NARRATIVE OF JOHN KILBY
Quarter-Gunner of the U. S. Ship "Bon Homme Richard,"
- under Paul Jones

With introduction and notes by Augustus C. Buell

SOME time after the publication of the "History of Paul Jones, Founder of the American Navy," by the house of Scribner, I received a letter from Bradford Kilby, Esq., a prominent member of the Virginia bar, informing me that his father, Judge Wilbur J. Kilby, of Suffolk, Va., had in his possession an unpublished narrative written by his great-grandfather, John Kilby, who served under Paul Jones in the Bon Homme Richard, and afterward in the Alliance, 1779-80.

The name of John Kilby was familiar in the roster of the Bon Homme Richard, in the published narratives of his shipmates, and in public documents relating to prize-money afterward. Shipping at 'Orient in July, 1779, as ordinary seaman, he soon became able seaman, and then petty officer (quarter-gunner, or gunner's mate). His career derives additional interest from the fact that he was one of the American prisoners of war exchanged in the spring of 1779 for the crew of the Drake; his earlier service having been in a privateer whose fate he relates in his narrative. His record as a seaman in the Richard and the Alliance was perfect. Altogether he was an admirable type of the genuine American sailor of those days—a type which, though numerically a minority of the Richard's crew, was the predominant moral and mental factor and the leaven of daring enterprise and unconquerable resolution that enabled Jones to gain his immortal victory.

The Americans on board the Richard numbered only 147 in a total of 375 at the beginning of the cruise, and 138 in a total of 325 in the battle off Old Flamborough Head. Of these a considerable majority were, like John Kilby, exchanged—or escaped—prisoners of war; at least eighty at the beginning, and not less than seventy in the battle itself. Among them were Richard Dale, John Louis White, Samuel Stacey, John Mayrant, Nathaniel Fanning, Henry Gardner, Thomas Potter, and many others of their kind; and John Kilby, though only a "man before the mast," was by no means least of them in value or honor.

In my "History of Paul Jones," Vol. I, pages 173-174, I state, from the records of Jones himself, that the total number of exchanged or escaped prisoners of war he enlisted at Nantes, in July, 1779, was 114; and that "about half of them were the remnant of the Lexington's crew (a sloop-of-war of the Continental Navy), captured more than a year before;" also that "the rest were men taken in privateers . . . or in recaptured prizes." To this last-named class, as will appear in his narrative, John Kilby belonged.

Further, on page 175 of the same volume, I venture the suggestion that "this force formed the fighting backbone of the Richard's final crew. What she did with them aboard is the plainest kind of history. What she might have done, or have failed to do without them, is neither useful nor pleasant to conjecture."

After the Revolution, John Kilby followed the sea in the merchant service, where he rose to the rank of master mariner and became one of the most competent and successful captains of his day. When he retired from active sea-service, he settled in Hanover County, Virginia, where he died on the 9th day of February, 1826. In 1810 he was induced by Mr. Thomas Ritchie, familiarly known as "Father Ritchie," a distinguished editor and politician of those days, in Richmond, Va., to write out his recollections of the immortal events in which he had borne such a hearty hand.

The Narrative speaks for itself. Its style is plain, simple, and rugged, yet terse, explicit, and always to the point.
NARRATIVE OF JOHN KILBY

HAVEN COUNTY (VA) SEPTEMBER 10, 1775

Mr. Thomas Ritchie:

Dear Sir,—You have many times requested me to give you a full account of the conduct and behavior of the brave honorable John Paul Jones, as also of my sufferings during the Revolutionary War, and as far as I have been able to collect, I am happy to comply with your request.

The conduct and behavior of John Paul Jones were exemplary. His bravery and courage were unmatchable. He was a man of principle, and his actions were guided by his strong sense of duty and honor. During the Revolutionary War, Jones served with distinction, earning the respect and admiration of his fellow soldiers and the enemy alike.

The sufferings of the revolutionaries were great. The war was long and brutal, and many men lost their lives or were injured in service. I myself, like many others, faced了许多 hardships and challenges. However, I am grateful for the opportunity to have served my country and to have fought for what I believed was just.

The war was a time when men were called upon to put aside personal comforts and sacrifices for a greater good. It was a time when men were tested by adversity and forced to prove their mettle.

Sincerely,

Augustus C. Bull

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four hundred of us were walking to and fro. The ball went through the body of Bartholomew White of Philadelphia, a tailor by trade. Notwithstanding this, he lives on his feet, though the last he took up, I believe, was the Black Hole. At last the day and hour of exchange were announced to us. A few moments before the hour of exchange, we were all (say one hundred, all of whom we knew who was to go, our names having been called over by the agent for that purpose), went to the iron gates and called to our companions, then in the Black Hole, to order them well. One of them, a Philadelphian, called his God to witness and bound it with a horrible oath, saying that he would be in the city of Nantes before us. I must and will acknowledge that I thought it only words said in the heat of passion. The agent appointed for that purpose, a Mr. Hurram, called all of our names, and then read to us these words, to wit: "You all now have received His Majesty’s most gracious pardon. At that time there was a loud cry from many of our men: "Damn his Majesty and his pardon too." The gates were opened and one hundred of us, the first on the list, were led out of the Black Hole, to mean this, that as we were committed so we stood on the list, unless put back under the penalty before mentioned, were marched out under a guard. There were loud cries from all of us with Captain John Harris at our head. We were accelerated by fine music. Some of our boys cried out: 'Give us Yankee Doodle!' and they certainly did play it for us all the way down the hill, though the French was more gloomy than usual, through the bounds of reason, from twenty to thirty thousand souls were looking at us, hundreds of whom cried out from the windows: 'We wish you all well!' We were put on board the Mary Frizell, carted up, commanded by Lieutenant Knox. We sailed and a length put into Plymouth, again sailed and anchored in Torbay where the whole of Admiral Hamilton’s [Sir Charles Cornwallis] grand fleet then lay. We then sailed for France, and arrived in the port of Plymouth. Now for the first time in nearly two and a half years were we free. After staying in this port three days, we got a vessel and were conveyed up to the city of Nantes, a

