

# The Alexandria Chronicle

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## A British Fleet Sails into Alexandria

by Ted Pulliam

In mid-March, 1755, twenty years before the beginning of the American Revolution, two British merchant ships, the *Osgood*, and the *Fishburn*, sailed slowly up the Potomac River and approached the new town of Alexandria.

Filled to the bulwarks with 200 British soldiers of the 48th Regiment of Foot and their supplies, they were the first to arrive of a convoy of 18 ships that had set sail from Ireland in mid-January, two months earlier. The convoy was transporting General Edward Braddock's army to North America to attack the French and their Indian allies at the beginning of the French and Indian War.

While Braddock and his soldiers have been written about frequently, the story of the ships, seamen, and naval officers who brought Braddock and his army to Virginia and to Alexandria has remained largely untold. It is a story that includes a future First Lord of the Admiralty (the ranking British naval officer), his unusual connection with the governor of Virginia, one of the most famous ships in the British navy, and a contingent of sturdy seamen who fought bravely with Braddock far away from the sea -- plus the excitement caused by the arrival at the Alexandria waterfront of all those ships heavily laden with troops and goods.

### **The French and Indian War Begins**

The French and Indian War started as a conflict between Great Britain and France over who would control the rich land west of the Allegheny River that is today western Pennsylvania and the state of Ohio. Then it was known as the Ohio Country. Indians, plus a few trappers and traders, were the only people who lived there, yet both Great Britain and France claimed it and both wanted it.

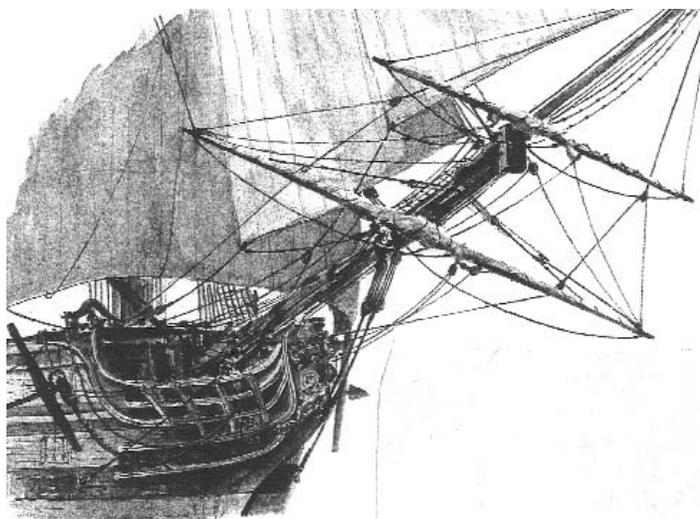
In 1753 France began building a chain of forts south from Canada down the Allegheny River in order to block the British in Pennsylvania and Virginia from expanding westward into the Ohio Country. A year later, the French finished building Fort Duquesne, its key fortress in the chain, located far down the Allegheny at its confluence with the Ohio and Monongahela Rivers, the site of present-day Pittsburgh.

That same year in response to this French incursion, the Virginians sent a small force north led by a young Lieutenant Colonel George Washington to compel the French to abandon Fort Duquesne. Before reaching the fort, Washington attacked and defeated a small party of Frenchmen and took over 20 prisoners, which he sent back to Virginia. As it turned out, he and his men had fired the first shots of the French

and Indian War. Soon after this initial success, however, Washington and his men were themselves attacked, soundly defeated, and forced to return home to Virginia.

Now in 1755, more than just Virginia but also Great Britain herself was seriously concerned about French activities in North America. Her response was to send an army of regular British troops under General Edward Braddock to Virginia to destroy Fort Duquesne and drive the French from the Ohio Country.

Thus over 250 years ago the *Osgood* and the *Fishburn* sailed toward the wharf at West's Point at the foot of Oronoco Street, where today are located the railroad terminal, dock, and northern warehouses of the Robinson Terminal Warehouse Corporation. The main thrust of the British Empire against France was centering on this small town of only a little over 500 people that had been in existence for less than six years.



**The average voyage from England to Virginia took six to seven weeks in good weather, longer in bad.**

### **The First Ships and the Virginia Connection**

Early in their winter voyage across the Atlantic, the *Osgood* and the *Fishburn* had become separated from the other ships in their convoy when a storm struck. Luck, skill, or perhaps a combination of both enabled these two ships to weather the storm and be the first to arrive at Hampton Roads at the mouth of the James River near Norfolk.

