ROOSEVELT THEODORE

THE NAVAL WAR OF 1812

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The Naval War of 1812 / Or the History of the United States Navy during the Last War with Great Britain to Which Is Appended an Account of the Battle of New Orleans:

Содержание

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PREFACE

The history of the naval events of the War of 1812 has been repeatedly presented both to the American and the English reader. Historical writers have treated it either in connection with a general account of the contest on land and sea, or as forming a part of the complete record of the navies of the two nations. A few monographs, which confine themselves strictly to the naval occurrences, have also appeared. But none of these works can be regarded as giving a satisfactorily full or impartial account of the war—some of them being of he "popular" and loosely-constructed order, while others treat it from a purely partisan standpoint. No single book can be quoted which would be accepted by the modern reader as doing justice to both sides, or, indeed, as telling the whole story. Any one specially interested in the subject must read all; and then it will seem almost a hopeless task to reconcile the many and widely contradictory statements he will meet with.

There appear to be three works which, taken in combination, give the best satisfaction on the subject. First, in James' "Naval History of Great Britain" (which supplies both the material and the opinions of almost every subsequent English or Canadian historian) can be found the British view of the case. It is an invaluable work, written with fulness and care; on the other hand it is also a piece of special pleading by a bitter and

not over-scrupulous partisan. This, in the second place, can be partially supplemented by Fenimore Cooper's "Naval History of the United States." The latter gives the American view of the cruises and battles; but it is much less of an authority than James', both because it is written without great regard for exactness, and because all figures for the American side need to be supplied from Lieutenant (now Admiral) George E. Emmons' statistical "History of the United States Navy," which is the third of the works in question.

But even after comparing these three authors, many contradictions remain unexplained, and the truth can only be reached in such cases by a careful examination of the navy "Records," the London "Naval Chronicle," "Niles' Register," and other similar documentary publications. Almost the only good criticisms on the actions are those incidentally given in standard works on other subjects, such as Lord Howard Douglass' "Naval Gunnery," and Admiral Jurien de la Gravière's "Guerres Maritimes." Much of the material in our Navy Department has never been touched at all. In short, no full, accurate, and unprejudiced history of the war has ever been written.

The subject merits a closer scrutiny than it has received. At present people are beginning to realize that it is folly for the great English-speaking Republic to rely for defence upon a navy composed partly of antiquated hulks, and partly of new vessels rather more worthless than the old. It is worth while to study with some care that period of our history during which our navy

stood at the highest pitch of its fame; and to learn any thing from the past it is necessary to know, as near as may be, the exact truth. Accordingly the work should be written impartially, if only from the narrowest motives. Without abating a jot from one's devotion to his country and flag, I think a history can be made just enough to warrant its being received as an authority equally among Americans and Englishmen. I have endeavored to supply such a work. It is impossible that errors, both of fact and opinion, should not have crept into it; and although I have sought to make it in character as non-partisan as possible, these errors will probably be in favor of the American side.

As my only object is to give an accurate narrative of events, I shall esteem it a particular favor if any one will furnish me with the means of rectifying such mistakes; and if I have done injustice to any commander, or officer of any grade, whether American or British, I shall consider myself under great obligations to those who will set me right.

I have been unable to get access to the original reports of the British commanders, the logs of the British ships, or their muster-rolls, and so have been obliged to take them at second hand from the "Gazette," or "Naval Chronicle," or some standard history. The American official letters, log-books, original contracts, muster-rolls, etc., however, being preserved in the Archives at Washington, I have been able, thanks to the courtesy of the Hon. Wm. H. Hunt, Secretary of the Navy, to look them over. The set of letters from the officers is very complete, in three

series,—"Captains' Letters," "Masters' Commandant Letters," and "Officers' Letters," there being several volumes for each year. The books of contracts contain valuable information as to the size and build of some of the vessels. The log-books are rather exasperating, often being very incomplete. Thus when I turned from Decatur's extremely vague official letter describing the capture of the Macedonian to the log-book of the Frigate *United States*, not a fact about the fight could be gleaned. The last entry in the log on the day of the fight is "strange sail discovered to be a frigate under English colors," and the next entry (on the following day) relates to the removal of the prisoners. The log of the *Enterprise* is very full indeed, for most of the time, but is a perfect blank for the period during which she was commanded by Lieutenant Burrows, and in which she fought the Boxer. I have not been able to find the Peacock's log at all, though there is a very full set of letters from her commander. Probably the fire of 1837 destroyed a great deal of valuable material. When ever it was possible I have referred to printed matter in preference to manuscript, and my authorities can thus, in most cases, be easily consulted. In conclusion I desire to express my sincerest thanks to Captain James D. Bulloch, formerly of the United States Navy, and Commander Adolf Mensing, formerly of the German Navy, without whose advice and sympathy this work would probably never have been written or even begun.

NEW YORK CITY, 1882.

PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION

I originally intended to write a companion volume to this, which should deal with the operations on land. But a short examination showed that these operations were hardly worth serious study. They teach nothing new; it is the old, old lesson, that a miserly economy in preparation may in the end involve a lavish outlay of men and money, which, after all, comes too late to more than partially offset the evils produced by the original short-sighted parsimony. This might be a lesson worth dwelling on did it have any practical bearing on the issues of the present day; but it has none, as far as the army is concerned. It was criminal folly for Jefferson, and his follower Madison, to neglect to give us a force either of regulars or of well-trained volunteers during the twelve years they had in which to prepare for the struggle that any one might see was inevitable; but there is now far less need of an army than there was then. Circumstances have altered widely since 1812. Instead of the decaying might of Spain on our southern frontier, we have the still weaker power of Mexico. Instead of the great Indian nations of the interior, able to keep civilization at bay, to hold in check strong armies, to ravage large stretches of territory, and needing formidable military expeditions to overcome them, there are now only left broken and scattered bands, which are sources of annoyance merely. To the north we are still hemmed in by the Canadian

possessions of Great Britain; but since 1812 our strength has increased so prodigiously, both absolutely and relatively, while England's military power has remained almost stationary, that we need now be under no apprehensions from her land-forces; for, even if checked in the beginning, we could not help conquering in the end by sheer weight of numbers, if by nothing else. So that there is now no cause for our keeping up a large army; while, on the contrary, the necessity for an efficient navy is so evident that only our almost incredible short-sightedness prevents our at once preparing one.

Not only do the events of the war on land teach very little to the statesman who studies history in order to avoid in the present the mistakes of the past, but besides this, the battles and campaigns are of little interest to the student of military matters. The British regulars, trained in many wars, thrashed the raw troops opposed to them whenever they had any thing like a fair chance; but this is not to be wondered at, for the same thing has always happened the world over under similar conditions. Our defeats were exactly such as any man might have foreseen, and there is nothing to be learned from the follies committed by incompetent commanders and untrained troops when in the presence of skilled officers having under them disciplined soldiers. The humiliating surrenders, abortive attacks, and panic routs of our armies can all be paralleled in the campaigns waged by Napoleon's marshals against the Spaniards and Portuguese in the years immediately preceding

the outbreak of our own war. The Peninsular troops were as little able to withstand the French veterans as were our militia to hold their own against the British regulars. But it must always be remembered, to our credit, that while seven years of fighting failed to make the Spaniards able to face the French,[Footnote: At the closing battle of Toulouse, fought between the allies and the French, the flight of the Spaniards was so rapid and universal as to draw from the Duke of Wellington the bitter observation, that "though he had seen a good many remarkable things in the course of his life, yet this was the first time he had ever seen ten thousand men running a race."] two years of warfare gave us soldiers who could stand against the best men of Britain. On the northern frontier we never developed a great general,—Brown's claim to the title rests only on his not having committed the phenomenal follies of his predecessors,—but by 1814 our soldiers had become seasoned, and we had acquired some good brigade commanders, notably Scott, so that in that year we played on even terms with the British. But the battles, though marked by as bloody and obstinate fighting as ever took place, were waged between small bodies of men, and were not distinguished by any feats of generalship, so that they are not of any special interest to the historian. In fact, the only really noteworthy feat of arms of the war took place at New Orleans, and the only military genius that the struggle developed was Andrew Jackson. His deeds are worthy of all praise, and the battle he won was in many ways so peculiar as to make it well worth a much closer study than it has

yet received. It was by far the most prominent event of the war; it was a victory which reflected high honor on the general and soldiers who won it, and it was in its way as remarkable as any of the great battles that took place about the same time in Europe. Such being the case, I have devoted a chapter to its consideration at the conclusion of the chapters devoted to the naval operations.

As before said, the other campaigns on land do not deserve very minute attention; but, for the sake of rendering the account of the battle of New Orleans more intelligible, I will give a hasty sketch of the principal engagements that took place elsewhere.

The war opened in mid-summer of 1812, by the campaign of General Hull on the Michigan frontier. With two or three thousand raw troops he invaded Canada. About the same time Fort Mackinaw was surrendered by its garrison of 60 Americans to a British and Indian force of 600. Hull's campaign was unfortunate from the beginning. Near Brownstown the American Colonel Van Horne, with some 200 men, was ambushed and routed by Tecumseh and his Indians. In revenge Col. Miller, with 600 Americans, at Maguaga attacked 150 British and Canadians under Capt. Muir, and 250 Indians under Tecumseh, and whipped them,—Tecumseh's Indians standing their ground longest. The Americans lost 75, their foes 180 men. At Chicago the small force of 66 Americans was surprised and massacred by the Indians. Meanwhile, General Brock, the British commander, advanced against Hull with a rapidity and decision that seemed to paralyze his senile and irresolute opponent. The latter retreated

to Detroit, where, without striking a blow, he surrendered 1,400 men to Brock's nearly equal force, which consisted nearly one half of Indians under Tecumseh. On the Niagara frontier, an estimable and honest old gentleman and worthy citizen, who knew nothing of military matters, Gen. Van Rensselaer, tried to cross over and attack the British at Queenstown; 1,100 Americans got across and were almost all killed or captured by a nearly equal number of British, Canadians, and Indians, while on the opposite side a large number of their countrymen looked on, and with abject cowardice refused to cross to their assistance. The command of the army was then handed over to a ridiculous personage named Smythe, who issued proclamations so bombastic that they really must have come from an unsound mind, and then made a ludicrously abortive effort at invasion, which failed almost of its own accord. A British and Canadian force of less than 400 men was foiled in an assault on Ogdensburg, after a slight skirmish, by about 1,000 Americans under Brown; and with this trifling success the military operations of the year came to an end.

Early in 1813, Ogdensburg was again attacked, this time by between 500 and 600 British, who took it after a brisk resistance from some 300 militia; the British lost 60 and the Americans 20, in killed and wounded. General Harrison, meanwhile, had begun the campaign in the Northwest. At Frenchtown, on the river Raisin, Winchester's command of about 900 Western troops was surprised by a force of 1,100 men, half of them Indians, under

the British Colonel Proctor. The right division, taken by surprise, gave up at once; the left division, mainly Kentucky riflemen, and strongly posted in houses and stockaded enclosures, made a stout resistance, and only surrendered after a bloody fight, in which 180 British and about half as many Indians were killed or wounded. Over 300 Americans were slain, some in battle, but most in the bloody massacre that followed. After this, General Harrison went into camp at Fort Meigs, where, with about 1,100 men, he was besieged by 1,000 British and Canadians under Proctor and 1,200 Indians under Tecumseh. A force of 1,200 Kentucky militia advanced to his relief and tried to cut its way into the fort while the garrison made a sortie. The sortie was fairly successful, but the Kentuckians were scattered like chaff by the British regulars in the open, and when broken were cut to pieces by the Indians in the woods. Nearly two thirds of the relieving troops were killed or captured; about 400 got into the fort. Soon afterward Proctor abandoned the siege. Fort Stephenson, garrisoned by Major Croghan and 160 men, was attacked by a force of 391 British regulars, who tried to carry it by assault, and were repulsed with the loss of a fourth of their number. Some four thousand Indians joined Proctor, but most of them left him after Perry's victory on Lake Erie. Then Harrison, having received large reinforcements, invaded Canada. At the River Thames his army of 3,500 men encountered and routed between 600 and 700 British under Proctor, and about 1,000 Indians under Tecumseh. The battle was decided at once by a

charge of the Kentucky mounted riflemen, who broke through the regulars, took them in rear, and captured them, and then dismounting attacked the flank of the Indians, who were also assailed by the infantry. Proctor escaped by the skin of his teeth and Tecumseh died fighting, like the hero that he was. This battle ended the campaign in the Northwest. In this quarter it must be remembered that the war was, on the part of the Americans, mainly one against Indians; the latter always forming over half of the British forces. Many of the remainder were French Canadians, and the others were regulars. The American armies, on the contrary, were composed of the armed settlers of Kentucky and Ohio, native Americans, of English speech and blood, who were battling for lands that were to form the heritage of their children. In the West the war was only the closing act of the struggle that for many years had been waged by the hardy and restless pioneers of our race, as with rifle and axe they carved out the mighty empire that we their children inherit; it was but the final effort with which they wrested from the Indian lords of the soil the wide and fair domain that now forms the heart of our great Republic. It was the breaking down of the last barrier that stayed the flood of our civilization; it settled, once and for ever, that henceforth the law, the tongue, and the blood of the land should be neither Indian, nor yet French, but English. The few French of the West were fighting against a race that was to leave as little trace of them as of the doomed Indian peoples with whom they made common cause. The presence of the British

mercenaries did not alter the character of the contest; it merely served to show the bitter and narrow hatred with which the Mother-Island regarded her greater daughter, predestined as the latter was to be queen of the lands that lay beyond the Atlantic.

Meanwhile, on Lake Ontario, the Americans made successful descents on York and Fort George, scattering or capturing their comparatively small garrisons; while a counter descent by the British on Sackett's Harbor failed, the attacking force being too small. After the capture of Fort George, the Americans invaded Canada; but their advance guard, 1,400 strong, under Generals Chandler and Winder, was surprised in the night by 800 British, who, advancing with the bayonet, broke up the camp, capturing both the generals and half the artillery. Though the assailants, who lost 220 of their small number, suffered much more than the Americans, yet the latter were completely demoralized, and at once retreated to Fort George. Soon afterward, Col. Boerstler with about 600 men surrendered with shamefully brief resistance to a somewhat smaller force of British and Indians. Then about 300 British crossed the Niagara to attack Black Rock, which they took, but were afterward driven off by a large body of militia with the loss of 40 men. Later in the season the American General McClure wantonly burned the village of Newark, and then retreated in panic flight across the Niagara. In retaliation the British in turn crossed the river; 600 regulars surprised and captured in the night Fort Niagara, with its garrison of 400 men; two thousand troops attacked Black

Rock, and after losing over a hundred men in a smart engagement with somewhat over 1,500 militia whom they easily dispersed, captured and burned both it and Buffalo. Before these last events took place another invasion of Canada had been attempted, this time under General Wilkinson, "an unprincipled imbecile," as Scott very properly styled him. It was mismanaged in every possible way, and was a total failure; it was attended with but one battle, that of Chrystler's Farm, in which 1,000 British, with the loss of less than 200 men, beat back double their number of Americans, who lost nearly 500 men and also one piece of artillery. The American army near Lake Champlain had done nothing, its commander, General Wade Hampton, being, if possible, even more incompetent than Wilkinson. He remained stationary while a small force of British plundered Plattsburg and Burlington; then, with 5,000 men he crossed into Canada, but returned almost immediately, after a small skirmish at Chauteaugay between his advance guard and some 500 Canadians, in which the former lost 41 and the latter 22 men. This affair, in which hardly a tenth of the American force was engaged, has been, absurdly enough, designated a "battle" by most British and Canadian historians. In reality it was the incompetency of their general and not the valor of their foes that caused the retreat of the Americans. The same comment, by the way, applies to the so-called "Battle" of Plattsburg, in the following year, which may have been lost by Sir George Prevost, but was certainly not won by the Americans. And, again, a similar

criticism should be passed on General Wilkinson's attack on La Colle Mill, near the head of the same lake. Neither one of the three affairs was a stand-up fight; in each a greatly superior force, led by an utterly incapable general, retreated after a slight skirmish with an enemy whose rout would have been a matter of certainty had the engagement been permitted to grow serious.

In the early spring of 1814 a small force of 160 American regulars, under Captain Holmes, fighting from behind felled logs, routed 200 British with a loss of 65 men, they themselves losing but 8. On Lake Ontario the British made a descent on Oswego and took it by fair assault; and afterward lost 180 men who tried to cut out some American transports, and were killed or captured to a man. All through the spring and early summer the army on the Niagara frontier was carefully drilled by Brown, and more especially by Scott, and the results of this drilling were seen in the immensely improved effectiveness of the soldiers in the campaign that opened in July. Fort Erie was captured with little resistance, and on the 4th of July, at the river Chippeway, Brown, with two brigades of regulars, each about 1,200 strong, under Scott and Ripley, and a brigade of 800 militia and Indians under Porter, making a total of about 3,200 men, won a stand-up fight against the British General Riall, who had nearly 2,500 men, 1,800 of them regulars. Porter's brigade opened by driving in the Canadian militia and the Indians; but was itself checked by the British light-troops. Ripley's brigade took very little part in the battle, three of the regiments not being engaged at all, and

the fourth so slightly as to lose but five men. The entire brunt of the action was borne by Scott's brigade, which was fiercely attacked by the bulk of the British regulars under Riall. The latter advanced with great bravery, but were terribly cut up by the fire of Scott's regulars; and when they had come nearly up to him, Scott charged with the bayonet and drove them clean off the field. The American loss was 322, including 23 Indians; the British loss was 515, excluding that of the Indians. The number of Americans actually engaged did not exceed that of the British; and Scott's brigade, in fair fight, closed by a bayonet charge, defeated an equal force of British regulars.

On July 25th occurred the Battle of Niagara, or Lundy's Lane, fought between General Brown with 3,100 [Footnote: As near as can be found out; most American authorities make it much less; Lossing, for example, says only 2,400.] Americans and General Drummond with 3,500 [Footnote: General Drummond in his official letter makes it but 2,800; James, who gives the details, makes it 3,000 rank and file; adding 13 per cent, for the officers, sergeants, and drummers, brings it up to 3,400; and we still have to count in the artillery drivers, etc.] British. It was brought on by accident in the evening, and was waged with obstinate courage and savage slaughter till midnight. On both sides the forces straggled into action by detachments. The Americans formed the attacking party. As before, Scott's brigade bore the brunt of the fight, and over half of his men were killed or wounded; he himself was disabled and borne from the field. The struggle

was of the most desperate character, the combatants showing a stubborn courage that could not be surpassed. [Footnote: General Drummond writes: "In so determined a manner were their attacks directed against our guns that our artillerymen were bayoneted while in the act of loading, and the muzzle of the enemy's guns were advanced within a few yards of ours." Even James says: "Upon the whole, however, the American troops fought bravely; and the conduct of many of the officers, of the artillery corps especially, would have done honor to any service."] Charge after charge was made with the bayonet, and the artillery was taken and retaken once and again. The loss was nearly equal; on the side of the Americans, 854 men (including Generals Brown and Scott, wounded) and two guns; on that of the British, 878 men (including General Riall captured) and one gun. Each side claimed it as a victory over superior numbers. The truth is beyond question that the British had the advantage in numbers, and a still greater advantage in position; while it is equally beyond question that it was a defeat and not a victory for the Americans. They left the field and retired in perfect order to Fort Erie, while the British held the field and the next day pursued their foes.

Having received some reinforcements General Drummond, now with about 3,600 men, pushed forward to besiege Fort Erie, in which was the American army, some 2,400 strong, under General Gaines. Col. Tucker with 500 British regulars was sent across the Niagara to destroy the batteries at Black

Rock, but was defeated by 300 American regulars under Major Morgan, fighting from behind a strong breastwork of felled trees, with a creek in front. On the night of the 15th of August, the British in three columns advanced to storm the American works, but after making a most determined assault were beaten off. The assailants lost 900 men, the assailed about 80. After this nothing was done till Sept. 17th, when General Brown, who had resumed command of the American forces, determined upon and executed a sortie. Each side had received reinforcements; the Americans numbered over 3,000, the British nearly 4,000. The fighting was severe, the Americans losing 500 men; but their opponents lost 600 men, and most of their batteries were destroyed. Each side, as usual, claimed the victory; but, exactly as Lundy's Lane must be accounted an American defeat, as our forces retreated from the ground, so this must be considered an American victory, for after it the British broke up camp and drew off to Chippeway. Nothing more was done, and on November 5th the American army recrossed the Niagara. Though marked by some brilliant feats of arms this four months' invasion of Canada, like those that had preceded it, thus came to nothing. But at the same time a British invasion of the United States was repulsed far more disgracefully. Sir George Prevost, with an army of 13,000 veteran troops, marched south along the shores of Lake Champlain to Plattsburg, which was held by General Macomb with 2,000 regulars, and perhaps double that number of nearly worthless militia;—a force that the British could have scattered

to the winds, though, as they were strongly posted, not without severe loss. But the British fleet was captured by Commodore MacDonough in the fight on the lake; and then Sir George, after some heavy skirmishing between the outposts of the armies, in which the Americans had the advantage, fled precipitately back to Canada.

