

# Nathaniel Mayo: Documenting an American Merchant Seaman of the Early Nineteenth Century

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## Abstract

Early nineteenth century American merchant seamen roamed the Atlantic World and many are well documented in the libraries and archives of the countries warring around the Atlantic at the time, as well as in the archives and papers of the American consuls in those countries. This study is of one seaman, Nathaniel Mayo of Massachusetts. Town records and the Federal census give little more than his name and that he was a seaman. However, French archives reveal that he was a mate on a vessel evading the strictures of the Embargo Act, was captured and became a prisoner of war. Consular papers contain letters from him and his father. State Department correspondence and French archives both show that he was on the crew of the privateer, the *True-Blooded Yankee*, while British archives describe his imprisonment in England. Court and prize records in Massachusetts show that he returned home to make a claim for his prize money. Hundreds more American seamen appear in Atlantic World records and archives; studying them could shed quite a lot of light on their hitherto anonymous lives.

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Documenting American merchant seamen of the first twenty or thirty years of the nineteenth century is quite difficult. Town registers of births, marriages and deaths may tell the three basic events of their lives but nothing more. Looking beyond registers, the Seaman's Protection Certificates carried a description of the man but little more; crew lists of merchant vessels were rare and few were preserved; vessel registration gave the names of a ship's owner and master only. Generally, genealogical and shipping records in American archives concerning this generation of merchant seamen are limited, yet further documentation exists elsewhere on many of these men, particularly in times of war.

From 1803 to 1815, most of Europe was at war, fighting with or against Napoleonic France. Toward the end of this period, the United States was at war with Great Britain. At the same time, and continuing for quite a while afterward, emerging South American countries were at war with Spain and Portugal. Throughout it all, American merchant vessels and privateers wove between blockades, disguised their nationality and tried to evade other countries' privateers in order to trade with and profit from all belligerents. American merchant seamen could be found on these vessels

and on vessels of every nationality that sailed the Atlantic. When these merchant vessels and merchant seamen were caught up in the war, they were documented; many of the surviving records can be found in American, British, European and Caribbean archives. Research in these collections may lead to the discovery that a mariner had an extraordinary and documented life, such as that of Nathaniel Mayo of Brewster, Massachusetts.

Brewster registers show that Nathaniel was the first child of Elnathan Mayo and Patia Lincoln, and that he was born on the 7th of April 1787.<sup>1</sup> Thirty years later, Nathaniel Mayo and Sophia Remick registered their intention to marry on the 1st of February 1817.<sup>2</sup> Their marriage record seems not to have survived, but the marriage surely took place as they had at least seven children, all born and registered in Brewster.<sup>3</sup> Nathaniel Mayo and his family appear in the 1830 Federal census for Brewster<sup>4</sup> and in the 1840 Federal census for Scituate, Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> The 1850 census shows Sophia as the head of the household (the name is spelt Mayhew).<sup>6</sup> Sophia died in 1857 and is buried in the Groveland Cemetery in Scituate, as are four of her children, Abraham, Adeline, Emily and Julia Mayo.<sup>7</sup> Nathaniel Mayo's grave is not there. No death record could be found for Nathaniel. Some online books give his date of death as 1844, without citing a source, and it certainly would seem that he died at some time between the 1840 and the 1850 censuses. That he is not buried in the Groveland Cemetery with his wife and children may indicate that he died too far away for his body to have been sent home, or that his body was not found.

The archives and libraries of at least three countries, France, Great Britain and the United States, document Nathaniel Mayo's life as a mariner and prisoner of war from 1810 to 1815 and show how much more than the basic information above can be learned about merchant seamen of this period.

On the 26th of October 1810, Nathaniel Mayo was the mate on the *Santa Maria*, a three-masted ship, master Asa Lewis, sailing from Amelia Island and probably bound for England, with a cargo of ship's stores. At the entry to the English Channel, the *Santa Maria* was captured by the French privateer, the *Furet*, captain Henry Gautier, on her first cruise out of Saint Malo. Gautier sent the *Santa Maria* in to the small cove of Toul An Héry, perhaps to wait out an autumn storm or perhaps to avoid the Royal Navy vessels that had been blockading French ports since 1806. Three days later, the prize arrived at the larger port of Morlaix.<sup>8</sup>

When a prize vessel was brought into a French port, all of the prize's papers (logbooks, ship passports and sea letters, crew lists, bills of lading and all other papers concerning the cargo, etc.) were confiscated and used as evidence. Whether or not the prize carried a crew list, the French officials made their own list of the men captured from a vessel, recording for each his name, place of birth, position on board, and age. Crew or passengers were clearly identified as such. The privateer's officers gave statements describing exactly how the capture took place, what flags were shown at what point, what the cargo was, what papers the prize vessel was carrying and, most of all, what were the true nationalities of the vessel, her crew and her cargo. (It was a point of great contention but French law at the time required that the flag of the vessel, the majority of her crew and all of her cargo be of the same nationality.) Interviews of a couple of members of the crew were a standard procedure, following a prescribed list of questions about the capture that mirror

almost identical questions in the procedures followed in British prize law.<sup>9</sup> Based on all of the evidence, statements and interviews, the Prize Court would determine whether or not the prize could legitimately be kept. If so, it was termed a “good prize”, “une bonne prise”.

