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Author(s): Robin F. A. Fabel

Source: *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Summer, 1989), pp. 165-190

Published by: University of Pennsylvania Press on behalf of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3123202>

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SELF-HELP IN DARTMOOR: BLACK AND WHITE PRISONERS IN THE WAR OF 1812

Robin F. A. Fabel

During the War of 1812 there were thousands of American sailors imprisoned in Britain. Most of them, in the final two years of the conflict, were housed in the massive jail at Dartmoor in Devon. Its meticulously kept entry books reveal that 6,553 American prisoners were admitted to the depot, of whom 955, just over 14.5 percent, were not white, members of a minority group that clearly made a significant and generally underrated contribution to the conduct of the American war at sea.¹

Fewer than 250 of the prisoners were from the United States Navy. Many more came from privateers (see Table 1). When Congress declared war on June 18, 1812, the navy had only 16 warships, 500 officers, 5,230 sailors, and 1,523 marines to pit against Britain's vast Royal Navy, a force with over a thousand warships and tens of thousands of ratings. Partially to redress this disparity, Congress had swiftly authorized large-scale privateering, and some 100,000 men had volunteered for that service. They were not the sweepings of the waterfronts of America. Britain's Orders in Council, Napoleon's maritime decrees, and Jefferson's embargo had severely hurt the commerce of the United States, robbing hordes of excellent seafarers of employment. The expedient of authorizing privateering was worthwhile but not without cost. Although two thirds of the 2,000 British ships captured or destroyed during the 1812 war fell to

Mr. Fabel is a member of the Department of History, Auburn University, in Auburn University, Alabama.

¹ An exception is Reginald Horsman, whose excellent, learned, but popularly written article, "The Paradox of Dartmoor Prison," may be found in *American Heritage*, 26 (Feb. 1975), 12-17, 85. Horsman also gives passing mention to the role of blacks in the war in *The War of 1812* (New York 1969), 263.

privateers, 300 of the 526 privateering voyages during the war were fruitless or ended in surrender. Privateersmen who survived unsuccessful combat nearly all came finally to Dartmoor.²

Black, bleak, and barren, the high moor was one of the most desolate wastes in England. Prisoners believed that no bird, rabbit, or even tree could survive there. Wet westerly winds blowing off the Atlantic kept it wreathed in mist and rain for two thirds of each year. Prisoners' spirits were usually low when, exhausted after a fifteen-mile march from the coast, they finally arrived at the huge and forbidding gates of the depot.

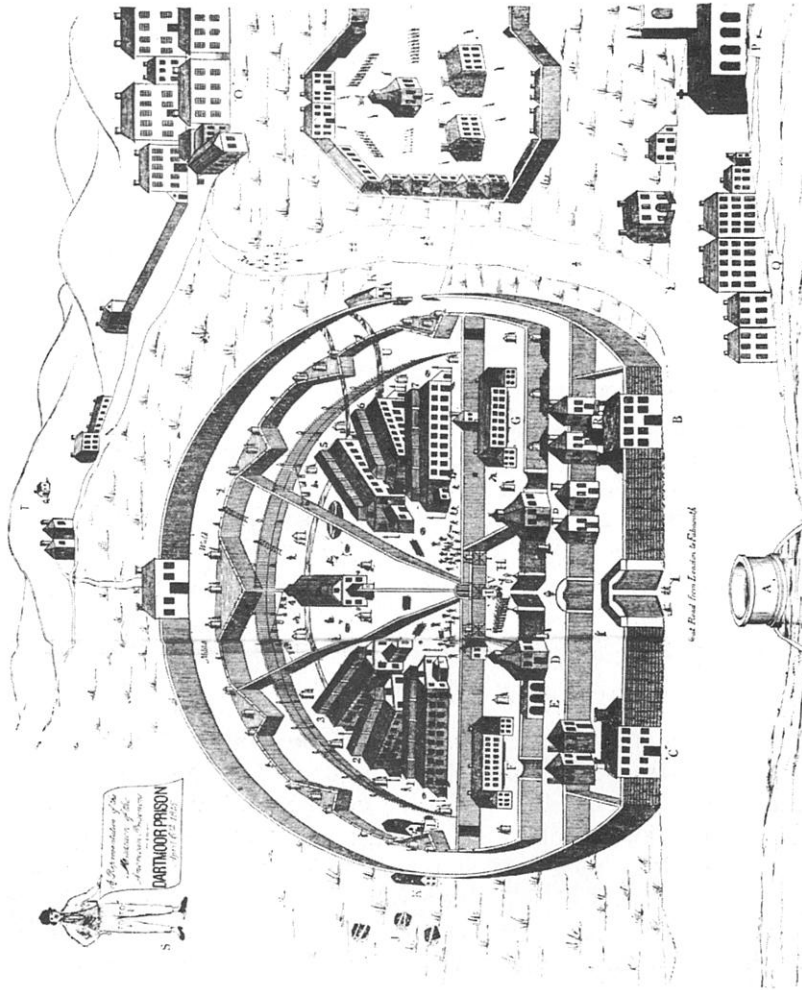
Practical considerations rather than a desire to depress inmates had dictated the choice of Dartmoor for the prison, which was designed to supplant the offshore hulks in which prisoners of war had formerly been penned. For several reasons that traditional resource of the British had proved unsatisfactory. One was the prevalence of sickness in hulks.³ Another was their vulnerability: prisoners had been known to set fire to them in the hope of escaping in the resulting confusion. A third reason was the danger to Britain, should invasion occur, of keeping large numbers of enemy fighting men in the vicinity of her naval arsenals where all the hulks were moored. By contrast Dartmoor was remote and naturally supplied with drinking water and with granite, a suitable material from which to make secure and healthy buildings.⁴ On land donated by the future George IV, Dartmoor's foundation stone was laid in March 1806, and construction of the complex was completed in December 1808.

Its seven slate-roofed, stone-floored main buildings each measured 180 by 40 feet. They did not contain cells. More like barracks, they housed long dormitories on their first and second stories. Iron pillars at intervals along the length of each dormitory allowed the prisoners to sling their hammocks in two or three tiers. Apart from a hammock, each prisoner was equipped with a pillow, a blanket, a coarse bedsack, and some rope yarn. At its most crowded these dormitories offered mere inches between hammocks—which

² Charles Andrews, *The Prisoners' Memoirs, or, Dartmoor Prison* (New York 1815), 162; Reuben Elmore Stivers, *Privateers and Volunteers: The Men and Women of Our Reserve Naval Forces: 1766 to 1866* (Annapolis 1975), 56-57, 60.

³ Aboard the prison hulk, *Bahama*, for example, 84 Americans out of 361 had died from typhus within three months of arrival. Benjamin Waterhouse, *Journal of a Young Man of Massachusetts* (Boston 1816), 133, 145, 148.

⁴ "Prisoners of War in England," *Littell's Living Age*, 200 (Feb. 3, 1894), 317-318.



