A watercolor illustration of the bow of a wooden schooner. The hull is painted a light tan color with a dark blue stripe along the gunwale. A white figurehead of a woman in a long dress is mounted on the bow. The ship is moving through blue water, creating white foam. The entire scene is framed by a black border.

NED BUSTARD  
*Squalls Before War:*  
HIS MAJESTY'S SCHOONER  
SULTANA



N E D B U S T A R D

Squalls Before War:

HIS MAJESTY'S SCHOONER

SULTANA



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*This book is dedicated to  
the crew of the schooner Sultana  
—both past and present.*

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## *A Note Before Reading*

Some readers have asked if this book is fiction or history. It is both—it's fictionalized history. The plot of this book does not tell of a great romance, mighty war or treacherous quest. It merely follows the work of a boat enforcing the laws of the Crown in the middle of the eighteenth century. The sailors aboard the *Sultana* did not know that they were sailing in the headwaters of war or that they were playing a part in the formation of a new nation. They were just doing their job. *Squalls Before War* is a slice of history—showing the excitement and tedium of life on a schooner between 1768 and 1772.

One of the appealing aspects of writing a fictional account about the tour of His Majesty's Schooner *Sultana* is the fact that the entire logs of both Lieutenant Inglis and Master Bruce have been preserved. We know exactly where the schooner was and what it was doing as it patrolled the colonies' waterways. These logs have at the very top of the page the month and year, with each entry listing the day of the week and the date, along with boxes for wind directions, courses, distance in miles, latitude, longitude, bearing and distance at noon and, finally, comments. Since there is a great amount of repetition in these entries—and most modern readers will find them cryptic—the full date and comments are usually all that will be found in this book. And for readability, some spelling irregularities have been corrected.

# OVERBOARD

A STORM WAS BREWING, AND MASTER DAVID Bruce was none too happy about it. It had already been a rough crossing, and it looked as if circumstances were not going to improve in the immediate future. He scanned the horizon, his green eyes set in a weather-beaten face topped with unruly chestnut hair that seemed perpetually wind-blown. The schooner's master wore a long overcoat against the foul weather. Beneath it he wore a once-white vest and his blue officer's coat—for warmth rather than duty. Topping things off, he wore a crumpled, wide-brimmed canvas hat covered with tar for weather-proofing.

“Mr. Huxley, I suggest going below,” Bruce absent-mindedly encouraged the surgeon's mate. The poor fellow was

looking ill and was sure to be a hindrance as the weather worsened. What on earth possessed him to follow a life at sea since he was so clearly unsuited? He seemed to fall ill more than his patients, and a less cheery fellow would be hard to find. "Bo'sun, please have the foretop sail dropped," Bruce ordered. "I am going below to speak with the Lieutenant."

"Drop the foretop," acknowledged Joshua Lowe, the boatswain's mate on duty that watch. Then he called forward, "Drop the foretop, ya Corkers!" Two young Irishmen responded by jumping to the rat lines, climbing up the fore shrouds. "Drop the foretop," they parroted.

David Bruce stepped off the poop deck to slide the aft grated hatch off and turned to descend the steep ladder into the lower level of the schooner. An experienced sailor, Bruce had served as boatswain on the *Lynx* in '61, and then also later on the *Lively*, before joining the crew of His Majesty's Armed Schooner *Sultana* at Deptford Dock on the eighteenth of July. As the master of the *Sultana*, Bruce was primarily in charge of navigation and served as second-in-command, directly below the captain of the ship—Lieutenant John Inglis—on whose door he knocked.

"Come," a voice barked from within the Lieutenant's cabin in response. "Ah, David, it's you. I was going over the charts, and you've made some miscalculations. It seems we are somewhere between the Alleghenies and the Mississippi River," John Inglis grinned.



“Well, then it is a good thing the late war with the French is over and that region belongs to England and not France,” David replied. David was a much better navigator than the lieutenant due to a quicker mind mathematically—yielding a recurring joke about miscalculation. “I wish your readings were truer than mine, as I would certainly desire to find ourselves closer to land. We are about to encounter a bit of a blow.”

“Ah, now I wish you *were* joking with me. But after that hard squall last Thursday, such a jest would be in bad taste. Well, lead on my friend, and we’ll see what the heavens wish to bestow.”

Inglis slipped into his dark blue navy lieutenant’s coat with nine gold buttons running along each wide, white lapel and placed his fore-and-aft bicorn hat on his head before following Bruce back up to the helm. The wind was blustering, and the sky had changed quickly from a ruffled, gray blanket to a boiling menace of dark clouds.

All the humor drained from the Lieutenant’s face. Inglis was an austere-looking man at most times, with dark hair combed to the side and charcoal eyes set beneath imposing eyebrows. He had a long, aristocratic nose with a small mouth set above a slightly cleft chin. “Reef the main,” the lieutenant commanded.

“Aye aye, Lieutenant,” replied the boatswain, and he relayed the order, “Reef the main!”

