

How the 'Planter' resisted attack by a privateer in 1799

Transcribed from "**a letter written from Captain David McClure, of the American ship 'Planter', dated 15 July 1799**" - neither the addressee nor the whereabouts of the original are now known.

In the book "The Liverpool Privateers", the item is headed: "**Captain John Watts, in a letter dated off Dover, July 15th**, gives the following account".

I sailed from Hampton Roads [*Virginia*] June 18th, in company with the Ship "Merchant", loaded by J Brown of Richmond, and consigned to Lamb & Younger, London, bound for your place [*Liverpool*]. We, outsailing her much, lost sight of her the same day. Nothing particular occurred for 24 days, but when in the latitude of 49° 2', and longitude 17° 30' [*the European side of the Atlantic*], on the tenth day of July, at two p.m. espied a lofty ship to the southward, in chase of us. By her appearance we were all fully convinced she was an enemy, and being likewise certain we could not outsail her, at four p.m. had all ready for action - down all small sails, up courses, spread boarding nettings, etc. At half past five p.m., we backed our main top sail, and laid by for her, all hands giving her three cheers. She then bore down on our starboard quarter, fired one gun into us, and showed National Colours [*the French tricolor, introduced in 1792*]. We found her to be a privateer of 22 guns - twelves, nines, and sixes - with small arms in the tops, and full of men. So immediately rounded to, and gave her a broadside, which commenced the action on both sides. The first broadside we received cut away all our halyards, topsheets and braces, and killed three men on the quarter-deck. We kept up a constant fire for two glasses [*prob. sand-filled hour-glasses*] and a half when he sheered off to repair damages; and in about one glass returned to board us, with his bloody flag hoisted. We were all in readiness to receive him, got our broadsides to bear upon him, and poured in our langrage and grape shots with great success. A heavy fire was kept up on both sides for three glasses this second time; in all the engagement continued firing for five glasses.

At last he found we would not give out, and night coming on, sheered off, and stood to the south-west. His loss, no doubt, was considerable, as the last too glasses we were so nigh each other that our well directed fire must have done great execution.

My brave ship's company acted with a degree of cool and undaunted courage, which, no doubt, does credit to the flag. I cannot help mentioning the good conduct of my passengers during the action:- Mr McKennon and Mr Hodgson with small arms, stood to their quarters with a degree of noble spirit, my two lady passengers, Mrs McDowell and Miss Mary Harley, kept conveying the cartridges from the magazine to the deck and were very attentive to the wounded, both during and after the action, in dressing their wounds and administering every comfort the ship could afford, in which we were in no wise deficient for a merchant ship.

When he sheered off, saw him heaving the dead bodies over-board in abundance. Our ship is damaged in the hull; one twelve pound shot under the starboard cat-head splintered the sides much; one double-headed shot through the long boat sails, rigging, spars, prodigiously injured.

I here give you a list of the killed and wounded:- John Leetch, Samuel Hoffman, Mr Johnston and Mr Chester killed. W McKennon, passenger, Daniel Comb, second mate, P Gordon, seaman, Henry Mason, Ditto, W Bagnalo, Ditto, John Barron, Ditto, Goodwin Hill, Ditto, and John Brown, Ditto, wounded.

The force of the Planter was 12 nine-pounders and 6 six-pounders, 43 men.

Presents given by the under-writers at Lloyds to the Crew of the ship Planter for their gallant defence against a privateer of superior force.

To the Captain, one large silver cup, contains one gallon, two smaller ditto, contains one quart each, with a ladle neatly engraved on the edge with all the trophies of war.

On one side of the cup is a representation of the engagement, and on the other this inscription - "**Presented by the Underwriters at Lloyd's to Mr DAVID MACLURE, Master of the American Ship PLANTER, as a Token of their Approbation of his Exemplary Bravery and Perseverance in defending the Said Ship, and Beating off an Enemy of very Superior Force on the 10th of July 1799**", and in cash 100 guineas; to the first mate, 50 guineas; second mate, 30 guineas; boatswain, 20 guineas; seamen, 6 guineas; sailors deeply wounded 15 guineas; for sailors' friends that fell in the action, 50 guineas; two lady passengers elegant gold watches; two gentlemen passengers elegant swords.