All through the war the sea-coasts of the United States had been harried by small predatory excursions; a part of what is now the State of Maine was conquered with little resistance, and kept until the close of hostilities; and some of the towns on the shores of Chesapeake Bay had been plundered or burnt. In August, 1814, a more serious invasion was planned, and some 5,000 troops—regulars, sailors, and marines—were landed, under the command of General Ross. So utterly helpless was the Democratic Administration at Washington, that during the two years of warfare hardly any steps had been taken to protect the Capitol, or the country round about; what little was done, was done entirely too late, and bungled badly in addition. History has not yet done justice to the ludicrous and painful folly and stupidity of which the government founded by Jefferson, and carried on by Madison, was guilty, both in its preparations for, and in its way of carrying on, this war; nor is it yet realized that the men just mentioned, and their associates, are primarily responsible for the loss we suffered in it, and the bitter humiliation some of its incidents caused us. The small British army marched at will through Virginia and Maryland, burned

Washington, and finally retreated from before Baltimore and reembarked to take part in the expedition against New Orleans. Twice, at Bladensburg and North Point, it came in contact with superior numbers of militia in fairly good position. In each case the result was the same. After some preliminary skirmishing, manoeuvring, and volley firing, the British charged with the bayonet. The rawest regiments among the American militia then broke at once; the others kept pretty steady, pouring in quite a destructive fire, until the regulars had come up close to them, when they also fled. The British regulars were too heavily loaded to pursue, and, owing to their mode of attack, and the rapidity with which their opponents ran away, the loss of the latter was in each case very slight. At North Point, however, the militia, being more experienced, behaved better than at Bladensburg. In neither case were the British put to any trouble to win their victory.

The above is a brief sketch of the campaigns of the war. It is not cheerful reading for an American, nor yet of interest to a military student; and its lessons have been taught so often by similar occurrences in other lands under like circumstances, and, moreover, teach such self-evident truths, that they scarcely need to be brought to the notice of an historian. But the crowning event of the war was the Battle of New Orleans; remarkable in its military aspect, and a source of pride to every American. It is well worth a more careful study, and to it I have devoted the last chapter of this work.

New York City, 1883.

[Illustration: Fig. 1.—Long gun.]

[Illustration: Fig. 2.—Carronade.]

[Illustration: Fig. 3.—Section of flush-decked corvette or sloop, carrying long guns. Such was the armament of the *Pike* and *Adams*, but most flush-decked ships mounted carronades.]

[Illustration: Fig. 4.—Section of frigate-built ship, with long gun on main-deck and carronade on spar-deck. Taken from the *American Artillerist's Companion*, by Louis de Toussard (Philadelphia, 1811).]

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTORY

Causes of the War of 1812—Conflicting views of America and Britain as regards neutral rights—Those of the former power right—Impossibility of avoiding hostilities—Declaration of war—General features of the contest—Racial identity of the contestants—The treaty of peace nominally leaves the situation unchanged—But practically settles the dispute in our favor in respect to maritime rights—The British navy and its reputation prior to 1812—Comparison with other European navies—British and American authorities consulted in the present work.

The view professed by Great Britain in 1812 respecting the rights of belligerents and neutrals was diametrically opposite to that held by the United States. "Between England and the United States of America," writes a British author, "a spirit of animosity, caused chiefly by the impressment of British seamen, or of seamen asserted to be such, from on board of American merchant vessels, had unhappily subsisted for a long time" prior to the war. "It is, we believe," he continues, "an acknowledged maxim of public law, as well that no nation but the one he belongs to can release a subject from his natural allegiance, as

that, provided the jurisdiction of another independent state be not infringed, every nation has a right to enforce the services of her subjects wherever they may be found. Nor has any neutral nation such a jurisdiction over her merchant vessels upon the high seas as to exclude a belligerent nation from the right of searching them for contraband of war or for the property or persons of her enemies. And if, in the exercise of that right, the belligerent should discover on board of the neutral vessel a subject who has withdrawn himself from his lawful allegiance, the neutral can have no fair ground for refusing to deliver him up; more especially if that subject is proved to be a deserter from the sea or land service of the former." [Footnote: "The Naval History of Great Britain," by William James, vol. iv, p. 324. (New edition by Captain Chamier, R. N., London, 1837.)]

Great Britain's doctrine was "once a subject always a subject." On the other hand, the United States maintained that any foreigner, after five years' residence within her territory, and after having complied with certain forms, became one of her citizens as completely as if he was native born. Great Britain contended that her war ships possessed the right of searching all neutral vessels for the property and persons of her foes. The United States, resisting this claim, asserted that "free bottoms made free goods," and that consequently her ships when on the high seas should not be molested on any pretext whatever. Finally, Great Britain's system of impressment, [Footnote: The best idea of which can be gained by reading Marryatt's novels.]

by which men could be forcibly seized and made to serve in her navy, no matter at what cost to themselves, was repugnant to every American idea.

Such wide differences in the views of the two nations produced endless difficulties. To escape the press-gang, or for other reasons, many British seamen took service under the American flag; and if they were demanded back, it is not likely that they or their American shipmates had much hesitation in swearing either that they were not British at all, or else that they had been naturalized as Americans. Equally probable is it that the American blockade-runners were guilty of a great deal of fraud and more or less thinly veiled perjury. But the wrongs done by the Americans were insignificant compared with those they received. Any innocent merchant vessel was liable to seizure at any moment; and when overhauled by a British cruiser short of men was sure to be stripped of most of her crew. The British officers were themselves the judges as to whether a seaman should be pronounced a native of America or of Britain, and there was no appeal from their judgment. If a captain lacked his full complement there was little doubt as to the view he would take of any man's nationality. The wrongs inflicted on our seafaring countrymen by their impressment into foreign ships formed the main cause of the war.

There were still other grievances which are thus presented by the British Admiral Cochrane. [Footnote: "Autobiography of a Seaman," by Thomas, tenth Earl of Dundonald, Admiral

of the Red; Rear-Admiral of the Fleet, London, 1860, vol. i, p. 24.] "Our treatment of its (America's) citizens was scarcely in accordance with the national privileges to which the young Republic had become entitled. There were no doubt many individuals among the American people who, caring little for the Federal Government, considered it more profitable to break than to keep the laws of nations by aiding and supporting our enemy (France), and it was against such that the efforts of the squadron had chiefly been directed; but the way the object was carried out was scarcely less an infraction of those national laws which we were professedly enforcing. The practice of taking English (and American) seamen out of American ships without regard to the safety of navigating them when thus deprived of their hands has been already mentioned. To this may be added the detention of vessels against which nothing contrary to international neutrality could be established, whereby their cargoes became damaged; the compelling them, on suspicion only, to proceed to ports other than those to which they were destined; and generally treating them as though they were engaged in contraband trade. * * * American ships were not permitted to quit English ports without giving security for the discharge of their cargoes in some other British or neutral port." On the same subject James [Footnote: *L. c.*, iv, 325.] writes: "When, by the maritime supremacy of England, France could no longer trade for herself, America proffered her services, as a neutral, to trade for her; and American merchants and their

agents, in the gains that flowed in, soon found a compensation for all the perjury and fraud necessary to cheat the former out of her belligerent rights. The high commercial importance of the United States thus obtained, coupled with a similarity of language and, to a superficial observer, a resemblance in person between the natives of America and Great Britain, has caused the former to be the chief, if not the only sufferers by the exercise of the right of search. Chiefly indebted for their growth and prosperity to emigration from Europe, the United States hold out every allurement to foreigners, particularly to British seamen, whom, by a process peculiarly their own, they can naturalize as quickly as a dollar can exchange masters and a blank form, ready signed and sworn to, can be filled up. [Footnote: This is an exaggeration.] It is the knowledge of this fact that makes British naval officers when searching for deserters from their service, so harsh in their scrutiny, and so sceptical of American oaths and asseverations."

The last sentence of the foregoing from James is an euphemistic way of saying that whenever a British commander short of men came across an American vessel he impressed all of her crew that he wanted, whether they were citizens of the United States or not. It must be remembered, however, that the only reason why Great Britain did us more injury than any other power was because she was better able to do so. None of her acts were more offensive than Napoleon's Milan decree, by which it was declared that any neutral vessel which permitted itself to

be searched by a British cruiser should be considered as British, and as the lawful prize of any French vessel. French frigates and privateers were very apt to snap up any American vessel they came across and were only withheld at all by the memory of the sharp dressing they had received in the West Indies during the quasi-war of 1799-1800. What we undoubtedly ought to have done was to have adopted the measure actually proposed in Congress, and declared war on both France and England. As it was, we chose as a foe the one that had done, and could still do, us the greatest injury.

The principles for which the United States contended in 1812 are now universally accepted, and those so tenaciously maintained by Great Britain find no advocates in the civilized world. That England herself was afterward completely reconciled to our views was amply shown by her intense indignation when Commodore Wilkes, in the exercise of the right of search for the persons of the foes of his country, stopped the neutral British ship *Trent*; while the applause with which the act was greeted in America proves pretty clearly another fact, that we had warred for the right, not because it *was* the right, but because it agreed with our self-interest to do so. We were contending for "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights": meaning by the former expression, freedom to trade wherever we chose without hindrance save from the power with whom we were trading; and by the latter, that a man who happened to be on the sea should have the same protection accorded to a man who remained on

land. Nominally, neither of these questions was settled by, or even alluded to, in the treaty of peace; but the immense increase of reputation that the navy acquired during the war practically decided both points in our favor. Our sailors had gained too great a name for any one to molest them with impunity again.

Holding views on these maritime subjects so radically different from each other, the two nations could not but be continually dealing with causes of quarrel. Not only did British cruisers molest our merchant-men, but at length one of them, the 50-gun ship *Leopard*, attacked an American frigate, the *Chesapeake*, when the latter was so lumbered up that she could not return a shot, killed or disabled some twenty of her men and took away four others, one Briton and three Americans, who were claimed as deserters. For this act an apology was offered, but it failed to restore harmony between the two nations. Soon afterward another action was fought. The American frigate *President*, Commodore Rodgers, attacked the British sloop *Little Belt*, Captain Bingham, and exchanged one or two broadsides with her,—the frigate escaping scot-free while the sloop was nearly knocked to pieces. Mutual recriminations followed, each side insisting that the other was the assailant.

When Great Britain issued her Orders in Council forbidding our trading with France, we retaliated by passing an embargo act, which prevented us from trading at all. There could be but one result to such a succession of incidents, and that was war. Accordingly, in June, 1812, war was declared; and as a contest

for the rights of seamen, it was largely waged on the ocean. We also had not a little fighting to do on land, in which, as a rule, we came out second-best. Few or no preparations for the war had been made, and the result was such as might have been anticipated. After dragging on through three dreary and uneventful years it came to an end in 1815, by a peace which left matters in almost precisely the state in which the war had found them. On land and water the contest took the form of a succession of petty actions, in which the glory acquired by the victor seldom eclipsed the disgrace incurred by the vanquished. Neither side succeeded in doing what it intended. Americans declared that Canada must and should be conquered, but the conquering came quite as near being the other way. British writers insisted that the American navy should be swept from the sea; and, during the sweeping process it increased fourfold.

When the United States declared war, Great Britain was straining every nerve and muscle in a death struggle with the most formidable military despotism of modern times, and was obliged to entrust the defence of her Canadian colonies to a mere handful of regulars, aided by the local fencibles. But Congress had provided even fewer trained soldiers, and relied on militia. The latter chiefly exercised their fighting abilities upon one another in duelling, and, as a rule, were afflicted with conscientious scruples whenever it was necessary to cross the frontier and attack the enemy. Accordingly, the campaign opened with the bloodless surrender of an American general to a much inferior British

force, and the war continued much as it had begun; we suffered disgrace after disgrace, while the losses we inflicted, in turn, on Great Britain were so slight as hardly to attract her attention. At last, having crushed her greater foe, she turned to crush the lesser, and, in her turn, suffered ignominious defeat. By this time events had gradually developed a small number of soldiers on our northern frontier, who, commanded by Scott and Brown, were able to contend on equal terms with the veteran troops to whom they were opposed, though these formed part of what was then undoubtedly the most formidable fighting infantry any European nation possessed. The battles at this period of the struggle were remarkable for the skill and stubborn courage with which they were waged, as well as for the heavy loss involved; but the number of combatants was so small that in Europe they would have been regarded as mere outpost skirmishes, and they wholly failed to attract any attention abroad in that period of colossal armies.

When Great Britain seriously turned her attention to her transatlantic foe, and assembled in Canada an army of 14,000 men at the head of Lake Champlain, Congressional forethought enabled it to be opposed by soldiers who, it is true, were as well disciplined, as hardy, and as well commanded as any in the world, but who were only a few hundred strong, backed by more or less incompetent militia. Only Macdonough's skill and Sir George Prevost's incapacity saved us from a serious disaster; the sea-fight reflected high honor on our seamen,

but the retreat of the British land-forces was due to their commander and not their antagonists. Meanwhile a large British fleet in the Chesapeake had not achieved much glory by the destruction of local oyster-boats and the burning of a few farmers' houses, so an army was landed to strike a decisive blow. At Bladensburg [Footnote: See the "Capture of Washington," by Edward D. Ingraham (Philadelphia. 1849).] the five thousand British regulars, utterly worn out by heat and fatigue, by their mere appearance, frightened into a panic double their number of American militia well posted. But the only success attained was burning the public buildings of Washington, and that result was of dubious value. Baltimore was attacked next, and the attack repulsed, after the forts and ships had shelled one another with the slight results that usually attend that spectacular and harmless species of warfare.

The close of the contest was marked by the extraordinary battle of New Orleans. It was a perfectly useless shedding of blood, since peace had already been declared. There is hardly another contest of modern times where the defeated side suffered such frightful carnage, while the victors came off almost scatheless. It is quite in accordance with the rest of the war that the militia, hitherto worse than useless, should on this occasion win against great odds in point of numbers; and, moreover, that their splendid victory should have been of little consequence in its effects upon the result. On the whole, the contest by land, where we certainly ought to have been successful, reflected greater

credit on our antagonists than upon us, in spite of the services of Scott, Brown, and Jackson. Our small force of regulars and volunteers did excellently; as for the militia, New Orleans proved that they *could* fight superbly, and the other battles that they generally *would not* fight at all.

At sea, as will appear, the circumstances were widely different. Here we possessed a small but highly effective force, the ships well built, manned by thoroughly trained men, and commanded by able and experienced officers. The deeds of our navy form a part of history over which any American can be pardoned for lingering.

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Such was the origin, issue, and general character of the war. It may now be well to proceed to a comparison of the authorities on the subject. Allusion has already been made to them in the preface, but a fuller reference seems to be necessary in this connection.

At the close of the contest, the large majority of historians who wrote of it were so bitterly rancorous that their statements must be received with caution. For the main facts, I have relied, wherever it was practicable, upon the official letters of the commanding officers, taking each as authority for his own force and loss.[Footnote: As where Broke states his own force at 330, his antagonists at 440, and the American court of inquiry makes

the numbers 396 and 379, I have taken them as being 330 and 379 respectively. This is the only just method; I take it for granted that each commander meant to tell the truth, and of course knew his own force, while he might very naturally and in perfect good faith exaggerate his antagonist's.] For all the British victories we have British official letters, which tally almost exactly, as regards matters of *fact* and not of *opinion*, with the corresponding American accounts. For the first year the British also published official accounts of their defeats, which in the cases of the *Guerrière*, *Macedonian* and *Frolic*, I have followed as closely as the accounts of the American victors. The last British official letter published announcing a defeat was that in the case of the *Java*, and it is the only letter that I have not strictly accepted: The fact that no more were published thereafter is of itself unfortunate; and from the various contradictions it contains it would appear to have been tampered with. The surgeon's report accompanying it is certainly false. Subsequent to 1812 no letter of a defeated British commander was published, [Footnote: Except about the battles on the Lakes, where I have accordingly given the same credit to the accounts both of the British and of the Americans.] and I have to depend upon the various British historians, especially James, of whom more anon.

The American and British historians from whom we are thus at times forced to draw our material regard the war from very different stand-points, and their accounts generally differ. Each writer naturally so colored the affair as to have it appear

favorable to his own side. Sometimes this was done intentionally and sometimes not. Not unfrequently errors are made against the historian's own side; as when the British author, Brenton, says that the British brig *Peacock* mounted 32's instead of 24's, while Lossing in his "Field-Book of the War of 1812" makes the same mistake about the armament of the American brig *Argus*. Errors of this description are, of course, as carefully to be guarded against as any others. Mere hearsay reports, such as "it has been said," "a prisoner on board the opposing fleet has observed," "an American (or British) newspaper of such and such a date has remarked," are of course to be rejected. There is a curious parallelism in the errors on both sides. For example, the American, Mr. Low, writing in 1813, tells how the *Constitution*, 44, captured the *Guerrière* of 49 guns, while the British Lieutenant Low, writing in 1880, tells how the *Pelican*, 18, captured the *Argus* of 20 guns. Each records the truth but not the whole truth, for although rating 44 and 18 the victors carried respectively 54 and 21 guns, of heavier metal than those of their antagonists. Such errors are generally intentional. Similarly, most American writers mention the actions in which the privateers were victorious, but do not mention those in which they were defeated; while the British, in turn, record every successful "cutting-out" expedition, but ignore entirely those which terminated unfavorably. Other errors arise from honest ignorance. Thus, James in speaking of the repulse of the *Endymion's* boats by the *Neufchatel* gives the latter a crew of 120

men; she had more than this number originally, but only 40 were in her at the time of the attack. So also when the captain of the *Pelican* writes that the officers of the *Argus* report her loss at 40, when they really reported it at 24 or when Captain Dacres thought the *Constitution* had lost about 20 men instead of 14. The American gun-boat captains in recounting their engagements with the British frigates invariably greatly overestimated the loss of the latter. So that on both sides there were some intentional misstatements or garblings, and a much more numerous class of simple blunders, arising largely from an incapacity for seeing more than one side of the question.

Among the early British writers upon this war, the ablest was James. He devoted one work, his "Naval Occurrences," entirely to it; and it occupies the largest part of the sixth volume of his more extensive "History of the British Navy." [Footnote: A new edition, London, 1826.] Two other British writers, Lieutenant Marshall [Footnote: "Royal Naval Biography," by John Marshall (London, 1823-1835).] and Captain Brenton, [Footnote: "Naval History of Great Britain," by Edward Pelham Brenton (new edition, London, 1837).] wrote histories of the same events, about the same time; but neither of these naval officers produced half as valuable a work as did the civilian James. Marshall wrote a dozen volumes, each filled with several scores of dreary panegyrics, or memoirs of as many different officers. There is no attempt at order, hardly any thing about the ships, guns, or composition of the crews; and not even the pretence of

giving both sides, the object being to make every Englishman appear in his best light. The work is analogous to the numerous lives of Decatur, Bainbridge, Porter, etc., that appeared in the United States about the same time, and is quite as untrustworthy. Brenton made a far better and very interesting book, written on a good and well-connected plan, and apparently with a sincere desire to tell the truth. He accepts the British official accounts as needing nothing whatever to supplement them, precisely as Cooper accepts the American officials'. A more serious fault is his inability to be accurate. That this inaccuracy is not intentional is proved by the fact that it tells as often against his own side as against his opponents. He says, for example, that the guns of Perry's and Barclay's squadrons "were about equal in number and weight," that the *Peacock* (British) was armed with 32's instead of 24's, and underestimates the force of the second *Wasp*. But the blunders are quite as bad when distributed as when confined to one side; in addition, Brenton's disregard of all details makes him of but little use.

James, as already said, is by far the most valuable authority on the war, as regards *purely British* affairs. He enters minutely into details, and has evidently laboriously hunted up his authorities. He has examined the ships' logs, the Admiralty reports, various treatises, all the *Gazette* reports, gives very well-chosen extracts, has arranged his work in chronological order, discriminates between the officers that deserve praise and those that deserve blame, and in fact writes a work which ought to be consulted

by every student of naval affairs. But he is unfortunately afflicted with a hatred toward the Americans that amounts to a monomania. He wishes to make out as strong a case as possible against them. The *animus* of his work may be gathered from the not over complimentary account of the education of the youthful seafaring American, which can be found in vol. vi, p. 113, of his "History." On page 153 he asserts that he is an "impartial historian"; and about three lines before mentions that "it may suit the Americans to invent any falsehood, no matter how barefaced, to foist a valiant character on themselves." On page 419 he says that Captain Porter is to be believed, "so far as is borne out by proof (the only safe way where an American is concerned),"—which somewhat sweeping denunciation of the veracity of all of Captain Porter's compatriots would seem to indicate that James was not, perhaps, in that dispassionate frame of mind best suited for writing history. That he should be biassed against individual captains can be understood, but when he makes rabid onslaughts upon the American people as a whole, he renders it difficult for an American, at any rate, to put implicit credence in him. His statements are all the harder to confute when they are erroneous, because they are intentionally so. It is not, as with Brenton and Marshall, because he really thinks a British captain *cannot* be beaten, except by some kind of distorted special providence, for no man says worse things than he does about certain officers and crews. A writer of James' undoubted ability must have known perfectly well that his statements were untrue in many instances,

as where he garbles Hilyar's account of Porter's loss, or misstates the comparative force of the fleets on Lake Champlain.

