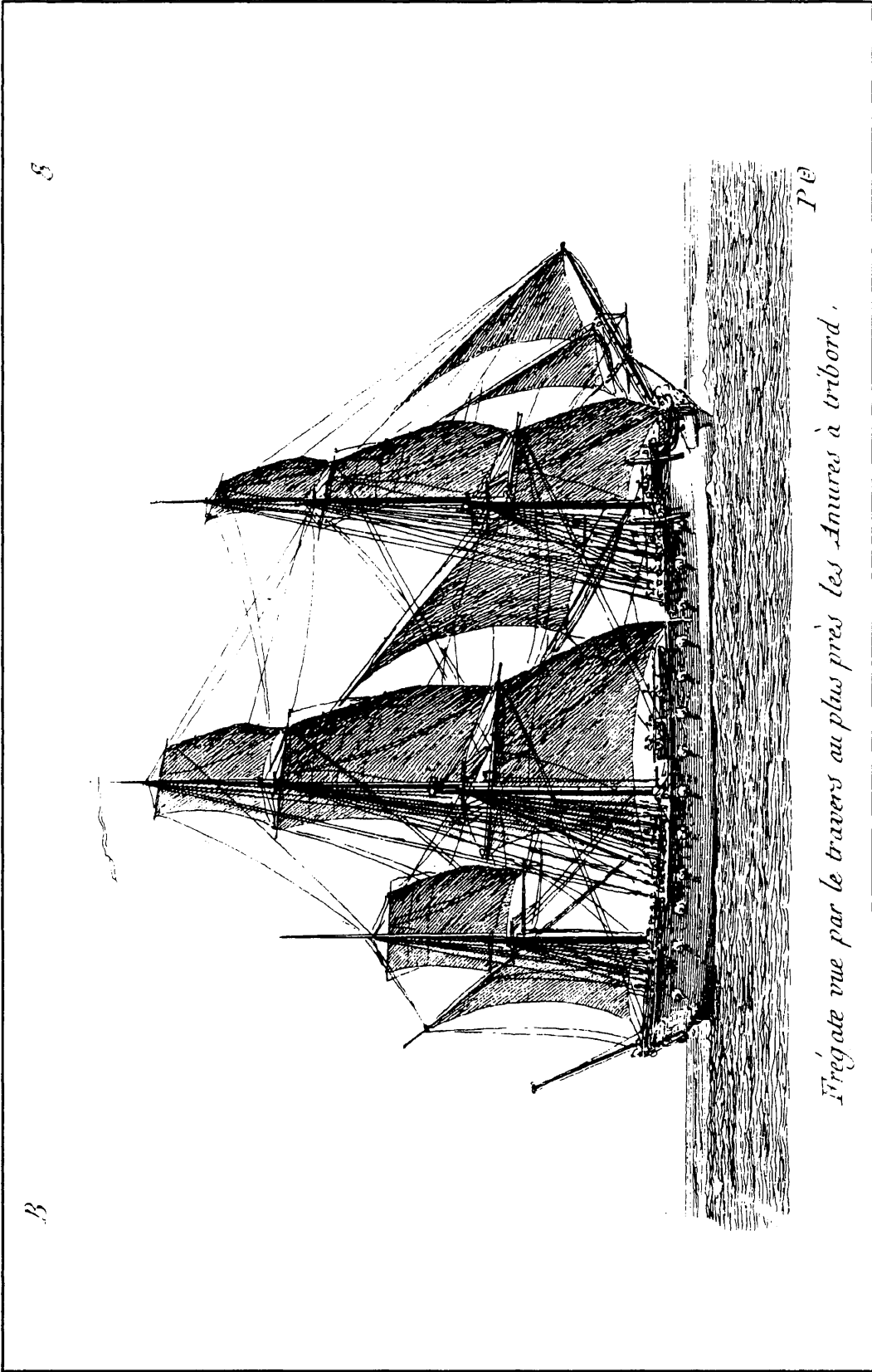


Figure 8. Frigate Running with Wind Astern Seen from Abeam (engraving by P. Ozanne, courtesy of Jean Boudriot).



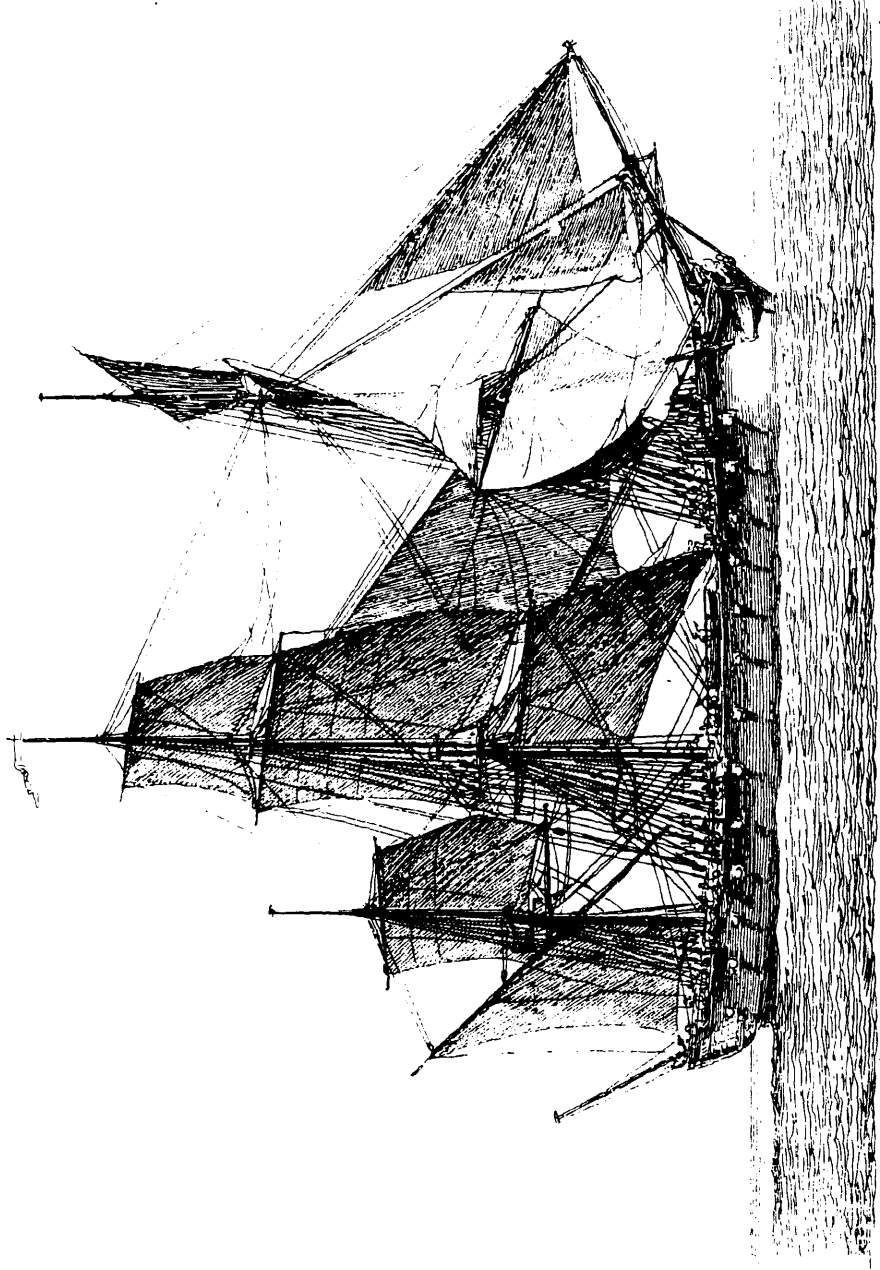
*Frégate vue par le travers au plus près les Amures à babord*

Figure 9. Frigate Seen from Abeam Close-Hauled with Sheets to Port (engraving by P. Ozanne, courtesy of Jean Boudriot).



*Frigate vue par le travers au plus près les Anures à tribord.*

Figure 10. Frigate Seen from Abeam Close-Hauled with Sheets to Starboard (engraving by P. Ozanne, courtesy of Jean Boudriot).



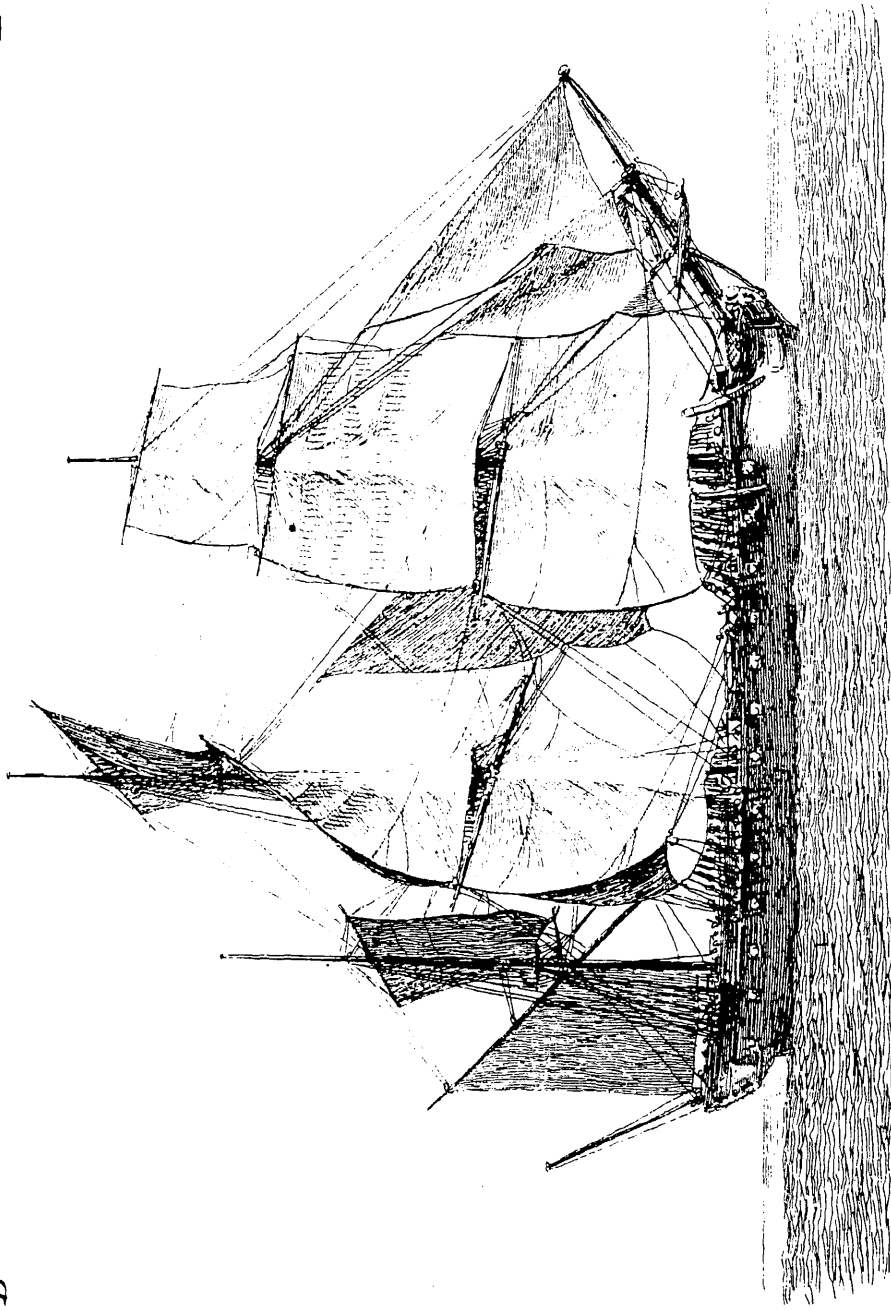
*l'égate vue par le travers virant vent devant déchargeant devant.*  
P. Ozanne

Figure 11. Frigate Seen from Abeam Turning into the Wind, Tacking Forward (engraving by P. Ozanne, courtesy of Jean Boudriot).



B

u



*Frigate vue par le travers v'ant vent devant déchargeant derrière . PΘ*

Figure 12. Frigate Seen from Abeam Turning into the Wind, Tacking Aft (engraving by P. Ozanne, courtesy of Jean Boudriot).

destroyed, while draughts for several sister ships have survived and are housed in various French and British archives. The seven frigates considered to be of the same design as *l'Inconstante* (under construction 1789/launched 1790) are *la Charmante* (under construction 1777/launched 1777), *la Junon* (under construction 1777/launched 1778), *la Tourtereau* (under construction 1782), *l'Atalante* (under construction 1784), *la Gracieuse* (under construction 1785/launched 1787), *la Fraternité* (under construction 1788 as *l'Aglaé*/launched 1791), and *l'Hélène* (under construction 1789/launched 1791). The ninth frigate designed by Chevillard the Younger, *l'Aurore* (under construction 1781), had slightly smaller dimensions than the others.<sup>38</sup>

*La Gracieuse* was laid down in 1785 and *l'Inconstante* in 1789. Because of the similarities in dimensions between the two vessels, it may be assumed that they were built according to the same draught by Chevillard the Younger. Like the plans of *l'Inconstante*, however, the original draughts for *la Gracieuse* are lost or have not survived.<sup>39</sup> *La Gracieuse*, renamed *l'Unité* during the French Revolution, was captured by the British in 1796. Subsequently, lines were taken off the frigate by the Royal Navy, and these are currently preserved in the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, London (Figures 13-15).<sup>40</sup> It is fortunate that these draughts exist, for it can be assumed that *l'Inconstante* conformed largely to the same plans as *l'Unité*, ex-*Gracieuse*. Additional details of construction for *la Gracieuse*, notably the spar dimensions, are preserved in the Rochefort Archives, and presumably these also apply for *l'Inconstante*. In these documents the excellent sailing characteristics of *la Gracieuse* are mentioned. It is noteworthy that the frigate could achieve speeds of up to 14 knots in strong winds. It is possible that *l'Inconstante* could do the same.<sup>41</sup>

Of the eight sister 12-pounder frigates designed by Chevillard the Younger, some were captured by the British and some were shipwrecked. Five had careers in the French Navy of under five years

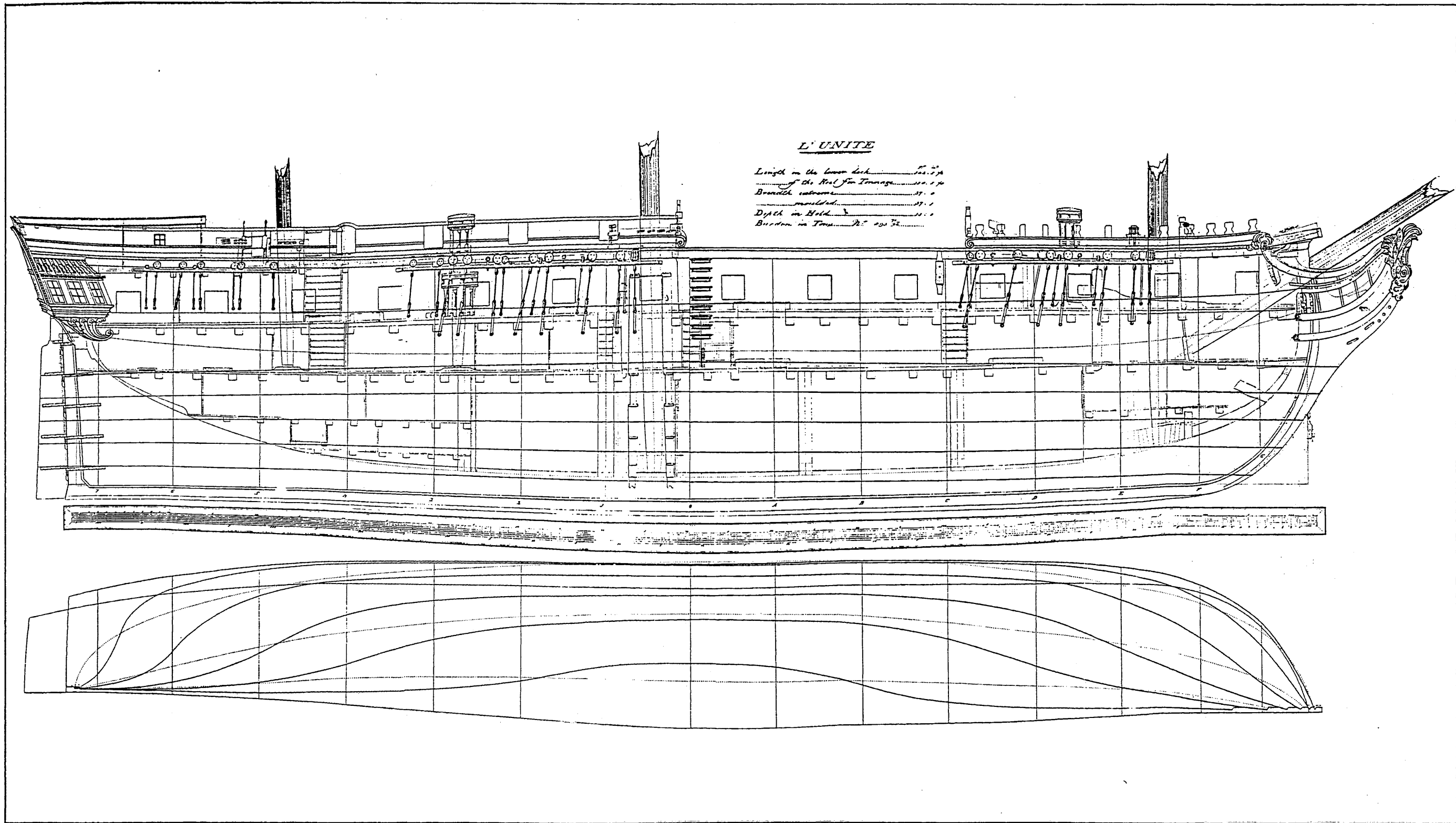


Figure 13. *L'Unité*, Profile, as Taken (courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, London).

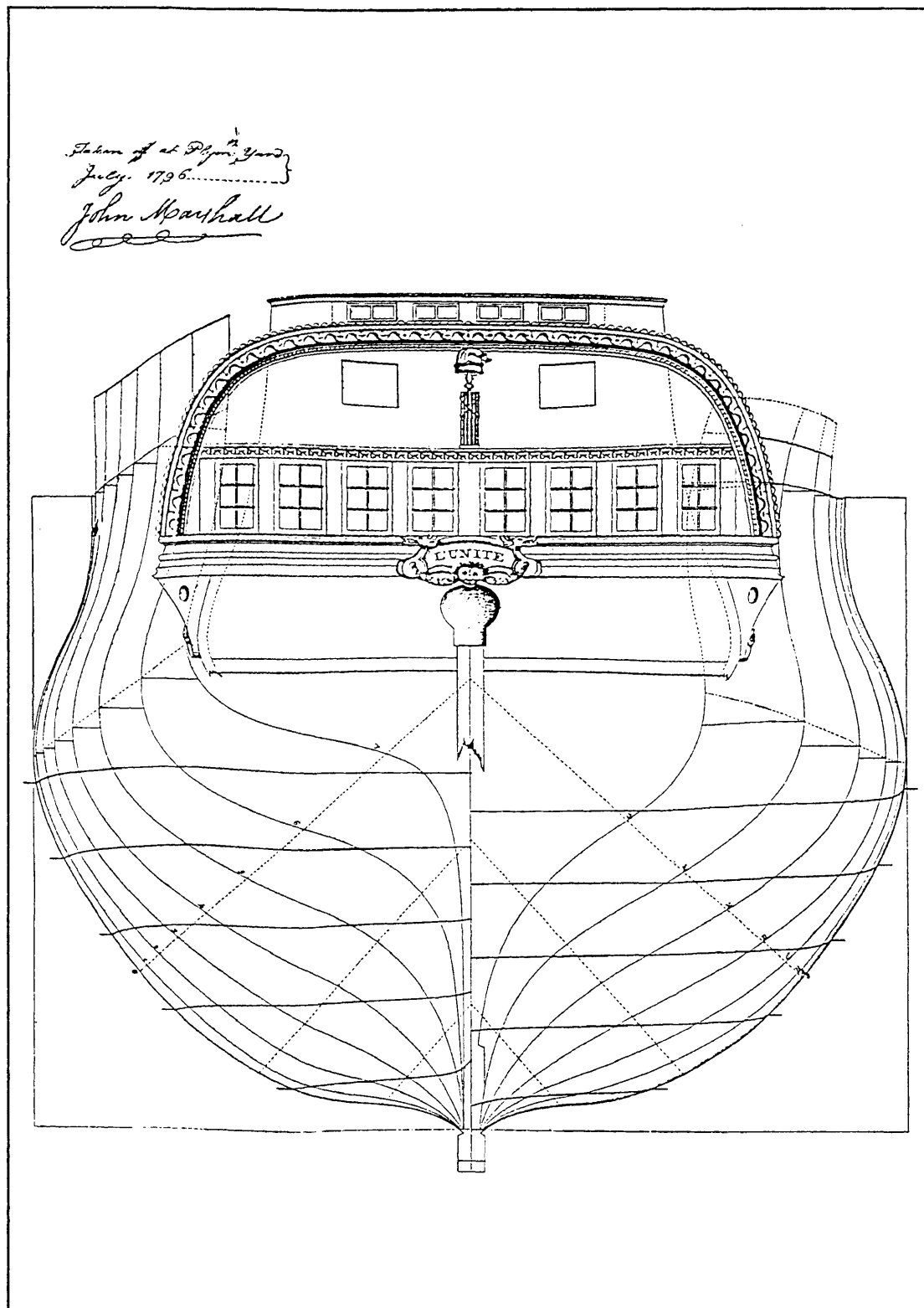


Figure 14. *L'Unité*, Stern, as Taken (courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, London).

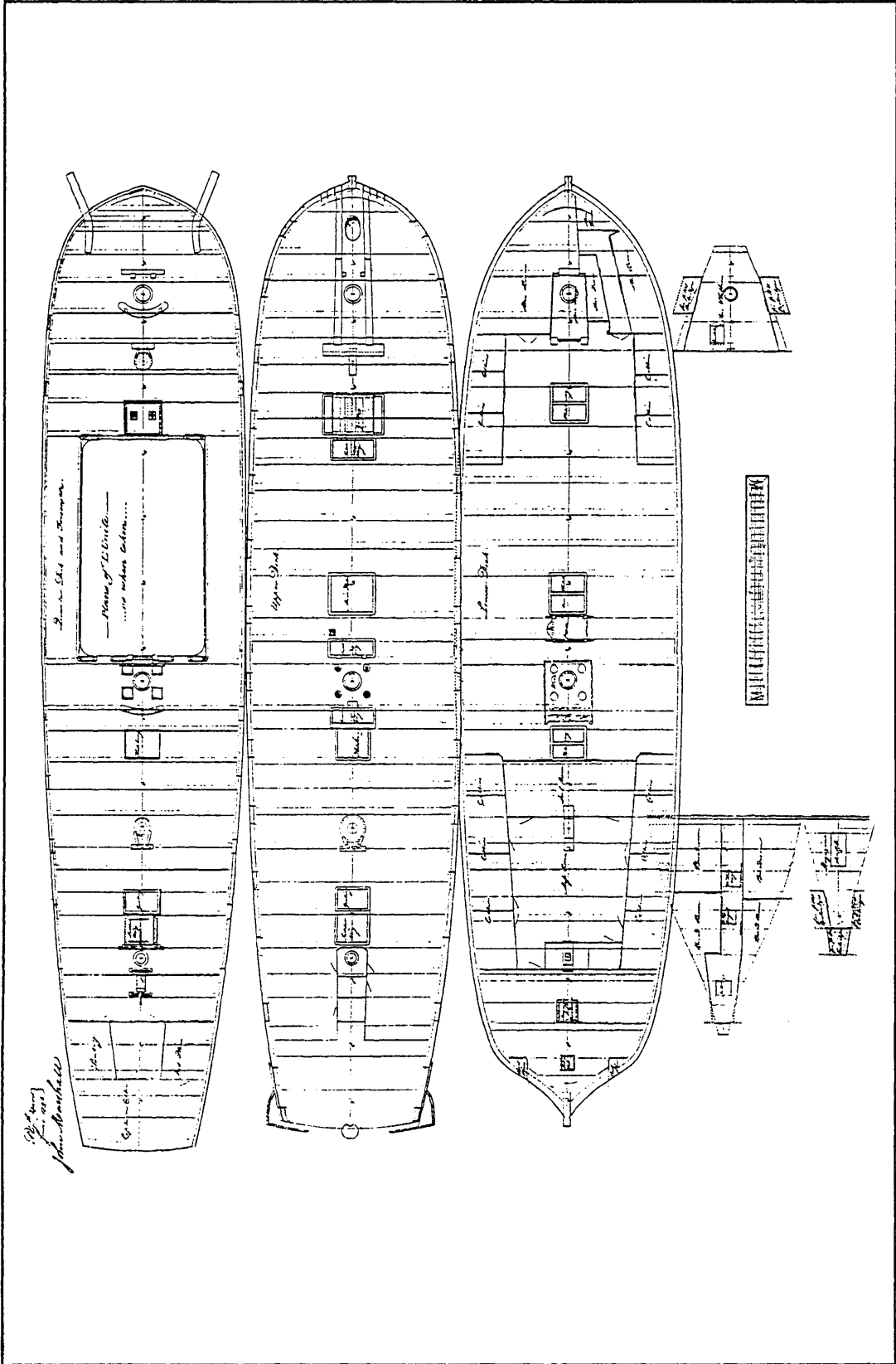


Figure 15. L'Unité, Decks, as Taken (courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, London).

from the date they were placed under construction to the date they were struck from the Navy List. The remaining three served France for between ten and 15 years.<sup>42</sup> *La Charmante* and *la Junon*, both built at Rochefort during the American War of Independence, experienced campaigns in the West Indies during their short careers. Each served France well in the conflict and each was involved in captures of British ships, but both frigates met untimely ends as shipwrecks. *La Charmante* wrecked in Europe in March 1780 while en route from L'Orient to Brest; she was cast upon the rocks of the Chaussée de Sein in a strong wind, with the loss of many of her crew. *La Junon* was wrecked on 11 October 1780 in the West Indies when she was hurled upon the coast of the island of St. Vincent in a hurricane, but her crew was saved.<sup>43</sup> *L'Inconstante* was captured in 1793 and subsequently was wrecked as a British ship in 1794 in the Cayman Islands, and *l'Unité*, ex-*Gracieuse*, was captured by the British in 1796. The other four 12-pounder frigates built to the design of Chevillard the Younger were struck off the French Navy List in the following years: *la Tourtereau* in 1787; *l'Atalante* in 1797; *la Fraternité* in 1802; and *l'Hélène* in 1793.<sup>44</sup>

### **Construction and Outfitting**

In the years between 1788 and 1789, directions were given for seven 12-pounder frigates to be built in the Royal Dockyards of France. Those to be built at Rochefort included *l'Aglaé* to draughts by Duhamel (the name seems later to have been changed to *la Fraternité* and the plans altered to those of Chevillard the Younger), *l'Embuscade* to plans of Vial du Clairbois, and *l'Hélène* and *l'Inconstante* to the draughts of Chevillard the Younger. *La Fidèle* was to be built at Le Havre to plans of Forfait; *la Prudente* at L'Orient to plans of Segondat; and *la Topaz* at Toulon to drawings by J.M.B. Coulomb. In the year following the 1789 French Revolution, only two frigates were ordered for construction; *la Fortunée* was to be built at Le Havre to plans of

Forfait, and *la Sémillante* at L'Orient to draughts of Pénetreau.<sup>45</sup> However, between 1791 and 1792 no additional 12-pounder frigates were requested and it is likely that this can be attributed in part to the unsettled political and social state of France.

The focus of the present study is *l'Inconstante* which was ordered and built at a momentous time in history, as her story begins only four months before the start of the French Revolution. Archival sources provide a brief and fragmented, but nonetheless important account of the progress of the frigate's construction at Rochefort. Following, in near chronological order, is information from these documents which provides insight into the workings of the dockyard and the building of the frigate.<sup>46</sup>

*L'Inconstante* was first referred to by name in the beginning of the year 1789. According to instructions in a letter of 14 March 1789 from M. le Comte de La Luzerne (of the central Navy Administration in Versailles) to M.M. le Comte de Vaudreuil and de La Grandville (principals at Rochefort), and transmitted at the Rochefort Dockyard, two 12-pounder frigates that had been ordered were to be called *l'Hélène* and *l'Inconstante* by orders of King Louis XVI (Figure 16).<sup>47</sup>

Rochefort operated in an organized fashion. Inventories were periodically taken to assess quantities of supplies and equipment on hand in the warehouses and on ships in the port, and to determine what items were required to complete the numerous building and repair projects that were undertaken simultaneously. One such summary of the articles needed to complete and equip the ships under construction and repair at the dockyard, as compared to the existing items in the *Magasin Général*, was taken on 1 May 1789 shortly before *l'Inconstante* was laid down. The inventory revealed that at that time there were more shortages than excesses in the list of specific commodities which included copper sheathing, copper nails for sheathing, bars of copper, launches and smaller boats, masts and spars, canvas for sails, cordage,

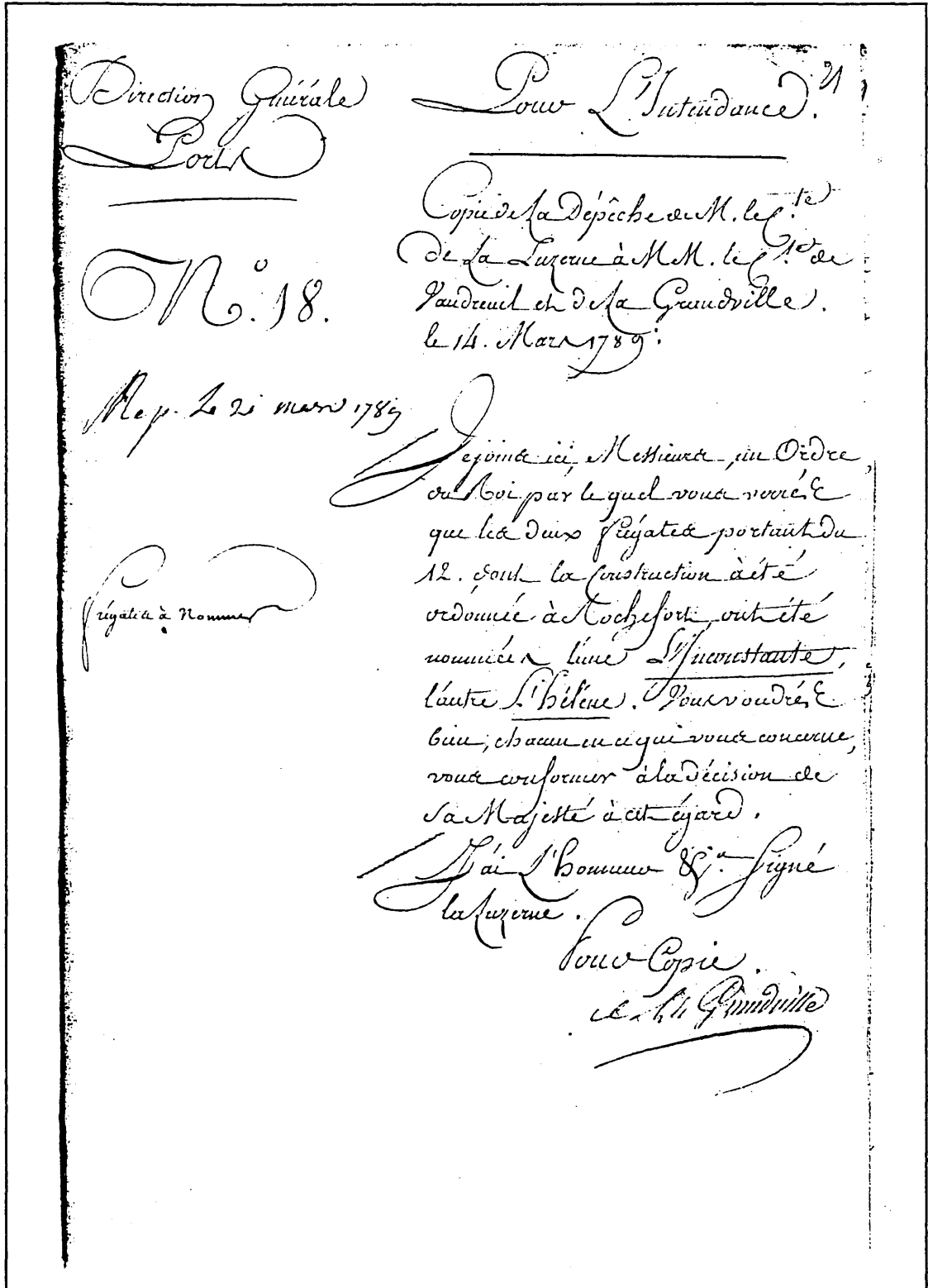


Figure 16. *L'Inconstante* and *L'Hélène* Are Named by Order of King Louis XVI (courtesy of the Archives du Port de Rochefort, Rochefort).



anchors and barrels.<sup>48</sup>

The earliest clue to the actual commencement of work on *l'Inconstante* was included in a letter sent to La Grandville from La Luzerne dated 16 May 1789. In the dispatch, La Luzerne confirmed that an estimate of labor costs, at 5,900 *livres* for the first phase of the construction of *l'Inconstante*, had been reviewed by the Naval Council and found to be reasonable for the King's interests (it is assumed that an abbreviation for the currency referred to in this document is the French *livre* [pound]). Therefore, La Luzerne had put his approval upon it and the work could go forward.<sup>49</sup>

A significant document dated 26 June 1789 from Rochefort, entitled *Diréction des constructions*, described the state of the *plancons* and *barrots* necessary for the ships under construction and in dry dock or maintenance at the port (Figure 17). From this document one may infer that the first phase of building *l'Inconstante* had proceeded without delay because the timbers which were currently being ordered for the frigate included beams for the deck, the orlop deck, the forecastle and the quarterdeck. For the decks and orlop decks of *l'Inconstante* and *l'Hélène*, 128 beams of 28 to 34 *pieds* by 10 and 11 *pounces* were required (there are twelve *pounces* [2.71cm] to a French *pied* [32.5 cm]). Presumably 64 such beams were to be used for each vessel. Sixty beams of another variety, perhaps the ledges that extended between the main beams, were to be provided for the forecastles and quarterdecks of the two 12-pounder frigates. These were to be 26 to 31 *pieds* by 9 and 9 *pounces*, and presumably 30 were needed for each vessel.

Although work on *l'Inconstante* must have been underway by this time, it appears that *l'Hélène* had not yet been placed under construction; the *Diréction* shows that four pieces of timber for her keel were still required. These were to be 32 to 36 *pieds* long by 16 and 14 *pounces*, and it can be assumed that the keel requirements of the

# Direction des Constructions

## Etat des Plancours et barrots nécessaires pour les bâtiments En construction, et en Radoub ou Entretien.

### Scavoiu

Nombre	1 <sup>re</sup> Espèce	Cube	
383	Plancours de 20 à 28 pieds de longueur sur 12 à 14 pouces d'épaisseur pour le V. <sup>ant</sup> Le Thersée, Cubant	16169.	<sup>liab</sup>
16	Plancours de 20 à 28 pieds sur 12 à 14 pouces pour la Frégate L'Entbuscade, Cubant	688.	
14	Pièces de Quille de 22 à 26 pieds sur 16 et 14 pouces pour la Frégate L'Hélène, Cubant	212.	
144	Plancours de 20 à 28 pieds sur 12 à 13 pouces pour les V. <sup>ant</sup> Le Sémirant et Le Sphinx, Cubant	5328.	<sup>liab</sup>
	Total de la 1 <sup>re</sup> Espèce	22697	22.697. -
	2 <sup>de</sup> Espèce		
363	Plancours de 26 à 30 pieds sur 11 pouces en quarré pour le V. <sup>ant</sup> Le Thersée, Cubant	8712	
50	Plancours de 26 à 30 pieds sur 11 et 11. pour la Frégate L'Entbuscade, Cubant	1200	
128	Barrots de 28 à 34 pieds sur 10 à 11 pouces pour les ponts et faux ponts des Frégates L'inconstant et L'Hélène, Cubant	2072.	
	Total de la 2 <sup>de</sup> Espèce	12984	12984.
			35681. <sup>liab</sup>

Figure 17. Direction des Constructions, Including Naval Timber Needed for l'Inconstante and l'Hélène (courtesy of the Archives du Port de Rochefort, Rochefort).

57

Nombre		Cube	
	De L'ordre d'art .....		35681.
	3. <sup>e</sup> Espèce		
200	Maçons de 24 à 28 pieds sur 9 et 10 pouces pour le N. <sup>o</sup> Le César, Cubant .....	2200.	
270	Maçons de 24 à 28 pieds sur 9 et 10 pouces pour la frégate L'Embuscade, Cubant .....	4220.	
60	Maçons de 26 à 28 pieds sur 9 et 9 pouces pour les quillards des frégates L'Inconstante & L. S. Helène Cubant .....	960	
	Total de la 3. <sup>e</sup> Espèce .....	8480.	8480.
	Total Général .....		44161.

Rochefort, ce 26<sup>e</sup> Juin 1789.

L'Ordonnateur

Figure 17. (continued).

sister ship *Inconstante* had been the same. Of interest is the fact that the 12-pounder frigate *Embuscade* also was under construction in the Rochefort Dockyard at this time, and three ships-of-the-line were being built or repaired.<sup>50</sup>

In mid-July, France experienced the storming of the Bastille in Paris. No doubt conditions at the Rochefort Dockyard were affected by the subsequent turmoil and confusion being experienced throughout France, and work on *l'Inconstante* and *l'Hélène*, among other vessels, was delayed. Four months after the Bastille incident, a copy of a letter of 21 November 1789 sent from La Luzerne to de Vaudreuil and de Bellefontaine was transmitted at the Dockyard. It stated that the King had recently ordered an account be made concerning the state of French Naval forces. After seeking advice from the Naval Council, the King had made decisions about the construction of ships to be achieved at Rochefort in 1790. His orders were that only two 74-gun ships would be built during the year because, in addition to this work, two other ships and the frigates *Inconstante* and *Hélène* needed to be completed. The building of the frigates was behind schedule and the King and Naval Council insisted that they be launched in 1790. The dispatch further maintained that the scheduled work would be sufficient to keep all the people at the dockyard from the local and surrounding area employed because they would also be responsible for repairing other ships; La Luzerne expressed some concern relative to this additional work and the budget. It was revealed that the budget for 1790 would be fixed at the same amount as it had been in 1789, and that a portion of these 1790 funds would go towards half the cost of building two *flûtes* that would be launched near Bayonne in 1791.<sup>51</sup> Although authorities attempted to present an image of stability, it comes as no surprise that there was some sense of insecurity in the dockyard town of Rochefort in these volatile times.

