A RENDEZVOUS OFF DIAMOND SHOALS

Tom Linton

Captain, William Overstocks, of the schooner Patriot takes stock as he rounds the point of North Island after leaving Georgetown Harbor.

His ship bore valuable cargo.

He was sailing around the “Graveyard of The Atlantic,” Cape Hatteras at the most problematic weather time of the year — “I hear, too, rumours of a gale off Cape Hatteras the beginning of the month!” (Letter from Gov. Alston to Aaron Burr, 15 Jan 1813). --- a “Grey Back Northeaster” welcomed him to Diamond Shoals.

The ports of the South Atlantic were being blockaded by the English fleet --- awaiting him offshore was the English flotilla!

The HMS vessels Poictier, Acasta, Tartarus, Sylph, Aeolus and Sophie, under the command of English Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren were blockading the east coast ports of the United States in the War of 1812. Warren was under orders from Robert, 2nd Viscount Melville, First Lord of the Admiralty, to “--- blockade New York City, Charleston, Port Royal, Savannah, and New Orleans.” (A British View of the Naval War of 1812, Naval History Magazine - August 2008 Volume 22, Number 4).
He had on board, above decks, a woman in ill health --- but not just any woman. She was the daughter a former Vice President and the one time belle of New York and Washington society --- a woman who was hostess at dinners attended by many of the founding fathers of our country. And at the present time the wife of the Governor of South Carolina.

The vessel had been a privateer for about three months but had not been to home port for adjudication of any prizes it had taken --- and these were below decks.

Overstock had a letter from the Governor of South Carolina requesting safe passage for his vessel which bore Governor Alston’s seriously ill wife. She was in route to New York for medical attention. If boarded by the English would this trump 56 days of privateering against their vessels?

The two cannons, that the vessel had deck mounted when she was privateering, were stored below decks.

The name of the vessel had been painted over.

The Patriot had put in to Georgetown S.C. after 56 days at sea as a privateer where it had burnt, sunk or destroyed 9 vessels (Coggeshall1856).

Letters of Marque and Reprisal was a government license authorizing a private vessel to attack and capture enemy vessels, and bring them before admiralty courts for condemnation and sale (Wikipedia).

Privateers and vessels with Letters of Marque out of east coast ports took their prizes to their port of origin, for adjudication (Coggeshall,op.cit.) . It was therefore assumed that the Patriot was going to New York, her home port, for adjudication. Adjudication of the prizes she was carrying that she had collected during those “---56 days at sea, as a privateer, burnt, sunk or destroyed 9 vessels.” Thus making her herself an attractive “prize.” Would this not serve as a magnet for pirates --- the rumor mill, while she was in Georgetown harbor, would have seen to that?

Two who had opportunity to know of the prizes she carried were Jean Defarges and Robert Johnson--- both having worked in the refitting of the vessel at Georgetown.

Two who were later shown to not be adverse to piracy.

On 29 August 1819, the two gun privateer, Bravo, lost a battle to two U.S. revenue cutters off the Dry Tortugas. The captain of the Bravo was Jean Desfarage and his first mate was Robert Johnson. They admitted to having been sailors aboard the Patriot ( 23 June 1820, New York Adviser).

They were tried for piracy by a U.S. Circuit Court Judge, sentenced to death and hanged onboard a US Navy warship in the Mississippi River .

At their trial they admitted their former association with the Patriot.