When he says (p. 194) that Captain Bainbridge wished to run away from the *Java*, and would have done so if he had not been withheld by the advice of his first lieutenant, who was a renegade Englishman, [Footnote: Who, by the way, was Mr. Parker, born in Virginia, and never in England in his life.] it is not of much consequence whether his making the statement was due to excessive credulity or petty meanness, for, in either case, whether the defect was in his mind or his morals, it is enough to greatly impair the value of his other "facts." Again, when James (p. 165) states that Decatur ran away from the *Macedonian* until, by some marvellous optical delusion, he mistook her for a 32, he merely detracts a good deal from the worth of his own account. When the Americans adopt boarding helmets, he considers it as proving conclusively that they are suffering from an acute attack of cowardice. On p. 122 he says that "had the *President*, when she fell in with the *Belvidera*, been cruising alone * * * Commodore Rodgers would have magnified the British frigate into a line-of-battle ship, and have done his utmost to avoid her," which gives an excellent idea of the weight to be attached to the various other anecdotes he relates of the much-abused Commodore Rodgers.

But it must always be remembered that untrustworthy as James is in any thing referring purely to the Americans, he is no worse than his compeers of both nationalities. The misstatements of Niles in his "Weekly Register" about the British are quite

as flagrant, and his information about his own side even more valuable. [Footnote: In Niles, by the way, can be found excellent examples of the traditional American "spread-eagle" style. In one place I remember his describing "The Immortal Rodgers," baulked of his natural prey, the British, as "soaring about like the bold bald eagle of his native land," seeking whom he might devour. The accounts he gives of British line-of-battle ships fleeing from American 44's quite match James' anecdotes of the latter's avoidance of British 38's and 36's for fear they might mount twenty-four-pounders. The two works taken together give a very good idea of the war; separately, either is utterly unreliable, especially in matters of opinion.] Every little American author crowed over Perry's "Nelsonic victory over a greatly superior force." The *Constitution* was declared to have been at a disadvantage when she fought the *Guerrière*, and so on *ad infinitum*. But these writers have all faded into oblivion, and their writings are not even referred to, much less believed. James, on the contrary, has passed through edition after edition, is considered as unquestionable authority in his own country, and largely throughout Europe, and has furnished the basis for every subsequent account by British authors. From Alison to Lieutenant Low, almost every English work, whether of a popular character or not, is, in so far as it touches on the war, simply a "rehash" of the works written by James. The consequence is that the British and American accounts have astonishingly little resemblance. One ascribes the capture of the

British frigates simply to the fact that their opponents were "cut down line-of-battle ships"; the other gives all the glory to the "undaunted heroism," etc., of the Yankee sailors.

One not very creditable trait of the early American naval historians gave their rivals a great advantage. The object of the former was to make out that the *Constitution*, for example, won her victories against an equal foe, and an exact statement of the forces showed the contrary; so they always avoided figures, and thus left the ground clear for James' careful misstatements. Even when they criticised him they never went into details, confining themselves to some remark about "hurling" his figures in his face with "loathing." Even Cooper, interesting though his work is, has gone far less into figures than he should, and seems to have paid little if any attention to the British official statements, which of course should be received as of equal weight with the American. His comments on the actions are generally very fair, the book never being disfigured by bitterness toward the British; but he is certainly wrong, for example, in ascribing the loss of the *Chesapeake* solely to accident, that of the *Argus* solely to her inferiority in force, and so on. His disposition to praise *all* the American commanders may be generous, but is nevertheless unjust. If Decatur's surrender of the *President* is at least impliedly praised, then Porter's defence of the *Essex* can hardly receive its just award. There is no weight in the commendation bestowed upon Hull, if commendation, the same in kind though less in degree, is bestowed upon Rodgers. It is

a great pity that Cooper did not write a criticism on James, for no one could have done it more thoroughly. But he never mentions him, except once in speaking of Barclay's fleet. In all probability this silence arose from sheer contempt, and the certainty that most of James' remarks were false; but the effect was that very many foreigners believe him to have shirked the subject. He rarely gives any data by which the statements of James can be disproved, and it is for this reason that I have been obliged to criticise the latter's work very fully. Many of James' remarks, however, defy criticism from their random nature, as when he states that American midshipmen were chiefly masters and mates of merchantmen, and does not give a single proof to support the assertion. It would be nearly as true to assert that the British midshipmen were for the most part ex-members of the prize-ring, and as much labor would be needed to disprove it. In other instances it is quite enough to let his words speak for themselves, as where he says (p. 155) that of the American sailors one third in number and one half in point of effectiveness were in reality British. That is, of the 450 men the *Constitution* had when she fought the *Java* 150 were British, and the remaining 300 could have been as effectively replaced by 150 more British. So a very little logic works out a result that James certainly did not intend to arrive at; namely, that 300 British led by American officers could beat, with ease and comparative impunity, 400 British led by their own officers. He also forgets that the whole consists of the sum of the parts. He accounts for the victories of

the Americans by stating (p. 280) that they were lucky enough to meet with frigates and brigs who had unskilful gunners or worthless crews; he also carefully shows that the *Macedonian* was incompetently handled, the *Peacock* commanded by a mere martinet, the *Avon's* crew unpractised weak and unskilful, the *Java's* exceedingly poor, and more to the same effect. Now the Americans took in single fight three frigates and seven sloops, and when as many as ten vessels are met it is exceedingly probable that they represent the fair average; so that James' strictures, so far as true, simply show that the average British ship was very apt to possess, comparatively speaking, an incompetent captain or unskilful crew. These disadvantages were not felt when opposed to navies in which they existed to an even greater extent, but became very apparent when brought into contact with a power whose few officers knew how to play their own parts very nearly to perfection, and, something equally important, knew how to make first-rate crews out of what was already good raw material. Finally, a large proportion of James' abuse of the Americans sufficiently refutes itself, and perhaps Cooper's method of contemptuously disregarding him was the best; but no harm can follow from devoting a little space to commenting upon him.

Much the best American work is Lieutenant George E. Emmons' statistical "History of the United States Navy." Unfortunately it is merely a mass of excellently arranged and classified statistics, and while of invaluable importance to the

student, is not interesting to the average reader. Almost all the statements I have made of the force, tonnage, and armament of the American vessels, though I have whenever practicable taken them from the Navy Records, etc., yet could be just as well quoted from Emmons. Copies of most of the American official letters which I have quoted can be found in "Niles' Register," volumes 1 to 10, and all of the British ones in the "London Naval Chronicle" for the same years. It is to these two authorities that I am most indebted, and nearly as much so to the "American State Papers," vol. xiv. Next in order come Emmons, Cooper, and the invaluable, albeit somewhat scurrilous, James; and a great many others whose names I have quoted in their proper places. In commenting upon the actions, I have, whenever possible, drawn from some standard work, such as Jurien de la Gravière's "Guerres Maritimes," Lord Howard Douglass' "Naval Gunnery," or, better still, from the lives and memoirs of Admirals Farragut, Codrington, Broke, or Durham. The titles of the various works will be found given in full as they are referred to. [Footnote: To get an idea of the American seamen of that time Cooper's novels, "Miles Wallingford," "Home as Found," and the "Pilot," are far better than any history; in the "Two Admirals" the description of the fleet manoeuvring is unrivalled. His view of Jack's life is rather rose-colored however. "Tom Cringle's log" ought to be read for the information it gives. Marryatt's novels will show some of the darker aspects of sailor life.] In a few cases, where extreme accuracy was necessary, or where, as in the case of the

President's capture, it was desirable that there should be no room for dispute as to the facts, I have given the authority for each sentence; but in general this would be too cumbersome, and so I have confined myself to referring, at or near the beginning of the account of each action, to the authorities from whom I have taken it. For the less important facts on which every one is agreed I have often given no references.

Chapter II

Overwhelming naval supremacy of England when America declared war against her—Race identity of the combatants—The American navy at the beginning of the war—Officers well trained—Causes tending to make our seamen especially efficient—Close similarity between the British and American sailors—Our ships manned chiefly by native Americans, many of whom had formerly been impressed into the British navy—Quotas of seamen contributed by the different States—Navy-yards—Lists of officers and men—List of vessels—Tonnage—Different ways of estimating it in Britain and America—Ratings—American ships properly rated—Armaments of the frigates and corvettes—Three styles of guns used—Difference between long guns and carronades—Short weight of American shot—Comparison of British frigates rating 38, and American frigates rating 44 guns—Compared with a 74.

During the early years of this century England's naval power stood at a height never reached before or since by that of any other nation. On every sea her navies rode, not only triumphant, but with none to dispute their sway. The island folk had long claimed the mastery of the ocean, and they had certainly succeeded in making their claim completely good during the time of bloody warfare that followed the breaking out of the French Revolution. Since the year 1792 each European nation,

in turn, had learned to feel bitter dread of the weight of England's hand. In the Baltic, Sir Samuel Hood had taught the Russians that they must needs keep in port when the English cruisers were in the offing. The descendants of the Vikings had seen their whole navy destroyed at Copenhagen. No Dutch fleet ever put out after the day when, off Camperdown, Lord Duncan took possession of De Winter's shattered ships. But a few years before 1812, the greatest sea-fighter of all time had died in Trafalgar Bay, and in dying had crumbled to pieces the navies of France and of Spain.

From that day England's task was but to keep in port such of her foes' vessels as she had not destroyed. France alone still possessed fleets that could be rendered formidable, and so, from the Scheldt to Toulon, her harbors were watched and her coasts harried by the blockading squadrons of the English. Elsewhere the latter had no fear of their power being seriously assailed; but their vast commerce and numerous colonies needed ceaseless protection. Accordingly in every sea their cruisers could be found, of all sizes, from the stately ship-of-the-line, with her tiers of heavy cannon and her many hundreds of men, down to the little cutter carrying but a score of souls and a couple of light guns. All these cruisers, but especially those of the lesser rates, were continually brought into contact with such of the hostile vessels as had run through the blockade, or were too small to be affected by it. French and Italian frigates were often fought and captured when they were skirting their own coasts, or had started off on a plundering cruise through the Atlantic, or to the Indian

Ocean; and though the Danes had lost their larger ships they kept up a spirited warfare with brigs and gun-boats. So the English marine was in constant exercise, attended with almost invariable success.

Such was Great Britain's naval power when the Congress of the United States declared war upon her. While she could number her thousand sail, the American navy included but half a dozen frigates, and six or eight sloops and brigs; and it is small matter for surprise that the British officers should have regarded their new foe with contemptuous indifference. Hitherto the American seamen had never been heard of except in connection with two or three engagements with French frigates, and some obscure skirmishes against the Moors of Tripoli; none of which could possibly attract attention in the years that saw Aboukir, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar. And yet these same petty wars were the school which raised our marine to the highest standard of excellence. A continuous course of victory, won mainly by seamanship, had made the English sailor overweeningly self-confident, and caused him to pay but little regard to manoeuvring or even to gunnery. Meanwhile the American learned, by receiving hard knocks, how to give them, and belonged to a service too young to feel an over-confidence in itself. One side had let its training relax, while the other had carried it to the highest possible point. Hence our ships proved, on the whole, victorious in the apparently unequal struggle, and the men who had conquered the best seamen of Europe were

now in turn obliged to succumb. Compared with the great naval battles of the preceding few years, out bloodiest conflicts were mere skirmishes, but they were skirmishes between the hitherto acknowledged kings of the ocean, and new men who yet proved to be more than their equals. For over a hundred years, or since the time when they had contended on equal terms with the great Dutch admirals, the British had shown a decided superiority to their various foes, and during the latter quarter of the time this superiority, as already said, was very marked, indeed; in consequence, the victories of the new enemy attracted an amount of attention altogether disproportionate to their material effects. And it is a curious fact that our little navy, in which the art of handling and fighting the old broadside, sailing frigate in single conflict was brought to the highest point of perfection ever reached, that this same navy should have contained the first representative of the modern war steamer, and also the torpedo —the two terrible engines which were to drive from the ocean the very whitewinged craft that had first won honor for the starry flag. The tactical skill of Hull or Decatur is now of merely archaic interest, and has but little more bearing on the manoeuvring of a modern fleet than have the tactics of the Athenian gallies. But the war still conveys some most practical lessons as to the value of efficient ships and, above all, of efficient men in them. Had we only possessed the miserable gun-boats, our men could have done nothing; had we not possessed good men, the heavy frigates would have availed as little. Poor ships and impotent artillery

had lost the Dutch almost their entire navy; fine ships and heavy cannon had not saved the French and Spanish from the like fate. We owed our success to putting sailors even better than the Dutch on ships even finer than those built by the two Latin seaboard powers.

The first point to be remembered in order to write a fair account of this war is that the difference in fighting skill, which certainly existed between the two parties, was due mainly to training, and not to the nature of the men. It seems certain that the American had in the beginning somewhat the advantage, because his surroundings, partly physical and partly social and political, had forced him into habits of greater self-reliance. Therefore, on the average, he offered rather the best material to start with; but the difference was very slight, and totally disappeared under good training. The combatants were men of the same race, differing but little from one another. On the New England coast the English blood was as pure as in any part of Britain; in New York and New Jersey it was mixed with that of the Dutch settlers—and the Dutch are by race nearer to the true old English of Alfred and Harold than are, for example, the thoroughly anglicized Welsh of Cornwall. Otherwise, the infusion of new blood into the English race on this side of the Atlantic has been chiefly from three sources—German, Irish, and Norse; and these three sources represent the elemental parts of the composite English stock in about the same proportions in which they were originally combined,—mainly Teutonic, largely

Celtic, and with a Scandinavian admixture. The descendant of the German becomes as much an Anglo-American as the descendant of the Strathclyde Celt has already become an Anglo-Briton. Looking through names of the combatants it would be difficult to find any of one navy that could not be matched in the other—Hull or Lawrence, Allen, Perry, or Stewart. And among all the English names on both sides will be found many Scotch, Irish, or Welsh—Macdonough, O'Brien, or Jones. Still stranger ones appear: the Huguenot Tattnall is one among the American defenders of the *Constellation*, and another Huguenot Tattnall is among the British assailants at Lake Borgne. It must always be kept in mind that the Americans and the British are two substantially similar branches of the great English race, which both before and after their separation have assimilated, and made Englishmen of many other peoples. [Footnote: The inhabitants of Great Britain are best designated as "British"—English being either too narrow or too broad a term, in one case meaning the inhabitants of but a part of Britain, and in the other the whole Anglo-Saxon people.] The lessons taught by the war can hardly be learned unless this identity is kept in mind. [Footnote: It was practically a civil war, and was waged with much harshness and bitterness on both sides. I have already spoken of the numerous grievances of the Americans; the British, in turn, looked upon our blockade-runners which entered the French ports exactly as we regarded, at a later date, the British steamers that ran into Wilmington and Charleston. It is curious to see how illogical

writers are. The careers of the *Argus* and *Alabama* for example, were strikingly similar in many ways, yet the same writer who speaks of one as an "heroic little brig," will call the other a "black pirate." Of course there can be no possible comparison as to the causes for which the two vessels were fighting; but the cruises themselves were very much alike, both in character and history.]

To understand aright the efficiency of our navy, it is necessary to take a brief look at the character and antecedents of the officers and men who served in it.

When war broke out the United States Navy was but a few years old, yet it already had a far from dishonorable history. The captains and lieutenants of 1812 had been taught their duties in a very practical school, and the flag under which they fought was endeared to them already by not a few glorious traditions—though these, perhaps, like others of their kind, had lost none of their glory in the telling. A few of the older men had served in the war of the Revolution, and all still kept fresh in mind the doughty deeds of the old-time privateering war craft. Men still talked of Biddle's daring cruises and Barney's stubborn fights, or told of Scotch Paul and the grim work they had who followed his fortunes. Besides these memories of an older generation, most of the officers had themselves taken part, when younger in years and rank, in deeds not a whit less glorious. Almost every man had had a share in some gallant feat, to which he, in part at least, owed his present position. The captain had perhaps been a midshipman under Truxtun when he took the *Vengeance*, and

had been sent aboard the captured French frigate with the prize-master; the lieutenant had borne a part in the various attacks on Tripoli, and had led his men in the desperate hand-to-hand fights in which the Yankee cutlass proved an overmatch for the Turkish and Moorish scimitars. Nearly every senior officer had extricated himself by his own prowess or skill from the dangers of battle or storm; he owed his rank to the fact that he had proved worthy of it. Thrown upon his own resources, he had learned self-reliance; he was a first-rate practical seaman, and prided himself on the way his vessel was handled. Having reached his rank by hard work, and knowing what real fighting meant, he was careful to see that his men were trained in the *essentials* of discipline, and that they knew how to handle the guns in battle as well as polish them in peace. Beyond almost any of his countrymen, he worshipped the "Gridiron Flag," and, having been brought up in the Navy, regarded its honor as his own. It was, perhaps, the Navy alone that thought itself a match, ship against ship, for Great Britain. The remainder of the nation pinned its faith to the army, or rather to that weakest of weak reeds, the militia. The officers of the navy, with their strong *esprit de corps,* their jealousy of their own name and record, and the knowledge, by actual experience, that the British ships sailed no faster and were no better handled than their own, had no desire to shirk a conflict with any foe, and having tried their bravery in actual service, they made it doubly formidable by cool, wary skill. Even the younger men, who had never been in action, had been so well trained by

the tried veterans over them that the lack of experience was not sensibly felt.

The sailors comprising the crews of our ships were well worthy of their leaders. There was no better seaman in the world than American Jack; he had been bred to his work from infancy, and had been off in a fishing dory almost as soon as he could walk. When he grew older, he shipped on a merchantman or whaler, and in those warlike times, when our large merchant-marine was compelled to rely pretty much on itself for protection, each craft *had* to be well handled; all who were not were soon weeded out by a process of natural selection, of which the agents were French picaroons, Spanish buccaneers, and Malay pirates. It was a rough school, but it taught Jack to be both skilful and self-reliant; and he was all the better fitted to become a man-of-war's man, because he knew more about fire-arms than most of his kind in foreign lands. At home he had used his ponderous ducking gun with good effect on the flocks of canvasbacks in the reedy flats of the Chesapeake, or among the sea-coots in the rough water off the New England cliffs; and when he went on a sailing voyage the chances were even that there would be some use for the long guns before he returned, for the American merchant sailor could trust to no armed escort.

The wonderful effectiveness of our seamen at the date of which I am writing as well as long subsequently to it was largely due to the curious condition of things in Europe. For thirty years all the European nations had been in a state of continuous

and very complicated warfare, during the course of which each nation in turn fought almost every other, England being usually at loggerheads with all. One effect of this was to force an enormous proportion of the carrying trade of the world into American bottoms. The old Massachusetts town of Salem was then one of the main depots of the East India trade; the Baltimore clippers carried goods into the French and German ports with small regard to the blockade; New Bedford and Sag Harbor fitted out whalers for the Arctic seas as well as for the South Pacific; the rich merchants of Philadelphia and New York sent their ships to all parts of the world; and every small port had some craft in the coasting trade. On the New England seaboard but few of the boys would reach manhood without having made at least one voyage to the Newfoundland Banks after codfish; and in the whaling towns of Long Island it used to be an old saying that no man could marry till he struck his whale. The wealthy merchants of the large cities would often send their sons on a voyage or two before they let them enter their counting-houses. Thus it came about that a large portion of our population was engaged in seafaring pursuits of a nature strongly tending to develop a resolute and hardy character in the men that followed them. The British merchantmen sailed in huge convoys, guarded by men-of-war, while, as said before, our vessels went alone, and relied for protection on themselves. If a fishing smack went to the Banks it knew that it ran a chance of falling in with some not over-scrupulous Nova Scotian privateer. The barques that sailed from Salem

to the Spice Islands kept their men well trained both at great guns and musketry, so as to be able to beat off either Malay proas, or Chinese junks. The New York ships, loaded for the West Indies, were prepared to do battle with the picaroons that swarmed in the Spanish main; while the fast craft from Baltimore could fight as well as they could run. Wherever an American seaman went, he not only had to contend with all the legitimate perils of the sea, but he had also to regard almost every stranger as a foe. Whether this foe called himself pirate or privateer mattered but little. French, Spaniards, Algerines, Malays, from all alike our commerce suffered, and against all, our merchants were forced to defend themselves. The effect of such a state of things, which made commerce so remunerative that the bolder spirits could hardly keep out of it, and so hazardous that only the most skilful and daring could succeed in it, was to raise up as fine a set of seamen as ever manned a navy. The stern school in which the American was brought up, forced him into habits of independent thought and action which it was impossible that the more protected Briton could possess. He worked more intelligently and less from routine, and while perfectly obedient and amenable to discipline, was yet able to judge for himself in an emergency. He was more easily managed than most of his kind—being shrewd, quiet, and, in fact, comparatively speaking, rather moral than otherwise; if he was a New Englander, when he retired from a sea life he was not unapt to end his days as a deacon. Altogether there could not have been better material for

a fighting crew than cool, gritty American Jack. Moreover, there was a good nucleus of veterans to begin with, who were well fitted to fill the more responsible positions, such as captains of guns, etc. These were men who had cruised in the little *Enterprise* after French privateers, who had been in the *Constellation* in her two victorious fights, or who, perhaps, had followed Decatur when with only eighty men he cut out the *Philadelphia*, manned by fivefold his force and surrounded by hostile batteries and war vessels,—one of the boldest expeditions of the kind on record.