This was not the first trip to Virginia for the *Osgood*. The *Virginia Gazette* reported that she had

sailed to the James and York Rivers three years earlier and may even have made additional trips. Neither this ship, nor any of the other transports in the fleet, were Royal Navy vessels. The practice then was for the Navy to charter privately-owned, commercial ships and their crews to transport soldiers and their supplies as needed, rather than the Navy having its own fleet of transport ships.

The *Osgood's* owner (and possibly the *Fishburn's* also) was London merchant John Hanbury, who several years earlier had become the leading Londoner involved in the prosperous Chesapeake tobacco trade. In fact, by 1755 some of the most prominent Virginia planters traded with Hanbury's company, including the Carters, Byrds, Lees, Washingtons, and Custises. Hanbury also had extensive commercial connections with Maryland, including serving as Lord Baltimore's "banker."<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, several years earlier, in 1748, Hanbury had become a member of the Ohio Company and been appointed its London lobbyist. (The Ohio Company was formed by a number of northern Virginians -- including Lawrence Washington, George Washington's older half brother -- to acquire and sell land in the Ohio Country.) Soon after his appointment, Hanbury was instrumental in persuading the British Crown to grant the Company 200,000 acres in that rich country.

Hanbury's business interest in the Chesapeake Bay region made it likely that his ship had visited Virginia before, and his stake in the future of the western frontier helps explain why the *Osgood* was involved in this mission.

At Hampton Roads both the *Osgood* and the *Fishburn* were ordered to load fresh provisions and proceed up the Potomac to Alexandria. Only a few officers on board, and none of the men of lesser rank, were allowed to disembark briefly at Hampton. This must have been a severe disappointment to those left on board the ships, particularly considering that the soldiers of the 48th Foot had been on board the entire length of the two-month trip from Ireland. Their quarters on the two ships likely were extremely cramped. Later during the French and Indian War, ten men traveling by ship were allowed a berth measuring only six square feet. Trying to put a good face on a soldier's life aboard ship, one high-ranking officer who served during the war, and who certainly had it better than a private soldier, could write only: "[F]or a man that



**The Alexandria harbor, when the waterfront was still cove-shaped, and the homes along Fairfax Street were 25 to 30 feet above the sandy beach (at today's Lee Street) and Potomac River.**

does not feel the ship's motion, and who's nose is not too nice for the smells, this life for a little while is tolerable."<sup>2</sup> Once the soldiers sighted Alexandria, they undoubtedly were eager to step onto land.

### **The Troops Step Out at West's Point**

As these two ships approached West's Point, the tobacco inspection and ferry landing at the foot of Oronoco Street, it is easy to imagine that excited townspeople started to gather nearby. At the same time, curious seamen would have peered over the ship's sides at the approaching town.

After the first ship came to rest at the landing, officers shouted orders, drums started to beat, and the 200 British soldiers began to disembark. As they stepped onto the landing, they quickly formed into ranks under their sergeants' insistent prodding and their officers' watchful eyes.

The ranks of soldiers must have made a striking scene with each man wearing his long, bright red coat with dull yellow lapels and wide, dull yellow cuffs. Under his red coat he wore a matching red vest buttoned up the front and beneath that a white shirt, probably slightly soiled. Below his coat were bright red breeches whose legs were tucked into white leggings that buttoned over his knees, half-way up his thigh. On his head a private wore a flat, black tricorne hat edged in white, and a special grenadier wore his distinctive tall, narrow hat shaped like a tombstone made of stiffened felt covered by wool cloth elaborately

embroidered in front.

Once the soldiers of the 48th were formed on shore and their ranks were still, the scene that followed would have looked something like this: their commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Burton, gave the order, "SHOULder your - FIRElocks!"<sup>3</sup> When each soldier had crisply raised his musket to his left shoulder, Burton marched the unit, to the rattle of drums and the piping of fifes, from the landing, past wood frame tobacco warehouses, and up the packed dirt of Oronoco Street.

A short way up Oronoco, the ordered ranks reached the intersection with Fairfax Street. There they wheeled to their left, avoiding a large marsh to their right, and marched full step up Fairfax toward the center of town.

Townsmen, housewives, children, and servants stood in front of log or wood-frame houses to watch and cheer as the redcoats, their fifes squealing, drums beating, regimental flag flapping, passed up the dusty street scattering hogs, geese, dogs from their path. Turning right onto Cameron Street, the troops quickly reached the town's boundary at Royal Street. Continuing their march, they soon arrived at the place north of town where they were to make their camp.

Their leader Lt. Col. Burton had been eager to accompany Braddock on this expedition, so eager that he sold his position as major in the 2d Troop of Horse Grenadier Guards, one of England's most prestigious outfits, which was stationed in London, and bought

the position of lieutenant colonel in the 48th Foot. Even though he moved up in rank, in the 48th he had placed himself in a newer, much less celebrated regiment that recently had spent much of its time in far removed Ireland. But it was a regiment headed to a fight, and that must have been important to Burton. Undoubtedly he was pleased now to parade his fine looking soldiers before these American provincials.