The crew list of the *Santa Maria* made by the French officials shows eleven men, nine of whom were American, including the mate, Nathaniel Mayo, "of Boston". One, John Smith, was Danish and one, a seventeen-year-old named Joseph Ximenes, was from Amelia Island. The vessel was flying a Spanish flag. The cargo, of finished masts, staves, yards, paddles, and squared timber, looked suspiciously to be of American origin. Christopher Ward describes generally what was almost certainly also the *Santa Maria's* case in his article on the use of Amelia Island as a depot by American merchants selling to the British.<sup>10</sup> The American Embargo Act of 1807 prohibited American merchants trading with any of the European belligerents. This, coupled with the fact that Spain, crippled by the Peninsular War, could not police East Florida or prevent smuggling from Saint Augustine and Amelia Island, led some merchants wishing to evade the law to ship goods to Amelia Island where the cargo would be labelled as originating in Spanish Florida, then shipped to England. With her American crew, Spanish name and flag, and likely American cargo, the *Santa Maria's* 1810 voyage would seem to have been just such an Embargo Act evasion. The Brest Prize Court judged the *Santa Maria* a good prize on the 12th of December 1810. She was sold at auction the following March, with the French Navy taking most of the stores, except the masts.<sup>11</sup>

The captain and crew, held in jail in Morlaix, vigorously denied the facts of the case. On the 18th of November, Nathaniel Mayo and two others of the crew wrote to Jonathan Russell, the American chargé d'affaires in Paris, asking him to help them.

"Honored Sir,

We have taken the liberty of writing to you to inform you of our distressed situation, for we were captured on the 6th of October [French records say the 26th] by the Furet Privateer and brought in to Morlaix and imprisoned as slaves, which we think very hard as we all are Americans and have all got good protections to shew, and never knew that the ship was under Spanish colors, for we understood that she belonged to Rhode Island, and we are informed by the Commissary General of Police that we should be cleared provided we were claimed. Therefore Good Sir, We trust that your ardent Zeal for your Country and your being our only Succour in this part of the World, that you will clear us .... we understand that Mr. Asa P. Lewis Of Boston has wrote to you, but we cannot tell wether he has mentioned us or not... "<sup>12</sup>

The first signature to the above letter is that of "Nathaniel Mayo - C. Cod - Massachusetts". The others were William Potts of Wilmington, Delaware and John Young of Eastport, Massachusetts. In a post script they added that "We are all that remains here of the

ship's crew<sup>13</sup> and we can assure your excellency that we all shipped in St. Mary [St. Marys, Georgia, just across the border of Florida] in the United States".

On the 29th of November, they wrote again to Russell:

"Honored Sir

We are sorry to trouble you so often but we are afraid of being marched to the Depot....We can assure you Sir that we all shipped in the United States and we were then informed that she [the *Santa Maria*] belonged to Rhodes Island and we humbly implore your Protection.

We are all furnished with Good American Protections...."<sup>14</sup>

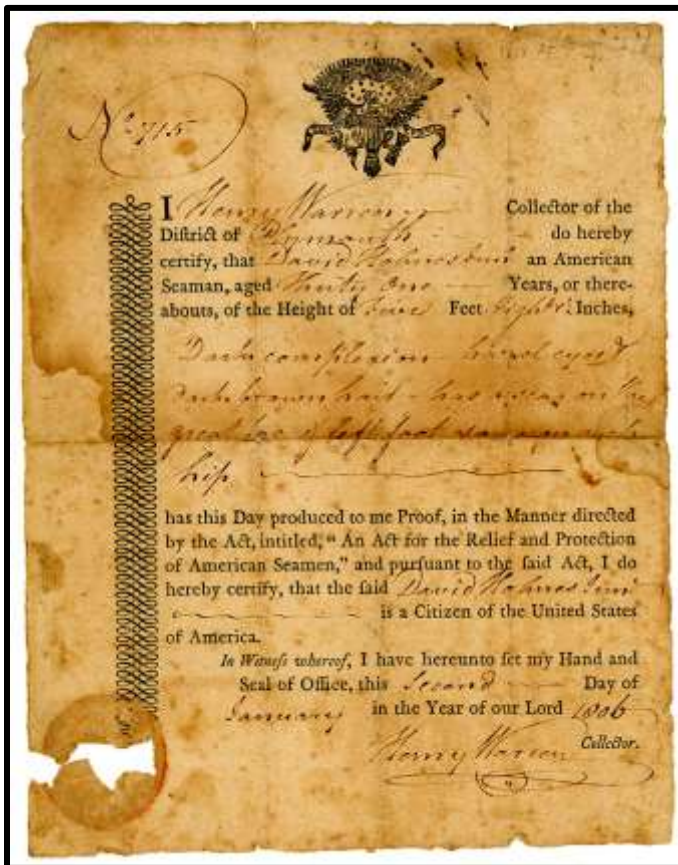


Figure 1 Example of a Seaman's Protection Certificate, Plymouth, MA 1806. VFM 1637 G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum.

Later, they and the captain tried claiming that they were not on the crew of the *Santa Maria* but had been passengers on her. Lewis asserted that young Joseph Ximenes was the captain.<sup>15</sup>

Their fear "of being marched to the Depot" was justified and helps to explain their urgency. If the capture of the *Santa Maria* had been ruled illegal, (if, for example, she had been an American and thus, neutral, vessel bound for a port in a country that was not one of France's enemies) all of the crew would have been released and the vessel and her cargo restored to Captain Lewis. They would have been able to carry on their voyage to their destination. If the men had been passengers, and thus, not working for or trading with the enemy, they might have been released. Since the *Santa Maria* was condemned as a good prize and since the original list made by the French showed that all men were

clearly members of the crew, that Lewis was the true captain, "capitaine reçu", and that Ximenes was only nominally the captain, "porteur d'expédition" they were now prisoners of war.

It is clear that they believed that their "Protections", their Seaman's Protection Certificates, would prove their American citizenship and that they would consequently be released, whether they had been crew or passengers. This was why they placed such emphasis on the documents, as did the United States consuls. The consuls were required by law to provide aid to "distressed" American seamen in foreign ports; in wartime France, their first task was to confirm that the seamen seeking aid were, in fact, American. The Seaman's Protection Certificate was the primary document for proving their nationality.<sup>16</sup> The United States Vice-Consul at Morlaix, Jean Diot, saw and verified their "Protections" and sent a list of the certificate numbers to Russell in Paris. Nathaniel Mayo's was number 7880, signed by Benjamin Lincoln, the customs collector for the Port of Boston.