*This was the famous Dr. David Hamby, who, with brilliant success, inoculated the French against the smallpox in the French Military Health Service. He had been captured by the French in 1777, and had been held in prison in Paris until 1783. He was then released, and returned to the United States. His work in the smallpox inoculation campaign was highly successful. He settled in Boston, and practiced medicine there for many years.*

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French crowns as entrance money, and had permission to remain on shore that night. Of course we thought proper to take what is commonly called a 'cruise.' O'Connor was a man who had gotten the good wishes of us all. Of course we thought it would be imprudent to take all of our money; we, and indeed O'Connor himself advised us against keeping it with us on that night; a deep plan of O'Connor's. We every man put in his hands fifteen crowns for keeping up the money. No one was to have any when we left. We left the ship the next day. We all went on board the ship "Bonhomme Richard." The first sight that was presented to our eye was thirteen men stripped and tied upon the larboard side of the quarter-deck. The boatswain's mate commenced at the first nearest the gangway and gave him one dozen lashes with a cat-o'nine-tails. Thus he went on until he came to the coxswain, Robertson by name. (These men were the crew, and the captain and Robertson was the coxswain.) When the boatswain's mate came to Robertson, the first lieutenant said: "As he is a bit of an officer, give him two dozens." It is necessary to let you know what they had been guilty of. They had carried the Captain on shore, and so soon as Jones was out of sight, they had got their ship and gone drunk. When Jones came down in order, we ordered not to go on board, not a man was to be found. Jones had to and did hire a fishing boat to carry him on board. It proved to be a very small sea, and all set out by land for the port of L'Orient, the distance from which to Nantes is one hundred and eight French miles. We arrived there on the third day after setting off. On the day following we all received from Mr. Moylan, the Continental Agent, twenty

* This is John C. Robinson's party. It included John Jones, James Jones, James Jones, and Nathaniel Farnham, one of which was rated midshipman at once, and who, in the name of God, refused to come with ship. He had been sent to the 2nd Line for the Continental War in a great privateering schooner. He was for John Moylan the second marvellous escapist, the first was for Captain Thomas. The last three were three of the ship's officers, and they were the only survivors of Nicholas Orin, who was the only officer of the ship's officers, and they were the only survivors of Nicholas Orin, who was the only officer of Nicholas MIDDLE. *

Well gentlemen and my lads I well know where you have all been for a long time. I know you are true to your country, and my ship is a large and powerful one. If any of you should want any liberty that is not allowed by the rules of the ship, you are to come into my cabin and let me know. I found the ship to have several men about as much as follows, to wit: Jones, Commander: First lieutenant, Richard Dale (now Commodore); Second Lieutenant, Henry Lunt; Sailing master, Cutting Lunt; midshipmen and apprentices; land officers, if I may so call them, to be Colonel Webster, William Coll. Bisby, and a captain and several lieutenants. The marines were of French, American, and Irish brigades. The whole ship's crew amounted to about four hundred men [78]. The ship was the brook of the ship, and the captain was the pursuer. We hoist a short, loosed fore top-sail, weighed anchor and sailed on a cruise in company with the Alliance, a frigate of thirty-six guns commanded by Captain Peter Lands, a Frenchman; the Fallas, a frigate of thirty-two guns, commanded by Captain Cottane, a Frenchman; a frigate of thirty-six guns, said to belong to the Lords of Honour of France, also commanded by a Frenchman with a French crew, which boat, I understand, was never in any way under the command of Jones, the Commodore of the squadron, but on the contrary had a man who is commonly called a "Roving Commission," a brig, La Vengeance of twelve guns, a French commander and crew, and captain of ten guns, a French captain and crew; all of which is in the service of Congress, the frigate of thirty-six guns said to belong to the Ladies of Honour excepted, and under the command of the Honorable Paul Jones, which fleet was fitted out from the port of L'Orient by that good man Dr. Benjamin Franklin, then in Paris as Commissioner for the United States of North America.

The first thing that happened was, we were boarded by a French frigate on the island of Groix, a man fell off the main top sail yard on the quarter-deck. As he fell, he struck the cock of Jones' hat, but did no injury to Jones. He was killed and buried on the island of Groix. We again sailed and continued our cruise. For several weeks nothing came of the voyage, and after which the frigate said to belong to the Ladies of Honour left us, for what cause I am unable to say more than that I understood the capture of said ship did not like the conduct of Landas, Captain of the Alliance. The next news we had was that sobre off the coast we were under the land occupied by a heavy sea beating in on shore. About one hour by night, Jones had his boat hauled out and manned by twelve men. The coxswain, Robertson by name, was the same man that had been flogged some small time before. Jones ordered a large rowboat around the ship and just before the sun went down, came on board. The large rowboat to the ship's head off from the land, the crew cried out that the ship had been taken by a large much larger boat than the large. It was done and manned with twenty-two men, the sailing-master, Cutting Lunt, and two Messrs. Watts, Irish cattes. They had orders to pursue the large and bring back. Soon as the
Narrative of John Kilby

Last boat struck the shore, a gauntlet of British soldiers reinforced the garge’s crew, now already landed, and together they were strong enough to make the pursuers prisoners and actually did so. We then continued our crossing, captured, sunk, and destroyed many ships. At length, we appeared off Leith Roads, Scotland. We were still going up the coast. Every office was crowded with French uniform and not a French soldier was to be seen on our deck.

