

= Battle of Gloucester (1775) =

The Battle of Gloucester was a skirmish fought early in the American Revolutionary War at Gloucester , Massachusetts on August 8 or 9 , 1775 . Royal Navy Captain John Linzee , commanding the sloop @-@ of @-@ war HMS Falcon , spotted two schooners that were returning from the West Indies . After capturing one schooner , Linzee chased the second one into Gloucester Harbor , where it was grounded . The townspeople called out their militia , captured British seamen sent to seize the grounded schooner , and recovered the captured ship as well .

The skirmish was one of a series of actions that prompted a retaliatory expedition by Royal Navy Captain Henry Mowat in October 1775 . The major event of his cruise , the Burning of Falmouth , was cited by the Second Continental Congress when it established the Continental Navy .

= = Background = =

In April 1775 , tensions between British colonists in the Province of Massachusetts Bay and the royal governor , General Thomas Gage , boiled over into war . When General Gage dispatched troops to Concord to search for military supplies the colonists had stored there , alarms were raised , and colonists and soldiers clashed in Lexington and Concord on April 19 . Militia companies continued to arrive in the days following , and the British troops were besieged in Boston .

The siege , which only blockaded land access to the city , made the army dependent on the ability of the navy to supply it with fresh provisions . In many communities near the city , livestock and hay were removed from islands in Boston Harbor and the immediate coastal areas , while General Gage and Vice Admiral Samuel Graves sent out expeditions to raid coastal communities for livestock and hay , and to interdict colonial shipping . When these expeditions landed troops or sailors to round up livestock , they were sometimes met with resistance . Not long after the siege began , colonists and army troops clashed on May 27 near Boston over supplies on a nearby island .

On August 5 , the HMS Falcon , commanded by John Linzee , appeared off Ipswich Bay . Captain Linzee sent a barge of men to the shore in search of livestock , hove to , and sent a barge containing about 50 men ashore to secure a supply of mutton from , the flock of sheep grazing on the Coffin farm at West Gloucester . Major Coffin observed their movements and anticipated their design . He hastily gathered some half dozen men , armed them with rifles and , concealed behind sand mounds , kept up such a brisk firing that the sailors in the barge , supposing that a large company were ready to receive them , thought it prudent to desist from their sheep foraging intentions and returned to the " Falcon " . When the barge returned to the Falcon , Linzee sent it to investigate a schooner in the harbor ; this ship turned out to only contain ballast . Linzee continued to cruise off Cape Ann for the next few days , and impressed some men from local ports and ships .

= = Battle = =

On August 8 or 9 (sources disagree on the exact date) , Captain Linzee spotted two American schooners making sail for Salem around 8 in the morning . Quickly capturing one of the schooners without incident , he put a crew aboard the prize before giving chase to the other . The captain of the second schooner , apparently familiar with the area , brought his ship deep into Gloucester Harbor and grounded it near Five Pound Island shortly after noon . Linzee forced a local fisherman to pilot the Falcon and the prize schooner to an anchorage in the harbor . He then sent 36 men on three small boats under the command of his lieutenant to take the ship . Among the crews sent were 10 impressed Americans , including four from Gloucester . The arrival of the British ship had caused the townspeople to raise the alarm , and militia companies began to muster , led by their captains , Joseph Foster and Bradbury Sanders . Armed with muskets and two aging swivel guns , they opened fire from the shore at the small boats as they neared the schooner . The British rowed faster , and boarded the grounded schooner , where they were effectively trapped by constant fire from the shore . Linzee , attempting to distract the townspeople , fired the Falcon 's guns on the town , and eventually sent a landing party to try to burn the town . However , this attempt was unsuccessful ,

and the party on the grounded schooner continued to be harassed by from the shore . The lieutenant was wounded in the action , and he and a few men managed to escape the action in a skiff around 4 pm , leaving the Falcon 's master in charge . The remaining men left on the grounded ship were eventually taken prisoner , including the impressed Americans . By 7 pm , the small boats had all been taken . Linzee then decided to send the prize schooner in to recover his men . Linzee reported his suspicion that the crew of the captured ship took the opportunity to overpower the prize crew , and recovered the vessel . According to Linzee , " After the master was landed I found I could not do him any good , or distress the rebels by firing , therefore I left off . "

= = Aftermath = =

Linzee 's attempt to burn the town as a punishment for resisting his actions was echoed in later naval actions . In October 1775 , Admiral Graves ordered Captain Henry Mowat on an expedition of reprisal against New England 's coastal communities , specifically including Gloucester as a target , and citing among other justifications Captain Linzee 's defeat at Gloucester . Mowat chose not to attack Gloucester , since he felt its buildings were too widely spaced for cannonades to have any significant effect . Reports of Mowat 's only major action , the Burning of Falmouth (present @-@ day Portland , Maine) , were instrumental in motivating the Second Continental Congress to establish the Continental Navy .