### **The Royal Navy and General Braddock Arrive in Virginia**

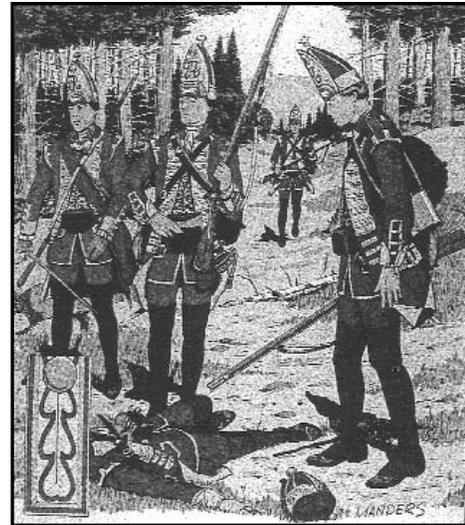
As the *Osgood* and the *Fishburn* were disembarking soldiers at Alexandria, the remainder of the convoy was arriving and reporting to the Royal Navy commander at Hampton Roads. The commander was the Honorable Augustus Keppel, Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels in North America. Commodore Keppel was one of the Royal Navy's rising stars. He had joined the navy at the age of ten and had achieved his present desirable command at the age of only 30 (in contrast with Braddock, then 60, and in the twilight of his career).

The young commodore had arrived in Virginia about three weeks earlier aboard his flagship the *Centurion*, an especially famous ship in Great Britain. She had been Commodore George Anson's flagship on his voyage around the world in the early 1740s. When Anson returned to England in 1744, he had on board the *Centurion* treasure from a captured Spanish treasure ship valued at 500,000 pounds sterling that was paraded through London in a triumphal procession of 32 wagons.

He also returned with only a quarter of the *Centurion's* original crew still alive. One of those still living was August Keppel. Keppel had begun that voyage as a 15-year old lieutenant and at its end found he had lost most of his hair and teeth to scurvy. His experience and service to Anson, however, proved to be a great benefit to his career.

Now Keppel and the *Centurion* were reunited. As the Commodore's flagship, the *Centurion*, plus the *HMS Norwich*, a 50-gun ship of the line, had traveled separately from the convoy. Rather than sailing from Ireland, they had sailed from Spithead, near Portsmouth in England. They also had left earlier than the convoy, on December 23. On board the *Norwich* was Major General Edward Braddock, Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Forces in North America.

Sailing across the Atlantic, the *Centurion* and the



**48th Regiment of Foot, Grenadier Company, 1755. John Carlyle, Commissary for Alexandria, provided supplies and provisions for the Regiment.**

*Norwich*, like the convoy, had run into a severe storm (“with excessive hard westerly winds and large Seas,” Commodore Keppel reported) that separated them from each other. The *Norwich* arrived first at Hampton Roads on February 19, but both her main mast and her foremast had been “sprung” (cracked or split) and later had to be replaced and “almost every Sail” had been “blown away.” However, this was no concern of General Braddock's. Early the next morning, he traveled rapidly to Williamsburg to consult with Virginia Governor Robert Dinwiddie.<sup>4</sup>

The *Centurion* arrived at Hampton three days later also with a sprung foremast. At Hampton the Commodore found that none of the ships from Ireland had yet arrived. (The *Osgood* and the *Fishburn* were not to arrive until March 2, and the remaining ships in the convoy sailed into port in small groups during the following two weeks.) Leaving instructions concerning the handling of the transports, the Commodore followed Braddock to see Governor Dinwiddie in Williamsburg.

### **The Commodore's Father and Governor**

Commodore Keppel and Governor Dinwiddie had an unusual connection. The Commodore's father, the Earl of Albemarle, was the actual Governor of Virginia while Dinwiddie was only the Lieutenant Governor. Under an arrangement Dinwiddie had made with Lord Albemarle, an arrangement that was not unusual at that time, Dinwiddie lived in Virginia



*E Braddock*

and undertook all the duties and received all the perquisites of governor. In the meantime, Albemarle, whose appointment as governor came from the Crown as something of a political plum, lived in Paris and received from Dinwiddie more than half Dinwiddie's income as Lieutenant Governor.