A pilot came on board. Jones asked him what was the news on the coast. "Why," said he, "very great and bad news! That rebel Paul Jones, is expected to land every day." Jones asked him when then what they thought of the rebel Jones, saying he wished he could come across him. What!" said he. "He is the greatest rebel and pirate that ever was and ought to be hanged." Jones then asked him if he knew who he was talking to, and observed, "I am Paul Jones." The poor pilot dropped on his knees and begged for his life. Jones said "Get up! I won't hurt a hair of your head, but you are my prisoner!"

On going up the Roads, the commander of the fort at the entrance of the place sent an express (supposing us to be a British fleet) requesting a few barrels of powder and that we should make all the way up we could. Jones sent him one barrel of powder with a request that he keep up good lights as the night was very dark and the weather squally. Lights were kept up. While we were beating up together with the rest of the fleet, an eighteen-gun English man-of-war was close along side of us several times, and even got foul of us three or four times. All of this time, all of our officers and crew, with the exception of Paul Garret, either got drunk or was much alarmed at the dreadful night. I believe it was in part both, so that he did not attend to his work. We were up, in consequence of which, First Lieutenant Dole went on the forecastle and rattled him well. All* of the captains of English ships, it is supposed, were in our company. We then drew a line, after the English ships had drawn a line, and were up for the Spanish ships. I believe it was as the man at quarters plain was to be seen. We were then but a small distance from them and you may be sure that our ship was as well prepared for action as it was in the power of man to have a ship. While we were still bearing down upon the enemy, she hauled us in these words: "Hole! the ship a-hole!" Our Captain, with a large trumpet in his hand, made no answer. The enemy again cried: "The ship a-hole!" Jones then said in a very loud voice said: "I can't tell what six o'clock is. The enemy again said: "Tell me what ship that is directly or I will sink you." Jones then answered: "Sink and be damned!" Both ships were within fifty yards of each other and at three words, "sink and be damned," I fully believe no man living could tell which ship fired first, but so was that each ship fired a broadside. I was on the main deck with two or three lower deck commanding two of the eighteen-pounders. Before the action commenced, everything was so silent that a man could easily hear everything said. At the broadside guns, that I had charge of, were dismissed as were also all of our lower deck guns, and of course, the men were quartered elsewhere. At this time, Jones ordered the helm to be held hard up, and we stood eastward away our ensign staff and colors. At this, they gave three cheers. We answered them with one cheer. Jones at the same time cried out: "Look at my ensign peak!" At which place was run up the greatest heights of America, I mean the most handsome suit of colors that I ever saw. They were about thirty-six feet in the sky. About this time a shot or something had cut away the enemy's flying jib stay and it fell on our quarter deck. Jones seized it and belayed it to our mizen cleats, saying at the same time "Now we'll hold her fast by this until one or the other sinks," During this time, you may be sure, neither ship's guns nor any of the implements of war were idle. We hove on board the enemy's least fifty gunboats, they made several attempts to tow and cut them away, but we continued to fling more aboard, as they attempted to fire two or three of our broadside with our boarders, and if the brave Jones cried out "Come on. I am ready to receive you."

They mounted and attempted to enter our gun-wag but we beat them off. After this, both ships seemed to commence firing with double vigor. Our ship was making much water. Jones Guilson, or "Gunson," the carpenter of the ship, whose duty it was, reported to our commander, the situation of the ship as other ships, which was at first every thirty minutes, secondly twenty, coming and finally every fifteen minutes. At last he reported that his estimate of the vessel was about three feet six inches in the hold, and that she was sinking fast. To this Jones had said: "This account, according to a word from the American shore, their ships have met with no ship taken, and one of their ships has been sunk. It is my report and strongly believed that the English were able to sail two ships, but having engaged into the English ships in the Atlantic had lost all the American ships, except in the ganges."
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replied: "Never mind, if she sinks, there are plenty of spars on deck and we shall be able to be round. Go back and do the best you can." In the course of the action, John Gardner,* the gunner of the ship, had by some means got a frigate into the Captain's cabin hatch (a most beautiful one it was). As Gardner was running fore and aft on the main deck, a candle was struck to the landhorn and he, alarmed at this, cried out: "Quar ters! Quarters!" Before any one could put him to death, he was wounded in the head and fell, but was not killed. Many of our men left their quarters (when I say our men, I mean those that Jones had entered out of the French prison). In fact, the brave Dale went forward in the bow of the ship between decks and drove out to quarters, many of those that had left. Such was the situation of our mixed crew, that every officer was compelled to do almost double duty. It must be remembered that early on that day, Second Lieutenant Henry Latt had been put on board one of the small vessels taken by us. This took place before we fired the first shot and brought us up with us until the action was all over. For this he was, by no means, to blame, though our ship was in danger in time of need. During the whole of the action, our ship continued to make great quantities of water, and all four of the hand-pumps were worked. Each chain-pump was allowed to deliver a ton of water per minute. By the time the enemy's ships were near to our tops, the action was about to close, the Alliance of thirty-six guns and the Captain of twenty-gun were about a quarter of a league beyond the wind being light and the night almost as bright as day. Her commander, Landaus, gave his first lieutenant, James Degg, orders to commence firing with the starboard bow gun first and so on until the broadside was discharged. On hearing this, Captain Richard was by some means gotten in the path of one of the cannon balls, and killed. He received it with thanks and died it when he pensioned. Jones received the first ball with the New Hampshire Richard, which had so short a time before carried us through all the dan-

