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Commanders of New Brunswick's Navy in the War of the Revolution.

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Commanders of New Brunswick's Navy in the War of the Revolution.

At the outbreak of the Revolution we find the citizens of New Jersey assembling in New Brunswick for the purpose of formulating plans for the protection and support of the newborn Republic. The different counties of the State honored the old town on the Raritan by making it the meeting place of the first Provincial Council of the State, thereby marking it as one of the spots that should become famous in the annals of New Jersey and American history during this soul-stirring period, but for some unaccountable reason, after this meeting the name of New Brunswick scarcely appears on the pages of our country's history. This is not as it should be, for this old Dutch town played its part, and played it well, notwithstanding the fact that it harbored within its walls an element, wealthy and aristocratic, who exerted an overshadowing influence over their less fortunate neighbors, with the result that it was almost impossible to tell who were for or against the patriotic cause. Those of wealth were avowed Tories, and were to be feared, and although New Brunswick has always held its own in the patriotic cause, it must be admitted that a number of its citizens who took the oath of allegiance, were ever treacherous subjects of a Republic they had sworn to support.

When this fact is taken into consideration, it seems beyond reason to believe that New Brunswick should become the harbor from which a band of patriots sped forth from night after night to harass the enemy and de-

stroy its shipping along the Long Island and New Jersey shore. Yet this is so, and I have taken the liberty to style the men who undertook those enterprises as the "Commanders of New Brunswick's Navy in the Revolution."

They were Captains Marriner, Hyler, Dickie and Storer, and although they were not connected directly with the army or naval arms of the Republic, they made such havoc along the coast that their names became a byword. A few of their exploits will show the manner in which they conducted their campaign.

On June 11, 1777, Marriner and Lieutenant John Schenck, of the militia, and twenty-six picked men, crossed from New Brunswick to Flatbush in two flat bottom boats, arriving at their destination about eleven o'clock in the evening. Marriner states that the reason this season was chosen was because there was no fishing on the beach at night. Twenty-four of the party landed and two were left to take care of the boats. The party marched to the church unobserved, and divided into four squads, determined to take Colonel Axtell, Mayor Matthews, who divided his time between the village and New York city, and Messrs. Sherbrook and Bache. Each party was supplied with a heavy post for breaking doors. It was agreed that when the party detached for Colonel Axtell struck his door, each party should do the same at the other houses. This was done to admiration and every door yielded at the first stroke. Colonel Axtell and Mayor Matthews were in

New York, but Sherbrook and Bache were taken. There was a bitter feeling between Sherbrook and Marriner and as a sort of a balm for past injuries appropriated all of Sherbrook's belongings as his share of the plunder. Sherbrook resided at the house of Geo. Martense. At the first stroke on the door, he fled to the garret, where he was found behind a large Dutch chimney, with his breeches in his hand. He was taken to the church, the place of rendezvous, where he put on his clothes, and after the men were mustered, all returned to the boats about daybreak, arriving in New Brunswick without further incident.

Some time after Marriner made another attack. At his landing he left his boats under guard of five men, while he visited the interior, but the guard hearing a firing, which was kept up on Marriner by the Flatbush guards, while he was taking his prisoners, concluded that he was taken, so without ceremony, they took one of the boats and made their escape. The other boat, as Marriner reached the shore, was just going adrift. The party was much crowded in her, but it was fortunately very calm, otherwise the boat could not have weathered it.

Marriner's party staid over two hours in Flatbush, for they were there some time before an alarm was given, and there was afterward time to dispatch an express to Brooklyn, who brought a detachment of the 35th Regiment under the command of Captain Drew. Marriner had wished to liberate his friend, Captain John Flahaven, of the New Jersey militia, who was billeted on Jacob Suydam, but as he had changed quarters Lieutenant Forrest was taken in his stead. One of the most noted prisoners captured by Marriner was taken on this raid in the person of Major Moncrieff, of the British army. He took his capture in the best of spirits, and said that it was one of the chances of war and as it was his misfortune to fall into the hands of the enemy, he was going to make the best of the situation. He was the father of the famous beauty, and first love of

Aaron Burr, Marguerite Moncrieff, who later married John Coglon, an officer in the British service. Her married life was not of the most pleasant kind, so she left Coglon, went to London and later became one of the most noted characters in Europe, spending most of her time in Paris.

It was deemed impossible for Marriner to march to Flatbush unobserved by the people. Therefore those who knew or had seen the party were accused of treason, for not giving the alarm. Col. Van Brunt, his brother Adrain, Rem Van Pelt, his brother Aert, were taken on suspicion and confined separately in the provost. Col. Van Brunt when arrested, took the precaution of providing himself with a purse of gold, and inquired of the sergeant of the provost if he could furnish him good provisions for breakfast, dinner and supper. The sergeant said yes, he was given a guinea and sent the fare by his wife. The colonel also gave her a guinea to provide food for his fellow prisoners and inquired how they fared. The woman returned and said they were fearful and sad. The colonel begged of the sergeant an opportunity of seeing his neighbors privately. They were brought in about midnight, and agreed to deny all knowledge of the affair. At the examination, which was separate, all agreed in their story. Nothing appeared against them so they were discharged. The sergeant and his wife received a liberal reward for their kindness.

On November 3, 1778, Marriner with seven men of Lord Stirling's division landed at New Utrecht and brought off Simon and Jacques Cortelyou, two famous Tories, specie and other property to the amount of \$5,000. The prisoners were taken to New Brunswick where they were paroled and later on exchanged for two officers of the New Jersey line. Marriner kept up this method of warfare whenever opportunity afforded, until he was finally captured and paroled.

William Marriner was a shoemaker by trade, but at the outbreak of hostilities joined Lord Stirling's regiment.

