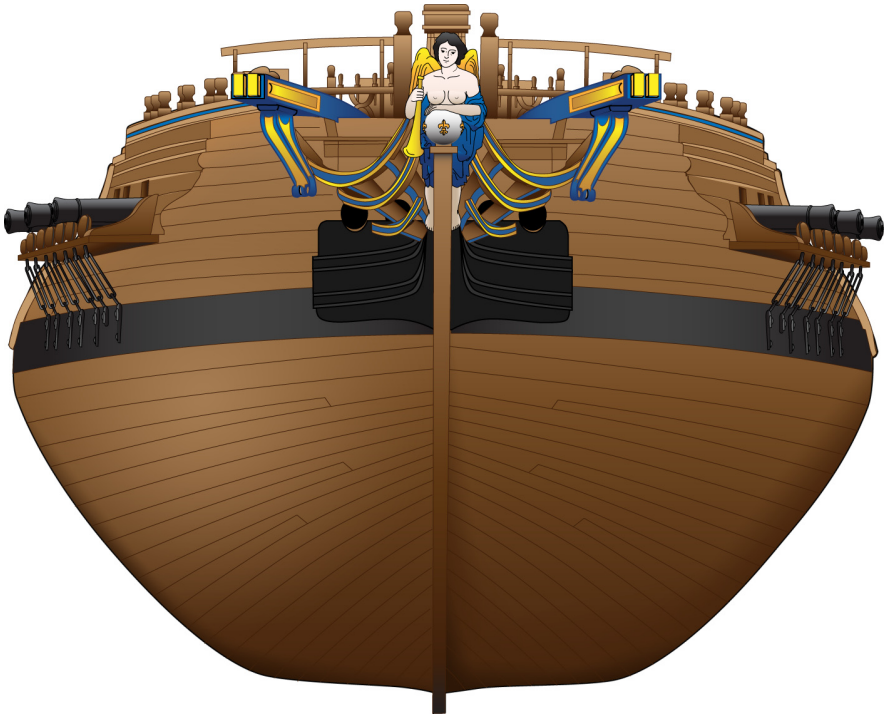


# La Renommée

Story of a French Frigate



D. E. STOCKMAN



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The excerpt from *The Ship's Carpenter* is from a work of historical fiction. Certain characters and their actions were inspired by historical individuals and events. The characters in the novel, however, do not resemble actual persons, living or dead. For more information contact the author at [davidstockman47@gmail.com](mailto:davidstockman47@gmail.com)

# *La Renommée*

## *Story of a French Frigate*

Few frigates of the mid-1700s garnered the reputation for speed as that of *la Renommée* (pronounced: lah • reh-noh-may'), launched in 1744 at the great French naval shipyard at Brest on the Atlantic coast in Brittany. Her unique nautical architecture influenced the future of ship design in Great Britain as well as in France. *La Renommée* sailed both sides of the ocean under the Bourbon and British Royal Navy ensigns for almost 27 years.

The story of *la Renommée* begins with the War of Austrian Succession that sprang out of multiple conflicts over colonies and trade around 1740. France had allied itself with Prussia while Great Britain supported Archduchess Maria Theresa's succession to the Hapsburg Monarchy. A confusing state of allegiances and colonial boundary disputes had, by 1743, brought France and Great Britain to war against one another.

### *French Construction*

In preparation for war, both Britain and France increased the construction of warships. Versailles's support for the French navy had always been inconsistent ever since its creation because the greater threat to France didn't come from the sea. Traditionally, invasions into France came from central Europe, requiring the French to fund a large, strong army. The later reign of the Sun King (Louis XIV, 1638–1715) with Secretary of State Colbert in charge, saw a marked

increase of support for the navy only to drop off when King Louis XV (1710–1774) ascended to the throne in 1715. The return to scant financial support created mediocre construction and manufacturing procedures, inexperienced crews, and poorly maintained ships. This was, however, occasionally offset by short bursts of financial investment during wartime. Throughout the mid-1700s, the output at the shipyards, including Brest, was irregular and under-funded on average.

Around 1737, realizing their sad state of naval construction, Versailles sent Blaise Ollivier to Holland and England to study

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**...making ships designed on scientific principles a new and wholly French process.**

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foreign methods of ship construction. He had earlier written a revealing treatise on the weaknesses of French nautical architecture. Upon returning he again wrote a detailed memoir on the Dutch and English methods and their arsenals in comparison to the French established practices. His keen insights thrust him to the peak of authority, making ships designed on scientific principles a new and wholly French process.

Ollivier produced the first true light frigate in 1741, *la Medée*, a marked difference from the traditional frigate designs. *La Medée* had two decks as previous frigates, but the bottom deck carried no guns. Ollivier built strong supports for the top deck to take the ordnance weight while reducing the ship's overall tonnage and draft to increase its speed. The ceiling planking, or inside planking below deck, was attached diagonally to replace hull supports and provide shear strength to overcome hogging. The lower (gun) deck that used to carry cannons was now no more than sleeping quarters for the crew with a scant 4-foot headroom. Keeping the deck low enabled the topside and upper deck to be closer to the water which reduced wind resistance and the tendency of ships to heel leeward. Even-keeled to reduce elevation and the center of gravity also increased her speed. Once *la Medée* put to sea, his improvements immediately became the required standard for all future frigates.

These discoveries alone, however, could not change the momentum of old theories of warship design at the many shipyards. To merge the industry standards, the School of Construction was established in 1741 at the Academy of Sciences in Paris to emphasize

teaching a unified approach to the new techniques, mathematics, and physics of ship design. This soon replaced the varied training and localized practices at the many shipyards whose shipwrights had no practical knowledge of nautical architecture or principles but only built as they had been taught.