ders we fore and aft, as the fire on both ships. The fire was, at this time, nearly all over both ships and as high as their tops. Our ship was on fire within three feet of her magazine. The fire on board both ships was at last conquered, though by much harder work than the fighting during the action. By the time all this was accomplished, day-light began to make its appearance. Then both ships, heads together, with all our fleet, were turned towards the Tercel in Holland. We then cleared the ships decks of the dead and at the rising of the sun, we have the seven bodies of our crew which were killed. There was one man who had been on board the ship, named, was conducted on board our ship. At that time, was within six feet of our captain. Jones presented his sword to Jones saying that, it was Diamond cut Diamond.*

* This is a confirmation, not only of many, but of all, the accounts that are given us of the great bravery of Captain Jones. He was a man of absolute magnanimity, and his name was "the best name that ever was." He was the gunner who belonged to the Duguay Toupin in France, and the magnanimity recorded on the will of his eldest son was: "To Captain Jones, my friend, I give this sword, my father's sword, to be used by him in the service of his country, and to be returned to me when he shall die." He left his eldest son the same sword, and he is now in the possession of the family of Captain Jones in Philadelphia. This sword was presented to Captain Jones from the family of his eldest son in the fall of the year 1874.

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overboard one hundred dead bodies. One hundred were wounded, between thirty and forty of whom died the next day before four o'clock. During this time, we also rigged up jury masts on board the "Sea-Racer," our prize ship. At four o'clock, the "Sea-Racer" was in the afternoon, our ship the "Bonhomme Richard," which had so short a time before carried us through all the dan- dangers we fore and aft, as the fire on both ships. The fire was, at this time, nearly all over both ships and as high as their tops. Our ship was on fire within three feet of her magazine. The fire on board both ships was at last conquered, though by much harder work than the fighting during the action. By the time all this was accomplished, day-light began to make its appearance. Then both ships, heads together, with all our fleet, were turned towards the Tercel in Holland. We then cleared the ships decks of the dead and at the rising of the sun, we have the seven bodies of our crew which were killed. There was one man who had been on board the ship, named, was conducted on board our ship. At that time, was within six feet of our captain. Jones presented his sword to Jones saying that, it was Diamond cut Diamond.*

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It seemed that he had been missing during nearly all the action, and about the very moment when they gave orders to board, some one discovered him in the main-chains, on the opposite side of the ship from the enemy. An officer was informed of it, and was in the act of running him through, when he jumped over on the quarter-deck, ran across it, and was actually one of those who boarded the enemy at the very moment when orders were given to board. His was an eye witness to. It passed over, but the man never was afterwards respected by any of the crew.

William Hamilton, captain of the main-top, during the whole of the action, or nearly so, continually kept going out on the starboard main-yard arm, which was directly over the enemy's main deck, and hove so many sink-pots, hand-grenades, and other combustible matter that the enemy's deck took fire several times and blew up many times. These explosions were caused by the loose powder that was spilled on the rigging, and by the muskets as they carried cartridges from the magazines to the cannon. Hamilton for his good conduct, was made master-mate, but, though he fought so manfully, he ran away from the ship in the same manner as the other officers. The next man to the officer in command of the vessel was the captain of the ship, that Captain Jones had entered out of Denain Prison in France.

When we arrived in the Tsesel, Jones, the Commander, wrote to Mr. Franklin and directed Landas the Captain of the Alliance, to come to him in Paris and for Jones to take charge of the Alliance. This was done. The captain and Lieutenant Cottin of the Pallas took charge of the "Sea-Rater" as a prize for the King of France, for at that time Holland and England were not at open war. It was done and Captain Cottin hoisted the French flag, as Admiral Cottin's first lieutenant succeeded to the command of the Pallas. Our ships were all righted and prepared for sea, we having remained in port several days. Several times during our stay in port, the Dutch Admiral de Reynst would send his officers on board of our ship, the Alliance, with directions for us to leave the land within a short time. Jones' answer would often be that he was not quite ready for sea. The admiral one day actually ordered two forty gun frigates (all guns being brass pieces) to come along side of us. They put springs on their cables and said it was their orders if we did not leave the land within four hours to sink us. To this, Jones, on his quarter-deck, so that all might hear it, returned a verbal answer. Said he: "Go back and tell Admiral that in our ill, he will send our best forty-gun frigate that he has only one league from the land, we'll sail safe into France." The two frigates lay along side of us several weeks, but never attempted anything hostile towards us.

