



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Vigilant, 1812

On the alert: watchful.

Builder: Benjamin Marble, Newport, RI

Length: 60' 7"

Beam: 18' 9"

Draft: 10' 6"

Displacement: 65 tons

Rig: Schooner

Commissioned: 1812

Decommissioned: 1842

Disposition: Sold for \$2,800.00 in Boston.

Complement: 17

Armament: 4 x 4 pdrs. (1830)

History:

The third cutter to bear the name *Vigilant* was a schooner built in 1812 at Newport, RI, by Benjamin Marble at a cost of \$8,500. Her career with the Government would span the next thirty years.

She was taken into the Navy during the War of 1812 and based at Newport, R.I., under the command of Capt. John Cahoone, USRCS.



Figure 1: Revenue Cutter *Vigilant* in combat with the British privateer *Dart*

Vigilant's first action came in the fall of 1813. The British privateer *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.

After the cessation of hostilities with Great Britain in 1815, *Vigilant* resumed patrolling the New England coast. On 11 October 1817, *Vigilant* captured the brig *B*, of Bristol, in Vineyard Sound. Apparently the British vessel had used American shores to outfit for smuggling operations. The prize was, in the words of the *New York Post* for 23 October 1817, "libeled under the Act of the last Congress, to more effectively preserve the neutral relations of the United States."

In the spring of the following year, the revenue cutter continued her cruising off the eastern seaboard. On 17 May 1818, Capt. Cahoone learned that the Spanish brig *Belle Corunnes*--manned by a crew of Irishmen, Spaniards, and Britishers--

lay in Block Island Sound. As his own ship was under repairs at the time, Cahoone embarked in a small gunboat with 10 volunteers. Proceeding from Newport, the revenue cutter captain and his men landed on the shores of Block Island Sound and found part of *Belle Corunnes'* cargo already landed. Placing a guard on the confiscated material--brandy and silks--Cahoone returned to Newport to hasten preparations of *Vigilant* for sea. Later that day, *Vigilant* embarked a detachment of artillerymen under Army Lt. Henry T. Evans and two artillery pieces. With the additional 18 men, the revenue cutter set sail.

Evans succinctly summed up what followed: "the desperadoes were over-awed by the superior force of the Revenue Cutter, and made little resistance; 25 of the crew were captured and the remainder, 11 in number, were captured soon thereafter." *Belle Corunnes* was eventually condemned and sold.

Vigilant maintained regular cruises in protection of American coastwise commerce out of Newport until 2 February 1830, when she was shifted to New Haven, Conn. Returning later to Newport, she underwent an extensive overhaul in the fall of 1835 and, after a period of further service, was sold at Boston on 13 May 1842.

Sources:

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