



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

General Greene, 1810

Wilmington, Delaware
Master Joseph Sawyer

General Nathanael Greene, born in Warwick, R.I., 7 August 1742, was elected to the colonial assembly in 1770 and became a strong champion of colonial liberty and an early advocate of independence. He commanded the militia during the siege of Boston; and served with Washington at Trenton, Brandywine, Germantown, and Valley Forge. He rendered outstanding service as Quartermaster General (1778-80), then took command of southern forces in the Carolinas campaign. By cunning strategy, he divided the forces under Cornwallis and turned the tide in the Carolinas. In this feat he was aided by his lieutenants, notably Daniel Morgan, Light-Horse Harry Lee, and partisan bands under Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter and Andrew Pickens. When he sold his estates to honor personal notes given to secure supplies for the Continental Army, the grateful people of Georgia voted to give him a plantation.

Builder: Philadelphia, PA

Rig:

Length: 60-ft

Beam: 18-ft

Draft:

Displacement:

Cost:

Commissioned: 1811

Disposition: Decommissioned 13 October 1815 and sold.

Complement:

Armament:

Cutter History:

Cutter: Construction of *General Greene* commenced in Philadelphia by a "Mr. Eyre" on November 6, 1810, after requests for bids were placed in city newspapers in October 1810. Her construction was overseen by Christopher L. Bennett. It measured approximately sixty feet in length with an eighteen-foot beam. The cutter was completed and began operations by April 1811 under the command of Bennett until he was dismissed by the President for "perverse conduct" on 7 September 1811. It served throughout the war and was decommissioned and sold on October 13, 1815.

Master: Joseph Sawyer served off-and-on in Philadelphia-and Wilmington-based cutters beginning on November 14, 1799, when he was commissioned a 3rd mate. He received a master's commission on February 20, 1807 and was dismissed as master of *General Greene* on August 30, 1808. Christopher Bennett superintended the construction of the "new" *General Greene* in Philadelphia and took command upon its acceptance in April, 1811 until he was dismissed on 7 September 1811. On October 30, 1811, Sawyer was re-commissioned a master of the cutter and remained in command until October 13, 1815, when *General Greene* was decommissioned and sold.

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.

August 25, 1812. *General Greene's* crew and personnel from a navy gunboat board the ship *Superior* loaded with illegal British goods. The ship was sent to New Castle, Delaware, where an altercation ensued between Customs Collector Allen McLane and the regional navy commander Alexander Murray regarding which federal agency had legal possession of the ship.

August 26, 1812. Commodore Alexander Murray orders the seized ship *Superior* sent to Philadelphia for adjudication. On September 21, Collector Allen McLane orders the commodore arrested and jailed in Delaware.

August 27, 1812. Commodore Alexander Murray returns seized ship *Superior* to Delaware and begins court proceedings against Customs Collector Allen McLane. On June 28, 1815, the newspapers reported that a jury in the U.S. Circuit Court case of "*Commodore Alexander Murray vs. Collector Allen McLane,*" found in favor of McLane in that "*Seizures of vessels within the waters of the U. States, for violation of the non-intercourse act, are considered as properly belonging to the revenue officers.*"

September 1, 1812. Acting Treasury Secretary Edward Polk authorizes increase of *General Greene's* complement to twenty-four men.

November 23, 1812. In Philadelphia, members of *General Greene's* crew use axes to cut open the bow of the brig *Rattlesnake*, which capsized during a severe storm. The cuttermen saved eighteen men and one boy, who all nearly died after spending four hours in chin-deep water with limited air.

December 28, 1812. In response to a letter from the Boston Customs Collector, Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin writes, "*A Revenue Cutter cannot be expressly fitted and employed for the purpose of cruising against an enemy except under the 98th Section of the collection law in which case the Cutter must be placed under the direction of the Secretary of the Navy.*"

January 31, 1813. Crew of *General Greene* saves prize ship *Lady Johnson*, which was adrift in thick pack ice and in danger of going ashore in Delaware Bay. The district court of Wilmington, Delaware, reported that Captain Sawyer and his crew "*exposed themselves to the rigors and severities of a most inclement season, succeeded in removing the said ship to a safe place in the Christina Creek, where she now lies and the part of her cargo on board in perfect safety . . .*"

March 20, 1813. Wilmington, Delaware, customs collector orders *General Greene* to observe and report all activities and movements of Royal Navy forces blockading the Delaware Bay.

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

September 6, 1814. Committee of Defense for the Delaware River writes Treasury Secretary George W. Campbell requesting the use of cutter *General Greene* for daily intelligence gathering trips into Delaware Bay to report the movements of enemy blockading vessels. In the letter the committee wrote "*the revenue cutter [General Greene] appears to us particularly well adapted to this service*" of observing "*movements of the enemy, in or towards the [Delaware] bay.*"

September 19, 1814. Treasury Secretary Campbell instructs Wilmington, Delaware, customs collector orders *General Greene* to gather intelligence on "*enemy movements in the Delaware [Bay].*"

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 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.

Sources:

Cutter History File, Coast Guard Historian's Office.

Information provided by William R. Wells, II.

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