The schooner became a fury of activity as the Lieutenant's orders were carried out. Looking forward from where Bruce and Inglis stood, the deck was mired down with rigging, the gig and twelve half-hogsheads of beer lashed to the rails. The schooner sailed on, the rain parting like a curtain as they entered the storm. The rain intensified as if offended by the sailors' impudence in attempting to climb into the rigging. Draped over the yards, the men began tying up the sail using bits of rope that had been sown into the sail for this purpose. Once they were done, the sails' overall area was reduced, causing the schooner to heel less.

"Keep us sailing close to the wind," Bruce urged the man at the helm as the schooner continued to be blown about.

"Man the bilges," Inglis ordered.

Bruce automatically passed the order along. "Deal and Clark—man the bilges." Able-bodied seamen James Clark and John Deal acknowledged their orders and climbed back over the half-hogsheads to reach the bilge pump. Lightning broke the sky as James and John began pumping on either side of the main mast. Foul water spewed out of the ship's hold, joining the torrents from the sky which were flowing over the side of the schooner.

Bruce called down through the grating in the aft hatch to the ship's clerk. "Mr. Dearl, how are we doing down there?"

A wiry man peered up from the gloom and replied, "Half the Atlantic is down here, but we're holding our own."

And the *Sultana* continued to persevere as they sailed into the night—there was no sunset, just gloom begetting blackness. The hull continued to creak and groan as the waves buffeted her and seamen shouted and struggled to reset slipping lines. Time seemed to stop as they crashed on and on through the dark storm.

After what seemed like days of relentless rain, Bruce muttered, “I believe the wind has changed.”

“I suppose we should have expected as much,” Inglis replied. “The sea’s been quite the cheeky mistress tonight—constancy from the wind would certainly be too much to expect.” Then to the two seamen struggling to hold the tiller, he ordered, “Take us a few points off to the south.” The *Sultana* altered course so that the wind wasn’t blowing into her bow.

Now either the men at the helm overcompensated or the sea pushed harder against the schooner. Regardless, she was off course, with the result that the small ship was at the wrong place at the wrong time and a giant wave rose over the *Sultana*. Instead of the schooner cutting through it, a huge wave came crashing down on her midship. Both Inglis and Bruce were thrown against the rails, and the *Sultana* seemed to disappear under the sea. When the water had run off, Deal and Clark who had been manning the pump were crumpled farther down against the same railing. Bruce leaped to their aid.

“Are you two alright?” he yelled. At that moment lightning

exploded across the sky. David saw the blood on Deal just before darkness fell again on him. The storm had been having a temporary blinding effect like that on them all throughout the night. "Clark, get Deal below—see if Mr. Huxley can help him."

"Moffet—Ritchie," bellowed Inglis. "Roundly now, to the bilges!"

Coughing and spluttering from the sea's recent assault, the two seamen climbed aft to pump.

"I'm surprised we're still afloat after that," said Bruce.

"If you can call this still afloat," retorted Inglis. "I feel like now we are sitting at water level."

Clark climbed back up on deck and confirmed the Lieutenant's hunch by interjecting, "Sir, our supplies in the hold are *floating*."

"Thank you, Mr. Clark."

"What about Deal?" queried Bruce.

"He smashed his ear, Master Bruce—it appears that there is more blood than damage."

"Faster on those bilges," Inglis exclaimed. But the bilges could not empty the hold faster than the water was pouring in. The water inside the vessel was forcing the *Sultana's* bow down, thereby throwing the ship's center of gravity too far forward. The result was that the tiny vessel was alternating between having her rudder pulled out of the water and having her bow dip so low that each wave she encountered was

crashing over into the boat and filling the hold more.

“Drop the top sails,” Inglis ordered. The acknowledgment of the orders was just heard over the din of the storm, and several sailors went aloft.

“Stay sharp up there,” Inglis yelled to the seamen aloft, “I have no wish to lose our topsail yards again like we did in that storm last week!” It seemed a small eternity before the sails were finally brought down. No noticeable change occurred, so Inglis ordered a second reef on mizzen and called for the jib to be reefed.

Bruce was helping to stow the sails with the help of a sullen sixteen-year-old able-bodied seaman Edward Cunningham and the Lieutenant’s servant, eight-year-old Christopher Curtis.

“Master Bruce, why don’t the Lieutenant bring all the sails down instead of tying ‘em up like that?” asked the freckled boy. “Don’t the sails just make the wind push us over more?”

“It’s not ‘tying up,’ Chris—it is called ‘reefing,’” David Bruce distractedly explained. “And we need the sails up to continue to make way—if not we will find ourselves at the mercy of the sea.”

“Drop rear sail—triple reef the mizzen!” Bruce heard Inglis cry out as he climbed out of the hatch onto the wildly pitching deck. He could picture in his mind’s eye the soaked forms above him in the darkness, swinging in the rigging, fulfilling the lieutenant’s instructions.

"Lieutenant, Clark wasn't stretching the truth much about the hold—it is as wet down there as it is up here!"

"I'm not surprised," Inglis answered. The ship lurched and the bow sank beneath another hill of water.

"I think we need to set the storm jib," Bruce suggested as the deck once again fell away from them, the *Sultana* heeling suddenly to port.

"My thoughts as well," Inglis said, standing on the poop deck with legs bent to accommodate the pitch, as one would do on an inclined roof. "Drop the jib—set the storm jib!"

