

REMINISCENCES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

NO. I.

“ In the month of June, [1776,] the Yankee Hero, of fourteen guns, commanded by Captain Tracey, was overtaken and brought to action by the British frigate Lively, of twenty-eight guns. The resistance of the Yankee Hero was spirited and obstinate. The engagement had continued for more than an hour, before the Lively succeeded in capturing her.”

[*Clark's Naval History of the United States*, Vol. II, p. 33.

The engagement, thus briefly noticed, was between the brig Yankee Hero, of twelve guns, Captain James Tracey, and the frigate Milford, of twenty-eight guns, Captain John Burr, commander. It occurred on the 7th of June, 1776, near Cape Ann, and lasted more than an hour and a half. At the commencement of the fight, the whole crew of the Yankee Hero numbered but forty men, officers included; and when the vessel was surrendered, only *twenty-three* of them, fit for duty, were left to contend against the *twenty-eight* guns of the enemy. These facts will appear from the following interesting narrative of this “bold action and well conducted,” which was written at the time.

Captain James Tracey sailed from Newburyport the seventh of June, 1776, in the Yankee Hero, for Boston, with twenty-six men only, including officers; this number was not a quarter of his complement; he was provisioned for a six months cruise, and was to take in the remainder of his men at Boston. The afternoon he went out, going round Cape Ann, he observed a sail in the offing, but in his situation did not think of looking after her.

Two boats full manned, with their muskets, who had put out after the sail, came on board, and informed him a number of transports had been close in with the Cape that day; fourteen men from the two boats joined him, and sent their boats on shore. He had now forty hands in the whole, (only a third of his complement;) with these he put away for the sail, which bore east-southeast about five leagues distance, the wind being then westerly; at six miles distance they perceived her to be a ship, and soon from her management, to be a ship of war. As a contest with her must have been very unequal, Captain Tracey, who intended to make a harbor that night, ordered the brig to be put about for the shore, not then suspecting the ship could come up with him; but he had not tacked ten minutes before the westerly wind died away, and the ship taking a fresh southerly breeze came fast in, endeavoring to cut the brig off from the shore.

After some time, the ship thus getting in the wake of the brig, the wind came again fresh from the westward, upon which the brig hauled in the best angle for the shore. The ship gave chase, and in an hour came up within half a mile, and began to fire her bow-chasers, which the brig only answered with a swivel, Captain

Tracey reserving his whole fire until the ship, keeping a constant fire, came up within pistol shot on his lee quarter, when the brig gave her the best return they could make from their main and quarter-deck guns, swivels and small arms, and after then kept up a constant fire. The ship was soon up alongside; and with twelve nine-pounders of a side, upon one deck, besides fore-castle and quarter-deck guns, and her marines overlooking the brig as high as her leading-blocks, kept a continual fire. After some time the ship hauled her wind so close, which obliged the brig to do the same, that Captain Tracey was unable to fight his lee guns; upon this he backed under her stern; but the ship, which sailed much faster, and worked as quick, had the advantage, and brought her broadside again upon him, which he could not evade; and in this manner they lay not a hundred feet from each other, yawing to and fro, for an hour and twenty minutes, the privateer's men valiantly maintaining their quarters against such a superior force. About this time, the ship's foremost guns beginning to slack fire, Captain Tracey tacked under her stern, and when clear of the smoke and fire, perceived his rigging to be most shockingly cut, yards flying about without braces, some of his principal sails shot to rags, and half his men, to appearance, dying and wounded. Mr. Main, his first lieutenant, was amongst the first wounded; and Mr. Davis, one of the prizemasters, fell in the last attack. In this situation they went to work to refit the rigging, and to carry the wounded below, the ship having taken a broader sheer some way off, and none of her guns bearing; but before they could get the yards to rights, which they zealously tried for, in hopes still to get clear of the ship; as they were now nearer in shore, or to part from her under the night, she again came up, and renewed the attack, which obliged Captain Tracey to have recourse to his guns again, though he still kept some of his hands aloft to his rigging. But before the brig had again fired two broadsides, Captain Tracey received a wound in his right thigh, and in a few minutes he could not stand; he laid himself over the arm-chest, and barricadoe, determined to keep up the fire, but in a short time from pain and loss of blood he was unable to command; growing faint, they helped him below; as soon as he came to, he found his firing had ceased, and his people round him wounded, and, not having a surgeon with them, in a most distressed situation, most of them groaning, and some expiring.