It is to be noted, furthermore, in this connection, that by a singular turn of fortune, Great Britain, whose system of impressing American sailors had been one of the chief causes of the war, herself became, in consequence of that very system, in some sort, a nursery for the seamen of the young Republican navy. The American sailor feared nothing more than being impressed on a British ship—dreading beyond measure the hard life and cruel discipline aboard of her; but once there, he usually did well enough, and in course of time often rose to be of some little consequence. For years before 1812, the number of these impressed sailors was in reality greater than the entire number serving in the American navy, from which it will readily be seen that they formed a good stock to draw upon. Very much to their credit, they never lost their devotion to the home of their birth, more than two thousand of them being imprisoned at the beginning of the war because they refused to serve against their country. When Commodore Decatur captured the *Macedonian*,

that officer, as we learn from Marshall's "Naval Biography" (ii. 1019), stated that most of the seamen of his own frigate, the *United States*, had served in British war vessels, and that some had been with Lord Nelson in the *Victory*, and had even been bargemen to the great Admiral,—a pretty sure proof that the American sailors did not show a disadvantage when compared with others. [Footnote: With perfect gravity, James and his followers assume Decatur's statement to be equivalent to saying that he had chiefly British seamen on board; whereas, even as quoted by Marshall, Decatur merely said that "his seamen had served on board a British man-of-war," and that some "had served under Lord Nelson." Like the *Constitution*, the *United States* had rid herself of most of the British subjects on board, before sailing. Decatur's remark simply referred to the number of his American seamen who had been impressed on board British ships. Whenever James says that an American ship had a large proportion of British sailors aboard, the explanation is that a large number of the crew were Americans who had been impressed on British ships. It would be no more absurd to claim Trafalgar as an American victory because there was a certain number of Americans in Nelson's fleet, than it is to assert that the Americans were victorious in 1812, because there were a few renegade British on board their ships.]

Good seaman as the impressed American proved to be, yet he seldom missed an opportunity to escape from the British service, by desertion or otherwise. In the first place, the life

was very hard, and, in the second, the American seaman was very patriotic. He had an honest and deep affection for his own flag; while, on the contrary, he felt a curiously strong hatred for England, as distinguished from Englishmen. This hatred was partly an abstract feeling, cherished through a vague traditional respect for Bunker Hill, and partly something very real and vivid, owing to the injuries he, and others like him, had received. Whether he lived in Maryland or Massachusetts, he certainly knew men whose ships had been seized by British cruisers, their goods confiscated, and the vessels condemned. Some of his friends had fallen victims to the odious right of search, and had never been heard of afterward. He had suffered many an injury to friend, fortune, or person, and some day he hoped to repay them all; and when the war did come, he fought all the better because he knew it was in his own quarrel. But, as I have said, this hatred was against England, not against Englishmen. Then, as now, sailors were scattered about over the world without any great regard for nationality; and the resulting intermingling of natives and foreigners in every mercantile marine was especially great in those of Britain and America, whose people spoke the same tongue and wore the same aspect. When chance drifted the American into Liverpool or London, he was ready enough to ship in an Indiaman or whaler, caring little for the fact that he served under the British flag; and the Briton, in turn, who found himself in New York or Philadelphia, willingly sailed in one of the clipper-built barques, whether it floated the stars and stripes

or not. When Captain Porter wrought such havoc among the British whalers in the South Seas, he found that no inconsiderable portion of their crews consisted of Americans, some of whom enlisted on board his own vessel; and among the crews of the American whalers were many British. In fact, though the skipper of each ship might brag loudly of his nationality, yet in practical life he knew well enough that there was very little to choose between a Yankee and a Briton. [Footnote: What choice there was, was in favor of the American. In point of courage there was no difference whatever. The *Essex* and the *Lawrence*, as well as the *Frolic* and the *Reindeer*, were defended with the same stubborn, desperate, cool bravery that marks the English race on both sides of the Atlantic. But the American was a free citizen, any one's equal, a voter with a personal interest in his country's welfare, and, above all, without having perpetually before his eyes the degrading fear of the press-gang. In consequence, he was more tractable than the Englishman, more self-reliant, and possessed greater judgment. In the fight between the *Wasp* and the *Frolic*, the latter's crew had apparently been well trained at the guns, for they aimed well; but they fired at the wrong time, and never corrected the error; while their antagonists, delivering their broadsides far more slowly, by intelligently waiting until the proper moment, worked frightful havoc. But though there was a certain slight difference between the seamen of the two nations, it must never be forgotten that it was very much less than that between the various individuals of the same nation;

and when the British had been trained for a few years by such commanders as Broke and Manners, it was impossible to surpass them, and it needed our best men to equal them.] Both were bold and hardy, cool and intelligent, quick with their hands, and showing at their best in an emergency. They looked alike and spoke alike; when they took the trouble to think, they thought alike; and when they got drunk, which was not an infrequent occurrence, they quarrelled alike.

Mingled with them were a few seamen of other nationalities. The Irishman, if he came from the old Dano-Irish towns of Waterford, Dublin, and Wexford, or from the Ulster coast, was very much like the two chief combatants; the Celto-Turanian kern of the west did not often appear on shipboard. The French, Danes, and Dutch were hemmed in at home; they had enough to do on their own seaboard, and could not send men into foreign fleets. A few Norse, however, did come in, and excellent sailors and fighters they made. With the Portuguese and Italians, of whom some were to be found serving under the union-jack, and others under the stars and stripes, it was different; although there were many excellent exceptions they did not, as a rule, make the best of seamen. They were treacherous, fond of the knife, less ready with their hands, and likely to lose either their wits or their courage when in a tight place.

In the American navy, unlike the British, there was no impressment; the sailor was a volunteer, and he shipped in whatever craft his fancy selected. Throughout the war there

were no "picked crews" on the American side, [Footnote: James' statements to the contrary being in every case utterly without foundation. He is also wrong in his assertion that the American ships had no boys; they had nearly as many in proportion as the British. The *Constitution* had 31, the *Adams* 15, etc. So, when he states that our midshipmen were generally masters and mates of merchantmen; they were generally from eleven to seventeen years old at the beginning of the war, and besides, had rarely or never been in the merchant marine.] excepting on the last two cruises of the *Constitution*. In fact (as seen by the letter of Captains Stewart and Bainbridge to Secretary Hamilton), there was often much difficulty in getting enough men. [Footnote: Reading through the volumes of official letters about this war, which are preserved in the office of the Secretary of the Navy, one of the most noticeable things is the continual complaints about the difficulty of getting men. The *Adams* at one time had a crew of but nineteen men—"fourteen of whom are marines," adds the aggrieved commander. A log-book of one of the gun-boats records the fact that after much difficulty *two* men were enlisted—from the jail, with a parenthetical memorandum to the effect that they were both very drunk. British ships were much more easily manned, as they could always have recourse to impressment.

The *Constitution* on starting out her last cruises had an extraordinary number of able seamen aboard, viz., 218, with but 92 ordinary seamen, 12 boys, and 44 marines, making, with the

officers, a total of 440 men. (See letter of Captain Bainbridge, Oct. 16, 1814; it is letter No. 51, in the fortieth volume of "Captains' Letters," in the clerk's office of the Secretary of the Navy.)] Many sailors preferred to serve in the innumerable privateers, and, the two above-mentioned officers, in urging the necessity of building line-of-battle ships, state that it was hard work to recruit men for vessels of an inferior grade, so long as the enemy had ships of the line.

One of the standard statements made by the British historians about this war is that our ships were mainly or largely manned by British sailors. This, if true, would not interfere with the lessons which it teaches; and, besides that, it is *not* true.

In this, as in every thing else, all the modern writers have merely followed James or Brenton, and I shall accordingly confine myself to examining their assertions. The former begins (vol. iv, p. 470) by diffidently stating that there is a "similarity" of language between the inhabitants of the two countries—an interesting philological discovery that but few will attempt to controvert. In vol. vi, p. 154, he mentions that a number of blanks occur in the American Navy List in the column "Where Born"; and in proof of the fact that these blanks are there because the men were not Americans, he says that their names "are all English and Irish." [Footnote: For example, James writes: "Out of the 32 captains one only, Thomas Tingey, had England marked as his birthplace…. Three blanks occur, and we consider it rather creditable to Captains John Shaw, Daniel S. Patterson,

and John Ord Creighton, that they were ashamed to tell where they were born." I have not been able to find out the latter's birth-place, but Captain Shaw was born in New York, and I have seen Captain Patterson incidentally alluded to as "born and bred in America." Generally, whenever I have been able to fill up the vacancies in the column "Where Born," I have found that it was in America. From these facts it would appear that James was somewhat hasty in concluding that the omission of the birth-place proved the owner of the name to be a native of Great Britain.] They certainly are; and so are all the other names in the list. It could not well be otherwise, as the United States Navy was not officered by Indians. In looking over this same Navy List (of 1816) it will be seen that but a little over 5 per cent, of the officers were born abroad—a smaller proportion by far than would exist in the population of the country at large—and most of these had come to America when under ten years of age. On p. 155 James adds that the British sailors composed "one third in number and one half in point of effectiveness" of the American crews. Brenton in his "Naval History" writes: "It was said, and I have no reason to doubt the fact, that there were 200 British seamen aboard the *Constitution*." [Footnote: New edition, London, 1837, vol. ii, p. 456.] These statements are mere assertions unsupported by proof, and of such a loose character as to be difficult to refute. As our navy was small, it may be best to take each ship in turn. The only ones of which the British could write authoritatively were, of course, those which they captured. The first one taken

was the *Wasp*. James says many British were discovered among her crew, instancing especially one sailor named Jack Lang; now Jack Lang was born in the town of Brunswick, New Jersey, *but had been impressed and forced to serve in the British Navy*. The same was doubtless true of the rest of the "many British" seamen of her crew; at any rate, as the only instance James mentions (Jack Lang) was an American, he can hardly be trusted for those whom he does not name.

Of the 95 men composing the crew of the *Nautilus* when she was captured, "6 were detained and sent to England to await examination as being suspected of being British subjects." [Footnote: Quoted from letter of Commodore Rodgers of September 12, 1812 (in Naval Archives, "Captains' Letters," vol xxv, No. 43), enclosing a "List of American prisoners of war discharged out of custody of Lieutenant William Miller, agent at the port of Halifax," in exchange for some of the British captured by Porter. This list, by the way, shows the crew of the *Nautilus* (counting the six men detained as British) to have been 95 in number, instead of 106, as stated by James. Commodore Rodgers adds that he has detained 12 men of the *Guerrière's* crew as an offset to the 6 men belonging to the *Nautilus*.] Of the other small brigs, the *Viper*, *Vixen*, *Rattlesnake*, and *Syren*, James does not mention the composition of the crew, and I do not know that any were claimed as British. Of the crew of the *Argus* "about 10 or 12 were believed to be British subjects; the American officers swore the crew contained none" (James, "Naval Occurrences,"

p. 278). From 0 to 10 per cent can be allowed. When the *Frolic* was captured "her crew consisted of native Americans" (*do*, p. 340). James speaks ("History," p. 418) of "a portion of the British subjects on board the *Essex*," but without giving a word of proof or stating his grounds of belief. One man was claimed as a deserter by the British, but he turned out to be a New Yorker. There were certainly a certain number of British aboard, but the number probably did not exceed thirty. Of the *President's* crew he says ("Naval Occurrences," p. 448): "In the opinion of several British officers there were among them many British seamen" but Commodore Decatur, Lieutenant Gallagher, and the other officers swore that there were none. Of the crew of the *Chesapeake*, he says, "about 32" were British subjects, or about 10 per cent. One or two of these were afterward shot, and some 25, together with a Portuguese boatswain's mate, entered into the British service. So that of the vessels captured by the British, the *Chesapeake* had the largest number of British (about 10 per cent. of her crew) on board, the others ranging from that number down to none at all, as in the case of the *Wasp*. As these eleven ships would probably represent a fair average, this proportion, of 0 to 10 per cent., should be taken as the proper one. James, however, is of the opinion that those ships manned by Americans were more apt to be captured than those manned by the braver British; which calls for an examination of the crews of the remaining vessels. Of the American sloop *Peacock*, James says ("Naval Occurrences," p. 348) that "several of her men were

recognized as British seamen"; even if this were true, "several" could not probably mean more than sixteen, or 10 per cent. Of the second *Wasp* he says, "Captain Blakely was a native of Dublin, and, along with some English and Scotch, did not, it may be certain, neglect to have in his crew a great many Irish." Now Captain Blakely left Ireland when he was but 16 months old, and the rest of James' statement is avowedly mere conjecture. It was asserted positively in the American newspapers that the *Wasp*, which sailed from Portsmouth, was manned exclusively by New Englanders, except a small draft of men from a Baltimore privateer, and that there was not a foreigner in her crew. Of the *Hornet* James states that "some of her men were natives of the United Kingdom"; but he gives no authority, and the men he refers to were in all probability those spoken of in the journal of one of the *Hornet's* officers, which says that "Many of our men (Americans) had been impressed in the British service." As regards the gun-boats, James asserts that they were commanded by "Commodore Joshua Barney, a native of Ireland." This officer, however, was born at Baltimore on July 6, 1759. As to the *Constitution*, Brenton, as already mentioned, supposes the number of British sailors in her crew to have been 200; James makes it less, or about 150. Respecting this, the only definite statements I can find in British works are the following: In the "Naval Chronicle," vol. xxix, p. 452, an officer of the *Java* states that most of the *Constitution's* men were British, many being from the *Guerrière*; which should be read in connection with

James' statement (vol. vi, p. 156) that but eight of the *Guerrière's* crew deserted, and but two shipped on board the *Constitution*. Moreover, as a matter of fact, these eight men were all impressed Americans. In the "Naval Chronicle" it is also said that the *Chesapeake's* surgeon was an Irishman, formerly of the British navy; he was born in Baltimore, and was never in the British navy in his life. The third lieutenant "was supposed to be an Irishman" (Brenton, ii, 456). The first lieutenant "was a native of Great Britain, we have been informed" (James, vi, 194); he was Mr. George Parker, born and bred in Virginia. The remaining three citations, if true, prove nothing. "One man had served under Mr. Kent" of the *Guerrière* (James, vi, p. 153). "One had been in the *Achille*" and "one in the *Eurydice*" (Brenton, ii, 456). These three men were most probably American seamen who had been impressed on British ships. From Cooper (in "Putnam's Magazine," vol. I, p. 593) as well as from several places in the *Constitution's* log, [Footnote: See her log-book (vol. ii, Feb. 1, 1812 to Dec. 13, 1813); especially on July 12th, when twelve men were discharged. In some of Hull's letters he alludes to the desire of the British part of the crew to serve on the gun boats or in the ports; and then writes that "in accordance with the instructions sent him by the Secretary of the Navy," he had allowed the British-born portion to leave the ship. The log-books are in the Bureau of Navigation.] we learn that several of the crew who were British deserters were discharged from the *Constitution* before she left port, as they were afraid to serve in a war against

Great Britain. That this fear was justifiable may be seen by reading James, vol. iv, p. 483. Of the four men taken by the *Leopard* from the *Chesapeake*, as deserters, one was hung and three scourged. In reality the crew of the *Constitution* probably did not contain a dozen British sailors; in her last cruises she was manned almost exclusively by New Englanders. The only remainder vessel is the *United States*, respecting whose crew some remarkable statements have been made. Marshall (vol. ii, p. 1019) writes that Commodore Decatur "declared there was not a seaman in his ship who had not served from 5 to 12 years in a British man-of-war," from which he concludes that they were British themselves. It may be questioned whether Decatur ever made such an assertion; or if he did, it is safe to assume again that his men were long-impressed Americans. [Footnote: At the beginning of the war there were on record in the American State Department 6,257 cases of impressed American seamen. These could represent but a small part of the whole, which must have amounted to 20,000 men, or more than sufficient to man our entire navy five times over. According to the British Admiralty Report to the House of Commons, February 1, 1815, 2,548 impressed American seamen, who refused to serve against their country, were imprisoned in 1812. According to Lord Castlereagh's speech in the House, February 18, 1813, 3,300 men claiming to be American subjects were serving in the British navy in January, 1811, and he certainly did not give any thing like the whole number. In the American service the term of

enlistment extended for two years, and the frigate, *United States*, referred to, had not had her crew for any very great length of time as yet. If such a crew were selected at random from American sailors, among them there would be, owing to the small number serving in our own navy and the enormous number impressed into the British navy, probably but one of the former to two of the latter. As already mentioned the American always left a British man-of-war as soon as he could, by desertion or discharge; but he had no unwillingness to serve in the home navy, where the pay was larger, and the discipline far more humane, not to speak of motives of patriotism. Even if the ex-British man-of-war's man kept out of service for some time, he would be very apt to enlist when a war broke out, which his country undertook largely to avenge his own wrongs.]

Of the *Carolina's* crew of 70 men, five were British. This fact was not found out till three deserted, when an investigation was made and the two other British discharged. Captain Henly, in reporting these facts, made no concealment of his surprise that there should be any British at all in his crew. [Footnote: See his letter in "Letters of Masters' Commandant," 1814, I. No. 116.]

From these facts and citations we may accordingly conclude that the proportion of British seamen serving on American ships *after the war broke out*, varied between none, as on the *Wasp* and *Constitution*, to ten per cent., as on the *Chesapeake* and *Essex*. On the average, nine tenths of each of our crews were American seamen, and about one twentieth British, the remainder being a

mixture of various nationalities.

On the other hand, it is to be said that the British frigate *Guerrière* had ten Americans among her crew, who were permitted to go below during action, and the *Macedonian* eight, who were not allowed that privilege, three of them being killed. Three of the British sloop *Peacock's* men were Americans, who were forced to fight against the *Hornet*: one of them was killed. Two of the *Epervier's* men were Americans, who were also forced to fight. When the crew of the *Nautilus* was exchanged, a number of other American prisoners were sent with them; among these were a number of American seamen who had been serving in the *Shannon*, *Acasta*, *Africa*, and various other vessels. So there was also a certain proportion of Americans among the British crews, although forming a smaller percentage of them than the British did on board the American ships. In neither case was the number sufficient to at all affect the result.

The crews of our ships being thus mainly native Americans, it may be interesting to try to find out the proportions that were furnished by the different sections of the country. There is not much difficulty about the officers. The captains, masters commandant, lieutenants, marine officers, whose birthplaces are given in the Navy List of 1816,—240 in all,—came from the various States as follows:

.- N.H.. 5-.
| Mass.. 20 |
New England -| R.I. 11 |- 42
'- Conn.. 6-'

.- N.Y.. 17-.
| N.J.. 22 |
Middle States-| Penn.. 35 |- 78
'- Del.. 4-'

District of Columbia -[D.C.. 4]- 4

.- Md.. 46-.
| Va.. 42 |
| N.C.. 4 |
Southern States-| S.C.. 16 |-116
| Ga.. 2 |
| La.. 4 |
'- Ky.. 2-'

Total of given birthplaces 240

Thus, Maryland furnished, both absolutely and proportionately, the greatest number of officers, Virginia, then the most populous of all the States, coming next; four fifths of the remainder came from the Northern States.

It is more difficult to get at the birthplaces of the sailors. Something can be inferred from the number of privateers and letters of marque fitted out. Here Baltimore again headed the list; following closely came New York, Philadelphia, and the New England coast towns, with, alone among the Southern ports, Charleston, S.C. A more accurate idea of the quotas of sailors furnished by the different sections can be arrived at by comparing the total amount of tonnage the country possessed at the outbreak of the war. Speaking roughly, 44 per cent, of it belonged to New England, 32 per cent, to the Middle States, and 11 per cent, to Maryland. This makes it *probable* (but of course not certain) that three fourths of the common sailors hailed from the Northern States, half the remainder from Maryland, and the rest chiefly from Virginia and South Carolina.

Having thus discussed somewhat at length the character of our officers and crews, it will now be necessary to present some statistical tables to give a more accurate idea of the composition of the navy; the tonnage, complements, and armaments of the ships, etc.

At the beginning of the war the Government possessed six navy-yards (all but the last established in 1801) as follows:

[Footnote: Report of Naval Secretary Jones, Nov. 30. 1814.]

Place Original Cost. Minimum number of men employed.

1. Portsmouth. N. H., $ 5,500 10
2. Charleston, Mass., 39,214 20
3. New York, 40,000 102
4. Philadelphia, 37,000 13
5. Washington, 4,000 36
6. Gosport, 12,000 16

In 1812 the following was the number of officers in the navy: [Footnote: "List of Vessels" etc., by Gen. H Preble U.S.N (1874)]

12 captains
10 masters commandant
73 lieutenants
53 masters
310 midshipmen
42 marine officers

—

500

At the opening of the year, the number of seamen, ordinary seamen, and boys in service was 4,010, and enough more were recruited to increase it to 5,230, of whom only 2,346 were destined for the cruising war vessels, the remainder being detailed for forts, gun-boats, navy yards, the lakes, etc. [Footnote: Report of Secretary Paul Hamilton, Feb. 21, 1812.] The marine corps was already ample, consisting of 1,523 men.