He was of a most daring and adventurous spirit and as a result was given a free swing in his manner of harrassing the British. In this his success was phenomenal, but like everything human, it had its end, which came when he was captured on one of his raiding expeditions on the Long Island coast.

Marriner was one of the prizes the British were anxious to capture. He was obnoxious to the New York magistrates, and would not have been exchanged by General Clinton had not Colonel Simcoe explained that he had saved his life, when a soldier was about to bayonet him as he lay senseless on the ground. After the close of the war, Marriner went to live in New York, where he kept a public house on John street, near Nassau. He died in 1814, age 85, from injuries received by being thrown from his wagon.

Marriner now introduces us to two more of New Brunswick's navy. On April 1, 1781, the papers contained an account of the capture of a sloop off the Coney Island shore, by two whale boats. Marriner as usual was credited with the act, to which he made a vigorous protest, which the following letter shows:

Brunswick, April 24, '81.

To Mr. Loring:

Sir—In a New York paper it is said I was concerned in taking a sloop. Such a report is without foundation. I am on parole, which I shall give the strictest attention to. She was taken by Hyler and Dickie.

Yours, etc.,

WILLIAM MARRINER.

Captain Dickie was one of the associates of Marriner. He was fearless and commanded numerous expeditions, which left this city under the direction of Marriner and later on by his successor, Captain Hyler. He was not as active as his associates, but could be depended on to carry out any instructions that were given to him.

The capture and parole of Marriner removed him from all active participation in any more raids, so one of the best known of New Brunswick's Re-

volutionary names comes to the front. It is Captain Adam Hyler. He was one of the most daring American officers in this part of the country, and had the rare faculty of infusing into his men his own spirit of venture and daring. His usual plan was to glide out of his hiding place, pass quickly down the river, make his captures and return. The enemy having heavier vessels, did not dare to follow, owing to the shallow and treacherous channel of the river. A few of his exploits will prove him to be a patriot whose memory should be perpetuated.

On Sunday night, April 15, 1781, he went over to Long Island and brought off a Hessian Major and ensign with their waiters. The following week he captured the pilot boat of Captain David Morris, and two other boats between Robins Reef and Yellow Hook. Morris's boat was plundered and later on ransomed for \$400.

On June 14 he took two of his whale boats and visited Nicholas Schenck, a Tory, who lived about three miles south of Flatbush and took away every thing he could carry in the line of plate and money. On the same evening he surprised the guards at Captain Schenck's. He seized the arms, and after jesting with the guard, borrowed the silver spoons, took all the muskets and a few other articles and made one prisoner. He then sent the guard to report themselves to Colonel Axtell. On the night of August 4, 1781, Hyler with his wonted spirit of enterprise, went over to Long Island, marched about three and a half miles into the country, carried off Colonel Lott and two slaves. The colonel was known to be rich. His person and money were the objects desired. His cupboard was searched for money and some silver found. On further search two bags, supposed to contain about \$3,000 in gold, were discovered. In the morning, on their passage up the Raritan, Hyler and his crew agreed to count and divide the guineas. The bags were opened and to the mortification of the crew were found to contain only half-pennies, belonging to the

church at Flatlands. A contented smile seemed to steal over the face of the colonel as he discovered that his guineas were safe at home. Hyler compelled the colonel to ransom his negroes when he returned home on parole. Captain Lott and John Hankins, a captain of a vessel, were also captured the same evening.

The British were hot after Hyler and exerted every means to effect his capture. On January 7, 1782, a party of infantry, under the command of Captain Beckwith, embarked in six boats from New York and arrived in New Brunswick about five o'clock the following morning, where they landed and brought off all of Hyler's boats. This was a hard blow to the venturesome captain, but a little thing like that did not discourage L.M. Not at all, he just went to work to rebuild his little navy and on February 21st he launched a new boat, rowing thirty oars. Early in July we find him back at his old tricks again. On the eleventh of the month he captured two fishing boats near the Narrows. They were afterwards ransomed at one hundred dollars each.

On July 21st, Hyler, with Captain Dickie, and three large twenty-four cased boats made an attack on the galley stationed at Princess Bay. There being little or no wind he came upon the enemy with a good deal of resolution, but the British guns were too heavy for him. Captain Cushman of the galley station, gave him an eighteen pound shot, which went through the stern of one of the boats and obliged Huyler to put ashore on the Island, where after a sharp combat he was obliged to leave one of his boats

and make the best of his way home with the other two. On his way up, John Althouse, who had charge of a guard boat, spied the two boats under the South Amboy shore. It was calm. A twenty-four pound ball was sent through Hyler's boat, his crew was taken into Captain Dickie's and all made off for New Brunswick with General Jacob Jackson, whom they captured in South Bay and kept prisoner until he was ransomed. This was about the last raid that Hyler made, as he accidentally wounded himself in the knee while cleaning his gun, which resulted in his death, September, 6, 1782, after a tedious and painful illness, which he bore with all the fortitude of a soldier. His many enterprising acts endeared him to the patriotic portion of his acquaintances. He was survived by a wife and two children. His remains were interred with all the honors of war, in the Dutch graveyard.

Hyler was at one time connected with the royal service. His death removed the principal leader from this band of free lances. His place was taken by Captain Storer, who was commissioned as the captain of a private boat of war, under the States. He promised fair to be a genuine successor of Hyler, but the spirit of venture in Hyler's men died with him. They either went into the regular service or drifted to other scenes of excitement and it was not long before New Brunswick's small but active and destructive navy became a matter of unrecorded history. It deserved a better fate and the time has arrived when the deeds of New Brunswick's sons and their associates ought to be looked up and preserved for posterity.

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