Moreover, unknown to Commodore Keppel or Governor Dinwiddie at the time, Lord Albemarle had died in Paris on the same day Keppel set sail for Virginia. When this news reached Virginia several weeks later, Dinwiddie must have realized he faced an uncertain future. Would he lose his position when the King appointed a new governor? As it turned out, Dinwiddie worked out a similar financial arrangement with the new governor and continued in his position for three more years.

### **Where Should the Army Land?**

In Williamsburg, Braddock, Keppel, and Dinwiddie met with Sir John St. Clair, the British officer who had been in Virginia for almost two months as the army's advance man. St. Clair already had traveled all the way to the small fort at Will's Creek (present day Cumberland, Maryland), one of the early destinations of Braddock's army once it moved inland. From there St. Clair had come down the Potomac River by canoe

to Alexandria and continued to Fredericksburg, Williamsburg, and points in between scouting the land, meeting with commissary officers like John Carlyle, organizing supplies and recruits, and generally preparing for the arrival of Braddock's army.

Virginia and the Potomac area might not seem at first glance at a map of the British colonies as the best place for an army to start on a march to western Pennsylvania. Philadelphia would have been as close or closer to the army's ultimate objective and given the British army a larger and better stocked port than any in Virginia or Maryland. The ministers of the Crown, however, chose Virginia. They apparently based their decision on the Virginia government's already having sent soldiers westward in an attempt to force the French to leave the Ohio Country and on Governor Dinwiddie's vigorous lobbying the Crown to send more troops. The Pennsylvania legislative assembly and much of Philadelphia, on the other hand, were controlled by the pacifist Quakers, who were unlikely to provide support willingly for a military expedition. Also, when the ministers in London looked at their maps, they saw that the Potomac provided a water route that went a long way toward Fort Duquesne. What they did not know was that it did not go nearly as far as they expected because rocks and falls only a short way upstream from Alexandria made much of the river unnavigable.



**Governor Robert Dinwiddie, the governor of Virginia by "arrangement."**

St. Clair had seen firsthand the shortcomings of the Potomac and informed Braddock and Keppel of them. Based on his observations, St. Clair recommended that the army land and camp in several separate places on or near the Potomac, including

Alexandria, Falmouth, and Maryland's Bladensburg. He made this recommendation, in part, in order not to overburden any one place with a host of soldiers. At the commanders' council at Williamsburg, however, Braddock decided against this proposal as likely to cause too much confusion. Instead, he ordered all the troops to disembark in Alexandria.

### The Convoy Sails Into Hampton Roads

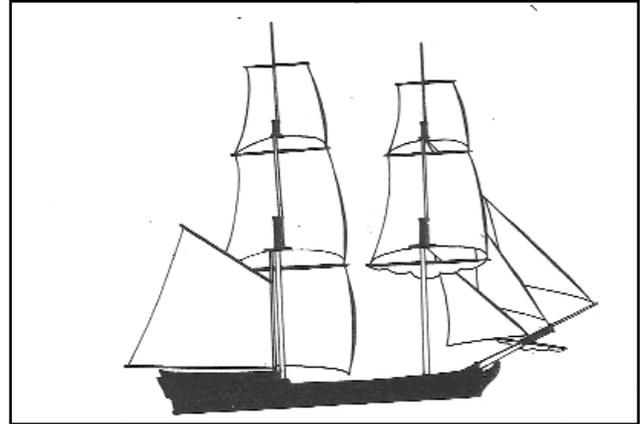
Braddock and Keppel had left orders for the other transports at Hampton Roads, as they arrived, to do as the *Fishburn* and *Osgood* had done several days earlier: load provisions and sail up the Potomac to Alexandria.

By March 18, all of the convoy, both transports and warship escorts, a total of eighteen ships, had arrived in Hampton Roads. Unfortunately, as the transports arrived, it was discovered that they had been loaded haphazardly -- men, clothing, and equipment destined for British troops in New York and Massachusetts had been mixed together on the same ships with that for the Braddock force. Before the ships could sail for Alexandria, these men and materials had to be offloaded for later reshipment, and the ships had to be re-provisioned.

The convoy had been escorted across the Atlantic by two warships, the *HMS Seahorse*, a frigate, probably of two decks and 44 guns, and *HMS Nightingale*, another Royal Navy frigate. Keppel ordered the two warships to continue to escort the transports on their voyage up the Potomac, and he gave every-day command of the transports to Captain Hugh Palliser of the *Seahorse*.

A total of seventeen ships left Hampton and sailed to Alexandria. (One of the eighteen ships that left Ireland with the convoy, the transport ship *Anna*, was sent north with the men, clothing and equipment meant for British units there.) In addition to *HMS Seahorse*, *HMS Nightingale*, the *Fishburn*, and the *Osgood*, the ships that arrived in Alexandria were: three ordnance ships: the *Whiting*, *Newall*, and *Nelly*; and ten transports: the *Halifax*, *London*, *Industry*, *Prince Frederick*, *Isabel* and *Mary*, *Terrible*, *Fame*, *Molly*, *Concord*, and *Severn*.

