

Eagle, 1809

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.

Builder: ?

Length: ?

Beam: ?

Draft: ?

Displacement: 130 tons

Rig: Topsail schooner

Cost: ?

Launched: ?

Commissioned: 1809

Decommissioned: N/A

Disposition: Captured by the British

Complement: 25

Armament: Four 4-pounders; two 2-pounders

Cutter History:

The third cutter named *Eagle* entered service in 1809. The Boston Collector of Customs received authorization from the Treasury Department to purchase a cutter not to exceed 130 tons and hire a crew that was not to exceed 25 in number. She was under the command of Captain Frederick Lee, of Guilford, Connecticut, and was based at New Haven.

When the War of 1812 began, she was ordered to patrol the coast against enemy privateers. She also convoyed merchantmen to New York, one of the (if not the first) instances of a Revenue cutter acting as an escort vessel for a convoy. The convoy consisted of the merchantmen *Astrea*, *Allen* and *Rising Planet*. *Eagle* also captured a number of valuable prizes, including the vessels *Patriot* (of Milford, bound for Liverpool with a cargo of salt), the *Harriet* (of Kennebunk, sailing from Bristol, England to New York with a cargo of copper) and the *Ann McLane* (of Portsmouth, sailing from Liverpool with a cargo of dry goods). They were seized for trading with the enemy.

Her luck ran out in October of 1814 when she sailed out of New Haven, Connecticut to assist a U.S. merchantman, the *Suzan*, which had been reported as having been captured by a boarding party of the British frigate *Pomone*. Lee gathered about 40 volunteers from the pubs in New Haven to reinforce his meager crew but was frustrated by a lack of wind to get underway. Undaunted, he put two boats over the side and towed *Eagle* to sea. With a breeze finally filling her sails, the cutter searched the area during the evening without success. But as dawn broke, with a mist settling over the area, the cutter's crew sighted the *Suzan*, a British man-of-war, the 18-gun brig *Dispatch*, and two of the warship's longboats filled with a boarding party ready to take the under-gunned cutter.

Eagle's crew managed to beat back the *Dispatch's* launches and Lee attempted to escape the warship by sailing through the shallows. The warship's heavy guns soon forced Lee to beach off Friar's Head, a 160-foot-high bluff 15 miles northeast of Port Jefferson, New York. The cuttermen and volunteers removed *Eagle's* cannons and hauled them up the bluff and took the *Dispatch* under fire.

The 18 October 1814 *New York Evening Post* gave an account of what happened next to the out-gunned cutter:

"During the engagement between the Cutter EAGLE and the enemy, the following took place which is worthy of notice. Having expended all the wadding of the four-pounders on the hill, during the warmest of the firing, several of the crew volunteered and went on board the cutter to obtain more. At this moment the masts were shot away, when the brave volunteers erected a flag upon her stern; this was soon shot away, but was immediately replaced by a heroic tar, amidst the cheers of his undaunted comrades, which was returned by a whole broadside from the enemy. When the crew of the Cutter had

expended all their large shot and fixed ammunition, they tore up the log book to make cartridges and returned the enemy's small shot which lodged in the hull. The cutter was armed with only 6 guns, 4 four-pounders and 2 twos with plenty of muskets and about 50 men. The enemy being gone and provisions scarce the volunteers from this city left Captain Lee and his crew and arrived here on Thursday evening the 13th instant, in a sloop from Long Island. Captain Davis, from this city, was slightly wounded in the knee by a stone impelled by a 32 pound shot which struck near him. We have since learned that Captain Lee succeeded in getting off the cutter and was about to remove her to a place of safety when the enemy returned and took possession of her. She was greatly injured, but it is expected that the enemy will be able to refit her to annoy us in the sound."

The cutter's ultimate fate remains unknown.

Sources:

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