- A Water Fountain
- B Agent's House
- C Doctor's House
- D Store Houses
- E Guard House
- F Hospital
- G Barracks
- H Market Square
- I Railing and Gates leading to Prison
- J Holes for Burying the Dead
- K Guard Houses
- L Cachot or Black Hole
- M Outer Barracks and Parade Ground
- N Bake Houses
- O Princetown
- P Church
- Q Turnkey's House
- R Captain's House
- S Prisoner in Full Dress
- T John Falan Escaping
- U Digging Out
- V Captain Shortland, Commanding Officer
- 1-7 Prisons
- 8 Cooking Houses
- Hole in the Wall

The Prison Wall is One Mile in Circumference
 Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1845 by Jonas Preston, in the Clerk's office of the District Court of the Eastern District of Pa.
 Engraved by D. C. Hitchcock

DIAGRAM OF DARTMOOR PRISON AS IT WAS ON THE DAY OF THE MASSACRE OF AMERICAN PRISONERS, APRIL 6, 1815. DESCRIBED BY THE UNKNOWN YANKEE PRIVATEER

Source: Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed., [Benjamin F. Browne], *THE YARN OF A YANKEE PRIVATEER* (New York 1926), facing 274

Table 1

TALLY OF POWs AT DARTMOOR ON MARCH 31, 1815

Numbers and Locations

In prison block 1	1269
In prison block 3	922
In prison block 4	1051
In prison block 5	958
In prison block 7	1263
Employed in stores	31
Employed in hospital	19
Patients in hospital	<u>130</u> [sic]
	5693

Origins and characteristics

Given up from Royal Navy ships	2200
Non-whites*	1000
United States soldiers and sailors	250
Taken aboard privateers and merchantmen	<u>2243</u>
	5693

* There is some illogicality in this division since the non-whites came from the other three categories.

Source: Charles Andrews, *The Prisoners' Memoirs, or, Dartmoor Prison* (New York 1815), 162.

must have offset the chill entering from the glassless dormitory windows, but must also have increased the chance of infection when epidemics raged. The third or top story of each building, known as the cockloft, furnished a communal living area. A circular iron-spike palisade surrounded the group of seven buildings at a distance of forty feet. Parallel with the palisade ran two walls twenty-two feet apart, each fourteen feet high. Of these the outermost was decked with bells to give warning of attempted escape. For added security, a military road, a mile in circumference, encircled the entire complex.⁵

The prison authorities recorded twenty-five items about each inmate upon his arrival at Dartmoor. One of them was his birthplace. If the prisoners as a whole are considered, about 45 percent originated from New England and only a few from the states south of

⁵ Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 19, 88; Vernon Harris, *Dartmoor Past and Present* (Plymouth, Devon, Eng. 1873), 10-12.

Table 2

BIRTHPLACES OF BLACK POWs IN DARTMOOR, 1813-1815

Connecticut	35
Delaware	27
Foreign parts	73
Georgia	2
Kentucky	1
Louisiana	43
Maine	15
Maryland	138
Massachusetts	126
Mississippi	1
New Hampshire	20
New Jersey	24
New York	181
North Carolina	6
Pennsylvania	114
Rhode Island	56
South Carolina	28
Vermont	6
Virginia	58
Washington, D.C.	<u>1</u>
Total	955

Source: U.S. Prisoners of War Entry Books, Adm 103/87, 88, 89, 90, 91, Public Record Office, Kew, Great Britain.

Virginia. The balance was different for the black prisoners, who came more evenly from the ports of the United States from Maine to Louisiana (see Table 2). New York was the preeminent supplier; there were 181 black New Yorkers in Dartmoor. Next came Maryland with 138. Massachusetts and Pennsylvania were each the state of origin of over 100 black prisoners. Unsurprisingly, southern states provided fewer, but 58 black prisoners came from Virginia and 43 came from New Orleans alone. How many of these southern blacks had been slaves is uncertain but 14, whose place of birth was Africa, surely were. Among the black American prisoners were some of foreign birth, including 30 or so from the West Indies and 5—who would not now be classed as black—who hailed from the East Indies (see Table 3). Not a homogeneous group, these non-whites had little in common except for service at sea, mostly in privateers, and low rank.

Commissioned officers normally gave their parole and were allowed to live privately in nearby villages. These officers were white. The sole known exception was a thirty-year old mulatto from Boston, William Lane, a prizemaster and as such part of the normal complement of a privateer.⁶ Lane lived in Dartmoor, perhaps because he preferred not to give, or was ineligible for, parole. British admiralty regulations on the subject were precise. No officer of a prize could qualify for parole unless his vessel carried a minimum of 14 carriage guns, each of at least four-pounder rating.⁷ Apart from Lane, 34 cooks, 14 stewards, 10 boys or apprentices, a carpenter, a shipwright, and 6 unfortunates who were passengers when captured, all the remaining black inmates had the simple status of seamen.

Dartmoor was a Royal Navy responsibility—specifically, the medical committee of the admiralty's transport board. For most of the period in which Americans were housed there, the prison commandant was Captain G. Shortland, who earned frequent mention in the memoirs of ex-prisoners, usually as a callous tyrant. One of the former prisoners called him "an inhuman monster" and "a murderous miscreant."⁸ Shortland's previous career had earned him no such notoriety, but rather a modest distinction. He had been promoted to commander for cutting out an armed brig under the shadow of French guns in 1799, had made post captain three years later, at the fairly early age of thirty-one, and had commanded a warship on the Scheldt expedition in 1809. It seems unlikely that his voyaging to Australia with its first convicts when he was but sixteen would have been considered when he was appointed to the superintendency of Dartmoor in November 1813. It was his predecessor, a Captain Isaac Cotgrave who, in the previous month, first made the suggestion, which received instant approval, that blacks should be housed separately from the white prisoners. This move, evidently made at the request of white inmates, is curious in that segregation on the lower deck of a sailing warship, the customary

⁶ Stivers, *Privateers and Volunteers*, 87.

⁷ Admiralty Transport Board to Reuben Beasley, Nov. 13, 1812, Adm 98/291:17, Public Record Office, Kew. The chief British admiralty records in this essay are the registers of Prisoners of War, Dartmoor, American (Adm 103/87-91), Letters to Agents at Dartmoor, 1813-1815 (Adm 98/227-229), Letters to U.S. Agent in Britain (Adm 98/291), Letters from Agents at Dartmoor (Adm 99/250-259), Reports on Navy Hospitals (Adm 105/21).

⁸ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 8 (June 17, 1815), 267; 9 (Oct. 28, 1815), 154.

Table 3

ORIGIN OF THE 73 FOREIGN-BORN NON-WHITES
IN THE DARTMOOR AMERICAN ENTRY BOOKS

Africa	14	Manila	1
Batavia	2	Martinique	2
Bengal	3	Mauritius	1
Brazil	3	Pondicherry	1
Calais	1	Puerto Rico	1
Canary Islands	1	San Antonio	1
Cartagena	13*	St. Bartholomew	3
Cavosso (Kavos, Corfu?)	1	St. Thomas	2
Demarara	1	Stettin	1
Egypt	1	Permanbuco	1
Guadelope	6	Peru	1
Haiti	3	Portugal	3
Kingston, Jamaica	1	St. Jago (Azores?)	2
Liverpool	1	Sumatra	2

* The Royal Navy vessel, *Pique*, had made a prize of a vessel flying the colors of the republic of Cartagena. Because this state existed only on paper, *Pique's* commander had assumed that his capture was an American privateer. Consequently her crew ended up in Dartmoor, but according to an American prisoner who made their acquaintance, not one member of the crew was American. They were, rather, "British subjects, negroes and South American Indians." The Indians all died of respiratory ailments in Dartmoor. Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed., [Benjamin F. Browne], *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer* (New York 1926), 118.

