



## U.S. Coast Guard History Program

# *Eagle*, 1809

New Haven, Connecticut  
Master Frederick Lee

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Any of the various large birds of prey of the family *Accipitridae*, including members of the genera *Aquila* and *Haliaeetus*, marked by a powerful hooked bill, long broad wings, and strong, soaring flight.

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Builder: Unknown, built in New Haven, East Guilford or possibly along the Thames River.

Rig: Foretopsail schooner

Length: 58-61'

Beam: 17-19'

Draft: 10'

Displacement: 130 tons

Cost:

Commissioned: 1809

Disposition: Captured and taken into service by the Royal Navy

Complement: Approximately 25

Armament: Four 4-pounders; two 2-pounders

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### **Cutter History:**

Cutter: On January 16, 1809, the Treasury Department authorized the New Haven customs collector to purchase and man a cutter to serve out of New Haven. Built in Connecticut, *Eagle* was completed and commissioned for service by September 16, 1809. Records indicate that the foretopsail schooner measured approximately sixty feet in length and eighteen feet in beam and drew about ten feet. It carried four four-pound cannon, two two-pound cannon, and a crew of twenty-five. The British captured *Eagle* on October 14, 1814, and sailed the cutter as a prize to Halifax. On December 31, 1814, the New Haven customs collector provided a down payment of \$3,900 to build a new cutter *Eagle* and, in October 1815, the collector paid a \$900 balance for the new cutter, which was ready to sail on March 29, 1816.

Master: Frederick Lee received his commission as a master in the State of Connecticut on September 14, 1809, and he took command of *Eagle* two days later. During the war, Lee's officers included Daniel P. Augur, first mate; and John Hall, second mate. Lee remained a revenue cutter master through 1829 and he commanded more than one cutter named *Eagle* during that time.

War of 1812 Events and Operations:

June 18, 1812. President James Madison signs a declaration of war and the War of 1812 officially begins. The congressional authorization states "*that the President of the United States is hereby authorized to use the whole land and naval force of the United States . . . against the vessels, goods, and effects of the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the subjects thereof.*"

June 18, 1812. Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin sends a circular to all customs collectors, writing only the sentence: "*Sir, I hasten to inform you that War was this day declared against Great Britain*". In a separate circular, Gallatin orders the news dispatched to U.S. naval vessels by revenue cutters stationed at Savannah; Norfolk; Charleston; New York; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; Wilmington, North Carolina; and Wilmington, Delaware.

July 14, 1812. *Eagle* sights a British squadron of four large warships off of Montauk Point and transmits the news by letter to the navy agent at New York.

July 24, 1812. A letter from Frederick Lee to the navy agent in New York reports that the USS *Constitution* escaped from a large British squadron after a chase of four days.

August 7, 1812. *Eagle* stops brig *Harriot* of Bristol, England, and a brig from Liverpool, both bound for New York; and sends both into New London for adjudication.

March 29, 1813. A local newspaper reports *Eagle* has returned to New Haven from a "cruise".

May 11, 1813. New Haven, Connecticut-based *Eagle* serves as platform for a prisoner transfer, with the British paroling thirty-eight Americans.

October 3, 1813. *Eagle* apprehends brigs *Patriot*, *Harriet* and *Ann McLane* and sends them into New Haven laden with illegal British cargoes.

October 10, 1813. A revenue cutter (likely *Eagle*) apprehends an eastbound "Boston and New York packet" near Fairfield, Connecticut, for "*breach of Sabbath*" as directed by the Non-Intercourse Act. All passengers and crew were indicted, incarcerated and fined for breaking the law.

October 26, 1813. *Eagle* escorts to New York Harbor the American coasters *Fair American*, *Jennet* and others vessels from New Haven.

May 30, 1814. *Eagle* takes on forty-four volunteer militia and pursues the privateer *Liverpool Packet*, which had just captured a locally owned sloop outside New Haven Harbor. *Eagle* and another armed vessel are forced back to the harbor after sighting a British frigate and two other enemy warships. The local newspaper states: "*The spirit which animated all who embarked on the expedition, is worthy of praise and imitation, and renews a confidence that the sons of Connecticut will still perform their duty, spontaneously, whenever a fit occasion demands.*"

June 14, 1814. *Eagle* escorts sloops *Astrea*, *Allen* and *Rising Planet* into New York Harbor from New Haven.