[Footnote: *Ibid*.]

No regular navy lists were published till 1816, and I have been able to get very little information respecting the increase in officers and men during 1813 and 1814; but we have full returns for 1815, which may be summarized as follows: [Footnote: Seybert's "Statistical Annals," p. 676 (Philadelphia, 1818)]

30 captains,
25 masters commandant,
141 lieutenants,
24 commanders,
510 midshipmen,
230 sailing-masters,
50 surgeons,
12 chaplains,
50 pursers,
10 coast pilots,
45 captain's clerks,
80 surgeon's mates,
530 boatswains, gunners, carpenters, and sailmakers,
268 boatswain's mates, gunner's mates, etc.,
1,106 quarter gunners, etc.,
5,000 able seamen,
6,849 ordinary seamen and boys.

Making a total of 14,960, with 2,715 marines.

[Footnote: Report of Secretary B. W. Crowninshield, April 18, 1816.]

Comparing this list with the figures given before, it can be seen that during the course of the war our navy grew enormously, increasing to between three and four times its original size.

At the beginning of the year 1812, the navy of the United States on the ocean consisted of the following vessels, which either were, or could have been, made available during the war. [Footnote: Letter of Secretary Benjamin Stoddart to Fifth Congress, Dec. 24, 1798; Letter of Secretary Paul Hamilton, Feb. 21, 1812; "American State Papers," vol. xix, p. 149. See also The "History of the Navy of the United States," by Lieut. G. E. Emmons, U. S. N. (published in Washington, MDCCCLIII, under the authority of the Navy Department.)]

(Guns).	Name.	Where Built.	Rate When Built.	Tonnage.	Cost.
44	*United States*	Philadelphia,	1797	1576	$299,336
44	*Constitution*	Boston,	1797	1576	302,718
44	*President*	New York,	1800	1576	220,910
38	*Constellation*	Baltimore,	1797	1265	314,212
38	*Congress*	Portsmouth,	1799	1268	197,246
38	*Chesapeake*	Norfolk,	1799	1244	220,677
32	*Essex*	Salem,	1799	860	139,362
28	*Adams*	New York,	1799	560	76,622
18	*Hornet*	Baltimore,	1805	480	52,603
18	*Wasp*	Washington,	1806	450	40,000
16	*Argus*	Boston,	1803	298	37,428

16 *Syren*, Philadelphia, 1803 250 32,521
14 *Nautilus*, Baltimore, 1803 185 18,763
14 *Vixen*, Baltimore, 1803 185 20,872
12 *Enterprise*, Baltimore, 1799 165 16,240
12 *Viper*, Purchased, 1810 148

There also appeared on the lists the *New York*, 36, *Boston*, 28, and *John Adams*, 28. The two former were condemned hulks; the latter was entirely rebuilt after the war. The *Hornet* was originally a brig of 440 tons, and 18 guns; having been transformed into a ship, she was pierced for 20 guns, and in size was of an intermediate grade between the *Wasp* and the heavy sloops, built somewhat later, of 509 tons. Her armament consisted of 32-pound carronades, with the exception of the two bow-guns, which were long 12's. The whole broadside was in nominal weight just 300 pounds; in actual weight about 277 pounds. Her complement of men was 140, but during the war she generally left port with 150. [Footnote: In the *Hornet's* log of Oct. 25, 1812, while in port, it is mentioned that she had 158 men; four men who were sick were left behind before she started. (See, in the Navy Archives, the Log-book, *Hornet*, *Wasp*, and *Argus*, July 20, 1809, to Oct. 6, 1813.)] The *Wasp* had been a ship from the beginning, mounted the number of guns she rated (of the same calibres as the *Hornet's*) and carried some ten men less. She was about the same length as the British 18-gun brig-sloop, but, being narrower, measured nearly 30 tons less. The *Argus* and *Syren* were similar and very fine brigs, the former being

the longer. Each carried two more guns than she rated; and the *Argus*, in addition, had a couple thrust through the bridle-ports. The guns were 24-pound carronades, with two long 12's for bow-chasers. The proper complement of men was 100, but each sailed usually with about 125. The four smaller craft were originally schooners, armed with the same number of light long guns as they rated, and carrying some 70 men apiece; but they had been very effectually ruined by being changed into brigs, with crews increased to a hundred men. Each was armed with 18-pound carronades, carrying two more than she rated. The *Enterprise*, in fact, mounted 16 guns, having two long nines thrust through the bridle-ports. These little brigs were slow, not very seaworthy, and overcrowded with men and guns; they all fell into the enemy's hands without doing any good whatever, with the single exception of the *Enterprise*, which escaped capture by sheer good luck, and in her only battle happened to be pitted against one of the corresponding and equally bad class of British gun-brigs. The *Adams* after several changes of form finally became a flush-decked corvette. The *Essex* had originally mounted twenty-six long 12's on her main-deck, and sixteen 24-pound carronades on her spar-deck; but official wisdom changed this, giving her 46 guns, twenty-four 32-pound carronades, and two long 12's on the main-deck, and sixteen 32-pound carronades with four long 12's on the spar-deck. When Captain Porter had command of her he was deeply sensible of the disadvantages of an armament which put him at the mercy of any ordinary antagonist who could

choose his distance; accordingly he petitioned several times, but always without success, to have his long 12's returned to him.

The American 38's were about the size of the British frigates of the same rate, and armed almost exactly in the same way, each having 28 long 18's on the main-deck and 20 32-pound carronades on the spar-deck. The proper complement was 300 men, but each carried from 30 to 80 more. [Footnote: The *Chesapeake*, by some curious mistake, was frequently rated as a 44, and this drew in its train a number of attendant errors. When she was captured, James says that in one of her lockers was found a letter, dated in February, 1811, from Robert Smith, the Secretary of War, to Captain Evans, at Boston, directing him to open houses of rendezvous for manning the *Chesapeake*, and enumerating her crew at a total of 443. Naturally this gave British historians the idea that such was the ordinary complement of our 38-gun frigates. But the ordering so large a crew was merely a mistake, as may be seen by a letter from Captain Bainbridge to the Secretary of the Navy, which is given in full in the "Captains' Letters," vol. xxv. No. 19 (Navy Archives). In it he mentions the extraordinary number of men ordered for the *Chesapeake*, saying, "There is a mistake in the crew ordered for the *Chesapeake*, as it equals in number the crews of our 44-gun frigates, whereas the *Chesapeake* is of the class of the *Congress* and *Constellation*."]

Our three 44-gun ships were the finest frigates then afloat (although the British possessed some as heavy, such as the

Egyptienne, 44). They were beautifully modelled, with very thick scantling, extremely stout masts, and heavy cannon. Each carried on her main-deck thirty long 24's, and on her spar-deck two long bow-chasers, and twenty or twenty-two carronades—42-pounders on the *President* and *United States*, 32-pounders on the *Constitution*. Each sailed with a crew of about 450 men—50 in excess of the regular complement. [Footnote: The *President* when in action with the *Endymion* had 450 men aboard, as sworn by Decatur; the muster-roll of the *Constitution*, a few days before her action with the *Guerrière* contains 464 names (including 51 marines); 8 men were absent in a prize, so she had aboard in the action 456. Her muster-roll just before the action with the *Cyane* and *Levant* shows 461 names.]

It may be as well to mention here the only other class of vessels that we employed during the war. This was composed of the ship-sloops built in 1813, which got to sea in 1814. They were very fine vessels, measuring 509 tons apiece, [Footnote: The dimensions were 117 feet 11 inches upon the gun-deck, 97 feet 6 inches keel for tonnage, measuring from one foot before the forward perpendicular and along the base line to the front of the rabbet of the port, deducting 3/5 of the moulded breadth of the beam, which is 31 feet 6 inches; making 509 21/95 tons. (See in Navy Archives, "Contracts," vol. ii. p. 137.)] with very thick scantling and stout masts and spars. Each carried twenty 32-pound carronades and two long 12's with a crew nominally of 160 men, but with usually a few supernumeraries. [Footnote:

The *Peacock* had 166 men, as we learn from her commander Warrington's letter of June 1st (Letter No. 140 in "Masters' Commandant Letters," 1814, vol. i). The *Frolic* took aboard "10 or 12 men beyond her regular complement" (see letter of Joseph Bainbridge, No. 51, in same vol.). Accordingly when she was captured by the *Orpheus*, the commander of the latter, Captain Hugh Pigot, reported the number of men aboard to be 171. The *Wasp* left port with 173 men, with which she fought her first action; she had a much smaller number aboard in her second.]

The British vessels encountered were similar, but generally inferior, to our own. The only 24-pounder frigate we encountered was the *Endymion* of about a fifth less force than the *President*. Their 38-gun frigates were almost exactly like ours, but with fewer men in crew as a rule. They were three times matched against our 44-gun frigates, to which they were inferior about as three is to four. Their 36-gun frigates were larger than the *Essex*, with a more numerous crew, but the same number of guns; carrying on the lower deck, however, long 18's instead of 32-pound carronades,—a much more effective armament. The 32-gun frigates were smaller, with long 12's on the main-deck. The largest sloops were also frigate-built, carrying twenty-two 32-pound carronades on the main-deck, and twelve lighter guns on the quarter-deck and forecastle, with a crew of 180. The large flush-decked ship-sloops carried 21 or 23 guns, with a crew of 140 men. But our vessels most often came in contact with the British 18-gun brig-sloop; this was a tubby craft, heavier than

any of our brigs, being about the size of the *Hornet*. The crew consisted of from 110 to 135 men; ordinarily each was armed with sixteen 32-pound carronades, two long 6's, and a shifting 12-pound carronade; often with a light long gun as a stern-chaser, making 20 in all. The *Reindeer* and *Peacock* had only 24-pound carronades; the *Epervier* had but eighteen guns, all carronades. [Footnote: The *Epervier* was taken into our service under the same name and rate. Both Preble and Emmons describe her as of 477 tons. Warrington, her captor, however, says: "The surveyor of the port has just measured the *Epervier* and reports her 467 tons." (In the Navy Archives, "Masters' Commandant Letters," 1814, i. No. 125.) For a full discussion of tonnage, see Appendix, A.]

Among the stock accusations against our navy of 1812, were, and are, statements that our vessels were rated at less than their real force, and in particular that our large frigates were "disguised line-of-battle ships." As regards the ratings, most vessels of that time carried more guns than they rated; the disparity was less in the French than in either the British or American navies. Our 38-gun frigates carried 48 guns, the exact number the British 38's possessed. The worst case of underrating in our navy was the *Essex*, which rated 32, and carried 46 guns, so that her real was 44 per cent, in excess of her nominal force; but this was not as bad as the British sloop *Cyane*, which was rated a 20 or 22, and carried 34 guns, so that she had either 55 or 70 per cent, greater real than nominal force. At the beginning of the war we owned

two 18-gun ship-sloops, one mounting 18 and the other 20 guns; the 18-gun brig-sloops they captured mounted each 19 guns, so the average was the same. Later we built sloops that rated 18 and mounted 22 guns, but when one was captured it was also put down in the British navy list as an 18-gun ship-sloop. During all the combats of the war there were but four vessels that carried as few guns as they rated. Two were British, the *Epervier* and *Levant*, and two American, the *Wasp* and *Adams*. One navy was certainly as deceptive as another, as far as underrating went.

The force of the statement that our large frigates were disguised line-of-battle ships, of course depends entirely upon what the words "frigate" and "line-of-battle ship" mean. When on the 10th of August, 1653, De Ruyter saved a great convoy by beating off Sir George Ayscough's fleet of 38 sail, the largest of the Dutch admiral's "33 sail of the line" carried but 30 guns and 150 men, and his own flag-ship but 28 guns and 134 men. [Footnote: La Vie et les Actions Memorables du Sr. Michel de Ruyter, à Amsterdam, Chez Henry et Theodore Boom. MDCLXXVII. The work is by Barthelemy Pielat, a surgeon in de Ruyter's fleet, and personally present during many of his battles. It is written in French, but is in tone more strongly anti-French than anti-English.] The Dutch book from which this statement is taken speaks indifferently of frigates of 18, 40, and 58 guns. Toward the end of the eighteenth century the terms had crystallized. Frigate then meant a so-called single-decked ship; it in reality possessed two decks, the main- or gun-deck,

and the upper one, which had no name at all, until our sailors christened it spar-deck. The gun-deck possessed a complete battery, and the spar-deck an interrupted one, mounting guns on the forecastle and quarter-deck. At that time all "two-decked" or "three-decked" (in reality three- and four-decked) ships were liners. But in 1812 this had changed somewhat; as the various nations built more and more powerful vessels, the lower rates of the different divisions were dropped. Thus the British ship *Cyane*, captured by the *Constitution*, was in reality a small frigate, with a main-deck battery of 22 guns, and 12 guns on the spar-deck; a few years before she would have been called a 24-gun frigate, but she then ranked merely as a 22-gun sloop. Similarly the 50- and 64-gun ships that had fought in the line at the Doggerbank, Camperdown, and even at Aboukir, were now no longer deemed fit for the purpose, and the 74 was the lowest line-of-battle ship.

The *Constitution*, *President*, and *States* must then be compared with the existing European vessels that were classed as frigates. The French in 1812 had no 24-pounder frigates, for the very good reason that they had all fallen victims to the English 18-pounder's; but in July of that year a Danish frigate, the *Nayaden*, which carried long 24's, was destroyed by the English ship *Dictator*, 64.

The British frigates were of several rates. The lowest rated 32, carrying in all 40 guns, 26 long 12's on the main-deck and 14 24-pound carronades on the spar-deck—a broadside of 324

pounds. [Footnote: In all these vessels there were generally two long 6's or 9's substituted for the bow-chase carronades.] The 36-gun frigates, like the *Phoebe*, carried 46 guns, 26 long 18's on the gun-deck and 32-pound carronades above. The 38-gun frigates, like the *Macedonian*, carried 48 or 49 guns, long 18's below and 32-pound carronades above. The 32-gun frigates, then, presented in broadside 13 long 12's below and 7 24-pound carronades above; the 38-gun frigates, 14 long 18's below and 10 32-pound carronades above; so that a 44-gun frigate would naturally present 15 long 24's and 12 42-pound carronades above, as the *United States* did at first. The rate was perfectly proper, for French, British, and Danes already possessed 24-pounder frigates; and there was really less disparity between the force and rate of a 44 that carried 54 guns than there was in a 38 that carried 49, or, like the *Shannon*, 52. Nor was this all. Two of our three victories were won by the *Constitution*, which only carried 32-pound carronades, and once 54 and once 52 guns; and as two thirds of the work was thus done by this vessel, I shall now compare her with the largest British frigates. Her broadside force consisted of 15 long 24's on the main-deck, and on the spar-deck one long 24, and in one case 10, in the other 11 32-pound carronades—a broadside of 704 or 736 pounds. [Footnote: Nominally; in reality about 7 per cent, less on account of the short weight in the metal.] There was then in the British navy the *Acasta*, 40, carrying in broadside 15 long 18's and 11 32-pound carronades; when the spar-deck batteries

are equal, the addition of 90 pounds to the main-deck broadside (which is all the superiority of the *Constitution* over the *Acasta*) is certainly not enough to make the distinction between a frigate and a disguised 74. But not considering the *Acasta*, there were in the British navy three 24-pounder frigates, the *Cornwallis*, *Indefatigable*, and *Endymion*. We only came in contact with the latter in 1815, when the *Constitution* had but 52 guns. The *Endymion* then had an armament of 28 long 24's, 2 long 18's, and 20 32-pound carronades, making a broadside of 674 pounds, [Footnote: According to James 664 pounds; he omits the chase guns for no reason.] or including a shifting 24-pound carronade, of 698 pounds—just *six pounds*, or 1 per cent, less than the force of that "disguised line-of-battle ship" the *Constitution*! As the *Endymion* only rated as a 40, and the *Constitution* as a 44, it was in reality the former and not the latter which was underrated. I have taken the *Constitution*, because the British had more to do with her than they did with our other two 44's taken together. The latter were both of heavier metal than the *Constitution*, carrying 42-pound carronades. In 1812 the *United States* carried her full 54 guns, throwing a broadside of 846 pounds; when captured, the *President* carried 53, having substituted a 24-pound carronade for two of her 42's, and her broadside amounted to 828 pounds, or 16 per cent *nominal*, and, on account of the short weight of her shot, 9 per cent, *real* excess over the *Endymion*. If this difference made her a line-of-battle ship, then the *Endymion* was doubly a line-of-battle ship compared to the *Congress* or

Constellation. Moreover, the American commanders found their 42-pound carronades too heavy; as I have said the *Constitution* only mounted 32's, and the *United States* landed 6 of her guns. When, in 1813, she attempted to break the blockade, she carried but 48 guns, throwing a broadside of 720 pounds—just 3 per cent more than the *Endymion*. [Footnote: It was on account of this difference of 3 per cent that Captain Hardy refused to allow the *Endymion* to meet the *States* (James, vi. p. 470). This was during the course of some challenges and counter-challenges which ended in nothing, Decatur in his turn being unwilling to have the *Macedonian* meet the *Statira*, unless the latter should agree not to take on a picked crew. He was perfectly right in this; but he ought never to have sent the challenge at all, as two ships but an hour or two out of port would be at a frightful disadvantage in a fight.] If our frigates were line-of-battle ships the disguise was certainly marvellously complete, and they had a number of companions equally disguised in the British ranks.

The 44's were thus *true frigates*, with one complete battery of long guns and one interrupted one of carronades. That they were better than any other frigates was highly creditable to our ingenuity and national skill. We cannot, perhaps, lay claim to the invention and first use of the heavy frigate, for 24-pounder frigates were already in the service of at least three nations, and the French 36-pound carronnade, in use on their spar-decks, threw a heavier ball than our 42-pounder. But we had enlarged and perfected the heavy frigate, and were the first nation that ever

used it effectively. The French *Forte* and the Danish *Nayaden* shared the fate of ships carrying guns of lighter calibre; and the British 24-pounders, like the *Endymion*, had never accomplished any thing. Hitherto there had been a strong feeling, especially in England, that an 18-pound gun was as effective as a 24- in arming a frigate; we made a complete revolution in this respect. England had been building only 18-pounder vessels when she ought to have been building 24-pounders. It was greatly to our credit that our average frigate was superior to the average British frigate; exactly as it was to our discredit that the *Essex* was so ineffectively armed. Captain Porter owed his defeat chiefly to his ineffective guns, but also to having lost his topmast, to the weather being unfavorable, and, still more, to the admirable skill with which Hilyar used his superior armament. The *Java*, *Macedonian*, and *Guerrière* owed their defeat partly to their lighter guns, but much more to the fact that their captains and seamen did not display either as good seamanship or as good gunnery as their foes. Inferiority in armament was a factor to be taken into account in all the four cases, but it was more marked in that of the *Essex* than in the other three; it would have been fairer for Porter to say that he had been captured by a line-of-battle ship, than for the captain of the *Java* to make that assertion. In this last case the forces of the two ships compared almost exactly as their rates. A 44 was matched against a 38; it was not surprising that she should win, but it *was* surprising that she should win with ease and impunity. The long 24's on the *Constitution's* gun-deck no more made her

a line-of-battle ship than the 32-pound carronades mounted on an English frigate's quarter-deck and forecastle made *her* a line-of-battle ship when opposed to a Frenchman with only 8's and 6's on his spar-deck. When, a few years before, the English *Phoebe* had captured the French *Nereide*, their broadsides were respectively 407 and 258 pounds, a greater disparity than in any of our successful fights; yet no author thought of claiming that the *Phoebe* was any thing but a frigate. So with the *Clyde*, throwing 425 lbs., which took the *Vestale*, throwing but 246. The facts were that 18-pounder frigates had captured 12-pounders, exactly as our 24-pounders in turn captured the 18-pounders.

Shortly before Great Britain declared war on us, one of her 18-pounder frigates, the *San Florenzo*, throwing 476 lbs. in a broadside, captured the 12-pounder French frigate *Psyché*, whose broadside was only 246 lbs. The force of the former was thus almost double that of the latter, yet the battle was long and desperate, the English losing 48 and the French 124 men. This conflict, then, reflected as much credit on the skill and seamanship of the defeated as of the victorious side; the difference in loss could fairly be ascribed to the difference in weight of metal. But where, as in the famous ship-duels of 1812, the difference in force is only a fifth, instead of a half and yet the slaughter, instead of being as five is to two, is as six to one, then the victory is certainly to be ascribed as much to superiority in skill as to superiority in force. But, on the other hand, it should always be remembered that there was a very decided

superiority in force. It is a very discreditable feature of many of our naval histories that they utterly ignore this superiority, seeming ashamed to confess that it existed. In reality it was something to be proud of. It was highly to the credit of the United States that her frigates were of better make and armament than any others; it always speaks well for a nation's energy and capacity that any of her implements of warfare are of superior kind. This is a perfectly legitimate reason for pride.