Source: U.S. Prisoners of War Entry Books, Adm 103/87, 88, 89, 90, 91, Public Record Office, Kew, Great Britain.

quarters of nearly all of them, was impossible.⁹ There is no doubt that segregation sprang from the racism of white prisoners. Charles Andrews wrote that he and his messmates petitioned for it because "it was impossible to prevent these fellows from stealing." Yet it was the same Andrews who had written of the prisoners in general: "Honesty and integrity are but mere chimeras in dire necessity. . . . Petty larcenies were daily committed among the prisoners; brothers and the most intimate friends stealing from each other."¹⁰

No distinction between whites and blacks pertained to the official prison rations for prisoners of war, which were substantial. On five

⁹ Harold D. Langley, *Social Reform in the United States Navy, 1798-1862* (Chicago 1967), 92.

¹⁰ Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 69-70, 44.

days a week each prisoner was entitled to one and a half pounds of bread, half a pound of beef, half a pound of cabbage and turnip, and four ounces of onion. On the remaining two days fish (herring or cod) replaced the beef, and potatoes replaced the other vegetables. For purposes of comparison, this entitlement was similar to, in fact rather more lavish than, the standard rations aboard the American privateer *Frolic*. Prison clothes, meant to last eighteen months, comprised a woolen cap, a cloth suit of jacket, vest, trousers, two cotton shirts, and two pairs of stockings. The suit was of a sickly yellow and clearly marked with the letters TO (for Transport Office) and the royal broad arrow. Hats and shoes were supposed to be issued as often as they were needed.¹¹

Theoretically, the prisoners were amply fed and clothed. The transport board was concerned that they should receive their due. An example was its qualification of approval of a change in the customary ration. White rather than red herring might be issued, cautioned the board, "provided they be perfectly good."¹² Again, the board reprimanded Cotgrave for allowing the issue of bread that was "clammy, sour, and of a musty taste, and such as ought not to be issued to prisoners." Because the board met in faraway London there appeared a gap between their intentions and actual practice. The faults of the contractors must have been severe and in the early days they defrauded the American sailors, according to one account, of half their due rations. In May 1814 a contractor was fined a substantial £3,000, and cases were begun against the subcontractors he employed to supply the prisoners.¹³ Here the board was conscientious. It could also be harsh. In June 1813 it denied prisoners the comfort of stockings because the issue wooden-soled shoes of list (strong, coarse yarn used normally for selvages) had high tops which reached to the lower hem of the prisoners' trousers. In March 1814 the admiralty stopped issuing any clothing, as the United States agent for prisoners had assumed that responsibility.¹⁴

¹¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed., [Benjamin F. Browne], *The Yarn of a Yankee Privateer* (New York 1926), 44, 69, 230; Adm 98/291:42.

¹² Board to Shortland, Aug. 8, 1814, Adm 98/228:109.

¹³ Board to Cotgrave, May 19, 1813, Adm/227:121; Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 38; Board to J. W. Croker, May 26, 1814, Shortland to Board, June 20, 1815, Adm 98/123:22, 99/257: n.f.

¹⁴ Board to Cotgrave, June 11, 1813, Adm 98/227:233; Board to Shortland, March 25, 1814, Adm 98/228:62.

It is unlikely that the prisoners benefited from the change. Reuben Beasley, the agent, seems to have had an appetite for London life. He visited his compatriots in Dartmoor only once. After listening abstractedly to prisoners' complaints, he replied that "he had no power to do anything, nor any funds to do it with."¹⁵ Beasley later obtained funds, but the prisoners still suffered, and Shortland wrote several times to the board for permission to relieve their wants, such as food for sick prisoners and clothing.¹⁶

In addition to Beasley's negligence and the board's stinginess, two other factors affected the adequate supply of food and clothing to the prisoners. One was the pervasive mania for gambling that, both prisoners and the prison authorities attest, lured the prisoners into staking their provisions and garments.¹⁷ The other source of deprivation was the policy of punishing the prisoners en masse for riotous behavior or prison damage by cutting their rations. Since the Americans were turbulent—much more so than their French predecessors—repeatedly punishing them in this fashion caused great resentment and probably real hardship.

The prisoners alleviated their hunger with purchases from a market located in a segment of the prison's inner circle. It was open daily except Sunday, from eleven in the morning until two in the afternoon. At prices fixed by the turnkeys consonant with those charged in nearby towns, English entrepreneurs could sell there vegetables, milk, meat, hats, cloth, books, and even alcoholic drinks.¹⁸

With comparative leniency, the board wrote to Cotgrave in October 1813 that "the prisoners may buy beer of whom they please, provided it be small beer." Cotgrave's successor Shortland, whose reputed tyranny is overrated, pleaded that they be allowed strong beer at the rate of two hogsheads a week per building. He was troubled by the prisoners' chronic drunkenness, which he attributed to smuggled-in spirits. The board approved, but insisted that if spirits

¹⁵ Board to Cotgrave, Sept. 21, 1813, Adm 98/227:266; Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 26.

¹⁶ Shortland to Board, Apr. 19, 1814, Adm 99/257: n.f.; Board to Shortland, Aug. 13, Sept. 26, 1814, Adm 98/228:114, 137. A. McCleay to Beasley, Sept. 1814, Adm 98/229:198.

¹⁷ "Prisoners of War in England," 318; Harris, *Dartmoor Prison*, 13; [Josiah Cobb], *A Green Hand's First Cruise* (2 vols., Boston 1841), II, 172.

¹⁸ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 8 (June 17, 1815), 288.

were ever discovered in the jail, the privilege of drinking strong beer would be withdrawn.¹⁹

By no means all the Americans in Dartmoor had been captured. A considerable percentage came from the ranks of the Royal Navy, in which they had served as pressed men or volunteers until the United States declared war on Britain. Although the British navy was desperately short of men, as was usual in wartime, the admiralty ordered that Americans should be allowed to choose imprisonment rather than continued service, and thousands seized the chance. Captain Odiorne, one-time commander of the privateer *Frolic*, estimated in November 1814 that, of 4,700 Americans then in Dartmoor, 2,100, or about 45 percent, had transferred there from British men of war.²⁰ The proportion of blacks who gave themselves up was lower but still substantial: 218 out of 955, or about 23 percent. This lower percentage is not surprising. To qualify as a prisoner of war, a sailor had to produce documents proving United States citizenship. These "protections" had become commonplace in the years 1798-1812 in order to guard, sometimes in vain, against impressment by the British.²¹ Producing them, however, might have been difficult for many blacks, especially former slaves who also would have had more incentive to stay on in the British navy. Upon demobilization in the British Isles, where slavery was banned, if they survived the war, their freedom would be guaranteed. In such circumstances, the number of blacks opting for prison life was high. No doubt their motives varied, but patriotism was probably among them, particularly in the case of one Thomas Lane, whose distinguishing marks were an eagle and stars tattooed on the palm of his hand.²²

Some British captains were reluctant to release crew, whatever their nationality, at a critical stage of the war with France. The fiercely patriotic *Niles' Weekly Register* alleged two instances. One concerned Americans serving aboard H.M.S. *Peacock*, who were not only put in irons when they claimed prisoner of war status, but compelled too, at pistol point, to serve *Peacock's* guns in action against the American *Hornet*. Another charged that Americans on the

¹⁹ Board to Cotgrave, Sept. 9, 1813, to Shortland, Dec. 17, 1814, Adm 98/228:3, 171.

