

Paullin's History of Naval Administration, 1775–1911

*A Collection of Articles from the
U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*

Charles Oscar Paullin



Naval Institute Press

PAULLIN'S
HISTORY
OF
NAVAL
ADMINISTRATION
1775-1911

A COLLECTION OF ARTICLES FROM THE
U. S. NAVAL INSTITUTE PROCEEDINGS



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U.S. NAVAL INSTITUTE, ANNAPOLIS, MD.

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

Naval history, as it is usually written, concentrates on the ultimate aim of all naval operations—battle. The tactical situation may be described, the strategic preliminaries may be touched on, but all too frequently the subjects of operational planning, logistics, training, procurement, recruiting and shipbuilding are overlooked. The multitudinous details involved in bringing a navy to the point of battle, which may be considered as administration for convenience, never result in stirring prose by naval historians or medals for the administrators.

Yet the history of the U. S. Navy is not complete without an understanding of the administrative processes under which it was created and developed. Fortunately—because that history commenced nearly two centuries ago—the details of early naval administration were searched out and preserved before they were buried in the vast accumulation of records resulting from two world wars. Charles Oscar Paullin, who produced the material contained in this book, commenced his work early in the twentieth century and the last chapter was published just prior to World War I.

Over the last half century, Paullin's sprightly accounts of early naval administration have become well known to historians, students and researchers. His detailed knowledge of the politics and personalities involved in managing the Navy, from the Revolutionary War through the Spanish-American War, give an insight into the times not available in any other work. "See Paullin" has become a standard answer to questions concerning much early naval history, but the student or researcher so instructed found that this was not a simple matter, as only some three dozen libraries throughout the United States maintained complete files of the U. S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* in which Paullin's history of naval administration appeared.

Accordingly, to make the material readily available, the U. S. Naval Institute has produced this single volume collection of the fifteen Paullin articles on early naval administration.

The titles under which these articles were originally published, and the dates, are as follows:

The Administration of the Continental Navy of the American Revolution (September, 1905)

The Administration of the Massachusetts and Virginia Navies of the American Revolution (March, 1906)

Early Naval Administration under the Constitution (September, 1906)

Naval Administration Under Secretaries of the Navy Smith, Hamilton, and Jones, 1801-1814 (December, 1906)

Naval Administration Under the Navy Commissioners, 1816-1842 (June, 1907)

Naval Administration, 1842-1861 (December, 1907)

A Half Century of Naval Administration in America, 1861-1911 (December, 1912; March, 1913; June, 1913; September, 1913; December, 1913; January-February, 1914; May-June, 1914; and July-August, 1914)

U.S. Naval Institute

BOOKS BY CHARLES OSCAR PAULLIN

THE NAVY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

COMMODORE JOHN RODGERS

DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS OF AMERICAN NAVAL OFFICERS

GUIDE TO MATERIALS FOR UNITED STATES HISTORY SINCE 1783 IN
LONDON ARCHIVES (WITH F. L. PAXON)

ATLAS OF THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE UNITED STATES

OUT-LETTERS OF THE CONTINENTAL MARINE COMMITTEE AND BOARD
OF ADMIRALTY, 2 VOLUMES (EDITOR)

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THE BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE (EDITOR)

EUROPEAN TREATIES BEARING ON THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED
STATES AND ITS DEPENDENCIES 1716-1815 (EDITOR)

CHARLES OSCAR PAULLIN, historian and nautical expert, contributed extensively to the written history of the United States Navy during his lifetime. He was born in Jamestown, Ohio, about 1870, and died in Washington, D.C. in 1944. Unmarried, Dr. Paullin was long a member of the Cosmos Club of Washington. He was awarded a BS degree at Union Christian College, Merom, Indiana, in 1893; did graduate work at Johns Hopkins and the Catholic University of America and took his PhD degree at the University of Chicago in 1904.

From 1896 to 1900, Dr. Paullin worked with the Hydrographic Office, U. S. Navy Department. He was a member of the Carnegie Institute staff in Washington from 1910 to 1936, and during those years he lectured on diplomatic and naval history at Johns Hopkins and George Washington Universities. He was a member of several historical and naval associations, including the U. S. Naval Institute, and served as trustee for the Naval Historical Foundation. A complete listing of his written works appears in the front pages of this book.