Struck severely with such a spectacle, Captain Tracey ordered his people to take him up in a chair upon the quarter-deck, and resolved again to attack the ship, which was all this time keeping up her fire; but after again getting into the air, he was again so faint that he was for some time unable to speak; and finding no alternative but they must be taken or sunk, for the sake of the brave men that remained, he ordered them to strike to the ship.

Thus was this action maintained upwards of two hours, in a low single-decked vessel, with not half the metal the ship had, against an English frigate, whose navy has been the dread of nations, and

by a quarter of the number of the people in the one as the other; yet the victors exulted as though they had overcome a force as much superior as this was inferior to them. The brig had four men killed and thirteen wounded, including officers; the number wounded in the Milford is not known, though there were some.

With justice to Captain Burr, of the Milford, it must be acknowledged he treated with humanity and politeness the officers and men that were wounded; but, to the eternal disgrace of Britain, and the present King and Parliament, let it be recorded, that in this very action above related, upwards of thirty Americans (prisoners in the Milford,) were forced, at the forfeit of their lives, to fight against their countrymen; and the officers and men of the Yankee Hero, that were not wounded, are now [August 9, 1776,] detained in several of their ships, and may meet with the same cruel fate; an exaction that even savages have not been known to require. It is to the credit of the Hero's men, that not one would enter upon the ship's books, though not only urged by every persuasion, but by threats.

The following is a copy of the commission of Captain Tracey, appointing him to the command of the Yankee Hero.

"COLONY OF THE MASSACHUSETTS BAY. } The major part of the Council of the Massachusetts Bay, in New England.

To James Tracey, Gentleman, greeting:

"Whereas James Tracey, Jonathan Jackson, Nathaniel Tracey, John Tracey, and Joseph Lee, merchants, have at their own expense fixed out and equipped for the defence of America, a vessel called the Yankee Hero, burthen about one hundred and twenty tons, and have recommended you as a suitable person to be commander thereof, we have thought fit to commission you for the purpose aforesaid, and do accordingly by these presents give you, the said James Tracey, full power, with such other persons as you shall engage to your assistance, to sail in the said vessel on the seas, attack, take, and bring into any port in this colony all armed and other vessels which shall be found making unlawful invasions, attacks or depredations, on the sea-coasts or navigation of any part of America; or improved in supplying the fleet and army, which have been or shall at any time be, employed against the United Colonies, or employed by the enemies of America in any respect whatsoever; and also all vessels whose masters or supercargoes shall have had designs of carrying supplies of any kind to the enemy, or that shall be returning from the enemy after having carried such supplies, that such proceedings may be had thereon as are required by a law of this colony, entitled, 'An act for encouraging the fixing out of armed vessels to defend the sea-coast of America, and for erecting a court to try and condemn all vessels that shall be found infesting the same:' and you are hereby directed in all your proceedings to govern yourself by the said act.

"Given under our hands, and the seal of the said Colony, at Water-town, the twentieth day of February, in the sixteenth year of the reign of his Majesty King George the Third.

"By their honors' command:

PEREZ MORTON, *D. Sec.*

B. GREENLEAF,	JED. FORSTER,	MOSES GILL,
W. SPOONER,	ELDAD TAYLOR,	JABEZ FISHER,
CALEB CUSHING,	B. LINCOLN,	B. WHITE,
T. CUSHING,	MICHAEL FARLEY,	S. HOLTON,
JOHN WHITECOMB,	J. PALMER,	JOHN TAYLOR."