²⁰ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 8 (Mar. 25, 1815), 56. Elsewhere the number is given as 2,350; see Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 212.

²¹ Langley, *Social Reform*, 89.

²² Adm 103/90:106.

Mediterranean station were flogged when they insisted on transfer to prison rather than continued service in the Royal Navy.²³

More generally, captains honored claims for transfer: the two thousand transferees in Dartmoor came from hundreds of different Royal Navy vessels. Life in the prison was not necessarily pleasanter than in the British navy and the Dartmoor authorities, reviving a method successfully practiced on Americans during their revolution, persistently tried recruiting its inmates.²⁴ Although only a small percentage succumbed to British blandishments, even Hezekiah Niles admitted that 210 Americans, presumably both black and white, volunteered to serve in British ships during the war, despite the severe floggings the prisoners administered to potential turncoats.²⁵

The temptation to enlist must have been great during the severe winter of 1813-1814, when fifteen-foot snowdrifts accumulated at Dartmoor. Because of the intense cold, or from inadequate clothing, or from fear of contact with diseased inmates, the prisoners did not leave their hammocks, except through necessity. They had small hopes of repatriation: exchanges were suspended in August 1813 because the American authorities had run short of British prisoners.²⁶ This lack probably resulted from the blockade of American ports which became tighter as the war progressed. One prisoner, however, believed that it arose from the custom on American privateers, which was quite contrary to Royal Navy practice, of releasing prisoners from prizes as soon as it was convenient. The distress of the prisoners during their first winter in Dartmoor was made worse by the indifference of Beasley, who was informed that, unless he came to their relief, they would offer their services en masse to the British.²⁷

With better weather came better times. On April 1, 1814, each prisoner received a new outfit of clothes, including a suit of navy blue instead of the hated yellow. It came from the United States government, which also then allowed each inmate a daily allowance of twopence halfpenny, enough for three pounds of potatoes, five

²³ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 5 (Sept. 25, 1813), 71; 5 (Oct. 2, 1813), 69.

²⁴ Marion and Jack Kaminkow, *Mariners of the American Revolution* (Baltimore 1967), xv.

²⁵ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 8 (June 24, 1815), 283.

²⁶ Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 30, 65; John Greenville McNeel, "American Prisoners at Dartmoor: A Neglected Chapter of History," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, 109 (Sept. 1904), 551; McLeay to Beasley, Aug. 12, 1813, Adm 98/101: n.f.

²⁷ Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 212; Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 33.

chews of tobacco or one pot of beer.²⁸ A new prisoner, Josiah Cobb, who arrived in the summer of 1814, was surprised at the “apparent high spirits” of all the prisoners and who, when issued with his first bread ration, found it “light and very palatable” and “so much more abundant than while on shipboard, that I wondered how I should ever be enabled to get through with it.” Cobb’s satisfaction must be balanced against the lengthy complaints about food of a fellow captive, Benjamin Waterhouse, who, while admitting that the the bread and meat supplied by the British were “not bad,” found fault with their quantity and the conditions in which they were served.²⁹

The American prisoners had a comparative abundance of money: too much, according to an ex-governor of Dartmoor who, by an eccentric mode of reasoning, argued that money fostered habits of indulgence which encouraged measles and smallpox.³⁰ Apart from their allowance from the United States government, which brought in, according to one estimate, \$9,000 a month, the prisoners were paid for work organized by the prison authorities at a rate of between threepence and sixpence a day. External work would have probably been popular even if it had not offered opportunities for smuggling spirits and escape. It included building a road from Dartmoor to the nearest port, Plymouth, clearing a turnpike of snowdrifts, and farm work. To curb escape, Shortland ordered that outside workers would receive pay only at three-month intervals and all would forfeit it if any individual got away. Americans also worked as cooks, sweepers, barbers, hospital orderlies, stablemen, and—a monopoly of the blacks—lamplighters.³¹

Since employment by the British was distasteful to some and, in any case, possible only for a minority, the sailors found other ways of making money. Some did so literally, with the help of lead from the prison guttering. Some washed clothes at a halfpenny per garment. Others crushed bone to make shortening for pastry. One practiced dentistry, charging threepence for an extraction. Perhaps the

²⁸ Cobb, *Green Hand*, II, 172; Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 37, 39. This allowance, worth about \$22 a year, contrasted sharply with the \$144 that an able seaman would have earned, exclusive of prize money, in the United States Navy at the time. Langley, *Social Reform*, 78.

²⁹ Cobb, *Green Hand*, II, 7, 13; Waterhouse, *Journal*, 149, 172.

³⁰ Harris, *Dartmoor Prison*, 34.

³¹ Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 212; Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 43, 31; Board to Shortland, Mar. 11, 1814, Adm 98/228:55; Shortland to Board, Jan. 18, 1814, Mar. 28, 1814, Adm 99/250: n.f., 99/252: n.f.

commonest way for entrepreneurs to make money was to cook and sell fast food, samples of which were plumgudgeon, freco, and burgoo. Plumgudgeon comprised potato and pieces of salt fish fried in butter. Freco was a stew: bone marrow and fat mixed with meat and potatoes and thickened with barley. Burgoo was oatmeal gruel. Eaten with butter or molasses, it was well known and rather despised in the British navy. Also sold was a synthetic "coffee" brewed from burnt peas or crusts of bread. That there should have been a market for these items is testimony to the desperate need for hot refreshments created by the cold damp of Dartmoor. It is also a reminder of the monotony of the official rations and the way that they were invariably prepared. Beef and fish were boiled in a communal copper and subdivided among the prisoners' messes.³²

A main source of money circulating in the prison was the back pay and prize money paid out to those who had earned them in the Royal Navy. The British admiralty was conscientious in this respect, enquiring, for instance, about proper beneficiaries for dead American veterans of the British service, and ensuring that those sent back to the United States should claim their entitlement before leaving. The sums involved could be considerable—£1,100 in one case.³³

"Everything indicated happy feelings . . . with as good order as could be met with anywhere," wrote one new inmate of Dartmoor. Fundamental to this good order were the good systems of government that the prisoners created. Rule by committee, which was normal at the prison complex, had been previously practiced in the hulks prior to the general transfer of prisoners to Dartmoor. Benjamin Waterhouse described the system aboard the prison hulk *Crown Prince* in some detail. There the governing committee numbered twelve, as they would in the Dartmoor prison blocks. The imprisoned sailors elected them and a president. They served a four-week term. The committee on *Crown Prince* performed executive and legislative functions. Punishments they devised included fining, flogging, and confinement in "the black hole." The prisoners were sensitive to their right to experience due process of law. A sailor who was ordered to "the black hole" for gambling, a practice forbidden by committee ordinance, protested that he had been sentenced without trial and that, in any case, the type of gambling in which he had indulged

³² Board to Shortland, Oct. 13, 1814, Adm 98/228:139; Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 209-210; Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 40.