One of the young student designers at the school, François Clairin-Deslauriers, drew upon *la Médée's* new characteristics in preparing plans for a frigate that could advance ship construction even further. His designs sharply increased the angle of the tumble-home, or inward slant of the frigate's sides, and lowered the upper deck even closer to the waterline. In addition to a long, narrow hull, he placed the foremast further to the bow to catch more wind. He also changed the dimensions of the masts and used iron braces to replace the heavy wooden hanging knee braces that supported the decks. The radical changes would reduce the draft and make the frigate much faster, however, they would also make handling harder and by-the-head, or tending to plow the waves instead of riding over them. Yet, the incredible speed gained outweighed the few, negative sailing characteristics.

The final plans for a *Frégate du Deuxième Ordre*, or Frigate of the Second Order rating, were approved by the French Admiralty. The shipwrights in Brest, one of the French shipyards on the European Atlantic Coast, laid the new frigate's keel in May 1744.

Brest had long been one of France's major naval bases. The Romans had first recognized the port's unique geography, and built a fort and harbor at the mouth of the Penfeld River. While under the Sun King, the shipyard's first warship, *la Infante*, was built in 1661 and hundreds more were to follow over the next three centuries. Besides sailing vessels, Brest also produced courageous captains during the War of Austrian Succession and Seven Years War like the brothers François and René de Saint-Aloüarn and Guy de Coëtnempren de Kersaint, all eventually to become officers aboard *la Renommée*.

When completed and launched on December 19th in Brest, she sailed as a 30-gun with twenty-six 8-pounder cannons on her gun deck and four 6-pounder cannons on her quarterdeck. Brest became *la Renommée's* home station from 1744 until 1747 while under French command.

## *Missions to Louisbourg*

In January of 1745, Captain de Kersaint took her first command and soon discovered the frigate out-ran any other ship at sea, doing 15 knots in gale winds. He immediately sailed on a mission to Cape Breton (then part of French Île-Royale) in North America to deliver communiques and assess the security of the great citadel of Louisbourg. The French fortress and port guarded the passages to Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, the St. Lawrence River, and the Atlantic entrance to all of Canada. A squadron of warships from Brest planned later to meet with Captain de Kersaint near the Grand Banks off Newfoundland. Together, they would form a well-armed deterrent against an anticipated British blockade around Louisbourg.

Upon arrival in April, sea ice kept him from approaching the port; and he encountered three New England colonial warships that pursued his frigate until night came. After a few day, in an attempt to sail again to the citadel, nine cruisers encircled his frigate and fired over 115 shots, but he refuse to surrender and avoided capture. Not to his surprise, colonial and British naval vessels had already begun blockading Louisbourg.

Later in the month, *la Renommée* chased a fleet of troop transports from Connecticut off Pope's Head on its way to Cabot's Strait near Nova Scotia and captured a lagging colonial transport ship carrying horses and militiamen. Captain de Kersaint boarded it and then released it in favor of chasing the fleet's snow escort, *Tartar*, but was unsuccessful in engaging it after an eight hour chase when it fled into the shallow waters of Tor Bay.

In mid-May, Captain de Kersaint was heading westward, south of Nova Scotia, when he sighted, attacked, and captured a snow, the

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**...captured a snow, the *Prince of Orange*. It was a newer built provincial naval warship...**

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*Prince of Orange*. It was a newer built provincial naval warship rather than one of the usual privateer ships hired by the colonies, and carried fourteen 6-pounders and was captained by a provincial naval officer. After repairing her, both ships

sailed out of Beaver Bay under the Bourbon flag to reconnoiter together.

Later in May, *La Renommée* captured a colonial brigantine of

200 tons from Carolina with a full hold of rice off Nova Scotia. When attempting again to enter Louisbourg's harbor, he caught sight of the French 64-gun *le Vigilant* in a battle against several colonial warships. Four other enemy ships spotted *la Renommée* and chased her away. Unable to enter the port or locate the French squadron on the Grand Banks, he departed for Brest to report his findings.

Captain de Kersaint arrived back at Brest in June to discover that the squadron had never left France because of a shortage of funds. The navy did, however, plan for a much larger fleet under the command of Admiral De Salvert to depart for Cape Breton to break the citadel's blockade. In early July 1745, he joined the fleet and was sent ahead to scout.

Along the way, he attacked an enemy mast-ship carrying timbers and after over two-hours of fierce fighting took her about 30 miles east off Newfoundland. The ship, another named the *Prince of Orange*, carried as a passenger New York Lieutenant Governor Clark on his way to London. During interrogation, the lieutenant governor mistakenly informed Captain de Kersaint that Louisbourg had fallen to the colonial infantry. Government documents that Clark had failed to destroy during the capture of the vessel later revealed a detailed plan of a British invasion of French Canada. However, the surrender of Louisbourg to the British navy and colonists scuttled their mission's goal to prevent the capture of the fort. *La Renommée* and the squadron spent time in the waters near Nova Scotia to warn off French merchants and then again set sail for home in September.

The next year, Versailles created plans to recapture Louisbourg and gathered an enormous fleet to depart in June 1746 under Admiral d'Anville (d'Enville). *La Renommée* once again led the expedition as the point ship, ahead of the fleet to assess the strength of the British defenses. However, terrible storms delayed, scattered, and destroyed many of the ships near Newfoundland.

Almost three months later, the remaining ships gathered in the bay near Chebucto (now Halifax, Nova Scotia). This third attempt to reach the citadel suffered when disease struck the expedition, killing hundreds. *La Renommée* then escorted several ships up to Quebec in October, returning to Chebucto. Compounded with the sudden death of Admiral d'Anville and the self-inflicted wound of his replacement, the season was now too late for an attack anywhere in Nova Sco-

tia or Cape Breton. The crippled, unfortunate fleet headed back to France. The mission and its exorbitant costs were in vain.

