CAPTAIN WILLIAM COIT

By E. H. Woodward

John Col. Col. the eminent ancestor of 1734, of the Col. family in America was born in 93, Salem, Mass., where he was born. He was one of the party that accompanied Rev. John Harvard to New England, and to whom the town of Harvard is due. He was a ship carpenter. His son Joseph, who, with his brother-in-law, built the vessel in which Capt. William was taken to New London from 1736 to 1742.

His grandson, also named William, was born in New London, N. Y., on Nov. 4, 1742, and was admitted to Yale College in the class of 1765. He studied law, and in 1771 was admitted to the bar. His certificate bore the signatures of Col. William Col. Col. Col. Col., the maker of this sketch, and was signed by J. W. Col. Col. Col., the previous June.

In December, 1776, he was ordered to the army, and was ordered to the service of Capt. William Col., the military commander of New London, N. Y. He was a soldier for several years, and contributed to the success of the army.

News of the battle at Lexington reached New London on April 19, 1775. A few hours later Capt. Col. Col. with a small part of the army was on the road. By the time the battle was over, he was back in New London, N. Y. It is probable that he was present at the battle of Bunker Hill.

Of course, many other men were present at the battle of Bunker Hill, and hundreds of others from

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Eastern Connecticut, they started under a sudden, tumultuous impulse. After a short stay, finding that hostilities were not likely to be renewed by Gen. Gage in the near future, New London, returned home to put their affairs in order for the serious work of war.

May 15, the company (the Fourth of the Sixth Connecticut Regiment, Col. Samuel Holden Parsons commanding) started for Boston, marching via Norwich, Sterling, and Providence. Eight of the companies remained on duty at New London till June 17, when they were ordered to duty at Roxbury.

No entries are made in the orderly book between April 16 and June 1.

Capt. Colt with his company marched from Cambridge to Bunker Hill while the battle was in progress, and aided the other troops from Connecticut in covering the retreat of the provincials.

The last entry on the last page of the orderly book bears date "Roxbury 7th August, 1775," and at this point the record as preserved breaks off abruptly.

On the 5th of October, 1775, the Continental Congress authorized Gen. Washington to employ two armed vessels to intercept British storeships, and before the close of the month made provisions for four additional cruisers. Acting under a broad construction of his commission, the commander-in-chief had anticipated Congressional action.

Capt. Colt was detailed from the army to take command of the armed schooner "Harrison," one of the first to be got ready for service. His instructions from Gen. Washington are dated Oct. 22, 1775, and are printed in this pamphlet. In brief, he is directed to seize supply ships bound to or from Boston; to send prizes to the nearest and safest port; to search diligently for paper-tenders to disclose the designs of the enemy; to treat prisoners kindly, allowing them to retain their money and apparel; to avoid any engagement with any vessel of equal or slightly inferior strength, "the design of this enterprise being to intercept the supplies of the enemy;" and to be extremely frugal of ammunition.

During the war no more daring service was performed than by the sailors of the nascent republic. King George regarded them as pirates, while his cruisers seemed sufficiently numerous to seal up the ports of New England. In putting out to sea they took not merely the ordinary risks of war, but as they had reason to expect, of ignominious death in case of capture. Capt. Colt claimed to be the first American "to turn His Majesty's bustling upside down."

In January, 1776, the Council of Safety of Connecticut authorized the construction by Uriah Hayden, at his yard in Saybrook, of a war ship, "to be 80 feet keel, 37 feet beam, and 12 feet hold," and of about 360 tons. July 11 Wm. Colt was appointed captain of this vessel, which had been christened the "Oliver Cromwell." Being in Lebanon the same day, Capt. Colt was called before the Council, when Gov. Trumbull with Homeric simplicity "gave him advice, instruction, and admonition as to his conduct, etc."

Early in August the masts were damaged by lightning; but on the 18th of the month she sailed out of the Connecticut River, and reached New London the 25th. On the 25th of October the Council ordered her to sail on a cruise of about two months, but she was not ready. Jan. 8, 1777, she was ordered to proceed to sea immediately, but the crew deserted. In March, McRelly, the First Lieutenant, was dismissed, and Capt. Colt reported that he would sail as soon as supplies were received. As the result of various complications, however, he was retired from the state service April 14. Later he commanded the "America," and perhaps other privateers.

When Benedict Arnold burned New London, Sept. 6, 1781, Capt. Colt was captured, and detained for a time on a prison ship near New York.

Capt. Colt was tall, portly, soldierly in bearing, frank, jovial, somewhat eccentric, and very liberal. Among his peculiarities he wore a scarlet coat, and hence was familiarly known as "The Red Dragon." Dec. 16, 1759, Capt. Colt married Sarah, daughter of Capt. John Prentiss, commander of the armed schoal "Defence," which conveyed five hundred Connecticut troops under Gen. Roger Wolcott from
New London to Cape Breton in 1745. He died in London, England, in February, 1747. They had eight children—three sons and five daughters; the latter celebrated for beauty. Samuel Waldo said that Esther (Mrs. Clapp) had the handsomest face he ever painted.

The eldest, Sarah, born in 1764, married George Lillington of North Carolina, grandson of Col. Alexander Lillington of the British Army. Gen. Lillington distinguished himself at the battle of Moore's Creek, N. C., where in February, 1776, about one thousand militia routed over fifteen hundred Tories, composed in large part of Scotch Highlanders.

Esther, born Jan. 2, 1767, married Samuel Clapp in March, 1792. They lived under the shadow of Trinity Church, New York city, and the remains of both rest in the adjoining cemetery.

Ann, born March 20, 1770, died March 30, 1792, on the day fixed for her marriage to the eldest son of Bishop Seabury.

Elizabeth, the youngest daughter, married Joseph Biscoe, a French exile, to whom Louis Philippe paid a lengthy visit while in this country. Mr. Biscoe died in St. Lucia, where he owned a large estate. His widow died in Pine Bluff, Ark., at the residence of her grandson, Hon. G. W. Biscoe.

Of the sons, Daniel died at sea and Leonidas in childhood.

William, Jr., born Nov. 19, 1771, married in 1800 Frances Murdock, daughter of Rev. Jonathan Murdock (Yale College, 1760). He sailed out of New York as master for twenty-six years. During the war of 1812, at the solicitation of Commodore Decatur, he took command of the armed boat that watched the enemy from the mouth of the Thames. He advanced, too, a large sum to pay the bounties demanded by the sailors who enlisted to man the fleet of Commodore O. H. Perry on Lake Erie. His vouchers were destroyed by fire in 1828. As he had no duplicates, and as Commodores Perry and Decatur died in 1838, and the chaplain of the squadron about the same time,—the only officers having knowledge of the facts,—no part of the money was ever refunded either to him or to his heirs.

In 1817, Capt. Wm. Colt, Sr., broken in health, left New London to visit his daughter in North Carolina, where he died in 1824. His dust rests in the family cemetery of the Lillingtons, on the banks of the Cape Fear river, thirty-five miles from Wilmington. His widow died in New York city in 1833, and was buried in Trinity churchyard beside her daughter, Mrs. Clapp.

Both father and son made generous sacrifices for their country. No descendant of theirs has ever received pension or bounty land, or asked for either.