On March 26, General Braddock, Commodore Keppel, and Governor Dinwiddie arrived in Alexandria from Williamsburg in the Governor's handsome coach. When they made their way to the town's harbor, they likely witnessed a scene of contin-



Pictured is a ship with square and fore-and-aft sails rigged as they were on one of the transports, the *Concord*.

uous activity -- ships anchored out in the channel, and from them seamen and townsmen, using all available means, busily unloading men, equipment, and supplies. Soldiers, officers, and some of their wives plus beef, butter, baggage, and powder were being unloaded at Point Lumley at the foot of Duke Street and the new wharf at West's Point. Small boats were transporting some goods and people to the narrow beaches below the bluffs that still bordered the town, and from the beaches they were taken on paths up the bluffs and finally into the town itself.

In the overcrowded town, rooms were scarce. Mrs. Charlotte Brown, a nurse who traveled with her brother, a commissary officer, wrote in her diary that she went to every house in Alexandria in search of lodging and "at last was Obligated to take a Room but little larger than to hold my Bed and not so much as a Chair in it."<sup>5</sup> (Some respectable and capable women were allowed to accompany their soldier husbands and other close relatives when the regiment went abroad and even were permitted to march with them.)

Many places likely were occupied by such people as drovers herding their cattle to the camp to supply the army with beef and wagoners from the country bringing corn, oats, and hay to sell to the army. Along with the wagoners and drovers, sailors from the English ships likely filled the drinking spots along the waterfront where they then filled themselves with food and ale.

General Braddock obtained for himself the best house in Alexandria, John Carlyle's white stone mansion, while Commodore Keppel undoubtedly chose to stay on board the *Seahorse* rather than seeking a room in town. He and her commander, Captain Palliser,

aged 32, only two years older than Keppel, became friends, although back in England years later, as will be described below, their friendship would dissolve in a firestorm of publicity.

As a ship was emptied of her goods, Palliser provided her master with a certificate attesting to the master's "having brought the Forces to Alexandria, also of [his] diligence & dispatch in having landed them with their Clothing Baggage, etc."<sup>6</sup> Once the ship returned to England, her owner could present the certificate to the Admiralty and be paid for his ship's service.

Gradually over the following month, the ships



A Royal Navy Lieutenant by Dominic Serres.

sailed back down the Potomac, down the Chesapeake, and into the lower James River to replenish their provisions and possibly seek cargo for the return voyage. Some of the ships, however, left Alexandria with unusual passengers on board -- French prisoners whom George Washington had captured the year before in his unsuccessful expedition to western Pennsylvania to drive away the French. They were being sent by ship to England, and from there they were to be returned to France.

### Seamen Become Soldiers

Remaining aboard ship in Alexandria rather than disembarking immediately was a contingent of seamen whom Commodore Keppel had provided Braddock at the General's request.

Braddock wanted the seamen to help his soldiers cross rivers and particularly help them transport four large cannons through the wilderness to the French

fort for the attack. The cannons, which weighed one ton each, had been taken straight off the decks of the *Norwich* and were stout enough to fire shot weighing 12 pounds. (Although Commodore Keppel had complied with the General's request for the cannons, he thought they were much too heavy ever to make it over the mountains.) Braddock also requested, and received, some of the transports' fishing tackle to take with him, presumably to help supply his men with food.

This contingent of seamen consisted of one lieutenant, three midshipmen, two boatswains mates, and 30 seamen taken from warships at Hampton Roads: the *Centurion*, *Norwich*, *Seahorse*, *Nightingale*, *Garland*, and *Syren*. Each seaman took with him his hammock, and like the soldiers he would accompany, a musket, musket sling, cartridge box, and bayonet drawn from the ship's ordinance stores. To the men selected this new assignment may have seemed a blessed break from their accustomed rough life aboard ship; however, they soon would curse the day they were chosen.

In charge of the seaman detachment was Lieutenant Charles Spendelow. Spendelow was an up-and-comer, probably in his early or middle twenties, and one of only two lieutenants mentioned by name in instructions to Keppel from the Admiralty. He was extra to Keppel's ships usual compliment of officers and was expected to go with Braddock to map the area traversed by the expedition. Now he was to go with Braddock not only to draw maps but also to command this group of seamen turned soldiers.

Under him were Midshipmen Haynes and Talbot of the *Centurion* and Midshipman Gill of the *Norwich*. Midshipmen usually were officers in training, some as young as their early teens, although these particular midshipmen, who were specially selected, likely were older.

