

# 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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*.

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## 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*.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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, and Edward Holbrooke is born 15 September 1760.

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## 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.

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## An Upright Man

*February 1762 to September 1762*

Holbrooke spends the second half of 1761 recuperating at his home in Wickham, Hampshire while *Argonaut* is refitted and her hull coppered as part of an experiment to improve speed and time between dockings. At the end of the year, he's sent to the Leeward Islands to test the coppering and there he meets Edward Carlisle and agrees to take his wife, Lady Chiara, to Hampton Roads, where he is bound with a convoy. On the way he meets and outwits a Spanish fourth-rate that has heard of Spain's entry into the war, while Holbrooke has not. On return to Portsmouth, he's sent to join the Brest Blockade and there he sights a French squadron commanded by his old adversary the Chevalier de Ternay and follows it to Newfoundland. *Argonaut* assists in ejecting de Ternay and again follows him back across the Atlantic, where he destroys a French sloop before it can escape through the Pointe du Raz.

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## Debatable Lands

*September 1762 to March 1763*

Holbrooke had hoped to take *Argonaut* back to Portsmouth after his encounter with de Ternay's squadron (An Upright Man) but instead he's sent to the faraway River Plate to assist a Portuguese expedition intent on seizing the Debatable Lands between Brazil and the river from the Spanish. It's a long voyage with visits to Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro and an engagement with *San Sebastian*, a Spanish fourth rate near the equator. The Portuguese expedition moves slowly when it finds that its intended base of operations has already been taken by a Spanish force under the command of the governor of Buenos Aires. When the expedition eventually retires to Rio de Janeiro, *Argonaut* covers its retreat and in so doing drives *San Sebastian* ashore on the English Bank. With the war ended, *Argonaut* returns to Portsmouth to be decommissioned, and Holbrooke finds himself ashore at last.

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## Straits of Anián

*September 1764 to June 1766*

Holbrooke had settled into life in Wickham until he had a summons to the Admiralty. He was given a fifth rate frigate *Orion* and ordered to pursue Commodore Byron on his voyage to the Pacific. On the way he discovered a French settlement on the Falkland's Land, passed through the Straits of Magellan and surveyed the coast of New Albion searching for the western end of the fabled Straits of Anián. He fought a Spanish ship that was sent to intercept him and discovered that not everyone on board *Orion* was quite who they appeared to be. He returned to England after an eighteen-month voyage.