On route, Captain de Kersaint was separated from the rest of the fleet in a storm and found himself in the morning fog in the middle of a British squadron. Attacked, he was seriously wounded in his thigh during a long-running, nine-hour battle with two of the enemy ships off the coast of France. The dreadful engagement nearly destroyed *la Renommée* and Captain de Kersaint considered surrendering. His first lieutenant, la Motte-Picquet, bravely took command in place of his injured commander and successfully brought the frigate, with only a foremast remaining and having lost many crewmen, into the safe French harbor of Port-Louis.

By this time, word of the fast frigate had spread among the British Royal Navy and many captains had set their goal on capturing the elusive, speedy warship. The commander that did, was sure to receive the Admiralty's notice.

In September 1747, Captain François Marie Aleno de Saint-Aloüarn was in command of *la Renommée* along with his brother René as second in command. They departed for Santo Domingo with the island's new governor, the Count de Conflans on board. Two days out, they encountered enemy warships along the French coast south of the island of Ushant. A clash with the British *Amazon* (the captured French *Panthère*, a sister ship to *la Renommée*) badly split the French frigate's masts. Although a fire and damage to the *Amazon* prevented her from attacking again, *La Renommée* then withdrew after sighting more enemy warships approaching. All night the frigate changed course to elude her British pursuers. The next day the *Dover*, a 44-gun commanded by Captain Washington Shirley, who had followed *la Renommée* by moonlight, caught up to the jury-masted Frenchman. At the end of an hours-long battle on September the 24th, Captain de Saint-Aloüarn surrendered the frigate after nearly sinking, losing fifty men and most of his gun crew officers, and having a third of his gunpowder under water. Count de Conflans, himself, took a wound to his thigh in addition. The fast French frigate, with its speed compromised, had little with which to defend against the larger British warship.



## British Missions

Captain Shirley towed the heavily damaged warship for weeks in contrary winds and arrived at Plymouth on October 10th. There the navy assessed *la Renommée* and they found her suitable to be commissioned into the British Royal Navy as a 5th Rate. For the next two months, shipwrights repaired the frigate, first renamed the *Fame* and then finally, *Renown*. The same Captain Shirley was the first to command the frigate for the British in January 1748, sailing for Port Royal, Jamaica in the West Indies.

The war ended and for three years the *Renown* patrolled the waters around Jamaica and the Caribbean for smugglers and pirates. For a few brief months, Cornelius Smelt captained the ship until the command was returned to Captain Shirley, who arrived back in England with her in March 1751. At that time the frigate was surveyed, reduced to a 6th rate, and then was ordered to be broken up. But favorable opinions of her speed prevailed and swayed the Admiralty to put the captured warship in Ordinary on the River Thames in Deptford. For six years the *Renown* was out of commission and tied to a cable with only a skeleton crew to keep her fit.

In 1757 she was partially rebuilt at Portsmouth, losing much of her famous speed and reclassified back to a 5th rate with heavier guns, twenty-four 9-pounders, four 6-pounders on the quarterdeck, and two 6-pounders on the forecastle. The ship's commission next went to Captain George Mackenzie. With the Seven Years War (French and Indian War in America) underway, the frigate saw action along the French coast in the "descents" or amphibious attacks in 1758 along the French coast, first at St.-Malo. During the actions on June 29th off Cherbourg, Captain Mackenzie chased the 22-gun corvette, *la Guirlande*, that was putting out to sea from the port. The fleeing sloop headed westward toward the Guernsey island of Alderney, ten miles off the coast.

After an intense fight, the French warship struck its colors when the British *Rochester*, a 50-gun, approached firing a few chase cannons. *La Guirlande* was the only capture during the entire mission. The *Renown* returned to England with the fleet and received repairs

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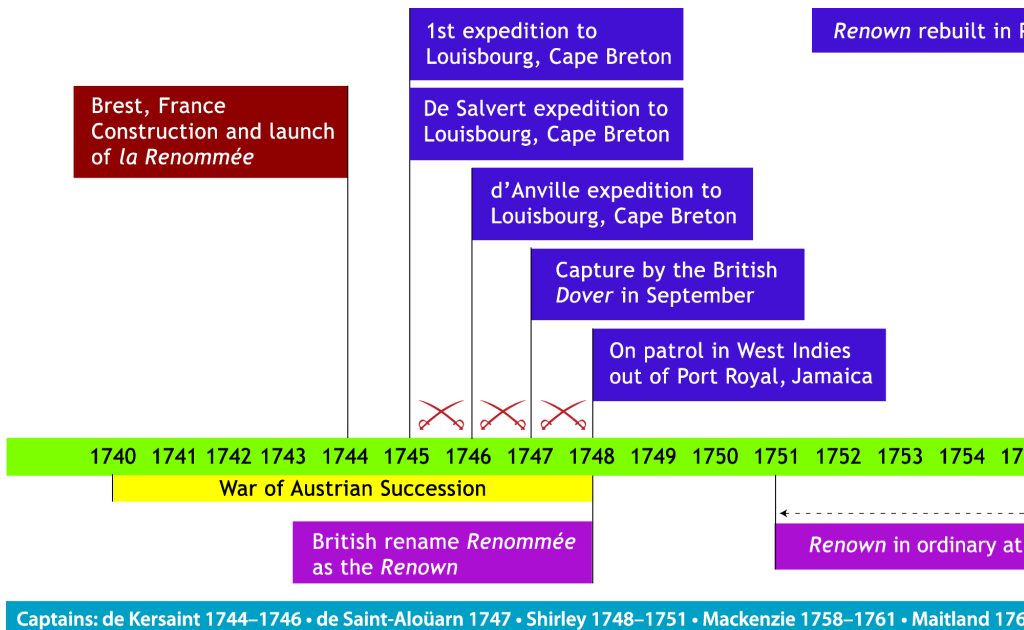
...the frigate saw action along the French coast in the "descents"...

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and new masts at Portsmouth. She sailed to Plymouth again, where new iron ballast and other ironmongery were supplied her. They also made alterations to her masts and spars.

