

From a Chapbook entitled:

**History of Paul Jones the Pirate
(published Glasgow date unknown (approximately 1790s))**

The following account of the battle was sent to the Lords of the Admiralty by the brave Captain Pearson:

“Pallas Frigate, in Congress service,
Texel, October 6, 1779

“On the 23rd ult. being close in with Scarborough about twelve o’clock, a boat came on board with a letter from the bailiffs of that corporation, giving information of a flying squadron of the enemy’s ships being on the coast, and of a part of the said squadron having seen from thence the day before standing to the southward. As soon as I received this intelligence, I made the signal for the convoy to bear down under my lee, and repeated it with two guns; notwithstanding which the van of the convoy kept their wind, with all sail stretching out to the southward from under Flamboroughhead, till between twelve and one, when the headmost of them got sight of the enemy’s ships, which were then in chase of them. They then tacked, and made the best of their way under the shore for Scarborough, letting fly their topgallant sheets, and firing guns; upon which I made all the sail I could to windward, to get between the enemy’s ships and the convoy, which I soon effected. At one o’clock we got sight of the enemy’s ships from the mast-head, and about four we made them plain from the deck to be three large ships and a brig; upon which I made the Countess of Scarborough’s signal to join me, she being in shore with the convoy; at the same time I made the signal for the convoy to make the best of their way, and repeated the signal with two guns. I then brought to, to let the Countess of Scarborough come up, and cleared ship for action.

“At half past five the Countess of Scarborough joined me, the enemy’s ships bearing down upon us with a light breeze at SSW; at six tacked and laid our head in shore, in order to keep our ground the better between the enemy’s ships and the convoy; as soon after which we perceived the ships bearing down upon us to be a two-deck’d ship and two frigates, but from their keeping end upon us in bearing down, we could not discern what colours they were under. At 20 minutes past 7, the largest ship of the three brought to on our lee-bow, within musket-shot. I hailed him, and asked what ship it was? They answered in English the Princess Royal. I then asked where they belonged to? They answered evasively – on which I told them, if they did not answer directly, I would fire into them. They then answered with a shot, which was instantly returned with a broadside; and after exchanging two or three broadsides, he backed his topsails and dropped upon our quarter, within pistol-shot; then filled again, put his helm a-weather, and ran us on board upon our weather quarter, and attempted to board us, but being repulsed, he sheered off: upon which I backed our topsails, in order to get square with him again: which, as soon as he observed, he then filled, put his helm a-weather,

and laid us athwart hawse; his mizzen shrouds took our jib-boom, which hung him for some time, till it at last gave way, and we dropt alongside of each other head and stern, when the fluke of our spare anchor hooking his quarter, we became so close fore and aft, that the muzzles of our guns touched each others' sides.

"In this position we engaged from half-past 8 till half-past 10; during which time, from the great quantity and variety of combustible matter which they threw upon our decks, chains, and, in short, into every part of the ship, we were on fire not less than ten or twelve times in different parts of the ship, and it was with great difficulty and exertion at times that we were able to get it extinguished. At the same time the largest of the two frigates kept sailing round us during the whole action, and raking us fore and aft, by which means, they killed or wounded almost every man on the quarter and main decks. At half past 9, either from a hand-grenade being thrown in at one of our lower deck ports, or other accident, a cartridge of powder was set on fire, and the flames running from cartridge to cartridge all the way aft, blew up the whole of the people and officers that were quartered abaft the mainmast; from which unfortunate circumstance all those guns were rendered useless for the remainder of the action, and I fear the greatest part of the people will lose their lives.

"At the o'clock they called for quarter from the ship alongside, and said they had struck. Hearing this I called upon the captain to say if they had struck, or if he asked for quarter; but receiving no answer, after repeating my words two or three times, I called for the boarders, and ordered them to board, which they did; but the moment they were on board her, they discovered a superior number lying under cover, with pikes in their hands, ready to receive them; on which our people retreated instantly into our own ship, and returned to their guns again till half-past ten, when the frigate coming across our stern, and pouring her broadside into us again, without our being able to bring a gun to bear on her. I found it in vain, and in short impracticable, from the situation we were in, to stand out any longer with the least prospect of success; I therefore struck. Our mainmast, at the same time, went by the board.

"The first lieutenant and myself were immediately escorted into the ship alongside, when we found her to be an American ship of war, called the Bon Homme Richard, of 40 guns and 375 men, commanded by Captain Paul Jones; the other frigate which engaged us to be the Alliance, of 40 guns, and 300 men; and the third frigate, which engaged and took the Countess of Scarborough, after two hours action, to be the Pallas, a French frigate, of 30 guns and 275 men; the Vengeance, an armed brig, of 12 guns, and 70 men; all in congress service, under the command of Paul Jones. They fitted out and sailed from Port L'Orient the latter end of July, and came north about. They have on board 300 English prisoners, which they have taken in different vessels in their way round since they left France, and have ransomed some others. On my going on board the Bon Homme Richard, I found her in the greatest distress, her quarters and counter on the lower deck entirely drove in, and the whole of her lower deck guns dismounted; she was also on fire in two places, and six or seven feet of water in her hold, which kept increasing upon

them all night and the next day, till they were obliged to quit her, and she sunk with a great number of her wounded people on board her – She had 300 men killed and wounded in the action. Our loss in the Serapis was also very great.

“My officers, and people in general, behaved well; and I should be very remiss in my attention to their merits, were I to omit recommending them to their Lordship’s favour.

“I must at the same time beg leave to inform their Lordships, that Captain Piercy, in the Countess of Scarborough, was not the least remiss in his duty, he having given me every assistance in his power; and as much as could be expected from such a ship, in engaging the attention of the Pallas, a frigate of 32 guns, during the whole action.

“I am extremely sorry for the accident that has happened, that of losing his Majesty’s ship which I had the honour to command; but at the same time I flatter myself with the hope that their Lordships will be convinced that she has not been given away; but, on the contrary, that every exertion has been used to defend her, and that two essential pieces of service to our country have arisen from it; the one, in wholly oversetting the cruise and intentions of this flying squadron; the other, in rescuing the whole of a valuable convoy from falling into the hands of the enemy, which must have been the case had I acted any otherwise than I did. We have been driving about the North Sea ever since the action, and endeavouring to make to any port we possibly could; but have not been able to get into any place till today we arrived in the Texel. – Herewith I enclose you the most correct list of the killed and wounded I have as yet been able to procure, from my people being dispersed among the different ships, and having been refused permission to muster them.

“R PEARSON”

“PS – I am refused permission to wait on Sir Joseph Yorke, and even to go on shore.

“The killed were: - 1 boatswain, 1 master’s mate, 2 midshipmen, 1 quarter master, 20 sailors, 15 marines – 40.

“Wounded: - Second Lieutenant Michael Stanhope, Lieutenant Whiteman, marines, 3 Surgeon’s mates, six petty officers, 46 sailors, 12 marines – Total, 69.

“Captain Piercy confirms this account, and adds, that at the beginning of the action he made sail to assist the Serapis; but finding her and the ships she was engaged with so close together, and covered with smoke, so that he could not distinguish one from the other; he shortened sail, and engaged the Pallas for near two hours; when, being so unfortunate as to have all his braces, great part of the running rigging, main and mizzen topsail-sheets shot away, seven guns dismounted, four men killed, and twenty wounded, and another frigate coming up, he saw it was in vain any longer to continue the contest, and he was obliged to strike to such superior force.”