Mayo had got word to his father of his capture. Elnathan Mayo immediately sent proofs of his son's birth and citizenship to Russell, asking that he "must beg your kind interference in getting him released & you will oblige his Afflicted Parents."<sup>17</sup> Armed with all of these proofs, Russell requested from the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Duc de Cadore, that Mayo and the others be released. Cadore checked with the Minister for Marine, Denis Decrès, who had his staff check the original crew list of the prize again. "Their names are on the crew list of the Spanish ship, *Santa Maria*," he wrote bluntly, "they are prisoners of war".<sup>18</sup> Though the men's nationality as American was accepted and though America was a neutral nation in the wars of Europe, this was irrelevant. In French law, they were captured on an enemy vessel, thus were working for the enemy. In addition, they were probably trading with the enemy, thus were aiding the enemy. For both of these reasons, they would remain prisoners of war and would be sent to one of the prison camps, or depots.

While they had awaited the judgement on the prize, Diot had been able to post a bond for them. After five weeks in what was nearly a dungeon, Nathaniel Mayo and the others were allowed to leave the jail on the 4th of December and could wait in an inn, so long as they maintained good behavior. It was a common complaint from vice-consuls that they could not afford the costs of food and lodging, as well as the bail bonds, for the American seamen who had been captured, and their correspondence to consuls and to the Secretary of State is filled with requests for reimbursement. Diot was no different; he could not pay for all of the lodging, clothing and food needed by the men of the *Santa Maria*. By the time that they were returned to the Morlaix jail in February 1811, the coldest and windiest month of the year, they were in a desperate state, as Diot reported to Russell.

"...I have restored them to the control of the Military Commandant, who reinstated them in Gaol...where they have the Scanty allowance of Prisoners of War, being even destitute of Cloathing; ...these unfortunate men are really to be pityed, The more So as they appear to me to be Innocent of the Fraud [that the vessel was sailing under a false flag] used upon them & Which hath brought them in their actual dismal predicament...."<sup>19</sup>

In this wretched state, the men began their march to the depots. Americans were held in the same depots as British prisoners of war. Officers were held at separate depots from those where seamen were held. Most of the crew were sent to the seamen's depot at Cambrai. Joseph Ximenes was probably sent to one of the depots for Spanish prisoners. Captain Asa Lewis and mate Nathaniel Mayo were marched, by way of Rennes, to the depot for captains and officers at Longwy, in northeastern France, a distance of about 850 kilometers, or nearly 530 miles. The marches were harsh. Prisoners were marched from dawn to dusk, in all weather, often chained together. At first, the daily march was rather short, until the prisoners became accustomed to walking all day, but soon the stages became longer. They were allowed a rest at midday. Their guards had the funds to buy food for the prisoners, but they did not always do so. They slept where they could, in local jails, army barracks, dungeons or barns along the way. When they arrived at the depot at last, they often were in rags and barefoot, lame, starved, and their health ruined.<sup>20</sup>

Mayo and Lewis arrived at the Longwy depot on the 8th of June 1811.<sup>21</sup> No record describing their condition has survived, but either the march or prison conditions or both killed Lewis, at the age of twenty-six, within eighteen months.<sup>22</sup>

The prison depot of Longwy was described in the memoirs of William Story, who had arrived there a few months before Nathaniel Mayo did:

“Longwy is a very strong fortress, and is on the frontier of France. The town is very small and inconsiderable; the principal buildings are caserns, [barracks], which are calculated to contain a numerous garrison...The population is only fourteen hundred, and the number of prisoners, when all arrived, was about fifteen hundred.”<sup>23</sup>

Story says that some prisoners were allowed to live in town, renting rooms in the homes of the residents, but their lives were not much easier.

“The houses of the town formed a neat square of about one hundred and fifty yards, within which was the only place that we were allowed to walk...We were mustered three times a day, without any exemption, except in case of sickness. If any person neglected to come, he was taken to the prison for twenty-four hours, where if he slept on straw, he had to pay fifteen sous, and in proportion if he had a bed, &c.”<sup>24</sup>

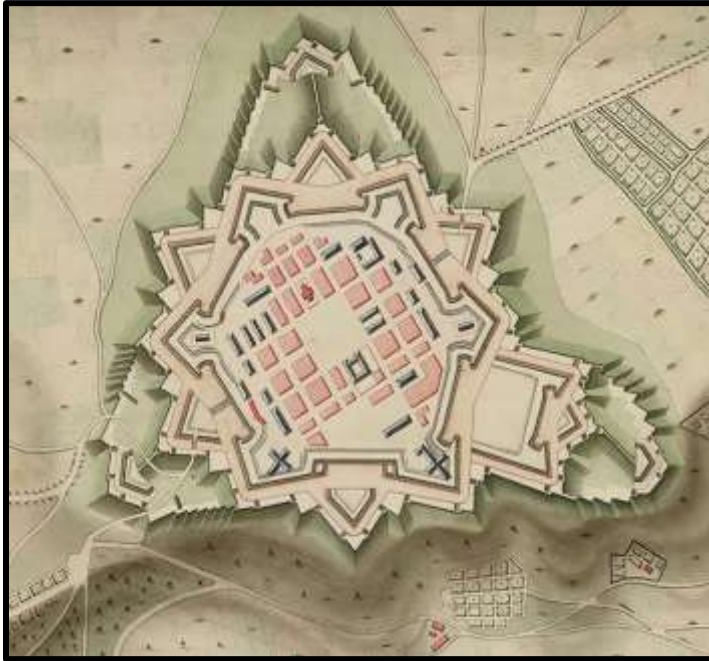


Figure 2 Longwy in 1745. Wikimedia Commons.

