

U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Revenue Cutter Heroes, War of 1812



**"Capture of the [revenue cutter] COMMODORE BARRY"
A watercolor by Irwin John Bevan.**

John Cahoone

Captain John Cahoone commanded the revenue cutter *Vigilant* during its engagement with the British privateer *Dart* during the War of 1812. The *Dart* had preyed upon Yankee shipping in Long Island Sound for some time, taking 20 to 30 vessels. She appeared off Newport on 4 October 1813 with two freshly caught prizes, and this braggadocio proved her undoing. Capt. Cahoone took 20 Navy volunteers on board to augment his regular crew and made sail to engage the brazen Britisher. *Vigilant* boldly sailed well within gun range of the more heavily armed sloop and loosed a broadside, which stunned the privateer. A boarding party from the revenue cutter quickly scrambled aboard the enemy vessel as she brushed alongside her quarry and quickly carried the Briton. *Vigilant* lost two men in the engagement, both of whom fell into the water and drowned while attempting to board.

William Ham

William Ham was a very aggressive Revenue cutter captain during the War of 1812. As commander of the Norfolk-based cutter *Jefferson*, he took by force the British schooner *Patriot* on

June 25, 1812. This event took place just a week after the proclamation of war and was the first American maritime capture of the conflict. On April 12, 1813, four Royal Navy barges captured the American schooner *Flight*. With volunteer militia on board *Jefferson*, Ham ran down three of the barges, capturing over sixty British officers and enlisted men and freeing the captain and crew of the American merchantman. Together with the cutter *Gallatin*, the *Jefferson* also participated in the wartime seizure of the British merchant vessels *General Blake*, *Active* and *Georgiana*.

Frederick Lee

Captain Frederick Lee of the Revenue Marine commanded the revenue cutter *Eagle* during the War of 1812. The British captured the *Eagle* only after a battle that lasted for over a day in which *Eagle's* crew valiantly fought the British from the shore when their cutter grounded.



Samuel Travis

Captain Samuel Travis of the Revenue Marine was the commanding officer of the cutter *Surveyor* during the War of 1812. The cutter was boarded by the British in 1813 and captured after a brief, but spirited, engagement which so impressed the British commander that he returned Travis's sword. He wrote:

"Your gallant and desperate attempt to defend your vessel against more than double your number, on the night of the 12 inst., excited such admiration on the part of your opponents, as I have seldom witnessed, and induces me to return you the sword you had so nobly used. . . . Our poor fellows have severely suffered; occasioned chiefly, if not solely, by the precautions you had taken to prevent surprise. In short, I am at a loss which to admire most, the arrangement on board the *Surveyor*, or the determined manner by which her deck was disputed, inch by inch. You have my most sincere wishes for the immediate parole and speedy exchange of yourself and brave crew. . ."