

The Totoket Historical Society, Inc.

# Letter of Marque

Issued by Jonathan Trumbull, Governor of Connecticut

May1, 1781

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2007

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## Introduction:

The following is a scan of an original Letter of Marque issued to Eli Rogers in May of 1781 by Jonathan Trumbull, Governor of Connecticut. A transcription of that document is included.

During the time of the American Revolution, a Letter of Marque was a government issued license authorizing a ship known as a *privateer* to attack and capture enemy vessels and bring them before admiralty courts for condemnation and sale. Cruising for prizes with a Letter of Marque was considered an honorable calling combining patriotism and profit, in contrast to unlicensed piracy.<sup>11</sup> During the Revolution, the British, after capturing an American privateer, might consider the officers and crew as traitors and course, quite dangerous. Many privateers operated out of Connecticut waters.

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<sup>1</sup> WikepeiA: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Privateer>

# State of Connecticut

By the Governor

Instructions to Elt Rogers, Master, Commander of a Vessel or Boat called, The Grall, - belonging to Capt. Abraham Rice, & Co in the said State.

You may by force of arms attack, subdue & take all ships & other vessels belonging to the Crown of Great Britain, or any of the subjects thereof on the high seas or between high & low water marks, except the ships or vessels together with their cargo belonging to any state heretofore or hereafter of Bermuda, or such other ships & vessels bringing persons with intent to settle & reside within the United States, which you shall suffer to pass unmolested, the Command or thereof permitting a peaceful search & giving savings to give information of the contents of the Lading & destination of their voyages.

You shall bring such ships & vessels as you shall take with their Guns, Rigging, Tackle, Apparel, Furniture & Lading to some convenient port in this State, that proceedings may thereupon be had in due form before the Courts which are, or shall be thus appointed to hear & determine causes civil & maritime.

You or one of your chief officers shall bring or send the Master & Pilot & one or more principal person or persons of the company of every ship or vessel by you taken as soon after the capture as may be to the Judge or Judges of the Court as aforesaid to be examined upon Oath & make answer to the Interrogations which may be propounded touching the Interest or property of the ship or vessel & her Lading, & at the same time you shall deliver, or cause to be delivered to Judge or Judges, all Papers, Sea Breefs, Charterparties, Bills of Lading, Collett Letters, & other Documents & writings found on board, proving the said papers by the affidavit of yourself, or some other person present at the capture, to be produced as they were received on board for and Collection, Substitution or employment.

You shall keep & preserve every ship or vessel & cargo by you taken until they shall be sent to a Court properly authorized to adjudge lawful prize, or acquitted, not selling, parting, washing or diminishing the same or locating the bulk thereof, nor suffering any such thing to be done.

You shall by all convenient opportunities send to me written accounts of the Capture, copies of your journal from time to time & Intelligence of what may occur with the number & names of the captures & whatever you shall discover concerning the designs of the Enemy & the destinations, motions & operations of their Fleet & Armies.

You shall observe all such further Instructions as shall be given you hereafter by me in the Premises above you shall have notice thereof. You shall not by yourself or your parties any illicit Trade with the Enemy, or others on Long Island, but you shall take care to detect all illicit Trade to and from, or any other place within the Enemy's Lines or Dominions.

and bring to condign punishment all such persons or persons as you shall discover  
to be concerned in or carrying on any illicit Trade or traitorous practices with the  
Enemy, according to the Laws in such case made & provided, & if you shall do any  
thing contrary to these Instructions, or to them hereafter to be given or willingly suffer  
such things to be done, you shall not only forfeit your Commission & be liable to an  
Action for breach of the Conditions of your Bond but be responsible to the party  
grieved for damages sustained by such Malversations

You will keep your Journal from the time of your setting forth on your  
service & keep every material Occurrence & war by you to put up for  
-cedings to me at the end of every Fortnight, or to B. General Ward if you for

Dated at Lebanon the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1781. J<sup>th</sup> Trumbull

2007-081-009

State of Connecticut

By the Governor

Instructions to Eli Rogers, Mariner, Commander of a Vessel or Boat called the Gull belonging to Capt. Rueben Rose & Co of said state.

You may by force of arms attack, subdue and take all ships and other vessels belonging to the crown of Great Britain, or any of the subjects thereof, on the high seas or between the high and low water marks except the ships or vessels together with their cargo belonging to any inhabitant or inhabitants of Bermuda or such other ships or vessels bringing persons with intent to reside within the United States which you shall suffer to pass unmolested, the commander whereof permitting a peaceable search & giving satisfactory information of the contents of the lading & destination of their voyages.

You shall bring such ships & vessels as you shall take with their guns, rigging, tackle, apparel, furniture & lading to some convenient port in this state, that proceedings may thereupon be had in due form before the courts which are or shall be then appointed to hear and determine causes Civil & maritime.

You or one of your Chief officers shall bring or send the Master & pilot and one or more principal person or persons of the company of every ship or vessel by you taken as soon after the capture as may be to the Judge or Judges of such court aforesaid to be examined upon Oath & make answer to the interrogations which may be propounded touching the interest or property of the ship or vessel and her lading & at the examination you shall deliver or cause to be delivered to Judge or Judges all Papers, Sea Briefs, Charter Parties, Bills of Lading, Packets, Letters and other Documents and writings found on board, proving the said papers by the affidavit of yourself or some other person present at the capture, to be produced as they were received without fraud, addition, subduction or embezelment.