³³ Adm 98/228:162; Cobb, *Green Hand*, II, 170.

should be legal. There existed a bench of prisoner judges aboard the hulk, which included the committee of twelve and its president. The defiant sailor's protest succeeded on both counts, apparently because his eloquence convinced a majority of his fellow prisoners to side with him.³⁴ Probably this crudely democratic system was adopted with minor variations at Dartmoor, where we know from other sources that each of the four prison blocks inhabited by whites was ruled by a committee of twelve.

The greater numbers at Dartmoor necessitated a higher degree of organization than on a hulk. In the larger prison the committees had to assign men to the numerous jobs paid for by the British prison establishment, including those of barbers, sweepers, and much sought after posts as cooks. Because there was no prison newspaper, another necessary appointment was crier, who called out coming events, sometimes in rhyme,³⁵ and who pinned news announcements to walls. Yet another committee responsibility, perhaps its most important in the eyes of hungry sailors, after earlier experience of fraud, was to receive and inspect the food supplied by the contractors, copies of whose contracts were supplied to the committees by the authorities. A committee could reject the provisions if they found them unsatisfactory and appeal to the prison commandant to ensure correct allowance. A committee-appointed subcommittee of correspondence of six men was responsible for receiving the United States money allowance and for maintaining written communication with Americans on prison ships, other depots, and with the agent in London. In spite of the necessary expense of bribing a guard to mail them, Reuben Beasley was bombarded, in 1813, by a daily letter, so great were the prisoners' grievances.³⁶

There was not complete uniformity in committee practice. In prison block 7, for instance, beer sales were not monopolized by the committee, as they were in the other white prison blocks. Again, there was no slavish imitation of the pattern established on the hulks. In Dartmoor, unlike on *Crown Prince*, the judiciary and the executive committee were identical. The power of committeemen was not unfettered. Quite apart from the necessity of presentation for periodic and frequent election, there was an element of popular participation in the conduct of trials in that, unlike a naval court martial, juries

³⁴ Cobb, *Green Hand*, II, 7; Waterhouse, *Journal*, 27, 53-54.

³⁵ Waterhouse, *Journal*, 88-90.

³⁶ Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 20.

participated. They were selected by the inmates at large from a list prepared by the committee that, when acting as judges, conducted trials in the cocklofts of the prison blocks. All prisoners could attend.³⁷ When acting as a legislature, a committee used a system implying a semblance of popular assent. The crier informed the prisoners in his block of the proposed committee measure. He determined whether the majority shouted in reply "Aye!" or "Nay!" and thus whether the ordinance stood or failed.³⁸

Although a prisoner could enlist the aid of an amateur defense counsel to plead his case, he could be punished severely for violating committee-ordained house rules. A sailor convicted of the apparently minor crime of not washing could be stripped and scrubbed with sand and water, even in mid-winter. Alternatively he could be punished, navy-style, with up to dozen strokes of the cat-o'-nine-tails, according to one memorialist, although another, Joseph Valpey, recorded that a thief found guilty by a prisoner jury was sentenced to 150 lashes on his naked back.³⁹

Flogging was cruel, but it was by no means unusual punishment in the United States Navy, where it was not abolished until 1850. Under the Articles of War of 1800 no commanding officer could order, on his sole authority, more than twelve lashes, but even for serious court martial offenses, the maximum penalty was one hundred lashes. Thus informal prisoners' courts punished more savagely, if Valpey was correct, than the navy, and much more severely still than in American privateers, where punishment by flogging was rare.⁴⁰

Huge punishments were not an American monopoly. In March 1815 a prison guard bayoneted a prisoner. Shortland ordered the soldier to be punished with 400 lashes. Rougher, because more permanent, justice was the lot of turncoats. Two prisoners enlisted in the Royal Navy during the severe winter of 1813-1814. They repented of their decision and returned to Dartmoor a year later. Three prisoners at once seized them and tattooed U.S. on one cheek

³⁷ Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 20, 45.

³⁸ Cobb, *Green Hand*, II, 147.

³⁹ Benjamin F. Palmer, *The Diary of Benjamin F. Palmer, Privateersman* (New York 1914), 116; Cobb, *Green Hand*, II, 137, 156; Joseph Valpey, Jr., *Journal of Joseph Valpey, Jr. of Salem, November, 1813-April, 1815* (Detroit 1922), 22.

⁴⁰ James E. Valle, *Rocks & Shoals: Order and Discipline in the Old Navy, 1800-1861* (Annapolis 1980), 61, 80; Stivers, *Privateers and Volunteers*, 165.

and T (for traitor) on the other of each of them.⁴¹ Shortland was outraged. He had the tattooers arrested and sent in irons for trial at the Exeter assizes where, however, they were finally acquitted. In January 1815 the commandant thwarted similar tattooing of five other prisoners by sending them to the prison hospital. They were Americans from the British warship *Pelican* which, on August 13, 1813, had captured the United States brig *Argus*, whose crew were later jailed in Dartmoor. Shortland's action merely delayed vengeance. In the following month three Americans from the *Pelican* were seized while drunk and kicked and cuffed, of whom one, found for some reason more obnoxious than the others, had a paper attached to his chest on which was written A TRAITOR AND A FEDERALIST. He was taken by his assailants to a lamp-iron projecting from the prison buildings, there, it was thought, to be hanged. Captain Shortland led armed guards to his rescue.⁴²

Not all attempts to keep order, whether by the British or the prisoners, were effective. Large prison camps in many wars, including Andersonville in the American Civil War and Changi in World War II, contained lawless bands of thugs. Dartmoor was no exception. Known as the "Rough Allies," its criminals messed by themselves and combined for various types of knavery. They specialized in robbing the market stallholders, plundering other prisoners, and forging the notes of local banks. Their leader was a talented villain. He spoke several languages and was an expert counterfeiter. Although his name and nationality are unknown, he was not a citizen of the United States, where he had been tried for piracy and murder. He had flouted the authority of the committee of prison block 7 by dismissing its cooks and replacing them with his own appointees. His attempted coup d'état failed when the committee appealed to the prison authorities. Shortland intervened, placing the rebel in the cachot (black hole). In retaliation the Rough Allies made the chairman of block 7's committee hostage, but were foiled in their attempt to use him for bargaining by a rescue organized by the chairman's son and his sympathizers. After serving his sentence in

⁴¹ Palmer, *Diary*, 160; Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 77. Like the committee system, tattooing traitors had previously been practiced on the hulks. Waterhouse, *Journal*, 94.