The prison had only nine guards, not enough to control all of the prisoners, who outnumbered the townspeople. Inevitably, there were escapes. A few weeks after Mayo and Lewis arrived, on the 14th and on the 20th of July 1811, a number of British merchant marine captains escaped. All were recaptured.<sup>25</sup>

After the escapes, the Commandant of the town (as opposed to that of the prison) was vigilant in attempting to control the prisoners granted permission to live in or just to walk in town. Anyone caught violating the evening curfew was:

"...wantonly hunted down, with inhumanity driven at the point of a bayonet into a dirty cell called the Violon to pass the night the floor of which is covered with the most nauseous filth, the walls emitting unwholesome vapours from their humidity, and an aperture at the top admitting the free circulation of the cold night air are sufficient to endanger the life the most healthy person, and in one or more instances, persons almost succumbed with cold and in the morning be condemned to a five days imprisonment in the Town jail."<sup>26</sup>

It is not likely that, as a mere mate, Mayo was allowed to live in town and no document has been found to show that he did so. More likely, he spent his time within the prison walls, perhaps permitted to walk around the town. Amongst the 1500 prisoners, only about thirty-five of them were recorded as being American and it might be presumed that they formed a tightly knit group. Possibly, he was not among those who suffered the most; if his father were able to send money to him, he could have bought clothes and better food, improving his chances of survival. Soon after the escapes, on the 24th of July, he wrote again to Jonathan Russell, thanking him for forwarding to him in prison a letter from his father, and changing his request for help to be separate from that of Asa Lewis's. "His case was quite different from mine," he wrote, perhaps indicating that it was Lewis who arranged the false flags of the *Santa Maria*. "I hope it may be in your power," he continues, "to procure me my liberty, at all events I confide in your answer conscious you will use every endeavour to liberate an unfortunate countryman from the bonds of captivity."<sup>27</sup> It was to no avail; he was not released.

A year later, on the 18th of June 1812, the United States declared war against Great Britain, inaugurating the War of 1812. Suddenly, France and the United States, if not allies, at least shared a common enemy, and American prisoners of war in France found they were now incarcerated with their enemies, the British. The lives of Mayo and the other American prisoners at Longwy would have become most uncomfortable, as was happening in the English depots across the country. "Several letters," wrote one United States consul to the Secretary of State, "...mentioned the ill treatment the American prisoners experience from the English in the depots since the intelligence of the Declaration of War..."<sup>28</sup>

On the 26th of June, the United States government authorized privateering against British vessels. The community of American captains and merchants living in France were quick to jump at the chance at wealth offered by privateering, and they purchased and armed a number of vessels, among them the *Saratoga*, the *Leo*, and the *True-Blooded Yankee*. The United States Minister to France, Joel Barlow, had received from Washington eight blank Letters of Marque to issue to these American privateers based in France, and all were used almost immediately.<sup>29</sup> The co-owners of the *True-Blooded Yankee*, Henry Preble and Nathan Haley, both of whom had been resident in France from the 1790s, received their Letter of Marque on the 19th of December 1812.<sup>30</sup> Preble, (who was the younger brother of Commodore Edward Preble,) was to act as the agent and accountant, the "armateur", while Haley was to captain the privateer, something at which he was quite experienced at doing from French ports.

A privateer the size of the *True-Blooded Yankee* required a crew of about 150 men, as eight or ten would be sent off with each captured vessel to sail her to a port. Haley had hired officers and some seamen, but finding enough American seamen in the ports at that moment proved difficult. The threat of war had caused many seamen to take the first possible ship home and others to sign on to French privateers. Barlow wrote to the French authorities requesting that Haley be given permission to take American seamen from the prison depots to man his privateer.<sup>31</sup> The Ministers of External Relations and of War supported the plan; the Minister of Marine was fiercely opposed to it. In the end, the Emperor Napoleon approved it and the order for the release of nearly one hundred American prisoners was given by the Minister of War on the 17th of January 1813. Nathaniel Mayo, still at Longwy, was amongst the released.<sup>32</sup>

It seems that the men were simply put out of the depots, probably given a "feuille de route", (a pass to get to Brest,) where the vessel was waiting, and nothing more. Preble and Haley, probably through a local agent, paid for their food and lodging as they marched from their various prisons toward the Brittany coast.<sup>33</sup> One United States consul wrote that what must have seemed a rather frightening mob of about one hundred men "in a wretched state" were descending on Brest.<sup>34</sup> Most of the men were coming from the prison depot at Arras, so Mayo, coming from 500 miles to the east with some seven other seamen, may not have been amongst them, or may have joined them only toward the end of their march. Once he did, he would have encountered two others from the original crew of the *Santa Maria* and who had been in jail with him in Morlaix, William Potts and Thomas Walker.



When the seamen arrived, the privateer owners bought all of them new clothes.<sup>35</sup> Accounts differ but the final complement was something between 150 and 175 men, of whom about twenty were French marines and the rest American seamen (and a few Irishmen). The addition of the French marines was probably a wise move as the ex-prisoners were nearly all merchant seamen, not naval sailors trained as gunners or to fight, and were not in peak condition after their years in prison.

The *True-Blooded Yankee* sailed from Brest on her first privateering cruise between the 21st of February and the 2nd of March.<sup>36</sup> She headed for the Isles of Scilly and St George's Channel, which meant Haley was after the trade between England and Ireland and the vessels to and from the busy and wealthy ports of Liverpool and Bristol. On the 4th of March, she took her first prize. On the 5th, she took five more prizes, the last of which was the *Fame*, boarded by the *True-Blooded Yankee's* lieutenant, and Preble's nephew, Thomas Oxnard. The next day, Nathaniel Mayo was assigned to the *Fame's* prize crew as mate. They were to take her north, around Scotland, to Norway. As soon as they arrived at Bergen, the cargo was taken out and put in government warehouses and sealed. On the 12th of April, the Prize Court took the customary statements, in the presence of the United States Vice-Consul at Bergen who provided translators. The prize master, Joseph Langford of Massachusetts, described the capture and voyage in which Mayo had taken part.