At last, we sailed on a cruise, the Alliance having on board in addition to her own crew, the remains of the crew of the Bonhomme Richard. The first thing of note that took place was one morning in the English Channel. Just about the dawn of day, the man at the foretop-mast head cried a sail on the starboard bow. In two or three minutes, he cried another sail, in a few minutes another sail and in very small time, he cried a fleet. By this time light began to appear and we soon discovered Admiral Hardee's [Hardy] grand fleet of fifty-two ships. Now it was that we had only one chance of escape, and this on being taken by one or more of the ships and, of course, receiving their fire. We hauled close on wind, which was certainly our ship's excellence, for I firmly believe that she was the fastest ship on a wind that my foot ever was on board of. In the mean time, we discovered two fifty-gun ships in a press of sail trying to cut us off. The morning was very clear, though the wind blew fresh. We were then under close reefed topsails. Jones ordered out a reef. It was done quickly. He ordered out the second and it was not long before it was done. He ordered out the third, and also that the topsails yards, should be hoisted up taut. It was done. One of the Lieutenant's observed to Jones that he was fearful lest we should carry a sail or he shall either carry this sail or drop it. The ship was then on a taut bow line, running off the red at fourteen knots. In four hours we were within one very one very close of the ships how on which we eased sail. We then cruised for some weeks and captured several vessels, some of which we scuttled and some we burned. On the cruise we retake a Captain Jones who had not long before been taken. At length we arrived in Coruna, Spain. After being there some days our good and worthy Doctor Brook and Jones, it seemed, had a private falling out and the former left the ship. The cause of this dispute I never did know. Just before we were about to sail, some of our men refused to do duty, saying they would be paid some money. On its being handed to their officers, First Lieutenant Dale and others drew their swords and went down between decks and drove all the men who refused to do duty up on the deck. The ships crew was mustered, and Jones made a speech to them, upon which every man readily agreed to do his duty. Jones ordered a double allowance of all men's pay. What more can I say? The evening of our last day on the road we were lying in this place, all of the Spanish ships of war were to be dressed. I believe it was on the King's birthday. So it was that we had our ships fully dressed. It was a grand sight to see. When in a friendly port first to have the colors of their own country up at the main-top gantlet royal head and next to their own, the colors of the nation they were in the port of. All this had been done. On the going down of the sun and at the moment of the Admiral's signal, all colors and top gallant yards came down at the boatswain's call. In this case, everything was very well managed except that the Spanish colors hung for some minutes. At this Jones got into a most violent rage. John Darling was the boatswain who had to attend to the colors so far as to see that everything fell down. Here I must let you know that Darling was one of the men entered out of Denain prison and Jones answered: "Shall we carry a sail or drop it?"
Narrative of John Kilby

in which ship, had he kept it, in all probability, might have been done for the American cause. At this very time, the first and second lieutenants were on shore together with many other officers, also many men of the Bon Homme Richard’s crew, scattered around the city. Scarcely a single man, and not one of the officers of the Alliance crew were on shore. This fully proved that it was a concerted plot that had been laid sometime before by Landas and the Alliance’s crew, for Landas called the Alliance his own ship. It had been understood that Landas had not tried to save the ship in France at that time, but mark what became of him hereafter.

On Landas’ stepping up the ship’s side, the first words he said were: “I now command this ship; call the master-at-arms to me.” He came. Landas said: “Go and put every soul belonging to the Bon Homme Richard in irons.” It was done and I, myself, was one of the number, making in all fifty-two officers and men. He weighed anchor and worked the ship down nearly to Fort Louis. The fort is forty miles from the river and forbade Landas going one foot further, saying that if he did, it would sink the ship. Landas came to put springs on his cables, hoisted three colors, and called all hands to quarters. In this situation did he remain three days and nights, during which time, many flags passed from the fort to the ship and from the ship to the fort. Landas still held out and said if the fort fired on him, he would strike the American flag to the French authorities. The commander of the fort knew that would not do, and as the American colors were hoisted, he came to anchor and lay about three weeks. Captain Jones sent many flags to Landas requesting the crew of the Bon Homme Richard, all of which were refused and none of soul of us, either. Landas was allowed any liberty whatever. We would, as often as we could get chances, send letters to Jones requesting that he would try to get us out of the way. Landas we despaired. Jones would write to us very often. His letters always came directed in this way: “To the brave officers and crew of the Bon Homme Richard.” The last flag that ever came was brought by First Lieutenant Richard Dale and Second Lieutenant Henry Lunt. These officers Landas did not allow to go on board, but indignantly said to Lunt, who was in the flag boat, that he would make a very good coxswain for his barge; the crew of the Bon Homme Richard being then in irons under a guard on deck and all in open view of the said Lunt. The flag was returned without any satisfaction whatever and the ship Alliance sailed. After that, we had been at quarters three days, a proposition was made to us. It was this: that we might all come out of irons and do duty, that those who were officers, as such, and those that were seamen, as such. We all refused for some time but were afterwards advised by many of the leading passengers that it was useless to remain in irons. We therefore agreed to comply with the proposition and were all taken out of irons and did duty agreeably to our former offices. On the seventeenth day after sailing, Landas confined his First Lieutenant, James Degg, [Degg] who was a most active man, the principal one in getting the said Landas on board. A few days after, Landas called his clerk, Thomas Poole, in the cabin. On entering the cabin, as he said, Landas had two pistols on the table and his commission. Landas said to Poole: “This is my commission. Do you read it,” and took up one of the pistols and cocked it and presented it to Poole’s breast, when the latter laughed, made out of the cabin. The third day after, Landas had the Captain of the marines, John Parks, called in, and treated him in the same way, and actually did snap the pistol at Parks’ breast, so Parks said. The ship was still going on for America and upon reaching the banks of New Newfoundland, as usual for all ships to do, we hoisted to sound. We found ourselves in thirty-three fathoms of water, nearly the very spot that we expected. The ship to, many, several lines were thrown out. One of the quarter-masters happened to catch a cod fish. He politely gave it to Mr. Lee, who lived in the cabin, and the officer in charge of the said cabin stewed it nicely dressed for dinner and as it was going in the cabin, Landas happened to see it and asked what it was. The steward answered that it was a codfish that one of the quarter-masters had given to Mr. Lee. Landas ordered it to be thrown overboard through the port holes. Mr. Lee was informed of it, but said nothing. Landas then shaped his course for Philadelphia, off which coast we were well informed that the British fleet was cruising. That port was a different one from that from which the ship was ordered. A few days after, Landas’ conduct was such that in the opinion of Mr. Lee and many other of the officers on board, it proved completely that he was in a measure beside himself. This was due, it was thought to his brooding over his conduct in the action between the Bon Homme Richard and the Serapis, and elsewhere. It therefore was agreed by all the passengers and officers, Mr. Lee being at the head, to draw up a paper which was signed first by Mr. Lee and all the passengers, and the object of which was to take the ship from Landas. It was done and at the four o’clock watch, was to be carried into effect. The plan was as follows: the quarter-master, by name James Pratt, a very large, robust, rough seaman was to take charge of the ship first. It was then to be left to the actions of the then Commodore Pratt. As the watch was relieved, Pratt mounted the quarter-deck and called for the second lieutenant of marines, to wit, First Lieutenant Elbridge, and secondly, Dr. Warren, the son of the great Dr. Warren of Boston. They both came to Pratt with their hats in their hands and asked what was his command. Pratt answered and said: “Take a file of soldiers and confine Captain Landas to his cabin. They had twelve soldiers ready with muskets. Orders were given by Elbridge to carry out Pratt’s command. Landas at first refused. Pratt then ordered them to charge bayonets. They did charge, took Landas and put him below under a guard of four soldiers, at the cabin door, after which Elbridge and Pratt came to Pratt and said: “Pray, sir, have you any further command?” Pratt answered: “Yes, I have been into the wardroom and bring to me, Lieutenant Degg.” In a very small time Degg came with his hat under his arm and addressed Pratt in these words, to wit, “Pray, sir, what is your order?” “Why,” said Pratt, “I now give you charge of this ship and you are to observe one thing and that is, that you carry her into Boston and should you be engaged by any ship whatever you do not sink before you strike the colors.” Degg answered: “Yes, sir, your command shall be obeyed.” After this, Admiral Pratt became quarter-master again.