Ballast of stone and iron was mentioned in correspondence of 25

September 1789. It was emphasized that there were only two providers of iron ballast for Rochefort, M. la Pougé and M. Butet, and that it was important to inform them that they should make their deliveries in a more timely fashion because they currently were not fulfilling their commitments.<sup>52</sup> A document dated 10 January 1790 quantified the amount of iron ballast considered necessary for various ships according to the *Regulations of 28 January 1787*. The 12-pounder frigates that were not outfitted with masts and other equipment each needed 400 tons, and those that were equipped for sea each required 110 tons of pig iron.<sup>53</sup>

Specific reference to the second phase of construction for *l'Inconstante* has not been found. In a letter dated 26 March 1790 from La Luzerne to de Vaudreuil and La Grandville, La Luzerne confirmed that he had given to the Naval Council their letter of 20 February, and La Grandville's letter of 6 December, concerning allocation of labor for the third part of the construction of the frigate. Due to a recent tariff resulting in the reduction of allocated funds, the Council of Rochefort had raised concerns about whether workers would receive their full daily pay and wanted authorization to make arrangements to ensure that the salaries would be paid, but the Naval Council was unsympathetic to this request. Therefore La Luzerne instructed La Grandville to postpone work on the frigate *Inconstante* until further notice.<sup>54</sup> Subsequently, in a letter from La Luzerne in Paris to La Grandville at Rochefort dated 23 April 1790, he acknowledged the latter's recent correspondence. La Grandville had written that he managed to get the labor for the third part of the construction of *l'Inconstante*, but that in order to keep to the conditions of the contract the number of workers was reduced. The fact that La Luzerne's correspondence now was from Paris rather than from Versailles indicates the emerging direction of Revolutionary France away from the monarchy.<sup>55</sup>

In a letter of 30 April 1790 to La Grandville, La Luzerne acknowledged La Grandville's letters that had come before the Naval

Council: one for the allocation of labor for the fourth part of the construction of *l'Inconstante* and another for the labor for the second part of the building of *l'Hélène*. La Luzerne informed La Grandville that both projects had been accepted.<sup>56</sup>

A journal kept by the *Commandant de la Marine* at Rochefort, about activities at the port in 1790, revealed that there was a request for copper in bars, nails and sheets. There was specific mention that 560 copper nails of ten *pouces* were being acquired for *l'Inconstante*. The entry for 11 September recorded that the frigate had been launched on 9 September 1790. The shipwright who directed her construction was mentioned by name. The *Commandant* wrote that notwithstanding a scarcity of funds, a gratuity should be given to *Sous-ingénieur-constructeur* St. Pennevert who directed the building of the frigate and to *Mt-charpentier* Dubois who worked under St. Pennevert, because the work had been well executed. It is not known whether Chevillard the Younger was actually involved in the construction, for the designer of a ship was not always in charge of the actual building of the vessel.<sup>57</sup> The entry for 11 December 1790 revealed that one side of the hull of *l'Inconstante* had been sheathed in copper and that the other side was still to be completed.<sup>58</sup>

An inventory of the quantity of ballast existing in the ships and the warehouses of Rochefort was requested in a letter of 28 December 1790.<sup>59</sup> The report was provided by 10 January 1791, suggesting that eight 12-pounder frigates required a total of 880 tons. *L'Inconstante* was among these frigates and would have been supplied with 110 tons of iron ballast.<sup>60</sup>

In 1791 *l'Inconstante* was furnished with masts, sails and rigging and the hull fitted out with equipment and necessities. On 3 December 1791 Alexandre Joseph Riouffe, soon promoted to *Capitaine de Vaisseau*, received his orders to command the frigate and under his authority the vessel was further equipped. She was intended to carry 40 guns, but

her ordnance consisted of only twenty-six 12-pounder cannons and six 6-pounders.<sup>61</sup> In theory the frigate was armed with guns cast according to the *Regulations of 1786*, but archaeological finds presented in Chapter IX suggest that her gundeck armament was made up of 12-pounder cannons cast according to the French Navy's former *Regulations of 1778-9* (Figures 18-20).<sup>62</sup> They were long pattern cannons with a defined overall length of 2.413 m (from the face of the muzzle to the back of the base ring), but the lengths varied up to 3 cm due to casting variances in guns made before 1786. It has not been confirmed whether the secondary armament of 6-pounders carried by the frigate were of the 1786 or 1778-9 pattern. Although *l'Inconstante* was launched in 1790, her primary ordnance thus consisted of a slightly older style gun. This, however, can be attributed to shortages at the ordnance stores in Rochefort.<sup>63</sup> The theory is supported by a letter of 13 June 1789 from La Luzerne to de Vaudreuil and La Grandville that was circulated at the Rochefort Dockyard. Concerns were raised that a recent inventory of the state of ordnance for ships in the harbor and under construction at Rochefort had not been accurate and did not show the actual deficit. Therefore orders were given to examine the whole situation again for a more exact accounting.<sup>64</sup> Use of the older style cannons probably made little difference in the overall firepower of *l'Inconstante*.

By January 1792 *l'Inconstante* was prepared to embark upon her first campaign. It was to be a tour of duty in France's important West Indian colony, St. Domingue. And it was to begin with a winter passage across the Atlantic.

### **Summary**

The 12-pounder frigate *Inconstante* was constructed according to plans drawn at the height of eighteenth-century French naval design and technology, and although more than 100 such frigates were built in the fifty years between 1748 and 1798, only eight were to the same draughts by Chevillard the Younger. Named by King Louis XVI in March 1789,

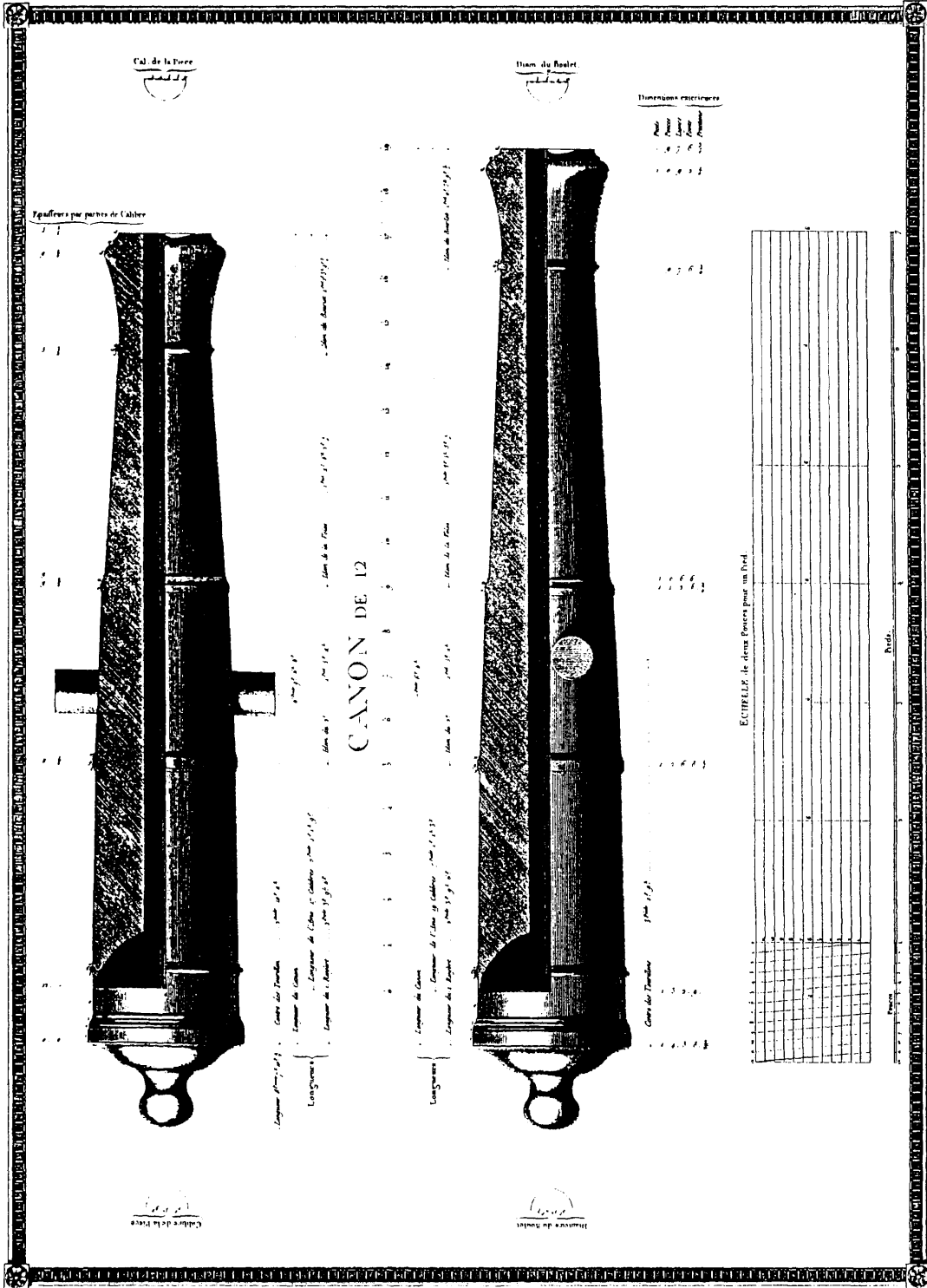


Figure 18. 12-Pounder Cannons to the Regulations of 1778-9. L'Inconstante carried Long Pattern Cannons as in the Lower Illustration (courtesy of Jean Boudriot).



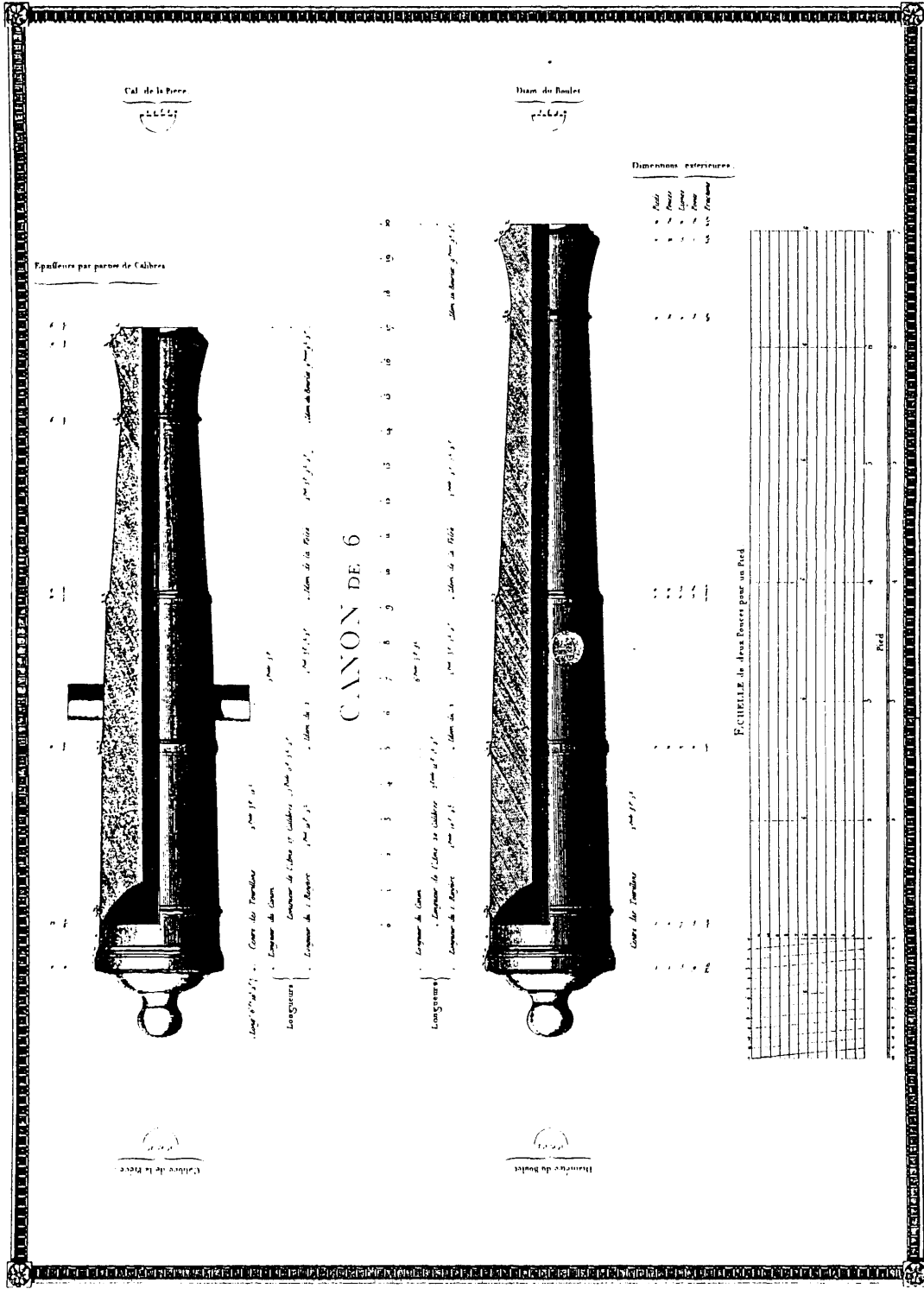
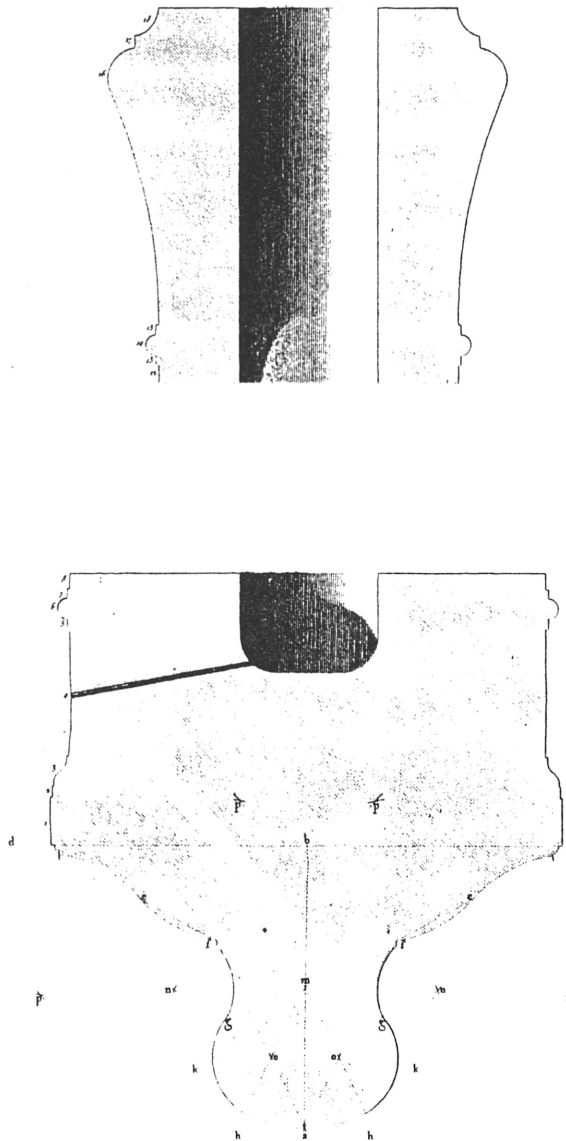
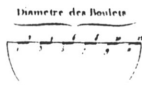


Figure 19. 6-Pounder Cannons to the Regulations of 1778-9 (courtesy of Jean Boudriot).

TRAIT DE LA CULASSE ET DE LA BOUCHE  
des Pièces de Canon de Fer de tous Calibres



ECHELLE de deux Toises pour un Pied

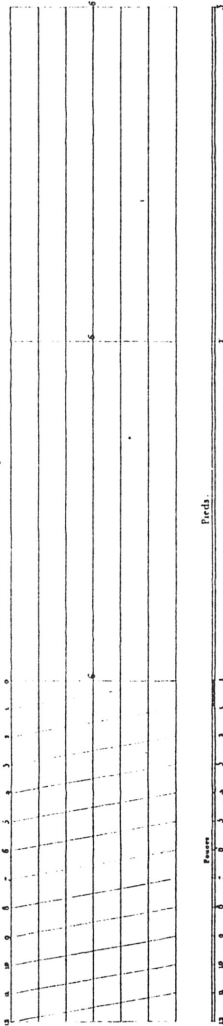


Figure 20. Details of the Breech and Muzzle of Iron Cannons of All Calibres to the Regulations of 1778-9 (courtesy of Jean Boudriot).

*l'Inconstante* was in progress in the Rochefort Dockyard during the eruption of the French Revolution. She was constructed under the direction of the shipwright St. Pennevert. After moderate delays the frigate was launched on 9 September 1790. Subsequently she was sheathed in copper, provided with masts, sails and rigging and the hull was fitted out with all equipment and necessities. In December 1791 *l'Inconstante* was assigned her captain and crew and commissioned for an expedition to St. Domingue.

## Footnotes for Chapter III.

1. William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), 32.
2. For further information about timber used by the French Navy from the seventeenth century into the Napoleonic Era, see Jean Boudriot, 'Propos sur les bois de marine sous l'Ancien Régime', *Neptunia*, 182.2 (1991), 12-18; Paul W. Bamford, *Forests and French Sea Power, 1660-1789* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1956); P.E. Herbin de Halle, *Des bois propres au service des arsenaux de la marine et de la guerre, ou développement et rapprochement des lois, réglemens et instructions concernant la recherche, le martelage et l'exploitation des arbres propres aux constructions navales, de l'artillerie, etc.* (Paris, S.C. L'Huillier, 1813).
3. Jean Boudriot, *The Seventy-Four Gun Ship I: Hull Construction* (trans. by David H. Roberts, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1986), 6.
4. Archives du Port de Rochefort (hereafter AR) 1 E 256, *Correspondance de la Cour avec l'Intendant de la Marine à Rochefort, Direction générale Port R pour l'Intendance, No. 18, 14 March 1789.*
5. Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy, The Ships, Men and Organization 1793-1815* (London, Conway Maritime Press, Ltd., 1989), 11.
6. Michael Lewis, *The History of the British Navy* (Baltimore, Penguin Books Inc., 1962), 172-174.
7. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 40. It becomes apparent that the British and French shared common seafaring practices and shipbuilding technologies in the late eighteenth century when one consults contemporary marine dictionaries; the French gave British equivalents and the British, French equivalents for most entries. For examples, see Daniel Lescallier, *Vocabulaire des termes de marine, anglois et françois* (Paris, L'Imprimerie Royale, 1777); William Falconer, *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine: or, A Copious Explanation of the Technical Terms and Phrases employed in the Construction, Equipment, Furniture, Machinery, Movements, and Military Operations of A Ship* (London, T. Cadell, 1769).
8. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 278.
9. For details about the progress of students in training to be shipwrights, see Boudriot, *Seventy-Four Gun Ship I*, 12-14. For examples of French treatises published on building and rigging ships, see Pierre Alexandre Laurent Forfait, *Traité élémentaire de la mâture des vaisseaux: à l'usage des élèves de la marine* (Paris, Clousier, 1788); Daniel Lescallier, *Traité pratique du gréement des vaisseaux et autres batimens de mer: ouvrage publié par ordre du Roi, pour l'instruction des élèves de la marine, sous le Ministère de M. de Fleurieu* (Paris, Clousier, 1791); Honore Sebastien Vial de Clairbois, *Traité élémentaire de la construction des vaisseaux, à l'usage des élèves de la marine, composé and publié, d'après les ordres de M. le Marechal de Castries, Ministre and Secrétaire d'Etat au Département de la Marine* (Paris, Clousier, 1787).

10. Many works on naval architecture published in Britain included draughts of ships from other countries, e.g., John Charnock, *An History of Marine Architecture, Including an Enlarged and Progressive View of the Nautical Regulations and Naval History, both Civil and Military, of All Nations, Especially of Great Britain; Derived Chiefly from Original Manuscripts, as well in Private Collections as in the Great Public Repositories: and Deduced from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, I, II, III (London, R. Faulder and 28 other publishers, 1800-2); *European Magazine: A Collection of Papers on Naval Architecture, Originally Communicated Through the Channel of the European Magazine* (London, European Magazine, 1791-3).
11. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 20, 40, 278. Examples of contemporary British works on naval architecture and the rigging of ships include David Steel, *The Elements and Practice of Rigging and Seamanship*, I, II (London, Sim Comfort Associates, 1978; reprint of the original edition: London, 1794); David Steel, *The Elements and Practice of Naval Architecture*, I, II (London, Sim Comfort Associates, 1977; reprint of the original edition: London, 1805); Marmaduke Stalkartt, *Naval Architecture or the Rudiments and Rules of Ship Building*, I, II (London, J. Boydell Cheapside, J. Dodsley Pall Mall & J. Sewell Cornhill, 1781-1787); William Sutherland, *The Ship Builder's Assistant* (London, Mount and Davidson Tower Hill, 1794).
12. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 40.
13. *Ibid.*, 279; Jean Boudriot, *The Seventy-Four Gun Ship III: Masts-Sails-Rigging* (trans. by David H. Roberts, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1987), 250-255.
14. Jean Boudriot, *The Seventy-Four Gun Ship II: Fitting Out the Hull* (trans. by David H. Roberts, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1986), 156.
15. Boudriot, *Seventy-Four Gun Ship I*, 6.
16. Boudriot, *Seventy-Four Gun Ship III*, 251, 254-255.
17. *Ibid.*, 251, 256-257; Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 19, 279.
18. Boudriot, *Seventy-Four Gun Ship III*, 250-259. Simplified draughts of the various types of ships in the French Navy are also included in the above reference.
19. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 279.
20. *Ibid.*, 20.
21. *Ibid.*, 40.
22. For a breakdown of the rating scale accompanied by a listing of the number and calibre of guns carried by each type of ship, see J.J. Colledge, *Ships of the Royal Navy* (Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1987), 12-13.
23. The 44-gun two-deckers would make a comeback in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in U.S. Navy *Constitution*-class frigates which were responsible for U.S. victories in the War of 1812.

24. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 49.
25. Colledge, *Royal Navy*, 12-13; Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 40-57. In Lavery there are examples of numerous draughts of the various types of ships in the Royal Navy.
26. The *rôle de bord* of *l'Inconstante* suggests that the frigate carried 40 guns although an inventory taken after her capture records only 36.
27. Boudriot, *Seventy-Four Gun Ship I*, 10.
28. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 280; Bernard Cros, 'Les ingénieurs de la marine aux XVII et XVIII siècles', *Neptunia*, 170.2 (1988), 7-18.
29. For details about the evolution of the *frégate légère*, see Jean Boudriot, 'La frégate dans la marine royale, 1660-1750, la frégate légère', *Neptunia* 181.1 (1991), 27-31.
30. Jean Boudriot and Hubert Berti, *Frégate la Belle-Poule 1765 de l'ingénieur Guignace, historique des frégates de 12 et monographie* (Paris, A.N.C.R.E., 1985), 6.
31. *Ibid.*, 11-13.
32. *Ibid.*, 6-13.
33. *Ibid.*, 11-13. The names of twenty-one shipwrights who collectively designed eighty-nine of the one hundred and four 12-pounder frigates built between 1748 and 1798, and the numbers of vessels constructed according to the plans of each, follows: Guignace (14); Coulomb, J.M.B. (12); Chevillard the Younger (9); Haran (8); Ginoux (7); Sané (6); Forfait (5); Secondat (5); Chevillard the Elder (4); Raffeau (3); Lamothe Père (3); Coulomb, J.L. (2); Pénetreau (2); Groignard (2); Morineau (1); Duhamel (1); Chapelle fils (1); Poumet (1); Estienne (1); Bombelle (1) and Vial du Clairbois (1).
34. *Ibid.* This publication includes copies of the plans of several different 12-pounder frigates drawn by various shipwrights over the half-century during which such frigates were built. Special emphasis is given to *la Belle-Poule*, for which draughts and detailed drawings are provided, including deck arrangements and sail plans, among many other detailed illustrations.
35. *Ibid.*, 10, 30, 32; Personal communication with Jean Boudriot and David H. Roberts in their letters to the author of 19 April and 9 May 1992 (David H. Roberts is a colleague of Jean Boudriot; he translates many of the latter's works from French to English). Figures 7-12 are engravings by Pierre Ozanne that are in the personal collection of Jean Boudriot.
36. Boudriot and Roberts, letter to author, 9 May 1992.
37. Boudriot and Berti, *La Belle-Poule*, 11-13; Boudriot, *Seventy-Four Gun Ship I*, 23: One French foot or  *pied* is equivalent to 32.5 centimeters, while an English foot is equivalent to 30.5 centimeters.
38. Boudriot and Berti, *La Belle-Poule*, 11-13; Boudriot and Roberts, letters to author, 19 April and 9 May 1992; Boudriot, *Seventy-Four Gun Ship III*, 260; Norman Hampson, *La marine de l'an II, mobilisation de la*

*flotte de l'océan 1793-1794* (Paris, 1959). For further information about *la Charmante* and *la Junon*, including plans of these frigates, see Patrick Villiers, *La marine de Louis XVI de Choiseul à Sartine*, I (J.P. Debbane, 1985), 400-401, 415-418.

39. Boudriot and Roberts, letter to author, 9 May 1992.

40. *Ibid.*; Personal communication with David Lyon, G. Slatter, and David Topliss of the National Maritime Museum in various communications with the author between 1991-3. The draughts are preserved in the National Maritime Museum as: *l'Unité*, Reg. No. 6247, Stern and Profile, As Taken; Reg. No. 6250, Decks, As Taken; Reg. No. 6248, Profile, As Fitted; Reg. No. 6249, Decks, As Fitted.

41. AR, 2 G2 25 & 2 G2 34, *Devis d'armement et de campagne, la frégate la Gracieuse, devis de retour de campagne*; Boudriot and Berti, *La Belle-Poule*, 28.

42. Boudriot and Berti, *La Belle-Poule*, 11-13.

43. Villiers, *La marine*, 400-401, 414-418.

44. Boudriot and Berti, *La Belle-Poule*, 11-13. Current research has not revealed the actual fate of the latter four frigates.

45. *Ibid.*

46. For detailed information about the administration of the ports and dockyards, see Boudriot, *Seventy-Four Gun Ship I*, 10-15.

47. AR, 1 E 256, *Direction générale Port R pour l'Intendance*, No. 18, Copy of a letter of 14 March 1789. Here the title of *Monsieur le Comte* or *Count* is included with the names of the men exchanging official letters. By early 1790, when Navy Administration correspondence comes from Paris rather than from Versailles, the titles are dropped and the individuals are addressed simply as *Monsieur*. Hereafter in the text names referenced in correspondence will be given by surname.

48. *Ibid.*, *Pour modèle, comparaison du résumé de l'état de situation des vaisseaux du 1 Mai 1789 avec l'inventaire du magasin général*.

49. AR, 1 E 256, *Direction générale Port R*, No. 34, Letter of 16 May 1789.

50. AR, 1 E 261, *Correspondance de la Cour avec l'Intendant de la Marine à Rochefort, Direction des constructions, Rochefort*, 26 June 1789.

51. AR, 1 E 256, *Direction général Port R pour l'Intendance*, No. 69, Copy of a letter of 21 November 1789.

52. AR, 1 E 261, *Intendance général*, No. 75, Letter of 25 September 1789.

53. AR, 1 E 262, *Correspondance de la Cour avec l'Intendant de la Marine à Rochefort, Direction du port, No.1, Rochefort*, 10 January 1790.

54. *Ibid.*, *Intendance générale pour l'Intendance*, No. 20, Copy of a letter of 26 March 1790.

55. *Ibid.*, *Intendance générale*, No. 27, Letter of 23 April 1790.
56. *Ibid.*, *Intendance générale*, No. 31, Letter dated 30 April 1790.
57. Boudriot, *Seventy-Four Gun Ship III*, 260.
58. AR, 1 A 122, *Correspondance du Commandant de la Marine à Rochefort avec la Cour*, 1790.
59. AR, 1 E 262, *Intendance générale*, No. 165, Letter of 28 December 1790.
60. *Ibid.*, *Direction du port*, No. 2, Rochefort, 10 January 1791.
61. AR, 3 E2 35, *Rôle d'équipage, la frégate l'Inconstante, commandée par M. Riouffe Major de Vaisseau, rôle de bord*, 21 November 1791 to 25 November 1793; PRO, ADM 1/245, Admiralty and Secretariat Papers, 'Jamaica 1793 & 94 Admiral John Ford Esqr.': John Ford, Commodore and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels at Jamaica, to Philip Stephens, Secretary of the Admiralty, aboard the *Europa*, off Jérémie, 5 February 1794, and Enclosure: Inventory and appraisement of *l'Inconstante*.
62. Jean Boudriot, personal collection.
63. Boudriot and Roberts, letters to author, 19 April and 9 May 1992.
64. AR, 1 E 256, *Direction générale Port R pour l'Intendance*, No. 43, Copy of a letter of 13 June 1789.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE ST. DOMINGUE CAMPAIGN

The French colony of St. Domingue was greatly affected by events that occurred in the mother country during and after 1789. Here the French Revolution took on a profound meaning. Once the world's most productive sugar producer, the colony experienced civil upheavals whose source was rooted in social inequality among its inhabitants.

A decree issued by the French National Assembly on 15 May 1791 gave mulattoes the hope of achieving the same status as the white population. It ruled that mulattoes born of free parents were to have social and political rights. The white planters of St. Domingue were opposed to this decree or any form of intrusion upon their social, economic and political advantages. Thus, when news of the decision reached the West Indian colony, white planters refused to abide by it, the governor would not enforce it, and some whites discussed the possibility of secession from France. In response the mulattoes demanded their rights and were preparing to take up arms when, in August 1791, a rebellion by St. Domingue's most disadvantaged body of inhabitants, the immense slave population, overwhelmed the colony. It was a time of shifting alliances, confusion and bloodshed. In the ensuing revolts, thousands of people on all sides were brutally killed and hundreds of plantations were devastated before the whites, in desperation, called a truce, in September 1791, by which mulattoes were awarded the status of equality with whites.

Decisions and events in Revolutionary France reflected the shifting state of French governmental affairs, and communications between the mother country and St. Domingue frequently took months. Before word of the August slave revolt reached France, the French National Assembly had repealed its 15 May decree, and on 24 September 1791 had replaced it with a resolution to let colonial assemblies make

legislation regarding slaves and mulattoes in each colony.

Subsequently, the colonial whites of St. Domingue abandoned their truce and rebellion erupted again.<sup>1</sup>

About the time that news arrived in France of the August slave revolt in St Domingue, orders were given in November for a small expedition to be sent to the unstable colony. *L'Inconstante* was among the vessels commissioned for this duty. Although there are gaps in the narrative, archival sources provide significant details about preparation of the frigate for the voyage and her later presence in the French West Indies.

### **Captain Joseph Riouffe and the Expedition for St. Domingue**

On 3 December 1791 Alexandre Joseph Riouffe, *Major de Vaisseau*, was ordered to command the frigate *Inconstante* on an expedition to St. Domingue (Figure 21). On 1 January 1792, during the first days of the campaign, he was promoted to *Capitaine de Vaisseau de la troisième classe* and on 1 January 1793, while on service in the West Indies, he became *Capitaine de Vaisseau de la première classe*. Riouffe had first entered the French Navy in 1765, and about the time of the American War of Independence had achieved the rank of *Lieutenant de Vaisseau et de Port*. During the war he served as Lieutenant on two ships-of-the-line from Brest, *Le Diadème* (1778) and *Le Vengeuse* (1778-81), and as Second Captain on a frigate from Rochefort, *l'Andromaque* (1782-83) (Figure 22). In 1784 *Lieutenant de Vaisseau* Riouffe commanded his first vessel, a frigate named *la Flore*. During the following years of peace he was not commissioned into another ship, but in November 1786 he secured the rank of *Sous Directeur de Port et Major de Vaisseau* at Rochefort. It was not until the serious insurrection of 1791 in St. Domingue that he received orders for his next command.<sup>2</sup>

Although Joseph Riouffe became the captain of *l'Inconstante*, he was not the first person selected to command the frigate. In a letter of 17 November 1791, Minister of the Navy de Bertrand, informed de

**E**XTRAIT des rôles d'équipages déposés au bureau général des armemens de ce Port.

ANNÉES du service.	NOMS DES VAISSEAUX.	NOMS DES CAPITAINES.	QUALITÉS & solde au services	Durée des campag		D A T E de l'embarquement & du débarquement.
				En paix	En guerre.	
		<i>Les Citoyens</i> —		A. M. J.	A. M. J.	
1765	<i>la flûte la Garrone</i>	<i>La fontaine; Lieut. de fr. 2<sup>e</sup></i>	<i>Volontaire</i> . 7 2			<i>Du 12<sup>e</sup> 1765 au 12 juin 1766</i>
1767	<i>La flûte, l'ivoire</i>	<i>La Giraudou; Capt. De Brest</i>	<i>Idem</i> . 3 35			<i>Du 10 janvier 1767 au 24 avril 1767</i>
1772	<i>La Gabarri la forteuse</i>	<i>Gyria; Capitaine de Brest</i>	<i>aide de post.</i> . 2 25			<i>Du 29 juin 1772 au 20<sup>e</sup> 1772</i>
1774	<i>La flûte labricole</i>	<i>La Biuliere; Lieut. de post.</i>	<i>Idem</i> . 30 8.			<i>Du 20 janvier 1774 au 27<sup>e</sup> 1774</i>
1782	<i>La frégate l'Andromaque</i>	<i>Delle blanche; Lieut. de V.</i>	<i>Second Cap.</i> . . . .			<i>9<sup>e</sup> 1782 au 19<sup>e</sup> 1783</i>
1784	<i>la frégate la Flore</i>	<i>Riouffe; Lieut. de V.</i>	<i>Commandant</i> . . . .			<i>Du 14<sup>e</sup> 1784 au 21<sup>e</sup> 1784</i>
1791	<i>la frégate l'inconstante</i>	<i>Riouffe; Lieut. de V.</i>	<i>Lieut.</i> . . . .			<i>Du 2<sup>e</sup> 1791 au 15<sup>e</sup> 1791 11<sup>e</sup> 1791 au 16<sup>e</sup> 1791 21<sup>e</sup> 1791</i>



LE Chef civil, préposé au Bureau des Armemens & des Classes de ce Port, certifie le présent extrait conforme aux rôles d'équipages déposés audit B<sup>ureau</sup>.

A Rochefort, le 28 Pluviose, — l'an 3<sup>me</sup> de la République française.

*Joseph Riouffe*  
*Joseph Riouffe*

*Joseph Riouffe, officier de la Marine, de Rochefort, département de la Gironde, est autorisé à attester que les signatures de ce document sont bien celles de ce chef de service.*

Figure 21. Excerpt from the Extrait des Rôles d'Equipages, Listing Joseph Riouffe's Services Aboard Ships from Rochefort (courtesy of the Service Historique de la Marine, Château de Vincennes).

3.

BREST.

*Mémoire des Services de Mer*  
Du Cit. Riouffe,  
SAVOIR:

ANNÉES des Campagnes.	N O M S des VAISSEAUX.	DESTINATION des VAISSEAUX.	N O M S des COMMANDANS.	D A T E S		DURÉE des Campagnes		QUALITÉS.
				de l'Armement.	du Déarmement.	Mois.	Jours.	
1778.	<i>Le Diadème</i>		<i>La cordouanerie</i>	<i>24 Juin</i>	<i>1. ix. br.</i>	5.	22.	<i>Prêt de Mer</i>
1778 & 1781.	<i>Le Pinguin</i>		<i>Ritr</i>	<i>16. ix. br.</i>	<i>25. Janvier</i>	25.	n.	<i>Prêt de Mer</i>
						30.	22.	
<p><i>Le Chef des Bureaux civils de la Marine certifie le présent état de Mer tant à l'égard de cette mois vingt Deux Jours de campagne conforme aux Rôles de Mer au Bureau du Armement de ce Port.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Brest le 3 Nivose 3. année République</i> <i>M. Aug. Massacq</i></p> <p><i>Le port. Signe. Mercurien</i> <i>Gény</i></p>								

27  
28




Figure 22. A List of Joseph Riouffe's Services Aboard Ships from Brest (courtesy of the *Service Historique de la Marine*, Château de Vincennes).

Vaudreuil and Charlot at Rochefort that, according to a deposition made by the King for the expedition to St. Domingue, *Major de Vaisseau* Villeblanche from the Department of Brest had been appointed to the command of the frigate *Inconstante* and *Sous Lieutenant de Vaisseau* Guillotin to the *gabarre* (transport ship) *la Lionne*. These officers had been given orders and advised of their destination and were to be joined by another frigate, *la Néréide*.<sup>3</sup> It is not clear why Villeblanche did not take command of *l'Inconstante*, but it is of interest that Riouffe had served in 1782-3 as Second Captain on the frigate *Andromaque* under an officer named Villeblanche, perhaps the same man.<sup>4</sup>

On 17 November 1791 an abstract of the crew requirements for three vessels, including the frigates *Inconstante* and *Néréide*, was prepared at Rochefort (Figure 23).<sup>5</sup> It is likely that this was done in response to directions given in a 16 November letter that the frigates should be fitted out *en flûte* (as troop transports rather than fighting ships) for the expedition to St. Domingue. A day later these orders were revised according to directions given in correspondence dated 17 November 1791, from de Bertrand to officials at Rochefort. The latter dispatch stated that the three French Navy vessels, accompanied by a merchantman, were to make the expedition to St. Domingue, and that they were to transport a battalion of troops from Agen. Although the two frigates were originally to be equipped *en flûte*, based on information received from the colony, the King had decided that *l'Inconstante* would take all of her artillery and would be fitted out on peace terms and not *en flûte*. The change meant that the frigate would carry a larger crew and fewer troops. More of the 250 passengers included in the expedition would have to be spread out on the other three vessels.<sup>6</sup> News had perhaps just reached France of the massive slave revolt and the ensuing violence that disrupted St. Domingue in late August and September. The armament and crew complement for *l'Inconstante* had

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*Extrait de l'Équipage de deux frégates  
armées en flûte, & celui d'une flûte.*

*Savoie*

	<i>Frégate armée en flûte.</i>	<i>Frégate armée en flûte.</i>	<i>Flûte.</i>	<i>Total des gens en mer.</i>
<i>Officiers Majors.....</i>	9.	9.	7.	25.
<i>Officiers Marins.</i>				
<i>Maitre d'Équipage.....</i>	1.	1.	1.	3.
<i>Second Maitre.....</i>	1.	1.	..	2.
<i>Contre Maitre.....</i>	2.	2.	1.	5.
<i>quartier Maitre.....</i>	6.	6.	1.	13.
<i>Maitre Côtier<sup>o</sup>.....</i>	1.	1.	1.	3.
<i>Maitre Canonnier<sup>o</sup>.....</i>	1.	1.	1.	3.
<i>Second Canonnier<sup>o</sup>.....</i>	3.	3.	1.	7.
<i>aide Canonnier<sup>o</sup>.....</i>	20.	20.	2.	42.
<i>Maitre Charpentier<sup>o</sup>.....</i>	1.	1.	1.	3.
<i>aide Charpentier<sup>o</sup>.....</i>	1.	1.	..	2.
<i>Maitre Vaisseau.....</i>	1.	1.	1.	3.
<i>aide Vaisseau.....</i>	1.	1.	..	2.
<i>Second Voilier<sup>o</sup>.....</i>	1.	1.	1.	3.
<i>aide Voilier<sup>o</sup>.....</i>	1.	1.	..	2.
<i>Total des officiers marins.....</i>	41.	41.	17.	99.
<i>Émoniers et chefs de Émoniers.</i>				
<i>chefs de Émonerie.....</i>	3.	3.	2.	8.
<i>Émoniers.....</i>	4.	4.	3.	11.
<i>Matelots.</i>				
<i>Matelots à 24<sup>h</sup>.....</i>	18.	18.	10.	46.
<i>Idem à 21<sup>h</sup>.....</i>	18.	18.	10.	46.
<i>Idem à 18<sup>h</sup>.....</i>	18.	18.	10.	46.
<i>Idem à 15<sup>h</sup>.....</i>	18.	18.	10.	46.
<i>Officiers de la garnison.....</i>	15.	15.	10.	40.
<i>Total de l'Équipage.....</i>	155.	155.	72.	382.
<i>Subordonnés.</i>				
<i>Officiers de Ammunition.....</i>	7.	7.	7.	21.
<i>Moules.....</i>	20.	20.	15.	55.
<i>Bénévoles.....</i>	7.	7.	6.	20.
<i>Total général.....</i>	169.	169.	100.	438.

*Rochefort le 17. Novembre 1791.*

*Moules*

Figure 23. The Proposed Ships' Crews for the St. Domingue Expedition (courtesy of the Archives du Port de Rochefort, Rochefort).

therefore been modified; a larger number of naval personnel would be dispatched to the troubled colony and the frigate would be battle-ready in the West Indies.

Preparations for the expedition to the West Indies were quickly under way. According to a letter of 27 November 1791, three supply officers by the names of Gaudin, Mayon and de St. Pierre were assigned to *la Néréïde*, *l'Inconstante* and *la Lionne*.<sup>7</sup>

In a letter of 3 December 1791, de Bertrand wrote to de Vaudreuil and Charlot of the last disposition for the embarkment of the Agenois Battalion which was to be distributed aboard the frigates *Inconstante* and *Néréïde*. The Minister of the Navy remarked that the owner of *le Meulan*, a merchant ship employed for the expedition to help transport the Battalion, was charging an exorbitant price, but that due to the dramatic circumstances of the moment and the fact that the vessel was the only seaworthy ship available, an arrangement to use it had been made. Furthermore, the merchantman could be ready to sail with the frigates. Minister of the Navy de Bertrand sent official instructions for Joseph Riouffe of *l'Inconstante* and asked de Vaudreuil to advise Riouffe not to lose a moment in getting the ships ready for the expedition.<sup>8</sup>

Another clue to the urgency of the intended mission and its purpose to restore order is suggested by the large numbers of small arms and ammunition that were to be transported to St. Domingue. In a letter of 8 December 1791 from de Bertrand in Paris to Charlot in Rochefort, approval was given for 5,000 *fusils* (muskets), 15,000 *cartouches* of the same calibre, 3,600 *balles* of the same calibre, and 2,100 *sabres* (300 with lions heads) to be taken from the arsenals of Rochefort.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, the safeguarding of French interests in St. Domingue at this time was perceived as important by the home government. This is illustrated by a letter of 17 December 1791 from the Minister of the

Navy to Charlot authorizing the passage of a civilian to St. Domingue. Since the man sought to make the Atlantic crossing so that he could protect his home and thereby French concerns in the colony, de Bertrand allowed his passage at the cost of the state.<sup>10</sup>

The journal of remarks about port affairs, which was kept by the *Commandant de la Marine* at Rochefort, provides some details about the final preparations and the departure of the expedition for St. Domingue. In the entry for 13 December 1791 the writer noted that he had made his inspections aboard *l'Inconstante* and *la Néréïde*, but that due to bad weather the frigates were retained and would be given orders to descend the River Charente when the weather allowed. The 24 December entry remarked that the two frigates had descended the river and were anchored in the *port des Basques*. Reference was also made to the troops who were to board the frigates, and to the merchant ship *Meulan* which would sail with the naval vessels.