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PAULLIN'S HISTORY OF
NAVAL ADMINISTRATION

CHAPTER ONE: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1775-1785

The history of the Continental navy covers a period of ten years extending from 1775 to 1785. During this time various organs of naval administration were employed by the Continental Congress and its successor, the Congress of the Confederation; these two bodies successively constituted the federal government of the Revolution, and their chief duties consisted of the providing, organizing, and maintaining of an army and a navy. The first armed vessels that sailed under Continental pay and control were a little fleet fitted out by Washington in the ports of Massachusetts in the fall of 1775. These vessels were manned by soldiers and commanded by army officers, and were designed to weaken the army of the enemy by capturing his transports which were carrying supplies and troops into Boston. Washington derived his authority for procuring and fitting out the fleet from his commission as commander-in-chief of the Continental army. On the evacuation of Boston by the British in March, 1776, Washington removed his army to New York, and here in April he began to equip a fleet similar to the one he had fitted out at Boston. Altogether these two fleets numbered a dozen vessels. They were abandoned in 1777.

Another "army fleet" was that which was collected and built on Lake Champlain in 1775 and 1776. Its building yard was at Skenesborough at the head of Lake Champlain. In the summer of 1776, this place was the scene of much naval activity. Naval stores, munitions of war, and seamen were collected, and several

small naval craft were constructed. The fleet was commanded by Brigadier-General Benedict Arnold. It reached its maximum size in October, 1776, when it consisted of fifteen small vessels mounting 94 cannon and carrying about 700 officers and men. The engagement of Arnold's fleet with that of the British under General Carleton was probably the most important naval battle of the Revolution, since it decided the military campaigns of 1776 and 1777.

Our naval affairs on the Mississippi during the Revolution were conducted by Oliver Pollock, originally a Pennsylvanian, and a man of great ability, integrity, and patriotism. He was the commercial agent at New Orleans of the federal government, and was responsible to the Commercial Committee of Congress. Pollock at different times fitted out three small vessels. One of these captured an armed sloop on Lake Ponchartrain called the *West Florida*, which became the third vessel of Pollock's fleet. He was also granted authority to commission privateers. His naval services came to an end in 1780.

The American Commissioners at Paris and their successor, the American Minister to the French Court, transacted a considerable naval business under the direction of the Committee of Foreign Affairs of Congress. They rented, purchased, and built naval vessels; and officered, manned, and fitted them for sea. They purchased naval supplies, paid officers and crews, and disposed of prizes. They devised plans of naval operations, commissioned privateers, and cared for the naval prisoners. The celebrated cruises in the waters of the British Isles of Conyngham, Wickes, and John Paul Jones were made under their direction. The vesting of these duties in the American representatives in France virtually constituted the establishment of a Branch Naval Office of the American Government at Paris. Benjamin Franklin, who was first one of the American Commissioners and later the American Minister, had more to do with the work of the navy than did his fellow commissioners, Silas Deane, Arthur Lee, and John Adams. Franklin's naval duties in 1779 and 1780 constituted a considerable part of this work at the French Court.

The naval services of Washington, Arnold, Pollock, and the American representatives at Paris, in their entirety by no means insignificant, nevertheless constituted the odds and ends of the naval business of the Continental navy. The far greater and far

more important part of naval administration naturally fell to the regularly authorized naval executive of the federal Congress. This body, as is well known, experimented considerably in executive machinery. It established and tried in succession four different organs of naval administration, the Naval Committee, Marine Committee, Board of Admiralty, and Agent of Marine. The organization and work of each of these four naval executives will be now separately considered.

Early in October, 1775, Congress decided to fit out two armed vessels to intercept two British transports loaded with arms, powder, and other stores, and bound from England to Halifax. A committee consisting of Silas Deane of Connecticut, John Langdon of New Hampshire, and Christopher Gadsden of South Carolina was appointed to estimate the expense that would be incurred in fitting out the two vessels. On October 30, when Congress voted to prepare for sea two more vessels, it added four additional members to the committee, Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island, Joseph Hewes of North Carolina, R. H. Lee of Virginia, and John Adams of Massachusetts. This reconstituted committee composed of seven members was sometimes called "the committee for fitting out armed vessels," but most frequently the "Naval Committee." It obtained for its use a room in a public house in Philadelphia, and in order that there should be no conflict between its meetings and those of Congress, it fixed its hours from six in the evening until the close of its business. Its sessions were sometimes pleasantly continued even until midnight, by conversational diversions marked by a rich flow of soul, history, poetry, wine, and Jamaica rum.