You shall keep & preserve every ship or vessel & cargo by you taken until they shall by sentence of a court properly authorized be adjudged lawful prize or acquitted, not selling, spoiling, wasting or diminishing the same nor breaking the bulk thereof nor suffering any such thing to be done.

You shall by all convenient opportunities send to me written accounts of the captures, copies of your journal from time to time & intelligence of what may occur with the number and names of the captives & whatever you shall discover concerning the designs of the enemy & the destinations, motions & operations of their Fleets & Armies.

You shall observe all such further instructions as shall be given you hereafter by me in the premises where you shall have notice thereof. You shall not by yourself or Crew practice any illicit trade with the Enemy on Long Island but you shall take care to detect all illicit trade to said island or any other place within the enemy lines or

dominions and bring to condign punishment all such person or persons as you shall discover to be concerned in or carrying on any illicit trade or traitorous practice with the enemy according to the Law in such case made and provided & if you shall do anything contrary to these instructions or to others hereafter to be given or willingly suffer such things to be done, you shall not only forfeit your Commission and be liable to an action for breach of the conditions of your Bond but be responsible to the party grieved for damages sustained by such malaversations.

The Gull, in concert with the Connecticut Privateers Revenue and Rattlesnake took part in the capture of 3

You shall keep your Journal from the time of your setting forth on your cruise and preserve every material resource and making your xxxxxxxxxxxx proceedings to me at the end of forty days or to B. General Ward at Guilford.

British ships in June of 1779. Those ships were Lively, 40-ton, Mayflower, 109-ton and John, 96-ton.

Dated at Lebanon the 1<sup>st</sup> May, AD 1781

Jonathan Trumbull

The Gull, in concert with the Connecticut Privateers Revenue and Rattlesnake took part in the capture of 3 British ships in June of 1779. Those ships were Lively, 40-ton, Mayflower, 109-ton and John, 96-ton.

The following incomplete list of ships were legally registered in Connecticut and operated as Privateers during the Revolutionary War.

Abigail, sloop. Commission: August 1777. Owner: Ackley Riley. Prizes: British sloop, name unknown, August 29, 1777; OSloop The General Burgoyne, September 3, 1777.

Betsey sloop. Commission: Date unknown. Owners: Ackley Riley and Abraham Wright of Farmington. Prizes: British sloop, name unknown, June 23, 1780.

Enterprise, schooner. Commission: June 1777. Owner: Jason Chester followed by Moses Tyron. Prizes: British sloop,

Experiment; schooner, Friendship; sloop, Hap Hazard; schooner, Greyhound; sloop, Swallow; sloop, Nonpareil. Dates unknown

Fair Trader, schooner. Commission: Date unknown. Owner: Joseph Webb; Commander, Joseph Webb. Record unknown.

Gull, schooner. Commission: June 17, 1779. Owner: Levi Riley. Commander: William Bunce. Record unknown.

Hero, sloop. Commission: January 14, 1778. Owners: Jacob Riley, Moses Williams and Ephriam Williams. Commander, Jacob Riley. Riley taken prisoner and exchanged August 3, 1782.

Humbird, schooner. Commission: October 21, 1781. Owners: John Wright, Oliver Goodrich, and John Bulkley Jr. Commander: Oliver Goodrich. Record unknown.

Jason, brigantine. Commission: November 27, 1780. Owners: John Wright and Company. Commander: Samuel Stillman, later Moses Tyron. Record unknown.

Lash, sloop. Commission: Date unknown. Owner: Thomas Newsom. Record unknown.

Lucy, sloop. Commission: December 2, 1777. Owner: Joseph Bulkley. Commander: Thomas Sellow. Prizes: British schooner, Tyrall, December 12, 1777; Sloop Elizabeth, December 15, 1777; sloop Dove, 1778; schooner, York, June 15, 1779; sloop, Tyron, 1779.

Mentor, schooner. Commission: April 17, 1779. Owners: Moses Tryon, James Lockwood, and James Church of Hartford. Commander: Moses Tryon. Record unknown.

Nancy, sloop. Commission: April 17, 1779. Owners: John Wright and Company. Commander: Moses Tryon. Tryon and his vessel were captured by the enemy and carried into New York in May of 1779. Tryon was exchanged on June 26, 1779 for one George Kidd.

Ranger, brigantine. Commission: May 25, 1780. Owners: Ebenezer Barnard Jr. and Company. Commander: Ashbel Riley. Captured November 14, 1780 near Montauk. Revenge, sloop. Commission: 1776. Owner: Silas Deane. Record unknown.

Samuel, brigantine. Commission: August 17, 1779. Owners: John Wright and Co. Commander: John Bulkley Jr. According to the "Connecticut Gazette" of New London, Capt. Bulkley and his brig were taken by the British and taken to the West Indies.

Snake, sloop. Commission: January 23, 1778. Owner: James Stanley. Commander: Ackley Riley. Prizes: British Sloop Maccaroni, February 16, 1779; schooner, Jenny, June 7, 1779; vessel, name unknown, November 13, 1779.

Washington, sloop. Commission: September 7, 1779. Owners: Justus Wright and John Wright and Company. Commander: Israel Deming followed on Feb. 20, 1780 by Richard Reynolds. Prizes: Two British sloops, names unknown.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wethersfield Historical Society: Wethersfield's Maritime Contribution To The Revolutionary War <http://www.wethhist.org/articles-from-the-community/2012/03/wethersfields-maritime-contribution-to-the-revolutionary-war.html>