Commodore Keppel ordered Spendelow to keep a careful journal of the events along the march, a task that he assigned to Midshipman Gill, and Gill's journal has survived.<sup>7</sup>

### Leaving Alexandria

On April 9, the first part of Braddock's army began to march out of Alexandria toward Fort Duquesne. This first contingent, led by rangers and light horsemen, traveled west toward Winchester on its way to Will's Creek (now Cumberland, Maryland),

marching out what later became Braddock Road.

On April 12, the detachment of seamen under Lieutenant Spendelow was ordered to disembark from the warship escorts, where they had lodged rather than in the soldiers camp, and take boats from the *Seahorse* and *Nightingale* to Rock Creek. Here they helped transport men and supplies of the second part of the army across the Potomac on its way to Will's Creek by way of Frederick, Maryland.

On April 14-16, an unprecedented council of colonial governors from Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts, plus General Braddock and Commodore Keppel, was held in John Carlyle's house to plan further steps in the upcoming campaign. Then by April 27, Braddock and all of his forces had left Alexandria, except for the sick and about 40 men to guard the hospital. After transporting the last of the troops to Georgetown, the detachment of seamen joined them on their march from Georgetown to Frederick, Maryland, and then on to Will's Creek.

As the soldiers and seamen marched out from Georgetown toward Frederick along what now is Wisconsin Avenue, the appearance of the seamen contrasted sharply with that of the soldiers. Unlike the predominantly red uniforms of the soldiers, Lieutenant Spendelow and the three midshipmen wore dark blue tricorne hats, dark blue coats with white lapels and cuffs over white vests, white breeches extending to just below the knee, and white stockings.

The ordinary seamen wore a hodgepodge of clothing. At that time ordinary seamen had no official uniforms. Some wore the clothes they came into naval service wearing, which had become much patched over time. A few who could afford better wore clothing purchased from ships stores, which consisted of whatever large quantity of clothing that could be bought cheaply in the ship's last port. Most long-time seamen, however, wore clothing they made themselves, usually from worn out canvas sails. Thus the predominant color of the seamen's loose shirts and baggy trousers as they marched with the red-clad soldiers likely was the dull off-white of used canvas.

By May 1, Commodore Keppel, Captain Palliser, and the *Seahorse* were back in Hampton Roads. They had left Captain Digges in the other escort ship, the *HMS Nightingale*, in Alexandria to help secure empty casks, lumber, and odds and ends in storehouses there "til the Army shall have no further use for him."<sup>8</sup>

Digges returned to Hampton on May 31. By that time, all the transport and escort ships had left Alexandria.

### **New Orders, News from Braddock, and the Fight of the Seamen**

At Hampton Roads Keppel received occasional reports from Braddock's army. Braddock wrote on June 7 that he was still at Will's Creek waiting for wagons and horses and for the road west to be cut for the army. A few days earlier, Lt. Spendelow, commanding officer of the detachment of seamen, exploring on his own had discovered a valley leading around a particularly steep and rugged mountain that had been blocking the army's move from Will's Creek. Once a road was built through Spendelow's valley, Braddock's army moved out, and the General's chief aide referred to Spendelow as "a young man of great discernment and abilities."<sup>9</sup> The General himself honored the lieutenant by naming the spot where the army rested a couple of days later as "Spendelow Camp."

When another letter from Braddock arrived, Commodore Keppel learned that the general, now far across the mountains, had split his forces in two and was marching the best troops and part of the artillery confidently ahead to attack Fort Duquesne.

Thus, Keppel understood the army was well on its way to its objective when, on July 17, a sloop arrived at Hampton Roads from England carrying dispatches from the Admiralty in London and orders for Keppel himself that may have been unexpected.

The Admiralty earlier had received news of a French fleet preparing to sail for Canada with reinforcements and supplies and had ordered Vice Admiral Boscawen, with eleven ships of the line, to intercept this French force and take command of the British ships in North America. Boscawen and several officers commanding ships under him were senior to Keppel. In these circumstances, it would have been inappropriate for Keppel to retain his squadron. Besides, Keppel's mission was over. Thus, under Boscawen's orders, Keppel dispatched his ships in different directions. He himself transferred to the *Seahorse* and prepared to sail for home.

Then on July 24, a week after receiving the Admiralty's orders, Keppel received disastrous news. Braddock had been routed by the French and Indians in western Pennsylvania less than ten miles from Fort Duquesne, and Keppel's detachment of seamen had suffered badly in the battle.