John Adams, who always wrote pungently, has left us a lively picture of the Naval Committee. His description makes it clear that the deliberations of this Committee were not always marked by that exalted seriousness and impassive dignity, which we too often ascribe to the Revolutionary Fathers. "The pleasantest part of my labors for the four years I spent in Congress from 1774 to 1778," he said, "was in the Naval Committee. Mr. Lee, Mr. Gadsden, were sensible men, and very cheerful, and Governor Hopkins of Rhode Island, above seventy years of age, kept us all alive. Upon business his experience and judgment were very useful. But when the business of the evening was over, he kept us in conversation until eleven, and sometimes twelve o'clock.

His custom was to drink nothing all day, nor till eight o'clock in the evening, and then his beverage was Jamaica spirit and water. It gave him wit, humor, anecdotes, science, and learning. He read Greek, Roman, and British history, and was familiar with English poetry, particularly, Pope, Thomson, and Milton, and the flow of his soul made all of his reading our own, and seemed to bring to recollection in all of us all we had ever read. I could neither eat nor drink in those days. The other gentlemen were very temperate. Hopkins never drank to excess, but all he drank was immediately not only converted into wit, sense, knowledge, and good humor, but inspired us with similar qualities."

The active life of the Naval Committee lasted from October, 1775, until January, 1776, during which time it laid the foundation of the navy. Its chairman in January, 1776, was Stephen Hopkins; whether he was the first to fill the position is not known. His knowledge of the business of shipping made him particularly useful to the Committee. The accounts of the Naval Committee were kept by Joseph Hewes, the member from North Carolina and close friend of John Paul Jones. Early in December, 1775, John Adams returned home, and by January only four members of the Committee were left to transact its business.

The Naval Committee prepared the naval legislation of Congress organizing the Continental navy. One of its most important pieces of work of this sort was the drafting of the first rules and regulations of the navy. These were in force throughout the Revolution and were re-adopted for the government of the new navy under the Constitution. They were largely the work of John Adams and are often referred to as Adams's rules. He drew liberally from the naval statutes and regulations in force in the British navy in 1775. Adams's rules, eight or ten pages in length, are brevity itself compared with the present voluminous Rules and Regulations of the United States Navy. The Committee also drafted the legislation that was adopted by Congress fixing the shares of the proceeds of prizes.

Under the authorizations of Congress of October 13 and October 30, 1775, the Naval Committee purchased four vessels, the *Alfred*, *Columbus*, *Cabot*, and *Andrew Doria*; named respectively for the founder of the English navy, the discoverer of America, the first English explorer of America, and the great Genoese Admiral. The first vessel to be bought, and the first vessel in the

American navy, was the *Alfred*, a ship of 220 tons burden. She was originally the *Black Prince* and was owned by John Nixon, the well-known Philadelphia merchant of Revolutionary times. By the end of January, 1776, the Committee had added four other small vessels to the navy, the sloops *Providence* and *Hornet*, and the schooners *Wasp* and *Fly*. The *Providence* had been the *Katy* of the Rhode Island navy. The *Hornet* and *Wasp* were obtained in Baltimore. These eight vessels were the nucleus of the Continental navy.

Meanwhile the Committee had been officering its fleet. On November 5, 1775, it appointed Esek Hopkins of Rhode Island, a brother of the chairman of the Committee, to be commander-in-chief of the fleet. On December 7, it gave a commission of lieutenant to John Paul Jones, an energetic and capable young man, twenty-eight years old, whose brilliant career was still unforeseen. On December 22, the Committee laid before Congress a "list of officers by them appointed." In addition to Hopkins and Jones the list included the names of four captains, four first lieutenants, five second lieutenants, and three third lieutenants. The little roll of captains was headed by Dudley Saltonstall, a brother-in-law of Silas Deane the Connecticut member of the Committee, and was ended by John Burroughs Hopkins, a son of the commander-in-chief. Immediately above J. B. Hopkins in rank was Nicholas Biddle, a young Philadelphian of great promise who had served in the British navy on board the same ship with Nelson. The fourth captain was Abraham Whipple, the commodore of the Rhode Island navy. In these appointments of the Committee it takes no eagle eye to discern the workings of nepotism and sectional influences.