Bruce amplified the orders, "Nichollson—give Jurd a hand up there!"

John Jurd, a handsome young sailor from London who was surprisingly at home at sea, straddled the bowsprit, inching out towards the blocks ten feet forward of the bow. When he was halfway out, a hole opened in the sea and the *Sultana* fell into it.

"Hold on," yelled the Norwegian Nichollson as a wave swept across the bow, pummeling all within its path. When the schooner broke free of the deluge, the norseman called again, "John, are you still there?"

Lightning charged across the sky, illuminating the miserable lump that was able-bodied seaman Jurd. He was clinging for dear life to the slender shaft of wood and was only able to moan in response. But quickly he resumed his journey to the schooner's farthest outpost.

“Ready,” croaked Jurd as another wave threatened to remove him from his roost. With Jurd in place, the order was given to proceed with dropping the jib. Jurd’s job was to “hank on”—unhook the metal loops from the forestay and pass the canvas back. As soon as the large mass of canvas was removed, Nichollson began feeding a smaller triangle of canvas up to Jurd, who then proceeded to hank on the storm jib.

“That should keep us making way,” Inglis said hopefully to no one in particular. Jurd was able to get back on board with slightly less trouble than when he set out, and the storm seemed to begin to cooperate.

“Let’s get some of you tars in the hold with buckets,” ordered Bruce. “We need to help Moffet and Ritchie empty us out!” The two Scotsmen had continued to labor at the bilges—a task that was almost comical in its futility—for nearly an hour. Several sailors struggled below as the *Sultana* continued to heave and pitch.

Farther and farther over the schooner rolled. With each swell the water inside the schooner rushed up the sides, knocking her on her beam. And with each roll she also stayed heeled over longer and longer.

“Much more of this and we won’t be able to right her,” Inglis grimly said, stating the obvious as he hung on to the binnacle to keep standing. Just before Bruce was able to reply, unnatural daylight cracked off the stern, making the shadows of the lieutenant and the master leap across the midship

stores that were lashed to the deck.

"The beer," they said to each other simultaneously.

"All hands on deck!" And as if realizing that Inglis and Bruce had thought of a way out of its trap, the storm rallied and began blowing the rain across the ship, rather than just drenching them from above.

"Untie the half-hogsheads of beer midship and roll them overboard," bawled Inglis. There seemed to be a slight pause as the concept sunk into their collective minds, then they tore into the task with a vengeance.

"Master Bruce, why are we throwing away all those supplies?" asked young Curtis. He had come up on deck with the others and was huddled near Bruce, by the *Sultana's* main mast.

"The schooner is top heavy, Chris, and each time wind or wave pushes her over, the water that has been rising steadily in the hold aggravates that. Those twelve half-hogsheads of beer weigh well over two tons—when we are free of them, the schooner will drain more quickly and not take on water so fast because she will ride higher in the water. Now get on down below—this is going to be hard work."

It sounds like a simple task to set barrels on their sides and roll them into the sea. Yet with the deck heaving up and down like a crazed colt intent on bucking a rider, and the sheer weight of the cargo swishing around inside, it took six men to move each barrel. Two stood in front of it with staves



to keep it from rolling too fast in one direction, and the others put all their strength into shoving the barrel in the right direction. There were passing complaints about throwing away good alcohol, and others expressing deep concern about dying of thirst if the rest of the trip took longer than expected, but all of these were lost beneath the howling of the wind and the groans of the men as they labored. It was two hours before all the barrels were overboard and nearly another before Inglis and Bruce felt they could leave the deck in the hands of the bo'sun. By then the storm was only miserable instead of completely terrifying.

John Inglis and David Bruce entered the aft cabin and stripped off their outer coats in a vain attempt to dry off. Inglis sat down at his desk and pulled out his log, commenting, "I'm very grateful for the way the men carried out their orders during this storm—such loyalty is a treasure in the Service."

"Loyalty?" Bruce said in surprise as he collapsed on the settee. "I suppose you could call it that . . . the desire to live can certainly serve as a motivating factor in birthing 'loyalty' and 'devotion.'"

Later that evening, Lieutenant Inglis got out his quill and daily log to record that day's events: "Strong gales and squally with rain . . ."

## INGLIS LOGBOOK:

*September 13, 1768. Strong gales and squally with rain brought too under the fore-sail. Shipped great deal of sea.*

*Obliged to heave overboard into the sea 12 half-hogsheads of beer to save the schooner from foundering.*



# LIBERTY

ON MONDAY, THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF October, 1768, the sky was a flawless blue and Halifax Harbor was crisp and clear as it cut into the shoreline of Nova Scotia. In stark contrast to the beauty of that fall day, the *Sultana* shuffled into port, tired and haggard from her hazardous crossing of the Atlantic.

The weary crew guided the *Sultana* past the *Martin*, the *Zephyr* and the *Viper* to find a spot to drop anchor off St. George's Island. She looked very tired and small beside the ten-gun, 100-man *Viper*.