On 27 December it was recorded that during the night of 23 to 24 December the wind from the west and northwest had been so violent that the two frigates anchored in the *port des Basques* had dragged their anchors and been damaged, and *l'Inconstante* had suffered injury to her bow. A shipwright sent aboard to assess the damages had determined that the repairs could be done on site in the anchorage. Attempts were made to accelerate the repairs but were delayed by the continuation of the tempest. In the entry for 2 January 1792 the *Commandant* wrote that repairs were going well on *l'Inconstante* and that he hoped that they would be completed within the week. He also remarked that if the winds became favorable the two frigates and *le Meulan* could sail in eight days. On 9 January 1792 the journal recorded that the troops, numbering about 600 men, were being boarded on *l'Inconstante*, *la Néréïde* and *le Meulan*. It was thought that the three ships might leave on that day because the weather was calm. The comments of 14 January 1792 noted that *l'Inconstante*, *la Néréïde* and *le Meulan* sailed on 13



January 1792 from the anchorage of the Isle d'Aix, by favorable winds, for the island of St. Domingue. Prior to the departure of the three ships, there had been insubordination of the troops on *le Meulan* because of overcrowding, and so the *Commandant de la Marine* had given new orders to take 50 men off that vessel and to put them aboard the two frigates. These troops seemed unreliable to him and he speculated that they would probably be ill-suited to establishing order in St. Domingue.

The journal entry for 4 February 1792 informs us that *la Néréide* had aborted her voyage and returned to Rochefort. Apparently, on 13 January the frigate had been forced to detach from the other two ships; after encountering violent winds and being pounded by heavy seas the crew had been forced to cut off the *mât d'artimon* (mizzen mast). The *Commandant* wrote that the ship would be repaired and sent again as soon as possible, but that he had not heard from *l'Inconstante* or *le Meulan*.<sup>11</sup>

The winter crossing of the Atlantic, however, was not to be. *l'Inconstante* also received substantial damage and was forced back to France.<sup>12</sup> She arrived at Port Louis near L'Orient on 7 February 1792, and on 10 February was taken to L'Orient for repairs. It was not until the spring that once again *l'Inconstante* sailed for the West Indies.<sup>13</sup>

### **Naval Service in St. Domingue**

The frigate *Inconstante* finally sailed on 12 April 1792 from L'Orient for St. Domingue (Figure 24).<sup>14</sup> It is likely that Captain Riouffe carried news of the famous decree of 4 April 1792 whereby the new Legislative Assembly in France conferred upon free Negroes and mulattoes in the French colonies political rights equal to those of whites.<sup>15</sup> No doubt he was aware that his mission would be difficult and that recent events in France and the decrees concerning the colonies would further fuel the civil unrest that was occurring in St. Domingue. However, Captain Riouffe could not have anticipated the profound

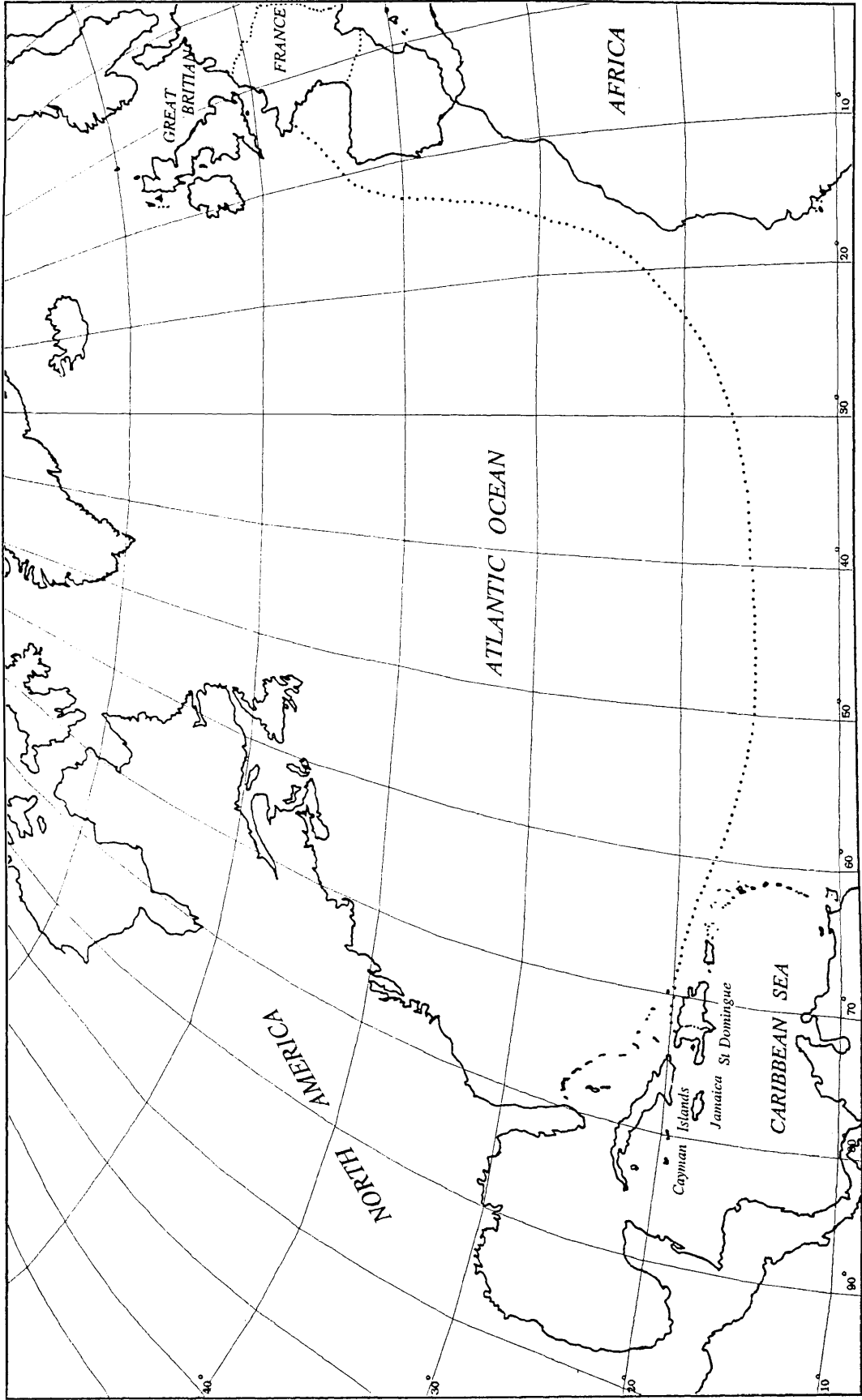


Figure 24. The Probable Route of L'Orient in France to Cap Français in St. Domingue (drawn by R.L. Craig).

changes that soon were to envelop not only France and St. Domingue, but also the West Indies, Europe and the world.

The French Revolution had occurred in 1789, but in April 1792 France was still officially ruled by a limited monarchy. However, extremist revolutionaries were now in power in a new Legislative Assembly and during these difficult times radical changes occurred with little warning. Only eight days after *l'Inconstante* set sail for the West Indies, France declared war on Austria, igniting the French Revolutionary Wars. Dynamic forces, including massive civil uprisings in France in August 1792, soon led to the total abolition of the French monarchy and establishment of the first French Republic by the end of September. Several months later, in January 1793, Louis XVI would be executed by guillotine as a traitor. These events would mark the onset of the *Reign of Terror* in France.

Between February and March 1793, the new French Republic would declare war on Great Britain, the United Provinces of the Netherlands and Spain, and this would in turn leave St. Domingue and all the French West Indies in imminent danger of attack from British, Dutch and Spanish naval forces.<sup>16</sup> During the frenzied *Reign of Terror* in the home country between 1793 and 1794, the French Republicans would turn upon all real and suspected traitors and in a single blow annihilate almost the entire corps of the country's pre-revolutionary naval officers, which had been traditionally composed of noblemen. Many of these officers, as members of the aristocracy, would be executed on the guillotine, while others would flee into exile; only later under the Directory would the fateful mistake be realized and attempts be made to restore order to the French Navy.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps if Captain Riouffe had not been sent to St. Domingue before these tragic events occurred, he would have suffered the fate of these officers. Nonetheless, his situation in the West Indies was to be exceedingly difficult and his lot almost as unfortunate.

It is likely that the unpredictable situations in St. Domingue and France resulted in a lengthier West Indian tour of duty for *L'Inconstante* than previously had been the case for French naval vessels. Instead of returning to Europe after a six- or seven-month campaign, the frigate remained in the revolutionary colony for over a year and a half, at the end of which she suffered capture by the British. The dates and destinations of her voyages are recorded in the ship's *rôle de bord* which today is housed in the *Archives du Port de Rochefort* (Figure 25).<sup>18</sup> Although the purposes of the passages and details about them are not specified, most of the absences from various ports are of relatively short duration. The pattern typifies the French tradition of using ships for certain naval tasks, rather than for offensive patrolling missions to maintain control of the seas, a common practice in the Royal Navy of Great Britain.<sup>19</sup>

*L'Inconstante* arrived at Cap Français on the north coast of St. Domingue on 12 May 1792, a month after her departure from L'Orient (Figure 26). Considered by many to be the Paris of the Antilles, Cap Français, along with the official capital, Port-au-Prince, was one of the two largest towns; its population numbered approximately 20,000 people.<sup>20</sup> At the time the entire French colony had about 544,000 inhabitants, not counting troops and sailors.<sup>21</sup> On 13 May the frigate sailed to nearby Port du Limbé, from which she returned the following day to Cap Français, where she remained for two-and-a-half months. On 1 August she sailed for Le Môle St. Nicolas, a town of perhaps 250 houses which has been referred to as the Gibraltar of the Caribbean Sea, presumably because of its strategic location adjacent to the Windward Passage.<sup>22</sup> The frigate arrived at Le Môle St. Nicolas on 2 August 1792 and remained there for eight-and-a-half months, until mid-April 1793. During this lengthy period, significant and terrifying events occurred in France and also in St. Domingue.

Although civil uprisings had overwhelmed France in August and

# RELACHES du Vaisseau, et DÉPENSES d'Équipement pendant la Campagne.

Lieux des Relâches.	Époques		A-COMPTES PAYÉS						TOTAL	Conduites.	
	d'arrivée.	de départ.	au Capitaine.		à l'Escadrier.		aux Enves & Volontaires.				à l'Équipage.
			Appointements.	Table.	Appointements.	Table.	Solde.	Subsistance.			
Port Louis, St. Pierre & Miquelon.	1791.	1792.									
Saint-Pierre	1791.	1792.									
Cap François, St. Pierre & Miquelon.	1792.	1793.									
Port Louis	1793.	1794.									
Cap François	1794.	1795.									
Môle St. Pierre & Miquelon	1795.	1796.									
Port Louis	1796.	1797.									
Cap François	1797.	1798.									
Cap François	1798.	1799.									
Port Louis	1799.	1800.									
Port Louis	1800.	1801.									
Port Louis	1801.	1802.									
Port Louis	1802.	1803.									
Port Louis	1803.	1804.									
Port Louis	1804.	1805.									
Port Louis	1805.	1806.									
Port Louis	1806.	1807.									
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Port Louis	1893.	1894.									
Port Louis	1894.	1895.									
Port Louis	1895.	1896.									
Port Louis	1896.	1897.									
Port Louis	1897.	1898.									
Port Louis	1898.	1899.									
Port Louis	1899.	1900.									

Figure 25. Extract from the Rôle de Bord Detailing the Ports of Call of l'Inconstante During Her St. Domingue Campaign (courtesy of the Archives du Port de Rochefort, Rochefort).

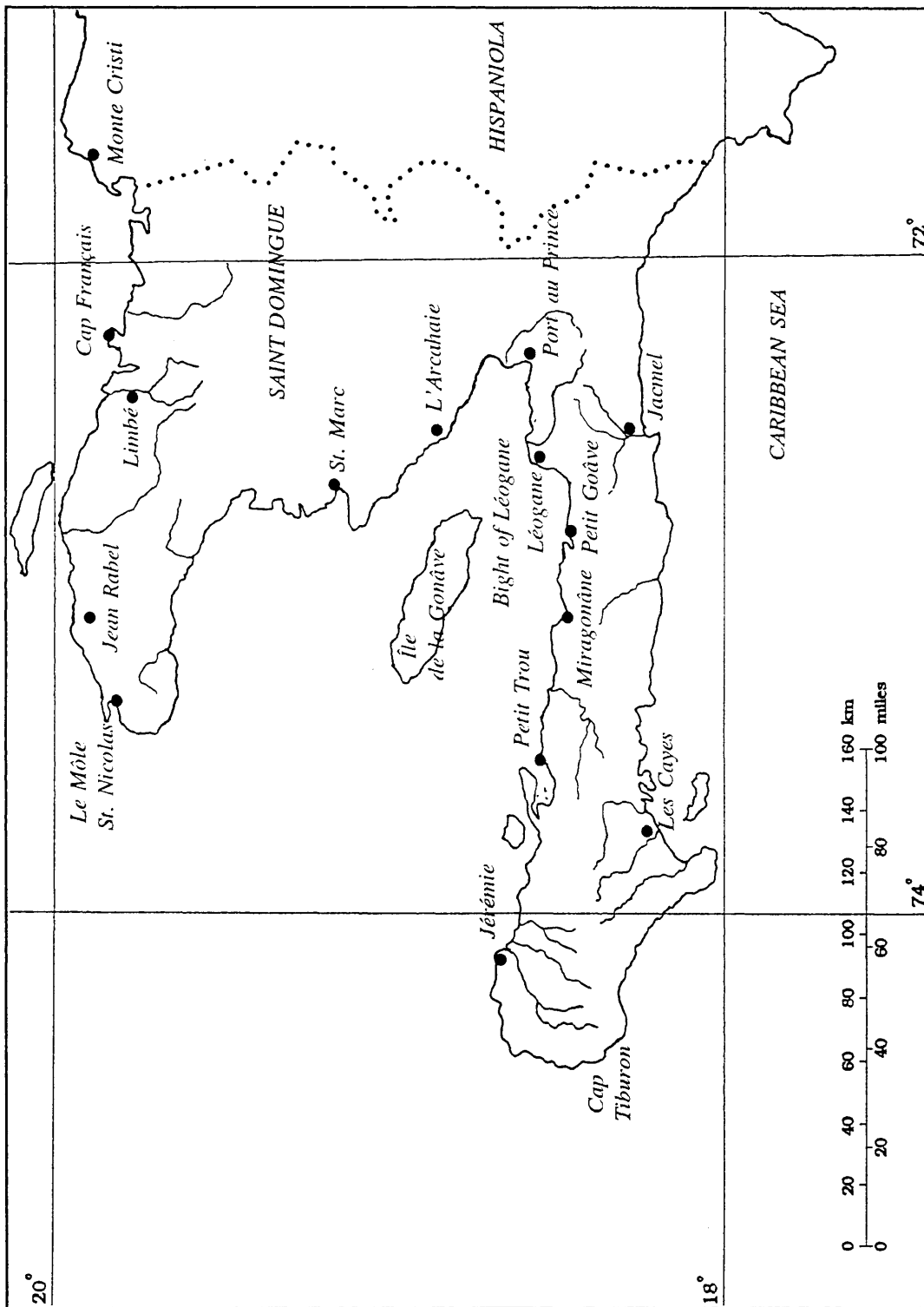


Figure 26. Eighteenth-Century St. Domingue (drawn by R.L. Craig).

eventually resulted in the abolition of the monarchy and establishment of the French Republic in September 1792, word of this did not reach St. Domingue until October 1792.<sup>23</sup> In mid-July, just prior to the major upheaval, three new government commissioners by the names of Messieurs Sonthonax, Polverel and Ailhaud, accompanied by 4000 national guards and 2000 troops of the line in fifteen ships, sailed for St. Domingue.<sup>24</sup> Sent by the Assembly, the commissioners and the support forces arrived in mid-September at Cap Français. The commissioners had orders to enforce the decree of 4 April 1792 which conferred political rights on free Negroes and mulattoes. Among other responsibilities, they were to establish peace and order and to identify, arrest and send to France the authors of troubles in the colony.<sup>25</sup>

Immediately after the arrival of the commissioners, the island's governor, Monsieur Blanchelande, was taken prisoner and sent to France. There remained, however, fundamental problems. The commissioners were revolutionaries and the national guard were civilians of the Revolution, while the troops and their commanding officers were still soldiers and officers of the King. Once news of the August events in France reached St. Domingue in October, the colony became absolutely divided and experienced a general state of terror. Those who chose to be royalists sided with the new governor, Monsieur Desparbes, who was general and commander-in-chief of the deposed King's forces, while revolutionaries aligned themselves with Sonthonax. In the struggle the mulattoes supported Sonthonax who emerged as victor, while Desparbes, royalist leaders and others who opposed the commissioners were sent to France under arrest.<sup>26</sup> Many of them were executed by guillotine. In St. Domingue the commissioners disagreed among themselves and expelled Ailhaud, leaving Sonthonax and Polverel in complete control of the colony by early 1793.<sup>27</sup>

On 23 September 1792, shortly before the October eruption of discord in St. Domingue, an account was given to the National

Convention of the state of the French Navy under the newly established Republic. The Minister of the Navy told the Convention that recently the Navy had been disorganized and that there had been rebellion among some of the officers of the *Ancien Régime*. However, he assured them that the new organization of administrators at the ports was finalized and that there were many excellent seamen in the National Navy who were devoted to the support of *Liberty* and who were capable of defending the flag of the Republic. He stated that reinforcements had been sent to the fleets in the Mediterranean and to the Colonies, and that there was union and harmony among the ships' crews who had all sworn to support *Liberty* and *Equality*. To the National Convention, the Minister minimized the troubles in the French Caribbean by stating, "The situation of our Western Colonies becomes every day less critical since the arrival of ships and troops; and above all, since the decree which permanently establishes the political relation of their inhabitants". He further assured the Convention that the French Republic maintained its rights in St. Domingue with a fleet of four ships (of-the-line), four frigates, one corvette, three-packets and four *flûtes*, and that a force of 8,000 troops carried out their decrees. However, he pointed out that while he would like to give an account of the good citizenship of the officers of the vessels in the colonies, as yet he did not know what their sentiments were.<sup>28</sup>

During the shifting political situation in the months after the September arrival of the government commissioners in St. Domingue, it is no wonder that *l'Inconstante* remained quietly in port at Le Môle St. Nicolas. In this period, slanderous statements circulated back in the port of Rochefort against Captain Riouffe. Officials of the municipality of Le Môle, however, made an impartial public statement, intended to quell these unfounded assertions, which was read by their representative on board *l'Inconstante* on 28 January 1793. Subsequently the document was signed by 86 of the people aboard, comprising all



those who could write, and it was generally approved by all. Along with additional statements the content of the lecture was entered into records of a session of the municipality of Le Môle on 29 January. The address affirmed that Captain Riouffe and the officers of *l'Inconstante* were courageous, exhibited irreproachable conduct and had shown patriotism in their actions and operations in St. Domingue during the nine months that they had been stationed in the colony. The city officials expressed indignation at the authors of false and defamatory rumors against the conduct of Captain Riouffe that were known to be widespread at Rochefort. They maintained that since 2 August 1792 the frigate had been stationed in their port and that during her time there the crew had professed considerable patriotism; Riouffe and the officers of *l'Inconstante* supported the doctrine of the French Revolution and kept the crew in obedience to the law and respect for authority as patriots. The officials professed that the citizens of Le Môle St. Nicolas had confidence in Captain Riouffe and the officers of *l'Inconstante* who had guarded the town in perilous times. They stated that their declaration was addressed to the crew of the frigate as testimony rendered to the civic virtues that characterized their leader; that the petition would be sent to the municipality of Rochefort to destroy the injurious rumors that were in circulation there regarding the conduct of Captain Riouffe; and that a copy would be deposited in the archives of the municipality of Le Môle St. Nicolas.<sup>29</sup>

Attacks on the loyalty and character of high-ranking naval officers suspected of having links to nobility were common during the *Reign of Terror* in France and the uncertainties that must have flooded Captain Riouffe's mind at this time can be appreciated. But in early 1793 when France declared war on Great Britain, the United Provinces of the Netherlands and Spain, Riouffe must have known that the greatest threat to his ship was at hand. Foreign enemies, particularly the

British, would soon be on the horizon, and the role of *l'Inconstante* and the rest of the French fleet clearly would be to defend the merchant shipping and the coasts of St. Domingue.

News that France had declared war on Great Britain reached Jamaica on 29 March 1793, and immediately all of the French merchant ships in the harbor at Kingston were seized.<sup>30</sup> Soon Royal Navy vessels were sent to patrol the waters near St. Domingue to seek intelligence and to disrupt the colony's shipping, and to protect British trade and communications bound for Jamaica in the Windward Passage (Figure 2, p.3). Numerous small French merchantmen were taken as prizes. On 16 April 1793, HMS *Penelope* captured *le Goelan*, a 290 ton corvette of 12 guns bearing the colors of the French Republic, and her 90 man crew, commanded by *Lieutenant de Vaisseau* Leisseguese.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps in response to news of *le Goelan*'s seizure in the Bight of Léogane and the need for reinforcements, *l'Inconstante* sailed south to those waters (Figure 26, p. 81). On 17 April the frigate departed from Le Môle St. Nicolas and arrived the next day at Port-au-Prince, a city of about 14,754 people including 2,754 whites, 4,000 mulattoes and 8,000 slaves.<sup>32</sup> The frigate remained in Port-au-Prince for two weeks, until 2 May. She sailed north and on 10 May arrived at Cap Français. On 18 May, after a week at Cap Français, *l'Inconstante* sailed again, but returned to the same port three and a half weeks later, on 11 June 1793.

Based on naval intelligence secured by Captain Rowley of HMS *Penelope* from a small boat that he captured, the British were aware that on about 30 May the *Jupiter* and the frigates *Concorde*, *Fine* and *Inconstante* were absent from Cap Français because they had gone to gather a convoy from Aux Cayes.<sup>33</sup> The *Oole* and the frigate *Surveillante* were with a convoy at Cap Français, and the 74-gun ship *America* remained at Port-au-Prince.<sup>34</sup> Around this time the British lost HMS *Hyena* of 24 guns to *la Concorde* of 40 guns while under orders to

protect the trade bound to Jamaica and to annoy the enemy in the seas between Cap Tiburon and Altavella.<sup>35</sup>

During May, while the French Republic's government commissioners were away from Cap Français to quiet an insurrection in Port-au-Prince and Jacmel, a new governor, Monsieur Galbaud, arrived in Cap Français with orders to put St. Domingue in a state of defense, since war had been declared on Britain and the United Provinces of the Netherlands. The governor was well received in the town but was dismissed from office by the commissioners who returned from Port-au-Prince and Jacmel in June. The Assembly in France, fearing planter disloyalty to the new Republic, had issued a decree that colonial governors could not own estates in the colonies they governed, and Galbaud owned a plantation in St. Domingue. Galbaud resisted his dismissal from office and managed to enlist local support of about 1,200 men including the Cap Français militia and seamen in the harbor. The commissioners opposed him and called upon slaves who were promised emancipation. Beginning on 21 June, 3,000 of the slaves descended upon Cap Français. The ensuing massacre was a scene of horror as the colonial whites, including the ex-governor, retreated to the sea to seek protection aboard ships in the harbor. Thousands of refugees sailed from St. Domingue to other islands and to America, never to return to the island, and some of the principal planters openly threw off allegiance to France and turned to Britain. Cap Français was largely burned and pillaged, and even the commissioners temporarily sought protection aboard a ship-of-the-line in the harbor.<sup>36</sup>

It is not known what role, if any, *L'Inconstante* played in the dramatic events of June 1793 in Cap Français. The frigate was in port there between 11 June and 19 June, but she had sailed before the carnage of 21 June and the subsequent exodus of refugees.

*L'Inconstante's* movements for the following months are known. On 24 June she arrived in Port-au-Prince and remained for two weeks. On 7

July the frigate embarked upon a one-week cruise and then returned to Port-au-Prince on 13 July where she stayed for about a month. On 18 August the frigate left Port-au-Prince again and on 21 August arrived at Miragonâne where she remained until 24 August. At that date she sailed from Miragonâne and arrived in Port-au-Prince on 26 August 1793. *L'Inconstante* was in the harbor there for about a month, until 23 September 1793.

French planters, wishing to maintain their existing way of life, had made gestures since the early days of the Revolution towards transferring their allegiance to Britain, but Britain had not wanted to openly violate her peace with France. Nonetheless, unofficial communications with St. Domingue planters had ensued, and once France declared war on Britain, it was inevitable that the British would attempt to secure the lucrative colony. On 9 September 1793 a force of almost 900 British troops, accompanied by Commodore Ford aboard HMS *Europa* of 50 guns, the frigates *Iphigenia* and *Hermione*, the sloop-of-war *Goelan* (now in British service), and the schooners *Mosquito*, *Flying Fish* and *Spitfire*, embarked upon a campaign from Jamaica. The frigate *Penelope* had previously sailed for St. Domingue.<sup>37</sup> The British arrived at Jérémie on 19 September; as had been previously arranged, the town surrendered. On 22 September they occupied the fortress and harbor at Le Môle St. Nicolas but the town remained hostile. During the campaign the British captured *la Convention Nationale*, a 10-gun schooner of the French Republic.<sup>38</sup> By the end of 1793, Jean Rabel, St. Marc, L'Arcahaie, Boucassin and Léogane would surrender on the same terms as Jérémie, and the British would control navigation in the Bight of Léogane. By June 1794 Port-au-Prince would be taken.<sup>39</sup>

On 23 September 1793 *l'Inconstante* left the harbor of Port-au-Prince, probably upon hearing news of the British occupation of Jérémie and Le Môle St. Nicolas. The frigate returned to Port-au-Prince on 2 October and remained there until 20 October when again she sailed. One

of the officers of *l'Inconstante* later made a declaration in which he criticized Captain Riouffe for his lack of action against the British on 20 and 22 October. He testified that on 20 October the frigate was at a distance of about one league from nine corsairs but that Riouffe had fired a cannon shot to facilitate their escape. He maintained that on 22 October, while they were escorting a convoy from Petit Goâve to Port Republicain (apparently a new revolutionary name used for Port-au-Prince), an English corvette came before La Gonâve to capture some of the merchantmen. Riouffe, he declared, only decided to chase it because rumors were circulating on board and then when he did pursue the vessel it was after tacking twice to give it time to see *l'Inconstante* broadside, thus giving the enemy time, and the impetus, to escape.<sup>40</sup>

On 24 October the frigate arrived in Port Republicain where she remained for several weeks. On 13 November *l'Inconstante* sailed for and arrived in Léogane, an important town in the West Province consisting of about 300 to 400 houses.<sup>41</sup> The frigate departed Léogane on 15 November and arrived the following day in Port Republicain where she remained for several days. On 20 November 1793 the ship sailed from Port Republicain to convoy two sloops loaded with provisions bound for Petit Trou; in Petit Trou, a French woman escaping the troubles in St. Domingue came aboard as a passenger.<sup>42</sup>

On the return voyage of *l'Inconstante* from Petit Trou to Port-au-Prince, the frigate, which had served France in St. Domingue for almost nineteen months, fell in with, and was taken prize by His Majesty's Ships *Penelope* and *Iphigenia*. Captain Joseph Riouffe and other French officers and seamen were mortally wounded in the engagement of 25 November 1793.<sup>43</sup>

### **Summary**

At the close of 1791, *l'Inconstante* and Captain Joseph Riouffe were commissioned by the French King for a campaign in the West Indies.

They first sailed for St. Domingue on 13 January 1792, but the voyage was delayed when winter seas and weather damaged the frigate and forced her return to France. They sailed once again for the troubled colony on 12 April 1792, eight days before France declared war on Austria, igniting the French Revolutionary Wars. While they were stationed in the Caribbean massive civil unrest occurred in France, resulting in the abolition of the monarchy, the birth of the French Republic and the death of Louis XVI. The period was marked by abrupt social, political, and military upheavals, and violence and terror in both the mother country and St. Domingue. Facing personal criticism and the uncertainties of France and her colonial affairs, the frigate's commander carried on duties in the West Indian colony. Predictably, in early 1793 after France declared war on Britain, the British began to patrol the coasts of St. Domingue in earnest and by September launched their first expedition against the colony. In November of that year two Royal Navy frigates captured *l'Inconstante* with the loss of Captain Riouffe and members of the crew. *L'Inconstante* would become a Royal Navy ship.

## Footnotes for Chapter IV.

1. Sir James Barskett, *History of the Island of St. Domingo: From Its First Discovery by Columbus to the Present Period* (London, Frank Cass and Company, Ltd., 1972; reprint of the original edition: London, 1818), 114-153.
2. *Ministère de la Défense, Service Historique de la Marine, Château de Vincennes* (hereafter SHM), CC7 ALPHA 2151, *Dossier individuel de Alexandre Joseph Riouffe*. Numerous documents in this class detail Riouffe's career in the French Navy and the ships on which he served.
3. AR, 1 E 268, *Correspondance de la Cour avec l'Intendant de la Marine à Rochefort, Officier militaire pour l'Intendance, No. 293*, Copy of a letter of 17 November 1791.
4. SHM, CC7 ALPHA 2151, *Rochefort, services du citoyen Riouffe Capitaine de Vaisseau, extrait des rôles d'équipages déposés au bureau général des armemens de ce port, 22 Nivôse et 28 Pluviôse l'an 3 de la République française* (11 January and 16 February 1795). The dates in this reference are according to the French Revolutionary Calendar which was the official calendar of France from 24 November 1793 to 31 December 1805; the first day of the calendar began on 22 September 1792, immediately after the establishment of the first French Republic. The calendar was divided into 12 months of 30 days each and the remaining five days were feast days; in leap year the last day of the year was Revolution day.
5. AR, 1 E 271, *Correspondance de la Cour avec l'Intendant de la Marine à Rochefort, Extrait de l'équipage de deux frégates armées en flûte, et celui d'une flûte*, 17 November 1791.
6. *Ibid.*, *Port R et arsenaux pour l'Intendance, No. 294*, Copy of a letter of 17 November 1791.
7. AR, 1 E 268, *Commis aux revues aux approvisionnement, No. 316*, Letter of 27 November 1791.
8. AR, 1 E 271, *Port R & arsenaux pour l'Intendance, No. 322*, Copy of a letter of 3 December 1791; Riouffe's instructions are included in: *Archives Nationales, Paris* (hereafter AN), C/7 276, *Dossier personnel de Alexandre Joseph Riouffe*.
9. AR, [1 E 271], *Artillerie et colonies, No. 330*, Letter sent from the Minister of the Navy in Paris to Charlot in Rochefort, 8 December 1791.
10. *Ibid.*, *Colonies, No. 353*, Letter from the Minister of the Navy to Charlot, 17 December 1791.
11. AR, 1 A 122, *Correspondance du Commandant de la Marine à Rochefort avec la Cour, 1791*.
12. Personal letter of 21 May 1986 from Jean Favier, Director of the *Archives Nationales, Paris*, to Charles Beeker, Indiana University.
13. AR, 3 E2 35, *Rôle d'équipage, la frégate l'Inconstante, commandée par M. Riouffe Major de Vaisseau, rôle de bord, 21 November 1791 to 25 November 1793*.

14. *Ibid.*
15. Barskett, *St. Domingo*, 154-157.
16. William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
17. Michael Lewis, *The History of the British Navy* (Baltimore, Penguin Books Inc., 1962), 174; Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy, The Ships, Men and Organization 1793-1815* (London, Conway Maritime Press, Ltd., 1989), 281.
18. AR, 3 E2 35, *L'Inconstante, rôle de bord*.
19. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 282.
20. C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins, Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London, W.H. Allen & Co. Plc, 1989), 31.
21. Captain Thomas Southey, *A Chronological History of the West Indies*, III (London, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968; reprint of the original edition: London, 1827), 37.
22. James, *Black Jacobins*, 31.
23. *Ibid.*, 122.
24. *Ibid.*, 118-119.
25. Barskett, *St. Domingo*, 154-157.
26. *Ibid.*, 157-159; James, *Black Jacobins*, 118-123; Southey, *Chronological History*, 53-54.
27. Barskett, *St. Domingo*, 154-159; Southey, *Chronological History*, 54.
28. National Library of Jamaica, Institute of Jamaica, Kingston (hereafter NLJ), 'French Navy, Account Given in to the National Convention of the State of the French Navy, Sept. 23', *The Royal Gazette*, XV (1793), From Saturday 29 December 1792 to Saturday 5 January 1793, No.1. This periodical frequently published intelligence gathered about France.
29. SHM, CC7 ALPHA 2151, *La municipalité du Môle, Séance du 29 janvier 1793 L'an premier de La République Francaise*.
30. PRO, ADM 1/245, Admiralty and Secretariat Papers, 'Jamaica 1793 & 94 Admiral John Ford Esqr.': John Ford, Commodore and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels at Jamaica, to Philip Stephens, Secretary of the Admiralty, aboard the *Providence*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 14 April 1793 and Enclosure: A List of French Vessels seized in the Port of Kingston on 29 March 1793. In the Public Record Office the dispatches and enclosures in ADM 1/245 are bound together and titled 'Jamaica 1793 & 94 Admiral John Ford Esqr.'. John Ford was, however, Commodore and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels at Jamaica until 12 April 1794 when he was promoted to Rear Admiral.



31. *Ibid.*, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Providence*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 12 May 1793 and Enclosure: A List of French Prizes taken by the Squadron under the Command of John Ford between 14 April and 12 May 1793. British documents refer to the captured French corvette as *le Goelan*; the French called her *le Goéland* (sea-gull).
32. Southey, *Chronological History*, 37.
33. British documents consistently refer to a place called Aux Cayes but attempts to find such a place on both modern and historical maps has, so far, been unsuccessful. There is, however, a place called Les Cayes on the south Coast of St. Domingue, and it is possible that the two names refer to the same location.
34. PRO, ADM 1/245, Extract of a Letter from Captain Rowley of His Majesty's Ship *Penelope* dated at Sea 3 June 1793, Enclosure in John Ford to Philip Stephens, 9 June 1793.
35. *Ibid.*, A List of the Squadron under the Command of John Ford...and the Services they are employed on 12 May 1793, Enclosure in John Ford to Philip Stephens, 12 May 1793; Southey, *Chronological History*, 74.
36. Barskett, *St. Domingo*, 159-165; James, *Black Jacobins*, 126-128; Southey, *Chronological History*, 67-69.
37. PRO, ADM 1/245, Disposition of the Squadron under the Command of John Ford...on 8 September 1793, Enclosure in John Ford to Philip Stephens, 8 September 1793.
38. Southey, *Chronological History*, 74.
39. Barskett, *St. Domingo*, 163-175; James, *Black Jacobins*, 135; Southey, *Chronological History*, 69-70.
40. AN, Marine BB/4/28, fo 86-95, *Dossier l'Inconstante*.
41. James, *Black Jacobins*, 31.
42. AR, 3 E2 35, *L'Inconstante, rôle de bord*.
43. Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica (hereafter JA), High Court of Vice Admiralty, Ship's Papers, '*L'Inconstant* to HMS *Penelope*, Taken 25th November 1793, Condemned'.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PRIZE

Eighteenth-century Britain and France acquired, maintained and defended colonies in the West Indies by naval strength. The British kept permanent squadrons in Jamaica and in the Leeward Islands, and in times of peace these squadrons protected the colonies and the seaborne merchant trade. During wartime they provided convoy protection for British ships and cruised to defend Britain's commerce; they attacked their enemy's trade and captured or destroyed their naval forces.<sup>1</sup>

Declarations of war were generally not bad news for Royal Navy officers. The lure of prize money for the seizure of enemy merchantmen and warships was, in fact, a great inducement for a naval career, for prize money was largely a wartime phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> The *Cruiser and Convoys Act* of 1708 had established a system for convoy-defense and trade-protection, containing clauses that became the basis of Prize Law for the remainder of the eighteenth century. The Act provided that almost all prize money went to the captors of enemy ships, and outlined when prize-taking could begin and how it should be regulated.

Seizure of prizes was to commence with a Royal Proclamation, such proclamations being issued at the onset of each war. Once a vessel was captured, certain procedures had to be followed and the question of whether it actually belonged to the enemy had to be adjudicated. This was handled by either the High Court of Admiralty in London or a Vice Admiralty Court located elsewhere in Britain or in the Colonies. The prize had to go through the process of *condemnation*. When the procedure was completed, prize-money was awarded and distributed among the officers and crews of the vessels that had achieved the capture, and those that were in sight when the enemy surrendered. Flag officers, such as admirals and their junior flags, also received a percentage of the value of prizes taken by the ships and vessels under

their command.

Merchantmen were the most tempting vessels to seize because they often carried valuable cargoes and were less dangerous to contest than ships of war, but promotions could be had for taking a warship. Head-money of five pounds per member of the enemy's crew was paid for both warships and privateers. Furthermore, a foreign navy vessel itself might be sold to the Admiralty, at a good price.<sup>3</sup>

### **Commodore John Ford's Squadron in Jamaica**

When Commodore John Ford, aboard His Majesty's 50-gun ship *Europa*, reached Jamaica on 3 January 1793 to command the squadron stationed there, Great Britain and France were still at peace (Figure 27). In his first letter to the Admiralty, dated 13 January, he reported that the colony was in a tranquil state. Upon his arrival he had fallen in with the frigates *Triton* and *Penelope* and the sloops *Hound*, *Falcon* and *Serpent*, off the east end of Jamaica, and had ordered them into Port Royal Harbor; there he found the frigate *Proserpine*, the *Hyæna* of 24 guns, and the sloop *Helena* (Figure 28). The next day, when the cutter *Advice* arrived, Commodore Ford gathered his whole squadron. After consultation with the Governor and Council he ordered the vessels on various services in the Caribbean. The *Serpent* was to cruise the Bahama and Turks Islands and look into Cap Français on her return voyage. The *Hound*, Captain John Lawford, had been supplied with four months' provisions for duty in the Bay of Honduras at the British settlements located there, but the voyage was delayed because the Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica had received a request by the Secretary of State in Britain that a proper officer be sent to meet the Spanish Commissary; the Lieutenant Governor suggested that perhaps Commodore Ford should go (Figure 2, p.3). The *Penelope*, Captain B.S. Rowley, was to sail to Cap Français with documents for the payment of a demand, acknowledged by their government, for damage done by rebellious Negroes who had been landed in the Bay of Honduras, and for costs incurred for

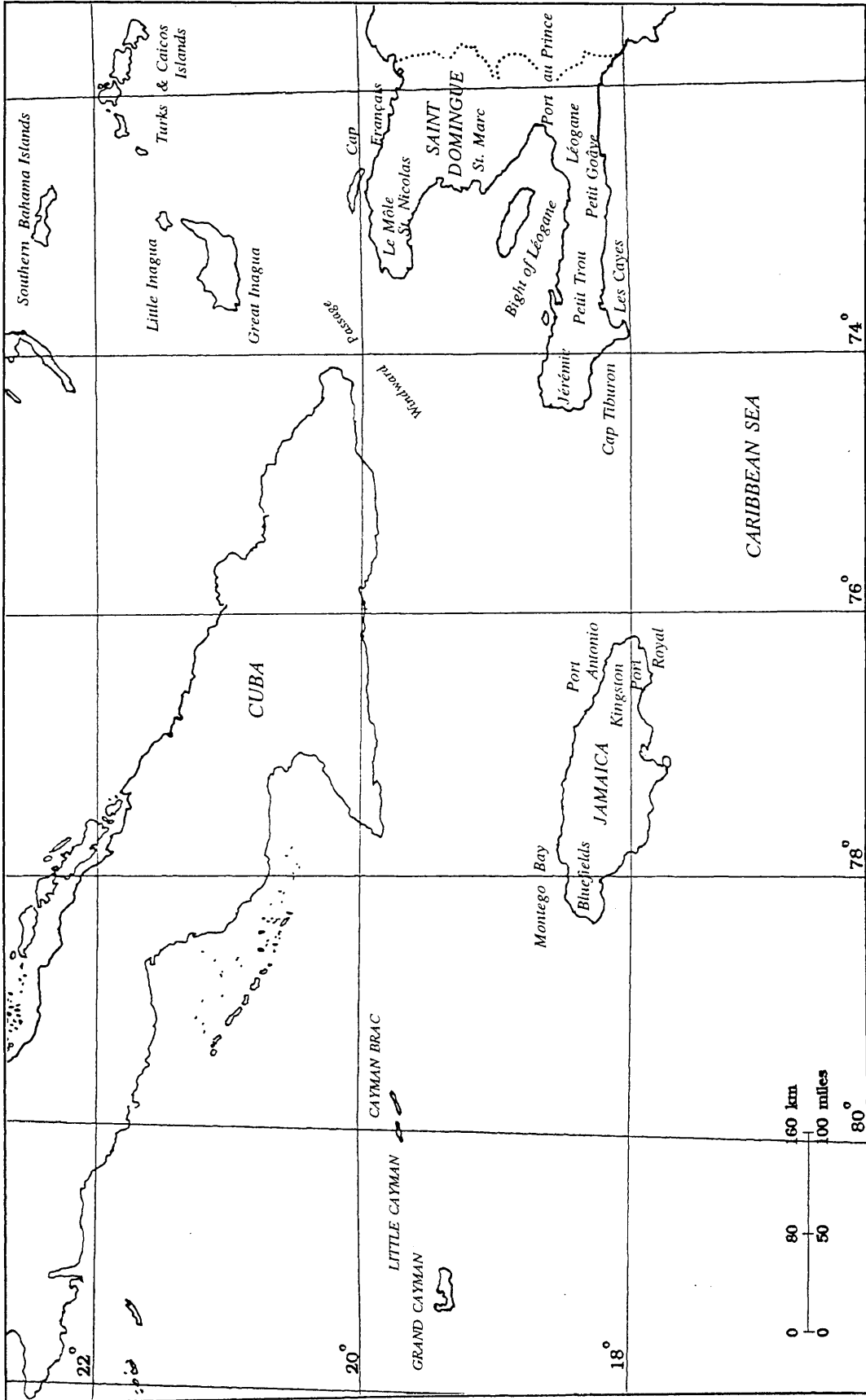


Figure 27. A Section of the Eighteenth-Century Caribbean Including Jamaica and St. Domingue (drawn by R.L. Craig).