Braddock's defeat had taken place two weeks earlier, on July 9. The General's red-coated soldiers and the seamen had just crossed a river and had begun to march up a narrow forest road when suddenly a force of roughly 250 French regulars and Canadian



militia and 650 Indians ran headlong into them.

Both groups were surprised. The French and Indians had hoped to ambush the British as they were crossing the river but were too late. The British, on the other hand, were aware that wading the river would be dangerous, but now that they had crossed it, they thought themselves safe.

Reacting instinctively, the French and Canadian soldiers quickly formed lines across the road in front of the advancing British column. The Indians -- Ottawas, Missiaugas, Potawotomies, Hurons, Shawnees, and Mingos -- shouted their soul-shattering war cry, swept down on each side of the British column, and threw themselves down behind logs, knelt behind trees, and hid in tangles of undergrowth. From there they fired into the red-coated soldiers who were clearly exposed on the road before them.

The British with over 1,450 troops outnumbered their enemy. Yet even as they returned fire, they could not see anyone to shoot. An Indian was visible only when he quickly emerged from cover to scalp one of the soldiers who had been killed earlier on the edge of the British column. Although frightening, this brutal

action indicated the Indians feared they might lose and were taking trophies quickly.

Soon, however, the French in front of the British column and the Indians concealed on each side forced the British soldiers leading the column to retreat. As they did so, they collided with soldiers coming to their aid from the main force a few hundred yards behind them. Advancing with the troops from the main force were the 35 seamen with three of the huge 12 pound cannons taken from the decks of the *Norwich*.

The two British groups collided in the powder smoke and the terrifying noise, creating a large, disorganized mass in the middle of the narrow road. Confused redcoats bumped into each other, swore, and looked for space to stand and shoot -- or for someone to hide behind. "[T]he men were sometimes 20 or 30 deep," wrote a British officer, "and he thought himself securest who was in the Center."<sup>10</sup>

The seamen, however, seemed to have kept together with their cannons in comparative order. Each one-ton cannon was towed on a specially adapted wagon pulled by a team of nine horses that likely were driven by army artillerymen. As fast as possible, these men and horses wheeled the cannons to a position on the left of the confused mass of soldiers.

Once the cannons were in position, the seaman gunners in their loose, white canvas shirts and trousers, dull and dirty with much ill usage, now quickly loaded them at the command of the blue-coated Spindelw, and according to one witness, "fired both Round and grapeshot with great Execution."<sup>11</sup> It is probable that any seamen not needed to man or direct the guns spread out to protect them, firing the muskets issued them from their ships' armory at Hampton almost three months before.

The cannons kept up "a tolerable good fire," a line officer reported, but like the soldiers, the gunners soon "could not see at what" they were shooting and were simply firing ineffectively into the smoke and trees. At the same time, however, they themselves were clearly visible and rapidly became a principal target of the hidden Indians. As one eyewitness wrote later: "The Indians, wither ordered or not, I can't say, kept an incessant fire on the guns [cannons], and killed the men very fast." Before long, another eyewitness reported, their "officers and men were mostly killed and wounded." Soon the guns and seamen were exposed alone to the left of the massed British redcoats and in danger of being cut off from the rest of

the army.<sup>12</sup>

Seeing their vulnerability, General Braddock more than once ordered some of his soldiers to go to the gunners' aid. Each time a few men left the mass of soldiers, but they managed to go only a short distance "til an officer, or perhaps a man or two, [was] struck down," an officer wrote, "and then the rest immediately gave way" and returned to the comparative safety of the mass.<sup>13</sup>

No longer able to hold out by themselves, the seamen who still lived had to abandon their guns and join the rest of the army, bringing their wounded with them. Shortly afterwards, General Braddock himself was mortally wounded, and the whole army retreated back across the river. Many soldiers simply turned and ran for their lives, "every one trying who should be the first," as one officer later wrote, pursued by the Indians until the Indians stopped to scalp the dead and wounded and to plunder.<sup>14</sup>

When the day was over, Lieutenant Spendelow, Midshipman Talbot, and one of the boatswains mates had all been killed. Midshipman Haynes was the only naval officer in the battle who survived. (Midshipman Gill, luckily for him, had become ill at Will's Creek and was left there to recuperate.) Of the 36 naval officers and men who had set out from their ships in Alexandria, twelve had been killed, their bodies probably left on the battlefield, and seven wounded.

Of Braddock's 1,469 soldiers engaged in the battle, 456 were killed and 520 wounded -- over 65% of those British engaged were casualties. George Washington was a voluntary aide to General Braddock and during the battle delivered messages from



Commodore August Keppel in 1749 painted by Joshua Reynolds. Having lost most of his hair and teeth Keppel preferred to be painted with his hat on and his mouth shut.