Originally, the *Sultana* had been a schooner rig ship with only five sails, but when she was purchased and refitted for service in the Royal Navy to enforce the Townshend Acts in

the colonies, two top masts were added so she could carry more sail for speed and maneuverability. "Mr. Dearl!" the Lieutenant shouted above the din of the crew stowing loose lines and tidying the ship for its time in port.

"Yes, Lieutenant?" The *Sultana's* clerk poked his head out from the forward hatch. William Dearl, a transfer from the *HMS Achilles*, was the ship's clerk, the man responsible for all the provisions to be found on board the schooner.

"Mr. Dearl, please take the launch into Halifax and begin to replenish our supplies at the Victualling Office." The Royal Navy had a Victualling Board that purchased the food and issued it to the various ships in the fleet at victualling offices in various ports, including Halifax. "Take Ritchie, Jurd and Grant with you, along with our good surgeon, Mr. Huxley," Inglis continued. Then as an afterthought Inglis smiled and said, "And have young master Curtis join you." The Lieutenant's servant was an energetic boy and the youngest son of friends of the Inglis's family in England. The crossing had sobered him a great deal, but he still had the enthusiasm of an army, and visiting the port would be a good channel for it.

The clerk set out and the crew continued its laborious resuscitation of the schooner until mid-morning when the boatswain called out, "Ship off the port stern."

Lieutenant John Inglis stared through his scope then snapped, "That is Commodore Samuel Hood's *Launceston*. Mr. Smith, prepare the guns for a thirteen-gun salute on my

command.” The gunner’s mate leaped into the nether regions of the ship to fulfill his orders.

The *Sultana* had been fitted with eight half-pound swivel guns when the Navy had overhauled her for her new service. The gunner and several ship mates placed the small-bore cannons into the gun stanchions. As the *Launceston* glided by the *Sultana*, Inglis yelled, “Fire!” and, with precision gained from practice at sea on the trip from England, the cannons went off, one after the other in succession, with five being reloaded and fired again. The *Launceston* returned the salute before anchoring nearby.

“Ah, that’s showing the colonials the *proper* way to respect one of His Majesty’s vessels,” Bruce said softly as the two senior officers of the *Sultana* witnessed the exchange. After their gruelling crossing, all seemed right again with the world. He understood his duty in the Service and his obligation to the Crown. The Navy was anchored right there before his eyes as a glittering testimony to his allegiance.

“I suspect that half of our mission over here will be to teach the locals what fidelity and respect look like,” Inglis agreed. The Lieutenant went below to retrieve dispatches from England in his cabin and then was rowed over to the *Launceston*. By mid-day four and a half tons of water had been brought on board, and the Lieutenant had returned from the *Launceston*.

Once he was settled, Inglis called Bruce out of his cabin and into his own. At the foot of the aft ladder was the



surgeon's mates' cabin opposite Bruce's, with the Lieutenant's beside it, farthest aft. There was an unusual layout of men's cabins extending forward with four on either side. More than just hammocks yet not nearly as comfortable as the officer's cabins, they were small beds like large cabinets with sliding

wooden doors. Each of the eight cubicles was an average of six feet long and three wide with just over two feet of head room. The hold was filled with a mass of sails and barrels and crates, leaving only enough space between the fore and aft hatches for the crew to crawl. Inglis was sitting on the settee built in along the back of the cabin, filling his pipe with tobacco, as Bruce entered.

“How did your meeting go with Commodore Hood?” Bruce queried. Seeing the posture of the Lieutenant, David settled into the chair by the desk that they used for keeping their logs, as it appeared they would be having a long talk. The cabin was roomy in comparison to the rest of the boat, with just over five feet of head room. A bunk was built into the port hull, and the whole space was lit from two windows on either side of the boat and three across the stern above the settee.

“Very well, thank you. Hood inquired into our passage then launched into a lengthy update on the state of affairs in the colonies,” Inglis said before lighting his pipe. “Tell me David, what had you heard about Boston before we left Deptford?”

“I understood that this past spring the tensions between radicals and officials of the Crown were heating up, due in large part to the Townshend Acts,” Bruce replied.

“Yes, that had been my understanding as well. Yet it turns out that over the summer Boston has been beset with virtual mob rule. The Crown officers all reported that ‘a general spirit

of insurrection was prevailing throughout the province.”

“Just because of the Townshend Acts? That seems a bit of an overreaction to a small duty placed on tea, glass and such,” said Bruce.

“It appears that the fuse was lit by an incident that began this past April. One of New England’s wealthiest citizens—and a leading critic of the Crown’s policies—Mr. John Hancock, had his ship the *Lydia* boarded by two customs officials. Would you believe that the firebrand forcibly removed the servants of the King and had them taken to shore!”

“How did he think he could get away with that?”

“Oh, Hancock claimed that they had ‘a lack of proper authorization,’” Inglis said mockingly. “Criminal charges were quickly filed of course, but they were later dropped when it was determined that the officials had not secured writs of assistance to allow the search.”

“Well, then it was resolved according to the law. I can’t see why that would stir things up in Boston to the degree you’ve implied,” Bruce said while beginning to sharpen a quill.