"...this Privateer went out from Brest on a Cruize having 14 Carronades and 4 Sixpounders aboard and 150 men. The 5th of March, the *Fame*, the Prize in question, was captured in lat: 53° N off Dublin, coming from Belfast in Ireland, and bound to Bristol, a Brig of 130 Tons burden, laden with Linens, Pork, Hydes, and Tallow....The Prize was manned by the....Prizemaster, one Mate and 5 American Sailors, likewise two Englishmen [they were Irish]...in the meantime, 3 english ships of war approached which obliged the Prize to set sail to escape....some of the goods are damaged by the vessel being leaky."<sup>37</sup>

All of the prize crew signed Langford's statement, confirming that this was a correct description of the events, the first signature being that of "Nathaniel Major [sic], from Massachusetts, of the Protestant Religion, 25 years old." Unfortunately for Mayo and the others, the Norwegian government blocked the sale of the *Fame* and her cargo for many, many months, in part due to the fact that, when the *Fame* was obliged "to set sail and escape" the three British ships of war, her papers were still aboard the *True-Blooded Yankee*. Thus, they could not be presented to the Prize Court. While the crew awaited the ruling of the Prize Court and the anticipated sale and receiving their share of the prize money, they were joined by more of the crew of the *True-Blooded Yankee* arriving in Bergen with more of her prizes, the *Peggy* and probably the *Industry*.

By July, the *Fame* had still not been sold. The seamen would have been a financial drain on the Vice-Consul and were probably encouraged to move on, yet leaving Bergen was not so easy. Because of fighting to the south, between Sweden and Denmark-Norway, the land route back

to France was blocked. The alternative of simply signing on to a merchant vessel was not really an option in Bergen at that time. Britain and Denmark-Norway had been at war for some years. In 1813, Britain controlled all of the Danish waters, which the Royal Navy patrolled diligently. As the United States was also at war with Britain, were the American seamen to go to sea and be picked up by a Royal Navy vessel, they would become prisoners of war. This is exactly what happened. A few of the men decided to try to take a small boat from Bergen to Jutland, perhaps hoping that, by hugging the coast, they could avoid the Royal Navy frigates on patrol. If they could have made it to Jutland, they would have been beyond the fighting and could have walked to Brest to meet up with the *True-Blooded Yankee* again.

On the 22nd of July, this small group, including Mayo, rowed out of the Bergen harbor. On their second day out, they were picked up by a patrolling Royal Navy vessel, the *Hamadryad*. Nathaniel Mayo found himself, yet again, a prisoner of war. The crew of the boat were held for more than three weeks on the *Hamadryad*, a Spanish frigate captured by the British in 1804 and with a crew of more than three hundred.<sup>38</sup> On the 17th of August, they then were transferred to the HMS *Raisonnable*, a third-rate ship of the line, built in 1768, but so old that she had been converted to a receiving ship at Chatham.<sup>39</sup> (It may have been galling for the Americans, if they were patriotic, to have been put on the *Raisonnable*, as she had been in the squadron sent to subdue the American Revolutionaries during that war.) The transfer register describes Mayo as being from Cape Cod, aged twenty-six, five feet four inches tall and "stout" (meaning not fat but muscular). He had a round face, a fair complexion, light hair and hazel eyes.<sup>40</sup> The register also shows that Mayo and the others from the boat remained at Chatham for a year. It does not say that they were discharged into another ship or prison, so they may have been on the *Raisonnable* the entire time.

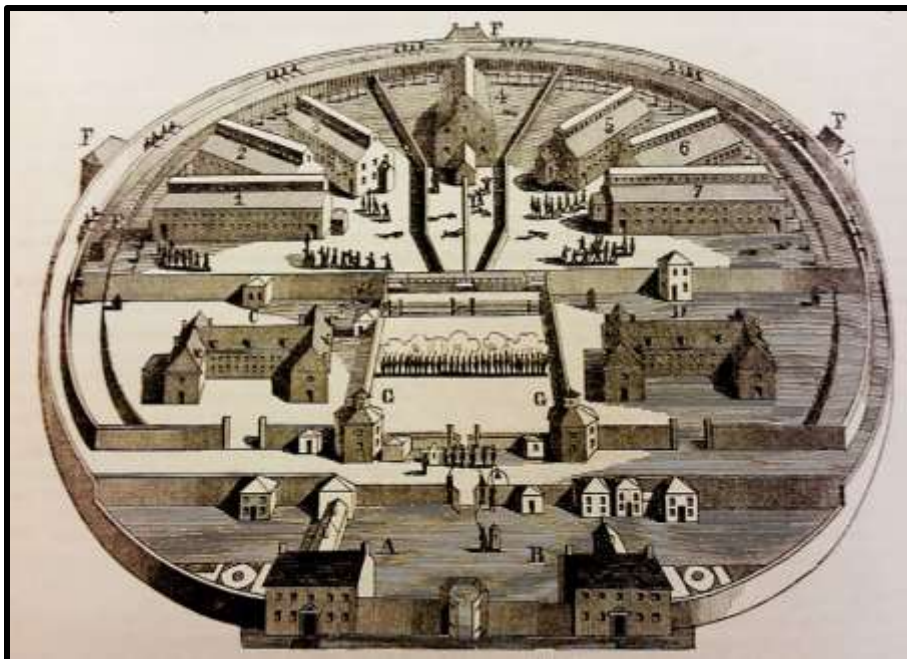
This would have been a vile experience, mostly because of the overcrowding, the lack of exercise, the rotting and infested food in minimal portions, and the stench and unhealthy filth of the men, the ship, its rats and vermin, and the surrounding waters filled with the raw sewage coming from the unmasted prison hulks and receiving ships that floated miserably there, never to sail again. Yet he survived that ordeal, and the exceptionally cold January of 1814. On the 11th of August 1814, he was put on the HMS *Freya* and sent to Plymouth. From there, he was marched sixteen miles to Dartmoor Prison. Nathaniel Mayo is registered in the Dartmoor entry book as arriving on the 21st of August. With him still were some of the men from the boat caught off Bergen: Samuel Rogers of New York, who had been the prize master of the *True-Blooded Yankee's* prize, the *Peggy*; William Story of Philadelphia; and Peter LeBarron, of Cape Ann, just across the bay from Mayo's own home of Cape Cod/Brewster.<sup>41</sup> (Another from the boat, Richard Hamilton of New London, Connecticut, who had been the prize master of the *True-Blooded Yankee's* prize, the *Industry*, had been sent to Dartmoor a few days earlier.)