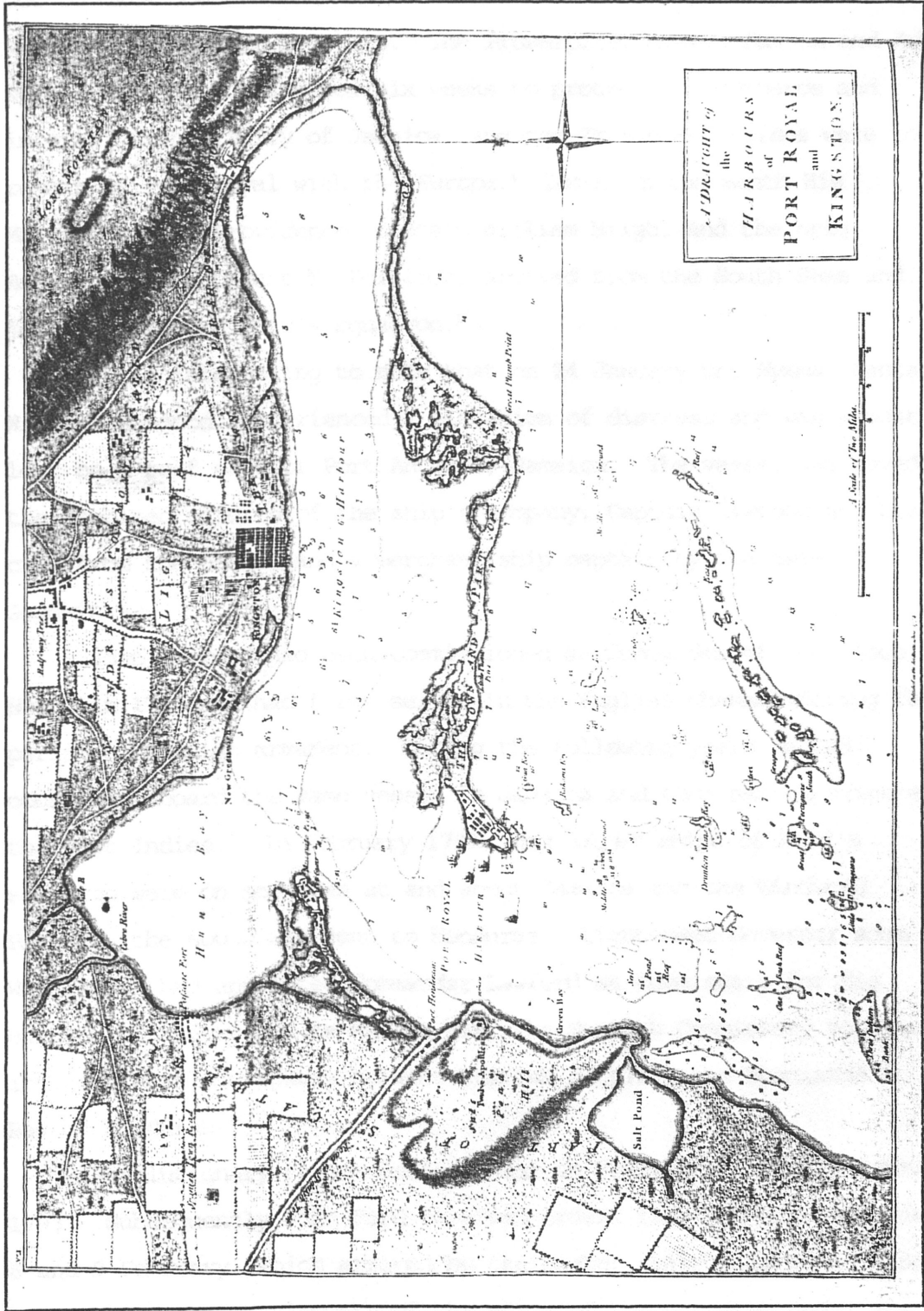


Figure 28. 'The Harbours of Port Royal and Kingston' from E. Long's *The History of Jamaica*, published in London by T. Lowndes in 1774 (by permission of the British Library).

conveying them back to Cap Français; he was also to take precautions but to make observations on the French naval and military forces that were present at Cap Français. The *Proserpine*, *Hyæna*, *Falcon* and *Advice* were ordered to cruise for six weeks to protect the commerce and internal tranquillity of Jamaica, and the *Triton* and *Helena* were to remain at Port Royal with the *Europa*.<sup>4</sup> Later in the month His Majesty's Ship *Providence*, Captain William Bligh, and the brig *Assistant*, Lieutenant N. Portlock, arrived from the South Seas and joined Commodore Ford's squadron.<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting to note that on 24 January the *Hyæna*, Captain William Hargood, experienced a situation of distress and was almost lost on a reef east of Port Antonio, Jamaica. The vessel was saved by the combined efforts of the ship's company, Captain Lawford and his crew from the *Hound*, and a merchant ship captain by the name of Goodwin.<sup>6</sup>

John Lawford had been commissioned as Commander of the sloop *Hound* in 1790 and had first served in the English Channel during the period of Spanish armament. During the following years he had continued aboard the same vessel in Jamaica and thus had experience in the West Indies.<sup>7</sup> In February 1793, when other ships of Ford's squadron were on services at and about Jamaica and the Windward Passage, the *Hound* was sent to Honduras. Lieutenant Governor Adam Williamson had appointed Commander Lawford as Commissary for His Britannic Majesty and he was to meet the Spanish Commissary to enquire into and settle disputes between British settlers and Spaniards in the Bay of Honduras.<sup>8</sup>

Revolutionary France declared war on Great Britain on 1 February 1793. Subsequently John Ford received orders from the Admiralty dated 8 and 9 February, which arrived by the packet *Cumberland* on 29 March, to complete the complements of the ships of the squadron under his command and "to seize or Destroy all Ships or Vessels belonging to the

subjects of France". Immediately he ordered that all French vessels in the Port of Kingston be seized; the prizes included five schooners and three sloops of between 35 and 65 tons. With no hesitation the Commodore had the Naval Storekeeper purchase a fast sailing, 60-ton schooner, which he named the *Spitfire*, to be used to "gain Intelligence of the Enemy's Force and Movements at Port-au-Prince and Cape Francois, or other important Purposes".<sup>9</sup> He also detained the *Providence* and *Assistant*, which he had intended to send home at the beginning of April with botanical plants for His Majesty's Garden at Kew, because the vessels were not fitted for war. They would, instead, wait until a convoy was appointed and then escort the homeward-bound merchantmen across the Atlantic.

In all likelihood, news of war was welcomed by Ford's officers. The West Indies was an excellent post for prize-taking. The Commodore transferred his *Pendant* to the *Providence* which remained at Port Royal, as did the brig *Assistant*, so that the *Europa* could be mobilized with the rest of the squadron, excluding the *Hound*.<sup>10</sup> Between 29 March and 14 April 1793 the fleet was dispatched on courier, reconnaissance and intelligence-seeking duties. The *Serpent*, Captain Richard Lee, was sent to the Bahama and Turks Islands with news that war had commenced with France, after which she was to cruise in the passages to inform and protect ships from America that were bound to Jamaica. The others were on services around St. Domingue: the *Europa*, Captain George Gregory, *Hyæna*, Captain William Hargood, *Penelope*, Captain Bartholomew Samuel Rowley, and *Proserpine*, Captain James Alms, were to protect the trade bound to Jamaica and to annoy the enemy; the *Europa* was also to support and guard the British cruisers, and her captain was to direct actions of the *Fly*, Captain William Brown; the *Advice*, Lieutenant Edward Tyrrell, and *Spitfire*, Lieutenant John Perkins, were to look into Port-au-Prince and Cap Français to learn the force of the enemy and to seek intelligence on their intentions. Within two weeks the

group captured a 100-ton brig, two sloops and three schooners.<sup>11</sup>

Away from the main action, the *Hound* was still on services in the Bay of Honduras. On 11 April 1793, Captain Lawford received news of Britain's state of war with France. Commodore Ford had sent him orders to complete the complement of his sloop and to seize all French ships and vessels that he might encounter.<sup>12</sup>

Word arrived in Jamaica that on 8 April 1793 a French frigate, *l'Ambuscade*, had arrived off the coast of the United States.<sup>13</sup> The frigate was said to be blocking the harbor at Charleston completely (presumably the British ships therein since the U.S. and France were not at war) and had taken several British prizes. Furthermore, privateers under French commissions and colors were fitting out in the American port. It was hoped that help would be sent from Jamaica to clear the coast of the frigate because there were many British merchantmen in the harbors of Charleston, Savannah and Wilmington.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the overt actions by France against British ships in American waters, the French Navy in St. Domingue faced the colony's civil disorder and was involved in the defense of its shores rather than in cruising far from the island to contest the British.

During the following months Commodore Ford's squadron continued activities near St. Domingue, cruising in the area to protect trade bound to Jamaica, seeking information on attitudes and events in the French colony, observing French naval and military forces, harassing the merchant trade and capturing prizes. Around 12 June, His Majesty's ships *Proserpine*, *Providence*, *Assistant* and *Fly* sailed from Jamaica with a convoy of 155 merchantmen bound to ports in Britain and three additional vessels headed for America. The *Providence* and *Assistant* were also to meet British merchant ships from Honduras off Cape Antonio that were expected to join the fleet (Figure 29). In June the schooner *Mosquito*, Lieutenant John Fenton, joined Ford's forces. In July additions to the squadron included the frigate *Hermione*, Captain John



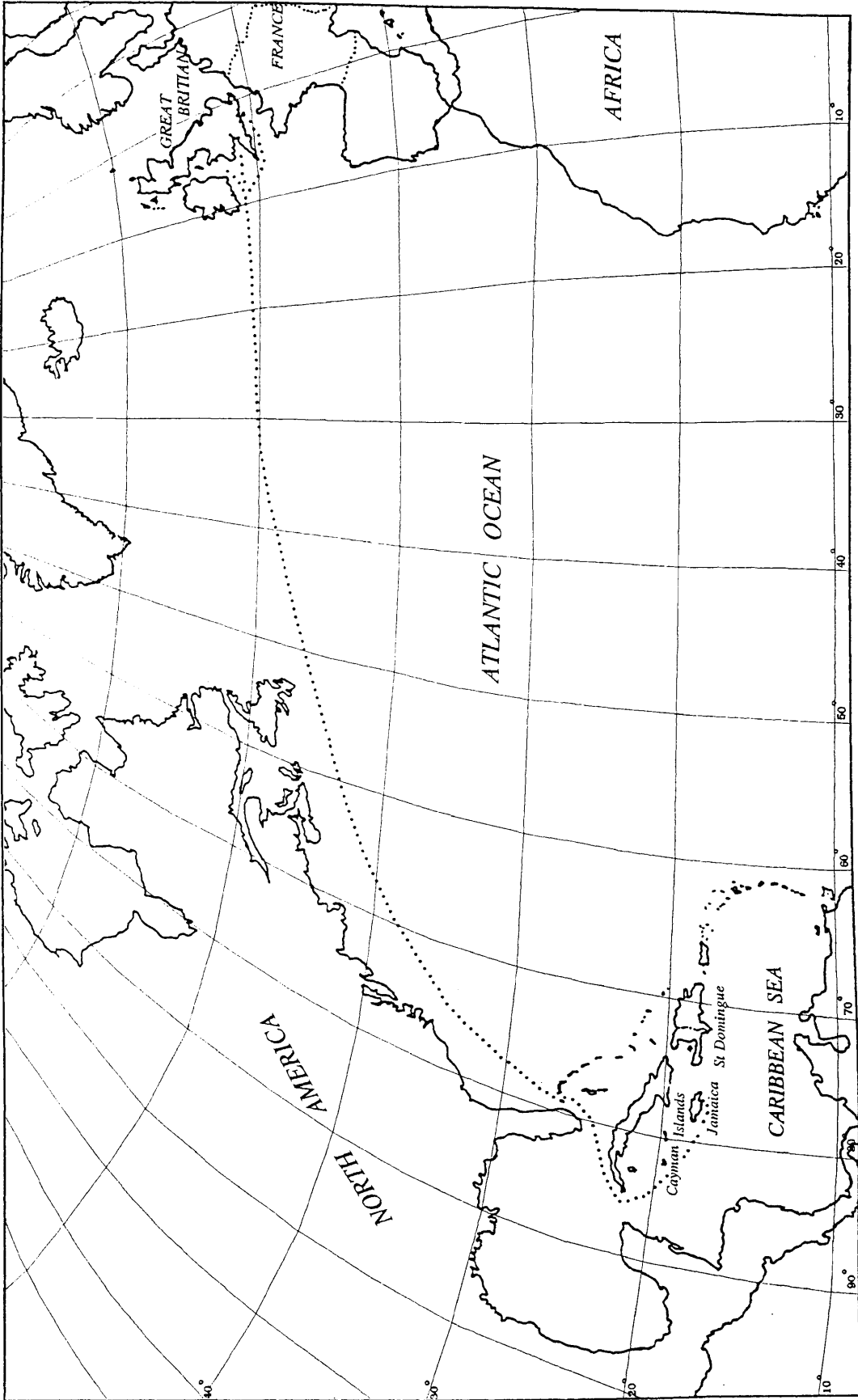


Figure 29. The Route of His Majesty's Ships and Their Merchant Convoys from Jamaica to Various British Ports (drawn by R.L. Craig).

Hills, and the 15-ton schooner *Flying Fish*, Lieutenant James Prevost, a former prize to the *Mosquito*.<sup>15</sup>

Between 29 March and 11 July, the British fleet in Jamaica seized at least 58 merchant prizes of between 8 and 250 tons, one packet and the French Republic's 290-ton corvette, *le Goelan*. Although some of the merchantmen were in ballast, many were laden with valuable cargoes including lumber, sugar, coffee, tobacco, wine, cotton, salt, flour, cacao, oil, dry goods, linen, earthenware, soap and candles; a few carried slaves.<sup>16</sup> *Le Goelan*, Lieutenant Leisseguese, captured by the *Penelope* on 16 April in the Bight of Léogane, was an excellent prize. Ford, who deemed her to be a fine and fast sailing vessel, had her purchased by the Naval Storekeeper and put her on the establishment of a sloop of war to mount 14 short 9-pounders and to carry a crew of 90 men. Her captain was to be Thomas Wolley, former First Lieutenant of the *Europa*.<sup>17</sup> The British were, however, not without casualties; HMS *Hyæna* commanded by William Hargood was taken by the French in May.<sup>18</sup>

Another loss to Ford's squadron occurred in Honduras. The schooner *Advice*, Lieutenant Tyrrell, which had replaced the decommissioned cutter *Advice*, was wrecked there on 1 June 1793, but her crew was saved. Her commander was under orders to deliver dispatches to Magistrates of the district and to Captain Lawford concerning the planned 12 June sailing of the convoy from Jamaica. Although Lawford's orders via the *Advice* were to escort the merchant trade from Honduras to join the convoy from Jamaica, he was unable to do so. He did not want to leave the British settlements undefended and after the loss of the schooner, Lieutenant Tyrrell could not relieve him of that duty. Lawford informed the masters of the merchant ships in Honduras of the convoy, but only six vessels could be ready to sail in time to meet the fleet. He sent the names of these merchantmen to the senior officer, Captain Rowley, along with news of the shipwreck as his reason for not being able to join them.<sup>19</sup> After assisting in the salvage of the

*Advice*, Captain Lawford sent her commander, the officers and the crew back to Jamaica in a merchant ship and remained in Honduras with the *Hound*.<sup>20</sup>

His Majesty's 74-gun ships *Hannibal*, Captain John Colpoys, and *Hector*, Captain George Montague, arrived in July, but both sailed with convoys from Jamaica by the end of the month. Together they escorted almost 100 merchantmen bound to ports in Britain, Canada and America. Aware of the presence of French forces near the United States, Commodore Ford ordered the *Europa* to accompany the convoy until it was clear of the American coast.<sup>21</sup> As news, and perhaps as a warning to those merchantmen who did not seek convoy protection, an excerpt from a letter written by a passenger of a captured British merchant ship was published in the Marine Intelligence section of *The Royal Gazette*, a weekly government publication in Jamaica. The Liverpool-bound *Golden Age*, which left Jamaica in August, fell in with the July convoy off the American coast, but then left it. She was subsequently captured in the mid-Atlantic by a privateer from Bordeaux, the *French Citizen*, and taken to Wilmington, on the Delaware, in America.<sup>22</sup>

According to the *Disposition of the Squadron*, dated 11 August 1793, the *Hound* was remaining on service in the Bay of Honduras; the *Europa* was accompanying the July convoy and afterwards was to cruise in the Caicos Islands; the *Flying Fish* was seeing the packet through the Windward Passage and then was to cruise off the Caicos Islands; and the *Spitfire*, *Hermione* and *Penelope* were stationed in the vicinity of St. Domingue. Commodore Ford was aboard the *Goelan* at Port Royal, and the *Mosquito* was refitting there.<sup>23</sup>

By the following month the *Iphigenia* frigate, Captain Patrick Sinclair, had joined the forces in Jamaica. The *Disposition of the Squadron* dated 8 September reveals that the *Hound* was still in Honduras, the *Penelope* was cruising near St. Domingue, and on 9 September the *Europa*, with Commodore Ford on board, along with the

*Iphigenia*, *Hermione*, *Goelan*, *Mosquito*, *Flying Fish* and *Spitfire* were to sail with troops on an expedition against French St. Domingue (Figure 27, p.95).<sup>24</sup> The British secured the town of Jérémie on 19 September and the harbor and fortress at Le Môle St. Nicolas by 22 September 1793. During the September campaign they captured *la Convention Nationale*, a schooner bearing colors of the French Republic.<sup>25</sup>

In November the frigate *Alligator*, Captain William Affleck, and the schooner *Marie Antoinette*, Lieutenant John Perkins, a recent capture, became part of the squadron. Perkins had been removed from the *Spitfire* and her command had been given to Lieutenant Maitland. Commodore John Ford's British forces based in Jamaica now included one 50-gun ship, four frigates, two sloops of war and four schooners.

In a letter of 24 November, Commodore Ford informed the Admiralty that the Ports of Jérémie and Le Môle St. Nicolas, with their dependencies, remained in British possession and that the French had not molested them at either location. On 7 November, he had returned to Jamaica from the latter port for provisions, leaving the frigates and some of the small craft of the squadron to protect the British posts in St. Domingue. According to entries in the *Disposition of the Squadron* for 24 November the *Penelope*, *Hermione*, *Alligator* and *Flying Fish* were at or near Le Môle St. Nicolas to protect the garrison; the *Iphigenia*, *Spitfire* and *Mosquito* were at and in the vicinity of Jérémie for its protection; and the sloop *Goelan* was in the Bahama Islands. The *Europa*, *Hound* and *Marie Antoinette* were refitting at Port Royal.<sup>26</sup> The *Hound* had arrived in Jamaica from the Bay of Honduras on Sunday, 17 November, having completed in excess of eight months of service in that district.<sup>27</sup>

While John Lawford, Commander of the sloop *Hound*, was stationed in Honduras, he missed the lucrative prize-seeking opportunities that his fellow officers were pursuing in St. Domingue. Nonetheless, he carried out his mission as British Commissary in the Bay of Honduras

with propriety. He gained the respect of the Governor of Yucatan and the Spanish Commissary as well as that of Lieutenant Governor Adam Williamson and Commodore John Ford in Jamaica. On 13 December 1793, Lieutenant Governor Williamson wrote a letter of commendation about John Lawford to Henry Dundas, Secretary of State for War. The letter contained 29 enclosures, consisting of much of Lawford's correspondence with Spanish Government officials in Honduras and with Williamson himself in Jamaica, detailing occurrences and the decisions that had been made during the eight-month tour of duty.<sup>28</sup> He also directed Lawford to give him an accounting of his expenses while on service in Honduras; this was done in a letter of 20 December 1793. After listing all of the general expenses incurred on the duty, Lawford wrote:

With respect to Compensation for my Personal trouble on this Service I feel myself unequal to enter upon the Subject, and must request that Your Honor will submit it entirely to the Consideration of His Majesty's Ministers, trusting that they will be pleased to recollect my having been employed upon this detached Service, at a Period when my situation on the Station had every prospect of being in a very high degree advantageous.

Williamson wrote a cover letter for Lawford's itemization and on 16 January sent it to the Secretary of State for War.<sup>29</sup> In a letter of 6 March 1793 to the Lieutenant Governor, Dundas wrote, "The Conduct of Captain Lawford, during his Visitation at Honduras, seems to have been exceedingly proper...I am of opinion that 25 Shillings a day, during Captain Lawford's absence on the Visitation, exclusive of his Expenses, is a proper allowance to him for that Service".<sup>30</sup>

### **The Capture of *l'Inconstante***

Brian Lavery tabulates that one hundred and forty-three French frigates, including both privateers and national ships (often the largest classes and most advanced designs), were either captured or destroyed by the British during the French Revolutionary Wars, and points out that these vessels made up a large percentage of the frigates in the Royal Navy. Some were relegated to harbor service, but

others were extremely successful and were copied, such as the *Hébé*, *Pomone*, *Belle-Poule*, *Magicienne*, and the *Impériouse*.<sup>31</sup> Had His Majesty's Ship *Convert*, ex-*Inconstante*, not been lost shortly after her capture, she probably would have been among the latter class of Royal Navy frigates.

#### British Accounts

In late November 1793, when much of the Jamaica squadron was in St. Domingue protecting Britain's newly acquired possessions at Jérémie and Le Môle St. Nicolas, *The Royal Gazette* in Jamaica published in the *Marine Intelligence* section that, "a forty-gun frigate, an armed brig, and a sloop, chiefly manned with brigands, are lying at Port-au-Prince, but not in a condition for service".<sup>32</sup> The French 12-pounder frigate *Inconstante* had been in Port-au-Prince for much of the previous five months and certainly was there during most of November.<sup>33</sup> Therefore it is likely that she was the frigate referred to. According to the British point of view, though unquestionably biased, it seems that *l'Inconstante* and Commander Joseph Riouffe had not escaped the ill-effects of upheavals in St. Domingue. No doubt among the frigate's crew of officers and seamen there were both cloaked royalist sentiments and open revolutionary views, and also considerable uncertainty.

Captain B.S. Rowley of His Majesty's Ship *Penelope* had spent much of his time since war had been declared at and about St. Domingue seeking intelligence and seizing French ships. He must have earned quite a reputation for prize-taking; in the previous eight months his frigate had been responsible for a large percentage of the captures, including the sloop of war *Goelan*, achieved by Commodore Ford's squadron. In those eight months he had also become quite familiar with events in the French colony. In late November, while under orders to protect the harbor and garrison at Le Môle St. Nicolas, he received an intelligence report that sparked his interest and upon which he acted. In his letter of 30 November 1793 to Commodore Ford describing the

capture of *l'Inconstante* Captain Rowley wrote (Figure 30):

I beg leave to acquaint you that I sailed from Mole St. Nicholas on the 20th Instant, having received Intelligence that the *Inconstant* Frigate was expected to leave Port au Prince to convoy a large Armed Merchantman. On the day following I fell in with His Majesty's Ship *Iphigenia*, Captain Sinclair, to whom I gave orders to keep Company, and was proceeding to Port au Prince when I was informed from Leoganne that the *Inconstant* had sailed with two small vessels for Petit Trou but was daily expected back.

I immediately made Sail with intention of trying to take or distroy [sic] her in the Harbour, but on the Night of the 25th we had the good fortune to fall in with her, and after exchanging a few Broad Sides she struck her Colours to the Frigates.

The *Penelope* had one Man kill'd and Seven wounded, amongst the latter is Mr. John Allen Midshipman. The *Inconstant* had Six kill'd, amongst whom was the First Lieutenant, and the Captain, and Twenty wounded, three of whom are since dead.

From the Gallant behavior of Lieutenant Malcolm the Officers and Ship's Company, I have every reason to flatter myself that had either of His Majesty's Frigates been Single, they would have been equally fortunate in capturing her.

I beg leave to add that Captain Sinclair's very favorable report of the Conduct of his Officers & Ship's Company, is such as does them the greatest honor.<sup>34</sup>

The Master's Log of the *Penelope*, kept by John Douglas, includes a more detailed narrative of the search for, and seizure of, *l'Inconstante*. It reveals the courses sailed and the calculated actions performed by the British frigates (Figure 31).<sup>35</sup> On 23 November 1793 the *Penelope* was cruising in company with the *Iphigenia* and the schooner *Flying Fish*. There were light breezes and the weather was clear. The three vessels ran into St. Marc's Bay where they observed at anchor two large merchant ships, a brig and several schooners and sloops with French national colors hoisted, along with two American and two Danish vessels. While in the bay, the *Penelope* was approached twice by boats from shore which came alongside.<sup>36</sup> The British vessels left St. Marc's Bay and the frigates parted company with the *Flying Fish*, sailing on a southward course towards Port-au-Prince. Later they encountered another vessel and fired a shot to bring her to; an officer

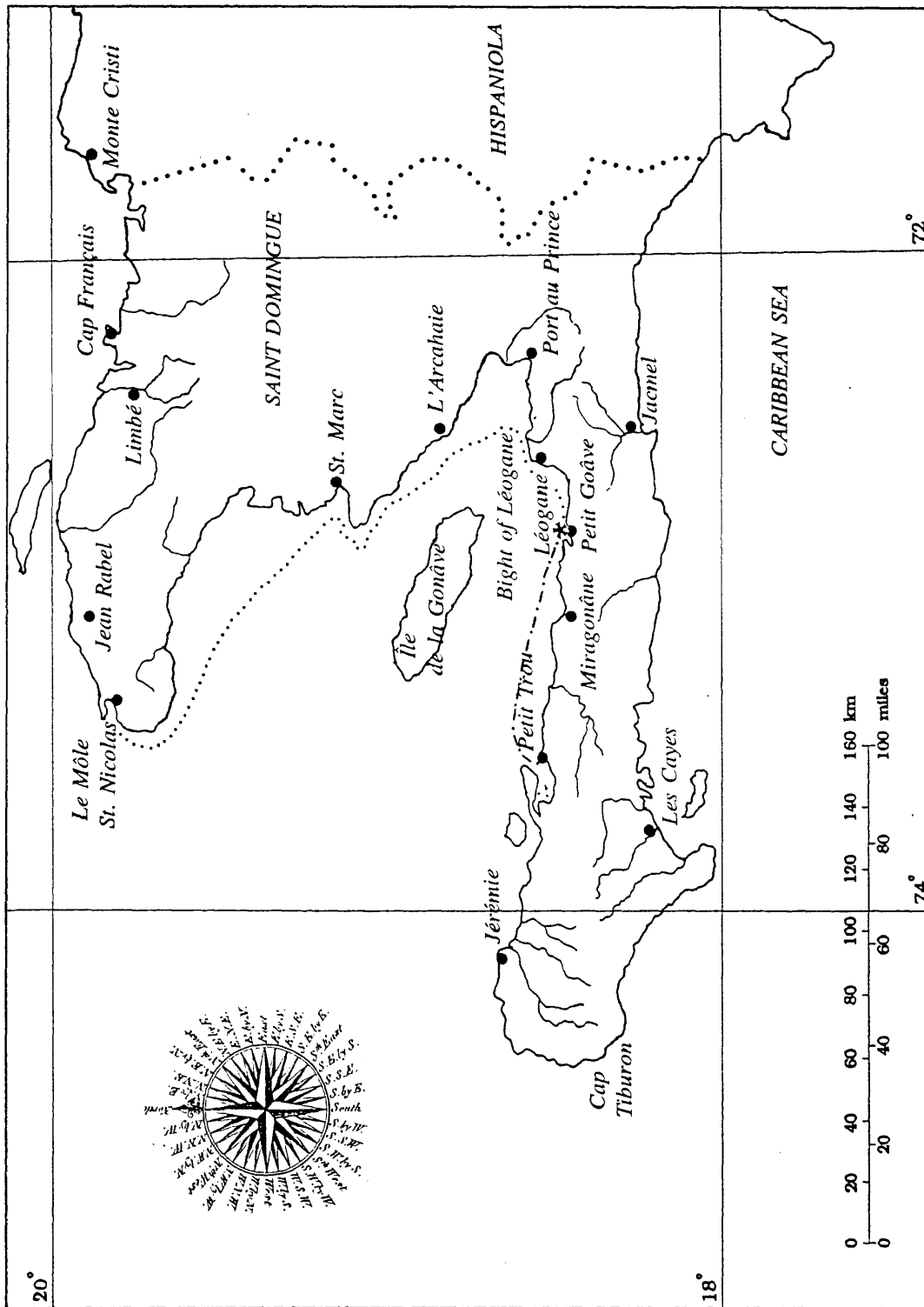


Figure 30. Simplified Route of the British Frigates from Le Môle St. Nicolas to the Site of the Capture of *L'Inconstante* (drawn by R.L. Craig).



No	Hour	Wind	Direction	Remarks	No	Hour	Wind	Direction	Remarks
1	1	4	E. N.E.	West	<p><b>Monday Nov. 25. 1793</b></p> <p>Light breeze and clear weather. <i>Spargina</i> &amp; <i>Phycis</i> fish schooners in company. <i>Mercurius</i> with <i>St. Marks</i> 1000, 1200, 1400, 1600, 1800, 2000, 2200, 2400, 2600, 2800, 3000, 3200, 3400, 3600, 3800, 4000, 4200, 4400, 4600, 4800, 5000, 5200, 5400, 5600, 5800, 6000, 6200, 6400, 6600, 6800, 7000, 7200, 7400, 7600, 7800, 8000, 8200, 8400, 8600, 8800, 9000, 9200, 9400, 9600, 9800, 10000.</p>				
2	2	4	—	—	at 3 came along side about from the shore and at anchor in the bay & large Merchant ships aboy.				
3	3	4	—	—	Several Schooners & Sloops with National Colours & 2 American private & 2 Daines. at 5 came along side a small boat from the town with a party in pursuit of the boat left us at 6 full of made sail out of the bay. Light air and variable at 7 parted company with the <i>Phycis</i> fish schooner. at 8 de took Double <i>St. Marks</i> on board.				
4	4	4	—	—	Made of shortened sail occasionally.				
5	5	4	—	—	at 11. <i>St. Marks</i> point E. S. E. 5 miles				
6	6	4	—	—	at 12. 2 tacks				
7	7	4	—	—	at 1. 3 tacks. Light air of clear weather.				
8	8	4	—	—	at day light and ashore to the last of find ashore to <i>Guantanamo</i> the West the only boat with another on board. It proved to be the <i>Concepcion</i> from Cape Verde Mole bound to port our prime in ballast.				
9	9	4	—	—	Sett steering sails of royal. Discovered great guns of small arms <i>Spargina</i> in company.				
10	10	4	—	—	East Point <i>Guantanamo</i> 1000 3. <i>Leopold</i> —				
11	11	4	—	—	Light air and clear weather. with the main sail.				
12	12	4	—	—	Taken aboard down royals of stay sails took sound in 15 fms water. with ground up main sail down jib.				
13	1	4	—	—	Tack up fore sail of hove to.				
14	2	4	—	—	Sett of made sail and arrived in <i>Leopold</i> and <i>Leopold</i> saw several small vessels at anchor there.				
15	3	4	—	—	at 3. 9 tacks. Light air of variable.				
16	4	4	—	—	Mastered the ship <i>Compass</i> light breeze from the north. with 1/2 gal. of rum.				
17	5	4	—	—	at 5. 11 shortened sail & hove to for about coming off from <i>Leopold</i> . <i>Spargina</i> in company.				
18	6	4	—	—	at 6. 12 <i>Leopold</i> 1000 part of 700 & 8 Miles.				

Figure 31. Excerpt from the Master's Log of HMS Penelope Including 23 to 26 November 1793 (courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew).

Date	Hour	Course	Wind	Remarks
1893				Remarks Penelope on Monday Nov. 25 <sup>th</sup> 1793
				Light breeze and clear weather
				Light breeze and clear weather
				Light breeze
				Mustered at dusk at 6 o'clock the sails were 2 sail to the
				miles, at 6 tows of League N. 1/2 E. 1/2 S. miles
				Board a fishing boat from Guariaca - Sphigina in
				Company
				Spinnaker up and set
				Set steering sails fore of aft
				Set to North. at 1 sail was to the weather closed ship
				for action, at 4-1 got along side of her found to be
				the 2nd constant station the Regalia from Port. Din
				found to be a Spanish one, long the along side of her found
				board sides into her which she returned, that Sphigina com
				ing up on her side, August at 2 she struck in the action
				the American's death got her was only 2 to third time all
				over board of 50 handkerchiefs the wooden steering sail blades
				being shot away but a man steering sail by accident
				found after the action 1 man killed & 9 wounded, found out
				all the boats were by board, the Spanish ship's crew
				ing the prize sent half of them for board the Sphigina with
				about 2 mts of 30 struck on board her - at 8 fell down
				about at a 1/2 m. there she got under the fore at 8 leagues
				being clear at 11 light on side sail,
				at 11 mts point of Guanata N. 1/2 E. 1/2 S. leagues in tow
1793				Remarks on Tuesday Nov. 26 <sup>th</sup> 1793.
				Light air & clear weather made & shortened sail
				slightly Sphigina & prize in company
				Qued a shot to bring her along sent about on board her
				her American had in with prisoners sent her to gun
				mine
				Mustered at dusk at 6 o'clock the sails
				at 6 leagues N. 1/2 E. 1/2 S. miles
				at 1/2 galt sails made of cloudy with thunder by storm
				and rain. Sphigina & prize in company
				Lightly with lightning of rain
				Light air & clear occasionally
				Calon
				Variable
				Light air & cloudy
				Set lower rig of the gal's steering sail
				Washed of Amovado between decks
				Calon of clear Sphigina & prize in company
				West point of Guanata N. 1/2 E. 1/2 S. leagues -

Figure 31. (continued).

from the *Penelope* was sent in the jolly boat to the unidentified ship which was found to be the *America* from Le Môle St. Nicolas bound to Port-au-Prince in ballast. Several hours later, while at sea, the *Penelope* "exercised her great guns and small arms". The *Iphigenia* remained in company.

During the following day, the frigates observed an American brig standing into Léogane, where several small vessels were already at anchor. They sailed on, but later hove-to for a boat that was approaching them from Léogane. It was via this vessel that Captain Rowley learned that *l'Inconstante* had sailed to Petit Trou and was soon expected back in Port-au-Prince.

On Monday, 25 November 1793, Master Douglas' log records, there were light breezes, the weather was clear and the frigates were cruising west of Léogane. Two sails appeared to the westward and subsequently the British boarded a fishing boat from Guanaba. In the moonlit hours a light southeast breeze sprang up. At 1:00 am the *Penelope* sighted another sail to the westward, and orders were given to clear the ship for action. By 1:30 am the *Penelope* was alongside the vessel, which was discovered to be the French National Frigate *Inconstante*, bound from Petit Trou to Port-au-Prince. The *Penelope* fired several broadsides into the hull of the French ship, which returned the fire. Presently, the *Iphigenia* came up on the starboard quarter of the 12-pounder frigate. At 2:00 am, *l'Inconstante* struck in the action. The *Penelope* hoisted out her boats and for the following two hours they were used to shift French prisoners and man the prize; half of the prisoners were put on board the *Iphigenia*, and two midshipmen and 30 seamen were sent from the *Penelope* to the captured frigate. Losses suffered by the *Penelope* during the engagement were one man killed and seven wounded, while the losses on board the *Iphigenia* and *Inconstante* were not listed in the Master's Log of the *Penelope*. There was minor damage on board the *Penelope*; 50 hammock

cloths that caught fire had been thrown overboard, the lower steering sail halyards had been shot away, and a main steering sail with its yards had been lost. At 8:00 am the *Penelope* fired shots at a sloop which took refuge under the forts at Petit Goâve.

On 26 November the *Penelope*, *Iphiginia*, and *Inconstante* sailed in company on a slow westward course in intermittently clear and squally weather (Figure 32). The following day they reached Jérémie where they encountered His Majesty's schooner *Spitfire*, Lieutenant Maitland. Subsequently Captain Rowley sent the *Spitfire* north to Le Môle St. Nicolas, presumably with news of the capture of *l'Inconstante*. On 28 November the three frigates made sail out of Jérémie Bay and set a course for Jamaica.

On Saturday, 30 November 1793, the *Penelope* arrived in Port Royal Harbor where the *Europa* and the sloop *Hound* were found at anchor; later the *Iphiginia* and *Inconstante* arrived. On 2 December, 80 men were sent from the *Penelope* on board the prize to unbend her sails. Also on this day it was recorded that His Majesty's Ships *Success*, Captain Francis Roberts, and *Magicienne*, Captain George Martin, arrived in the Harbor with the convoy from Great Britain. The entry in the Master's log for 3 December 1793 documented that the prize had been commissioned and her name had been changed to *Convert*; 20 men from the *Penelope* were sent on board the frigate to assist in warping her alongside the wharf. Later that day the *Penelope* headed off on another cruise.<sup>37</sup>

An extract of a personal letter sent from Jérémie in St. Domingue on 27 November 1793 and received in London on 27 January 1794 also refers to the captured *Inconstante* and provides insight into the early British perception of the events which were affecting their standing in St. Domingue:

The probability of Port au Prince & all the Country to the Westward being in our possession speedily increases every day.