In December, the Committee was preparing its fleet for sea. The Pennsylvania government contributed arms, ammunition, and sailors. Commodore Hopkins enlisted more than one hundred seamen in Rhode Island. On December 3, Lieutenant John Paul Jones hoisted the Continental flag on board the *Alfred*, the flagship of the fleet and the first Continental vessel to fly the colors of the new nation. In February, 1776, the fleet assembled at Cape Henlopen. On January 5, the Naval Committee issued sailing orders to the commander-in-chief. He was directed, if winds and weather admitted of it, to proceed directly to Chesapeake Bay and strike the enemy's fleet under Lord Dunmore, from thence to

sail southward and master the British forces off the coast of the Carolinas, and from thence to proceed to Rhode Island and "attack, take, and destroy all the enemy's naval force that you may find there." This program of the Committee seems rather ambitious when one considers the motley assemblage of officers, seamen, and cruisers that composed this fleet of made-over merchantmen. The first naval essay of the new government met with rather indifferent success. Hopkins, having concluded that his Armada might prove vincible on the stormy coasts of Virginia, gave orders to his captains to sail for Nassau, New Providence, on leaving the Delaware Capes. Meeting with but slight resistance, he early in March captured this town. He next sailed for Rhode Island, and off the eastern end of Long Island met and engaged His Majesty's ship *Glasgow*. The fleet permitted the British ship to escape under circumstances that were regarded as discreditable to the naval skill of the American commanders. This expedition of Hopkins was the sole naval enterprise of the navy while it was in charge of the Naval Committee. Early in 1776, this Committee, reduced in membership, yielded its control of marine affairs to a new committee with a fuller complement of members, whose organization and work will be next considered.

While the Naval Committee was purchasing, in the fall of 1775, a few small merchantmen and fitting them out as naval vessels. Congress was earnestly discussing a much larger and more important project, the building of a fleet of frigates adequately adapted to the purposes of war. Several members who favored the first undertaking were loth to embark on the more ambitious and more warlike enterprise of constructing a navy. It was not until December 13, 1775, that Congress decided to enter upon a program of naval construction. It this day voted to build thirteen frigates, five of 32, five of 28, and three of 24 guns, to be distributed, as regards the place of their construction, among the states as follows: New Hampshire, one; Massachusetts, two; Rhode Island, two; Connecticut, one; New York, two; Pennsylvania, four; and Maryland, one. It was estimated that these ships would cost on the average, \$66,666.67 each, and that their whole cost would amount to \$866,666.67. All the materials for fitting them for sea, except canvas and gun powder, could be procured in America.

On December 14, a committee consisting of one member from

each colony was chosen by ballot to take charge of the building and fitting out of these vessels. The members chosen with their states were as follows: Josiah Bartlett, New Hampshire; John Hancock, Massachusetts; Stephen Hopkins, Rhode Island; Silas Deane, Connecticut; Francis Lewis, New York; Stephen Crane, New Jersey; Robert Morris, Pennsylvania; George Read, Delaware; Samuel Chase, Maryland; R. H. Lee, Virginia; Joseph Hewes, North Carolina; Christopher Gadsden, South Carolina; and John Houston, Georgia. The committee was a very able one, comprising several of the foremost men of the Revolution. Hancock, Morris, Hopkins, and Hewes were especially interested in naval and maritime affairs. The absence of the name of John Adams is probably accounted for by his return home early in December.

This new committee was soon designated as the "Marine Committee," by which name it was referred to throughout the Revolution. Larger and with its engrossing work of building and fitting out the thirteen frigates more active than the Naval Committee, it soon overshadowed and finally absorbed its colleague. This absorption was facilitated no doubt by the fact that the four members of the Naval Committee remaining in January, 1776, also belonged to the new committee. On January 25, 1776, Congress placed with the Marine Committee the direction of the fleet that the Naval Committee had prepared and sent to sea. The Marine Committee now acquired a firm grasp of the naval business of the colonies and from this time until December, 1779, it was the recognized and responsible head of the Naval Department, and as such, during the period that saw the rise and partial decline of the Continental navy, its history is of prime importance.

The Marine Committee like the Naval Committee had an office of its own, in Philadelphia, and held its sessions in the evening. Its officers consisted of a chairman or president, a vice-president, and a secretary. Its clerical force comprised one or more clerks. On June 6, 1777, Congress resolved that five of its members—which number thereafter constituted a quorum—should form a "board" for the transaction of business. Each of the thirteen states had one member on the Committee. Rarely did more than one-half of the Committee's members attend its meetings. Its personnel was continually changing. This was in part necessitated by a similar change in the membership of Congress, whose