With no surviving letter or journal from him from this period, it is impossible to state with certainty Nathaniel Mayo's thoughts as he entered the Dartmoor Prison compound, but something along the lines of despair is likely. Dartmoor was a prison different in many but not all ways from Longwy. Only five years earlier, Dartmoor had been purpose built as a prison specifically for prisoners of war and specifically because too many of them being held on prison hulks were

dying.<sup>42</sup> Like Longwy, it was oppressive and the stone walls dripped with moisture, and like Longwy, there were punishment cells. At Longwy, Mayo had been held with British prisoners under French guards; at Dartmoor, American prisoners were held with French prisoners under British guards. Probably, Mayo had learned some French at Longwy and could communicate with this fellow French prisoners, though it is unlikely that this would have brought him much advantage. The greatest difference between the French and the British prisons was the size of the population. Longwy held 1500 prisoners of war; Dartmoor held up to six times that many, some 9000, though it was designed for only 6000.<sup>43</sup>

When Mayo and the others arrived, they were informed of an escape plan and tunnel being dug by the American prisoners.<sup>44</sup> Alas, they were discovered and no one escaped. At Dartmoor, there were a fair number of others who had been in prison in France and on the crew of the *True-Blooded Yankee* whom Mayo would have encountered. They may have told him of the privateer's further adventures and captures. As the War of 1812 drew to a close, the prison authorities began to consolidate all of the American prisoners at Dartmoor, swelling the numbers even more. The Treaty of Ghent, ending the war was signed on the 24th of December 1814 and was ratified in mid-February 1815. The prisoners heard of it and anticipated being released quickly, but their release was delayed. In March, there was a smallpox outbreak in the prison. This may have been what killed Mayo's fellow prisoner and shipmate from the *True-Blooded Yankee*, Jonathan Dyer, who was also from Cape Cod.<sup>45</sup>

By the 6th of April, the frustrated hopes, general misery and the overcrowding led inevitably to violence, the infamous "Dartmoor Massacre", in which prison guards opened fire on



fractious American prisoners. "The Americans ran back to their buildings amid a hail of bullets. The shooting continued for twenty minutes and left six dead and over sixty wounded."<sup>46</sup> It is very likely that Nathaniel Mayo was amongst the American prisoners in the yard that day; possibly he was wounded, but he was not amongst the dead.

Figure 3 Dartmoor Prison in 1815. Benson Lossing, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Goaded by the riot and killings, the British quickly began releasing the prisoners. A few weeks after the massacre, on the 3rd of May, Mayo and Story, the last of the Bergen boat crew, were finally released. They would have been marched to Plymouth and put on a cartel to the United States, probably docking in New York. Mayo wasted no time in getting back to Massachusetts. On the 8th of August, he and Samuel Rogers attached a claim to Thomas Oxnard's libel against the grandest prize of the *True-Blooded Yankee*, the *Cora*.

"Samuel C. Rogers of the City of New York and Nathaniel Mayo of Brewster... mariners, respectfully inform your Honor that they shipped on board the private armed vessel of War, called the True Blooded Yankee ... as prize Masters on a cruise as specified in the shipping articles of said vessel - That shortly after the sailing...the said Rogers was put on board a prize called the Peggy and the said Mayo was put on board a prize called the Fame, as prize masters, and ordered for the North of Europe ..."<sup>47</sup>

They continue to describe the capture and condemnation of the *Cora* as a good prize, to which they, as members of the crew, had rights to shares. Moreover,

"...no order of distribution [of monies] has been made - That the proceeds of sundry other vessels captured by the said Privateer, and sent into France and Norway, and received by the owners of said Privateer have never been distributed among the crew of which proceeds a proportional share or part is due to the said Petitioners, and which they claim to have paid them out of such part of the proceeds of the said prize vessel the *Cora*..."<sup>48</sup>

In short, Oxnard, who had taken over command of the *True-Blooded Yankee* from Haley, and his uncle, Henry Preble, the owner-agent for the privateer, would seem to have paid none of the crew their shares from any of the prizes. Unfortunately for Mayo and Rogers, their claim was filed too late. Oxnard's libel was originally filed on the 12th of July 1815 and the Marshall of the Massachusetts District Court was ordered to give notice to "all persons concerned" that the libel had been filed and that the trial would be held on the 5th of August, and to give that notice by publication in two newspapers and by posting on the Court House at least twenty days before the trial. The claim made by Mayo and Rogers was made three days late. The court documents give no indication as to whether the seamen received money from Oxnard or not but, given the assertions in their statement, it seems unlikely that he gave them much of anything, leaving Nathaniel Mayo, who surely cheered his days in Dartmoor in discussing his expected payment with Rogers, with nothing.