The people of Colour & the Whites in the Neighborhood of St. Marc have United & are now taking the field against the Commissioners

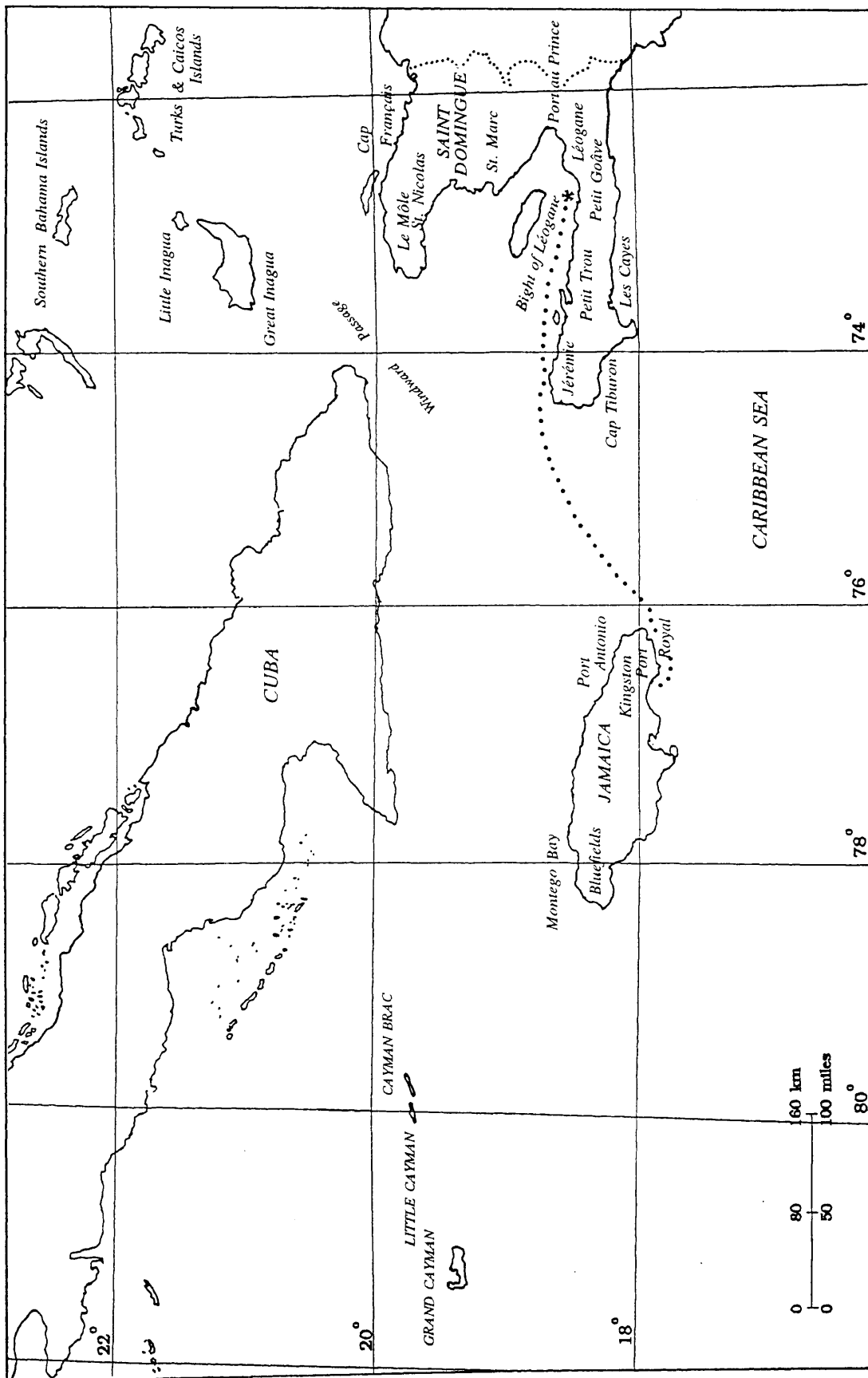


Figure 32. The Route of the Prize Inconstante from St. Domingue to Jamaica (drawn by R.L. Craig).

whose only hope seems now to be in the Slaves whom they have universally declared free, almost all the Whites that can escape from Port au Prince & that neighborhood are flying to us & implore our protection, & a few more Regiments which we are told we may hourly expect from England will I am persuaded do the business.

The *Inconstante* french frigate of 40 Guns the only Vessel of Force the Democratic party had in the bite [sic] of Leogane is now off this Harbour a Prize to the *Penelope* and *Iphigenia* Frigates she was taken Two days ago after a short engagement.<sup>38</sup>

On 1 December 1793 John Lawford, former Commander of the sloop *Hound*, was promoted to the rank of Post Captain into the Royal Navy's newest acquisition, the fifth-rate frigate *Convert*. Thomas Surridge replaced him on the *Hound* (Figure 33).<sup>39</sup>

On 7 December 1793, John Ford wrote to the Admiralty about the prize *Inconstante*, enclosing a copy of Captain Rowley's letter of 30 November to him that described the incident. The Commodore remarked, "I shall add (in Justice to the commendable Zeal, Activity and Enterprise of those Officers on all occasions, the high Condition and Discipline of their Ships) that, in my Opinion, either of them alone would have accomplished what fell to their United Efforts". He also praised the frigate and explained his reasoning for giving her command to John Lawford:

As this *Inconstant*, is a very fine Ship, about Two Years and a Half old, and reported by Survey a very fit Ship in all Respects for His Majesty's Service (a Copy of which I shall send by next Packet) I have therefore, as an Encouragement to Service, and the Practice of other Officers on similar Occasions, commissioned her accordingly under the Appointments No. 2, and by Name the *Convert*, there being already an *Inconstant* in His Majesty's Navy, and for all which I hope to receive their Lordship's Approbation.<sup>40</sup>

Commodore Ford's *List of the Squadron* for 7 December 1793 reveals that on that date, in addition to the 50-gun ship *Europa*, there were seven frigates, two sloops of war and four schooners under his command in Jamaica. The *Penelope*, *Hermione*, *Magicienne*, *Alligator* and *Flying Fish* were protecting British interests at and in the vicinity of Le Môle St. Nicholas. The *Mosquito* and *Spitfire* were protecting Jérémie,

By the first Lt. Commander and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels employed and to be employed at and about the Island of Jamaica and the Bahama Islands. &c.

To the Honble Lord Esquire, hereby appointed Captain of His Majesty's

By Notice of the Board and Authority to the given, I do hereby constitute and appoint you Captain of His Majesty's ship the *Conestoga*, *Waring* and rejoining you forthwith to go on board and take upon you the Charge and Command of Captain in his accordingly, strictly charging and Commanding all the Officers and Company of the said Ship to behave themselves jointly and severally, in their respective employments, with all due respect and Obedience unto you this said Captain, and you likewise to observe and execute the General Printed Instructions, and such Orders and Directions as you shall from time to time receive from Me, or any other your Superior Officer, for His Majesty's Service. & That you nor any of you may fail as you will answer the Contrary at your peril; And for so doing this shall be your Warrant. & Given under my hand and Seal the first day of December 1793 in the third year of His Majesty's reign.



True Copy  
J. P. Ford

By Command of the Commodore  
John Lawford

J. M. Mackay, Captain of His Majesty's Ship *Conestoga*

Figure 33. Captain John Lawford's 1 December 1793 Commission into HMS *Conestoga* (courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew).

and the *Goelan* was in the Bahamas. The *Europa*, *Success*, *Iphigenia*, *Convert*, *Hound* and *Marie Antoinette* were in Port Royal Harbor; the *Convert* was discharging her stores alongside the wharf.<sup>41</sup>

The *Royal Gazette* also published details about the seizure of the French Frigate *Inconstante*. Although the prize arrived in Port Royal on 30 November, the weekly periodical managed to include, in the 23 to 30 November issue, a brief paragraph about the capture. The *Iphigenia*, however, was not mentioned and the description of casualties was incorrect. In the 30 November to 7 December issue, Captain Rowley's 30 November letter to Commodore Ford was published to relate the incident more accurately to the public. The fact that the name of the French frigate had been changed to the *Convert* and that her command had been given to Captain Lawford was also included. The gazette article went on to state:

The great loss of men on board *L'Inconstante* frigate, for so short an action is in a great measure attributed to the well-directed fire of musquetry from the *Iphigenia* frigate.

The wound received by the Commander of *L'Inconstante* frigate was in the right arm; which shattered it so severely that an amputation became necessary.<sup>42</sup>

In summary, British accounts of the capture of *l'Inconstante* suggest that the event went according to Captain Rowley's pre-meditated plan. British losses were minimal and French casualties were high for the short engagement. The achievement was praised by Commodore John Ford. The prize itself was a fine French-built frigate which was acquired and commissioned for Royal Navy service as the *Convert*. The new ship gave the Commodore an opportunity to promote to higher commands several of his deserving officers on the Jamaica station. Among those men was John Lawford who had recently distinguished himself by his service in the Bay of Honduras.

#### French Accounts

In addition to British reports, there are French accounts of the taking of *l'Inconstante*. In Jamaica brief testimonies were drawn from



two of the frigate's officers. Their words were translated from the French language during the interrogation and recorded in English.<sup>43</sup> In 1794 French authorities were provided with declarations from the commander of *le Goelan*, also a prisoner in Jamaica since the seizure of his corvette in April 1793, and from a naval officer who had been on board *l'Inconstante*; both men criticized the frigate's captain for his actions during her capture.<sup>44</sup> An opposing viewpoint regarding Captain Riouffe was taken by others and recorded in documents regarding him and his widow, Hypolite Valliet Riouffe, in her quest to clear her husband's name and to realize a pension for her family based on his many years of service in the French Navy.<sup>45</sup>

Second Lieutenant Augustin de Boyery and Boatswain Joseph Goy, French prisoners from *l'Inconstante*, were interrogated in the proceedings for the captured prize in the High Court of Vice Admiralty in Jamaica. The officers testified that *l'Inconstante* held a Commission as a French Ship of War which had been granted by Louis XVI, late King of France. Her Commander had been Jean Riouffe who also carried a Commission from the late King, and whose wife and family resided in France. Boyery had met Captain Riouffe several years before, and Goy had known him for more than thirty years.<sup>46</sup> The Second Lieutenant had encountered *l'Inconstante* in St. Domingue and had been on board her for eleven months, while the Boatswain had first seen her four years before at Rochefort where he said she had been built. Both men testified that no person on board had any holdings in the frigate. According to Boyery her crew was made up of about 250 people who had come aboard at different times in different ports and her ordnance comprised twenty-six 12-pounders, six 6-pounders and two swivels. Goy said the crew numbered 240 and that there were four swivels.

The Second Lieutenant testified that, on 20 November 1793, *l'Inconstante* had sailed from Port-au-Prince to Petit Trou to convoy two sloops laden with provisions and that a French lady passenger

escaping the troubles in St. Domingue had come on board there. On the return voyage the frigate had been steering her course for Port-au-Prince when she fell in with and was seized by the *Penelope* and *Iphigenia*. The frigate, sailing under French national colors, was taken in the Bight of Léogane at about 3:00 am on Monday 25 November 1793. During her resistance many guns were fired by the *Penelope*, and several by the *Inconstante*. Second Lieutenant Boyery had been stationed between decks during the engagement and thus did not know whether the *Iphigenia* had discharged any guns, but he stated that she was in company with the *Penelope* and that no other ships had been in sight at the time of the capture. Boyery also affirmed that the ship's commission and muster roll were on the frigate at the time of capture and that he did not know of any other papers being on board, and that none were destroyed. The Boatswain's testimony largely paralleled the Second Lieutenant's, although he recalled that both British ships had fired guns during the resistance of the French frigate and suggested that the lady passenger named Poitier had come on board at Port-au-Prince.<sup>47</sup>

When *Lieutenant de Vaisseau* Leissegues, former commander of the captured *Goelan*, returned to France by prisoner exchange he made a declaration concerning the fate of the frigate *Inconstante* on 27 June 1794 that was subsequently circulated at Brest (Figure 34).<sup>48</sup> He stated that the frigate of the Republic *l'Inconstante* commanded by *Capitaine de Vaisseau* Riouffe had surrendered at the first volley from the English frigate and that Captain Riouffe had fired only six cannon shots. He said that at the time both the port and starboard batteries remained unprepared because they were encumbered by the *bittures* laid on the cannons by Riouffe's orders; the *bittures* consisted of anchor cable brought up on the gundeck and laid down in a serpentine manner so that upon anchoring the cable would run out freely. Leissegues further testified that the Captain had been wounded, the Second Captain had

Manuscrit joint à l'acte  
 de la prise de la ville  
 de la République  
 Liberté  
 27 Juin 1794  
 9. Mars 1794  
 Copie pour  
 le C. D.

89

Copie de la Déclaration du Citoyen-Listeques  
 Lieutenant de Vaisseau (sur le sort de la frégate)  
 l'Inconstante commandée par le Cit. Riouffe, Capitaine  
 des Vaisseaux.

Je déclare que la frégate de la République  
 l'Inconstante commandée par le Capitaine de Vaisseau  
 Riouffe a amené le pavillon de la République à la mer  
 Volée de la frégate anglaise & que le Capitaine Riouffe  
 n'a tiré que six coups de canon que la Batterie  
 Tribord et Gabord étoit engagée par les Billures élongées  
 sur ces canons par ordre du Cap<sup>te</sup> Riouffe qui a été  
 blessé, le second tué, le 3<sup>e</sup> une blessé qu'il arresté deux  
 officiers non blessés, les Citoyens surmés & Boitquere.

C'est le rapport qui en a été fait à la Convention par  
 le Citoyen Morice aspirant à bord de la frégate  
 l'Inconstante. Signé de Riouffe, Lieut. de Vaisseau

Pour Copie conforme  
 Signé Leissegues  
 Pour Copie  
 Genay

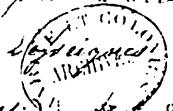


Figure 34. The Declaration of Lieutenant de Vaisseau Leissegues (courtesy of the Archives Nationales, Paris).

been killed, the third in command had been wounded, and that there were two officers who were not wounded, Citizens Omnes and Boisguere.<sup>49</sup> He stated that this was the report of the incident made to him in Jamaica by Citizen Morice, *Aspirant* (Midshipman) aboard *l'Inconstante*.<sup>50</sup>

Subsequently *Officier de Marine* (Naval Officer) Omnes arrived in France in July 1794. The testimony given by this zealous officer was extremely critical of his Captain but his own performance (described herein) in the episode might have led him to lay blame on the dead, where it was least likely to be contested.<sup>51</sup> The following is his detailed description of events surrounding the day of combat between *l'Inconstante* and His Majesty's Frigates *Penelope* and *Iphigenia*; also included is a summary of his report of imprisonment in Jamaica and return voyage to France.

According to Omnes, *l'Inconstante* had left Port Republicain (Port-au-Prince) between Tuesday 19 and Wednesday 20 November 1793 to escort two small vessels, a *golette* and a *bateaux* [sic] full of provisions to Petit Trou.<sup>52</sup> On Friday 22 November the three vessels reached their destination and the frigate, having completed her mission, set sail again for the return trip to Port Republicain (Figure 30, p.107). On the evening of Sunday 24 November and morning of Monday 25 November the French vessel was passing Petit Goâve when at 1:00 am *Soldat de la Marine* (Marine) La Font sighted from the forecastle two ships ahead. He passed to the stern to give the news to Omnes who immediately went to the forecastle to see for himself. Omnes saw the two vessels coming towards them but could not discern the types of ships that they were because they were partially hidden by land. Without delay he went to the stern and entered the Captain's quarters to report that there were two ships ahead. When the Captain asked what vessels they were Omnes responded that he had been unable to distinguish them. An instant later the Captain appeared on the deck and upon sighting the two vessels stated that they were American ships;

he went back to his room and returned with his spyglass, but persisted in saying that they were both American ships. *Lieutenant de Vaisseau* La Bourd, who was the Second Captain on board the frigate, pointed out to Riouffe that the ships seemed very large for American ships, yet Captain Riouffe maintained that they were nothing else.

In the meantime the two ships approached rapidly because they had a good land wind from the east/southeast that was common in the area, and *l'Inconstante* was picking up a little wind from the west. In his testimony describing the event Omnes emphasized that it didn't matter whether the ships were American or not because as they approached under full sail the battery remained unprepared.

Finally the Captain gave Officer Omnes the order to muster the crew silently without ringing the bell and to have them come up on deck. Omnes acted immediately by ordering the *Maitre de Quart* (Watch Boatswain) to have the crew awakened and prepared for combat. Soon the Captain gave orders for everyone to go to his station and the instructions were immediately executed. At the Captain's command, Omnes had the sails adjusted to alter the course away from *Île de La Gonâve* towards the coast of St. Domingue. Simultaneously they felt the wind from the east and were almost becalmed. The time was 1:20 am.

Omnes turned the watch over to *Tourneur, Officier de Manoeuvre* (Navigator) in combat, who came up on deck, and Omnes went to his own station in the forward battery. When he arrived he was astonished that the port and starboard batteries were not prepared in spite of the fact that Officer Boyery was present there. It took some time to stow the *bittures*, but eventually everything was ready and everyone was at his station.

Omnes asked the *Cheffe des Pieces* (Gun Captain) if he had everything he needed for the cannons, including the case of ammunition, to which he replied, no. Therefore Omnes sent men, and eventually went himself, to retrieve the ammunition, but the *Maître Canonnier* (Gunner's

Mate) would not release it without the Captain's orders. Omnes stated that he would take all the responsibility upon himself, believing that in such circumstances an officer of the battery had the authority to give orders for the delivery of all items needed for the cannons. Finally he went directly to the Captain, who allowed for small quantities of ammunition to be released; only two boxes were to be brought for each cannon. Everyone was at his post and the battery was prepared.

At 1:30 am the two approaching ships were but a single gunshot away and Riouffe still maintained that they were American. Omnes, in his relation of the story, emphasized that the Captain should not have been mistaken because the vessels were clearly warships. Riouffe had *Officier Marignie* (Naval Officer?) Vinette call out to ask the ships who they were and at the same moment the French flag and pendant were raised. One of the two ships answered that they were two English frigates, the *Penelope* and *Iphigenia*. They raised their flags while demanding the surrender of *l'Inconstante*; in the beautiful moonlit night, it was easy to distinguish the English colors.

Upon hearing the answer from the two frigates, Captain Riouffe gave orders to change course in order to secure a tail wind, presumably to outrun them, and further commanded that the crew put up the studding sails. Later, in his declaration regarding the capture, Omnes severely criticized his Captain for these actions, stressing that *l'Inconstante* was in a calm while the *Penelope* and *Iphigenia* still had the breeze with them. He maintained that in consequence Riouffe had taken the most disadvantageous position possible rather than sailing through in a manner more to the French advantage. He felt that if they had maintained their original course the English ships would have been forced to let them pass through and they would have been able to use their entire battery; with the tack that they took, they could fire at the adversary frigates with only the port cannons between the stern and

the main mast.

According to Omnes, the enemy frigates surrounded them, one at starboard and the other at port, although the vessel at starboard did not close within firing range. It was 1:36 am. Lieutenant La Bourt suggested that Omnes ask for three to four cannons at starboard because the English frigates had taken them upon both sides. La Bourt asked him if he was ready, to which the latter replied yes, except that he had little help. The Lieutenant said he would send Omnes some help from the guns on the forecastle, but these men never appeared.

The English frigates witnessed *l'Inconstante's* maneuver, and at only a pistol's distance away the ship on port, the *Penelope*, opened fire. The other frigate, the *Iphigenia*, which was behind at starboard, imitated the first without delay. The French frigate immediately fired back at port but was unable to use her starboard cannons. While the fire of the enemy was intense, that of *l'Inconstante*, because of her unfavorable position, was weak.

Omnes related that at the first cannon shot fired aboard, many of the combat lanterns fell and several people left their posts and went below deck. He castigated Riouffe for his lack of bravery, maintaining that his actions were enough to discourage the unhappy crew who were so tired of being far away from their homeland. He said he would not hide the fact that when the first shots were fired at *l'Inconstante*, Captain Riouffe shouted to lower the flag and surrender. Lieutenant La Bourt instantly headed for the stern, but was killed by debris falling from the damaged mainmast. Officer Omnes interjected into his account that he had since been told that La Bourt had passed to the rear to discover the motive for surrender and that he still could not comprehend the reason since, at the time, they were not in a distressed situation and only a few people were out of combat.

Omnes continued in his testimony that they had surrendered, and that the fire had ceased momentarily, when the *Iphigenia* appeared at

starboard. Not knowing that they had surrendered, he ordered the *Canonnier* (Gunner) who was with him at starboard to fire. The action was executed immediately. When the English frigate was fired upon, she instantly discharged a volley that seriously wounded Captain Riouffe, leaving him motionless. At the same moment, *Quartier-maître* (Quartermaster) Simon came to Omnes and told him to cease firing because both the Captain and Lieutenant had surrendered. The time was a few moments past 2:00 am.

Although firing had just begun on the starboard side, Omnes ordered it stopped and there were no more discharges from on board. He stated that before he knew that they had surrendered he had seen lights which made him think that they were being boarded. He went up on deck and witnessed the lowered flag, the injured Captain, and the enemy boarding *l'Inconstante*. The English asked for the Captain and, when they learned of his fate, for the commanding officer. Second Lieutenant Augustin de Boyery presented himself and surrendered his sword; subsequently he was removed to the frigate *Penelope*. Officer Omnes stayed on the prize with almost 80 men while the rest of the crew was transported to the two English frigates. Those who stayed on board took care of the sick and the wounded until their arrival in Jamaica, but there seemed to be no linen for bandages to dress the injuries.

Omnes presented some statistics concerning the engagement. He stated that the English frigates each had a crew of 120 men and that both were armed with twenty-six 12-pounder cannons and six 6-pounders.<sup>53</sup> *L'Inconstante* had a crew of 245 men and, although she was pierced for 44 guns, carried only twenty-six 12-pounders and six 6-pounders.<sup>54</sup> He maintained that the French ship had fired at most 15 cannon shots, and that, although the gun captain of the three cannons under his control at starboard wanted to continue firing, Omnes pointed out that only a few men remained at their stations, while others were already aboard the English launches.<sup>55</sup>



There were eight French dead, including Captain Riouffe, who died in Jamaica after three progressive amputations of his arm, Lieutenant La Bourt, Quartermaster Bournie, *Caporal de Marine* (Marine Corporal) Le Doux, *Maître Voilier* (Sailmaker) Fayet and *Matelots* (Seamen) Pierre Rossignol, Clavier, and Maureaux. Eight others were wounded in the seizure of *l'Inconstante* but survived; they were *Enseigne de Vaisseau* (Ensign) Tourneur, Quartermaster Egreto, *Contremaître* (Boatswain's Mate) Simon, *Armurier* (Armorer) Mason and Seamen Jean Le Vegue, J. de Ville, Dédé and Bourgouin.<sup>56</sup>

According to Omnes, *l'Inconstante* was escorted to Jamaica by the *Penelope* and *Iphigenia*. They arrived on Saturday 30 November, and by Sunday the crew, including the wounded, were on land. Omnes remained on board the frigate until Tuesday 2 December with the *Major* (Surgeon); he was responsible for removing all of his own possessions as well as those belonging to Captain Riouffe and the late Lieutenant La Bourt.<sup>57</sup>

Although Omnes was a prisoner of the British, he, like most officers, was paroled and therefore enjoyed limited freedom in Jamaica until he was returned to France by prisoner exchange. In contrast, most of the crew were securely imprisoned, and when he visited them they complained of their conditions and bad food. According to Omnes, he went to see the Commissary on behalf of the prisoners, but the man refused to listen to him. On 7 December, however, when he and the Surgeon of *l'Inconstante*, along with 29 other people, were taken to Spanish Town he spoke to the Governor about the problem and the Governor seemed sympathetic. Subsequently, however, the prisoners were treated even worse; they were robbed by the guards and when they complained they were shot in their cells.<sup>58</sup> Officer Omnes claimed that villains visited and upset the prisoners, told them stories about the position of France, and tried to get them to take service with Great Britain. When they refused, they were often shot under the pretense that there was an uprising. Omnes believed that the troops were given

money by the villains to commit the atrocities. Eventually he secured parole from the Governor for five individuals, but the Commissary would not release them and would no longer let him into the prison.

Omnes said that eight days after their arrival in Jamaica, Captain Riouffe died and that a few days after his death, while they were in Spanish Town, the Surgeon was taken away under the pretext that he was being sent to London. Omnes wanted to know the motive for the action and was told that the Governor had ordered it and that he would be told nothing else. He wrote to Second Lieutenant Boyery who said he did not know the reason, but that he had seen paperwork suggesting that the Surgeon was sent to London as a partisan of the Civil Commissary of Sonthonax (in St. Domingue); at this point Omnes alluded to hearsay that Captain Riouffe may have been responsible. He testified that the Surgeon from *le Goelan*, who was also a prisoner under parole, knew Doctor Renal and that Doctor Renal had told him that the Surgeon from *l'Inconstante* had been in the prison at Port Royal.<sup>59</sup> Captain Riouffe in his dying moments had asked Doctor Renal if his Surgeon had been the cause of his death because he suspected that the man had purposely operated badly and had done it for vengeance; Riouffe had asked for grace that his Surgeon be imprisoned until the end of the war.<sup>60</sup>

Omnes left Jamaica on 7 May 1794 aboard a *parlementaire*, a neutral ship used to transport prisoners under exchange, with a British captain bound for St. Malo with about 203 other French prisoners. Four of the prisoners jumped ship before leaving the harbor at Port Royal.

Omnes related that the remaining prisoners refused to accept a white flag on the *parlementaire* and insisted upon making a National flag from several seamen's turbans. They encountered two French corsairs in the Windward Passage. After growing tired of complaints, Omnes persuaded the captain to give the prisoners one pound of bread rather than the allotted four ounces and said that he would be reimbursed in France. Three men died during the Atlantic crossing, but

the captain would not provide anything in which to wrap their bodies. Upon the approach to France the prisoners wanted to make the nearest port. They persuaded the captain to take them to Nantes rather than St. Malo, but when they encountered a British convoy of more than 100 merchantmen escorted by two ships-of-the-line and three frigates, they were boarded by an officer from one of the naval ships. The captain of the British vessel complained that the French prisoners had taken over his ship; Omnes was called upon to explain his actions and was told that he deserved to be sent to London. They were ordered to proceed to St. Malo and were told to leave the commands to the captain. The convoy took its departure and in his account Omnes interjects that although they were told that the fleet was bound for India, it was actually headed for Jamaica because when he left the island the British had been waiting for a large convoy in order to take over the whole of St. Domingue. They encountered a pirate ship with people of various nationalities which left them to pursue two Dutch ships. At this point they were short of food, and when they neared France Omnes forced the captain to sail into the closest anchorage. They arrived at Camaret to the south of Brest on 12 July 1794 (Figure 6, p.35).

The following day *Officier de Marine* Omnes was sent to Brest where he secured permission for their ship to enter the anchorage there. He spoke to French officials about his journey and gave them intelligence information about the Jamaica-bound convoy, about a Europe-bound convoy that left Jamaica shortly after their departure, and about encountering the pirate ship.

Omnes' narrative ends here, but at the bottom of the final page of his declaration he added additional observations about Captain Riouffe. He declared that the capture of *l'Inconstante* was not the first time that Riouffe had performed badly, listing several instances. He stated that on 20 October the French frigate had been about a league's distance from nine corsairs and that the Captain had fired a

cannon shot to facilitate their escape. Next he attributed to Riouffe their loss of a chance on 22 October to take as prize an English corvette; the Royal Navy vessel arrived near île de la Gonâve to capture prizes from a French convoy being escorted by *l'Inconstante* from Petit Goâve to Port Republicain (Figure 26, p.81). Omnes maintained that Captain Riouffe only decided to chase the corvette because there were rumors (concerning Riouffe) circulating among the crew, many of whom were refusing to work for him. The corvette remained broadside, too, under English colors, but *l'Inconstante* tacked twice to give it time to see her broadside before giving chase.

There is yet another source of information regarding Captain Joseph Alexandre Riouffe and *l'Inconstante*. This is a series of certified documents regarding the individual case history of Riouffe which was compiled as supporting evidence for a claim that was made by his widow, Hypolite Valliet Riouffe, for a commissioned officer's pension based on her husband's twenty-eight years, seven months and nine days of service in the French Navy.<sup>61</sup> The evidence adds several details to events surrounding the taking of *l'Inconstante* and provides insight into the Revolutionary Period and the character of Captain Riouffe and his family.<sup>62</sup>

Among the documents there are abstracts regarding the chronology of Joseph Riouffe's career in the French Navy and a listing of all the vessels upon which he served and the positions that he held on board each, including his commission into *l'Inconstante*. There is an excerpt from his death notice which revealed not only that the Captain's left arm was amputated, but that he was also seriously wounded in the lower abdomen and the left eye, which he subsequently lost, during the combat that occurred on board *l'Inconstante* on 25 November 1793; he died two weeks later in Jamaica on 9 December 1793. These documents do not reveal Captain Riouffe's exact age, but since he began his naval career in 1765 it is likely that he was about 40 when he died.

Joseph Riouffe *fils* (Joseph Marie Hypolite Riouffe, born on 27 March 1782), the young son of the Captain, had embarked with his father on board the frigate as a *mousse* (ship's boy) on 3 December 1791 and had been aboard for twenty-three months and twenty-three days when *l'Inconstante* was captured. The boy was subsequently held as a prisoner-of-war in Jamaica. He wrote a letter to his mother dated 31 March 1794, from Kingston, that was taken to France aboard a *parlementaire* bound to St. Malo. In it he consoled his mother and told her that he was well and that Monsieur Boyery counseled and taught him and had shown him the same friendship as his own father. He sent her a million kisses.

Other documents reveal that Hypolite Valliet Riouffe was born on 18 February 1756 and thus was 37 years old when her husband died. Captain Riouffe and his wife also had two daughters, Marie Josephine Hypolite Riouffe (born on 23 July 1784) and Marie Sophie Hypolite Riouffe (born on 1 March 1789); they were 9 and 4 respectively when their father was killed. They did not escape the discord of the epoch, for among the records is information regarding the arrest of Valliet Riouffe, an event that occurred prior to the capture of *l'Inconstante*. On 6 *Brumaire l'an 2* (27 October 1793) members of the *Comité de Surveillance Révolutionnaire* of the District of Rochefort came to the family home, sealed the writing desk and confiscated various papers and letters. Subsequently they separated Madame Riouffe from her daughters and imprisoned her on the pretext that the family was related to foreigners and nobility, and under the suspicion of her husband's alleged emigration. In a letter of 13 *Thermidor l'an 2* (31 July 1794) to the *Commission de la Marine*, the widow demanded her freedom. She professed that her husband had been a brave Navy Officer who had died in service to the French Republic and she asked for a pension for her young children and herself based on Captain Riouffe's lengthy naval service. In a meeting of 8 *Brumaire l'an 3* (29 October 1794) the

*Comité de Surveillance* granted Valliet Riouffe provisional freedom.

The widow secured the assistance of Blutel, the Representative of the People in the ports of La Rochelle, Rochefort, Bordeaux, Bayonne and adjacent Ports, who filed a statement on her behalf dated 23 *Nivôse l'an 3* (12 January 1795), along with supporting documentation (Figure 35). Representative Blutel wrote that he had seen the widow's petition which revealed that she was a mother who had been inhumanely separated from her children and detained for a year under vague pretexts, and that she had forgotten her own misery when she learned that her husband had died from grave and numerous wounds received on board *l'Inconstante*, the frigate that he commanded. He stated that the widow asked for a pension, to which she had a right, and for temporary assistance to keep the children from suffering. Blutel had seen a certificate from the *Bureau des Armemens* that affirmed that Joseph Riouffe died from wounds received in combat against two English frigates, and that the Second Captain had been killed at his side. He had seen a certificate from the Municipality of Rochefort that the widow had only 400 *livres* income and that she was the mother of three children. He had seen a certificate from the head of the *Bureaux Civils de la Marine* at Rochefort confirming that she had not received any provisional aid from the pension accorded her for the service of her husband. Blutel stated that, because Captain Riouffe had died while serving the Republic, he had authorized the Maritime Agent at Rochefort to pay Widow Riouffe a provisional sum of 800 *livres* from the pension she would be entitled to receive under the terms of the Decree of the National Convention, the governing body of the French Republic. Blutel concluded that various pieces relative to her claim were being forwarded to the *Comité de Secours* of the National Convention.

The supporting documentation included official papers regarding Captain Joseph Riouffe and his son, the imprisonment and innocence of Hypolite Valliet Riouffe, testimonies that the family was not

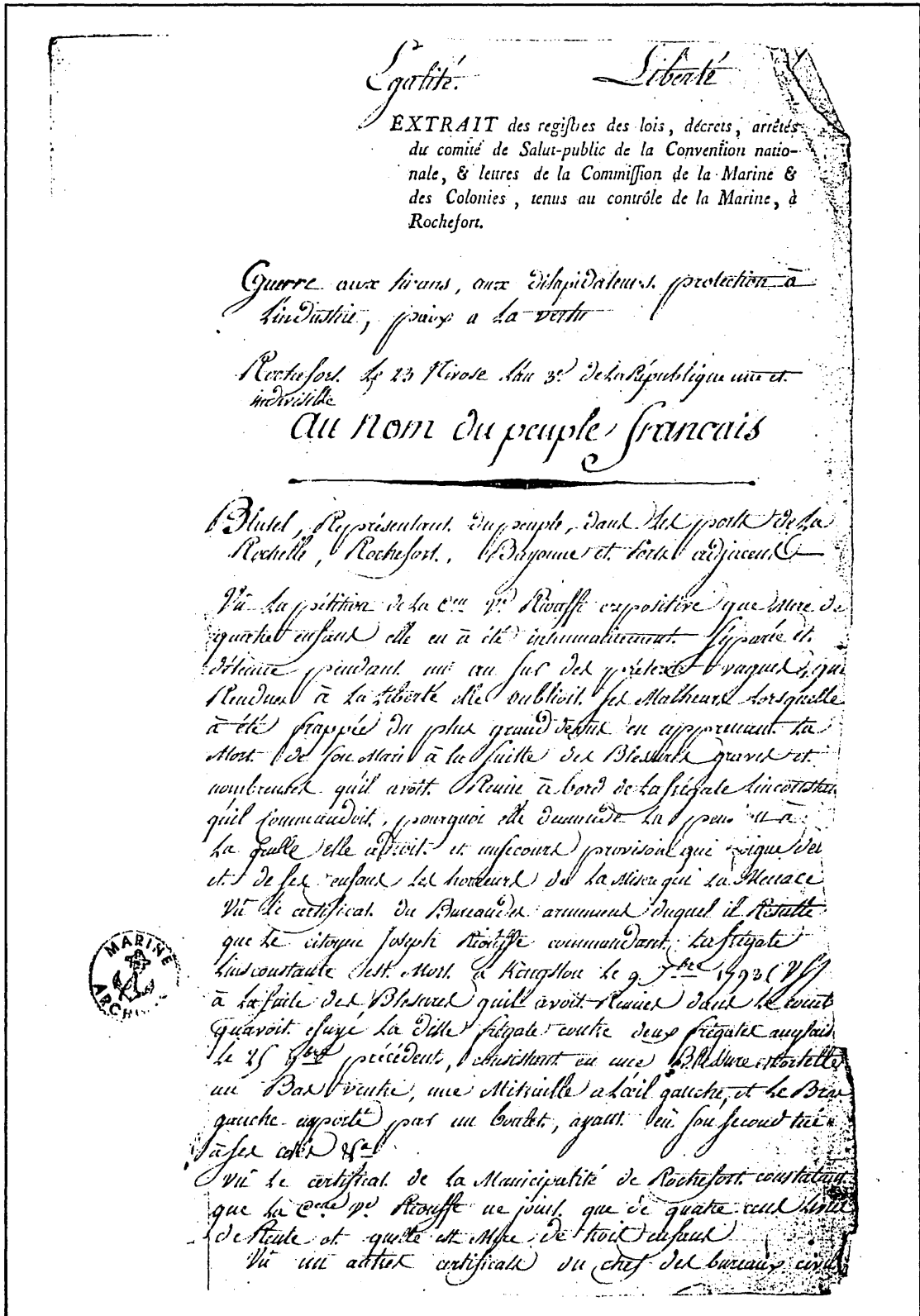


Figure 35. First Page of the Statement Filed by Representative Blutel on Behalf of the Widow Riouffe (courtesy of the Service Historique de la Marine, Château de Vincennes).

considered to be of nobility, and certificates proving that the children were legitimate. Also sent were excerpts from personal letters that Joseph Riouffe had written to his wife from St. Domingue which revealed his temperance, loyalty and devotion to his family and to France. He wrote tender words regarding his wife and children; and he wrote that he wanted peace, union and order, that he worked to be of service to his country and that he hoped all would end with satisfaction. Also forwarded to the appropriate officials was an extract from a public address given by the citizens of Le Môle St. Nicolas on 28 January 1793 on board *l'Inconstante*, and signed and accepted by the crew, regarding the patriotism exhibited by Captain Joseph Riouffe in St. Domingue.

A detailed and moving letter from Valliet Riouffe was addressed to the *Comité de Marine* on 28 Nivôse l'an 3 (17 January 1795). In it she asked for a pension for a widow and three children aged five, ten, and 12, the first born boy being a prisoner in Jamaica (Figure 36). Since the document effectively sums up the whole issue of Joseph Riouffe's patriotism and his family's situation, a synopsis follows. Valliet Riouffe wrote that she was a victim of passions unleashed at the beginning of the Revolution and had been imprisoned at Brouage, to the detriment of her two girls and boy, under the false accusations of fanaticism, suspicious correspondence and family ties to nobility and foreigners. She lamented that secret enemies or exaggerated patriotism were not the purpose of the Revolution, which should have been beneficial to all instead of causing misery, and that such would have been the case if a whirlwind of intrigues had not obsessed some people who wore only the mask of patriotism. It was easy for such influences to affect the *Comité de Surveillance* and infinitely more difficult to get rid of the slander.

But justice had emerged. She had been able to prove that she was not a fanatic and that the creed that she thought she must follow under



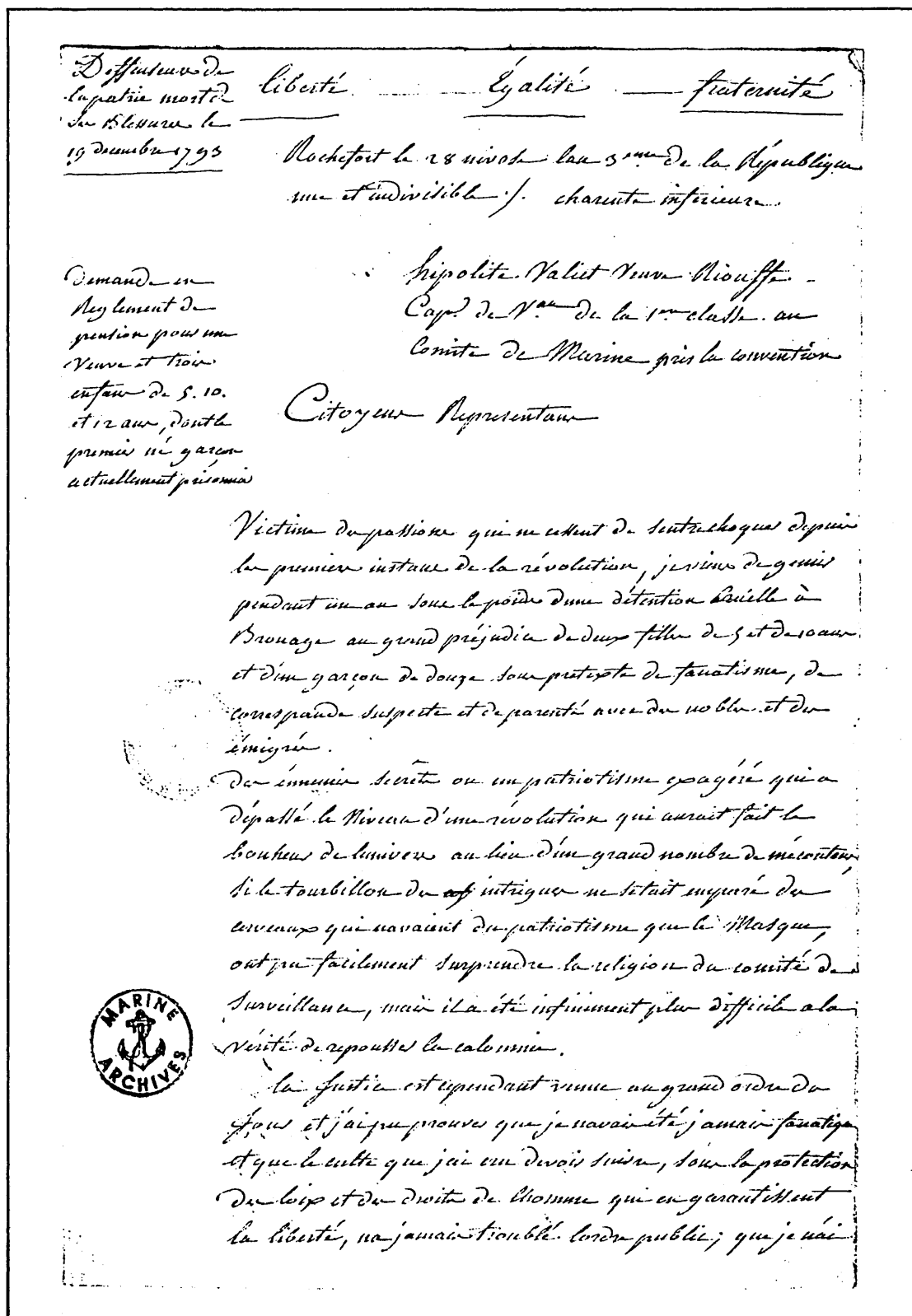


Figure 36. Excerpt from Madame Riouffe's Letter to the Comité de Marine in which She Asks for a Pension (courtesy of the Service Historique de la Marine, Château de Vincennes).

the protection of the laws and the Rights of Man had never troubled public order. She had no suspicious correspondence and her three brothers had remained employed and attached to the Revolution. Furthermore, the *Comité de Surveillance* certified that among her possessions they found only family papers and some letters from her husband that seemed to be of good principle, which they left in her possession. Ultimately they determined that she had no foreign relatives or ties to nobility.

She stated that she was aware that it was particularly the question of her having foreign or noble relatives that led to her detention, because in order to secure provisional liberty from the *Comité de Surveillance* (which had been confirmed by the *Sûreté Générale*) testimonies had been obtained from six notable people who affirmed that neither her family nor her husband's family were reputed to be of nobility. She conceded that one relation might have explained the error; her husband's first cousin had married a man who had gone to Russia in the first year of the Revolution and stayed there.