“That incident alone would have been fine, I’m sure, but on the tenth of June, customs seized his sloop, the *Liberty*, because its cargo of Madeira wine had been unloaded without going through customs. And the warship *Romney* was ordered to tow the *Liberty* away from Hancock’s dock to the harbor to prevent a rescue attempt. Then the Sons of Liberty—”

“Sons of what?” interrupted Bruce.





SULTANA

“Sons of Liberty”—that’s the name the local malcontents are taking. These groups are popping up all over. Back in ’65 Isaac Barré referred to the opponents of the Stamp Act as the ‘Sons of Liberty,’ and now these secret groups have adopted the name. It’s been used before, by a variety of local rabble-rousers, but these new incarnations consist largely of well-to-do and respectable artisans, merchants and gentlemen. These groups actually *organize* uprisings, and they will not hesitate to use violence to advance their agenda,” Inglis explained between puffs on his pipe. “Anyway, the Sons of Liberty stirred up a mob gathered on the wharf, and they pelted the custom house officers with stones and other missiles and attacked the customs house. The mob broke windows and dragged a small boat belonging to one of the collectors through the city and made it the central element in a huge bonfire on the Common!”

“Were any of the customs officials injured during the event?” Bruce inquired.

“No, they wisely fled to Castle William—the island fortress in Boston Harbor. But it wasn’t over. Three days later the Sons of Liberty held a meeting at Faneuil Hall and appointed a committee to petition Governor Francis Bernard for the removal of the *Romney*. The next day the Governor promised to do all within his power to fix the situation. I understand he said, ‘I shall think myself most highly honored if I can be, in the lowest degree, an instrument in preserving a perfect

conciliation between you and the parent state.”

“An overly courteous response to the ruffians, I’d say.”

“Quite so. And then he even promised to end impressment.”

“End press gangs?” Bruce burst out incredulously. “And I suppose he can put an end to hiccups as well? How does he think the navy will stay manned? Able-bodied seamen don’t just spring full-grown from the ocean. No one likes the press, but until recruitment includes a chest of gold for each man, it’s a fact of life.”

“Certainly, Bernard couldn’t make good on his promises,” Inglis replied. He took a long draw on his pipe, blew out the smoke, and continued. “Now all the while this was going on, he was also secretly trying to get troops into Boston, either from New York or England. Then later, London ordered the governor to appear before the Massachusetts assembly and call for the revocation of a letter that had been sent last winter to the other colonies calling for united resistance to the Townshend Acts. Ninety-two members voted against the governor and only seventeen voted for.”

“So then we shouldn’t expect to be invited to dinner by any of the Massachusetts assembly?” Bruce asked with a smirk.

“I’d say not!” Inglis laughed. “But the assembly doesn’t exist anymore. The Governor dissolved the assembly in July, and it has been chaos there since. Personally, I don’t think the Commodore likes the customs commissioners down there, but he is officially giving them his full support. Therefore, we

are going to help in the deployment of troops as soon as we can make ready.”

“After spending the last month battling wind and wave a mere one hundred leagues from shore, we are going to set sail again? The crew will be overjoyed,” Bruce said facetiously.

“I am sure. Which makes this a perfect time to read the Articles of War again.” The Articles of War were originally established over a century earlier and served as the “holy writ” for naval life. They were read at least once a month on a Sunday after the church services. They were also read when punishment was executed. “We need to remind everyone of their duties to the Crown—and of the consequences for disobedience,” Inglis grimly muttered.

#### INGLIS LOGBOOK:

*October 24, 1768 Moor'd in Halifax Harbour. Light breezes with calms, hoisted out our boat, emp'd rowing the schooner into Halifax Harbour. Came too in 10 fathoms water, found riding here His Majesty's Sloop Viper, arriv'd here His Majesty's Ship Lancaster. Read the Articles of War to the Schooner Company. Fired to salute Commodore Hood's guns*

# MERMAID

**B**OSTON BOILED WITH UNEQUIVOCAL FURY. His Majesty's armed schooners St. Lawrence and Sultana quietly joined His Majesty's warships Beaver, Bonatta, Glasgow, Romney, Senegal, and Mermaid. Within a few days the crew of the Sultana was aiding in the transport of the Sixty-fourth and Sixty-fifth Regiments of British soldiers from the navy vessels into the city. It was Commodore Samuel Hood's intent that the Townshend Acts be enforced and malcontents put in their place by the Crown's sheer display of force.

"Mr. Lowe, please have the ship's boat pulled around," David Bruce ordered the boatswain. The rain was falling, and the dreary weather foretold of a long mundane day of work

ahead of them. Lowe repeated the Master's orders to a pair of seamen. The ship's boat, a cutter, trailed the *Sultana* off her stern—she was eighteen feet long, about six feet wide, fore-and-aft-rigged for rowing or sailing and was used for carrying heavy weights of men or stores.

“Cunningham, Lowe, Ritchie and Caton—you will be joining me on the first transports today,” Bruce informed them. Then turning to the Lieutenant's servant said, “Curtis, please drop below and inform the Reefer that we are prepared to begin. He is to relieve me on this watch.”

The young boy scurried down the ladder to fetch the ‘Reefer,’ that is, the midshipman. James Sutherland, a nineteen year-old Scotsman, quickly attired himself in his stiff-collared, blue midshipman's coat for work topside, and in a few moments the cutter was being manned.