It spoke well for the Prussians in 1866 that they opposed breech-loaders to the muzzle-loaders of the Austrians; but it would be folly to give all the credit of the victory to the breech-loaders and none to Moltke and his lieutenants. Thus, it must remembered that two things contributed to our victories. One was the excellent make and armament of our ships; the other was the skilful seamanship, excellent discipline, and superb gunnery of the men who were in them. British writers are apt only to speak of the first, and Americans only of the last, whereas both should be taken into consideration.

To sum up: the American 44-gun frigate was a true frigate, in build and armament, properly rated, stronger than a 38-gun frigate just about in the proportion of 44 to 38, and not exceeding in strength an 18-pounder frigate as much as the latter exceeded one carrying 12-pounders. They were in no way whatever line-of-battle ships; but they were superior to any other frigates afloat, and, what is still more important, they were better manned and commanded than the *average* frigate of any

other navy. Lord Codrington says ("Memoirs," i, p. 310): "But I well know the system of favoritism and borough corruption prevails so very much that many people are promoted and kept in command that should be dismissed the service, and while such is the case the few Americans chosen for their merit may be expected to follow up their successes except where they meet with our best officers on even terms." [Footnote: To show that I am not quoting an authority biassed in our favor I will give Sir Edward Codrington's opinion of our rural better class (i, 318). "It is curious to observe the animosity which prevails here among what is called the better order of people, which I think is more a misnomer here than in any other country I have ever been. Their *whig* and *tory* are democrat and federalist, and it would seem for the sake of giving vent to that bitterness of hatred which marks the Yankee character, every gentleman (God save the term) who takes possession of a property adopts the opposite political creed to that of his nearest neighbor."] The small size of our navy was probably to a certain extent effective in keeping it up to a high standard; but this is not the only explanation, as can be seen by Portugal's small and poor navy. On the other hand, the champions or pick of a large navy *ought* to be better than the champions of a small one. [Footnote: In speaking of tonnage I wish I could have got better authority than James for the British side of the question. He is so bitter that it involuntarily gives one a distrust of his judgment. Thus, in speaking of the *Penguin's* capture, he, in endeavoring to show

that the *Hornet's* loss was greater than she acknowledged, says, "several of the dangerously wounded were thrown overboard because the surgeon was afraid to amputate, owing to his want of experience" ("Naval Occurrences," 492). Now what could persuade a writer to make such a foolish accusation? No matter how utterly depraved and brutal Captain Biddle might be, he would certainly not throw his wounded over alive because he feared they might die. Again, in vol. vi, p. 546, he says: "Captain Stewart had caused the *Cyane* to be painted to resemble a 36-gun frigate. The object of this was to aggrandize his exploit in the eyes of the gaping citizens of Boston." No matter how skilful an artist Captain Stewart was, and no matter how great the gaping capacities of the Bostonians, the *Cyane* (which by the way went to New York and not Boston) could no more be painted to look like a 36-gun frigate than a schooner could be painted to look like a brig. Instances of rancor like these two occur constantly in his work, and make it very difficult to separate what is matter of fact from what is matter of opinion. I always rely on the British official accounts when they can be reached, except in the case of the *Java*, which seem garbled. That such was sometimes the case with British officials is testified to by both James (vol. iv, p. 17) and Brenton (vol. ii, p. 454, note). From the "Memoir of Admiral Broke" we learn that his public letter was wrong in a number of particulars. See also any one of the numerous biographies of Lord Dundonald, the hero of the little *Speedy's* fight. It is very unfortunate that the British stopped publishing official accounts

of their defeats; it could not well help giving rise to unpleasant suspicions.

It may be as well to mention here, again, that James' accusations do not really detract from the interest attaching to the war, and its value for purposes of study. If, as he says, the American commanders were cowards, and their crews renegades, it is well worth while to learn the lesson that good training will make such men able to beat brave officers with loyal crews. And why did the British have such bad average crews as he makes out? He says, for instance, that the Java's was unusually bad; yet Brenton says (vol. ii, p. 461) it was like "the generality of our crews." It is worth while explaining the reason that such a crew was generally better than a French and worse than an American one.]

Again, the armaments of the American as well as of the British ships were composed of three very different styles of guns. The first, or long gun, was enormously long and thick-barrelled in comparison to its bore, and in consequence very heavy; it possessed a very long range, and varied in calibre from two to forty-two pounds. The ordinary calibres in our navy were 6, 9, 12, 18, and 24. The second style was the carronade, a short, light gun of large bore; compared to a long gun of the same weight it carried a much heavier ball for a much shorter distance. The chief calibres were 9, 12, 18, 24, 32, 42, and 68-pounders, the first and the last being hardly in use in our navy. The third style was the columbiad, of an intermediate grade

between the first two. Thus it is seen that a gun of one style by no means corresponds to a gun of another style of the same calibre. As a rough example, a long 12, a columbiad 18, and a 32-pound carronade would be about equivalent to one another. These guns were mounted on two different types of vessel. The first was flush-decked; that is, it had a single straight open deck on which all the guns were mounted. This class included one heavy corvette, (the *Adams*), the ship-sloops, and the brig-sloops. Through the bow-chase port, on each side, each of these mounted a long gun; the rest of their guns were carronades, except in the case of the *Adams*, which had all long guns. Above these came the frigates, whose gun-deck was covered above by another deck; on the fore and aft parts (forecastle and quarter-deck) of this upper, open deck were also mounted guns. The main-deck guns were all long, except on the *Essex*, which had carronades; on the quarter-deck were mounted carronades, and on the forecastle also carronades, with two long bow-chasers.

Where two ships of similar armament fought one another, it is easy to get the comparative force by simply comparing the weight in broadsides, each side presenting very nearly the same proportion of long guns to carronades. For such a broadside we take half the guns mounted in the ordinary way; and all guns mounted on pivots or shifting. Thus Perry's force in guns was 54 to Barclay's 63; yet each presented 34 in broadside. Again, each of the British brig-sloops mounted 19 guns, presenting 10 in broadside. Besides these, some ships mounted bow-chasers run

through the bridle-ports, or stern-chasers, neither of which could be used in broadsides. Nevertheless, I include them, both because it works in about an equal number of cases against each navy, and because they were sometimes terribly effective. James excludes the *Guerrière's* bow-chaser; in reality he ought to have included both it and its fellow, as they worked more damage than all the broadside guns put together. Again, he excludes the *Endymion's* bow-chasers, though in her action they proved invaluable. Yet he includes those of the *Enterprise* and *Argus*, though the former's were probably not fired. So I shall take the half of the fixed, plus all the movable guns aboard, in comparing broadside force.

But the chief difficulty appears when guns of one style are matched against those of another. If a ship armed with long 12's, meets one armed with 32-pound carronades, which is superior in force? At long range the first, and at short range the second; and of course each captain is pretty sure to insist that "circumstances" forced him to fight at a disadvantage. The result would depend largely on the skill or luck of each commander in choosing position.

One thing is certain; long guns are more formidable than carronades of the same calibre. There are exemplifications of this rule on both sides; of course, American writers, as a rule, only pay attention to one set of cases, and British to the others. The *Cyane* and *Levant* threw a heavier broadside than the *Constitution* but were certainly less formidably armed; and the *Essex* threw a heavier broadside than the *Phoebe*, yet

was also less formidable. On Lake Ontario the American ship *General Pike* threw less metal at a broadside than either of her two chief antagonists, but neither could be called her equal; while on Lake Champlain a parallel case is afforded by the British ship *Confiance*. Supposing that two ships throw the same broadside weight of metal, one from long guns, the other from carronades, at short range they are equal; at long, one has it all her own way. Her captain thus certainly has a great superiority of force, and if he does not take advantage of it it is owing to his adversary's skill or his own mismanagement. As a mere approximation, it may be assumed, in comparing the broadsides of two vessels or squadrons, that long guns count for at least twice as much as carronades of the same calibre. Thus on Lake Champlain Captain Downie possessed an immense advantage in his long guns, which Commodore Macdonough's exceedingly good arrangements nullified. Sometimes part of the advantage may be willingly foregone, so as to acquire some other. Had the *Constitution* kept at long bowls with the *Cyane* and *Levant* she could have probably captured one without any loss to herself, while the other would have escaped; she preferred to run down close so as to insure the capture of both, knowing that even at close quarters long guns are somewhat better than short ones (not to mention her other advantages in thick scantling, speed, etc.). The British carronades often upset in action; this was either owing to their having been insufficiently secured, and to this remaining undiscovered because the men were not exercised at

the guns, or else it was because the unpractised sailors would greatly overcharge them. Our better-trained sailors on the ocean rarely committed these blunders, but the less-skilled crews on the lakes did so as often as their antagonists.

But while the Americans thus, as a rule, had heavier and better-fitted guns, they labored under one or two disadvantages. Our foundries were generally not as good as those of the British, and our guns, in consequence, more likely to burst; it was an accident of this nature which saved the British *Belvidera*; and the *General Pike*, under Commodore Chauncy, and the new American frigate *Guerrière* suffered in the same way; while often the muzzles of the guns would crack. A more universal disadvantage was in the short weight of our shot. When Captain Blakely sunk the *Avon* he officially reported that her four shot which came aboard weighed just 32 pounds apiece, a pound and three quarters more than his *heaviest*; this would make his average shot about 2 1/2 pounds less, or rather over 7 per cent. Exactly similar statements were made by the officers of the *Constitution* in her three engagements. Thus when she fought the *Java*, she threw at a broadside, as already stated, 704 pounds; the *Java* mounted 28 long 18's, 18 32-pound carronades, 2 long 12's, and one shifting 24-pound carronade, a broadside of 576 pounds. Yet by the actual weighing of all the different shot on both sides it was found that the difference in broadside force was only about 77 pounds, or the *Constitution's* shot were about 7 per cent, short weight. The long 24's of the *United States*

each threw a shot but 4 1/4 pounds heavier than the long 18's of the *Macedonian*; here again the difference was about 7 per cent. The same difference existed in favor of the *Penguin* and *Epervier* compared with the *Wasp* and *Hornet*. Mr. Fenimore Cooper [Footnote: See "Naval History," i, p. 380.] weighed a great number of shot some time after the war. The later castings, even weighed nearly 5 per cent, less than the British shot, and some of the older ones, about 9 per cent. The average is safe to take at 7 per cent. less, and I shall throughout make this allowance for ocean cruisers. The deficit was sometimes owing to windage, but more often the shot was of full size but defective in density. The effect of this can be gathered from the following quotation from the work of a British artillerist: "The greater the density of shot of like calibres, projected with equal velocity and elevation, the greater the range, accuracy, and penetration." [Footnote: "Heavy Ordnance," Captain T. F. Simmons, R. A., London, 1837. James supposes that the "Yankee captains" have in each case hunted round till they could get particularly small American shot to weigh; and also denies that short weight is a disadvantage. The last proposition carried out logically would lead to some rather astonishing results.] This defectiveness in density might be a serious injury in a contest at a long distance, but would make but little difference at close quarters (although it may have been partly owing to their short weight that so many of the Chesapeake's shot failed to penetrate the *Shannon's* hull). Thus in the actions with the *Macedonian* and *Java* the American frigates

showed excellent practice when the contest was carried on within fair distance, while their first broadsides at long range went very wild; but in the case of the *Guerrière*, the *Constitution* reserved her fire for close quarters, and was probably not at all affected by the short weight of her shot.

As to the officers and crew of a 44-gun frigate, the following was the regular complement established by law: [Footnote: See State Papers, vol. xiv, 159 (Washington, 1834).]

1 captain,
4 lieutenants,
2 lieutenants of marines,
2 sailing-masters,
2 master's mates,
7 midshipmen,
1 purser,
1 surgeon,
2 surgeon's mates,
1 clerk,
1 carpenter,
2 carpenter's mates,
1 boatswain,
2 boatswain's mates,
1 yeoman of gun-room,
1 gunner,
11 quarter gunners,
1 coxswain,

1 sailmaker,
1 cooper,
1 steward,
1 armorer,
1 master of arms,
1 cook,
1 chaplain.

—
50
120 able seamen, 150 ordinary seamen, 30 boys, 50 marines.
___ 400 in all.

An 18-gun ship had 32 officers and petty officers, 30 able seamen, 46 ordinary seamen, 12 boys, and 20 marines —140 in all. Sometimes ships put to sea without their full complements (as in the case of the first *Wasp*), but more often with supernumeraries aboard. The weapons for close quarters were pikes, cutlasses, and a few axes; while the marines and some of the topmen had muskets, and occasionally rifles.

In comparing the forces of the contestants I have always given the number of men in crew; but this in most cases was unnecessary. When there were plenty of men to handle the guns, trim the sails, make repairs, act as marines, etc., any additional number simply served to increase the slaughter on board. The *Guerrière* undoubtedly suffered from being short-handed, but neither the *Macedonian* nor *Java* would have been benefited by

the presence of a hundred additional men. Barclay possessed about as many men as Perry, but this did not give him an equality of force. The *Penguin* and *Frolic* would have been taken just as surely had the *Hornet* and *Wasp* had a dozen men less apiece than they did. The principal case where numbers would help would be in a hand-to-hand fight. Thus the *Chesapeake* having fifty more men than the *Shannon* ought to have been successful; but she was not, because the superiority of her crew in numbers was more than counterbalanced by the superiority of the *Shannon's* crew in other respects. The result of the battle of Lake Champlain, which was fought at anchor, with the fleets too far apart for musketry to reach, was not in the slightest degree affected by the number of men on either side, as both combatants had amply enough to manage the guns and perform every other service.

In all these conflicts the courage of both parties is taken for granted: it was not so much a factor in gaining the victory, as one which if lacking was fatal to all chances of success. In the engagements between regular cruisers, not a single one was gained by superiority in courage. The crews of both the *Argus* and *Epervier* certainly flinched; but had they fought never so bravely they were too unskilful to win. The *Chesapeake's* crew could hardly be said to lack courage; it was more that they were inferior to their opponents in discipline as well as in skill.

There was but one conflict during the war where the victory could be said to be owing to superiority in pluck. This was when the *Neufchatel* privateer beat off the boats of the *Endymion*.

The privateersmen suffered a heavier proportional loss than their assailants, and they gained the victory by sheer ability to stand punishment.

For convenience in comparing them I give in tabulated form the force of the three British 38's taken by American 44's (allowing for short weight of metal of latter).

CONSTITUTION. GUERRIÈRE. 30 long 24's, 30 long 18's, 2 long 24's, 2 long 12's, 22 short 32's. 16 short 32's, _____ 1 short 18. Broadside, nominal, 736 lbs. _____ real. 684 lbs. Broadside, 556 lbs.

UNITED STATES MACEDONIAN 30 long 24's, 28 long 18's, 2 long 24's, 2 long 12's, 22 short 42's. 2 long 9's, _____ 16 short 32's, Broadside, nominal, 846 lbs. 1 short 18. real, 786 lbs. _____ Broadside, 547 lbs.

CONSTITUTION JAVA 30 long 24's, 28 long 18's, 2 long 24's, 2 long 12's, 20 short 32's. 18 short 32's, _____ 1 short 24. Broadside, nominal, 704 lbs. _____ real. 654 lbs. Broadside. 576 lbs.

The smallest line-of-battle ship, the 74, with only long 18's on the second deck, was armed as follows:

28 long 32's, 28 " 18's, 6 " 12's. 14 short 32's 7 " 18's

or a broadside of 1,032 lbs., 736 from long guns, 296 from carronades; while the *Constitution* threw (in reality) 684 lbs., 356

from long guns, and 328 from her carronades, and the *United States* 102 lbs. more from her carronades. Remembering the difference between long guns and carronades, and considering sixteen of the 74's long 18's as being replaced by 42-pound carronades [Footnote: That this change would leave the force about as it was, can be gathered from the fact that the *Adams* and *John Adams* both of which had been armed with 42 pound carronades (which were sent to Sackett's Harbor), had them replaced by long and medium 18 pounders, these being considered to be formidable: so that the substitution of 42-pound carronades would, if any thing, reduce the force of the 74] (so as to get the metal on the ships distributed in similar proportions between the two styles of cannon), we get as the 74's broadside 592 lbs from long guns, and 632 from carronades. The *United States* threw nominally 360 and 486, and the *Constitution* nominally 360 and 352; so the 74 was superior even to the former nominally about as three is to two; while the *Constitution*, if "a line-of-battle ship," was disguised to such a degree that she was in reality of but little more than *one half* the force of one of the smallest *true* liners England possessed!

Chapter III

1812

ON THE OCEAN

Commodore Rodgers' cruise and unsuccessful chase of the Belvidera—_Cruise of the _Essex—*Captain Hull's cruise, and escape from the squadron of Commodore Broke*—Constitution *captures* Guerrière—Wasp *captures* Frolic—*Second unsuccessful cruise of Commodore Rodgers*—United States *captures* Macedonian—Constitution *captures* Java—Essex *starts on a cruise—Summary*

At the time of the declaration of war, June 18, 1812, the American navy was but partially prepared for effective service. The *Wasp*, 18, was still at sea, on her return voyage from France; the *Constellation*, 38, was lying in the Chesapeake river, unable to receive a crew for several months to come; the *Chesapeake*, 38, was lying in a similar condition in Boston harbor; the *Adams*, 28, was at Washington, being cut down and lengthened from a frigate into a corvette. These three cruisers were none of them fit to go to sea till after the end of the year. The *Essex*, 32,

was in New York harbor, but, having some repairs to make, was not yet ready to put out. The *Constitution*, 44, was at Annapolis, without all of her stores, and engaged in shipping a new crew, the time of the old one being up. The *Nautilus*, 14, was cruising off New Jersey, and the other small brigs were also off the coast. The only vessels immediately available were those under the command of Commodore Rodgers, at New York, consisting of his own ship, the *President*, 44, and of the *United States*, 44, Commodore Decatur, *Congress*, 38, Captain Smith, *Hornet*, 18, Captain Lawrence, and *Argus*, 16, Lieut. Sinclair. It seems marvellous that any nation should have permitted its ships to be so scattered, and many of them in such an unfit condition, at the beginning of hostilities. The British vessels cruising off the coast were not at that time very numerous or formidable, consisting of the *Africa*, 64, *Acasta*, 40, *Shannon*, 38, *Guerrière*, 38, *Belvidera*, 36, *Aeolus*, 32, *Southampton*, 32, and *Minerva*, 32, with a number of corvettes and sloops; their force was, however, strong enough to render it impossible for Commodore Rodgers to make any attempt on the coast towns of Canada or the West Indies. But the homeward bound plate fleet had sailed from Jamaica on May 20th, and was only protected by the *Thalia*, 36, Capt. Vashon, and *Reindeer*, 18, Capt. Manners. Its capture or destruction would have been a serious blow, and one which there seemed a good chance of striking, as the fleet would have to pass along the American coast, running with the Gulf Stream. Commodore Rodgers had made every preparation, in expectation of war being

declared, and an hour after official intelligence of it, together with his instructions, had been received, his squadron put to sea, on June 21st, and ran off toward the south-east [Footnote: Letter of Commodore John Rodgers to the Secretary of the Navy, Sept. 1, 1812.] to get at the Jamaica ships. Having learned from an American brig that she had passed the plate fleet four days before in lat. 36° N., long. 67° W., the Commodore made all sail in that direction. At 6 A.M. on June 23d a sail was made out in the N. E., which proved to be the British frigate *Belvidera*, 36, Capt. Richard Byron. [Footnote: Brenton, v. 46.] The latter had sighted some of Commodore Rodgers' squadron some time before, and stood toward them, till at 6.30 she made out the three largest ships to be frigates. Having been informed of the likelihood of war by a New York pilot boat, the *Belvidera* now stood away, going N. E. by E., the wind being fresh from the west. The Americans made all sail in chase, the *President*, a very fast ship off the wind, leading, and the *Congress* coming next. At noon the *President* bore S. W., distant 2 3/4 miles from the *Belvidera*, Nantucket shoals bearing 100 miles N. and 48 miles E [Footnote: Log of *Belvidera*, June 23, 1812.]. The wind grew lighter, shifting more toward the south-west, while the ships continued steadily in their course, going N.E. by E. As the *President* kept gaining, Captain Byron cleared his ship for action, and shifted to the stern ports two long eighteen-pounders on the main-deck and two thirty-two pound carronades on the quarter-deck.

