Edward Peyton (naval officer, d. 1749)

Participation in the War of Austrian Succession: *Privateering (Mediterranean, East Indies), Battle of Negapatam*

Edward Peyton, about whose early years little is known, joined the Royal Navy as a volunteer in 1707. From 1727 onwards, he served as a lieutenant on several ships, including the HM Ships *Dursley Galley*, *Chatham* and *Somerset,* before being promoted to captain aboard the *Grampus* on 27 June 1739.[1] As captain of HMS *Kennington*, he sailed to the West Indies in 1741, narrowly missing the *Battle of Cartagena de Indias* in 1741 , which was led by Vice Admiral Edward Vernon (1784-1747).[2] Moreover, Peyton made the acquaintance of Thomas Mathews, who promoted him to the Mediterranean fleet as captain on HMS *Rochester* on 10 June 1743. However, Mathews assigned him the task of conveying messages to the King in Hanover and to the ministry and admiralty in London. As a result, his time on the *Rochester* ended on 3 August. Thus, he missed the *Battle of Toulon* in February 1744 but became involved in another fateful event shortly thereafter:[3]

Immediately following the official declaration of war between Britain and France in the *War of the Austrian Succession,* which also marked the beginning of the *First Carnatic War*, Peyton sailed to the East Indies in March 1744 as captain of HMS *Medway* in a squadron commanded by Curtis Barnett (naval officer, d. 1746).[4] With the intention of weakening the French economy, Britain employed strategic privateering against the enemies' overseas trade.[5] This mission was extremely successful, at least until 1746, when French Admiral Bertrand François Mahé de La Bourdonnais implemented countermeasures. "[He] secures seven armed merchantmen to add to his single of the line *Achille* (70 guns). [La Bourdonnais] has the ship painted and armed with numerous cannon to mask their weakness, and in July 1746 he sets sail for the Coromandel coast with 1,200 troops."[6] In the course of this campaign, the *Battle of Negapatam* took place on 25 July, when the French ships encountered the British squadron of seven ships of the line, which had been under the command of Peyton since the

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[1] cf. Harding, Richard: Peyton, Edward, 03.01.2008, in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22078.
[2] cf. ibid.
Harding, Richard: Vernon, Edward, 03.01.2008, in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/28237.
[3] cf. Oxford Dictionary: Peyton, Edward [internet recourse].
Baugh, Daniel Albert: Mathews, Thomas, 03.01.2008, in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18332.
[4] cf. ibid.
Laughton, John Knox/ Harding, Richard: Barnett, Curtis, 03.01.2008, in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1477.
[5] cf. Bryant, G. J.: The Emergence of British Power in India 1600-1784. A Grand Strategic Interpretation (Worlds of the East India Company 9), Woodbridge 2013, p. 38.
[6] cf. Tucker, Spencer Coakley (Ed.): A Global Chronology of Conflict. From the Ancient World to the Modern Middle East Vol. I, Santa Barbara 2010, p. 752.

death of Barnett on 29 April 1746. The result of the encounter was a gun battle which not only killed 14 British and 27 French sailors but also caused damage to the masts of some Royal Navy ships.[7] Peyton, in consultation with his war council, therefore decided to withdraw from the battle and retire to Tricomales for repairs. "The following day, as the two squadrons closed, Peyton believed that the French were now considerably reinforced and decided not to pursue the action."[8] He intended to wait until reinforcements arrived from England, a decision that proved to be fatal because, on 10 September, La Bourdonnais conquered Madras. After this news reached the mother country in 1747, Peyton was arrested and brought back as a prisoner to Great Britain, arriving at Spithead on 6 July 1749. Peyton, who was in poor health, was allowed to return to London and await his court case; however, he passed away before his fate could be adjudicated on 26 October 1749.

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[7] cf. ibid.
[8] Oxford Dictionary: Peyton, Edward [internet recourse].

by Annika Eileen de Freitas, Oldenburg, 05 October 2023