

= Action of 9 November 1822 =

The Action of 9 November 1822 was a naval battle fought between the United States Navy schooner USS Alligator and a squadron of three piratical schooners off the coast of Cuba during the US Navy 's West Indies Anti @-@ Piracy Operation . Fifteen leagues from Matanzas , Cuba , a large band of pirates captured several vessels and held them for ransom . Upon hearing of the pirate attacks , the Alligator under Lieutenant William Howard Allen rushed to the scene to rescue the vessels and seize the pirates .

Upon arriving at the bay where the pirates were said to be , USS Alligator dispatched boats to engage the enemy vessels , as the water was too shallow for the US warship to engage them herself . With Allen personally commanding one of the boats , the Americans assaulted the piratical schooner Revenge . Although the Navy was able to force the pirates into abandoning Revenge , the buccaneers managed to fight their way out of the bay and inflict heavy casualties , including Allen . With their commander mortally wounded , the boats ceased pursuit of the pirates but managed to recover the vessels that had been held in the bay .

= = Background = =

In early November 1822 , the schooner USS Alligator , under the command of Lieutenant William Allen , put in to Matanzas , Cuba , intending to patrol the area as part of the United States Navy 's West Indian Anti @-@ Piracy Campaign . Upon arriving at the port , Allen discovered two Americans attempting to raise \$ 7 @,@ 000 in order to pay a ransom to a band of pirates that had captured their vessels . If the ransom was not delivered , the pirates threatened to destroy the ships and rough up their crews . Learning from these men that the pirates were holed up some 15 leagues away , Allen took the civilians aboard and decided to make an attempt at recovering their ship from the buccaneers .

The band of pirates was relatively large , consisting of around 125 men and three armed schooners . One schooner , Revenge , was an 80 @-@ ton vessel armed with five cannon and 35 men ; a second , 90 @-@ ton schooner had six guns and 30 men ; a third vessel displaced 60 @-@ tons , was armed with three cannon and manned by 60 men . In addition to their armed vessels , the pirates also had in their possession five American prizes . These were the ship rigged vessel William Henry from New York , the brigs Iris and Sarah Morril from Boston , and a pair of merchant schooners with one hailing from Rochester and the other Salem .

Allen 's force of 100 was outnumbered by the pirates and also outgunned , with Alligator mounting only 12 six pounders compared to the pirates ' 14 cannons . Despite being outnumbered , Alligator and her crew were experienced veterans , having taken the Portuguese brig Marianna Flora the year before in a bloody action . Allen himself was also an experienced commander who had taken command of USS Argus during her engagement with HMS Pelican in the War of 1812 . Though Alligator 's draft was too deep to chase pirate craft inshore , if need be , she could send her cutter , gig , and launch out with boarding parties to engage the pirates .

= = Action = =

As Revenge was the nearest of the three pirate vessels to the Americans , Allen ordered Alligator 's boats lowered to run inshore and attack her . Some 40 men armed with small arms were put into the boats , with Allen personally taking command of the launch , Lieutenant Dale the cutter , and Midshipman Henley the gig . Revenge was already underway by the time it was sighted and attempted to escape the Americans despite the lack of wind , using its sweeps . After the American boats had rowed about 10 miles (16 km) , the piratical schooner made an about @-@ face and raised a red flag . Upon approaching the piratical schooner , the American craft were fired on with both grape and roundshot . The American boats returned fire with small arms and moved in to board the vessel . Rather than try to fight off the boarding attempt , the pirates abandoned Revenge while another schooner covered their escape . Alligator 's gig manned by Henley and four men was sent

off to take Revenge as a prize .

Allen then set off with the other two boats in an attempt to seize the schooner which had helped Revenge 's crew escape . This second schooner maintained a heavy fire upon the advancing American boats , and Alligator 's cutter soon lagged behind as it had taken heavy casualties and had trouble manning its oars . Allen attempted to rally his men by standing up and waving them forward . In doing so Allen exposed himself and was struck by musket fire , taking a round first in the head and then in the chest . With their commander mortally wounded and their crew taking heavy casualties , the American boats withdrew , thus allowing the second piratical schooner as well as a third that had not been engaged , to escape . The vessels the pirates had seized were left behind and recovered by the Americans after the action had ended .

= = Aftermath = =

By the end of the action , the American boats were all damaged and their crews suffered four killed and three wounded . Allen was among the former and died some four hours after the battle ended . Despite the fact that they had escaped , the pirates also suffered heavy casualties , with 14 bodies being counted by the Americans at the end of the action in addition to several buccaneers that were presumed drowned . Alligator returned to Matanzas with the recovered prizes ; there Allen was buried with an escort provided by the local governor .

Alligator left Matanzas on 18 November escorting her prizes back to the United States . The following day , she ran hard aground on a coral reef in the Florida Keys , which has since been named Alligator Reef . Her crew failed to refloat the vessel , but managed to salvage her guns , papers , and other valuables . Fearing that she would be salvaged by pirates , they burnt her and she sank . Though it was previously thought that the location of the wreck was known , a 1996 expedition proved this false and Alligator 's exact final resting place remains unknown . Allen was regarded by the Navy as a hero for his efforts against the pirates and his name would be used as a rallying cry the following year when USS Galliniper and USS Mosquito engaged and defeated a band of pirates led by Diabolito near the same area where the American lieutenant had been slain .