A model of a War of 1812 gunboat.

"JAMES B. COOPER, A Hero of Two Wars
Soldier in Revolutionary War; Sailor in War of 1812"

Although we don't customarily associate Lee's Legion with the Navy, one of it's members, James B. Cooper (1761-1854), from New Jersey, actually went on after the war to serve as an officer in that branch of the armed services, and even commanded some gunboats off the New Jersy coast during the War of 1812. Below is a rare sketch of Cooper's life by Wallace McGeorge, M. D.; as found in *Notes On Old Gloucester County, New Jersey* (1917); compiled and edited by Frank H. Stewart, pp. 132-138.

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James B. Cooper, or plain James Cooper as his name appears on the muster roll of the first troop, Lee's Legion, Continental Troops, Revolutionary War, was born at Cooper's Point, Camden, N. J., in 1761, and enlisted February 1, 1779, for three years.

In the archives of the Bureau of Pensions, it is recorded that "James B. Cooper enlisted in the Continental Line, and served to the end of the Revolutionary War, at which period he was a private in James Armstrong's First Troop of Colonel Lee's Partisans, Legion of Light Dragoons."

Lee's Legion was originally composed of Virginians, but while it was serving in the vicinity of Camden and Haddonfield, one hundred Jerseymen were enlisted and mustered into the Legion, two of whom, James B. Cooper and John Mapes, died in Haddonfield.

The commander of this Partisan Legion was Henry Lee, of Virginia. He entered the service in 1776, at the command of a company of Virginia volunteers, and had distinguished himself in scouting parties, and harrassing the enemy's pickets. His adventurous exploits soon won for him the popular appellation of "Light Horse Harry."

Environment had much to do with James Cooper's enlistment. Born a Friend [i.e. a Quaker], reared under Friends' influence, opposed to war and bloodshed, he was subject to many temptations to forego those principles of peace which had been instilled into him from early childhood.

Living at Cooper's Point, in Camden, N. J., directly opposite Philadelphia, where American or British soldiers were constantly to be seen, his father's house occupied either by the Continental or British forces all the earlier, it is no wonder that despite the commands of his father and the earnest and loving solicitations of his mother, he forsook the principles of Friends, choosing rather to serve his country as a soldier than to continue neutral and passive during the struggle for freedom. Although only a stripling in his eighteenth year, he ran away from home, enlisted and became a Dragoon.

Early in the summer, Lee's Legion was ordered to the northern part of this State and the river counties in New York, and in July, 1779, as a volunteer, he took part in the storming and capture of Stony Point, by Mad Anthony Wayne.

General Wayne was the officer picked out by Washington for this daring work, and he readily assented. It is a popular tradition that when Washington proposed to Wayne the storming of Stony Point, the reply was : "General, I'll storm hell, if you will only plan it." To which Washington is said to have replied, "Suppose you try Stony Point first."
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One of the engagements in our State in which Lee's Legion was victorious was the capture of Paulus Hook, in what is now Jersey City. Major Lee in his scoutings had discovered that the British post at Paulus Hook, immediately opposite New York, was very negligently guarded. Paulus Hook at that time was a long, low point of the Jersey shore stretching into the Hudson, and connected to the mainland by a sandy isthmus. A fort had been erected on it, and it was garrisoned with five hundred men under Major Sutherland. It was a strong position. A creek fordable only in two places rendered the Hook difficult of access. Lee had discovered these features, and he had proposed to Washington the daring plan of surprising the fort at night. The commander-in-chief was pleased with the project and consented to it, stipulating that Lee was to "surprise the post, bring off the garrison immediately and effect a retreat."

On August 18, 1779, Lee set out with three hundred of Lord Stirling's division and a troop of dismounted dragoons. Between two and three o'clock, on the morning of August 19, Lee arrived at the creek. It happened fortunately that the British commanders had the day before dispatched a foraging party to a part of the country called the English Neighborhood, and as Lee and his men approached they were mistaken by the sentinel for this party on its return. The darkness of the night favored the mistake, and our troops passed the creek and ditch, entered the works unmolested and had made themselves masters of the post before the garrison was well roused from sleep. Major Sutherland and about sixty Hessians threw themselves into a, small block house on the left of the fort and opened an irregular fire. To attempt to dislodge them would have cost too much time. Alarm guns from ships in the harbor, and the forts at New York, threatened speedy reinforcements to the enemy. Having captured one hundred and fifty-nine prisoners, Lee returned without trying to destroy either the barracks or artillery. He had achieved his object, a coup-de-main of signal audacity. Few of the enemy were slain for there was but little fighting and no massacre. His own loss was two men killed and three wounded. James Cooper was one of the dismounted dragoons. A beautiful monument in Jersey City marks the spot where this struggle occurred.[1]

In 1781 General Washington removed General Gates from the command of the Southern army, and appointed General Nathaniel Greene in his place. "Light Horse Harry" with his legion were transferred from the Northern army and sent south to aid Greene in his arduous task and for the rest of the war the Legion was engaged in the wresting of the Southern States from the British army. Private Cooper took part in the battles of Guilford Court House and Eutaw Springs.