Later that year Captain Mackenzie joined the fleet of Admiral Boscawen and sailed again to Port Royal. In the West Indies, the *Renown* captured the *Captain West*, a French schooner, and in January 1759, joined Commodore Moore's expedition at Carlisle Bay, Barbados before the attacks against Martinique and Guadeloupe Islands. Following an aborted attempt to take Fort Royal on Martinique, the fleet proceeded to cannonade Saint-Pierre. After failing to silence the protecting redoubts, the fleet sailed on to Guadeloupe. There the *Renown* and the fleet bombarded the citadel of Basse-Terre and almost destroyed the town, landed troops, and captured it.

The *Renown* then joined a smaller squadron to attack Fort Louis on Grand Terre, Guadeloupe and after six hours of bombardment, landed Highlanders and marines who took the fortification. However, with news of the arrival of a French fleet, Commodore Moore's ships relocated to Prince Rupert's Bay in Dominica to protect Basse-Terre and the British Leeward Islands. In November 1759, Captain

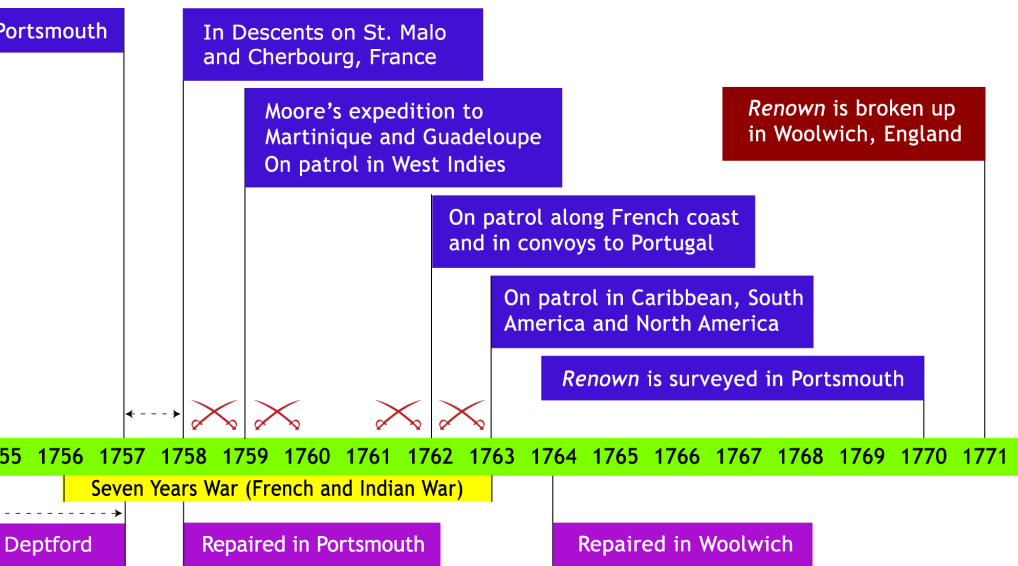


Mackenzie's *Renown* set sail for Jamaica once again, carrying Brigadier General Haldane, the governor-elect of the island, to prepare defenses for an attack by the French fleet under Admiral Bompar.

Although during the war both the French and British performed almost equally well at sea against one another in battle, British superiority in numbers and experience kept most of the French ships bottled up in their ports. By the end of the year 1759, an *annus mirabilis* for Great Britain, it proved to be a costly lesson for Versailles. Their invasion fleets had failed miserably; France lost distant colonies in New France and Guadeloupe, and the defeats at both the battles of Lagos and Quiberon Bay devastated the capabilities of their navy, allowing British dominion over the seas for many decades to come.

Throughout all 1760, the *Renown* sailed from the Port Royal station on patrol duties with Captain Mackenzie.

In April 1761, Captain Frederick L. Maitland took over command and remained on station in Jamaica where the *Renown* captured the French schooner *la Neptune* that month and a French schooner from Bordeaux in May. Later, she recaptured from the French the *Black Jack* out of South Carolina. The *Renown* patrolled the West Indies



1-1764 • McBride 1765-1766 • Bickerton 1766-1769 • Murray 1769-1770 • Fitzherbert 1770 • Williams-Freeman 1771

until September and she returned to the Downs near Kent, England.

During early 1762, the frigate cruised the coasts of England and France. And in early March, she captured the 6-gun privateer cutter, *la Saujon* out of Morleaux, and with the British *Lizard* assisting, took the privateer *le Count d'Herouville* of 12-guns from Dunkirk. Later that month, the *Renown* chased and seized the French snow *le Domerville* of 8-guns out of Bayonne, and the French privateer snow *le Sequin* of 12-guns, off St.-Malo, assisted by the British sloop, *Adventure*.

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**She captured the privateers,  
*la Saujon* and *le Count  
d'Herouville***

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In April the *Renown* escorted transports to Lisbon, Portugal and during the summer convoyed to Oporto, Portugal on numerous trips. By November of that year, the frigate was back in Port Royal, Jamaica with Captain Maitland still in command.

In both 1763 and 1764, *Renown's* tasks took her to the islands of Haiti and Tortuga, and Cartagena, Columbia, plus a number of trips to Savannah, Georgia; St. Augustine, Florida; Mobile, Alabama; and Pensacola, Florida. Maitland returned to Spithead, England in July 1764. The *Renown* was surveyed, the crew paid off, and the ship was put up at Woolwich for repairs by November of that year.

Captain John MacBride took command in June of 1765 and in 1766 the ship sailed back to Woolwich, England. By 1767 the *Renown* was under Captain Richard Bickerton and returned to the Port Royal station in Jamaica.

Bickerton captained the *Renown* until 1768 when in poor health, Captain George Murray took over patrolling the West Indies and Gulf of Mexico until March of 1770. Then Captain Thomas Fitzherbert commanded the ship, returning the aged frigate to England in July. At Portsmouth, England in August, the crew was paid off, and the ship was laid up to be surveyed.