“So, Joshua, you're having a bit of a homecoming today, eh?” Bruce asked the boatswain as the men settled into their places at the oars that were staggered throughout the cutter.

“Aye, sir, that I am,” replied Lowe as he grabbed onto the *Sultana's* main shrouds to ease himself down into the cutter. “But I hardly recognize the place, to be honest. I was born here around thirty years ago, but besides changes in the number of buildings . . . well, when I was a child here we were a bit—shall we say—more *hospitable* to visitors.”

“Yes, I see that the crowd on the docks don't remember those friendly times. I imagine they don't care for England

sending shiploads of soldiers to them to house and feed,” Bruce rejoined. “Cunningham, you’ll have to keep a lookout to see if you see any friends of yours among the soldiers—I understand the regiments consist almost entirely of your Irish brothers.”

“That would be grand, Mr. Bruce,” Edward Cunningham replied, “but I’d be more eager to set foot on solid ground.”

“Ah, if we were to set foot in Boston, I could take you tars to a grand spot called the Midwood Tavern,” Lowe added wistfully, “And a lovely lass named Lydia used to serve there.”

“I can’t imagine that tavern is worth a court martial for desertion, though. Cast off, Mr. Cunningham,” ordered David Bruce as the rain began to fall heavily.

The wind blew out of the northwest, adding miserably to the rain. The *Sultana’s* cutter joined the small transports in creaking and crashing against the sides of the large ships bearing the soldiers. One by one the soggy soldiers climbed down into the cutter, and *Sultana’s* men rowed them to the wharf. It had been since the fourteenth of June that the customs commissioners in Boston had been waiting for these troops. They had fled to the Castle William for asylum when faced with rioting mobs of colonists. They insisted that it would be impossible for them to step foot in the city without two or three regiments occupying the city. They also would maintain their self-imposed exile until they had the assurance from the civil authorities they would call for troops whenever

the customs officers felt the need for extra protection.

On their third ferry of the *Sultana's* cutter across the harbor, one of the soldiers found the weather did not impede his tongue and chatted merrily with the seamen.

“Cor! I am glad to be off that floating prison,” the infantryman prattled on. “Two blessed months in that ship—and the weather did not once give up. I declare I now know what it feels like to *really* be pickled. Why back in Blarney—”

“Blarney? Why, I grew up in county Cork,” Cunningham chimed in. “But I must say you have no idea what cooped up is like until you have spent four months—and a day!—on a wee boat as I have been serving on. It’s the smallest schooner in the fleet, and when it is filled with supplies there is precious little more room in it’s hellish hold than to crawl.” The two then compared memories of old haunts, both roomy and snug.

Soon they reached the wharf, and Cunningham jumped onto the wharf to tie off the lines for the cutter. To empty the boat was a tedious process, as each red-clad soldier attempted to get onto the wharf in one piece with all the equipment he carried with him—musket, musket balls, bayonet and a knapsack with blankets and camping gear.

“We don’t want you lobsterbacks here!” shouted a young boy from the dock. “Go home, bloodybacks!” added a woman further back in the crowd. As had been occurring all day, townsfolk crowded around offering impolite and often rude



remarks, getting in the way to make the process of unloading the soldiers as difficult as possible, without outright defiance. Eventually the soldiers were off and the men from the *Sultana* had returned to their oars.

“Cast off,” Bruce said while gazing through the rain at the ships in the harbor. “Ed, did you hear—?” Turning, he saw the boat was missing one sailor. Roused out of their drudgery-inspired malaise, the others then noticed his absence as well.

“Where did Cunningham go?” “He was just here a moment ago, I’d swear.” “Is that him over there?” Each man was up and looking about, nearly capsizing the cutter. Master Bruce then walked up and down the wharf twice before returning in defeat.

“Cast off, Joshua,” Bruce sighed. “Cunningham seems to have gotten his wish to set his foot on solid ground. I wonder how lucky the Irish really are? For his sake, he better make his next wish that I never find him.” Bruce stared back at the wharf for a while, before picking up again on his diatribe as if he had only paused for a breath. “It is the audacious self-centeredness of it all. As if his individual desires trumped his duties and obligations. I must say that it pushes me beyond the scope of my imagination how someone could be so cavalier about their responsibilities. And after all we went through together on the crossing . . . oh, the Lieutenant will be livid, that’s for certain.”

