



## *U.S. Coast Guard History Program*

# **Loss of the U. S. Revenue Schooner *Gallatin*, 1 April 1813 in Charleston Narbor, South Carolina**

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## **CHARLESTON COURIER**

### *Dreadful Explosion*

Between the hours of ten and eleven yesterday forenoon, a most awful explosion took place in this harbor, on board the Revenue schooner GALLATIN, commanded by Capt. John. H. Silliman, which had arrived the day before from a short cruise on the coast, and anchored off the town. Captain Silliman was on shore at the time; he had give orders on leaving the vessel that the muskets and pistols, which were suspended in the cabin, should be examined and cleaned. There were about 35 persons in all on board; of this number about 10 were on the quarter deck and in the cabin; part of them employed in cleaning the arms. Thus situated, the dreadful explosion took place, and in one instant the whole quarter deck with all of those upon it, were hurled into the air. Some of the bodies were thrown nearly as high as the mast head of the vessel; others were driven through the cabin and lodged upon the main deck. The whole stern of the vessel was torn down to a level with the water; the mainsail, which had been hoisted to dry, was torn to rags, and the fragments of broken spars were scattered in all directions. As soon as the accident had happened, boats put off from the wharves and from the vessels lying near her, to the relief of the crew. An attempt was immediately made to slip the cables and run her into one of the docks to prevent her from sinking, but before this could be fully accomplished, the fire in the cabin had communicated to the mainsail and main-rigging, at the same time the vessel was found to be filling very fast. In this extremity, the wounded men were hastened into the boats alongside, and by the time the persons on board could leave her, she went down stern foremost, a few yards from the head of Blake's wharf. The bodies of three of the unfortunate sufferers were never seen; and happier would it have been for some of those who were brought on shore if they had shared their fate, as they cannot, in all human probability survive the dreadful wounds and bruises which they have received.

### **Fire in Magazine**

It has been found impossible, after the most diligent enquiries, to ascertain the manner in which fire was communicated to the magazine; the persons immediately adjoining the cabin steps, where the door opened from the cabin to the magazine, were either entirely destroyed, or so much maimed, as to be unable, as yet, to give any account of the immediate cause of

the disaster. That fire was communicated to the powder in the magazine (and not to a single cask, as by many at [*sic*] first supposed) appears now reduced to a certainty. The first lieutenant had left the vessel but a few minutes before the accident took place, at which time the magazine was locked, and the key left in a drawer in the cabin. The gunner, the only person on board who had any business in the cabin, was on deck. It has been said that fire was communicated by the snapping of one of the muskets, but that could not be the case, unless the door of the magazine had been opened. We have heard it suggested that the explosion could never have been the effect of accident; we trust, however that these surmises will prove incorrect [*sic*], and should the unfortunate men now suffering from their wounds survive, we may yet have a satisfactory account of the cause which has produced do much public loss and private distress.

The following are the names of the sufferers:

*Missing* – Thomas Feld, gunner’s mate; George Segur and one other whose name is not ascertained.

*Wounded* – William Pritchard, gunner; John McCoan, Benjamin Chart, George Craft and William Hunter (boy), most of them severely. Several others were slightly wounded.

An attempt will be made this day to raise schooner.

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Excerpt transcribed from the 2 April 1813 edition of the *Charleston Courier*, as quoted in Horatio Davis Smith, *Early History of the United States Revenue Marine Service or (United States Revenue Cutter Service) 1789-1849*, edited by Elliot Snow (Naval Historical Foundation: Press of R. L. Polk Printing Co., 1932); (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Coast Guard, 1989), reprint; pp. 29-30. Please note that Smith incorrectly lists the date of the article as being the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, 1813.