⁴² Andrew Baird to Board, Mar. 9, 1815, Adm 99/259:n.f.; Shortland to Board, Jan. 3, 23, 1815, Adm 99/259:n.f.; Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 161; Waterhouse, *Journal*, 181.

the cachot the Rough Allies' leader transferred to another prison block where he resumed coining and counterfeiting.⁴³

His henchmen also continued former unsocial activities, but not in prison block 4, where the discipline was such that many peace-loving whites preferred to mess there. In that building was a distinct form of government—one-man rule. The man was known as King Dick. He was allegedly illiterate, but was probably the strongest man in Dartmoor.⁴⁴ If any of the men in block 4 were “dirty, drunken, or grossly negligent” or insolent, Dick changed their ways with his fists or the threat of a beating.⁴⁵ Daily he inspected the berths in the block, club in hand, a fur cap on his head.

For income to finance his government and to provide community services and, perhaps, improve his personal fortune, King Dick monopolized beer sales, taxed the shopkeepers under his control, and, most significantly, capitalized on the widespread passion for gambling from which, according to one inmate, only one out of twenty of his fellows was immune.⁴⁶ Dick supervised a variety of games of chance in the cockloft of number 4: dicing, roulette, brag, blackjack, and, most popular of all, bingo, or keeno as it was then called.⁴⁷ After the treaty ending the war was signed, discipline deteriorated and two of the white prison blocks created gambling schools but, until then, King Dick maintained a profitable monopoly.

Combined with his organizational ability, these profits enabled Dick to provide theatrical entertainment for the prisoners at large. He bought the superior scenery, costumes and props of the French prisoners of war who had previously occupied prison block 4, where they had staged plays once a month. In block 5, white Americans also staged plays, genteel comedies like *The Heiress at Law*, followed sometimes, it seems, by an afterpiece. There too a regiment of Irish regulars who, for a time, supplied guards for the depot, also put on

⁴³ Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 224, 226.

⁴⁴ King Dick's identity is almost certain. I am grateful to Reginald Horsman, who explored the question as thoroughly as existing sources will allow and kindly shared his findings. He concluded that King Dick was Richard Crafus (alias Seaver), a “stout black,” aged 23, 6'3 1/4” in height, who had been captured off Bordeaux on March 6, 1814, while serving aboard the privateer *Requin*. He did not enter Dartmoor until October 9, 1814, leaving it on June 15, 1815. Horsman to the author, Apr. 25, 1988.

⁴⁵ Waterhouse, ed., *Journal*, 164.

⁴⁶ Cobb, *Green Hand*, II, 170.

⁴⁷ Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 238.

plays.⁴⁸ A record of what dramas were produced in Dartmoor is incomplete but the blacks of block 4 undoubtedly staged *Romeo and Juliet*, *Harlequin Revived*, John Home's tragedy *Douglas*, and several pantomimes. An entrance fee of sixpence helped King Dick balance his books. More entertainment was supplied by the band of block 4, the only one known to exist among the prisoners, which played patriotic airs like "Yankee Doodle Dandy."⁴⁹

We know little about the musical tastes of American prisoners in the War of 1812 but what we do know suggests that they ran to martial and patriotic tunes of English provision. Musically, as in some other aspects of culture, the United States was still a British possession—the reverse of the "coca-colonization" of our own time. Even the ubiquitous "Yankee Doodle," the informal national anthem of the day, was allegedly composed in England in the mid-eighteenth century and sung to deride American troops. Other tunes popular among the American prisoners were the British "Rule Britannia" and "God Save Our Gracious King," which were sung to Americanized words and became "Rule Columbia" and "God Save Great Madison." The captive assistant surgeon of a privateer was shocked that the American sailors were so lacking in musical originality that they sang songs learnt from their captors that celebrated British naval heroes. "It is high time that we had new songs put in our mouths," he lamented. A similar regret was expressed by an American sailor imprisoned on Barbados where, in place of "beautiful national melodies," the sailors danced to British tunes to celebrate July 4th, 1814. On the same day, on a prison ship in the Medway, the American prisoners had to borrow a fife and drum ornamented with the royal arms of George III,⁵⁰ but there were instruments in abundance in Dartmoor, especially in the cockloft of prison block 4, where the visitor could enjoy, if he would, the sounds of clarinets, flutes, violins, flageolets, fifes, and tambourines.⁵¹

The enigmatic King Dick is hard to categorize. He was something of a martinet, something of an Emperor Jones, and something of an Al Capone, but in his association with drama and his preference for having pretty white boys in his entourage, there is a suggestion, too,

⁴⁸ Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 74; Waterhouse, *Journal*, 155.

⁴⁹ Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 238; Palmer, *Diary*, 108.

⁵⁰ Thomas H. Johnson, *The Oxford Companion to American History* (New York 1966), 883; Waterhouse, *Journal*, 78, 80, 114; Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 97.

⁵¹ Waterhouse, *Journal*, 165.

of Oscar Wilde.⁵² Here may be the appropriate place to mention the practice of homosexuality in Dartmoor, where many of the prisoners were boys of twelve and thirteen. Although existing references to it are few and oblique, there can be no doubt of its existence. "I have seen men, once respectable, give examples of vice that I cannot describe, or even name," wrote one New Englander. "I am fearful that some of our young boys, may carry home . . . vices they never had any idea of when they left . . ." ⁵³ Another prisoner wrote moralistic verses expressing the same fear:

Place not the boy with those who have not shame
With some whom nature shudders e'en to name
Then better doom him to the lions' den
Than to this cursed abode of wicked men.⁵⁴

Few warnings against immorality came from clergymen in Dartmoor, for the quality of organized religion in the depot was generally dismal. There was an official chaplain, the Reverend Mr. Mason, but during most of the time that Americans inhabited the depot, the church and parsonage were under construction. In November 1814 it was reported to the prime minister, the earl of Liverpool, that no divine service had been held for the prisoners in eighteen months, and English philanthropists who sent in Bibles for the prisoners stopped doing so when they found that many of them were sold to outsiders.⁵⁵

The prison chaplain may have neglected his duty, but evangelical services were regularly held in building number 4. The black minister who regularly presided, known only by his first name, Simon, earned the grudging respect even of Benjamin Waterhouse, who normally derided blacks. He admitted that Simon gave "good advice to his brethren," that his preaching "had an imposing cast," and that the British officers had heard Simon preach "without any expressions of ridicule." Simon was seconded by a deacon/choirmaster named John, who had once been a servant to one of the royal princes, the duke of Kent, in whose household he had attended Anglican services. John had also known such services in the Royal Navy and conceived that, in Dartmoor as in his previous experience, prayers should be read

⁵² Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 186.

⁵³ Waterhouse, *Journal*, 174.

⁵⁴ Harris, *Dartmoor*, 43.

⁵⁵ Board to Shortland, Nov. 10, 1814, Adm 98/228:n.f.; Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 191-192.

from the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer. Simon disagreed, arguing that prayers should spring impromptu from the heart.