At length we arrived safely in Boston. The ship Alliance was hauled along side of the long wharf and dismantled. A court of inquiry was called by the board of war, and many other of the navy, I believe thirty in number, on it. Landas was broke and the whole ship’s crew was left there to shift for themselves.

Now as I am about to take leave of all my old officers, it will not be amiss to say something of some of them. First of all, the brave and honorable John Paul Jones, although the British print has said so much of him and made him out the hero of all men, yet I can say and will say that during the time that I sailed with him, I never sailed with any man of a more seaman and gentlemanly deportment. He had a high and mild in action, fed his ship’s crew well and treated both men and officers as a Commander ought to do. As to our not getting our wages and prize money, he was not to blame and no other man except that old cowardly Peter Landas. Now as to First Lieutenant Richard Dale, since Commodore Degg: I consider him in every respect one of the most brave and zealous officers I have ever known. His conduct in the court-martial, he did give such a certificate to Degg at the latter’s request. The only interesting details in our proceedings described by Kilby—occurs in the testimony of Mr. Kilby himself before the court of inquiry. He said: “I have no doubt that Landas and his companions in cabin under guard were affected without moody and violent proceedings. It was an important consideration, because there was much disaffection among the officers and men, and I feared they would try to desert to the Spaniards, and I gave the order to prevent the desertion of military.” Unfortunately the letter which Mr. Kilby describes in his letter was written in a manner calculated to ensure the fidelity of the crew, etc., was that which Kilby describes in his letter...
NARRATIVE OF JOHN KILBY