At 4:30 [Footnote: Cooper, ii, 151. According to James, vi, 117, the *President* was then 600 yards distant from the *Belvidera*, half a point on her weather or port quarter.] the *President's* starboard forecastle bowgun was fired by Commodore Rodgers himself; the corresponding main-deck gun was next discharged, and then Commodore Rodgers fired again. These three shots all struck the stern of the *Belvidera*, killing and wounding nine men,—one of them went through the rudder coat, into the after gun-room, the other two into the captain's cabin. A few more such shots would have rendered the *Belvidera's* capture certain, but when the *President's* main-deck gun was discharged for the second time it burst, blowing up the forecastle deck and killing and wounding 16 men, among them the Commodore himself, whose leg was broken. This saved the British frigate. Such an explosion always causes a half panic, every gun being at once suspected. In the midst of the confusion Captain Byron's stern-chasers opened with spirit and effect, killing or wounding six men more. Had the *President* still pushed steadily on, only using her bow-chasers until she closed abreast, which she could probably have done, the *Belvidera* could still have been taken; but, instead, the former now bore up and fired her port broadside, cutting her antagonist's rigging slightly, but doing no other damage, while the *Belvidera* kept up a brisk and galling fire, although the long bolts, breeching-hooks, and breechings of the guns now broke continually, wounding several of the men, including Captain Byron. The *President* had lost

ground by yawing, but she soon regained it, and, coming up closer than before, again opened from her bow-chasers a well-directed fire, which severely wounded her opponent's main-top mast, cross-jack yard, and one or two other spars; [Footnote: James, vi, 119. He says the *President* was within 400 yards.] but shortly afterward she repeated her former tactics and again lost ground by yawing to discharge another broadside, even more ineffectual than the first. Once more she came up closer than ever, and once more yawed; the single shots from her bow-chasers doing considerable damage, but her raking broadsides none. [Footnote: Lord Howard Douglass, "Naval Gunnery," p. 419 (third edition).] Meanwhile the active crew of the *Belvidera* repaired every thing as fast as it was damaged, while under the superintendence of Lieutenants Sykes, Bruce, and Campbell, no less than 300 shot were fired from her stern guns. [Footnote: James, vi, 118.] Finding that if the *President* ceased yawing she could easily run alongside, Captain Byron cut away one bower, one stream, and two sheet anchors, the barge, yawl, gig, and jolly boat, and started 14 tons of water. The effect of this was at once apparent, and she began to gain; meanwhile the damage the sails of the combatants had received had enabled the *Congress* to close, and when abreast of his consort Captain Smith opened with his bow-chasers, but the shot fell short. The *Belvidera* soon altered her course to east by south, set her starboard studding-sails, and by midnight was out of danger; and three days afterward reached Halifax harbor.

Lord Howard Douglass' criticisms on this encounter seem very just. He says that the President opened very well with her bow-chasers (in fact the Americans seem to have aimed better and to have done more execution with these guns than the British with their stern-chasers); but that she lost so much ground by yawing and delivering harmless broadsides as to enable her antagonist to escape. Certainly if it had not been for the time thus lost to no purpose, the Commodore would have run alongside his opponent, and the fate of the little 36 would have been sealed. On the other hand it must be remembered that it was only the bursting of the gun on board the *President*, causing such direful confusion and loss, and especially harmful in disabling her commander, that gave the *Belvidera* any chance of escape at all. At any rate, whether the American frigate does, or does not, deserve blame, Captain Byron and his crew do most emphatically deserve praise for the skill with which their guns were served and repairs made, the coolness with which measures to escape were adopted, and the courage with which they resisted so superior a force. On this occasion Captain Byron showed himself as good a seaman and as brave a man as he subsequently proved a humane and generous enemy when engaged in the blockade of the Chesapeake. [Footnote: Even Niles, unscrupulously bitter as he is toward the British, does justice to the humanity of Captains Byron and Hardy—which certainly shone in comparison to some of the rather buccaneering exploits of Cockburn's followers in Chesapeake Bay.]

This was not a very auspicious opening of hostilities for America. The loss of the *Belvidera* was not the only thing to be regretted, for the distance the chase took the pursuers out of their course probably saved the plate fleet. When the *Belvidera* was first made out, Commodore Rodgers was in latitude 39° 26' N., and longitude 71° 10' W.; at noon the same day the *Thalia* and her convoy were in latitude 39° N., longitude 62° W. Had they not chased the *Belvidera* the Americans would probably have run across the plate fleet.

The American squadron reached the western edge of the Newfoundland Banks on June 29th, [Footnote: Letter of Commodore Rodgers, Sept. 1st.] and on July 1st, a little to the east of the Banks, fell in with large quantities of cocoa-nut shells, orange peels, etc., which filled every one with great hopes of overtaking the quarry. On July 9th, the *Hornet* captured a British privateer, in latitude 45° 30' N., and longitude 23° W., and her master reported that he had seen the Jamaica-men the previous evening; but nothing further was heard or seen of them, and on July 13th, being within twenty hours' sail of the English Channel, Commodore Rodgers reluctantly turned southward, reaching Madeira July 21st. Thence he cruised toward the Azores and by the Grand Banks home, there being considerable sickness on the ships. On August 31st he reached Boston after a very unfortunate cruise, in which he had made but seven prizes, all merchant-men, and had recaptured one American vessel.

On July 3d the *Essex*, 32, Captain David Porter, put out

of New York. As has been already explained she was most inefficiently armed, almost entirely with carronades. This placed her at the mercy of any frigate with long guns which could keep at a distance of a few hundred yards; but in spite of Captain Porter's petitions and remonstrances he was not allowed to change his armament. On the 11th of July at 2 A. M., latitude 33° N., longitude 66° W., the *Essex* fell in with the *Minerva*, 32, Captain Richard Hawkins, convoying seven transports, each containing about 200 troops, bound from Barbadoes to Quebec. The convoy was sailing in open order, and, there being a dull moon, the *Essex* ran in and cut out transport No. 299, with 197 soldiers aboard. Having taken out the soldiers, Captain Porter stood back to the convoy, expecting Captain Hawkins to come out and fight him; but this the latter would not do, keeping the convoy in close order around him. The transports were all armed and still contained in the aggregate 1,200 soldiers. As the *Essex* could only fight at close quarters these heavy odds rendered it hopeless for her to try to cut out the *Minerva*. Her carronades would have to be used at short range to be effective, and it would of course have been folly to run in right among the convoy, and expose herself to the certainty of being boarded by five times as many men as she possessed. The *Minerva* had three less guns a side, and on her spar-deck carried 24-pound carronades instead of 32's, and, moreover, had fifty men less than the *Essex*, which had about 270 men this cruise; on the other hand, her main-deck was armed with long 12's, so that it is hard to say whether she did right or not

in refusing to fight. She was of the same force as the *Southampton* whose captain, Sir James Lucas Yeo, subsequently challenged Porter, but never appointed a meeting-place. In the event of a meeting, the advantage, in ships of such radically different armaments, would have been with that captain who succeeded in outmanoeuvring the other and in making the fight come off at the distance best suited to himself. At long range either the *Minerva* or *Southampton* would possess an immense superiority; but if Porter could have contrived to run up within a couple of hundred yards, or still better, to board, his superiority in weight of metal and number of men would have enabled him to carry either of them. Porter's crew was better trained for boarding than almost any other American commander's; and probably none of the British frigates on the American station, except the *Shannon* and *Tenedos*, would have stood a chance with the *Essex* in a hand-to-hand struggle. Among her youngest midshipmen was one, by name David Glasgow Farragut, then but thirteen years old, who afterward became the first and greatest admiral of the United States. His own words on this point will be read with interest. "Every day," he says, [Footnote: "Life of Farragut" (embodying his journal and letters), p. 31. By his son, Loyall Farragut, New York. 1879.] "the crew were exercised at the great guns, small arms, and single stick. And I may here mention the fact that I have never been on a ship where the crew of the old *Essex* was represented but that I found them to be the best swordsmen on board. They had been so thoroughly trained as boarders that

every man was prepared for such an emergency, with his cutlass as sharp as a razor, a dirk made by the ship's armorer out of a file, and a pistol." [Footnote: James says: "Had Captain Porter really endeavored to bring the *Minerva* to action we do not see what could have prevented the *Essex* with her superiority of sailing, from coming alongside of her. But no such thought, we are sure, entered into Captain Porter's head." What "prevented the *Essex*" was the *Minerva's* not venturing out of the convoy. Farragut, in his journal writes: "The captured British officers were very anxious for us to have a fight with the *Minerva*, as they considered her a good match for the *Essex*, and Captain Porter replied that he should gratify them with pleasure if his majesty's commander was of their taste. So we stood toward the convoy and when within gunshot hove to, and awaited the *Minerva*, but she tacked and stood in among the convoy, to the utter amazement of our prisoners, who denounced the commander as a base coward, and expressed their determination to report him to the Admiralty." An incident of reported "flinching" like this is not worth mentioning; I allude to it only to show the value of James' sneers.]

On August 13th a sail was made out to windward, which proved to be the British ship-sloop *Alert*, 16, Captain T. L. O. Laugharne, carrying 20 eighteen-pound carronades and 100 men. [Footnote: James (History, vi, p. 128) says "86 men." In the Naval Archives at Washington in the "Captains' Letters" for 1812 (vol. n. No. 182) can be found enclosed in Porter's letter

the parole of the officers and crew of the *Alert* signed by Captain Laugharne; it contains either 100 or 101 names of the crew of the *Alert* besides those of a number of other prisoners sent back in the same cartel.] As soon as the *Essex* discovered the *Alert* she put out drags astern, and led the enemy to believe she was trying to escape by sending a few men aloft to shake out the reefs and make sail. Concluding the frigate to be a merchantman, the *Alert* bore down on her; while the Americans went to quarters and cleared for action, although the tompions were left in the guns, and the ports kept closed. [Footnote: "Life of Farragut," p. 16.] The *Alert* fired a gun and the *Essex* hove to, when the former passed under her stern, and when on her lee quarter poured in a broadside of grape and canister; but the sloop was so far abaft the frigate's beam that her shot did not enter the ports and caused no damage. Thereupon Porter put up his helm and opened as soon as his guns would bear, tompions and all. The *Alert* now discovered her error and made off, but too late, for in eight minutes the *Essex* was along side, and the *Alert* fired a musket and struck, three men being wounded and several feet of water in the hold. She was disarmed and sent as a cartel into St. Johns. It has been the fashion among American writers to speak of her as if she were "unworthily" given up, but such an accusation is entirely groundless. The *Essex* was four times her force, and all that could possibly be expected of her was to do as she did—exchange broadsides and strike, having suffered some loss and damage. The *Essex* returned to New York

on September 7th, having made 10 prizes, containing 423 men. [Footnote: Before entering New York the *Essex* fell in with a British force which, in both Porter's and Farragut's works, is said to have been composed of the *Acasta* and *Shannon*, each of fifty guns, and *Ringdove*, of twenty. James says it was the *Shannon*, accompanied by a merchant vessel. It is not a point of much importance, as nothing came of the meeting, and the *Shannon*, alone, with her immensely superior armament, ought to have been a match twice over for the *Essex*: although, if James is right, as seems probable, it gives rather a comical turn to Porter's account of his "extraordinary escape."]

The *Belvidera*, as has been stated, carried the news of the war to Halifax. On July 5th Vice-Admiral Sawyer despatched a squadron to cruise against the United States, commanded by Philip Vere Broke, of the *Shannon*, 38, having under him the *Belvidera*, 36, Captain Richard Byron, *Africa*, 64, Captain John Bastard, and *Aeolus*. 32, Captain Lord James Townsend. On the 9th, while off Nantucket, they were joined by the *Guerrière*, 38, Captain James Richard Dacres. On the 16th the squadron fell in with and captured the United States brig *Nautilus*, 14, Lieutenant Crane, which, like all the little brigs, was overloaded with guns and men. She threw her lee guns overboard and made use of every expedient to escape, but to no purpose. At 3 P.M. of the following day, when the British ships were abreast of Barnegat, about four leagues off shore, a strange sail was seen and immediately chased, in the south by east, or windward

quarter, standing to the northeast. This was the United States frigate *Constitution*, 44, Captain Isaac Hull. [Footnote: For the ensuing chase I have relied mainly on Cooper; see also "Memoir of Admiral Broke," p. 240; James, vi, 133: and Marshall's "Naval Biography" (London, 1825), ii. 625.] When the war broke out he was in the Chesapeake River getting a new crew aboard. Having shipped over 450 men (counting officers), he put out of harbor on the 12th of July. His crew was entirely new, drafts of men coming on board up to the last moment. [Footnote: In a letter to the Secretary of the Navy ("Captains' Letters." 1812. ii, No. 85), Hull, after speaking of the way his men were arriving, says: "The crew are as yet unacquainted with a ship of war, as many have but lately joined and have never been on an armed ship before. * * * We are doing all that we can to make them acquainted with their duty, and in a few days we shall have nothing to fear from any single-decked ship."] On the 17th, at 2 P.M., Hull discovered four sail, in the northern board, heading to the westward. At 3, the wind being very light, the *Constitution* made sail and tacked, in 18-1/2 fathoms. At 4, in the N. E., a fifth sail appeared, which afterward proved to be the *Guerrière*, The first four ships bore N. N. W., and were all on the starboard tack; while by 6 o'clock the fifth bore E. N. E. At 6.15 the wind shifted and blew lightly from the south, bringing the American ship to wind-ward. She then wore round with her head to the eastward, set her light studding-sails and stay-sails, and at 7.30 beat to action, intending to speak the nearest vessel, the *Guerrière*. The two frigates neared

one another gradually and at 10 the *Constitution* began making signals, which she continued for over an hour. At 3.30 A. M. on the 18th the *Guerrière*, going gradually toward the *Constitution* on the port tack, and but one half mile distant, discovered on her lee beam the *Belvidera* and the other British vessels, and signalled to them. They did not answer the signals, thinking she must know who they were—a circumstance which afterward gave rise to sharp recriminations among the captains—and Dacres, concluding them to be Commodore Rodgers' squadron, tacked, and then wore round and stood away from the *Constitution* for some time before discovering his mistake.

[Illustration: Captain Isaac Hull: a miniature by an unknown artist, circa 1807-1812. (Courtesy The New-York Historical Society)]

At 5 A. M. Hull had just enough steerage way on to keep his head to the east, on the starboard tack; on his lee quarter, bearing N. E. by N., were the *Belvidera* and *Guerrière* and astern the *Shannon*, *Aeolus*, and *Africa*. At 5.30 it fell entirely calm, and Hull put out his boats to tow the ship, always going southward. At the same time he whipped up a 24 from the main-deck, and got the forecastlechaser aft, cutting away the taffrail to give the two guns more freedom to work in and also running out, through the cabin windows, two of the long main-deck 24's. The British boats were towing also. At 6 A. M. a light breeze sprang up, and the *Constitution* set studding-sails and stay-sails; the *Shannon* opened at her with her bow guns, but ceased when

she found she could not reach her. At 6.30, the wind having died away, the *Shannon* began to gain, almost all the boats of the squadron towing her. Having sounded in 26 fathoms, Lieutenant Charles Morris suggested to Hull to try kedging. All the spare rope was bent on to the cables, payed out into the cutters, and a kedge run out half a mile ahead and let go; then the crew clapped on and walked away with the ship, overrunning and tripping the kedge as she came up with the end of the line. Meanwhile, fresh lines and another kedge were carried ahead, and the frigate glided away from her pursuers. At 7.30 A. M. a little breeze sprang up, when the *Constitution* set her ensign and fired a shot at the *Shannon*. It soon fell calm again and the *Shannon* neared. At 9.10 a light air from the southward struck the ship, bringing her to windward. As the breeze was seen coming, her sails were trimmed, and as soon as she obeyed her helm she was brought close up on the port tack. The boats dropped in alongside; those that belonged to the davits were run up, while the others were just lifted clear of water, by purchases on the spare spars, stowed outboard, where they could be used again at a minute's notice. Meanwhile, on her lee beam, the *Guerrière* opened fire; but her shot fell short, and the Americans paid not the slightest heed to it. Soon it again fell calm, when Hull had 2000 gallons of water started, and again put out his boats to tow. The *Shannon* with some of the other boats of the squadron helping her, gained on the *Constitution* but by severe exertion was again left behind. Shortly afterward, a slight wind springing up,

the *Belvidera* gained on the other British ships, and when it fell calm she was nearer to the *Constitution* than any of her consorts, their boats being put on to her. [Footnote: Cooper speaks as if this was the *Shannon*; but from Marshall's "Naval Biography" we learn that it was the *Belvidera*. At other times he confuses the *Belvidera* with the *Guerrière*. Captain Hull, of course, could not accurately distinguish the names of his pursuers. My account is drawn from a careful comparison of Marshall, Cooper, and James.] At 10.30, observing the benefit that the *Constitution* had derived from warping, Captain Byron did the same, bending all his hawsers to one another, and working two kedge anchors at the same time by paying the warp out through one hawse-hole as it was run in through the other opposite. Having men from the other frigates aboard, and a lighter ship to work, Captain Byron at 2 P. M. was near enough to exchange bow—and stern-chasers with the *Constitution*, out of range however. Hull expected to be overtaken, and made every arrangement to try in such case to disable the first frigate before her consorts could close. But neither the *Belvidera* nor the *Shannon* dared to tow very near for fear of having their boats sunk by the American's stern-chasers.

The *Constitution's* crew showed the most excellent spirit. Officers and men relieved each other regularly, the former snatching their rest any where on deck, the latter sleeping at the guns. Gradually the *Constitution* drew ahead, but the situation continued most critical. All through the afternoon the British frigates kept towing and kedging, being barely out of gunshot. At

3 P. M. a light breeze sprung up, and blew fitfully at intervals; every puff was watched closely and taken advantage of to the utmost. At 7 in the evening the wind almost died out, and for four more weary hours the worn-out sailors towed and kedged. At 10.45 a little breeze struck the frigate, when the boats dropped alongside and were hoisted up, excepting the first cutter. Throughout the night the wind continued very light, the *Belvidera* forging ahead till she was off the *Constitution's* lee beam; and at 4 A. M., on the morning of the 19th, she tacked to the eastward, the breeze being light from the south by east. At 4.20 the *Constitution* tacked also; and at 5.15 the *Aeolus*, which had drawn ahead, passed on the contrary tack. Soon afterward the wind freshened so that Captain Hull took in his cutter. The *Africa* was now so far to leeward as to be almost out of the race; while the five frigates were all running on the starboard tack with every stitch of canvas set. At 9 A. M. an American merchant-man hove in sight and bore down toward the squadron. The *Belvidera*, by way of decoy, hoisted American colors, when the *Constitution* hoisted the British flag, and the merchant vessel hauled off. The breeze continued light till noon, when Hull found he had dropped the British frigates well behind; the nearest was the *Belvidera*, exactly in his wake, bearing W. N. W. 2 1/2 miles distant. The *Shannon* was on his lee, bearing N. by W. 1/2 W. distant 3 1/2 miles. The other two frigates were five miles off on the lee quarter. Soon afterward the breeze freshened, and "old Ironsides" drew slowly ahead from her foes, her sails being watched and tended

with the most consummate skill. At 4 P. M. the breeze again lightened, but even the *Belvidera* was now four miles astern and to leeward. At 6.45 there were indications of a heavy rain squall, which once more permitted Hull to show that in seamanship he excelled even the able captains against whom he was pitted. The crew were stationed and every thing kept fast till the last minute, when all was clewed up just before the squall struck the ship. The light canvas was furled, a second reef taken in the mizzen top-sail, and the ship almost instantly brought under short sail. The British vessels seeing this began to let go and haul down without waiting for the wind, and were steering on different tacks when the first gust struck them. But Hull as soon as he got the weight of the wind sheeted home, hoisted his fore and main-top gallant sails, and went off on an easy bowline at the rate of 11 knots. At 7.40 sight was again obtained of the enemy, the squall having passed to leeward; the *Belvidera*, the nearest vessel, had altered her bearings two points to leeward, and was a long way astern. Next came the *Shannon*; the *Guerrière* and *Aeolus* were hull down, and the *Africa* barely visible. The wind now kept light, shifting occasionally in a very baffling manner, but the *Constitution* gained steadily, wetting her sails from the sky-sails to the courses. At 6 A. M., on the morning of the 20th the pursuers were almost out of sight; and at 8.15 A. M. they abandoned the chase. Hull at once stopped to investigate the character of two strange vessels, but found them to be only Americans; then, at midday, he stood toward the east, and went

into Boston on July 26th.

In this chase Captain Isaac Hull was matched against five British captains, two of whom, Broke and Byron, were fully equal to any in their navy; and while the latter showed great perseverance, good seamanship, and ready imitation, there can be no doubt that the palm in every way belongs to the cool old Yankee. Every daring expedient known to the most perfect seamanship was tried, and tried with success; and no victorious fight could reflect more credit on the conqueror than this three days' chase did on Hull. Later, on two occasions, the *Constitution* proved herself far superior in gunnery to the average British frigate; this time her officers and men showed that they could handle the sails as well as they could the guns. Hull outmanoeuvred Broke and Byron as cleverly as a month later he outfought Dacres. His successful escape and victorious fight were both performed in a way that place him above any single ship captain of war.

On Aug. 2d the *Constitution* made sail from Boston [Footnote: Letter of Capt. Isaac Hull, Aug. 28, 1812.] and stood to the eastward, in hopes of falling in with some of the British cruisers. She was unsuccessful, however, and met nothing. Then she ran down to the Bay of Fundy, steered along the coast of Nova Scotia, and thence toward Newfoundland, and finally took her station off Cape Race in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where she took and burned two brigs of little value. On the 15th she recaptured an American brig from the British ship-sloop

Avenger, though the latter escaped; Capt. Hull manned his prize and sent her in. He then sailed southward, and on the night of the 18th spoke a Salem privateer which gave him news of a British frigate to the south; thither he stood, and at 2 P. M. on the 19th, in lat. 41° 30' N. and 55° W., made out a large sail bearing E. S. E. and to leeward, [Footnote: Letter of Capt. Isaac Hull, Aug. 30, 1812.] which proved to be his old acquaintance, the frigate *Guerrière*, Captain Dacres. It was a cloudy day and the wind was blowing fresh from the northwest. The *Guerrière* was standing by the wind on the starboard tack, under easy canvas; [Footnote: Letter of Capt. James R. Dacres, Sept. 7, 1812.] she hauled up her courses, took in her top-gallant sails, and at 4.30 backed her main-top sail. Hull then very deliberately began to shorten sail, taking in top-gallant sails, stay-sails, and flying jib, sending down the royal yards and putting another reef in the top-sails. Soon the Englishman hoisted three ensigns, when the American also set his colors, one at each mast-head, and one at the mizzen peak.

