

# LIFE ON A PRIVATEER

## Solomon Drowne

Tuesday, 3 October 1780

Sailed from Providence on board the Sloop HOPE, mounting seven guns. Wind at N. E. drizzly, dirty weather. Outsailed Mr. John Brown in his famous boat. Put about for Capt. Munro, and take Mr. Brown and Capt. S. Smith on board, who dine with us. Some time after noon Capt. Munro comes on board, and a few glasses of good wishes founded on HOPE having circled, Col. Nightingale, &c. depart, and we proceed on our course....

11 October 1780

Whilst at Dinner, a Sail cried. Immediately give chase, and discover another. One, a sloop which bears down upon us; the other a brig. Make every preparation for an engagement; but, on approaching and hailing the Sloop, she proved to be the RANDOLPH, Capt. Fosdick from New London,—mounting 18 four-pounders, 140 tons. The Brig, with only two guns, her prize from England, taken at 8 o'clock this morning.—Capt. Fosdick says her Cargo amounted to £20,000 Sterling. What good and ill fortune were consequent on that capture!—Hard for those poor fellows, their tedious Voyage being just accomplished, thus to have their brightening prospect clouded in a moment. If Virtue is the doing good to others, privateering cannot be justified upon the principles of Virtue;—though I know it is not repugnant to The Laws of Nations, but rather deemed policy amongst warring powers thus to distress each other, regardless of the suffering individual. But however agreeable to, and supportable by the rights of war; yet, when individuals come thus to despoil individuals of their property, 'tis hard:—the cruelty then appears, however, political.

12 October 1780

Early this morning two sail in sight, a Ship and Brig. Chase them chief of the day to no purpose. We conclude they sail well, and may be bound to Philadelphia.—Lat. 39°. 6'. Soundings 19 fathoms. Lost sight of the RANDOLPH by the chase.

13 October 1780

A foggy morning and Scotch mist. Clears away pleasant. Lat. 39°. 31'. This Afternoon a Sloop discovered under the lee bow standing before the wind: All hands upon deck preparing for the chase:—but little wind so the oars are to be plied. I must go and see how we come on.—Night obliges us to give over the pursuit.

14 October 1780

A sail seen from Mast-head; proves a Ship. We chase. Catch a Herring-Hog, which makes us a fine Breakfast, and dinner for the whole crew. Another sail heaves in sight. Upon a nearer approach the Ship appears to be of the line. Several in sight. Towards evening signal guns heard. We take them to be men of War, standing in, N. W. by W. Longitude by reckoning 73°. 30". Lat. 39°. 34". 26 fathoms. A pleasant moon-light Evening. Spend it in walking the Quarter Deck.

15 October 1780

A pleasant day. See a Sail to windward; as she rather approaches us we lie a hull for her. I think it is more agreeable waiting for them, than rowing after them. Get a fishing line under way: catch a Hake and a few Dog-fish. It being Sunday, try the efficacy of a clean shirt, in order to be something like folks ashore. Give chase, as the vessel comes down rather slow On approaching discover her to be a Snow. She hauls her wind and stands from us;—sails very heavy, and Capt. Munro is sanguine in the belief we shall make a prize of her. Get everything in readiness to board her. There seems something awful in the preparation for an attack, and the immediate prospect of an action. She hauls up her courses and hoists English Colours. I take my station in the Cabin; where, remain not long before I hear the Huzza on deck in consequence of her striking. Send our boat for the Captain & his papers. She sailed from Kingston, Jamaica, upwards of 40 days since, in a fleet, and was bound to New York: Capt. William Small, Commander. She has ten men on board and four excellent four pounders. Her Cargo consists of 149 Puncheons, 23 Hogsheads, 3 Quarter Casks and 9 Barrels of Rum, and 20 Hogsheads Muscovado Sugar. Send two prize Masters and ten men on board, get the prisoners on board our Vessel, and taking the prize in tow, stand towards Egg Harbour. We hardly know what to do with the prize: the wind shifting a little we stand to the eastward.

16 October 1780

Keep an eastern course, to try to get her into our harbour if possible. Now we are terribly apprehensive of seeing a sail. About sunset a sail seen from mast-head, which excites no small anxiety. Cast off the Snow's hawser, &c.— however night coming on and seeing no more of said sail, pursue our course. Sound, 42 fathoms of water...

19 October 1780

The Snow in sight this morning; run along side and take her in tow again.... Lat.,. 40°. 30". At this rate the West Indies will bring us up sooner than Martha's Vineyard or Nantucket. 49 fathoms. Have our Pistols hung up in the Cabin, to be in readiness for the prisoners, should they take it into their heads to rise upon the watch in the night...

Sunday, 22 October 1780

Very foggy. What wind there is, ahead. Weigh Anchor, and out oars. A fair gentle breeze springs from the South. Pass through Bristol Ferry way with hard tugging about the middle of the afternoon: come to Anchor in the Bay, but where rendered uncertain by the fog having come up again....

23 October 1780

Early, after breakfast, we set off again in the boat, with the Compass, being still surrounded with an excessive fog. Run ashore to the Eastward of Nayat Point, and mistake it for Connimicut: however, arrive at Providence about 11 o'clock, it having cleared off very pleasant. Thus ends our short, but tedious cruise. At sunset the Sloop and Snow arrive, firing 13 cannon each.

Solomon Drowne. *Journal of a Cruise in the Fall of 1780 in the Private Sloop of War, Hope*. (New York: 1872), pp. 3–18.