Valliet Riouffe continued that it was publicly known that she had no associations other than those that she had prior to the Revolution, and that she and her husband had been happily united by a sensible and good heart. She maintained that they had associated with all people, and that their natural generosity had altered their fortune; both their children and domestic helpers had always been considered as their friends and they had enjoyed bringing happiness to all who surrounded them.

She wrote that the slanderous statements had, however, invoked some secret hatreds. Before she was freed she had to absorb not only the cruel reality of her husband's death but also the malevolent accusations put forth by those who sought to dishonor him in the last moments of his life. While he may have made some mistakes as a naval or military commander, she would leave it to the journals of the

campaign to justify his behavior; but she stressed that one error was not a crime and she swore adamantly that he was incapable of betraying his country. She pointed out that he would be in Russia with his in-law if he hadn't favored the Revolution. On the contrary, he constantly refused invitations of that kind, and when the new organization of the Navy released him from his attachment to the port he solicited employment, and sacrificed his only son, then aged 10, to his country. The boy was still in Jamaica and had not been among the other prisoner exchanges because he contracted smallpox.

Valliet Riouffe related that her husband had proved by authentic certificates that he served the cause of liberty in St. Domingue, especially at Le Môle St. Nicolas. She explained that *l'Inconstante*, the frigate that he commanded, had been attacked at 2:00 in the morning by superior forces that he thought were neutral ships. She maintained that he had been surprised by the enemy. He had received mortal wounds in the abdomen, had his arm severed, and eventually lost his left eye after it was damaged by shot; his Second Captain was killed. She asked whether more was needed to bring disorder to the crew and to make them cry out that they had been betrayed. She compared the situation to similar occurrences of injustice that had happened in the confusion of war. The widow pointed out that the cry of betrayal had mostly been yelled by men in whom the spirit of treason and malevolence resided, who had escaped from the disaster of St. Domingue and who had found themselves on board as part of the crew. Moreover, she would like to think that everyone had done his duty and that they had only ceded by force. She suggested that it would not be the first time that the dead had been used to justify the living.

Madame Riouffe grieved that, as if she was not unhappy enough that the memory of her husband remained dishonored by malevolence, he had actually died at his post, at arms, as a consequence of grave wounds. She speculated that if his wrong doings had been real, he had

been punished justly. And she asked whether, if it was still believed that she was guilty of the motives for which she had been imprisoned, it would be fair to punish her children.

The wife of Joseph Riouffe concluded that she was a widow charged with three young children who had almost nothing, and that she could not provide bare necessities. She recommended herself to the National Munificence and stated that she and the children were four victims of the misfortunes of war who trusted that the *Comité de Marine* would give justice to their request by applying the pension law and giving them what they so desperately needed, without which they would experience extreme misery.

It seems that Hypolite Valliet Riouffe was successful in clearing her husband's name. Under the terms of the Decree of the National Convention dated 18 *Fructidor de l'an 3* (4 September 1795), regarding widows of citizens who died in defense of their country, she was awarded a certificate for a pension, signed by the *Commissaire des Secours Publics* in the name of the National Convention and dated 12 *Brumaire de l'an 4* (2 November 1795). The document suggests that she received the maximum annual award of 1500 *livres* for herself and 750 *livres* each for her children until they reached the age of twelve. Payment of the funds commenced with the date of Captain Joseph Riouffe's death on 19 *Frimaire l'an 2* (9 December 1793).

Hypolite Valliet Riouffe's problems were not all behind her at this time. Also in this class of documents is a letter dated 1 *Ventôse l'an 7* (19 February 1799) addressed to the Minister of the Navy. In it she wrote that although she had been awarded an annual pension of 1500 (*livres*) there had been inadequacy in her receiving the installments. She pleaded that she was a sad widow with three young children who had lost her only means of subsistence, her husband, while he was supporting the honor of the National flag. She hoped that the Minister would help her so that she would receive at least provisional aid if

not her entire pension. There is another document dated 12 *Ventôse l'an 8* (2 March 1800) which certifies that Valliet Riouffe was entitled to a pension of 1500 *francs* (the *livre* was discontinued in 1794; it was replaced in 1795 by the *franc*). Further information was not found regarding the ultimate fate of the family of Joseph Alexandre Riouffe.

### **The High Court of Vice Admiralty**

On Saturday, 30 November 1793, *l'Inconstante* and His Majesty's Frigates *Penelope* and *Iphigenia* arrived in Port Royal Harbor from St. Domingue. On Sunday, 1 December 1793, Commodore Ford commissioned the prize as the *Convert* under the command of Captain John Lawford. During the following days men were sent from the *Penelope* to assist in unbending the frigate's sails and warping her alongside the wharf.<sup>63</sup> In a letter of 7 December 1793 to the Admiralty, John Ford wrote of the capture of the French prize and reported that she was a fine ship which by survey had been found fit for His Majesty's Service; the Commodore had ordered the assessment on 30 November and planned to send the report by the next packet (Figure 37).<sup>64</sup> (See Appendix B for a complete transcript of the inventory and appraisal of the sails, rigging, ordnance and stores from *l'Inconstante* that were acquired for His Majesty's Service.) He informed the Admiralty of the commission of the prize and the promotion of John Lawford to be her commander. In the 7 December listing of the disposition of the squadron, John Ford wrote that the *Convert* was at Port Royal discharging her stores.<sup>65</sup>

Although Commodore Ford lost no time in acquiring *l'Inconstante* for the Royal Navy and commissioning her as His Majesty's Ship *Convert*, the ship still had to go through the formal legal process of condemnation in an Admiralty Court. This was standard procedure because some ships and vessels sailed under false colors. All French prizes, warships and merchantmen alike, had to be proved to have belonged to the enemy, France.<sup>66</sup> The case of the French frigate *Inconstante* was adjudicated in the High Court of Vice Admiralty in

Pursuant to an Order from  
John Ford Esq. Commodore  
and Commander in Chief, &c. &c.  
date the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1793,  
and to us directed. —

We whose Names are hereunto  
Subscribed have been onboard the Frigate  
L'Inconstante and there have taken a  
strict and careful Survey of such of  
her Sails, Rigging and Stores, as are  
fit for His Majesty's Service and find them  
to be as herein set forth with our Apprais-  
ments Annexed (Viz:)

### Boatwain's Stores

Canvas No 3	—	200 Yards	New
" " 3		50 Yards	"
Cables of 17	—	2 No. (90 fms each)	3 Worn
" " 17	—	20 fathoms	—
Messenger 9	1 No. (45 fms)		New
Cablet of 7	—	21 fms	"
		4 $\frac{1}{2}$	30 " "
Hawser 5	—	209 "	"
"		4 $\frac{1}{2}$	101. " "
"		4	213 " "

Rope

Figure 37. First Page of the Inventory and Appraisalment of the Sails, Rigging, Ordnance and Stores from l'Inconstante (courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew).

Jamaica. Records regarding the litigation, described below, survive today in the Jamaica Archives.<sup>67</sup>

Two of the surviving French officers from *l'Inconstante*, Second Lieutenant Augustin de Boyery and Boatswain Joseph Goy, were produced, sworn and examined as part of the Vice Admiralty Court proceedings on 2 December and 4 December 1793, respectively. A synopsis of their largely parallel testimonies was presented earlier in this chapter. Of particular relevance to the prize court, they attested that there were about 240 to 250 people on board the frigate, which had a commission as a French ship of war from the late King of France; that the ship sailed under French national colors; that no person on board had any interest or share in the ship or sustained any loss from her capture; that the ship's commission and muster roll were on board, but no other papers; and that the *Penelope* and *Iphigenia* were the only other ships in sight at the time *l'Inconstante* was taken.

On 5 December 1793 copies of a monition (Appendix C) were publicly posted in the towns of St. Jago de La Vega (Spanish Town), Kingston and Port Royal, where they remained on display for three days, as certified in writing by Deputy Marshall Daniel Fraser, Court of Vice Admiralty, on 10 December 1793. The official legal notice was intended to notify persons of the capture of *l'Inconstante* and order them to appear before the Judge in St. Jago de la Vega on 10 December 1793 between 8:00 am and 12:00 noon if they had proof of any just claim, right, title or interest in the vessel. If they failed to appear or to show such documents they forfeited their rights, and the Judge would pronounce the vessel to be a just and lawful prize to Bartholomew Samuel Rowley and Patrick Sinclair and their "officers, seamen, marines and Mariners".

Also on 5 December 1793, Advocate General George Ricketts at the relation of B.S. Rowley and Patrick Sinclair instituted a suit against *l'Inconstante* by a libel, a formal written declaration filed in the

Court of Vice Admiralty (Appendix C). *L'Inconstante* was proved to have belonged to the wartime enemy France and so was subsequently condemned on 3 January 1794.

On 7 May 1794 Benjamin Waterhouse, agent for the relators B.S. Rowley and Patrick Sinclair et. al, took an oath that he never received any papers from any of the relators regarding *l'Inconstante* prior to the filing of the libel. He also stated that he did not believe that there were any papers delivered up or found on board the ship when she was taken by them.

The remaining document in the file of the Jamaica Archives concerning the French ship is entitled *Sales of Vessel & Stores of the Frigate L'Inconstant Prize to His Majesty's Ships Penelope and Iphigenia* (Figure 38). On 1 August 1794 Benjamin Waterhouse, acting as agent for the relators, was sworn in and took an oath that the document as presented was a just and true account of the sales of *l'Inconstante*, condemned in the Court of Vice Admiralty in Jamaica. The document is divided into two registers; the right column, dated 25 January 1794, is a tabulation of the funds received for the sale of the frigate and her stores, while the left column, dated 26 May 1794, is an account of payments made from the proceeds of the sale of the same.

Naval Storekeeper William Smith purchased the hull, etc., as per valuation for £19,844:10s:3d, and Nicholas Lechmere of the Office of Ordnance acquired the ordnance, stores, etc., for £2,161:7s:6d, for the Admiralty. Various merchants purchased all the water casks, 13 hogsheads of wine, 13 barrels of beef, 14 barrels of pork, 75 barrels of flour, one hogshead of taffia (inferior rum), three hogsheads of salt, five hogsheads of calavances (chick peas), ten bags of calavances, two hogsheads of vinegar, 35 casks of bread, 13 sails, 2 awnings and 4,242 pounds of cordage for a total of £828:18s:9d. The complete sale of the frigate and her stores resulted in proceeds of £22,834:16s:6d.



## Sales of the Stores of the Frigate *Sanconstante* by a Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.

Date	Purchasers	Price	
		Rs.	D.
1794	Sanchoy	48	24
15 10 5	10% of the stores of the Frigate <i>Sanconstante</i> by a Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	2	16
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	250	
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	87	10
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	29	
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	35	12
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	31	11
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	3	17
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	9	10
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	8	5
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	117	15
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	10	8
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	23	
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	7	5
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	87	10
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	26	5
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	37	7
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	0	6
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	7	19
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	56	2
	To the Lic. Judge of the Auditing of the Kingdom.	235	16

Figure 38. Sales of the Vessel and Stores of the Frigate *Sanconstante* (courtesy of the Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town).

The entire sum was subsequently allocated to various parties. Expenses associated with pilotage into Port Royal were £15:10s:5d; court fees amounted to £119; costs for hire of a vessel to transport stores from Port Royal was £208:17s:6d; expenditures for appraisement of the hull, rigging and stores was £73:10s; examination and appraisement of the water casks required £11:5s; wharfage and weighing sundries incurred a fee of £98:15s; cooperage on casks, etc., cost £40:5s; charges for advertisements and a crier at the sales of the stores amounted to £6; the fee for lodging a copy of the sales in the Register's Office was £5:10s; and 5% commission on the complete sale totalled £1,141:14s:9d, presumably paid to the relators' agent, Benjamin Waterhouse. The remaining sum of £21,114:8s:10d was disbursed to His Majesty's Ships *Penelope* and *Iphigenia*.<sup>68</sup>

Under the Prize Law in effect in 1794, prize money was awarded and distributed among the officers and crews of all Royal Navy vessels involved in the capture of an enemy ship and those that were in sight at the time of surrender. Since the *Penelope* and *Iphigenia* were the only British ships in view when *l'Inconstante* was seized, they received the net prize money of £21,114:8s:10d from the sale of the frigate. It is likely that this sum was supplemented by *head money* of £5 per crew member from the captured French frigate, equalling approximately £1,225 paid for the complement of 245 men on board *l'Inconstante*. Thus, about £22,339:8s:10d would have been disbursed between the officers and men of the two frigates. The standard share-out in force at the time was: 3/8 share to the Captain or Captains; 1/8 share divided equally among the Captains of Marines and Army, Sea Lieutenants, Master and Physician; 1/8 share divided among the Lieutenants of Marines and Army, Secretary of Admiral, Principal Warrant Officers, Master's Mates, and Chaplain; 1/8 share divided between the Midshipmen, Inferior Warrant Officers, Principal Warrant Officer's Mates and Marine Sergeants; and 2/8 share divided among the rest of the crew. Flag officers such as an

Admiral, or in this case, Commodore Ford, and his junior flag officers received one of the Captain's or Captains' eights.<sup>69</sup>

### **Summary**

Naval strength was the means by which eighteenth-century Great Britain and France protected their colonies and trade in the West Indies in times of war and peace. During wartime, Royal Navy ships and vessels provided convoy escort and cruised to defend British trade. They also attacked the enemy's merchantmen and naval forces.

On 29 March 1793, news reached Jamaica that Revolutionary France had declared war on Britain on 1 February. Commodore John Ford immediately gave his squadron orders from the Admiralty to seize or destroy all ships or vessels belonging to France, and dispatched the British forces who were based in Jamaica chiefly on services at and about St. Domingue, the Bahamas and the Windward Passage, although one sloop of war was already on a mission in the Bay of Honduras. In the following months numerous merchantmen were captured and *le Goelan*, a corvette bearing the colors of the French Republic, was taken as a prize. At the same time, however, the British sustained the loss of His Majesty's 24-gun ship *Hyæna* to a French frigate.

In September, Commodore Ford's squadron launched an expedition against St. Domingue and secured Jérémie and the fortress and harbor at Le Môle St. Nicolas for Britain. Meanwhile, *l'Inconstante* and other French warships carried on services in St. Domingue, a colony in great civil and political turmoil; the 12-pounder frigate was the only French Navy vessel of size that was based in the capital, Port-au-Prince. On 20 November 1793 *l'Inconstante* convoyed two small vessels to Petit Trou. At this time much of the Royal Navy's Jamaica squadron was at and about St. Domingue, protecting newly acquired British possessions in the French colony. Captain B.S. Rowley of the *Penelope* received intelligence concerning *l'Inconstante* and sailed south from Le Môle St. Nicolas to seize or destroy her. While en route, the *Penelope*

encountered the *Iphigenia*, Captain Patrick Sinclair, and ordered the frigate to keep company. After receiving additional intelligence from Léogane that *l'Inconstante* was soon expected back in Port-au-Prince from Petit Trou, the British sailed to intercept her. The three frigates met off Petit Goâve in the early morning hours of 25 November 1793, but French Captain Joseph Riouffe was late to recognize the others as British warships. Eventually he tried to alter course to escape the *Penelope* and *Iphigenia*, but to no avail since *l'Inconstante* faced disadvantageous sailing conditions; there was confusion among the crew on board the French vessel. The British frigates benefitted from favorable winds and, intent upon a mission of capture, were prepared for the encounter. The *Penelope* and *Iphigenia* seized their prize after a short engagement. The French frigate experienced numerous casualties, including the death, two weeks later from his wounds, of Joseph Riouffe, who had given almost 29 years of dedicated service to the Navy of France. The French Captain was severely criticized in the mother country for his actions during the capture of *l'Inconstante*, but it must be remembered that these were troubled political times in France. His name was eventually cleared, largely by efforts of his widow, Valliet Riouffe, who succeeded in securing an official commissioned officer's pension in his name.

The prize *Inconstante* was taken to Jamaica by the *Penelope* and *Iphigenia* and instantly commissioned into the Royal Navy as His Majesty's Ship *Convert*. The vessel, sails, rigging, ordnance and stores were acquired by the Admiralty. The case of the French frigate was adjudicated in the High Court of Vice Admiralty in the town of St. Jago de la Vega, Jamaica, with the net proceeds of the prize money distributed among her captors. Commodore John Ford gave command of the *Convert* to Captain John Lawford, a deserving officer and former Commander of the sloop *Hound*, who had just returned from an extended tour of duty in the Bay of Honduras.

## Footnotes for Chapter V.

1. F.R. Augier, S.C. Gordon, D.G. Hall, and M. Reckord, *The Making of the West Indies* (Trinidad and Jamaica, Longman Caribbean, Ltd., 1990), 98-99.
2. The following explanation of prize money is based on largely parallel descriptions related by Naval Historians Michael Lewis and Brian Lavery: Michael Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy 1793-1815* (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1960), 315-333; Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy, The Ships, Men and Organization 1793-1815* (London, Conway Maritime Press, Ltd., 1989), 116.
3. *Ibid.*
4. PRO, ADM 1/245, Admiralty and Secretariat Papers, 'Jamaica 1793 & 94 Admiral John Ford Esqr.': John Ford, Commodore and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels at Jamaica, to Philip Stephens, Secretary of the Admiralty, aboard the *Europa*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 13 January 1793. Ford was promoted from Commodore to Rear Admiral in April 1794.
5. Captain Thomas Southey, *A Chronological History of the West Indies*, III (London, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968; reprint of the original edition: London, 1827), 70. William Bligh of the *Providence* was the famous Bligh who, several years before, had suffered the mutiny of his crew on the *Bounty*.
6. PRO, ADM 1/245, Captain William Hargood to John Ford, aboard the *Hyæna*, Port Antonio, Jamaica, 27 January 1793, Enclosure in John Ford to Philip Stephens, 3 February 1793.
7. *Gentleman's Magazine*, Obituary 'Admiral Sir John Lawford, K.C.B.', (April 1843), 426.
8. PRO, CO 137/92, Jamaica Original Correspondence, 18 November 1793 to 7 February 1794, John Lawford to the Governor of Baccalar, aboard the *Hound*, St. George's Kay, 5 March 1793, Enclosure in Adam Williamson, Lieutenant Governor and Commander in Chief in and over His Majesty's Island of Jamaica and the Territories thereon depending in America, Chancellor and Vice Admiral of the same, to Henry Dundas, Secretary of State for War, Kings House, Jamaica, 13 December 1793.
9. The British spelling of Cap Français was Cape Francois.
10. The *Triton*, *Falcon* and *Helena* were no longer with the squadron in Jamaica.
11. PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Providence*, Port Royal, 14 April 1793 and Enclosure 9: A List of the Squadron under the Command of John Ford...and the Services they are employed on 14 April 1793, Enclosure 10: A List of French Vessels seized in the Port of Kingston on 29 March 1793, and Enclosure 11: A List of French Prizes taken by the Squadron between 1 and 14 April 1793.
12. *Ibid.*, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Providence*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 12 May 1793, and Enclosure: John Lawford to John Ford aboard the *Hound*, off Belize Honduras, 14 April 1793.

13. Although the British spelled the French frigate's name with an 'A' this vessel was the frigate *Embuscade* which was under construction at Rochefort at the same time as *l'Inconstante*.
14. PRO, ADM 1/245, Extract of a Letter from Mr. Miller to Lord Dunmore, Charlestown, 18 April 1793, Enclosure in John Ford to Philip Stephens, 9 June 1793.
15. *Ibid.*, A List of the Squadron under the Command of John Ford...and the Services they are employed on 12 May 1793, ...on 9 June 1793, ...on 14 July 1793, Enclosures in dispatches from John Ford to Philip Stephens between 12 May and 14 July 1793; PRO, ADM 7/782, Registers of Convoys 1793-7, Ships from Jamaica under Convoy of the *Proserpine* Frigate, Captain Alms, arrived 3 September 1793. It is supposed that the *Fly* joined the home-bound fleet because she escorted vessels from Port Antonio to Bluefields where the convoy assembled, and she is absent from subsequent lists of Ford's squadron in Jamaica.
16. *Ibid.*, A List of French Vessels seized in the Port of Kingston on 29 March 1793, A List of the French Prizes taken by the Squadron under the Command of John Ford between 1 and 14 April 1793, ...between 14 April and 12 May 1793, ...between 14 May and 9 June 1793, ...between 10 June and 11 July 1793, Enclosures in dispatches from John Ford to Philip Stephens between 14 April and 11 July 1793.
17. *Ibid.*, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Providence*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 12 May 1793.
18. Southey, *Chronological History*, 74.
19. Captain Rowley of the *Penelope* did not sail with the 12 June Europe-bound convoy but it seems that Lawford believed he would do so.
20. PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Providence*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 12 May 1793, and Enclosure: A List of the Squadron...on 12 May 1793; *Ibid.*, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Providence*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 17 May 1793; *Ibid.*, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Goelan*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 11 August 1793, and Enclosure: John Lawford to John Ford, aboard the *Hound*, off Belize River, 26 June 1793.
21. PRO, ADM 7/782, A List of Ships and Vessels brought under Convoy of HMS *Hector*, George Montague Comdr., from Jamaica to England between 22 July and 4 October 1793; *Ibid.*, Ships from Jamaica under Convoy of the *Hannibal*, Captain Colpoys, arrived 1 October 1793; PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Goelan*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 11 August 1793, and Enclosure: Disposition of the Squadron under the Command of John Ford...on 11 August 1793.
22. NLJ, *The Royal Gazette*, XV (1793), From Saturday 26 October to Saturday 2 November, No. 44, 22-23.
23. PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard HMS *Goelan*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 11 August 1793, and Enclosure: Disposition of the Squadron... on 11 August 1793. The *Serpent* sloop was no longer with the squadron by this time.
24. *Ibid.*, John Ford to Philip Stephens, 8 September 1793, and Enclosure: Disposition of the Squadron under the Command of John Ford...on 8 September 1793.

25. Southey, *Chronological History*, 74.
26. PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Europa*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 24 November 1793, and Enclosure: Disposition of the Squadron under the Command of John Ford...on 24 November 1793.
27. NLJ, *The Royal Gazette*, XV (1793), From Saturday 23 November to Saturday 30 November, No. 48, 22-23.
28. PRO, CO 137/92, Adam Williamson to Henry Dundas, Kings House, Jamaica, 13 December 1793, and Enclosures. As British Commissary in the Bay of Honduras John Lawford was involved in settling disputes, chiefly regarding infractions committed by British settlers who persisted in cutting Mahogany outside of the limits prescribed by the Treaty of 1783 and Convention of 1786 between Spain and Britain. The British had fewer complaints about Spanish infractions. Lawford's role was difficult and at times misunderstandings arose between the British Magistrates of the district, who tried to suppress complaints about unauthorized cutting of wood on the Spanish side of the boundary, and himself.
29. *Ibid.*, Adam Williamson to Henry Dundas, Kings House, 16 January 1794, and Enclosure: John Lawford to Adam Williamson, *HMS Convert*, Port Royal, 20 December 1793.
30. *Ibid.*, Henry Dundas to Adam Williamson, Whitehall, 6 March 1794.
31. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 51.
32. NLJ, *The Royal Gazette*, XV (1793), No.48, 23.
33. AR, 3 E2 35, *Rôle d'équipage, la frégate l'Inconstante, commandée par M. Riouffe Major de Vaisseau, rôle de bord*, 21 November 1791 to 25 November 1793.
34. PRO, ADM 1/245, B.S. Rowley to John Ford, aboard the *Penelope*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 30 November 1793, Enclosure in John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Europa*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 7 December 1793.
35. Use Figures 30 and 31 together for a more detailed understanding of the courses sailed by His Majesty's Ships *Penelope* and *Iphigenia* between 23 and 26 November 1793. Please note that data were recorded in ships' logs from mid-day to mid-day.
36. Presumably these vessels had people aboard who were unsympathetic to the new French Republic and its civil commissioners in St. Domingue, as it is known that the parish of St. Marc gave itself up to the British in the following month of December.
37. PRO, ADM 52/3276, Master's Logs, A Log of the Proceedings of the *Penelope*, B.S. Rowley, Commander, by John Douglas, Master, from 31 August 1793 to 10 June 1794.
38. PRO, ADM 1/3992, Lloyds 1793-1804, Extract of a personal letter from Jérémie dated 27 November 1793 and received in London on 27 January 1794, forwarded by Thomas Taylor of Lloyd's Coffee House to Philip Stephens, 27 January 1794.

39. PRO, ADM 1/2059, Captain's Letters, 1793-4, "L", John Lawford's Commission into the *Convert*, 1 December 1793. John Lawford was promoted to post captain, a term used to describe a full captain who commanded a ship of the sixth rate or higher.

40. PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Europa*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 7 December 1793, and Enclosure: A List of the Squadron under the Command of John Ford...on 7 December 1793.

41. *Ibid.*

42. NLJ, *The Royal Gazette*, XV (1793), No. 48, 23; *Ibid.*, From Saturday 30 November to Saturday 7 December, No. 49, 22-23. French documents recorded that Captain Riouffe's left arm received the wound and was subsequently amputated.

43. JA, High Court of Vice Admiralty, Ship's Papers, 'L'Inconstante to HMS *Penelope*, Taken 25th November 1793 Condemned'.

44. AN, *Marine* BB/4/28, fo 86-95, *Dossier l'Inconstante, copie de la déclaration du citoyen Leissegues Lieutenant de Vaisseau sur le sort de la frégate l'Inconstante commandée par le deu Riouffe Capitaine de Vaisseau*, 27 June 1794, and *Extrait de la journée du combat de la frégate l'Inconstante...* as described by *Officier de Marine Omnes*.

45. SHM, CC7 ALPHA 2151, *Dossier individuel de Alexandre Joseph Riouffe*.

46. Official French documents give this officer's full name as Alexandre Joseph Riouffe and commonly refer to him as Joseph Riouffe. Apparently he was also known as Jean Riouffe.

47. JA, High Court of Vice Admiralty, *L'Inconstant* to HMS *Penelope*.

48. The name of the commander of *le Goelan* is spelled three ways in two documents. A previously referenced British account spells the name Leissegues while in this French letter the name is spelled both as Leissegues and Lesseigues.

49. It is probable that the officer whose name is spelled Boisguere in the referenced French document is the same man as Second Lieutenant Augustin de Boyery who appeared in the previously referenced British document. It is difficult to decipher the exact spelling of the name of the other officer in the referenced French document which also occurs in the accompanying, *Extrait de la journée du combat...*; it might be Omnes or Omues.

50. AN, *Marine* BB/4/28, fo 86-95, *Dossier l'Inconstante, déclaration du citoyen Leissegues*.

51. The testimony given by *Officier de Marine Omnes* is not dated but was given after *Lieutenant de Vaisseau Leissegues*' 27 June 1794 statement; the events that Omnes describes begin with the capture of *l'Inconstante*, cover the period of his imprisonment in Jamaica and end with his arrival in Brest on 13 July 1794.

52. Although the word *bateaux* is plural the document refers to *un bateaux*, in the singular.



53. The small number of men on board the British frigates can be attributed to difficulties in completing the complements of the Royal Navy vessels stationed in Jamaica in the first year of war with France; the squadron had been sent to the West Indies on a peace time mission.

54. Although Omnes refers to 44 guns, *l'Inconstante's* official documents suggest that she was designed to carry 40 guns.

55. Omnes seems to be stating that the gun captain wanted to continue firing after *l'Inconstante* lowered her flag, but it is not clear whether the gun captain was aware that the flag had been lowered.

56. In *Officier de Marine* Omnes' testimony he refers to a man named Simon as Quartermaster and to a man named Simon as Boatswain's Mate. It is unclear whether these Simons are two individuals or whether one title is in error.

57. Omnes mixes up his dates here as 2 December was a Monday.

58. The author did not encounter other documentation that corroborates these serious allegations made by Omnes.

59. In this source the name of the corvette is spelled *Goillant* but it is almost certainly the same vessel referred to in British accounts as *le Goelan*. There is no clear identification given for Doctor Renal.

60. Captain Riouffe's words during his dying moments, as related by Omnes, are a bit confusing. The English paraphrase relates the statements as accurately as has been possible.

61. Hypolite Valliet Riouffe's name is spelled in numerous ways in this class of documents; the most common spelling is reflected in the text.

62. SHM, CC7 ALPHA 2151, *Dossier individuel de Alexandre Joseph Riouffe*. Many of the documents included within this class exhibit Revolutionary Calendar dates. If only Revolutionary dates occur on referenced documents, standard calendar dates will also be given.

63. PRO, ADM 52/3276, Master's Log of HMS *Penelope*; PRO, ADM 1/2059, John Lawford's Commission.

64. PRO, ADM 1/245, Inventory and appraisalment of the sails, rigging, ordnance and stores from *l'Inconstante*, ordered on 30 November 1793 and completed on 20 and 21 December 1793, Enclosure in John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Europa*, off Jérémie, 5 February 1794.

65. *Ibid.*, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Europa*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 7 December 1793, and Enclosure: A List of the Squadron under the Command of John Ford...on 7 December 1793.

66. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 116; Lewis, *Social History*, 318.

67. JA, High Court of Vice Admiralty, *l'Inconstante* to HMS *Penelope*.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Lewis, *Social History*, 318-319, 330-333; Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 116.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CONVERT CONVOY

Brian Lavery relates that in 1792 more than 16,000 merchant vessels, of 1.5 million tons, were engaged in shipping in Great Britain and her overseas colonies, and that these commercial interests had significant political influence. The Royal Navy itself depended on the British merchant marine for timber, naval stores, provisions and troop transports, and was paid from tax funds that merchant shipping generated. In turn, the Royal Navy protected the seaborne trade.<sup>1</sup>

When war broke out, British commerce was significantly affected. Enemy ships and privateers were a constant danger to merchant shipping. Lavery stresses that owners faced rising costs and diminishing manpower to sail their vessels, and insurance rates spiraled. Thus, the Royal Navy provided naval escorts to guard the merchant fleets. While this service safeguarded the merchants' interests, convoys were time-consuming to organize, and once underway, were dependant on the speed of the slowest sailer. And the greatest annoyance, to the masters of merchantmen, was the Royal Navy's practice of impressing trained seamen from their ships.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Captain John Lawford and Preparation for the Convoy**

From the time that Commodore Ford received news of war with France on 29 March 1793, he appointed periodic convoy protection for fleets of homeward-bound merchantmen from the West Indies. The *Proserpine* convoy sailed around 12 June 1793 with 158 merchantmen from Jamaica, accompanied by the *Providence* and *Assistant* which were also to meet the ships from Honduras, en route, to escort them to Britain.<sup>3</sup> In late July 1793, the *Hector* and *Hannibal*, with separate convoys, left Jamaica with a total of almost 100 vessels.<sup>4</sup> But six months passed before Commodore Ford spared another of His Majesty's ships to escort the merchant trade to Europe.

The Jamaica squadron was small in the first year of Britain's war with France, and Ford was unable to appoint more frequent convoy protection for British merchantmen, particularly to and from outlying areas. Concern was expressed by the Assembly of Jamaica, on 12 November 1793, that the Commander in Chief of His Majesty's ships would not have the power to grant a convoy for the homeward-bound winter fleet, much less provide such protection for British vessels bound to and from America for staves, lumber and other provisions.<sup>5</sup> By the end of November, however, the capture of *l'Inconstante* provided the Commodore with another frigate which he purchased for the Admiralty.

On 1 December 1793, *l'Inconstante* was renamed *Convert* and her command was given to Captain John Lawford, former commander of the *Hound* sloop. (See Appendix D for a biographical sketch of John Lawford.) Admiralty regulations specified the ship's complement and the number of commissioned and warrant officers, petty officers, servants, artisans and marines that should be on board, but did not specify the make-up of the balance of the crew. A fortunate captain would be able to muster a larger percentage of able seamen, but most had to settle for a number of ordinary seamen and landmen as well.<sup>6</sup> Admiralty regulations also provided that John Lawford, as captain of the newly commissioned frigate *Convert*, was responsible for finding the ship's crew. Captain Lawford would, however, be afforded some assistance.<sup>7</sup>

Commodore Ford promoted several officers for their services on the Jamaica station. The *Convert's* four commissioned officers, and most of the warrant officers, were assigned from other Royal Navy ships (Figure 39). (See Appendix E for detailed data from the muster-table of HMS *Convert*.) The *Convert's* muster-table reveals that on 1 December 1793 commissions were granted to First Lieutenant Joseph Bradby Bogue and Second Lieutenant William Earnshaw, while John Scott (Purser), George Innes (Gunner), Joseph Blease (Cook) and John Doran (Surgeon's

Bounty Paid.	N <sup>o</sup>	Entry.	Year.	Appearance.	When and whether Paid or not.	Place and County, where Born.	Age at Time of Entry in this Ship.	N <sup>o</sup> and Letter of Tickets	MENS NAMES.	Qualific.	D. D. or R.	Time of Discharge
5	91	Dec 93	Dec 93	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	Royal			Peter Dwyer ab		33	13 <sup>th</sup> Aug
	14	"	"	"	"	Royal			Lieut. Batters	Comdr	9	
	17	"	"	"	"	Bomb	10 <sup>th</sup>	Dec 93	Lieut. Allen	3 <sup>rd</sup>		
	"	"	"	"	"	Royal			Penelope	in boat		
5	18	"	"	"	"	Bomb	7 <sup>th</sup>	Dec 93	Lieut. Brady	Comdr	2 <sup>nd</sup>	
	"	"	"	"	"	Royal			Rich <sup>d</sup> Dague	Lieut		
	"	"	"	"	"	"			M <sup>r</sup> . Ashton	ab	33	13 <sup>th</sup> Aug
5	"	"	"	"	"	"			M <sup>r</sup> . Williams	ab		
	"	"	"	"	"	"			John. W. Hunt	ab	R	28 <sup>th</sup> Aug
5	90	"	"	"	"	"			Rich <sup>d</sup> Smith	ab		
	"	"	"	"	"	Penelope			Lieut. Pitt	ab	33	7 <sup>th</sup> Aug
5	21	"	"	"	"	Alington			Thos. Sherwin	mid		
	"	"	"	"	"	Royal			Lieut. M <sup>r</sup> . Shaw	ab	R	10 <sup>th</sup> Aug
5	"	"	"	"	"	"			Patt Gallagher	ab		
5	5	"	"	"	"	"			Peter Ryan	ab		
5	"	"	"	"	"	"			John Toy	ab		
5	"	"	"	"	"	"			Chas <sup>r</sup> Groby	ab		
5	"	"	"	"	"	"			Edw <sup>d</sup> Campbell	ab		
5	"	"	"	"	"	"			M <sup>r</sup> . Finmore	ab		
5	100	"	"	"	"	"			Peter Thomas	ab		

Figure 39. A Page from the Convert's Muster-Table Showing Dates of Commission for the First and Third Lieutenants (courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew).

First Mate) were appointed to their posts by warrant. In the following two days additional warrants were issued to William Porter (Surgeon), Thomas Popplewell (Master), Roger Kirby (Boatswain) and William Cruise (Carpenter). On 10 December 1793 John Allen, a former midshipman on the *Penelope* who had been wounded in the taking of *l'Inconstante*, was commissioned as Third Lieutenant of the *Convert*. Two of the warrant officers, George Innes and William Cruise, died before the end of December 1793. Innes was replaced by William Dixon (Gunner), who was appointed by warrant on 2 January 1794, but apparently no fully qualified replacement was found for the post of carpenter.<sup>8</sup> These men made up the total number of commissioned and warrant officers who were assigned to the *Convert*.

By order of Commodore Ford, the *Convert's* complement was to be 220 men, exclusive of the 29 marines who were also assigned to her. At the end of the first 18 days of her commission, there were 91 crew members listed in the muster-table. Among these men were the captain, nine captain's servants (most of whom were young men who planned to become officers), and two 'widow's men' (fictitious seamen whose pay went into a general pension fund for widows and dependents of officers killed in action).<sup>9</sup> Also included were the three lieutenants and their respective three servants, as well as seven warrant officers and their ten servants. Fifteen men were appointed by list (presumably identified by John Lawford) and one came as a volunteer from the *Hound* sloop, Captain Lawford's former command; 11 of these 16 men were ranked as petty officers (two midshipmen, one master's mate, one gunner's mate, one yeoman of the powder room, one quartergunner, one coxswain, two quartermasters and two corporals) while five were rated able seamen. The purser's steward also came from the *Hound*.<sup>10</sup> One midshipman was listed from Port Royal, and one able seaman was assigned from the *Penelope*. The remaining 37 crew were able seamen who signed on as volunteers. From this group of volunteers, five were given petty

officer assignments (one carpenter's crew, one yeoman of the sheets, one quartermaster's mate, one clerk and one boatswain's mate).

The initial enlistment of volunteers probably can be attributed to a bounty of £5 that was paid to new recruits upon joining the navy. In fact, when news of war with France had first arrived in Jamaica, many seamen had fled into the countryside. To counter this resistance to navy service, Commodore Ford had issued a 'Proclamation for Bounty', as given in England, in order to lure them into Royal Navy service.<sup>11</sup> From the time he commissioned the *Convert*, however, Ford knew that additional measures would be necessary in order to complete the complement of the frigate.

The offer of bounty enticed some seamen, but life in the socially stratified navy was hard and hazardous. Volunteers did not fill His Majesty's ships. The Royal Navy, therefore, relied heavily upon impressment; this was a form of conscription for naval service that theoretically applied only to professional seamen, for warships needed trained men. It was unpopular for many reasons, not the least of which was the indefinite term of service that the navy required.<sup>12</sup>

On 2 December 1793, Commodore Ford wrote a letter to Lieutenant Governor Williamson, and Williamson brought it before the Council of Jamaica, for their "opinion and advice", on 3 December 1793:

As I have commissioned the *Inconstant* for His Majesty's Service, and as there does not appear a probability of raising a sufficient number of seamen to man her without having recourse to an Impress; I therefore request you will please to obtain an Order of Council to that effect to the extent of two hundred and fifty men as absolutely necessary to her Complement, and the present exigency of the Squadron.<sup>13</sup>

The Board gave their consent to impressing 250 men because they considered it "emergent and necessary" for the protection of the Island and its trade. They replied:

We do therefore by virtue of an act of Parliament entitled "An Act for the better Encouragement of the Trade of His Majesty's Sugar Colonies in America", hereby give to the said Commodore and to all and every the Captains and Commanders of His Majesty's Ships of War on this station

our Concurrence Approbation and Consent to Impress throughout this Island and the several Ports thereof for the term of six weeks from the date hereof, Mariners and Seamen to serve on board His Majesty's said Squadron; Provided the number so to be Impressed do not exceed two hundred and fifty men; and Provided there be not taken more than one man out of seven from on board any one Merchant ship; and that the several Persons employed to Impress men on shore for the purpose aforesaid be attended by a Constable or Constables, and that such men as they take upon shore to Impress be carried before a Magistrate in order that such Magistrate may see that none but Marines or Seamen be Impressed: Provided that all such Mariners or Seamen as shall be Impressed out of the Several Merchant Ships by virtue of His Consent be Discharged, if they shall require the same, as soon as the Service for which they are so Impressed shall be performed; which Discharge each Captain in His Majesty's said Squadron is by the above mentioned Act required to give.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the impressment could go forward with certain restrictions. It is likely that Captain Lawford was issued a press warrant, as was usual, which authorized him to appoint lieutenants to impress seamen to complete the complement of the *Convert*.<sup>15</sup>

On 7 December 1793, the *Marine Intelligence* section of *The Royal Gazette* reported, "We understand that a convoy will sail for Great Britain about the third week in January".<sup>16</sup> By 28 December the weekly periodical revealed, "A smart impress took place on Sunday evening in this town, and near fifty seamen were procured for the *Convert* frigate".<sup>17</sup> The *Convert*'s muster-table confirms and enlarges this report, for between 21 and 24 December, 106 additional names were entered in the list. One was a midshipman assigned from the *Alligator*, six were able seamen from the *Penelope*, and one was a captain's servant from Port Royal; the remaining 98 able seamen, however, were listed as 14 prest men and 84 volunteers. From the ranks of the 84 volunteers, seven petty officer assignments were made (one carpenter's crew, one carpenter's mate, two quartermaster's mates, one quartermaster, one quartergunner and one yeoman of the sheets).<sup>18</sup> Although the majority of these new recruits appear as volunteers in the *Convert*'s muster-table, it is probable that their enlistment was prompted by the impress. The harbor at Kingston was filled with merchant ships and the 'press gang'

was allowed to take seamen afloat as well as ashore. When the officer in charge of impressment boarded a merchantman, however, he was required to gather the crew together and inform them that they would be paid a bounty if they volunteered for navy service, and that if they did not volunteer they were liable to be pressed in any case.<sup>19</sup>

Between 31 December 1793 and 8 January 1794, entries in the muster-table increased from 197 to 281. The additional 84 men included one gunner, two gunner's servants, one surgeon and his servant, one master's servant, one purser's servant, one master's mate from the *Penelope*, one captain's servant, two able seamen who had been prest and 73 volunteer able seamen. Three petty officer appointments were made from the group of volunteer seamen (one armorer's mate and two quartergunners).<sup>20</sup>

Although the number of entries in the muster-table was now well above the *Convert*'s specified crew allotment, she had not actually exceeded her complement. Some individuals had died, others had jumped ship and several had been legally discharged. There was a high degree of mortality on board, a situation that would plague the Jamaica squadron in the following months.<sup>21</sup> In fact, before the *Convert* sailed, 31 of her mustered crew had been discharged dead, including one gunner, one carpenter, one carpenter's servant, two captain's servants, one master's servant and 25 able seamen. Twelve men had been discharged for legitimate reasons, including one midshipman (to the *Success*), two gunner's servants, two carpenter's servants, one purser's servant and six able seaman (two prest). An additional 31 men had 'Run'; of these deserters, 13 men had been pressed into service while 18 men had volunteered. Only one person who was formally listed as prest actually remained on board for the *Convert*'s voyage.<sup>22</sup>

The *Convert*'s first commission was to provide convoy escort for a fleet of merchantmen from Jamaica. In his letter of 22 January 1794, Commodore Ford officially informed the Secretary of the Admiralty:



You will likewise acquaint their Lordships that in consequence of a Requisition of the Merchants and Planters of Jamaica, through General Williamson, for a Convoy to be appointed to sail with the Trade of that Island, I have directed Captain Lawford of the Convert to proceed through the Gulf of Florida to England with such Ships as may be ready to sail on the 20th instant, and to proceed agreeable to the extract of the Orders No.1, herewith enclosed.<sup>23</sup>

On 5 January 1794 Commodore Ford had given Captain Lawford the following instructions:

Whereas the Principal Merchants and Planters of Jamaica have applied to me by means of Governor Williamson, for a Convoy to be appointed to Sail with the Homeward Bound Trade about the Middle of this Month.