In the battle of Eutaw Springs, which was fought on September 8, 1781, Lee's Legion was assigned to the duty of covering the right flank, and Armstrong's troops, in which Cooper served, led the advance.

As the English retreated next day after destroying many of their stores the victory was considered to be ours. The American loss was very heavy in this prolonged battle and this may have been the place to which Captain Cooper referred when he told his friend John Redfield, of Gloucester, that he stood in the battle when every third man was killed.

During the entire Revolutionary War, Congress only voted six gold medals for bravery in action, and three of those were to General Wayne, for his storming of Stony Point; to Light Horse Harry for his surprise of Paulus Hook, and to General Greene for his victory at Eutaw Springs, and in each of these three engagements Private Cooper was one of the men who helped to win. Which only proves the statement that when a Quaker does fight, he fights well. What other private or officer had a better record in the entire war?

Prowell's History of Camden County says Cooper assisted in the storming of Forts Mott[e], Granby and Watson, all of which surrendered to Light Horse Harry. Private Cooper was once sent with dispatches to General Washington, and on another occasion with a flag of truce to the British commander, showing the esteem in which he was held by his leader.

After the Revolutionary War was over James B. Cooper adopted a seafaring life, and rose to the command

[1] [*Edit. Note*. A previously rare and well documented work on Paulus Hook is George H. Farrier's *Memorial of the centennial celebration of the battle of Paulus Hook, August 19, 1879: with a history of the early settlement and present condition of Jersey City, N.J.* (1879); available at: https://archive.org/details/memorialofcenten00farr]

of some fine ships sailing from Philadelphia.

In 1805 he organized a company of cavalry from the young men of Haddonfield and Woodbury, and was elected its captain. It was from this circumstance that Cooper got his title of Captain.

In the War of 1812 Cooper accepted the position of sailing master in the navy, and was in charge of the gun boats on the New Jersey coast, to guard against the depredations of the British cruisers. This was a dangerous task, for his vessel was inferior in guns, and it was his duty when he discovered the foe, by his superiority in sailing, to notify the American frigates so they could meet the enemy.

Through the Bureau of Navigation at Washington, I have been enabled to secure the following data as to Commander Cooper's services in the United States Navy:

1812, July 9. Warranted a sailing master in the Navy this date. Appointed from New Jersey.
1815, May 26. Promoted to Acting Lieutenant.
1816, Aug. 9. Ordered to report to Commodore Murray for duty.
1822, Jan. 10. Ordered to Philadelphia on duty.
1822, April 22. Promoted to Lieutenant from this date, and ordered to report for duty at Baltimore.
1832, July 5. Ordered to the Navy Yard, at New York.
1832, Nov. 5. Detached from the Navy Yard, New York, and granted two months' leave of absence.
1834, May 2. Appointed to the Naval Asylum, Philadelphia.
1838, Aug. 13. Granted three-months' leave, which was renewed Nov. 16, 1838; Feb. 22, 1839; May, 1839.
1839-1840-1841. He was granted six months' leave of absence continuously till September 8, 1841, when he was promoted to Commander from this date.
1854, Feb. 5. Died this day at Haddonfield, New Jersey.

On July 5, 1828, nearly fifty years after his enlistment in the Continental army, a pension was allowed him. After his retirement from the command of the Naval Asylum at Philadelphia, he returned to his home in Haddonfield, where he spent the remainder of his days. Captain James B. Cooper was the last survivor of Lee's Legion, dying seventy-five years and four days after he was mustered into the service of his country — in his ninety-third year. In his death, as in his life, he was unfortunately the cause of the animadversion of Friends [i.e. the Quakers]. Having a son who was an Admiral in the Navy, and on account of his military and naval service in two wars, he was buried with military honors. Soldiers and sailors took part, the Naval Reserves coming from Philadelphia for this purpose. Here, again, there was a conflict between Church and State, or between principles and affection. The soldiers and sailors followed his remains on foot to the Friends' Meeting House Burying Ground, in Haddonfield, and fired a salute over his grave, to the horror of many Friends. What with flags flying and guns firing, it was a sorry day for many rigid orthodox Quakers. Even in his family there was a divided feeling. The widow, proud of her departed hero, acquiesced in the desire of his military and naval friends, and followed his remains to the grave in this military parade, while the widow's sister was so horrified at this vain pomp that she stayed at home, and would not even look upon this wicked show. Many young Friends and the world's people enjoyed this unusual spectacle as a mark of respect to this grand old man, and a grand-daughter, who was then only a little child, said she liked to see the soldiers and the flags, and thought it was just the thing. No stone marks the grave of this grand old man.

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