Compelled to Run His Majesty's Ship Ashore: The Story of the HMS Santa Monica as Historical, Cultural and Environmental Resource

Kelly Gleason
Maritime Studies Program
East Carolina University
1794 East 3rd St.
Greenville, NC 27858
Kag1122@mail.ecu.edu

Abstract

In April of 1782, Captain John Linzee sailed the 36-gun frigate HMS Santa Monica towards Tortola in the British Virgin Islands following raids on the island by American Colonists. Captain Linzee was sailing the HMS Santa Monica, a prize of war captured by the HMS Pearl during the siege of Gibraltar in 1779. On April 1st, the 145 foot British frigate was deliberately run aground on the island of St. John to keep her from sinking. Captain Linzee salvaged what he could and the wreck was, for the most part, forgotten for about 188 years. The HMS Santa Monica is a reminder of the often-disregarded role that the Caribbean played during the American Revolution.

Management of a submerged cultural resource is a delicate balance of cooperation, outreach and protection. Allowing the interested public access to the remains of the HMS Santa Monica and still treating the site with integrity as an ecosystem is a dilemma for managers. The story of the HMS Santa Monica should be told, but not without careful attention to the impacts the "hands-on" history of archaeological research will have. Research conducted on the site in June of 2002 attempted to determine the impact that archaeological research has upon a coral reef ecosystem, such as the one that the HMS Santa Monica has become a part of while it still remains largely intact on the ocean floor after over 200 years. The site is an excellent example of interdisciplinary management, as the wreck of the HMS Santa Monica is not only a valuable part of maritime history, but also an important cultural and natural resource to be managed with care.