The navy promoted Captain William Peere Williams-Freeman to Post Captain on the *Renown* in January 1771, although he likely never sailed on patrol on board her. In April 1771, she was determined by the Admiralty to be unfit for commission and was broken up the next month at Woolwich, England, her timbers becoming parts of barns, piers, and roof beams.

## *The Ship's Construction*

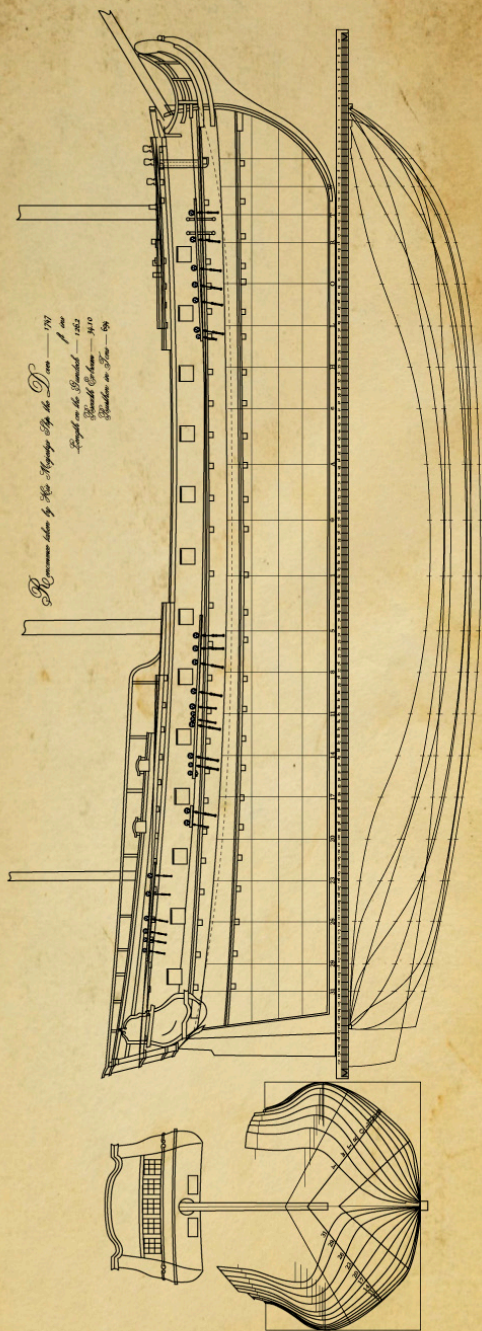
The well-respected *la Renommée* far surpassed the average 10–15-year lifespan of most frigates, sailing for twenty-seven years. Although the frigate had Great Repairs that undoubtedly prolonged her length of service, it is important to note that the navy felt the ship was worth the large investments to do so. Many important naval leaders both in France and Great Britain desired to command the frigate for her speed and low profile. In a report, they stated that she was “*well built,*” unlike many other French captures, having “*that appearance, and a very promising body for going, and common fame says she out-sailed everything...*”

She was considered the most popular frigate during the War of Austrian Succession. Her nautical architecture, along with other French captures, influenced the British Admiralty later to adopt the Unicorn and Lyme classes of frigate construction based upon those French ship designs.

Wartime stresses had forced each combatant country to create new weaponry like bayonets, infantry flintlock muskets, and ship mortars; and refinements to old weapons; cannon trunnions, standardized cannons, and better rockets and grenades. On the deep blue, the advancements took place with better rigging and sail arrangements, hull shapes, and very important, faster ships. France's break from traditions, unlike Britain's restrictive Establishment, set the pace for hydrodynamic excellence in ship design. The “modern” light frigate was born, and within a few short years, *la Renommée* was launched at Brest.

Ships at that time were not complete without the elaborate sculptures that decorated the prow, stern, and quarter gallery. Those on *la Renommée* were drawn up by Charles-Philippe Caffieri, the Master Sculptor at the Brest shipyard of the Caffieri artists family who had designed the decor for many ships. Unlike the entwined curving motif of the earlier rococo period, Caffieri adopted the newer restraints toward classicism in French art. The original sketches for the ship were completed on the 2nd of July 1744 and are now kept at the Maritime Historical Service at Chateau de Vincennes.

By January 1744, Ollivier approved the design and *la Renommée's* keel was laid down in May at the Brest shipyard on the north-



*The Common plan of the Hydrographic Office — 1797*  
*Length in the Strand — 102 1/2*  
*Breadth in the Strand — 34 1/2*  
*Breadth on Deck — 54*

west Brittany coast. And on December 19th of the same year, the navy launched her. Once she put to sea, her speed was stunning.

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**Once she put to sea, her speed was stunning.**

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With a stern gale wind two points off her beam, she made 15 knots even without stunsails or topgallants, becoming the fastest ship afloat.

The frigate was armed with twenty-six 8-pound guns on the upper deck and four 4-pound guns on her quarterdeck likely forged at Foundry Lane in Touvre in southwestern France or one of the nearby foundries.

French nautical construction and design had been at odds with the British construction methods for many decades. To the British, French ships were simply built too flimsy. The French spaced their thinner frames, or ship ribs, too far apart and other scantlings, the timbers and beams, were also lighter. Often the futtock timbers were joined with butt-joints instead of the stronger scarf-joints. They used lighter cannons to lighten the deck loads, allowing them to use more iron supports in their constructions to avoid the heavy wood braces and lodging knees than the British. Instead of sturdy oak treenails, they used pine or other lighter softwoods. French vessels also had more iron bolts in use. This introduced “nail-sickness,” with the iron rusting away and rotting the surrounding wood.

All of the usual French practices increased maintenance and produced faster hogging and warping in ships along their length, decreasing the ship’s seaworthiness and maneuverability. Although a conservative attitude prevailed in the British Admiralty nearly unchanged, there were pleas from their captains for revisions to the Establishment methods, created by 1745, to increase ship speed.

