

Sailor's Story  
*John and Joseph Cheever*

My name is Joseph and my brother, John, and I hailed from Marblehead, Massachusetts.

Nearly all us Marblehead boys follow the sea at one time or another. Most fish for cod in Massachusetts Bay or on George's Bank. We did that for a while too, but when the war broke out, we walked down to Boston and enlisted on the famous *Constitution*. The officers rated us able seamen, since we "knew the ropes." They taught us to load and fire the great iron cannons, too. I was stationed on the gun deck at gun number five. It was my job to ram home the cartridge, ball and wad every time we fired. To do it, I had to stick half my arm out the gun port- a frightening job in battle to be sure!

Well, on December 29, 1812, we fought the British frigate *Java*. Just as I feared, the worst

came true. As I handled the long rammer to load the gun, a British cannon ball struck me near the elbow. Oh, the agony of it! The surgeon cut away the mangled bone and flesh, but still the pain ran like fire. My poor brother John, he was not even so lucky. He died in the height of the battle, killed outright by a British shot. I lingered on in pain, until January 27, 1813, when at 4 o'clock I died.

Congress awarded our widowed mother, Mary Cheever, a "gratuity" of \$25.00 quarterly, beginning April 12, 1814. Our mother had been dependent on our support and our pay to live, and without us she was left in a destitute condition. The money she received were not a death benefit or pension, but an acknowledgment of our distinguished bravery, and the loss that she suffered.