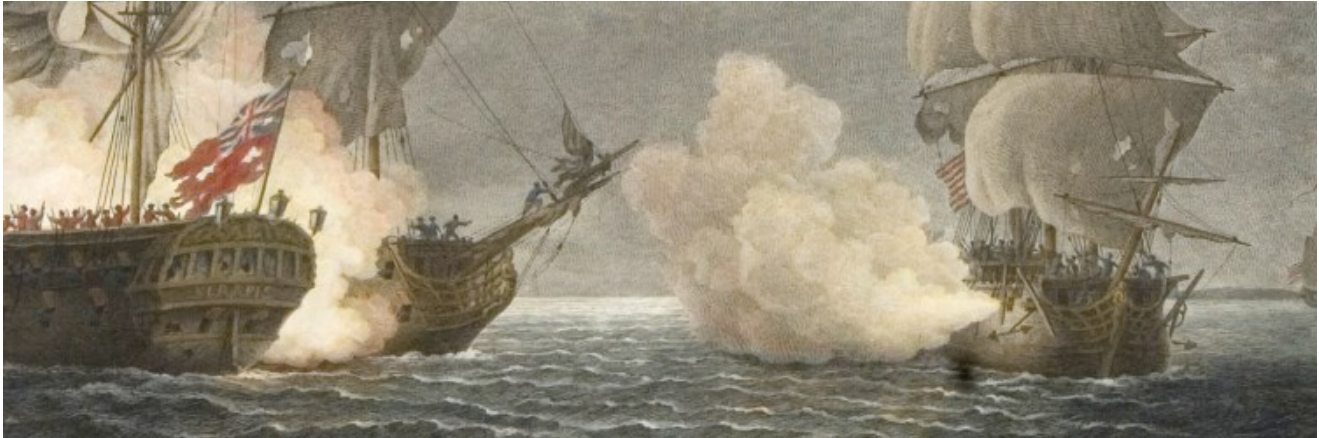


The capture of the British ship Picaroon at Cundy's Harbor

pressherald.com/2025/03/26/the-capture-of-the-british-ship-picaroon-at-cundys-harbor

March 26, 2025



An illustration of the battle between the patriot ship America and the British ship Picaroon with the captured Coaster. Battles off the Maine coast were not uncommon during the American Revolution.

Courtesy of Naval History and Heritage Command

As the final days of the American Revolution were nearing, British pirates — known as privateers — were still harassing Coastal Maine waters. But one local group of Harpswell men were determined to stop one of the most menacing of these privateers in Casco Bay and take his ship as a prize.

Ever since 1775, these British privateers raided the islands of Casco Bay, searching for provisions of food; “wood, fresh water” and “miscellaneous loot.” The “most detested of these sea bandits” was the schooner Picaroon.

The armed Picaroon was “commanded by a shrewd Scotch Skipper ... a daredevil ... named Linnacum.” Linnacum was a “master of the fast, top sailing, Picaroon,” and was famed for being “a thorn in the patriot side” as he “made the war decidedly unpleasant for Maine merchants and ship owners, sinking vessels right and left,” and either confiscating or “destroying cargoes.”

Linnacum was also a braggart who claimed to have “attended church services at the First Parish Church in Brunswick” under false pretenses. Linnacum also boasted of “landing at defenseless places and robbing farmers and praying upon fisherman.”

When word reached Harpswell locals that Linnacum had landed, once again, at Cundy's Harbor to trade with a local pro-British family named Eastman, pro-patriot Harpswell men — “incensed by the marauding” — resolved to capture Linnacum, his crew and his ship.



The most famous sea-battle off the coast of Maine was the Battle of Machias in June 1775.

Courtesy of Naval History and Heritage Command

Soon, “30 men ... all willing to engage in the enterprise, [met] at the house of Colonel Nathaniel Purinton” in Harpswell “to organize for an attack.” Purinton had been “a Colonel in the Continental Army” and was now “the Captain of the America ... a 14-ton schooner ... with guns, small arms, and 18 men.”

When these locals heard that the *Picaroon* was once again anchored at Cundy’s Harbor, the men formed and went to confront the British crew and their captain. But when the men arrived at the shore, they found that the *Picaroon* had already set sail. Colonel Purinton ordered his crew of patriots to pursue the British pirates.

By “2 o’clock in the morning” Purinton and his men boarded the fishing vessel “*Shaving Mill*” and sailed to Small Point where the patriot crew climbed aboard Purinton’s *America*, raised sail and “swore to get” the *Picaroon*.

By sunrise, the *America* located the *Picaroon* near Seguin Island, “at some distance,” as the privateer was “chasing a laden Coaster loaded with lime and cordwood ... bound for Portland.” Purinton ordered “the *America* ... [to] set her course directly toward” the *Picaroon*.

When Linnacum spied the *America* 3 miles off the *Picaroon*’s stern, he had his men place the now-captured Coaster between his ship and the fast approaching *America*. With the Coaster now acting as a shield, Linnacum ordered his men to fire their “two 3-pounder swivels” at the oncoming Harpswell patriots.

As shot and shell burst over their heads, Colonel Purinton ordered his men to hold their fire. He then ordered the “*America*’s Master,” Josiah Totman, to strike at the *Picaroon*’s “quarter and lash the two ship’s together.”

While the Picaroon's gun fired at will, the guns of the America remained silent until the America came alongside the Picaroon. Then, Nathaniel Purinton "ordered his men to open fire and board" the pirate vessel.

"Colonel Purinton and his men were more than a match for Linnecum and his crew," as the "well planned" patriot "musketry cleared the Picaroon," and all of the pirates quickly fled below decks, then "surrendered ... begging for quarter."

Harpwell's patriots quickly seized the British Picaroon as well as the merchant coaster and captured seven British crewmen and their braggart of a captain. Colonel Purinton then ordered the America and her "prizes of war" to return to Cundy's Harbor.

The "Helmsman" of the Picaroon, a "Halifax man ... named Shepherd" was the only fatality of this battle. His body was also brought back to Cundy's Harbor and was buried at "a point of land" forever after known as "Shepherd's Point."

By the next morning, the British prisoners of war were escorted to Portland and locked up in the county jail. Captain Linnacum could now add being captured by a group of angry island patriots to his list of things to brag about.

The brave and patriotic efforts of these determined Harpswell farmers, fishermen, woodsmen and merchants who pursued these feared British pirates did much for the security of Maine and for the cause of American independence.

Today, this nearly forgotten battle in Casco Bay is proudly remembered as one of the more revolutionary of our Stories from Maine.

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