## INGLIS LOGBOOK:

November 16, 1768. Moored in Boston harbor, the Long Wharf WSW one Cable's length. First part Moderate & Cloudy with Rain. Middle & Later parts Strong Gales & Cloudy. At 7 am Manned Ships for General Gage Going on board of the Romney as did all the Ships of the Fleet. The Boats employed in Landing the Troops out of the Transports



“Article fifteen of the Articles of War clearly states that: ‘Every person in or belonging to the fleet, who shall desert to the enemy, pirate, or rebel, or run away with any of His Majesty’s ships or vessels of war, or any ordnance, ammunition, stores, or provision belonging thereto, to the weakening of the service, or yield up the same cowardly or treacherously to the enemy, pirate, or rebel, being convicted of any such offense by the sentence of the court martial, shall suffer death.’” The voice of the captain of the HMS *Mermaid*—a 28-gun, 200-man frigate—rang out across the harbor. All hands of the *Sultana*, along

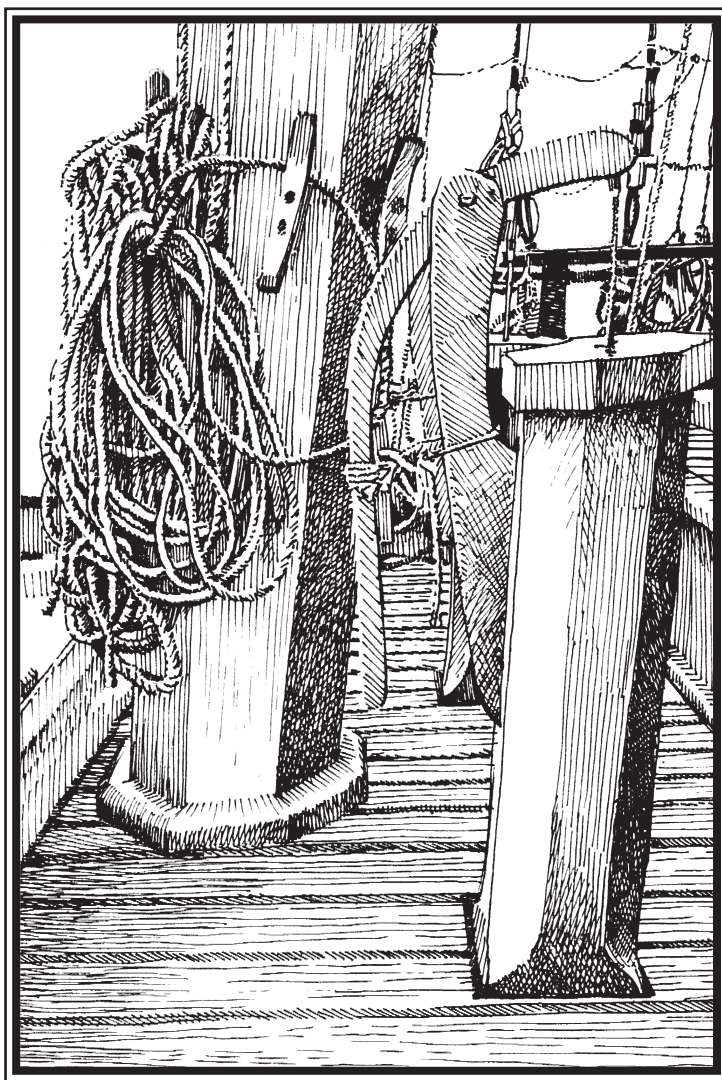
with those on the other ships in the harbor were on deck to witness the execution of the punishment that had been handed down.

“Able-Bodied Seamen Robert Bignall and Thomas Dean have been convicted of attempting to desert from this, His Majesty’s Ship the *Mermaid*, and so will be whipped ‘round the fleet,” the captain continued.

Slowly the two men were placed into separate launches and their wrists were tied to capstan bars above their heads so their bare backs were clearly exposed. The two boats bearing the guilty men were rowed beside each of the ships in the harbor. Drums beat out as the cat-o’-nine-tails ripped into the backs of Bignall and Dean ten times alongside each ship.

The launch bearing Bignall was first to bump against the starboard side of the *Sultana*. Bruce obediently stared down to watch the punishment resume. The sailor’s back was already a mass of slices and bruises. Toward the center of his back the skin had been ripped away and steam rose in the cold November air as the blood flowed down, soaking the waist of his trousers.

One, two, three, four lashes were issued. The sailor meeting out the punishment rested his arm for a moment and resumed. Five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten—the cat-o’-nine-tails was nothing now but a crimson confusion. The launch moved on to the next ship and was replaced alongside the *Sultana* by the boat bearing Dean. After the launches were



rowed past several other ships, the men of the *Sultana* were dismissed to resume their normal duties. Inglis invited Bruce into his cabin, and the two shared some brandy.

“Well, I can’t imagine those two seamen will be called ‘able-bodied’ any longer,” the Lieutenant said grimly, breaking the silence between them.

“Maimed for life, I’d say,” agreed David. “But I suppose they didn’t fare as badly as the *Mermaid’s* quartermaster, Odnall. He is going to hang a few days from today, correct?”

“That was what was *said* at the court martial, but between you, me and the deep blue sea—I expect to see Mr. Tom Odnall given a reprieve.”

“Aw, that’s bilge water!” Bruce protested.