Nathaniel Mayo had been both captive of a privateer and on the crew of a privateer as well as on a prize crew. He had been a prisoner of war in France and in England, in a fort, on a ship and in a prison. He survived years of inadequate food, smallpox outbreaks, hundreds of miles of forced marches and a prison riot, as well as all of the many dangers of a life at sea. He is documented in both naval and prisoner of war records of two countries, in the correspondence of an American

diplomatic official, in the prize records of two countries and in court records of his own state. This type of research, using shipping, naval, prize and prisoner of war records to discover a seaman's career in the early nineteenth century will often yield such results, that is, a great deal of information covering a brief period, shedding light on the hitherto obscured lives of these early American merchant seamen.<sup>49</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Town and City Clerks of Massachusetts. *Massachusetts Vital and Town Records*. Provo, UT: Holbrook Research Institute (Jay and Delene Holbrook). Ancestry.com. *Massachusetts, U.S., Town and Vital Records, 1620-1988* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011. [Accessed 9 December 2020.]

<sup>2</sup> Bowman, Geroge Ernest, editor. *Vital records of the town of Brewster, Massachusetts to the end of the year 1849*. Boston, Mass : Massachusetts Society of Mayflower Descendants at the charge of the Cape Cod Town Record Fund, 1904. [Accessed 9 December 2020] <https://archive.org/details/vitalrecordsofto00brew/page/n1/mode/2up> p.13.

<sup>3</sup> Bowman. *Vital records of the town of Brewster*. p.84.

<sup>4</sup> Ancestry.com. *1830 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Images reproduced by FamilySearch. Original data: Fifth Census of the United States, 1830. (NARA microfilm publication M19, 201 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C. [Accessed 10 December 2020]

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Year: 1840; Census Place: Scituate, Plymouth, Massachusetts; Roll: 195; Page: 256; Family History Library Film: 0014680 [Accessed 10 December 2020]

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Year: 1850; Census Place: Scituate, Plymouth, Massachusetts; Roll: 332; Page: 61b [Accessed 10 December 2020]

<sup>7</sup> Groveland Cemetery. [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com). <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/91046/groveland-cemetery?> [Accessed 10 December 2020]

<sup>8</sup> Archives de la Marine, Service Historique de la Défense, Brest, 1P10/85-86, Saint Malo-Inscription Maritime.

<sup>9</sup> Kert, Faye Margaret. "Prize and Prejudice: Privateering and Naval Prize in Atlantic Canada in the War of 1812". *Research in Maritime History*, no. 11 (1997) published by: International Maritime Economic History Association. Quoting Dr. Christopher Roberts in English Reports, Vol. 165, Appendix 2 gives the complete list of "Standing Interrogatories" used by the Admiralty with British captures during the War of 1812. The equivalent French law, *Règlement Sur le Armemens en course* of 1803, does not stipulate what the interrogation questions should be but of the interrogations of prisoners that survive, it can be seen that they follow a very similar pattern.

<sup>10</sup> Ward, Christopher. "The Commerce of East Florida During the Embargo, 1806-1812, the Role of Amelia Island." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (1989): 160-79. [Accessed 1 December 2020]

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30148064>.

<sup>11</sup> Correspondence from John Diot to Jonathan Russell, 13 February 1811. Jonathan Russell Papers (1795-1832), John Hay Library, Brown University Library.

<sup>12</sup> Correspondence from Nathaniel Mayo to Jonathan Russell, 18 November 1810. Jonathan Russell Papers (1795-1832), John Hay Library, Brown University Library.

<sup>13</sup> By "all that remains here" they did not mean that the others had died but that they had been moved to another jail or prison.