Braddock to his officers. Although he survived unharmed, he had two horses shot out from under him and when the fighting was over, he found four bullet holes in his coat.

Commodore Keppel was saddened to learn of the defeat and the casualties and especially of the deaths of Lieutenant Spendelow and Midshipmen Talbot, both of whom had served on his ship. Keppel also learned that Mishipman Haynes of his ship had survived and that he and the remaining seamen, along with the surviving soldiers, had retreated to the British fort at Will's Creek with Colonel Dunbar, the new commander of Braddock's forces after Braddock himself had died.

### End of the Mission

There was little Commodore Keppel could do for any of the survivors. Two days after he received the news of the defeat, he sailed for England as ordered on board the *Seahorse* with her commander Captain Palliser. Meanwhile, the *Norwich* and *Centurion* sailed for Halifax, Nova Scotia. Keppel left one warship, the *HMS Garland*, a small, twenty-gun frigate, in Hampton "for the protection of the Trade of the Colony of Virginia."<sup>15</sup>

For his part, Keppel had performed well. Braddock, in letters back to ministers in London before leaving Virginia, called him "an Officer of infinite Merit."<sup>16</sup> The Commodore was to have an unusual but distinguished career. His valuable service in several naval engagements later in the French and Indian War earned him promotion to rear admiral. Then when the American Revolution began, he "refused to serve at sea in what he considered an unjust war."<sup>17</sup> His position changed, however, when Britain's old enemy France came into the war on the side of the Americans. Then he accepted command of the fleet stationed in the English Channel.

During Keppel's command of that fleet, his friendship with Captain Palliser of the *Seahorse*, which had matured in Virginia and on their return voyage together across the Atlantic, came to an abrupt end. During a naval engagement off the coast of France, Palliser, then Keppel's second in command, failed to support Keppel with adequate force. Although Keppel did not complain, the matter reached the newspapers, and Palliser replied vociferously alleging that it was Keppel who was guilty of misconduct. Each was tried by court martial, and although

both officers were acquitted, Palliser came off the worse in the court of public opinion. Keppel, on the other hand, eventually became First Lord of the Admiralty, the head British naval officer.

Lieutenant Colonel Burton, who marched the 48th Foot from the landing area at Alexandria, survived the battle near Fort Duquesne but received “an extreme bad wound in his hip.”<sup>18</sup> He recovered before long, however, and had a distinguished career later in the French and Indian War. Just before the end of the war, he became a major general, and in 1764 he became commander in chief of all forces in the province of Quebec and the upper Great Lakes.

Keppel, before leaving Virginia, had sent a letter to Colonel Dunbar, then at the fort at Will’s Creek and in command of Braddock’s remaining men, requesting Dunbar to send the surviving seamen to Hampton. As Dunbar was marching his soldiers away to Philadelphia, the seamen left the fort at Will’s Creek on August 2nd heading for Virginia. They arrived in Winchester on the 5th and in Fredericksburg on the 11th. At Fredericksburg they hired a vessel that took them on to Hampton Roads, where on August 18 they reported on board the *HMS Garland*.

Thus the last of the naval personnel who had participated in the landing at Alexandria had completed their mission.

## The War Ends

Fort Duquesne was not conquered by the British until November 1758. Then as an overwhelming British force, which had started this time from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, approached the fort, the French destroyed it, and the British took over its remains without firing a shot.

The French and Indian War finally ended in 1763 when the British drove the French from all of North America east of the Mississippi, except for New Orleans and two small islands off Newfoundland. Yet the cost to Great Britain had been substantial. It chose to retrieve some of these costs from the American colonies (who had greatly benefitted from the expenditure) through taxation. These taxes, however, were to lead to another, even more expensive war for Great Britain as they became a prime cause of the American Revolution.

Ted Pulliam is a member of the Alexandria Archaeology Commission and the Alexandria Historical Society’s Board of Directors. He wants to thank Pam Cressey, Diane Riker, and Jim Johnston for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article. The article, with endnote citations, is on file in the Alexandria Archaeology Museum.

## Footnotes

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A publication of monographs about historical Alexandria, Virginia.

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The next issue of *The Chronicle*, summer 2009, is *Alexandria and Belhaven: A Case of Dual Identity* by Diane Riker. This article analyzes early documents to determine the city's original name.



**A British Grenadier with his distinctive tombstone-shaped hat and elaborate front embroidery.**

While the main events of the French and Indian War in America have been written about frequently, the story of the men and officers who were the manpower of the war has not often been told. In *A British Fleet Sails into Alexandria* Pulliam explains how war “worked” in the 18th century.