The contentious methods in French shipbuilding allowed their ships to be swift, something the British commanders envied greatly. With so many French frigates outperforming British frigates, the Admiralty eventually gave in to the fact that French designs should be considered.

Unlike other French cruisers, *la Renommée* after capture was found to have frames that were closer and “*are all framed bends in the French manner, both timbers as joined are from 1ft 2in to 1ft 6in and in the room between from 4in to 7in*”.

The *Renown* was a favorite among the commissioned captured

frigates that changed the outlook of the British Admiralty. *La Renommée's* survey after capture in Plymouth, unlike many of her sisters, found her to be outstanding in comparison. By the late 1740s, the new French designs and resulting sailing characteristics of the light frigates influenced the British to change their design requirements allowing for more experimentation.

Immediately after *la Renommée's* capture in September 1747, the Royal Navy surveyed and refitted her at a cost of £5,103.16s.7d before commissioning her. In 1751, the *Renown* was found worthy

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*La Renommée's* survey after capture in Plymouth, unlike many of her sisters, found her to be outstanding in comparison.

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enough to undergo a Great Repair for five months, costing £10,754.14.3d, that changed her sailing characteristics and slowed her after placing heavier cannons on her and reclassified her as a 5th rate. Then beginning on August 27, 1764, the navy surveyed her again and did another repair costing £1,808.14s.0d between Sep-

tember 1764 and May 1765. By 1770, she needed additional repairs but her age and the costs swayed the officials against spending the estimated £7,000 more on her and she was broken up in May 1771 at Woolwich.

Her exact specifications vary depending upon the source of research, national standards of measurement, and year of measurements (i.e. before or after capture and the British rebuilds). The following are assumed to be close to the actual dimensions when captured based upon the Plymouth survey, taken from Jean Boudroit's *La Renommée, Frégate de VIII*.

## Ship Measurements:

Length: 124' 6"  
Keel Length: 100'  
Breadth: 31' 8"  
Hold depth: 16'  
Burthen: 500 tons - 670 tons  
Displacement: 931.06 tons  
Draft Fore: 13' 6"  
Draft Aft: 14' 2"



Midship Ports (above water): 6' 4"

Guns (French): 26 x 8 pounders (Upper Deck), 4 x 4 pounders (Quarterdeck)

Guns (British): 24 x 9 pounders (Upper Deck), 6 x 4 pounders (4 on Quarterdeck & 2 on Forecastle)

Broadside Weight: 120.9 lbs. (54.8 kg)

Top Speed: 15 knots

Stored for Service: 3 months

Crew: 224 (British)/206 (French)

Officers: 4 (British)/ 10 (French)

Men: 220 (British)/196 (French)

### **Unusual Features:**

The most recognizable characteristic of *la Renommée* is the acute inward slanting tumblehome and low profile. As mentioned above, it reduced wind resistance and no doubt provided for protection by better deflecting cannonballs. Another easily seen addition to the ship was the two false chase-gun ports on the stern below the gallery. Besides giving pause to an attacking ship at the stern, they likely served as the ventilation for the crew's sleeping quarters on the gun deck that now had no ports on the hull.

### **Sailing Qualities:**

In good weather, *la Renommée* sailed well on smooth seas and strong winds. She was maneuverable, albeit slow in tacking and wearing. However, in rough weather, she pitched greatly and rolled. She was a wet sailor in a blow, burying her bow into waves when close hauled, largely due to the fore-placed mast and even keel. Stiff and wet, she needed much trimming. And on long voyages, the change in displacement from consuming provisions forced adjustments to her loading and handling. With the wind 2 points abaft the beam and doubled reefed topgallants and foresail, her speed was best.





## *The Commanders and Captures*

Most of the captains of the frigate went on to have illustrious careers and distinctive social ranking. Some of the most respected French and British commanders of that age commanded the desirable *la Renommée*. As the commanders' highest achieved ranks indicate below, ten of the twelve became admirals.

### List of Commanders—with year of *la Renommée*'s command and highest achieved rank:

1744–1747

**Guy François de Coëtnempren de Kersaint**, Chef d'Escadre (Rear Admiral)

1745

**Toussaint Guillaume de La Motte-Picquet**, Chef d'Escadre (Rear Admiral), Lieutenant General of the Navy. (Acting commander for wounded Captain Guy de Kersaint)