King Dick, who seems to have strongly supported services in his domain and desired no schism among his subjects, solved the dispute by summoning, as arbitrator, a Methodist preacher who enjoyed the hospitality of building number 4's pulpit, the only one in the depot, apparently, to supplement Simon's regular Sunday services. Predictably, the Methodist backed Simon in his theological dispute with John, who accepted the decision with good grace.⁵⁶ Their services were not perfunctory. The performance of the black choir was a major attraction for inmates from all over the depot, and Simon is known to have converted at least two white prisoners.⁵⁷

Although Waterhouse thought it worth noting that the black preacher, Simon, could read, the way the common crier was used suggests that inability to read was widespread. Nevertheless several newspapers circulated irregularly among the prisoners. The guards allowed them access to the Federalist newspapers printed in Boston and also to the anti-American London *Times*. If Waterhouse may be believed, the prisoners were predominantly Republican, so much so that the word "Federalist" was equal in odium to "Traitor" and "Informer." Waterhouse's favorite paper was the English *Political Register* for the wit and intelligence with which its Whig editor lambasted the Liverpool ministry. The prison authorities must have practiced censorship because William Cobbett's *Register* had to be smuggled into Dartmoor baked inside bread loaves.⁵⁸ English newspapers were costly, even in normal circumstances, and for this even more expensive expedient, several sailors would pool their resources. After being covertly enjoyed, the *Register* would be destroyed before attracting the notice of jailers.⁵⁹

The degree of literacy among the sailors, especially the many who came from New England, evoked surprise among the British. More solid reading than newspapers was available from a circulating library in prison building number 7. A prisoner there had used his Royal Navy prize money to buy its stock and charged a small sum for the loan of books. That the sailors used their allowance—which could

⁵⁶ Waterhouse, *Journal*, 105-108.

⁵⁷ Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 196.

⁵⁸ Waterhouse, *Journal*, 105-108. Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 199.

⁵⁹ British newspapers were twice the price of their American counterparts. Waterhouse, *Journal*, 39; Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 175.

have been used for food, beer, or tobacco —to rent books, dents the stereotype of the noncommissioned tars of the day. They were also ready to pay for education. Lessons were offered for a shilling (about five days' allowance) a month. The chief school was building number 1, a white prison block.⁶⁰ The prime purpose of the school was to teach the three Rs to the many illiterate young boys in Dartmoor. They paid a reduced rate of sixpence a month.⁶¹

It was natural that most of the classes organized for the adult prisoners to speed their empty hours were practical. Certainly there were courses in philosophy, political economy, and naval tactics, but fencing, dancing, and music classes probably attracted more students. The blacks excelled in music and white prisoners readily became their students, as they did for the boxing taught by King Dick in building number 4, for boxing was a popular pastime in all the prison blocks.⁶²

In spite of the classes, probably more intellectual effort went into devising escape than anything else. Tunneling was one possibility and tunnels were begun from buildings numbers 4, 5, and 6. Since they could not be dug secretly, all prisoners were told that the penalty for informing of their existence would be death by hanging. Excavated earth was disposed of in the water supply, or daubed on the prison walls and covered with whitewash. Without his being directly told, Shortland suspected that a tunnel existed in building number 5, found it, and banished all the white inmates of that building and of number 6 to unoccupied prison blocks. The blacks of number 4 were not suspected by Shortland and were thus able to continue their promisingly long tunnel, but a white informer betrayed its existence before it was complete. Despite one prisoner's allegation that King Dick was "a great favorite with the authorities of the depot"—perhaps because of better order in block 4—it was the inmates of that building who hid, in black disguise, one Simeon Hays, who had escaped from solitary confinement in the cachot. Hays's safety from reconfinement was brought about by mass action of all prisoners. Shortland had closed the market to the prisoners until Hays was given up. The result was a strike of the prisoners. They would do no work

⁶⁰ Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 81.

⁶¹ Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 197-199.

⁶² Cobb, *Green Hand*, II, 164; Waterhouse, *Journal*, 167. In postwar years Dick ran a boxing school in Boston. Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 187; Palmer, *Diary*, 168.

for the authorities. Shortland then relented, allowing the market to reopen and Hays to remain with his comrades.⁶³

So large and strong were the prison buildings and so low and weak the morale of some of the guards, that the most practicable method of escape was to bribe the sentries. While the prisoners believed, probably wrongly, that no soldier was sent to Dartmoor except as a punishment, it is certainly unlikely that, while the war against Napoleon raged, the war office would have sent crack units to guard prisoners of war. The least disciplined and most vindictive were the militia regiments—at one time the Derbyshire Militia and, later, the Somersetshire Militia. It was from a militiaman that one prisoner, a former lieutenant of the privateer *Rattlesnake*, obtained the countersign with a bribe and subsequently walked from the prison disguised as a guard.⁶⁴ Contact between prisoners and guards, as Shortland discovered rather late in his tenure of office, were the lamplighters, all of whom were from building number 4.⁶⁵

Mention must be made of the notorious “Dartmoor Massacre,” although a full account is impossible here. In brief, the War of 1812 ended but the Americans remained in Dartmoor. Once the Ghent treaty was signed, Shortland appeared to relax, even allowing the Stars and Stripes to fly in the depot, but when prisoners made a hole in a wall leading to the barrack square, where arms were stored, he thought a mass escape could be planned. It is uncertain who, if anybody, gave the command, but in restoring order, the guards opened fire. Seven prisoners were killed and forty-six wounded.⁶⁶

Despite the infamy that thereafter attached to Shortland as the Nero of Dartmoor, he had not presided over a hell camp, and the quality of life there contrasted favorably with the hulks, where neither alcohol, candles, nor newspapers were permitted. It is easy, nevertheless, to find horror stories. Some concern disease. Americans were struck by pneumonia, rubella, smallpox, and measles, and Isaac Cotgrave denied some of the sick admittance to the prison hospital,

⁶³ Cobb, *Green Hand*, II, 44, 202; Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 66, 111-116, 147-148.

⁶⁴ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 8 (July 15, 1815), 346-347. The privateer *Rattlesnake* was a 14-gun brig captured off Nova Scotia on June 22, 1814.

⁶⁵ Only on February 18, 1815, did Shortland replace the blacks with troops as lamplighters. Shortland to Board, Feb. 16, 18, 1815, Adm 99/259: n.f.

⁶⁶ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 8 (June 10, 1815), 262; Adm 103/88:71, 81; Adm 99/259: n.f.

which at times contained as many as 221 American patients.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, by the standards of previous and some later wars, Dartmoor was a healthy place, despite a death toll of 331.⁶⁸ The yards were “well paved, lighted . . . swept and scraped as often as was necessary for either health or appearance,” and there was “never failing” fresh water via two stone-lined canals running through them which supplied two fountains, one for cooking, another for washing. The systematic inoculation of prisoners against smallpox undoubtedly reduced deaths from the disease, though less than it might have done, since some prisoners refused immunization. Above all there was a humane and sympathetic physician. None of the prisoners had a bad word for the Irish Doctor George Magrath, although the transport board criticized his treatments as outdated.⁶⁹ Old-fashioned or not, Magrath was at least a qualified physician, which was not always the case with the surgeons appointed, as required by law, to practice on all American privateers. Magrath replied to the board’s strictures by sending them a testimonial of gratitude from the prisoners.⁷⁰

If Dartmoor was no hell-hole, neither was it a Holiday Inn. Confinement, lack of privacy, a desolate location, poor ventilation, a lack of worthwhile employment, and grim weather made a severe ordeal inevitable for all prisoners. Maladministration made it worse. Shortland needed more assistants and, if he had been given authority over the military, the massacre might have been avoided.⁷¹ Beasley’s negligence also heightened prisoners’ woes.