June 17, 1814. *Eagle* escorts a convoy of twenty coastal sailing craft into New Haven Harbor from New York City. The *New York Evening Post* (June 18) reports "*Yesterday at 4 P.M. Passed the New-Haven Revenue Cutter Eagle, Lee, from New York, with 20 sail of coasters under convoy, standing into New-Haven. No enemies cruisers in the sound.*"

July 19, 1814. In response to correspondents from the New Haven area, Treasury Secretary George Campbell writes the New Haven customs collector to remind local residents that the "*the Cutter 'Eagle' being exclusively intended for the protection of the Revenue, cannot with propriety be employed in the manner they wish [as a naval warship].*"

August 8, 1814. Peace negotiations between the United States and Great Britain begin in Ghent, Belgium.

October 10-13, 1814. After a British sloop captures an American merchantman near New Haven, cutter *Eagle* takes on extra volunteer crewmembers and attempts to intervene. The next morning, Lee finds his cutter dangerously close to the gun brig HMS *Dispatch* (18) and a tender; manages to escape capture by enemy barges; and runs the cutter ashore on Long Island. The cutter's crew and militia drag *Eagle's* cannon on shore and duel with the British warship without a decisive outcome. An American captive on board the captured merchantman characterized the engagement as such: "*The cutter was stripped of her sails, &c, and her guns dragged up to a high bluff, and there fought against the brig and tender with bravery until two o'clock. The brig opened fire against the cutter and our people on the hill about 9 o'clock, and by two the cutter's masts were cut away, and her hull appeared to us who were in the sloop, about 2 or 3 miles from the brig, to be a wreck.*" After fighting for two days, *Dispatch* departed, and then Lee patched up and refloated damaged *Eagle*. However, *Dispatch* and its tender returned with HMS *Narcissus* (36) on October 13 and delivered an overwhelming

force of seven barges, whose men fought off Lee's men and captured the damaged cutter. Lee later commented: "*The officers and crew, together with the volunteers, on board the cutter, have done their duty as became American sailors.*"

November 16, 1814. "*American revenue cutter, the Eagle, prize to H.M.B. Dispatch, sailed under convoy of the [frigate] Narcissus*" bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia (Boston *Daily Advertiser*, 12/19/14). New Haven lacked a replacement cutter until commissioning of a new cutter *Eagle* in 1816.

December 24, 1814. Peace treaty (Treaty of Ghent) signed between representatives of the United States and Great Britain at a ceremony in Ghent, Belgium.

January 4, 1815. In response to the destructive effects of the war on commerce, New England delegates to the Hartford Convention claim that "*Commerce, the vital spring of New England's prosperity, was annihilated. Embargoes, restrictions, and rapacity of revenue officers, had completed its destruction.*"

January 8, 1815. Americans defeat a British army in the Battle of New Orleans in the last major land engagement of the war.

February 11, 1815. Under the white flag, HMS *Favorite* (18) delivers the peace treaty, Treaty of Ghent, to New York City.

February 16, 1815. President Madison signs Treaty of Ghent officially ending the War of 1812.

February 25, 1815. Treasury Secretary Alexander J. Dallas issues a circular to all customs collectors regarding future policy in light of the conclusion of the war. In the two-page circular, he instructs, "[cutter] *officers and men must be recommended for their vigilance, activity, skill and good conduct.*" Dallas later directs that "*Smuggling, in every form, must be prevented, or punished. And if it be not prevented, the officers of the customs, according to their respective duties and stations, will be held answerable to prove, that there was no want of vigilance on their part.*" In the final paragraph, Dallas lists other duties to be carried out by the customs officials, hence their respective cutters, including "*immediate measures will be taken, for restoring the light-houses, piers, buoys, and beacons, within your district and jurisdiction, to the state in which they were before the war*".

March 3, 1815. Congress repeals "*the acts prohibiting the entrance of foreign vessels into the waters of the United States*", thereby repealing elements of the Non-Intercourse and Non-Importation acts.

May 30, 1815. Treasury Secretary Alexander Dallas writes the New York customs collector about building one or more schooner-rigged cutters to replace those lost in the war.

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**Sources:**

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