1747

**François Aleno de Saint-Aloüarn**, Capitaine de Vaisseau (Captain)

1747-1751

**Washington Shirley**, Vice Admiral of the White

1750

**Cornelius Smelt**, Captain (uncommissioned commander)

1758–1760

**George Mackenzie**, Vice Admiral of the White

1761–1765

**Frederick Maitland**, Rear Admiral

1765

**John MacBride**, Admiral of the Blue

1766–1768

**Richard Bickerton**, Vice Admiral of the White

1768–1769

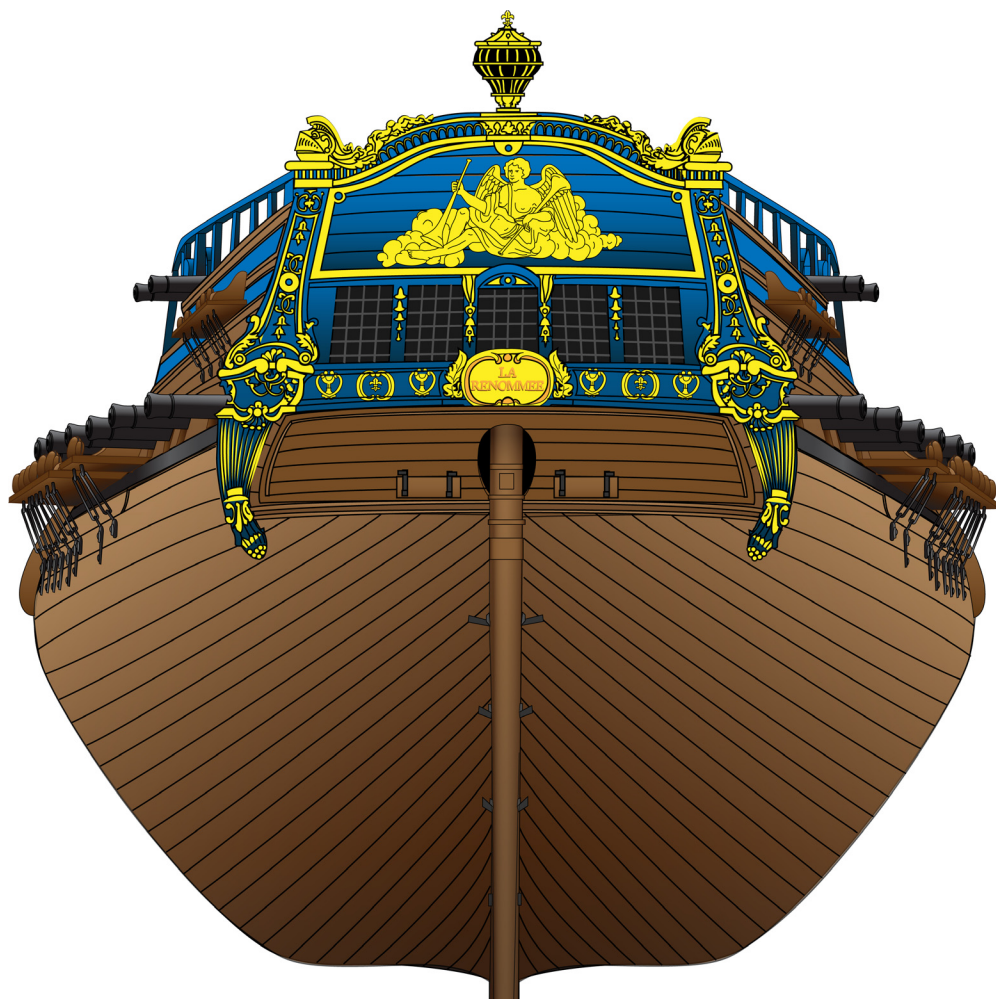
**George Murray**, Vice Admiral

1769–1770

**Thomas Fitzherbert**, Vice Admiral of the White

1771

**William Peere Williams-Freeman**, Admiral



*La Renommée/Renown* made numerous captures while in service to France and Great Britain. The following is a partial listing of her more noted engagements. Smaller ships taken in the West Indies were omitted. Also noted is *la Renommée's* own capture by the British *Dover*.

### List of Captures:

1745 May 5:

A colonial transport ship surrendered to *la Renommée* near Massachusetts and was released.

May 16:

Captain de Kersaint captured the colonial *Prince of Orange*, a 28-gun snow off Nova Scotia.

May (late):

*La Renommée* took a 200-ton Carolina brigantine carrying rice near Nova Scotia.

1747 September 23:

*La Renommée* captained by François Marie Aleno de Saint-Aloüarn was sailing a hundred and fifty miles southwest of Ushant, an island off the coast of France, making its way to Santo Domingo with the new governor of Santo Domingo. There they encountered the 26-gun British frigate, *Amazon*, and had a running battle for hours. Eventually the *Amazon*, greatly damaged, ended her attacks after she caught fire. Four larger British warships then appeared distant and closed on *la Renommée*. With badly damaged masts from the previous fight, she was still able to outrun them and made course changes during the night. At daybreak on the 24th, however, she was attacked by one that had followed her by moonlight, the *Dover* of 44-guns and commanded by Captain Washington Shirley. After three hours of battle, *la Renommée* was forced into lowering the flag. Captain Shirley towed the ship to Plymouth where she was surveyed, repaired, and commissioned into the Royal Navy as the *Renown*.

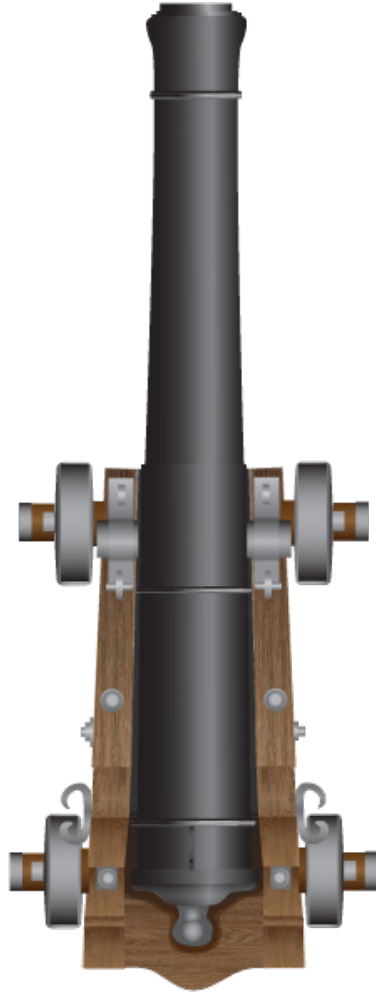
- 1758 June 29:  
The *Renown* under Captain George Mackenzie chased and captured the French sloop *la Guirlande* of 22-guns off the Guernsey Islands. The *Rochester* of 74-guns assisted in the last few minutes of the battle.
- 1759 December:  
Captain Mackenzie captured the French schooner *Captain West* in the West Indies. The ship was later taken by the French and recaptured again by the British.
- 1761 April 21:  
While commanded by Captain Frederick Lewis Maitland, the *Renown* captured the French schooner *la Neptune*.
- May 7:  
Captain Maitland also captured a French sloop from Bordeaux and took it to Port au Prince, Haiti.
- May 10:  
The *Renown* recaptured the English schooner *Black Jack* from South Carolina, taken by the French the previous day.
- 1762 March 7:  
Captain Maitland while on Channel duty, captured the French privateer, *la Saujon*, a cutter of 6-guns from Morleaux.
- March 9:  
The *Renown* captured a French privateer, *le Comte d'Herouville* of 16-guns from Dunkirk, assisted by the *Lizard*.
- March 18:  
Captain Maitland commanding the *Renown* chased and took the French snow *le Domerville* of 8-guns out of Bayonne, and the French privateer snow *le Sequin* of 12-guns, off St. Malo, assisted by the sloop *Adventure*.