I was now in Boston without money. I shipped on board the ship, Amoor, of twenty-four guns, commanded by David Porter, the father of the present Commodore Porter. We went to the port of Port-au-Prince, then to the port of L’Orient, France, and returned to Boston. Then I shipped as a gunner on board the Robin Hood of twenty-four guns. She was commanded by Sargent Smith and was bound for Christiansand, Denmark. After cruising for some time, we arrived safely there and then returned to Boston. I then, together with two more of my companions, travelled by land to my home in Maryland, the place of my nativity. On my arrival, I found that my mother had died some time before. My brother had long before entered into the service of his country for three years, or during the war, and, having served upwards of three years, was killed at Camden in Gates’ defeat. I remained at home about two months and then went up to Baltimore and shipped on board the schooner, Rambler, of ten guns, commanded by Captain Thomas Shiles. I was second mate, and we were bound to St. Thomas. We arrived safely but on our passage home, were captured by a British sloop of war of sixteen guns, Lieutenant Parker being commander. She had dispatches from New York to Admiral Hood in the West Indies. Soon after, we fell in company with the “L’Amiable,” of thirty-eight guns, commanded by Alexander Hood and were put on board of her. After some days, we fell in with the “Bayfleur” [Barfleur] of ninety guns, commanded by Admiral Hood. After some days, all the prisoners in the fleet were put on board of the “Barfleur” of seventy-four guns, commanded by Captain Robinson. This ship together with the “London,” a few days before, had chased a French seventy-four from on Mount Acris and carried away her rudder. The Torbay was ordered into Kingston, Jamaica, and we, the prisoners, on board of her, were landed there where we lay nearly four months. At that time, being an officer, was permitted the liberty of the town. At last through a friendly man I lived in Somerset County, Maryland, and had sailed on many voyages with an uncle of mine, a plan was laid for Captain Shiles, the Captain’s clerk, Mr. Wales, and myself to escape the plan was this: He owned many fishing boats. We were to be taken in one of them down to the Pallasades near Port Royal where all the fleet then lay. About the boat were hauled over the Pallasades, a narrow neck of land, and in the morning all of us were fishing there in sight of the British fleet. So soon as a land breeze sprung up, Captain White, a Danish Burgher, of the island of Santa Cruz, was to come out on his way up to the island and take us in. He did so and we all got on board by climbing up at the bow of the vessel, unnoticed by the fleet, I suppose. The schooner stretched up for Aureoys, the port at which she was to touch. On the third day after leaving Kingston, being then about two leagues from Spanish Town, we were chased by a British frigate. Captain White, if detected in having us on board, would have been subjected to heavy fine and imprisonment, and we would have sent back in irons. The frigate was coming up on us very fast. We resolved on taking to the schooner’s boat, though small, and looking the open sea, although the wind was very high. We hoisted overboard and made the best of our way for land. The frigate fired nearly one hundred cannon at us, though they never struck the boat. We at last made the beach. We then travelled by land to Aureoys, where we found our vessel. How it was that Captain Shiles left me, occurred in this manner. He sailed for America and I shipped as first mate on board the brigantine Catharine, Captain Hall, bound to Cartagena, South America. The brig was a neutral bottom owned in St. Thomas. We made the voyage and returned to Aureoys [Aureoys], then beat up to St. Thomas. On our arrival there, the news of peace was announced, happy news to a man that had sailed through the war and trying war. But it was for liberty and that kept my spirits up. The brig was then sold to Captain Josiah Hill, who became the sole owner and I continued as first mate. We sailed for Charleston, South Carolina. On our arrival there, I left the brig, resolved once more to see home. I arrived in Norfolk, Virginia, where I engaged on to make one more voyage as first mate with Captain John Bramble of the town of Norfolk. We sailed for the West Indies (Gaudeloupe). The spring broke, put into the island of Bermuda, retitled, sailed and I could to windward, to get between the enemy’s ships and the convoy, which I soon effected. At one o’clock I got sight of the enemy’s ships from the mainhead and about four o’clock we were them plain from the deck to be three large ships and a brig; upon which I made the Countess of Scarborough’s signal to join me, she being in shore with the convoy, at the same time I made the signal for the convoy to make the best of their way, and repeated the signal with two guns: I then brought to, to let the Countess of Scarborough come up, and cleared ship for action. At half-past five the Countess of Scarborough joined me, the enemy’s ships then bearing down upon us, with a light breeze at S. S. W. at fix tacked, and laid our head in shore, in order to keep our ground; the lighter being two decked ships and a brig; upon which we perceived the ships bearing down upon us to be a two-decked ship and two Frigates, but from their keeping on and on bearing down we could not discern what colours they were under: At about twenty minutes past seven, the largest ship of the three brought to, on our larboard bow, within musket shot; I hailed him, and asked what ship it was; they answered in English, the Princess Royal; I then asked where they belonged to, they answered evasively; on which I did not answer directly, I would fire into them; they then answered with a shot, which was instantly returned with a broadside; and after exchanging about two or three broadsides, he hacked his topsails, and dropped upon our quarter within pistol shot, then filled again, put his helm a weather and run us on board upon our weather quarter, and I attempted to board us, but being repulsed he sheered off; upon which I backed our topsails, in order to get square with him again, which, as soon as he observed, he then filled, put his helm a weather, and laid us asthorehawse; his mizen shrouds took our jib-boom, which hung for him some time, till at last gave way, and we dropped alongside.
of each other, head and stern, when the
fluke of our spar anchor hooking his quar-
ter, we became so close fore and aft, that
the masts of our ships interfered with each
other's sides. In this position we engaged
from half-past eight till half-past ten, dur-
ing which time, from the quantity and
vigor of combustible matters, which they
threw in upon our decks, chains, and in
short into every part of the ship, we were on
fire not less than ten or twelve times in dif-
ferent parts of the ship, and was with the
greatest difficulty and exertion imaginable
at times that we were able to get it extin-
guished. At the same time the largest of
the two frigates kept sailing round us the
whole action, and raking us fore and aft, by
which means she killed or wounded almost
every man on the quarter and main decks.
About half-past nine, either from a hand
magazine being thrown at us from one of our
lower deck ports, or from some other accident, a
cartridge of powder was set on fire, the
flames of which running from cartridge to
cartridge all the way aft, blew up the whole
deck of the people and officers that were quar-
tered abaft the mainmast, from which
unfortunate circumstance all those guns were
considered useless for the remainder of the
action, and I fear the greatest part of the
people will lose their lives. At ten o'clock they called for quarters from the
ship alongside, and said they had struck.
Hearing this, I called upon the Captain to
know if they had struck, or if he asked for
quarters; but nothing being made, after
removing my words two or three times, I
called for the boarders and ordered them to
board, which they did; but the moment
they were on board, they discovered a
sufficient number laying under cover
with pikes in their hands ready to receive them,
upon which our people instantly retreated
into our own ship, and returned to their
guns until half-past ten, when the
frigate coming across our stern, pouring
her broadside into us again, without
our being able to bring a gun to bear on
her, I found it in vain, and, in short, im-
practicable, from the situation we were in,
and then out any longer with the least pros-
tect of success; I therefore struck (our
mainmast at the same time went by the
board). The first Lieutenant and myself,
were immediately escorted into the ship
alongside, when we found her to be an
American ship of war, called the Bon
Homme Richard, of 40 guns and 375 men,
commanded by Captain Paul Jones; the
other frigate which engaged us proved to be
the Alliance, of 60 guns and 360 men; and
the third frigate which engaged and took
the Countess of Scarborough after two hours
action, to be the Pallas, a French frigate, of
32 guns and 275 men; the Vengeance, an
armed brig, of 12 guns and 70 men, all in
Congress service, and under the command
of Paul Jones. They fitted out and sailed
from Port l'Orient the latter end of July,
and came Northward; they have on
board the Bon Homme Richard, I found
her in the greatest distress; her quarters
and counter on the lower deck entirely drove
in, and the whole of her lower deck guns
downed; she was also on fire in two
places, and six or seven feet of water in her
hold, which kept increasing upon them all
through the night and the next day, and was
laid to quit her, and was not worth, with a great
number of her wounded people on board her.
She had 926 men killed and wounded in ac-
tion: Our loss on the Scorbut was very
great. My officers and people in general
behaved well and I should be very remiss in
my attention to their merit were I to omit
recommending the reward of their
Lordship's favours. I must at the same
time beg leave to inform their
Lordship, that Captain Fricer, in the Countess of Scar-
borough, was not the least conscious to them of
having given me every assistance in his
power, and as much as could be expected
from such ship in engaging the attention of
the Pallas a frigate of 32 guns, during the
whole action. I am extremely sorry for the
misfortune that has happened, that of
losing his Majesty's ship I had the honour
to command; but at the same time, I bat-
ter myself with the hopes, that their Lord-
ships will be convinced that she has not
been given away; but, on the contrary, that
every exertion has been used to defend us
and that two essential pieces of service to
our country has arisen from it; the one in
wholly overwetting the cruise and in-
tentions of the flying squadron; the other in
rescuing the whole valuable convoy from
taking into the hands of the enemy,
which must have been the case had I acted
any otherwise than I did. We have been
driving about in the North Sea ever since
the action, endeavoring to make any port
we possibly could, but have not been able
to get into any place till to-day, we arrived
in the Texel.惠erewith I enclose you the
most exact list of the killed and wounded I
have as yet been able to procure, among the
people being dispersed amongst the
different ships and having been refused
permission to muster them: There are, I find,
many more, both killed and wounded, than
appears on the enclosed list, but their names
as yet I find impossible to ascertain; as
soon as I possibly can, shall give their
Lordships a full account of the whole.
I am,
Your most obedient and
Most humble servant,
R. PEARSON,
P. S.—I am refused permission to wait on
Sir Joseph Yorke, and even to go on
shore. Enclosed is a copy of a letter from
Captain Fricer, late of the Scarborugh.
I do not attach any list of the killed and
wounded:
Killed.......................... 40
Wounded.......................... 68
Amongst the killed is the late boatswain, pilot,
one master's mate, two midshipmen, the
crossman, one quartermaster, 27 seamen,
13 marines. Amongst the wounded are
the second Lieutenant Michael Stanhope and
Lieutenant Whitman second Lieu-
tenant of marines, 3 surgeons mates, 6 petty
officers, 46 seamen, and 12 marines.
After reproducing this report, Kilby com-
ments on it as follows:

