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Two in the belt

By GMCM W.R. Wells, II
Military Readiness Branch, Headquarters

The increase in law enforcement operations in the Coast Guard is not new to the service. The Revenue Cutter Service, predecessor to the Coast Guard, was involved in many such operations — from national defense to chasing smugglers of salt.

These operations brought about requests for more small arms for crew protection.

There were no established small arms allowances in the days of the Revenue Cutter Service. There were no specific types of small arms named in any of the regulations. This matter was left to the good judgment of the captain of the cutter and to the Collector of Customs. The Secretary of the Treasury made the final decision.

A good example can be seen in a rebuttal written by CAPT Ezekel Jones of the cutter *Ingham* on Nov. 14, 1834. The cutter on this day was described as being "off the Balize" (now called Blind Bay about 80 miles south of New Orleans), an area filled with smugglers, pirates, and all-around bad guys. CAPT Jones' rebuttal was to a survey (inspection) report of the condition of the cutter, its supplies and equipment.

Addressed to Collector James Breed-

love, CAPT Jones states:

"With due difference to the report of the Surveyors, Captains Taylor and Talbert, I would observe that a cutter on that station ought, in my opinion, to have at least one musket for each man, our present number of men, including officers, is twenty according to the foregoing report, thirteen muskets and twelve pistols are deemed a sufficient complement for this vessel. Instead of "9 new muskets," I think 17 are highly necessary — and instead of 10 new pistols, I think 24 are required. No man in Naval service is considered properly armed unless he has two pistols in his belt. Therefore, if only 10 new pistols are allowed, it follows that I can only arm 6 out of my 20 men and officers. The same armament will hold good with respect to the number of muskets. In my humble opinion, the cutter on this station, above all articles, ought to be

well armed."

With a small change in prose style and the use of current weapons terminology, this letter could have been written today.

CAPT Jones made his point. Unfortunately, no records indicate whether he ever received the amount of arms he wanted. It is doubtful that he did for two reasons. First, small arms were expensive. A good quality musket during this period sold for about ten dollars and a pistol for about five dollars. The Secretary was not inclined to spend such a large amount on arms. A less expensive method of procuring arms was usually sought.

The second reason is that *Ingham* was sold at New Orleans in January 1836. It was not the policy of the department to purchase anything for a cutter about to be sold, whether the items could be used on another cutter or not.



The sale of *Ingham* was not the last we heard of CAPT Jones. He soon took command of the newly-built and better-armed cutter *Washington*. He finally got his wish for more arms on this cutter. For he was involved in yet another aspect of operations — guerilla warfare — in the Seminole War.

The nature of these operations would not be repeated for the service for 129 years when the Coast Guard became an active participant in the Vietnam War.

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Editor's Note: Master Chief Wells is currently involved in the research of the

arms and armament of the Revenue Cutter Service and the small arms used by the Coast Guard. Any information in either area would be greatly appreciated. Write to him at: Commandant (G-OMR), U.S. Coast Guard, Washington, D.C. 20593.