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Abraham manned his station below to check for hull damages on the orlop deck and in the hold. He overheard the battle above and, for the first time, experienced what sailors felt in terrifying engagements at sea: fear. The quaking of the ship was tremendous as the *Northumberland* replied with her guns and Abraham grabbed a plank to steady himself.

“Head for the 64-gun!” Captain Watson tore for the French warship. As he made for her, the first ship turned about in the English ship’s wake. “This will be a day they’ll remember, Lieutenant,” he said as they prepared to strike again. “Keep an eye out for the 62-gun astern.”

“That’s the *Mars* ahead, Captain. I’ve seen her before.”

Inside of a minute, *le Mars* was passing and firing its port-side guns. Likewise, Watson’s ship returned the fire with greater accuracy, shredding sails and raking the decks. The *Northumberland* turned for another run as the first French ship caught it half way and blasted away the foresail of the *Northumberland*. Her huge foresail yard, falling and lying across the deck with a limp web of lines, made it difficult to man the fore guns.

The first ship, *le Content*, navigated away from the *Northumberland* to wait for *le Mars*. Then, together, the enemy warships attacked the *Northumberland* from both sides in a continual shower of cannonball and musket fire. The carnage was everywhere; nevertheless, the firing continued with exchange after exchange—every ship showing more damage with every volley.

Belowdecks on the *Northumberland*, the roars deafened the gun crews, who depended on hand signals from their officers, and the thick smoke of the cannons often blinded them, making aiming difficult. Men carried the injured below for the surgeon and his aides to attend. A few powder monkeys, boys as young as ten, were wounded in the firestorm while running powder canisters up from the magazine storeroom. Deep in her belly, the carpenters ran and crawled on the decks and in the hold inspecting the hull. Removed from the mayhem above, they checked hits below the waterline for leaks or other structural damage.

The power of the heavy iron thrown through the planked sides was devastating. Nothing had prepared Abraham for the continual pounding of doom upon the great wooden shell. His blood burned with excited, terrified energy. He hurried from side to side, fore to aft in search of damages. All the while, over him, cannons exchanges covered the decks with wood splinters, fallen lines, and wounded men.

The horror ground on for over three hours as the ships locked together in a contest of dominance and death. In the late afternoon, *le Mars*—crippled—withdrawed from the action. Even so, *le Content* continued the barrage as injury to the ships and men mounted still higher. Captain Watson eventually staggered and fell upon the poop deck. Crewmen carried him below to the quarterdeck where he leaned against the mizzenmast, alive, though gravely wounded by a musket ball.

“Cease firing, we have struck!” A shout came from the poop deck above him.

Angered, Captain Watson turned to his first lieutenant, who was just as puzzled by the command. “Who called the strike, Lieutenant?”

As the first lieutenant climbed the stairs to figure it out, a blast from *le Content* shattered the helm. It instantly killed both helmsmen and took away the wheel in splinters. The ship lurched as the wind spilled from the sails, freeing the ship of any control.

“Damn the rascals. Leave firing and house your guns, we’ve struck!” The curse bellowed from the poop deck. It was the shipmaster trying to surrender. He and the gun master came running down the stairs followed by the first lieutenant.

The three hurried to the ashen captain, the shipmaster was shaking with fear. “We will all be killed! They are going to rake us fore and aft, Captain. Strike and let us cut away the masts, we’ll be retaken tomorrow. The ship is without a helm and can’t continue.”

French cannons continued firing through the dense powder smoke, unaware the *Northumberland’s* shipmaster had struck its colors. The officers carried the pallid captain below to the purser’s cabin for the surgeon to tend. In a faint breath, Captain Watson gave a weak order. “Put her before the wind and continue the fight.”

Unsure whether the existing damage put their warship in any danger of sinking, the first lieutenant sent for the master carpenter. Within a minute, Abraham arrived in the purser’s cabin. “There’s not an inch of water leaking in, sir. She’s in fine shape below.”

The shipmaster and the first lieutenant returned to the poop deck to consider Captain Watson's order, but the firing subsided just as the captain fainted dead away.

Abraham started back for the orlop deck when the ship bumped something. Shouts of "Cease your fire!" came from the upper deck, then the tromping of feet from French marines. The shipmaster had struck the colors, and the French had boarded.

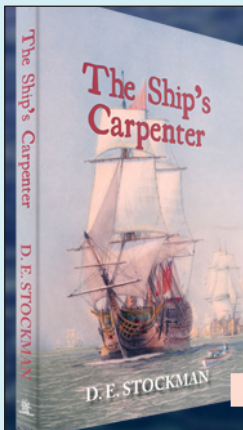
"My God, we didn't strike, did we?" Captain Watson asked as a French lieutenant came to accept his surrender. Mister Lake, working on his wound, ignored the French soldiers, too busy to care.

"*Oui*, sir. Your ship is surrendered," said the French officer in English.

"The fool." Captain Watson, with little strength left, motioned to the doctor to hand him his sword; while still in the surgeon's hand, the captain pushed it toward the Frenchman. "Here, I won't need it any longer."

"He's finished," said the lieutenant to two marine guards as he took the sword. "Get the English officers on the upper gun deck so I can instruct them. Unarm the crew and take them to the gun deck. Careful, many will want to continue fighting!"


Abraham, understanding the exchange, was aghast: his ship had surrendered, his captain was seriously wounded, and worse—he was a prisoner of war! ~



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