I shall take the liberty to contradict some
parts of the above letter. First, Pearson
says the Alliance kept constantly sailing
around and raking him the whole of
the action. It is untrue; for the Alliance never
came up until just before the close of
the action, and when she did come up, in room
of firing into the enemy's ship she came
under our larboard quarter and raked us
fore and aft, although she was cautioned of
our being the Bonhomme Richard
before she had fired a gun. The first broadside
she gave us, she killed eleven men. Did I
say broadside? It was rather more like a
salute than a broadside, for she commenced
by firing the starboard guns and con-
tinued one after another till she discharged
twelve pounders, every ball of which went through our cabin windows
and shot out our bows, and so scared the
dreadful close of the ship shot ahead of us, she howed about and discharged
the other broadside as before. Again, Pear-
son says that many of our dead and wounded
went down in our ship. It is equally un-
true. I don't believe one soul of either dead
or wounded went down in the ship. Again
he says, that he killed and wounded three
hundred and six of our men. Still worse!
and in my opinion, makes against Pearson,
for if he had killed and wounded that num-
ber of us, ought he not to have taken us?
Surely he ought, for he says we had only
three hundred and seventy-five men, and by
that rule how many men had we left? Why
sixty-nine men! Handsome business for
sixty-nine men to take her Majesty's ship
with two hundred and eighty eight men, for
he had on his books four hundred men.
The truth is that we had a hundred men killed
and a hundred wounded. Many of the
wounded died the next day. The Scour-
borough lost one hundred and one killed and a
hundred wounded. This was proved by their
ship's books and is, of course, true. But
the truth of the matter is this: A British com-
corder could not endure to have it said
that one of his Majesty's ships was taken
by an American rebel, as they so called
them. But time has changed. The weight
is now in the other scale. I will say this
for Captain Pearson and his officers; they
all fought bravely. But had we not had
such a mixed, disaffected crew (when I
say disaffected crew, I mean all those
that Jones had entered out of French prisons), I
really believe we have taken the ship
in one half the time. Captain Pearson was
like all other British commanders, when
they write to their government. It is not to
be expected from them to give the truth.
Had he done so, it would have been depart-
ing from their principle at least for a cen-
tury past.