Shortland could have been a worse commandant. Unquestionably more attentive to the inmates than his predecessor, he not only did not ban, as Cotgrave had done, prisoners’ petitions to Beasley and the United States Congress, but personally undertook their dispatch. His letters to the transport board made sure that it was informed of prisoner needs. Shortland insisted that the prison doctor and his

⁶⁷ Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 12, 33; Board to Shortland, Oct. 5, Nov. 23, 1814, Feb. 22, 1815, Adm 98/228:141, 161, 195; Shortland to Board, Feb. 20, 1814, Adm 99/252: n.f.; Board to Shortland, Dec. 12, 1814, Adm 98:168.

⁶⁸ *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 8 (June 24, 1815), 283. For instance, of 61,000 Allied prisoners of war whom the Japanese employed on the Burma-Siam railroad in World War II, 12,399 died. In the Korean War, 2,701 of 7,140 Americans taken prisoner died in captivity.

⁶⁹ Cobb, *Green Hand*, II, 180; Adm 98/222:171; Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 23; Waterhouse, *Journal*, 152.

⁷⁰ Hawthorne, ed., *Yankee Privateer*, 44; Board to Shortland, Apr. 17, 1815, Adm 98/228:211.

⁷¹ Andrew Baird to Board, Nov. 7, 1814, Adm 105/21: n.f.

assistant should visit the prison blocks daily and, on taking over from Cotgrave, had ordered into the hospital all the sick who had previously been excluded. Finally, after the Rough Allies had made the peaceful operation of the market impossible, rather than closing the market, Shortland had initiated a system whereby two prisoners a day were delegated to make purchases there for their fellow inmates.⁷²

And yet, whatever Shortland did required the endorsement of the admiralty's transport board, which seemed more exercised by equity than kindness. For example, although it ordered for sick American prisoners identical treatment to that provided for British ratings, it allowed United States prisoners aboard British ships only two thirds of the rations that serving British ratings received. That was the scale for non-combatants of any nationality, including Britons, it declared, but Americans thought it either a deliberately unjust policy designed to degrade them or a device to lure them into volunteering for the Royal Navy. Again, the board denied shrouds to dead Americans because it authorized no shrouds for dead British sailors either.⁷³ Without exception the board approved Shortland's probably mistaken policy of punishment through curtailment of rations but otherwise there was no close supervision of life within Dartmoor.

That life was essentially devised by the prisoners themselves and was quite remarkable. A large body of almost completely unofficered men from all parts of the American Union, sensibly given considerable autonomy by authorities who were short of administrators and reliant on inferior guards, managed to develop in four of the five inhabited prison blocks various but similar governmental forms, embodying features of the American constitutional tradition. Election of officials, popular consent to regulations, and adherence to due process in trials were observed principles. The prisoners were not remarkable for sophistication or education but clearly, a quarter of a century after the Philadelphia Convention, they were sticklers for some of its leading tenets. Exceptional were the Rough Allies, who were only imperfectly controlled by the majority.

The difficulty of maintaining order in an overcrowded society made for severe punishments, even though orderly legal processes were attempted. On fellow inmates the prisoners' courts ordered

⁷² Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 33.

⁷³ Transport Board Regulations, McLeay to Beasley, Nov. 19, 1812, Board to Shortland, Nov. 7, 1814, Adm 98/292:5, 98/291:5, 98/228:155.

flogging, a punishment known to civilian courts at the time. What was unusual at Dartmoor was the large number of lashes ordered for what, in civilian life, would have been minor offenses. Even more extreme was tattooing, which seems to have been informally decided, without due process, but which was reserved exclusively for alleged traitors and was condemned by no prison memorialist. Treason and Federalism seem to have been equated by the prisoners, even by the many who came from New England, where Federalism was strongest. There must have been many like Benjamin Waterhouse. From a Federalist family, he was anti-Republican and rather Anglophile when he entered the naval service. These feelings were completely reversed by his naval and prison experiences and by the Federalists' attitude in the war which, as is well known, hastened the demise of Federalism as a viable political party. His grievance against the Federalists was less their secessionist tendencies than their complacency toward the impressment and subsequent imprisonment of Americans.⁷⁴ Among the hundreds of Americans in Dartmoor who had been transferred from the Royal Navy, some with eight, twelve, or even eighteen years of service to George III, there were many who had hoped for release, not incarceration, when the United States went to war with Britain. Understandably bitter, they marched to Dartmoor wearing the sign "British Gratitude for Past Services" fixed to their caps.

That the Dartmoor prisoners did not become so absorbed in their personal plights that they lost their sympathy for the broader objects of the war is evidenced by the slogans that they sewed on defiant banners: "All Canada or Dartmoor for Life" and "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights." The nationalism stimulated by the war and enduring into captivity did not express itself merely in anti-British sentiment; it had a darker xenophobic cast. Charles Andrews wrote of mass fights between French and American prisoners and had contempt for Jews.⁷⁵ Waterhouse stereotyped "the thick skulled plodding Dane," and generalized that "next to the French, I believe the Irish the next in vicious action."⁷⁶

Admirable by contrast was the effectiveness of the widely respected system of elected committees, through which internal government was managed equitably, negotiations with the

⁷⁴ Waterhouse, *Journal*, 9, 62-67.

⁷⁵ Andrews, *Dartmoor Prison*, 36, 45, 66, 85, 96, 137.

⁷⁶ Waterhouse, *Journal*, 57, 91.

commandant carried on, and contact kept, however tenuously, with the American agent in London. It might be assumed that the Americans borrowed the committee system from their French fellow inmates, since committees were such an egregious feature of the French Revolution. Alternatively it could be supposed that the system derived from those Americans transferred from the Royal Navy who would have known of or, just possibly, participated in the sailors' committees behind the Nore and Spithead mutinies of 1797. There is no evidence of any such derivation. Much more likely is that the prisoners' committees derived from New England civilian practice, so much so that Benjamin Waterhouse of Massachusetts occasionally wrote the word "selectman" instead of "committee man," although in New England towns the number of selectmen was smaller than the dozen customary in Dartmoor. It is interesting that the blacks, who eschewed committees, apparently achieved a workable system which was as efficient and in some ways superior through one-man rule in building number 4. Nevertheless, if conditions improved in Dartmoor between 1813 and 1815, as they undoubtedly did, it was largely through the system developed by the majority of the prisoners. Other assistant factors were the receipt of a regular allowance, welcome job opportunities opened up by the departure of the French, and Cotgrave's replacement by a more enlightened commandant. But of more importance was the brake on stealing by prisoners' courts, the strict supervision of rations from contractors, the direction of correspondence, control of marketing, and the diffusion of news, all of which were the result of committee work.