

George Holbrooke of Wickham, Hampshire

Early Life

Home and School

October 1738 to July 1753

George Holbrooke was born on the seventh of October 1738 in Wickham, Hampshire, the only child of William Holbrooke, a naval sailing master and Mary Holbrooke. He attended the grammar school in Wickham and in 1750 he was admitted to the naval academy at Portsmouth, where he studied for three years.

Midshipman

July 1753 to December 1755

In July 1753 George went to sea as a King's letter boy in a succession of ships-of-the-line engaged in port guardship duties.

The Colonial Post Captain

December 1755 to July 1756

In September 1755 his father persuaded his old shipmate Edward Carlisle to take George as a master's mate into his new command *Fury* based at Minorca. In May 1756 *Fury* was with Byng's squadron at the Battle of Minorca. In June 1756 *Fury* captured the French frigate *Vulcain* and later that month Holbrooke passed his lieutenant's examination and received his commission and appointment as first lieutenant of *Fury*. In August 1756 *Fury* sailed for Portsmouth.

The Leeward Islands Squadron

November 1756 to February 1757

In September 1756, Holbrooke followed Captain Carlisle into the new sixth-rate frigate *Medina*, as first lieutenant. In October *Medina* sailed for the Leeward Islands Squadron and in December *Medina* took part in the attack on Port Louis in Grenada. In February 1757 *Medina* captured the French frigate *L'Arques*.

The Jamaica Station

June 1757 to November 1757

In April 1757, *Medina* sailed for Jamaica. In June 1757 *Medina* survived a hurricane off San Domingue and in July 1757 *Medina* conveyed the Governor of Florida to St. Augustine. In August 1757, when his captain was wounded in action with two Dutch pirates, George took command of *Medina* and captured *Torenvalk*, one of the pirate ships. With his captain convalescent he took command of *Medina* on a mission to watch the French activities at Cape François. He took part in the battle of Cape François and later drove the French frigate *Outarde* to her destruction on the

Inagua Islands. On his return to Port Royal he was promoted to commander and given *Torenvalk* to command, now re-named *Kestrel*.

Holbrooke's Tide

December 1757 to March 1758

In November 1757 *Kestrel* was sent to Portsmouth with despatches. On his arrival at the Admiralty, he was given orders to initiate a blockade of Emden in advance of Commodore Holmes' arrival. In January 1758 he survived an attempted murder. In March 1758 he negotiated the surrender of Emden before the arrival of Commodore Holmes, and later in the month captured the Dunkirk privateer *Bon Chance* before returning to Portsmouth for a refit.

Perilous Shore

March 1758 to November 1758

After returning from Emden in March 1758, Holbrooke is ordered to join Commodore's Howe's Inshore Squadron of the Channel Fleet. He takes part in the raids on Saint-Malo and Cherbourg in the summer of 1758. In September he is captured at Saint-Cast as the army is being re-embarked after the second failed raid on Saint-Malo. Holbrooke is exchanged and returns to England to find that *Kestrel* has been given to another commander. He is ordered to the American Colonies to support the attack on Fort Niagara and sails in the packet *Lord Halifax* in November 1758.

Rocks And Shoals

December 1758

In December 1758 Holbrooke has a lucky escape when *Lord Halifax* is saved from a privateer by Carlisle in *Medina*. Holbrooke joins Carlisle in Williamsburg for Christmas before continuing his journey to New York.

Niagara Squadron

June 1759 to September 1759

Holbrooke is seconded to Brigadier Prideaux' army for the 1759 attack on Fort Niagara. After a difficult start as the only senior naval officer in the expedition, he quickly proves his value by capturing a French schooner on Lake Ontario and protecting the army's boats as they coast along the lake to the fort. He befriends a Mohawk warrior he teaches him how to survive in the North American wilderness. Holbrooke takes part in the final battle of La Belle Famille that forces the French capitulation. He returns to England in September 1759 where he at last achieves his promotion to post-captain.

Nor'west By West

February 1760 to May 1760

On his promotion to post-captain, George Holbrooke is appointed to command *Argonaut*, a twenty-eight-gun sixth rate frigate that is shortly to be launched at Moody Janverin's yard on the Hamble. While his ship is fitting out, Holbrooke marries Ann Featherstone on the 21st of October 1759.

Argonaut sails to join the Downs Squadron in January 1760 and is immediately sent to shadow the French expedition that has been ordered to make a landing in the north of Britain. That task takes Holbrooke right around the British Isles and lasts until May 1760. In February 1760 Ann informs him that he is to become a father.

Treacherous Moon

January 1761 to June 1761

Argonaut spends the winter of 1760-61 blockading the river Vilaine where a few French ships took refuge after the battle of Quiberon Bay in 1759. After an unsuccessful attempt to intercept two of the ships as they make their way to Brest, Holbrooke receives Admiralty orders to insert a spy on the Brittany coast. When he joins the expedition against Belle Isle, he finds that he can't shake off his expertise in espionage and as well as covering the army's landings on the island he undertakes hazardous missions into French territory. Belle Isle falls to the British in June 1761.