You are therefore hereby required and Directed to be at Bluefields Bay on that Island, with His Majestys Ship under your Command, by the 18th Instant, taking such Merchant Ships as may be ready to Sail from the Port of Kingston with you, & having received under your protection such Ships as may be assembled at Bluefields, to put to Sea with them and His Majestys Ship under your Command on the 20th Instant, proceeding (through the Gulf of Florida) off Cape Clear in Ireland, if the Wind and Weather will admit thereof, but if the Contrary or if you should receive Intelligence that a Superior force of the Enemy is Cruising in the Vicinity thereof, you are then left at Discretion to act according to the exigency of the Moment for His Majestys Service and the Protection of the Convoy.

Upon Making the Land you are to give directions when you shall judge expedient, for the Masters of such Vessels as may be bound up St. Georges Channel, to repair without loss of time to the Ports to which they are respectively destined; and proceed with His Majestys Ship under your Command and such part of the Convoy as may be bound so far to the Eastward, to the Downs, giving the Secretary of the Admiralty an Account of your arrival & proceedings, and in your way thither permitting the Masters of the Ships and Vessels bound to any of the Western Ports, to repair thither, as you arrive off them respectively.

You are to be very attentive to the Ships and Vessels under your Care, Keeping them together by every means in Your power, and giving their Masters such Orders and Directions as you judge will be most conducive to that end; and on no account or pretence whatever to leave them, but to accommodate your Progress to that of the worst Sailing Ship among them; and in Case (not withstanding these precautions) any of them shall part Company with you, or disobey your Commands, you are to transmit to the Admiralty a list of their Names; with the Circumstances attending such separation or Disobedience.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Captain Lawford of the Convert had orders to lead the winter convoy of merchantmen on their passage to Great Britain. Commodore Ford's instructions were specific regarding organization of the convoy,

the intended sailing route and the protection of the fleet from the privateers and naval ships of France (Figure 40).

On 11 January 1794, the *Marine Intelligence* section of *The Royal Gazette* reported, "It is intended that the *Convert*, Capt. Lawford, shall sail on the 18th for Bluefields, and from thence the 20th, with the convoy for England; but there is some doubt whether Capt. Lawford can be ready exactly at the time".<sup>25</sup> It was perceived that Lawford was having difficulty completing the complement of his ship.

On 12 January, in the absence of Commodore Ford aboard the *Europa* in St. Domingue, Captain Francis Roberts of the *Success*, the senior officer present in Jamaica, wrote a letter to Lieutenant Governor Adam Williamson as follows:

It having been represented to me by Captain Lawford of his Majesty's ship the *Convert*, that the warrant issued by the honourable the Privy Council empowering the officers of His Majesty's navy to Impress seamen for the purpose of manning the ship under his command is limited to the term of six weeks from the date thereof, which period will expire upon Tuesday next the 14th instant, and that owing to the obstructions to this service on the part of the officers and seamen of various privateers and armed merchant ships, it has not been in his power to carry the same into execution, the ship being still fifty men short of her complement, I have to request that your honour will be pleased to submit to the Honourable the Privy Council the propriety of extending the powers of the said warrant until the above mentioned number is completed.<sup>26</sup>

At a meeting of the Council of Jamaica on 20 January 1794, the Lieutenant Governor laid Captain Roberts' letter before the board for their opinion. The Council granted an extension of the warrant for the impressment of 50 seamen to man the *Convert* and other exigencies of the Jamaica squadron for a period of six weeks, under the previously outlined restrictions.<sup>27</sup> A review of the muster-table reveals that, in fact, only ten additional crew would be enlisted for the *Convert* before she sailed. Therefore, it is likely that the impressment also helped fill shortages in other of His Majesty's ships.<sup>28</sup>

On 18 January 1794, *The Royal Gazette* reported, "In consequence of an application to the Commander in Chief, the departure of the

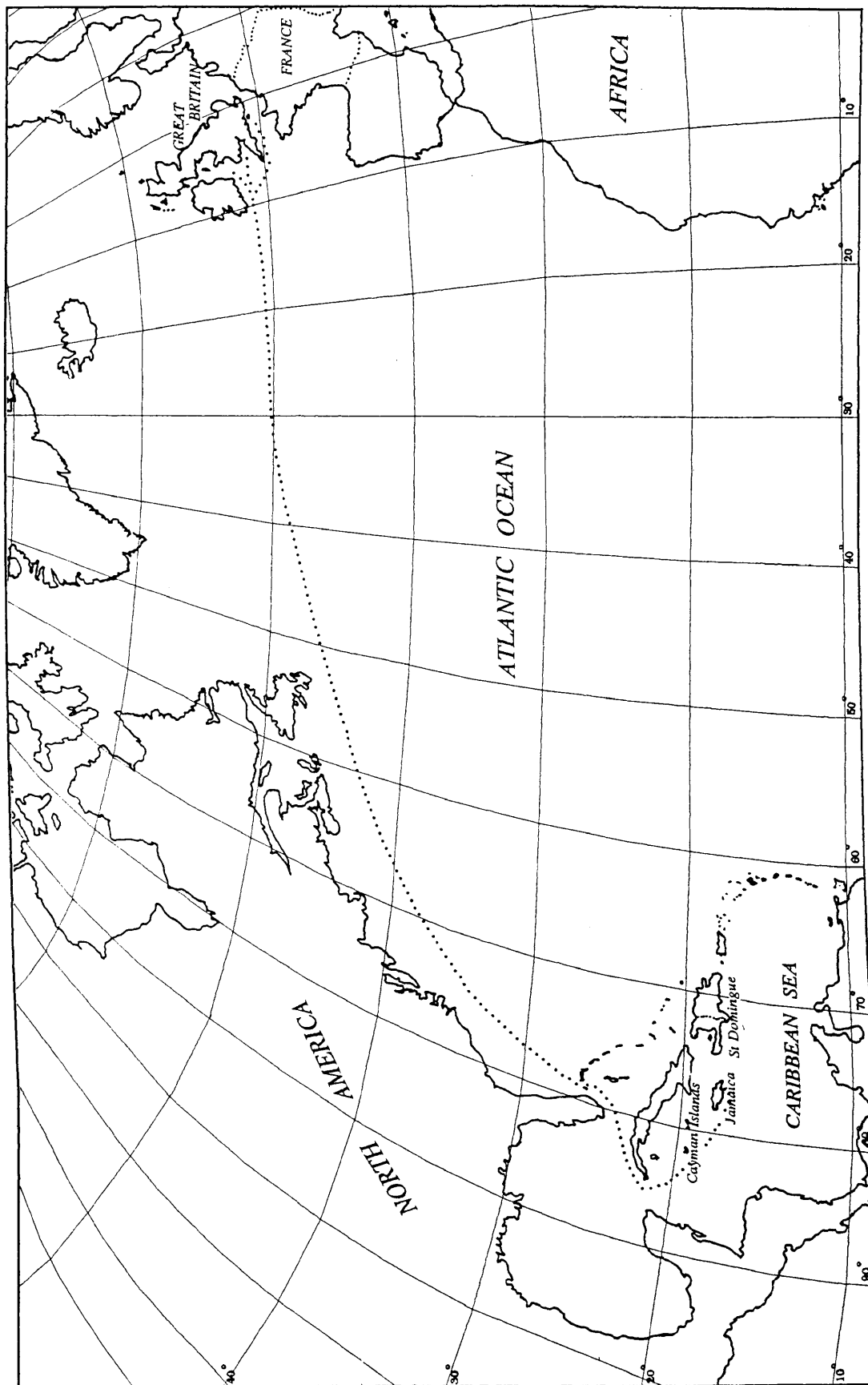


Figure 40. The Intended Route of the Convert Convoy from Jamaica to Various British Ports (drawn by R.L. Craig).

Convoy has been postponed for a few days".<sup>29</sup> Commodore Ford informed the Admiralty in a letter of 5 February 1794, sent from St. Domingue, that the convoy had been delayed until 3 February:

You will also be pleased to acquaint their Lordships that in consequence of Applications from the Merchants and Planters at Jamaica to Governor Williamson, the sailing of the Convoy was postponed 'til the 3rd instant, whereof Captain Lawford informed me by Letter of the 21st Ulto. which I received by the *Success* on the 28th, and have transmitted an extract thereof No.1 for their Lordships Information.<sup>30</sup>

Captain Lawford, writing from the *Convert* in Port Royal Harbor on 21 January, had informed Commodore Ford about the 2 week delay:

I have the pleasure to acquaint you that His Majesty's Ship *Convert* under my Command, from the great Assistance given me by Captain Roberts would have been ready to sail at the time your Orders directed me. Notice thereof I communicated officially to the Merchants of Kingston through the Custos of that Parish. A Meeting of the Planters and Merchants was called in consequence, the result of which was a petition to the Lieutenant Governor, praying that the Sailing of the Convoy might be put off 'till the 3rd of February, this General Williamson thought proper to acquiesce in, and wrote to Captain Roberts, and myself on the occasion, signifying that he should take the earliest opportunity of informing you of it accordingly, by forwarding a Dispatch to you by the way of Jeremie.<sup>31</sup>

A General Post Office notice in *The Royal Gazette*, published on Saturday 25 January 1794, advertised that the *Convert* would sail on "Monday morning next", that is, on 3 February 1794 (Figure 41). The Post Office was receiving letters to be carried by the frigate to Britain.<sup>32</sup> The time was approaching when the *Convert* convoy would sail.

On 25 January 1794, 29 marines arrived aboard the *Convert* from Port Royal. There were eight sergeants, ten corporals, four drummers and seven privates in the detachment. The muster-table describes them as "Non-Commissioned Officers & Privates borne for whole allowance of all Species per order of Captain Lawford".<sup>33</sup> There were no commissioned officers listed among the marines, although it was usual for such detachments, aboard a frigate, to be commanded by a first lieutenant. Nevertheless, it was a common practice, on smaller vessels, for the marines to be commanded by a sergeant.<sup>34</sup> The *Convert*'s lack of a

GENERAL-POST-OFFICE, Jan. 24, 1794.

Notice is hereby given,

That his Majesty's SHIP



**CONYERT**

*Will sail from Port-Royal,*

**FOR GREAT-BRITAIN, ON MONDAY**

**MORNING next.**

**LETTERS will be received at this Office, to be forwarded by her.**

Figure 41. A General Post Office Notice Regarding HMS Conyert, published in The Royal Gazette, XVI, No. 4, 18 to 25 January 1794, Jamaica (courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew).

commissioned marine officer aboard can likely be attributed to personnel shortages in Jamaica, during this wartime period.

In addition to the *Convert's* crew complement and marines, there were other groups of people on board for her voyage to Britain. The muster-table lists 31 "Supernumeraries Borne for Victuals only". These supernumeraries were passengers who received meals, but who were not paid as members of the *Convert's* crew.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, three people in this category were listed as having positions aboard ship (one pilot, one able seaman and one master at arms). The pilot who came on board on 1 December 1793 was discharged before the *Convert* sailed, and two men were discharged dead. Thus, the frigate bore 28 of the supernumeraries for her passage. They had embarked between 14 January and 28 January 1794, and most of them were invalids. Included were two men from the Port Royal Hospital, four men from the *Success*, Lieutenant Brice from the *Hermione*, seven men from the *Europa*, three men from the *Penelope*, three men from the *Iphigenia*, two men from the *Alligator*, one man from the *Convert*, three men from the *Mosquito*, one man from the *Spitfire* and one man from the *Flying Fish*.<sup>36</sup>

Also listed in the *Convert's* muster-table were, "a Prisoner and Eight Invalids belonging to the 1st Regt. Royals, & 62nd Regt. of Foot & Royal Artillery, Victualled at %ds allowance of all Species of Provisions per order of Captain Lawford". The French prisoner had been sent by Admiral Sir John Jervis, via a packet from Barbados to Jamaica, to be taken to England. He had come on board on 26 January 1794, while the others embarked two days later.

There are no entries in the crew list of the *Convert* between 8 January and 26 January 1794, but between 26 January and 28 January 1794 the *Convert* took on board three more volunteers. Among them were an able seaman and an ordinary seaman (the only one on the *Convert*), as well as a second able seaman from the *Mosquito* who was appointed to the carpenter's crew on 2 February 1794.<sup>37</sup>

The *Marine Intelligence* section of *The Royal Gazette*, dated 1 February 1794, reported, "His Majesty's Ship *Convert*, Capt. Lawford, sailed for Bluefields on Tuesday morning. Col. Amherst of the 10th regiment and Captain Thomson of the Royal Artillery are passengers in her for England".<sup>38</sup> The *Convert*'s muster-table lists neither Colonel Amherst nor Captain Thomson as being on board the frigate, but additional evidence suggests that Amherst was on board either the *Convert* or one of her merchant convoy for the passage to Europe.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Merchantmen**

Brian Lavery points out that in 1792 British merchant shipping was the greatest in the world with about 16,079 vessels, totalling 1.5 million tons, manned by approximately 118,286 seamen. He tabulates that in 1796, out of 15,996 registered vessels, there were only 157 ships of over 500 tons, while there were more than 11,000 vessels of under 100 tons. Thus, merchantmen were relatively small.<sup>40</sup>

The merchant trade involved both coastal shipping at home as well as overseas commerce, primarily with British colonies, the trans-Atlantic trade with the West Indies being one of the most profitable routes. Lavery suggests that merchantmen used for the overseas traffic were built and rigged according to the same fundamental principles as warships, but that they generally had more square midship sections and bluff bows.<sup>41</sup> So, many sea-going merchantmen were full-bodied slow sailers. In fact, David MacGregor, a leading historian on merchant sail, notes that reliance of British merchants on the convoy system in wartime frequently prompted them to forgo speed in order to maximize cargo space in the hulls of their ships. There were, however, some well-armed, fast sailing merchant ships built to outsail the slow convoys and thereby capture commercial markets.<sup>42</sup>

MacGregor, in an excellent work on merchant shipping of 1775 to 1815, discusses numerous types of merchant ship hulls that could be rigged as ship, snow, brigantine, schooner or sloop, among other rigs.

(The reader is referred to this volume for a description of the range of merchant vessels that might have composed the *Convert* convoy.)<sup>43</sup>

Brian Lavery comments that the square rig was the preferred rig of larger merchantmen and that vessels of over 250 tons usually were rigged as 'ships'. A ship was a three-masted vessel carrying square sails. Vessels of between 80 and 250 tons were frequently rigged as brigs.<sup>44</sup> The two principal types of merchantmen that departed Jamaica for Britain with the *Convert* convoy were described as ships and brigs; there were also a couple of snows. At least one schooner was bound to America.<sup>45</sup>

A typical vessel used in the West Indies trade is found in David MacGregor's illustration of a merchant ship of 330 tons which is based largely on plans in David Steel's 1805 work *The Shipwright's Vade-Mecum* (Figure 42). Also depicted is the sail plan of a merchant ship of 330 tons reconstructed by MacGregor from late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sources (Figure 43).<sup>46</sup>

William Falconer, in his *Universal Dictionary of the Marine* which was first published in 1769 describes a brig as follows:

Brig, or Brigantine, a merchant-ship with two masts. This term is not universally confined to vessels of a particular construction, or which are masted and rigged in a method different from all others. It is variously applied, by the mariners of different European nations, to a peculiar sort of vessel of their own marine.

Amongst English seamen, this vessel is distinguished by having her main-sail set nearly in the plane of her keel; whereas the main-sails of larger ships are hung athwart, or at right angles with the ship's length, and fastened to a yard which hangs parallel to the deck: but in a brig, the foremost edge of the main-sail is fastened in different places to hoops which encircle the main-mast, and slide up and down it as the sail is hoisted or lowered: it is extended by a *gaff* above, and by a boom below.<sup>47</sup>

A typical brig of the late eighteenth century was the collier brig of 170 tons, redrawn by David MacGregor from plate XXII in David Steel's 1805 work *Elements and Practice of Naval Architecture* (Figure 44). The sail plan was reconstructed by MacGregor from late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sources (Figure 45).<sup>48</sup>



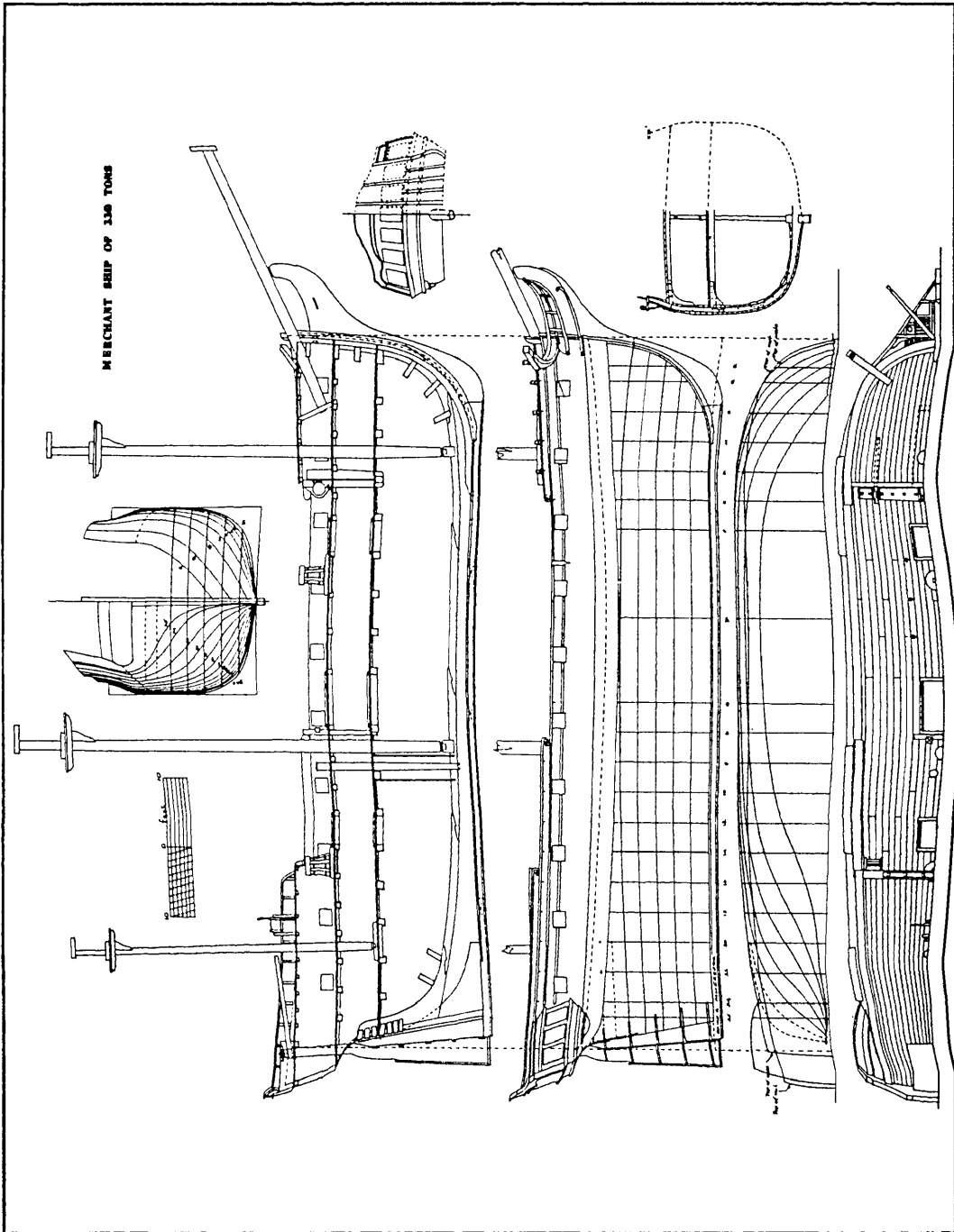


Figure 42. A Merchant Ship of 330 Tons, Plate 122 from Merchant Sailing Ships 1775-1815 by David R. MacGregor (courtesy of David R. MacGregor).

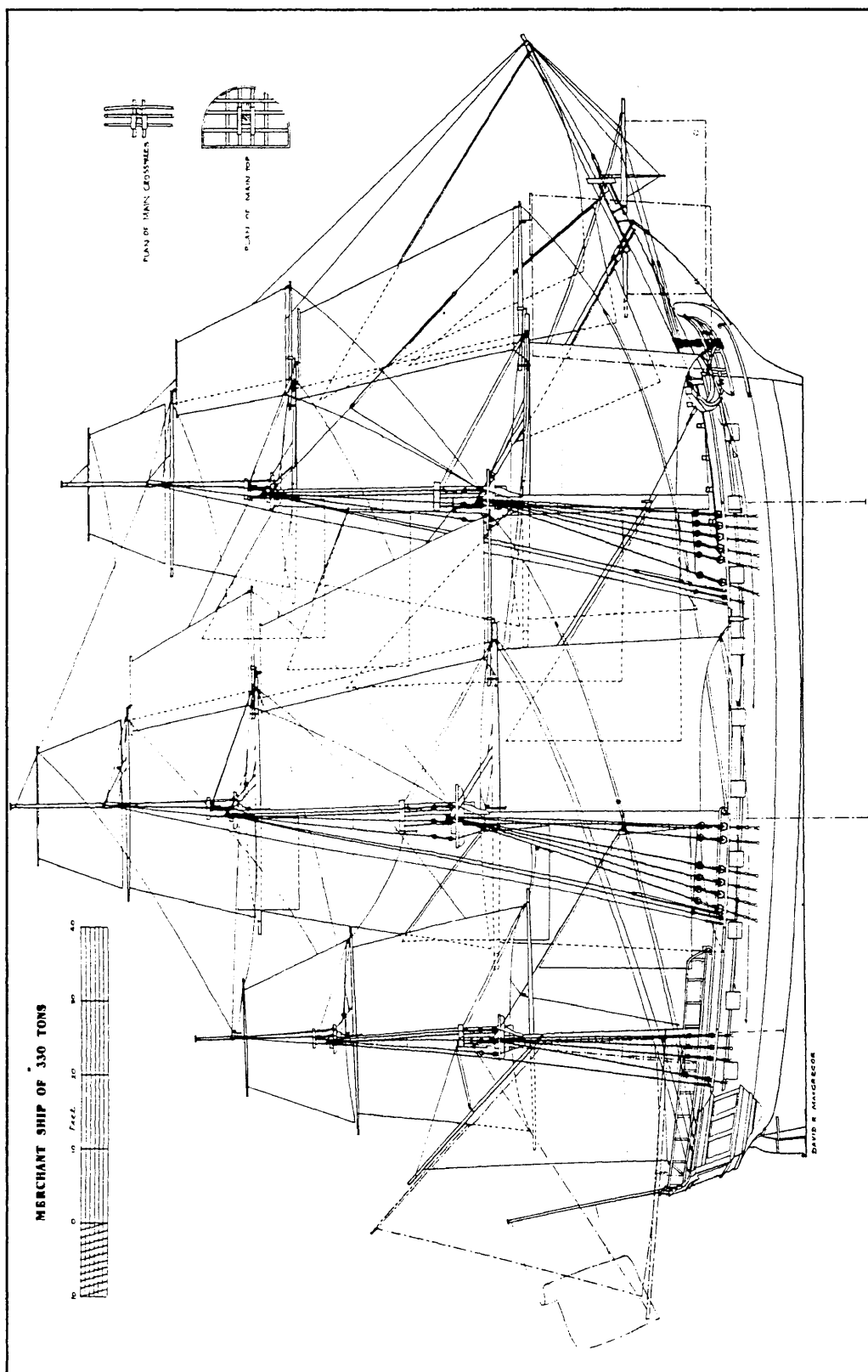


Figure 43. Sail Plan of a Merchant Ship of 330 Tons, Plate 126 from Merchant Sailing Ships 1775-1815 by David R. MacGregor (courtesy of David R. MacGregor).

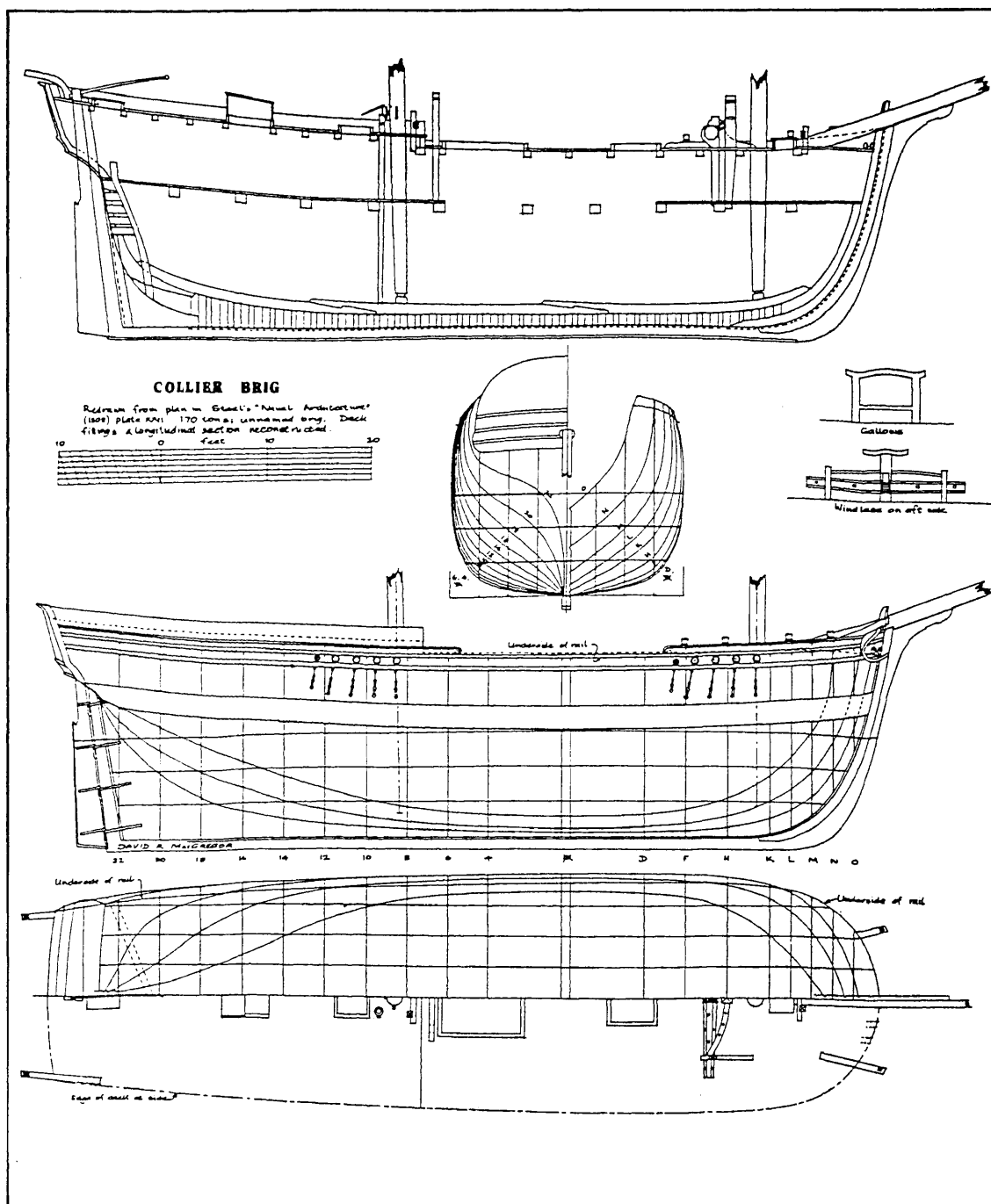


Figure 44. A Collier Brig of 170 Tons, Plate 158 from *Merchant Sailing Ships 1775-1815* by David R. MacGregor (courtesy of David R. MacGregor).

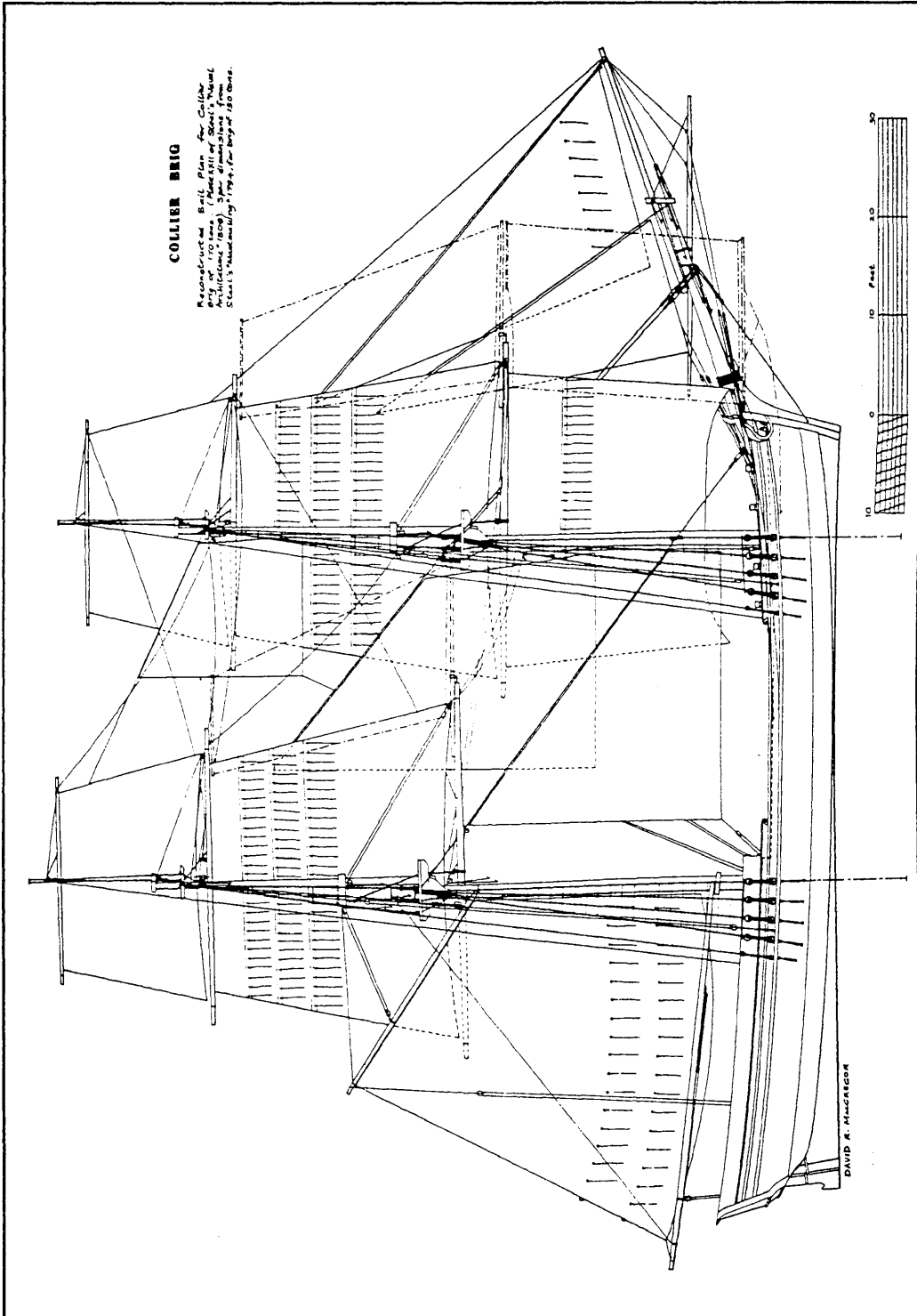


Figure 45. Sail Plan of a Collier Brig of 170 Tons, Plate 163 from Merchant Sailing Ships 1775-1815 by David R. MacGregor (courtesy of David R. MacGregor).

The snow was usually the largest type of two-masted vessel, similar in many respects to the brig. According to MacGregor, however, "the snow was fully square-rigged on both masts, with the addition of a boomless gaff trysail which hoisted on its own trysail mast. This mast was stepped on the deck and terminated at the after end of the main top, and the sail was hooped to this mast".<sup>49</sup> In the late eighteenth century the schooner rig also was carried primarily on two-masted vessels. Among different nations, there was some variety regarding the exclusive use of fore-and-aft sails, or the addition of square sails, on schooners.<sup>50</sup>

In December 1793 and January 1794, before the departure of the *Convert* from Jamaica, advertisements appeared in *The Royal Gazette* for ten ships and one brig that would comprise part of the *Convert* convoy (Figure 46).<sup>51</sup> Quotations for the advertisements, and illustrations of them are given in the following pages.

One of the ships publicized was the *Britannia*, Daniel Martin, master, which was bound for London (Figure 47). It was advertised that she, "*Will positively sail with the Convoy on the 20th January. She is a remarkable stout fast-sailing vessel, mounting Eight Carriage-Guns and Eight Swivels. For Freight or Passage apply to the Captain on board, or to MacNEILL, HENRY, & WEST*". David MacGregor points out that it was common practice for foreign-going merchantmen to take on passengers as well as cargo when space allowed.<sup>52</sup>

Another advertised ship for London was the *Lion*, Thomas King, master (Figure 47). The vessel was, "*Warranted to sail with CONVOY, should one be appointed in JANUARY; if not, to run it with what armed ships may sail about that time*". The *Lion* was described as, "*A fast-sailing copper-sheathed ship, mounting 18 double-fortified Four Pounders, and, should no Convoy be appointed, will be manned accordingly. For Freight or Passage apply to the Master, on board, or at the store of TAYLOR, BALLANTINE, & FAIRLIE*".

T H E 1  
R O Y A L G A Z E T T E.

JAMAICA, PUBLISHED BY ALEXANDER AIKMAN

PRINTER TO THE KING'S



MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

VOL. XVI. FROM SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26, 1793, TO SATURDAY, JANUARY 4, 1794. No. 1.

Kingston, Dec. 13, 1793.  
**For LONDON,**  
To sail with the FIRST CONVOY,  
THE NEW SHIP  
**MARTHA,**  
Capt. ROBERT BROWN.  
Copper-bottomed, mounts Twelve Nine-Pounders, and  
sails remarkably fast.  
For Freight or Passage apply to the Master, at the  
Store of Messrs. HOLECOMB, YOUNG, & Co.

Kingston, Dec. 18, 1793.  
**For LIVERPOOL,**  
THE SHIP  
**MOORHALL,**  
SAMUEL NICHOLSON, Master;  
Burthen 150 tons, mounts ten double-fortified Four  
Pounders, with Small Arms, and men invulnerable; is  
intended to sail with the Convoy on the 20th of JANUARY  
next.  
For Freight or Passage apply to the Master, on board,  
or to  
ASPINALL & HARDY;  
Who have for Sale, imported in the said *Yacht*,  
Superfine FLOUR, HAMS, CHEESE, POTATOES,  
And about 50 TONS of COALS in bulk.

Kingston, Dec. 6, 1793.  
**For LIVERPOOL,**  
*The Big BETSEY,*  
RICHARD KENT, Master;  
A strong copper-bottomed vessel, and  
sails remarkably fast; mounts Ten Car-  
riage-Guns, six pounders, with men an-  
vulnerable.  
Will sail about the 17th of JANUARY next.  
For Freight or Passage apply to the said Master,  
or to  
RAINFORD, BLUNDELL, & RAINFORD.

Kingston, Dec. 5, 1793.  
**FOR S A L E,**  
On FRIDAY the 15th instant,  
275 Prime Young Gold-Coast, Papaw,  
and Whydaw  
**NEGROES,**  
Imported in the brig KING OF DAMONAX, James  
RUBENSON, Master, from WHYDAW.  
JOHN HINDE.  
The above Negroes have all had the Small-Pox, and  
are perfectly recovered.

Kingston, Dec. 5, 1793.  
**FOR S A L E,**  
On FRIDAY the 15th instant,  
225 Choice Young Gold-Coast  
**NEGROES,**  
Imported in the ship PEACE, J. A. SMITH, Master, from  
the River Congo, Leone and Cape Mountains.  
ASPINALL & HARDY.

Kingston, Dec. 18, 1793.  
**FOR S A L E,**  
On SATURDAY the 4th January, 1794,  
220 Choice Young  
**ANGOLA NEGROES,**  
Imported in the ship GIPSEY, John Tobin, mas-  
ter, from ANGOLA.  
ASPINALL & HARDY.

Kingston, Dec. 16, 1793.  
**FOR S A L E,**  
On MONDAY the 6th of January, 1794,  
340 Choice Young  
**CONGO NEGROES,**  
Imported in the ship NEB, George Maxwell,  
master, from ANGOLA.  
JOHN HINDE.  
N. B. The above Negroes have all been inoculated for  
the Small-Pox, and are perfectly recovered.

December 28, 1793.  
The SALE of the CARGO of the *Ship Brothers,*  
From New CALABAS,  
IS POSTPONED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE,  
The Negroes being under INOCULATION for the  
Small-Pox.  
TAYLOR, BALLANTINE, & FAIRLIE.

Kingston, Dec. 7, 1793.  
ON SALE, at the Store of the *Subscribers,*  
The undermentioned Choice Young  
S L A V E S; viz.  
COROMANTEE, PANTEE, and ASHANTEE  
NEGROES  
100 GOLD-COAST, PAPAWE, and WHYDAM Males  
And, 50 FEMALES.  
RAINFORD, BLUNDELL, & RAINFORD.

September 8, 1793.  
**FOR S A L E,**  
A HOUSE in Spanish Town, at present inha-  
bited by Mr. Lewis McLENSON, is well adapted  
for a family, with suitable Out-Offices, situated di-  
rectly opposite to the meeting-house of Alexander  
McLENSON, Esq. and will be sold reasonably for Cash.  
The premises will be shown by Mr. M. Lenson, and  
further particulars made known on application, in  
Kingston, to William McMURDO, Benjamin Water-  
house, or Aspinall & Hardy.

St. Ann, July 31, 1793.  
THE Subscriber intending to leave the island, re-  
quests those indebted to him to make early pay-  
ments, otherwise he will be under the disagreeable  
necessity of instituting suits at law, a practice he has  
hitherto avoided.  
He will dispose of the GOODS in his Store, at a  
very low advance, for immediate payment.  
Alls for Sale, The HOUSE he now lives in, with  
the WHARF, STORES, LUMBER-YARD, &c. &c.  
Libby's, Sundry Field, House, and Tradesmen NE-  
GROES.  
THOMAS JENKINS.

From the LONDON GAZETTE.  
WHITENALL, Oct. 12, 1793.  
Y accounts from the Right Hon. Sir  
William Hamilton, Knight of the  
Bath, his Majesty's Envoy Extraor-  
dinary, and Minister Plenipotentiary  
at the Court of Naples, dated the 17th of Sep-  
tember, it appears that, on the 11th, Captain  
Nelson, in his Majesty's ship *Agamemnon*, ar-  
rived there with dispatches from Lord Hood,  
dated off Toulon, the 27th of August, and a  
letter of the 31st, from Lord Hugh Conway,  
who had left Toulon in the possession of Lord  
Hood, and met with Captain Nelson at sea,  
that Sir William Hamilton having communi-  
cated this intelligence to General Adon, two  
thousand of his Sicilian Majesty's best troops  
were embarked on the 16th on board of two  
line of battle ships, two frigates, two corvettes,  
and one Neapolitan transport vessel. That a  
Spanish frigate, returning to Toulon, had like-  
wise taken some of the troops on board: that  
three more battalions were that night to em-  
bark at Gaeta, on board of two Neapolitan  
frigates, two brigantines and nine large pola-  
cres. That, in a week or ten days, the Nea-  
politan Government were to send off Toulon  
the remaining ships, and two thousand more  
men, with thirty pieces of regimental artillery,  
and plenty of provisions; and that, should the  
wind remain as it then was, those succours  
might reach Toulon in five days, or sooner.