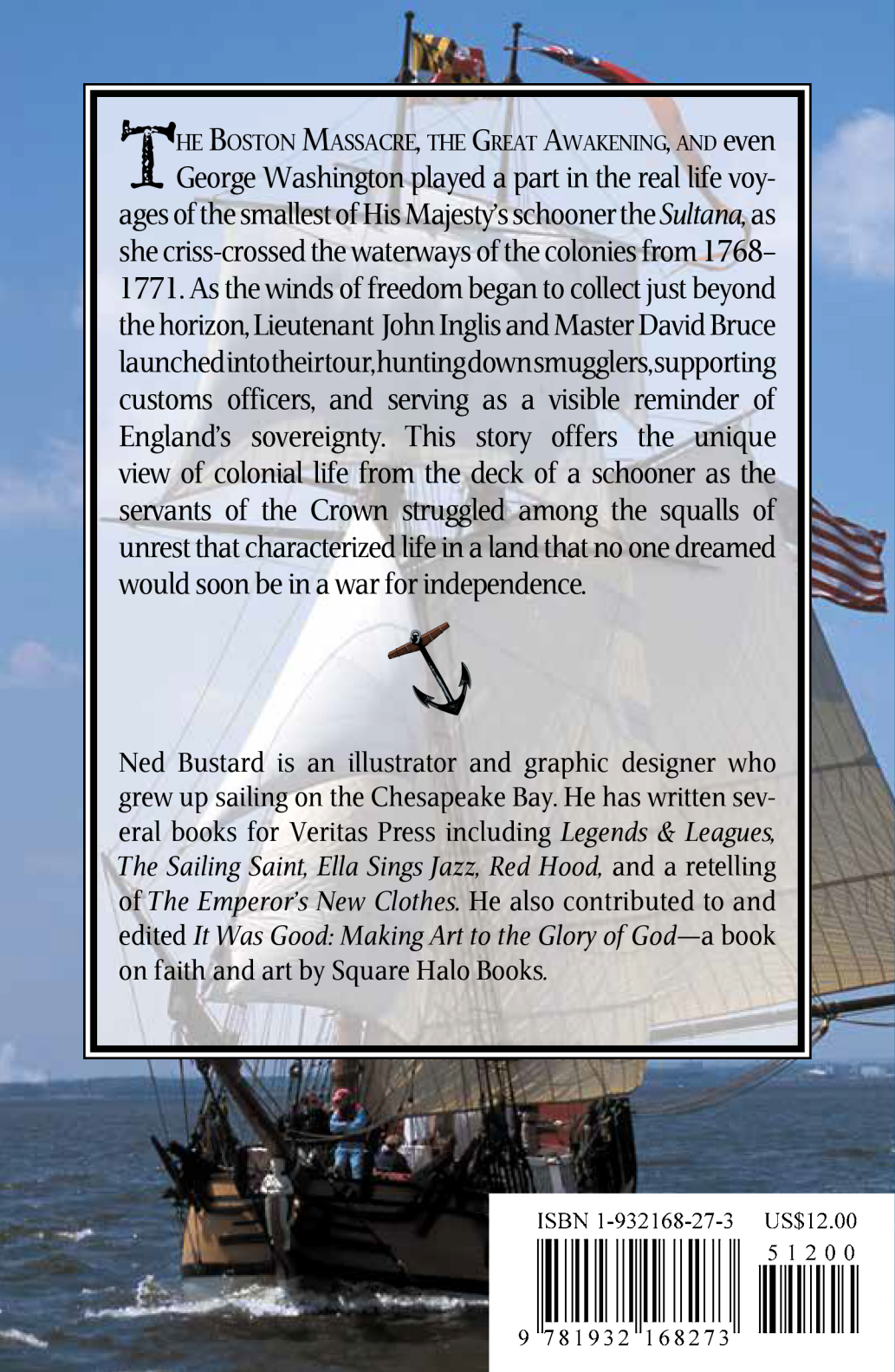
“I wouldn’t put money on it, but that was my reading of things. It really is too bad that things should get to this and that all three of them couldn’t just have been given two dozen of the best and been done with it. But trying to run in such a conspicuous spot as Boston—”

“And with the political scene as tense as it is right now,” Bruce interrupted.

“Yes, of course under these circumstances the full force of the law had to be displayed.” Inglis finished his brandy and looked out the windows in the stern of his cabin. “Yes, it is too bad . . . especially since I dare say that we’ve all wanted to ‘swallow the anchor’ over the years. Did I ever tell you about when I deserted?”

“No! I would not have fancied you’d be the sort to run,” David exclaimed.

“I was fourteen when I joined the Navy. I was serving on



**T**HE BOSTON MASSACRE, THE GREAT AWAKENING, AND even George Washington played a part in the real life voyages of the smallest of His Majesty's schooner the *Sultana*, as she criss-crossed the waterways of the colonies from 1768–1771. As the winds of freedom began to collect just beyond the horizon, Lieutenant John Inglis and Master David Bruce launched into their tour, hunting down smugglers, supporting customs officers, and serving as a visible reminder of England's sovereignty. This story offers the unique view of colonial life from the deck of a schooner as the servants of the Crown struggled among the squalls of unrest that characterized life in a land that no one dreamed would soon be in a war for independence.



Ned Bustard is an illustrator and graphic designer who grew up sailing on the Chesapeake Bay. He has written several books for Veritas Press including *Legends & Leagues*, *The Sailing Saint*, *Ella Sings Jazz*, *Red Hood*, and a retelling of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. He also contributed to and edited *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*—a book on faith and art by Square Halo Books.

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