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- <sup>14</sup> Correspondence from Nathaniel Mayo to Jonathan Russell, 29 November 1810. Jonathan Russell Papers (1795-1832), John Hay Library, Brown University Library.
- <sup>15</sup> Correspondence from John Diot to Jonathan Russell, 13 February 1811. Jonathan Russell Papers (1795-1832), John Hay Library, Brown University Library.
- <sup>16</sup> See the thorough discussion of these documents as proofs of nationality in Nathan Perl-Rosenthal's *Citizen Sailors: Becoming American in the Age of Revolution*. Cambridge : Belknap Press, 2015.
- <sup>17</sup> Correspondence from Elnathon Mayo to Jonathan Russell, 10 May 1811. Jonathan Russell Papers (1795-1832), John Hay Library, Brown University Library.
- <sup>18</sup> Service Historique de la Défense. Archives de la Guerre et Armée de Terre. "Prisonniers de guerre français et étrangers (1792-1874)", Yj47.
- <sup>19</sup> Correspondence from John Diot to Jonathan Russell, 13 February 1811. Jonathan Russell Papers (1795-1832), John Hay Library, Brown University Library.
- <sup>20</sup> Lewis, Michael. *Napoleon and His British Captives*. London : George Allen & Unwin, 1962, pp. 83-115.
- <sup>21</sup> The National Archives. Register of British POWs Prisons L-V, France, 1787-1820. ADM 103/468 PART 2. [Accessed 13 December 2020] <https://www.findmypast.co.uk/transcript?id=GBM%2FPOW-GALLIP-NAP%2F40594980#learn-more-content>
- <sup>22</sup> As reported in the *Columbian Centinel* on 27 January 1813. Ancestry.com. *U.S., Newspaper Extractions from the Northeast, 1704-1930* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014. Original data: Newspapers and Periodicals. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Frame 701. [Accessed 16 December 2020] <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/50015/>
- <sup>23</sup> Story, William. *A Journal Kept in France, During a captivity of more than nine years, commencing the 14<sup>th</sup> Day of April, 1805, and ending The 5<sup>th</sup> Day of May, 1814*. Sunderland : printed by George Garbutt, 1815. p93.
- <sup>24</sup> Story, *A Journal Kept in France*, p94.
- <sup>25</sup> Service Historique de la Défense. Archives de la Guerre et Armée de Terre. "Prisonniers de guerre français et étrangers (1792-1874)", Yj29.
- <sup>26</sup> Service Historique de la Défense. Archives de la Guerre et Armée de Terre. Prisonniers de guerre français et étrangers (1792-1874), Yj29.
- <sup>27</sup> Correspondence from Nathaniel Mayo to Jonathan Russell, 24 July 1811. Jonathan Russell Papers (1795-1832), John Hay Library, Brown University Library.
- <sup>28</sup> Barnet to Monroe, 6 November 1812. United States. Department of State. National Archives. *Despatches from United States Consuls in Paris, 1790-1906*. Vol. 4. Microfilm copy, 1952, roll T1/4.
- <sup>29</sup> Barlow to Monroe, 25 September 1812. United States. Department of State. National Archives. *Despatches from United States Consuls in Paris, 1790-1906*. Vol. 4. Microfilm copy, 1952, roll T1/4.
- <sup>30</sup> The National Archives. High Court of the Admiralty: Prize Court : Papers. Papers is Cases of Common Condemnation from the beginning of 1811 to the End of the War. No. 1630. Captured ships: Two row boats names unknown, a pinnace belonging to the True Blooded Yankee....HCA/32/1307.
- <sup>31</sup> Duc de Bassano Minister of External Relations, to the Duc de Feltre, Minister of War, 30 November 1812. Archives diplomatiques. Correspondance politique - Etats-unis, Vol 69.
- <sup>32</sup> Duc de Feltre, Minister of War to the Comte de Decrès, Minister of Marine, 17 January 1813. Service Historique de la Défense. Archives de la Marine, FF2 10.
- <sup>33</sup> John Wiltshire Petition for Clemency. 27 July 1813. The National Archives. HO/47/52. 1812privateers.org. [Accessed 16 December 2020] [https://1812privateers.org/United\\_States/TrueBloodedYankee/index.htm](https://1812privateers.org/United_States/TrueBloodedYankee/index.htm)
- <sup>34</sup> Barnet to Monroe, 25 January 1813. United States. Department of State. National Archives. *Despatches from United States Consuls in Paris, 1790-1906*. Vol. 4. Microfilm copy, 1952, roll T1/4.
- <sup>35</sup> John Wiltshire Petition for Clemency.
- <sup>36</sup> Again, accounts differ as to the exact date of departure.
- <sup>37</sup> "Henry Preble vs. Brig Fame & Cargo". War of 1812 Prize Cases, Southern District Court, NY. Fold3.com. Source data: National Archives microfilm publication M928, *Prize and Related Records for the War of 1812 of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, 1812-1816*. {Accessed 17 December 2020} <https://www.fold3.com/title/496/war-of-1812-prize-cases-southern-dist-court-ny>
- <sup>38</sup> Winfield, Rif. *British Warships in the Age of Sail 1793-1817 : Design, Construction, Careers and Fates*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire : Seaforth Publishing, 2008, pp182-3.
- <sup>39</sup> Winfield, Rif. *British Warships in the Age of Sail 1793-1817*, pp94-5.

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<sup>40</sup> General Entry Book of American Prisoners of War at Chatham, August 1813 - January 1814. *American Prisoners of War, 1812-1815, Prison Ships and Depots in England, Chatham, 1812-1814*. British Online Archives. [Accessed 18 December 2020] <https://microform.digital/boa/collections/58/american-prisoners-of-war-1812-1815>

<sup>41</sup> General Entry Book of American Prisoners of War at Dartmoor, August 1814 - September 1814. *American Prisoners of War, 1812-1815, Prison Ships and Depots in England, Chatham, 1812-1814*. British Online Archives. [Accessed 18 December 2020] <https://microform.digital/boa/collections/58/volumes/338/prison-ships-and-depots-in-england-dartmoor-1813-1815>

<sup>42</sup> "History of Dartmoor Prison". Dartmoor Prison Museum. [Accessed 19 December. 2020] [https://www.dartmoor-prison.co.uk/history\\_of\\_dartmoor\\_prison.php](https://www.dartmoor-prison.co.uk/history_of_dartmoor_prison.php)

<sup>43</sup> Crimmin, Patricia K.. "Prisoners of War and British Port Communities, 1793-1815". *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*, VI, No. 4 (October 1996), 17-27, p18.

<sup>44</sup> Andrews, Charles. *The prisoners' memoirs, or, Dartmoor prison; containing a complete and impartial history of the entire captivity of the Americans in England, from the commencement of the last war between the United States and Great Britain, until all prisoners were released by the treaty of Ghent. Also a particular detail of all occurrences relative to the horrid massacre at Dartmoor, on the fatal evening of the 6th of April, 1815*. New York, 1815, p112. Internet Archive. [Accessed 19 December 2020] <https://archive.org/details/prisonersmem00andr>

<sup>45</sup> "Dyer, Jonathan". American War Memorials Overseas, Inc. [Accessed 20 December 2020] [https://www.uswarmemorials.org/html/people\\_details.php?PeopleID=2820](https://www.uswarmemorials.org/html/people_details.php?PeopleID=2820)

<sup>46</sup> Gilje, Paul A. "The End of the War: the Dartmoor Massacre and a Tainted Peace". *Commonplace: the journal of early American life*. [Accessed 19 December 2020] <http://commonplace.online/article/the-end-of-the-war/>

<sup>47</sup> *Thomas Oxnard (brig True-Blooded Yankee) v. Ship Cora*. (608282), US District Court for the District of Massachusetts 1789-, War of 1812 Prize Cases - 1812-1815, Record Group 21 - Records of the District Courts of the United States 1685-2009. National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, Massachusetts.

<sup>48</sup> *Thomas Oxnard (brig True-Blooded Yankee) v. Ship Cora*.

<sup>49</sup> See the author's book, *American Merchant Seamen of the Early Nineteenth Century: a Researcher's Guide*, for a complete explanation of such resources and how to locate them. <https://www.lulu.com/en/us/shop/anne-morddel/american-merchant-seamen-of-the-early-nineteenth-century-a-researchers-guide/paperback/product-ej6vr5.html?page=1&pageSize=4>