Bayle, Oct. 7. Drouet, the infamous mon-  
ster who delivered Louis the XVth to his exe-  
cutioners, in stopping him at Varennes, was  
brought yesterday morning into this city. He  
is closely guarded at the ancient Hotel of Fi-  
nance. Every sort of arms or instruments has  
been taken from him, he is strictly watched,  
he is obliged to eat, and his morsel is cut for  
him. He was deputy of the Convention, and  
Commissioner at Maubeuge. Afraid of being  
shut up in the garrison, which is closely block-  
aded, he set off on the 3d inst. under the escort  
of about seventy troopers, to go to Phillipville,  
and from thence to the army of the Ardennes.  
His escort was attacked by the Hussars of  
Blankenstein, it fled; fifteen were taken, and  
the rest escaped; Drouet himself would have  
escaped, if his horse had not fallen with him.  
Paris, O.S. 3. On the 30th ult. the follow-  
ing Generals were sent to the prison of the  
Abbey, by order of the Committee of Public  
Welfare:  
Hedouville and Dumcny, late General of

Figure 46. A Page Featuring Advertisements for Three Merchantmen of the Convert Convoy, from The Royal Gazette, XVI, No. 1, 28 December 1793 to 4 January 1794, Jamaica (courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew).

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49-52                      Kingston, Dec. 7, 1793.

For L O N D O N,  
THE SHIP




**BRITANNIA,**  
DANIEL MARTIN, Master;  
*Will positively sail with the Convoy on the 20th January.*  
She is a remarkable stout fast-sailing vessel, mounting Eight Carriage-Guns and Eight Swivels.  
For Freight or Passage apply to the Captain on board, or to  
**MACNEILL, HENRY, & WEST.**

---

49-51                      Kingston, Dec. 4, 1793.

For L O N D O N,  
THE SHIP



**L I O N,**  
THOMAS KING, Master;  
A fast-sailing copper-sheathed ship, mounting 18 double-fortified Four Pounders, and, should no Convoy be appointed, will be manned accordingly.  
For Freight or Passage apply to the Master, on board, or at the store of  
**TAYLOR, BALLANTINE, & FAIRLIE.**

---

Figure 47. Advertisements for the Ships *Britannia* and *Lion*, from *The Royal Gazette*, XV, No. 50, 7 to 14 December 1793, Jamaica (courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica, Kingston).

A third ship for London was the *Cowley*, Richard George, master (Figure 48). It was noted that, "She mounts Twelve Six Pounders, with Men answerable, will positively sail on the 13th JANUARY next, with or without Convoy, and has excellent accommodations for passengers. She will proceed round to St. Ann's Bay in about ten days, and take in here such Freight as may offer for either place. Apply to the Captain on board, lying off Messrs. Stewart & Holgate's Wharf, or to BRIDGMANS & HALL". Thus the *Cowley* would transport cargo and travelers from the Kingston area to St. Ann's Bay, or on to Britain. The vessel would also load goods and accommodate passengers outward from St. Ann's Bay.

The ship *Lord Charlemont*, Captain Pinder, was headed for Liverpool (Figure 48). The *Royal Gazette* advertised: "A strong copper-bottomed vessel, mounts fourteen six pounders, and will sail on or before the 10th of next Month. For Freight or Passage apply to the Master, or W. DAGGERS & CO."

Another ship for Liverpool was the *Cyclops*, Captain Patrick Fairweather (Figure 49). She was described in the *Gazette* as "A strong copper-bottomed vessel, and sails remarkably fast; mounts six guns, 6 pounders, and manned in proportion; Will sail on the 13th of JANUARY. For Freight or Passage apply to the said Captain, or to RAINFORD, BLUNDELL, & RAINFORD".

Also Liverpool-bound was the ship *Alice*, Bryan Smith, master, advertised to be (Figure 49):


A well-known stout British-built ship, burthen 220 Tons, mounts Six Carriage-Guns, copper-sheathed, and sails fast; is intended to sail about the middle of January, when it is expected several armed ships will sail in company for Liverpool; or, if a suitable Freight offers, said ship will wait for convoy, should any be appointed. For Freight apply to said Master, on board the ship, or at the store of RAINFORD, BLUNDELL, & RAINFORD.<sup>53</sup>

The *Martha*, Captain Robert Brown, was described as a new ship that would sail with the first convoy for London (Figure 50): "Copper-bottomed, mounts Twelve Nine-Pounders, and sails remarkably fast. For Freight or Passage apply to the Master, at the store of Messrs.



---

47-50 November 22, 1793.

*For* LONDON, *to load at St. Ann's Bay,*  
 THE SHIP  

**COWLEY,**  
 RICHARD GEORGE. *Master;*  
 She mounts Twelve Six Pounders, with Men answerable, will positively sail on the 13th JANUARY next, with or without Convoy, and has excellent accommodations for passengers.  
 She will proceed round to St. Ann's Bay in about ten days, and take in here such Freight as may offer for either place.  
 Apply to the Captain on board, lying off Messrs. Stewart & Helgate's Wharf, or to  
**BRIDGMANS & HALL.**

---

47 Kingston, Nov. 20, 1793.



*For* LIVERPOOL,  
 THE SHIP  

**Lord Charlemont,**  
 Capt PINDER;  
 A strong copper-bottomed vessel, mounts fourteen six pounders, and will sail on or before the 10th of next Month.  
 For Freight or Passage apply to the Master, or  
**W. DAGGERS & CO.**

Figure 48. Advertisements for the Ships *Cowley* and *Lord Charlemont*, from *The Royal Gazette*, XV, No. 50, 7 to 14 December 1793, Jamaica (courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica, Kingston).

Kingston, O.S. 29, 1793.

44  
For L I V E R P O O L,  
THE S H I P  
 C Y C L O P S,  
Capt. PAT. FAIRWEATHER;  
A strong copper-bottomed vessel, and sails remarkably fast; mounts six guns, 6 pounders, and manned in proportion;  
*Will sail on the 13th of JANUARY.*  
For Freight or Passage apply to the said Captain, or to  
RAINFORD, BLUNDELL, & RAINFORD.

---

Kingston, Nov. 29, 1793.


45  
For L I V E R P O O L,  
THE S H I P  
 A L I C E,  
BRYAN SMITH, Master;  
A well-known stout British-built ship, burthen 220 Tons, mounts Six Carriage-Guns, copper-sheathed, and sails fast; is intended to sail about the middle of January, when it is expected several armed ships will sail in company for Liverpool; or, if a suitable Freight offers, said ship will wait for convoy, should any be appointed. For Freight apply to said Master, on board the ship, or at the store of  
RAINFORD, BLUNDELL, & RAINFORD.

Figure 49. Advertisements for the Ships *Cyclops* and *Alice*, from *The Royal Gazette*, XV, No. 50, 7 to 14 December 1793, Jamaica (courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica, Kingston).

50 Kingston, Dec. 13, 1793.  
For **L O N D O N,**

To sail with the **FIRST CONVOY,**  
**THE NEW SHIP**



**M A R T H A,**

Capt. **ROBERT BROWN.**

Copper-bottomed, mounts Twelve Nine-Pounders, and sails remarkably fast.

For Freight or Passage apply to the Master, at the Store of Messrs. **HOLCOMBE, YOUNG, & Co.**

51 Kingston, Dec. 18, 1793.  
For **L I V E R P O O L,**

**THE SHIP**



**M O O R H A L L,**

**SAMUEL NICHOLSON, Master;**

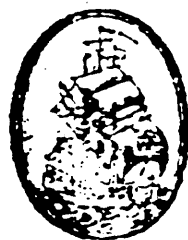
Burthen 150 tons, mounts ten double-fortified Four Pounders, with Small Arms, and men answerable; is intended to sail with the Convoy on the 20th of **JANUARY** next.

For Freight or Passage apply to the Master, on board, or to

**ASPINALL & HARDY;**

Who have for Sale, imported in the said Vessel,  
Superfine **FLOUR, HAMS, CHEESE, POTATOES,**  
And about 50 Tons of **COALS** in bulk.

1 Kingston, Dec. 6, 1793.  
For **L I V E R P O O L,**



*The Big* **B E T S E Y,**

**RICHARD KENT, Master;**

A strong copper-bottomed vessel, and sails remarkably fast; mounts Ten Carriage-Guns, six pounders, with men answerable;

*Will sail about the 13th of* **JANUARY** next.

For Freight or Passage apply to the said Master, or to

**RAINFORD, BLUNDELL, & RAINFORD.**

Figure 50. Advertisements for the *Martha*, *Moorhall*, and *Betsey*, from *The Royal Gazette*, XVI, No. 1, 28 December 1793 to 4 January 1794, Jamaica (courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew).

HOLCOMBE, YOUNG, & CO."

The ship *Moorhall*, Samuel Nicholson, master, was also intended to sail for the port of Liverpool (Figure 50). The gazette highlighted: "Burthen 150 tons, mounts ten double-fortified Four Pounders, with Small Arms, and men answerable; is intended to sail with the Convoy on the 20th of JANUARY next. For Freight or Passage apply to the Master, on board, or to ASPINALL & HARDY; *Who have for Sale, imported in the said Vessel, Superfine FLOUR, HAMS, CHEESE, POTATOES, And about 50 Tons of COALS in bulk*".

A fifth vessel for Liverpool was the brig *Betsey*, Richard Kent, master (Figure 50). The *Royal Gazette* notice identified her as: "A strong copper-bottomed vessel, and sails remarkably fast; mounts Ten Carriage-Guns, six pounders, with men answerable; *Will sail about the 13th of January next. For Freight or Passage apply to the said Master, or to RAINFORD, BLUNDELL, & RAINFORD*". The ships *Cyclops* and *Alice*, and brig *Betsey* were marketed by the same merchants, Rainford, Blundell, & Rainford.

A fifth ship for London was the *Ludlow*, David McClure, master (Figure 51): "A fine new vessel, on her first voyage, is now loading at Port-Morant, and will be at Port-Royal early in next month, to take on board any light goods that may offer. For freight or Passage apply to TAYLOR, BALLANTINE, & FAIRLIE". The *Ludlow* was to sail with the first convoy.


The ship *Jane*, Captain Gammell, was destined for the port of Bristol (Figure 51). It was advertised: "Has now on board a great part of her cargo, at Morant-Bay, is expected in a few days at Port-Royal to take in any freight that may offer from Kingston, will proceed to Black-River to fill up, and positively sail with first Convoy. For Freight or Passage apply to TAYLOR, BALLANTINE, & FAIRLIE".<sup>54</sup> The last two ships, the *Ludlow* and *Jane*, and also the *Lion* previously described, were all affiliated with the merchants Taylor, Ballantine, & Fairlie.

Kingston, Dec. 30, 1793.

For **L O N D O N**,

To sail with the **FIRST CONVOY**,

THE SHIP

 **L U D L O W**,

DAVID M'CLURE, Master;

A fine new vessel, on her first voyage, is now loading at Port-Morant, and will be at Port-Royal early in next month, to take on board any light goods that may offer.


For Freight or Passage apply to  
**TAYLOR, BALLANTINE, & FAIRLIE.**

---

Kingston, Dec. 30, 1793.

For **B R I S T O L**,

THE SHIP

 **J A N E**,

Captain Gammell,

Has now on board a great part of her cargo, at Morant-Bay, is expected in a few days at Port-Royal to take in any freight that may offer from Kingston, will proceed to Black-River to fill up, and positively sail with first Convoy.

For Freight or Passage apply to  
**TAYLOR, BALLANTINE, & FAIRLIE.**

Figure 51. Advertisements for the Ships *Ludlow* and *Jane*, from *The Royal Gazette*, XVI, No. 1, 28 December 1793 to 4 January 1794, Jamaica (courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew).

The advertisements for the *Ludlow* and *Jane*, alone, fail to mention weaponry. It is likely that the nine armed merchantmen were among the most self-sufficient and fastest sailing ships in the convoy.

### **The Departure From Jamaica**

On Tuesday, 28 January 1794 the *Convert* sailed from Kingston Harbor for Bluefields Bay on the southwest coast of Jamaica (Figure 52). The frigate was to collect her convoy there and ready them for the passage to Great Britain. There are two lists of vessels that sailed from Port Royal, printed respectively in the 1 February and 8 February 1794 *Marine Intelligence* section of *The Royal Gazette* (Figures 53 and 54). These lists reveal that, besides the *Convert*, 28 merchantmen departed Kingston for Bluefields, and/or various British ports, between 28 January and 3 February 1794. Among these merchant vessels were 19 three-masted square-rigged ships (*Alice*, Smith, master; *Britannia*, Martin; *Thomas Henry*, Kirkpatrick; *William and Elizabeth*, Goodwin; *Royal Charlotte*, Souter; *Gascoigne*, Bibbye; *Peggy*, Robertson; *Lord Charlemont*, Pindar; *Lion*, Finnan; *Barbados*, Moore; *Arethusa*, Smith; *Ludlow*, McClure; *Nancy*, Campbell; *Catherine*, Singleton; *Martha*, Brown; *Moorhall*, Nicholson; *Cyclops*, Fairweather; *Eliza-Ann*, Hughes; and *Nancy*, Leary), eight brigs (*Dispatch*, Pattison; *Fortune*, Love; *Betsey*, Kent; *Nile*, Bowden; *Betsey & Susan*, Harvey; *Countess of Galloway*, Eglin; *Friends*, McDonald; and *Flora*, Davidson) and one snow (*Susanna*, McIsaac). There were also three merchantmen that were bound to America (the Brigs *Constant*, Miles, and *Molly*, Willey; and the Schooner *Delaware*, Davis).<sup>55</sup> The ship *Jane*, Gammel, had previously sailed for Bluefields on 22 January 1794.<sup>56</sup> While the *Convert*'s list of the convoy has not survived, it is likely that all of these 32 merchant ships joined the *Convert* convoy.

On 4 February 1794, the brig *Eagle*, Manning, for Charleston and the Schooner *Hope*, O'Neill, for Halifax sailed from Port Royal.<sup>57</sup> Since they departed one day after the official date upon which the convoy was

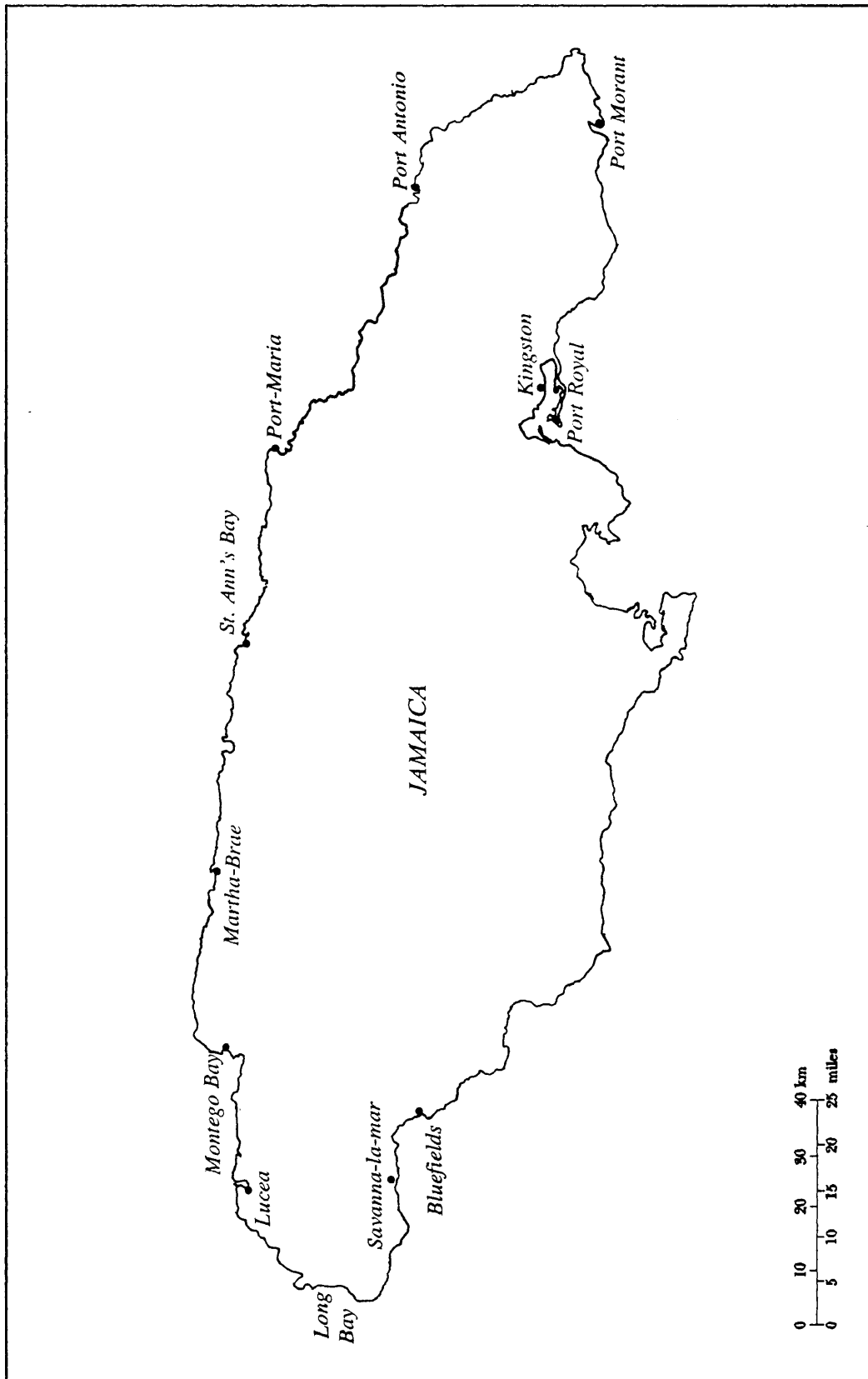


Figure 52. Ports of Eighteenth-Century Jamaica (drawn by R.L. Craig after map by Bryan Edwards, 1794, Cayman Islands National Archive).

... annually from  
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... National Conve-  
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... m six days longer;  
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... after the return  
... sent to Vienna,  
... Mr. Drake, the  
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... la Drake, having  
... Vienna; sent on  
... stage; the purport  
... received by what  
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... apolitan ships to  
... anishy ships have  
... ready shipped on  
... e on shore. Our  
... have, through the  
... alled: *Conservatori*  
... insurance Brokers  
... rt must be confi-  
... at they must act  
... ort and rivers are  
... ing itself to the  
... from the mo-

# KINGSTON,

FEBRUARY 13, 1794.

## MARINE INTELLIGENCE.

*Arrived at PORT-ROYAL since our last.*

Jan. 24	Sloop Ferret, Dallas	from	St. Marc's
	Sch. Intrepid, Ruitan		ditto
	— Hope, Meyer		Honduras
25	— Nonette, Pichler		St. Marc's
26	Ship Jane, Morgan		Jeremie
27	Sch. Nancy, Newton		Charleston
28	H. M. S. Refe, Capt. Riou		Barbadoes
29	Sch. Betsey, Perry		Leogane
31	Brig Milly Huntres, Eastwood		North Carolina and Jeremie

*Sailed from PORT-ROYAL since our last.*

Jan. 25	Brig Minerva, Wade	for	New-York
	Sch. Amiable, Perie		Jeremie
	— Dolphin, Chepeau		ditto
	— Owen, Fifer		Savanna
	Sloop Betsey, Archer		North-Carolina
26	Ship Mary, Pattison		Jeremie
	Sch. Maria, Simmons		St. Thomas's
	— La Blonde, Luca		Jeremie
28	H. M. S. Convert, Capt. La vford		Bluefields
	Ship Alice, Smith		Liverpool
	— Mary, Pattison		Jeremie
	— Britannia, Martin		London
	Brig Dispatch, Pattison		ditto
	Sch. Secour, Barry		Jeremie
	— Triton, Callander		Cape Nicholas Mole
	— Trimmer, Ryken		Curacao
29	Ship Isabella, M'Kellar		Port-Morant
	— Thomas Henry, Kirkpatrick		Bluefields
	Sch. Active, Walker		Honduras
30	Ship William and Elizabeth, Goodwin		Bluefields
	— Royal Charlotte, Souber		ditto
	— Gascoigne, Bibbye		ditto
	Brig Fortune, Love		ditto
	— Constant, Miles		North-Carolina
	— King of Dabomey, Smart		Savanna-la-Mar
	— Earl of Moira, Craig		Green Island
	— Betsey, Kent		Bluefields
	Sch. Neptune, Seiger		St. Eustacia
	— Fidelle, Utter		St. Marc's
31	Ship Peggy, Robertson		Bluefields
	— Lord Charlemont, Pindar		ditto
	— Lion, Finnan		ditto
	— Barbados, Moore		ditto
	— Arethusa, Smith		ditto
	Snow Sufanna, M'Isaac		ditto
	Sch. Delaware, Davis		Charleston
	Sloop Constat, Lewis		St. Marc's

... some days before

It is reported that Jervis at Barbadoes has ordered the Frenchmen to whom hands were provided they would petition; but it was provided a guard, the whole board, and consilium, where latitude, where course whither fifteen hundred large quantity of at Wapping, in cember.

We are informed an expedition, with success, is

Those French unexampled valent in Hispania, and which pelled by their forces in the der, are said to be peculiarly distressing being placed on express purpose passage back, and notice (as the Jacobable in France) sacrificed.

The Harlequin company of the remie last Monday Penelope, Capt. sailed again on t

Four battalions embarked, under the embarked on the 21st instant, secret expedition

The Spanish barrels, of gunpowder Port-Royal on The Master reports the Havannah days at sea, and water.

Figure 53. A List of Ships that Arrived at, or Sailed from Port Royal, Published in *The Royal Gazette*, XVI, No. 5, 25 January to 1 February 1794, Jamaica (courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew).



so which have  
100,000 more  
of provisions.  
firm. She take

The garrison  
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ting off from  
, that increase  
its fall by ad-  
ns, which has  
said that Gen.  
of Strasburgh  
o say, its re-  
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FEBRUARY 8, 1794.

MARINE INTELLIGENCE.

*Arrived at PORT-ROYAL since our last.*

Feb. 1	H. M. Sch. Berbice, Lt. Oliver,	from Barbadoes
	Ship Commerce, Bell	Gork
2	Sch. Polly & Jane, Edwards	a cruise
	— Polly, M'Kinley	Jeremie
3	Ship Phoenix, Stimpson	London
	Brig Betsey, Obar	North-Carolina
	Sch. Rebecca, Inglis	Sbelburne
	Sloop Delight, Bourne	Digby
4	Sch. La Lilley, Rosille	Jeremie
	— Harlequin, Danzies	Gonaive
5	Brig George, Macconau	Jeremie
6	Sch. St. Domingo Packet,	ditto
7	Brig King of Dahomy, Smart	Savanna-la-Mar

*Sailed from PORT-ROYAL since our last.*

Feb. 1	Ship Ludlow, M'Clure	for London
	— Nancy, Campbell	ditto
	— Catherine, Singleton	ditto
	— Martha, Brown	ditto
	— Moorhall, Nicholson	Liverpool
	— Cyclops, Fairweather	ditto
	— Eliza-Ann, Hughes	Dublin
	Brig Nile, Bowden	London
	— Betsey & Susan, Harvey	ditto
	— Countess of Galloway, Eglis	ditto
	— Friends, M'Donald	Belfast
2	Sch. Henry, Murphy	Havanna
	Sloop Le Furrrie, Dallas	Cape Nichol's Mole
	Brig Flora, Davidson	London
3	Ship Nancy, Leary	ditto
	Brig Molly, Willey	Baltimore
	Sch. Thomas, Britlow	on a cruise
4	Ship Wilding, Pemberton	for Old-Harbour
	Brig Eagle, Manning	Charleston
	Sch. Hope, O'Neill	Hallifax
6	Ship Isabella, Given	Africa
	— King Grey, Bryan	Acogane
	Sch. Curlew, Zuill	Jeremie
7	Ship Elizabeth, Rose	Lucas
	Sch. La Nannette, Polthier	St. Marc's
	— La Lilley,	Jeremie
	— La Deux,	ditto

*Copy of a Letter from the Right Hon. Henry Dundas, Secretary of State, &c. to his Honour the*

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Figure 54. A List of Ships that Arrived at, or Sailed from Port Royal, Published in *The Royal Gazette*, XVI, No. 6, 1 to 8 February 1794, Jamaica (courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew).

scheduled to sail from Jamaica, it is likely that they did not intend to join the fleet. Nonetheless, they probably intended to accompany it unofficially.

According to the orders that Captain Lawford had received from Commodore Ford, he assembled the merchantmen that had rendezvoused at Bluefields Bay with the intention of making sail on Monday, 3 February 1794. In Lawford's words, however, "light Westerly winds and Calms prevailing, rendered it impossible for the Heavy Merchant Ships to Clear the Bay before the morning of the 5th, when I got underway at Day light, with about Thirty Two Sail and brought too off Long Bay in the Afternoon to give the necessary Instructions & Signals to the Ships that had joined me from the Northside".<sup>58</sup> Upon gathering at a specified rendezvous, it was standard procedure for the master of each merchant ship seeking convoy protection to send a boat to the naval escort for a copy of the official instructions. These directions detailed various signals that would be used for communication among the ships during the passage.<sup>59</sup>

When the *Convert* left Bluefields Bay on 5 February 1794, the departure was witnessed from a town located to the westward. Information included in a note sent from Montego Bay, dated 8 February, was later reported in *The Royal Gazette*: "We are informed from Savanna-la-Mar, that the fleet under convoy of his Majesty's Ship *Convert*, Capt. Lawford, numbering about 40, sailed on Wednesday last, and at sun-set were nearly out of sight".<sup>60</sup> They had sailed to Long Bay, off the west end of Jamaica near Negril, to meet the ships from ports on the north coast of the island that had been gathering at Lucea to join the convoy. Reports in *The Royal Gazette*, from Montego Bay, suggest that the following six vessels called at, or sailed past, Montego Bay to Lucea to assemble and rendezvous with the convoy for Europe: the ships *Nereus*, *McIver*, from Port-Maria, *Fanny*, *Withall*, from St. Ann's, as well as the *Alfred*, *Bryan*, and *Hawke*, Hill, from Martha-

Brae; and the snows *Sarah*, *Potter*, from Bucknor's Bay and *Diana*, *Thompson*, from Martha-Brae.<sup>61</sup> According to an advertisement in the gazette, it is also likely that the ship *Cowley*, *George*, sailed from St. Ann's Bay to join the *Convert* convoy.<sup>62</sup>

Commodore Ford assumed that the *Convert* convoy had departed from Jamaica on 3 February 1794, and in correspondence sent two days later from St. Domingue, he informed the Admiralty that the *Convert* was, "On her Passage to England with the Convoy" (Figure 55). At that time, the Commodore, aboard the *Europa*, was preparing to return to Jamaica where two of His Majesty's schooners were refitting, but 11 vessels under his command would remain in St. Domingue to promote British interests there. Ford's list of the squadron on 5 February suggests that the 64-gun ship *Sceptre* had joined his forces and that there remained on the Jamaica station one 50-gun ship (*Europa*), six frigates (*Penelope*, *Hermione*, *Iphigenia*, *Alligator*, *Magicienne* and *Success*), two sloops (*Hound* and *Goelan*) and four schooners (*Spitfire*, *Mosquito*, *Flying Fish* and *Marie Antoinette*).<sup>63</sup>

On the evening of 5 February 1794, the *Convert* and the merchant convoy lay to in Long Bay off the west end of Jamaica. Earlier that day John Lister, one of the *Convert's* able seaman, had deserted at Bluefields anchorage before the *Convert* had sailed. The muster-table suggests that Lister was the only deserter who managed to wait long enough to receive his £5 bounty for volunteering before he ran. The muster-table also reveals that, on 6 February, the *Convert* acquired seven additional able seamen in an attempt to complete her complement. It is likely that these men were impressed from vessels in her convoy, perhaps from those that arrived from the north side ports, although they are recorded in the muster-table as volunteers.

At this time, according to the muster-table, there were 283 people registered to be on board the *Convert*, including 217 officers and crew (just short of the frigate's complement of 220), 29 marines,

and Commander in Chief H. M. S. Jamaica on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 1794.

Names of the		Upon what Service
Commanders		
Sceptre	Adm. R. Dacres.	At the Mole and in the Neighbourhood thereof for its Protection Cruising in different Places occasionally.
Thames	John Hills.	
Penelope	B. L. Rowley	
Thames	Thos. Surridge.	
Spheerion	Pat. Sinclair.	
Success	Frederick Roberts	At Tidmouth, and in the Neighbourhood thereof.
Magician	Geo. Newton	Blockading Port au Prince, and giving Protection to the Ports at Leguane, St. Catharine &c.
Allegator	John Affleck	
Swallow	Thos. Holly	
Marie Antoinette	Leitch Perkins	
Flying Fish	John Percival	
Bunche	Geo. Gregory	On her Passage to Jamaica
Mosquito	Lieut. Denton	Repairing at Port Royal
Whippoorwill	" Rich	
Comet	Mr. Langford	On her Passage to England with the Army

Figure 55. Commodore Ford's List of the Disposition of the Jamaica Squadron on 5 February 1794 (courtesy of the Public Record Office, Kew).

28 supernumeraries, one prisoner and eight invalids.<sup>64</sup> There were actually 281 people known to be on board the *Convert*, because two of her crew, the widow's men, were fictitious. Also, although they are not listed in the muster-table, *The Royal Gazette*, dated 25 January to 1 February 1794, reported that Colonel Amherst and Captain Thomson were on board the *Convert* for the voyage.<sup>65</sup> If these two men were, in fact, on board, the figure comes to 283 people. On Thursday morning, 6 February 1794, the *Convert* "bore away, having Fifty Five Sail of square rigged vessels Bound to Europe, and three Schooners to Different Ports in America".<sup>66</sup>

### **Summary**

The Jamaica squadron was a small, peace-time force when war broke out between Britain and France, and Commodore Ford had few Royal Navy ships available to act as convoy escorts. Nonetheless, he appointed convoys in June and July 1793 for the protection of merchantmen homeward-bound to Europe. The fortuitous capture of *l'Inconstante* in late November 1793 provided Commodore Ford with an extra frigate, that he renamed *Convert*; the ship's first commission was to accompany and protect a winter convoy from the West Indies to Britain. The *Convert* convoy was to sail on 20 January 1794. Meanwhile, Commodore Ford promoted several officers on the Jamaica station into the new warship.

Captain John Lawford and the officers of the *Convert* worked to complete the complement of their frigate by seeking volunteers and by impressing seamen in the ports of Jamaica. Death and desertion added to their task by reducing the numbers of men they enlisted for the *Convert*'s crew, but the ship was ready to sail by the appointed date.

In December 1793 and January 1794, advertisements appeared in *The Royal Gazette*, in which ten ships and a brig offered to carry freight and passengers to Britain under the protection of the upcoming convoy. Some merchants and planters of Jamaica, however, were having difficulty meeting the departure deadline and requested that the convoy be

postponed until 3 February 1794.

On 28 January the *Convert* sailed from Port Royal to Bluefields Bay, the rendezvous appointed for the convoy. On 5 February 1794, about 32 merchantmen cleared the bay and sailed with the *Convert* to Long Bay to meet the merchant ships that had gathered from ports on the north side of Jamaica. Captain Lawford gave instructions for the voyage to 55 ships, brigs and snows bound to Britain, and 3 vessels for America. On 6 February 1794, the ships of the *Convert* convoy embarked upon their journey.

## Footnotes for Chapter VI.

1. Brian Lavery, *Nelson's Navy, The Ships, Men and Organization 1793-1815* (London, Conway Maritime Press, Ltd., 1989), 269.
2. *Ibid.*, 273.
3. PRO, ADM 1/245, Admiralty and Secretariat Papers, 'Jamaica 1793 & 94, Admiral John Ford Esqr.': John Ford, Commodore and Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels at Jamaica, to Philip Stephens, Secretary of the Admiralty, 9 June 1793, and Enclosure: A List of the Squadron under the Command of John Ford...on 9 June 1793; PRO, ADM 7/782, Registers of Convoys 1793-7, Ships from Jamaica under Convoy of the *Proserpine* Frigate, Captain Alms, arrived 3 September 1793. The *Fly* may also have sailed with the home-bound June convoy (see Chapter V, footnote 15).
4. PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Goelan*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 11 August 1793; PRO, ADM 7/782, A List of Ships and Vessels brought under Convoy of HMS *Hector*, George Montague Comdr., from Jamaica to England between 22 July and 4 October 1793; *Ibid.*, Ships from Jamaica under Convoy of the *Hannibal*, Captain Colpoys, arrived 1 October 1793.
5. JA, 1B/5/3/20, Council of Jamaica Minutes, May 1792 to May 1799, 7 August and 12 November 1793. As a result of pleas from merchants, the Assembly of Jamaica asked that Jamaican ports be opened to neutral vessels. Many British ships had been captured by French ships of war and privateers in American seas, and such action was deemed necessary because Commodore Ford could not provide protection for British ships that might be sent from Jamaica to America for supplies. Lieutenant Governor Adam Williamson granted that the ports be opened to neutral vessels for a limited period.
6. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 130.
7. *Ibid.*, 113.
8. PRO, ADM 36/11476, Ships' Muster Books, Muster-Table of HMS *Convert*, 1793-4. The ship's crew did, however, include one carpenter's mate and three carpenter's crew.
9. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 88, 99.
10. The purser's servant also came from the *Hound*, but he was counted above in the group of 10 warrant officer's servants.
11. PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Providence*, Port Royal, Jamaica, 14 April 1793.
12. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 117-23.
13. JA, 1B/5/3/20, Council Minutes, 3 December 1793.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 120.

16. NLJ, *The Royal Gazette*, XV (1793), From Saturday 30 November to Saturday 7 December, No. 49, 23.
17. *Ibid.*, From Saturday 21 December to Saturday 28 December, No. 52, 22.
18. PRO, ADM 36/11476, Muster-Table of HMS *Convert*.
19. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 120.
20. PRO, ADM 36/11476, Muster-Table of HMS *Convert*.
21. JA, 1B/5/3/20, Council Minutes, 17 July 1794.
22. PRO, ADM 36/11476, Muster-Table of HMS *Convert*.
23. PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Europa*, Mole St. Nicholas, 22 January 1794.
24. PRO, ADM 1/5331, Courts Martial, February to December 1794, April 1 - Captain John Lawford, the Officers and Company of the *Convert*, for the loss of her, John Ford to John Lawford, Captain of HMS *Convert*, aboard the *Europa*, off Port au Prince, 5 January 1794. A copy of Ford's 5 January 1794 instructions to John Lawford are also included as an Enclosure in: PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Europa*, Port Royal Harbour, Jamaica, 3 April 1794. The latter copy of Ford's instructions are, however, misdated 5 February 1794.
25. PRO, CO 141/1, Government Gazettes, *The Royal Gazette*, XVI (1794), From Saturday 4 January to Saturday 11 January, No. 2, 23.
26. JA, 1B/5/3/20, Council Minutes, 20 January 1794.
27. *Ibid.*
28. PRO, ADM 36/11476, Muster-Table of HMS *Convert*.
29. PRO, CO 141/1, XVI (1794), From Saturday 11 January to Saturday 18 January, No. 3, 19.
30. PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Europa*, off Jérémie, 5 February 1794, and Enclosures.
31. *Ibid.*
32. PRO, CO 141/1, XVI (1794), From Saturday 18 January to Saturday 25 January, No. 4, 17.
33. PRO, ADM 36/11476, Muster-Table of HMS *Convert*.
34. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 150.
35. *Ibid.*, 113.
36. It is not clear why two of the men who came from the *Mosquito* were paid the £5 bounty.
37. PRO, ADM 36/11476, Muster-Table of HMS *Convert*.



38. PRO, CO 141/1, XVI (1794), From Saturday 25 January to Saturday 1 February, No. 5, 22.
39. *Ibid.*, From Saturday 1 March to Saturday 8 March, No. 10, 23.
40. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 269-271.
41. *Ibid.*
42. David MacGregor, *Fast Sailing Ships, Their Design and Construction, 1775-1875* (Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1988), 13.
43. David MacGregor, *Merchant Sailing Ships, 1775-1815* (London, Conway Maritime Press Ltd, 1985).
44. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 271.
45. PRO, CO 141/1, XVI (1794), No. 5, 22-23; *Ibid.*, From Saturday 1 February to Saturday 8 February, No. 6, 22-23.
46. MacGregor, *Ships 1775-1815*, 109-114.
47. William Falconer, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary* (New York, Augustus M. Kelley, 1970; reprint of *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine* 1780, the work was first published in 1769), 50.
48. MacGregor, *Ships 1775-1815*, 139-146.
49. *Ibid.*, 81.
50. *Ibid.*, 92-98.
51. NLJ, *The Royal Gazette*, XV (1793); PRO, CO 141/1, XVI (1794). There were also advertisements for several vessels that intended to sail with the 'first convoy', but that actually sailed later. Among these vessels were the *Betsey*, *Gibson*, *Belisarius*, *Cleland* and *Gipsey*, *Tobin*.
52. MacGregor, *Fast Sailing Ships*, 14.
53. NLJ, *The Royal Gazette*, XV (1793), From Saturday 7 December to Saturday 14 December, No. 50, 1.
54. PRO, CO 141/1, XVI (1794), From Saturday 28 December 1793 to Saturday 4 January 1794, No. 1, 1 and 17.
55. *Ibid.*, No. 5, 22; *Ibid.*, No. 6, 22. In the lists of vessels that arrived at, or sailed from, Port Royal, the name of each merchantman occurs first, followed by the surname of the vessel's master. The ships *Lion*, *Finnan*, and *Arethusa*, Smith, which occur in the Jamaica departure list, are not accounted for as arrivals in Britain in *Lloyd's List* (in March and April 1794) or in *The Royal Gazette*. The *Lion* (or *Lyon*), *King*, and the *Arethusa*, Dods (or Dodds), however, are recorded in both *Lloyd's List* and *The Royal Gazette* as arriving in Britain from Jamaica. Thus, it is likely that there was only one *Lion* and one *Arethusa* in the fleet. It is possible that the masters died and that the ships arrived with different masters. However, there are ads in several issues of the 1793 *Royal Gazette* that refer to the ship *Lion*, *King*, suggesting that this ship intended to sail with the winter

convoy. Therefore, the name Finnan may simply have been a mistake in the departure list.

56. *Ibid.*, No. 4, 22.

57. *Ibid.*, No. 6, 22.

58. PRO, ADM 1/5331, John Lawford's Court Martial, John Lawford to John Ford, Island of Grand Cayman, 20 February 1794. A copy of Lawford's 20 February 1794 letter to John Ford is also included as an Enclosure in: PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Europa*, Port Royal Harbour, Jamaica, 3 April 1794. The two transcriptions vary slightly in punctuation, spelling, and an occasional word, but their overall content is the same.

59. Lavery, *Nelson's Navy*, 307.

60. PRO, CO 141/1, XVI (1794), From Saturday 8 February to Saturday 15 February, No. 7, 19.

61. *Ibid.*, No. 5, 23; *Ibid.*, No. 6, 23.

62. NLJ, *The Royal Gazette*, XV (1793), No. 50, 1.

63. PRO, ADM 1/245, John Ford to Philip Stephens, aboard the *Europa*, off Jérémie, 5 February 1794, and Enclosures.

64. PRO, ADM 36/11476, Muster-Table of HMS *Convert*.

65. PRO, CO 141/1, XVI (1794), No. 5, 22.

66. PRO, ADM 1/5331, John Lawford's Court Martial, John Lawford to John Ford, 20 February 1794. In Captain Lawford's 20 February 1794 letter to Commodore Ford, in which he describes the circumstances of the convoy as well as the wrecking of ten ships, he recalls that three vessels of the convoy, which were bound to America, were schooners. It is possible, however, that one was a schooner and that two were brigs, as suggested previously in the text (based on the list of ship departures from Port Royal in the 1 February and 8 February 1794 *Marine Intelligence* section of *The Royal Gazette*). The *Convert*'s list of the convoy does not survive, and approximately 19 names of vessels that left Jamaica with the *Convert* convoy are not revealed in the departure documents that were consulted. Information about vessels arriving in Britain, however, combined with the departure data, provides details that enable a reasonably accurate reconstruction of the convoy. This list is presented in chart form, in Chapter VII, when the various circumstances of the members of the convoy are described.