The *Constitution* now ran down with the wind nearly aft. The *Guerrière* was on the starboard tack, and at five o'clock opened with her weather-guns, [Footnote: Log of *Guerrière*.] the shot falling short, then wore round and fired her port broadside, of which two shot struck her opponent, the rest passing over and through her rigging. [Footnote: See in the Naval Archives (Bureau of Navigation) the *Constitution's* Log-Book (vol. ii, from Feb. 1, 1812, to Dec. 13, 1813). The point is of some little importance because Hull, in his letter, speaks as if both the

first broadsides fell short, whereas the log distinctly says that the second went over the ship, except two shot, which came home. The hypothesis of the *Guerrière* having damaged powder was founded purely on this supposed falling short of the first two broadsides.] As the British frigate again wore to open with her starboard battery, the *Constitution* yawed a little and fired two or three of her port bow-guns. Three or four times the *Guerrière* repeated this manoeuvre, wearing and firing alternate broadsides, but with little or no effect, while the *Constitution* yawed as often to avoid being raked, and occasionally fired one of her bow guns. This continued nearly an hour, as the vessels were very far apart when the action began, hardly any loss or damage being inflicted by either party. At 6.00 the *Guerrière* bore up and ran off under her top-sails and jib, with the wind almost astern, a little on her port quarter; when the *Constitution* set her main-top gallant sail and foresail, and at 6.05 closed within half pistol-shot distance on her adversary's port beam. [Footnote: "Autobiography of Commodore Morris" (Annapolis, 1880), p. 164.] Immediately a furious cannonade opened, each ship firing as the guns bore. By the time the ships were fairly abreast, at 6.20, the *Constitution* shot away the *Guerrière's* mizzen-mast, which fell over the starboard quarter, knocking a large hole in the counter, and bringing the ship round against her helm. Hitherto she had suffered very greatly and the *Constitution* hardly at all. The latter, finding that she was ranging ahead, put her helm aport and then luffed short round her enemy's bows, [Footnote: Log

of *Constitution*.] delivering a heavy raking fire with the starboard guns and shooting away the *Guerrière's* main-yard. Then she wore and again passed her adversary's bows, raking with her port guns. The mizzen-mast of the *Guerrière*, dragging in the water, had by this time pulled her bow round till the wind came on her starboard quarter; and so near were the two ships that the Englishman's bowsprit passed diagonally over the *Constitution's* quarter-deck, and as the latter ship fell off it got foul of her mizzen-rigging, and the vessels then lay with the *Guerrière's* starboard bow against the *Constitution's* port, or lee quarter-gallery. [Footnote: Cooper, in "Putnam's Magazine." i. 475.] The Englishman's bow guns played havoc with Captain Hull's cabin, setting fire to it; but the flames were soon extinguished by Lieutenant Hoffmann. On both sides the boarders were called away; the British ran forward, but Captain Dacres relinquished the idea of attacking [Footnote: Address of Captain Dacres to the court-martial at Halifax.] when he saw the crowds of men on the American's decks. Meanwhile, on the *Constitution*, the boarders and marines gathered aft, but such a heavy sea was running that they could not get on the *Guerrière*. Both sides suffered heavily from the closeness of the musketry fire; indeed, almost the entire loss on the *Constitution* occurred at this juncture. As Lieutenant Bush, of the marines, sprang upon the taffrail to leap on the enemy's decks, a British marine shot him dead; Mr. Morris, the first Lieutenant, and Mr. Alwyn, the master, had also both leaped on the taffrail, and both were at the same moment wounded by

the musketry fire. On the *Guerrière* the loss was far heavier, almost all the men on the forecastle being picked off. Captain Dacres himself was shot in the back and severely wounded by one of the American mizzen topmen, while he was standing on the starboard forecastle hammocks cheering on his crew [Footnote: James, vi, 144.]; two of the lieutenants and the master were also shot down. The ships gradually worked round till the wind was again on the port quarter, when they separated, and the *Guerrière's* foremast and main-mast at once went by the board, and fell over on the starboard side, leaving her a defenseless hulk, rolling her main-deck guns into the water. [Footnote: Brenton, v, 51.] At 6.30 the *Constitution* hauled aboard her tacks, ran off a little distance to the eastward, and lay to. Her braces and standing and running rigging were much cut up and some of the spars wounded, but a few minutes sufficed to repair damages, when Captain Hull stood under his adversary's lee, and the latter at once struck, at 7.00 P. M., [Footnote: Log of the *Constitution*.] just two hours after she had fired the first shot. On the part of the *Constitution*, however, the actual fighting, exclusive of six or eight guns fired during the first hour, while closing, occupied less than 30 minutes.

[Illustration: *Constitution* vs. *Guerrière* (1): "The Engagement" is the original title of this, the first in a series of four paintings of the action done for Captain Hull by Michele F. Corné. (Courtesy US. Naval Academy Museum)]

[Illustration: *Constitution* vs. *Guerrière* (2): "In Action."

The *Guerrière's* mizzenmast goes down. (Courtesy U.S. Naval Academy Museum)]

[Illustration: *Constitution* vs. *Guerrière* (3): "Dropping Astern." The *Guerrière's* mainmast and foremast follow. (Courtesy U.S. Naval Academy Museum)]

[Illustration: *Constitution* vs. *Guerrière* (4): "She Fell in the Sea, A Perfect Wreck." The puff of smoke over the *Guerrière's* bow is from a gun being fired to leeward to signal her surrender, the customary practice when a vessel no longer had a flag to strike. (Courtesy New Haven Historical Society)]

The tonnage and metal of the combatants have already been referred to. The *Constitution* had, as already said, about 456 men aboard, while of the *Guerrière's* crew, 267 prisoners were received aboard the *Constitution*; deducting 10 who were Americans and would not fight, and adding the 15 killed outright, we get 272; 28 men were absent in prizes.

COMPARATIVE FORCE

	Tons	Guns	Broad- side	Men	Loss	Comparative Force	Comparative loss Inflicted
Constitution	1576	27	684	456	14	1.00	1.00
Guerrière	1338	25	556	272	79	.70	.18

The loss of the *Constitution* included Lieutenant William S. Bush, of the marines, and six seamen killed, and her first lieutenant, Charles Morris, Master, John C. Alwyn, four

seamen, and one marine, wounded. Total, seven killed and seven wounded. Almost all this loss occurred when the ships came foul, and was due to the *Guerrière's* musketry and the two guns in her bridle-ports.

The *Guerrière* lost 23 killed and mortally wounded, including her second lieutenant, Henry Ready, and 56 wounded severely and slightly, including Captain Dacres himself, the first lieutenant, Bartholomew Kent, Master, Robert Scott, two master's mates, and one midshipman.

The third lieutenant of the *Constitution*, Mr. George Campbell Read, was sent on board the prize, and the *Constitution* remained by her during the night; but at daylight it was found that she was in danger of sinking. Captain Hull at once began removing the prisoners, and at three o'clock in the afternoon set the *Guerrière* on fire, and in a quarter of an hour she blew up. He then set sail for Boston, where he arrived on August 30th. "Captain Hull and his officers," writes Captain Dacres in his official letter, "have treated us like brave and generous enemies; the greatest care has been taken that we should not lose the smallest trifle."

The British laid very great stress on the rotten and decayed condition of the *Guerrière*; mentioning in particular that the mainmast fell solely because of the weight of the falling foremast. But it must be remembered that until the action occurred she was considered a very fine ship. Thus, in Brighton's "Memoir of Admiral Broke," it is declared that Dacres freely expressed the opinion that she could take a ship in half the time the *Shannon*

could. The fall of the main-mast occurred when the fight was practically over; it had no influence whatever on the conflict. It was also asserted that her powder was bad, but on no authority; her first broadside fell short, but so, under similar circumstances, did the first broadside of the *United States*. None of these causes account for the fact that her shot did not hit. Her opponent was of such superior force—nearly in the proportion of 3 to 2—that success would have been very difficult in any event, and no one can doubt the gallantry and pluck with which the British ship was fought; but the execution was very greatly disproportioned to the force. The gunnery of the *Guerrière* was very poor, and that of the *Constitution* excellent; during the few minutes the ships were yard-arm and yard-arm; the latter was not hulled once, while no less than 30 shot took effect on the former's engaged side, [Footnote: Captain Dacres' address to the court-martial.] five sheets of copper beneath the bends. The *Guerrière*, moreover, was out-manoeuvred; "in wearing several times and exchanging broadsides in such rapid and continual changes of position, her fire was much more harmless than it would have been if she had kept more steady." [Footnote: Lord Howard Douglass, "Treatise on Naval Gunnery" (London, 1851), p. 454.] The *Constitution* was handled faultlessly; Captain Hull displayed the coolness and skill of a veteran in the way in which he managed, first to avoid being raked, and then to improve the advantage which the precision and rapidity of his fire had gained. "After making every allowance claimed by the enemy, the character of this victory

is not essentially altered. Its peculiarities were a fine display of seamanship in the approach, extraordinary efficiency in the attack, and great readiness in repairing damages; all of which denote cool and capable officers, with an expert and trained crew; in a word, a disciplined man-of-war." [Footnote: Cooper, ii. 173.] The disparity of force, 10 to 7, is not enough to account for the disparity of execution, 10 to 2. Of course, something must be allowed for the decayed state of the Englishman's masts, although I really do not think it had any influence on the battle, for he was beaten when the main mast fell; and it must be remembered, on the other hand, that the American crew was absolutely new, while the *Guerrière* was manned by old hands. So that, while admitting and admiring the gallantry, and, on the whole, the seamanship of Captain Dacres and his crew, and acknowledging that he fought at a great disadvantage, especially in being short-handed, yet all must acknowledge that the combat showed a marked superiority, particularly in gunnery, on the part of the Americans. Had the ships not come foul, Captain Hull would probably not have lost more than three or four men; as it was, he suffered but slightly. That the *Guerrière* was not so weak as she was represented to be can be gathered from the fact that she mounted two more main-deck guns than the rest of her class; thus carrying on her main-deck 30 long 18-pounders in battery, to oppose to the 30 long 24's, or rather (allowing for the short weight of shot) long 22's, of the *Constitution*. Characteristically enough, James, though he carefully reckons in the long bow-

chasers in the bridle-ports of the *Argus* and *Enterprise*, yet refuses to count the two long eighteens mounted through the bridle-ports on the *Guerrière's* main-deck. Now, as it turned out, these two bow guns were used very effectively, when the ships got foul, and caused more damage and loss than all of the other main-deck guns put together.

[Illustration: This diagram is taken from Commodore Morris' autobiography and the log of the *Guerrière*: the official accounts apparently consider "larboard" and "starboard" as interchangeable terms.]

Captain Dacres, very much to his credit, allowed the ten Americans on board to go below, so as not to fight against their flag; and in his address to the court-martial mentions, among the reasons for his defeat, "that he was very much weakened by permitting the Americans on board to quit their quarters." Coupling this with the assertion made by James and most other British writers that the *Constitution* was largely manned by Englishmen, we reach the somewhat remarkable conclusion, that the British ship was defeated because the Americans on board would *not* fight against their country, and that the American was victorious because the British on board *would*. However, as I have shown, in reality there were probably not a score of British on board the *Constitution*.

In this, as well as the two succeeding frigate actions, every one must admit that there was a great superiority in force on the side of the victors, and British historians have insisted that this

superiority was so great as to preclude any hopes of a successful resistance. That this was not true, and that the disparity between the combatants was not as great as had been the case in a number of encounters in which English frigates had taken French ones, can be best shown by a few accounts taken from the French historian Troude, who would certainly not exaggerate the difference. Thus on March 1, 1799, the English 38-gun 18-pounder frigate *Sybille*, captured the French 44-gun 24-pounder frigate *Forte*, after an action of two hours and ten minutes. [Footnote: "Batailles Navales de la France." O. Troude (Paris, 1868), iv, 171.] In *actual* weight the shot thrown by one of the main-deck guns of the defeated *Forte* was over six pounds heavier than the shot thrown by one of the main-deck guns of the victorious *Constitution* or *United States*. [Footnote: See Appendix B, for actual weight of French shot.]

There are later examples than this. But a very few years before the declaration of war by the United States, and in the same struggle that was then still raging, there had been at least two victories gained by English frigates over French foes as superior to themselves as the American 44's were to the British ships they captured. On Aug. 10, 1805, the *Phoenix*, 36, captured the *Didon*, 40, after 3 1/2 hours' fighting, the comparative broadside force being: [Footnote: Ibid., lii, 425.]

PHOENIX	*DIDON*
13×18	14×18
2× 9	2× 8
6×32	7×36
21 guns, 444 lbs.	23 guns, 522 lbs. (nominal; about 600, real)

On March 8, 1808, the *San Florenzo*, 36, captured the *Piedmontaise*, 40, the force being exactly what it was in the case of the *Phoenix* and Didon.[Footnote: Ibid., in, 499.] Comparing the real, not the nominal weight of metal, we find that the *Didon* and *Piedmontaise* were proportionately of greater force compared to the *Phoenix* and *San Florenzo*, than the *Constitution* was compared to the *Guerrière* or *Java*. The French 18's threw each a shot weighing but about two pounds less than that thrown by an American 24 of 1812, while their 36-pound carronades each threw a shot over 10 pounds heavier than that thrown by one of the *Constitution's* spar-deck 32's.

That a 24-pounder can not always whip an 18-pounder frigate is shown by the action of the British frigate *Eurotas* with the French frigate *Chlorinde*, on Feb. 25, 1814. [Footnote: James,

vi, 391.] The first with a crew of 329 men threw 625 pounds of shot at a broadside, the latter carrying 344 men and throwing 463 pounds; yet the result was indecisive. The French lost 90 and the British 60 men. The action showed that heavy metal was not of much use unless used well.

To appreciate rightly the exultation Hull's victory caused in the United States, and the intense annoyance it created in England, it must be remembered that during the past twenty years the Island Power had been at war with almost every state in Europe, at one time or another, and in the course of about two hundred single conflicts between ships of approximately equal force (that is, where the difference was less than one half), waged against French, Spanish, Italian, Turkish, Algerine, Russian, Danish, and Dutch antagonists, her ships had been beaten and captured in but five instances. Then war broke out with America, and in eight months five single-ship actions occurred, in every one of which the British vessel was captured. Even had the victories been due solely to superior force this would have been no mean triumph for the United States.

On October 13, 1812, the American 18-gun ship-sloop *Wasp*, Captain Jacob Jones, with 137 men aboard, sailed from the Delaware and ran off southeast to get into the track of the West India vessels; on the 16th a heavy gale began to blow, causing the loss of the jib-boom and two men who were on it. The next day the weather moderated somewhat, and at 11.30 P.M., in latitude 37° N., longitude 65° W., several sail were

descried. [Footnote: Capt. Jones' official letter, Nov. 24, 1812.] These were part of a convoy of 14 merchant-men which had quitted the bay of Honduras on September 12th, bound for England, [Footnote: James' History, vi, 158.] under the convoy of the British 18-gun brig-sloop *Frolic*, of 19 guns and 110 men, Captain Thomas Whinyates. They had been dispersed by the gale of the 16th, during which the *Frolic's* main-yard was carried away and both her top-sails torn to pieces [Footnote: Capt. Whinyates' official letter, Oct. 18, 1812.]; next day she spent in repairing damages, and by dark six of the missing ships had joined her. The day broke almost cloudless on the 18th (Sunday), showing the convoy, ahead and to leeward of the American ship, still some distance off, as Captain Jones had not thought it prudent to close during the night, while he was ignorant of the force of his antagonists. The *Wasp* now sent down to her top-gallant yards, close reefed her top-sails, and bore down under short fighting canvas; while the *Frolic* removed her main-yard from the casks, lashed it on deck, and then hauled to the wind under her boom main-sail and close-reefed foretop-sail, hoisting Spanish colors to decoy the stranger under her guns, and permit the convoy to escape. At 11.32 the action began—the two ships running parallel on the starboard tack, not 60 yards apart, the *Wasp*, firing her port, and the *Frolic* her starboard, guns. The latter fired very rapidly, delivering three broadsides to the *Wasp's* two, [Footnote: Cooper, 182.] both crews cheering loudly as the ships wallowed through the water. There was a very heavy sea running,

which caused the vessels to pitch and roll heavily. The Americans fired as the engaged side of their ship was going down, aiming at their opponent's hull [Footnote: Miles' Register, in, p. 324.]; while the British delivered their broadsides while on the crests of the seas, the shot going high. The water dashed in clouds of spray over both crews, and the vessels rolled so that the muzzles of the guns went under. [Footnote: *Do.*] But in spite of the rough weather, the firing was not only spirited but well directed. At 11.36 the *Wasp's* maintop-mast was shot away and fell, with its yard, across the port fore and foretop-sail braces, rendering the head yards unmanageable; at 11.46 the gaff and mizzentop-gallant mast came down, and by 11.52 every brace and most of the rigging was shot away. [Footnote: Capt. Jones' letter.] It would now have been very difficult to brace any of the yards. But meanwhile the *Frolic* suffered dreadfully in her hull and lower masts, and had her gaff and head braces shot away.[Footnote: Capt. Whinyates' letter.] The slaughter among her crew was very great, but the survivors kept at their work with the dogged courage of their race. At first the two vessels ran side by side, but the American gradually forged ahead, throwing in her fire from a position in which she herself received little injury; by degrees the vessels got so close that the Americans struck the *Frolic's* side with their rammers in loading, [Footnote: Capt. Jones' letter.] and the British brig was raked with dreadful effect. The Frolic then fell aboard her antagonist, her jib-boom coming in between the main- and mizzen-rigging of the *Wasp*

and passing over the heads of Captain Jones and Lieutenant Biddle, who were standing near the capstan. This forced the *Wasp* up in the wind, and she again raked her antagonist, Captain Jones trying to restrain his men from boarding till he could put in another broadside. But they could no longer be held back, and Jack Lang, a New Jersey seaman, leaped on the *Frolic's* bowsprit. Lieutenant Biddle then mounted on the hammock cloth to board, but his feet got entangled in the rigging, and one of the midshipmen seizing his coat-tails to help himself up, the lieutenant tumbled back on the deck. At the next swell he succeeded in getting on the bowsprit, on which there were already two seamen whom he passed on the forecastle. But there was no one to oppose him; not twenty Englishmen were left unhurt. [Footnote: Capt. Whinyates' letter.] The man at the wheel was still at his post, grim and undaunted, and two or three more were on deck, including Captain Whinyates and Lieutenant Wintle, both so severely wounded that they could not stand without support. [Footnote: James, vi, 161.] There could be no more resistance, and Lieutenant Biddle lowered the flag at 12.15 —just 43 minutes after the beginning of the fight. [Footnote: Capt. Jones' letter.] A minute or two afterward both the *Frolic's* masts went by the board—the foremast about fifteen feet above the deck, the other short off. Of her crew, as already said, not twenty men had escaped unhurt. Every officer was wounded; two of them, the first lieutenant, Charles McKay, and master, John Stephens, soon died. Her total loss was thus over 90 [Footnote:

Capt. Whinyates' official letter thus states it, and is, of course, to be taken as authority; the Bermuda account makes it 69, and James only 62;] about 30 of whom were killed outright or died later. The *Wasp* suffered very severely in her rigging and aloft generally, but only two or three shots struck her hull; five of her men were killed—two in her mizzen-top and one in her maintop-mast rigging—and five wounded, [Footnote: Capt. Jones' letter.] chiefly while aloft.

[Illustration: *Wasp* vs. *Frolic*: a contemporary painting by Thomas Birch, believed to have been done for the *Wasp's* captain, James Biddle. (Courtesy Peabody Museum of Salem)]

The two vessels were practically of equal force. The loss of the *Frolic's* main-yard had merely converted her into a brigantine, and, as the roughness of the sea made it necessary to fight under very short canvas, her inferiority in men was fully compensated for by her superiority in metal. She had been desperately defended; no men could have fought more bravely than Captain Whinyates and his crew. On the other hand, the Americans had done their work with a coolness and skill that could not be surpassed; the contest had been mainly one of gunnery, and had been decided by the greatly superior judgment and accuracy with which they fired. Both officers and crew had behaved well; Captain Jones particularly mentions Lieutenant Claxton, who, though too ill to be of any service, persisted in remaining on deck throughout the engagement.

The *Wasp* was armed with 2 long 12's and 16 32-pound

carronades; the *Frolic* with 2 long 6's, 16 32-pound carronades, and 1 shifting 12-pound carronade.

COMPARATIVE FORCE.

Tons. No. Guns. Weight Metal. Crews. Loss. *Wasp* 450 9 250 135 10 *Frolic* 467 10 274 110 90

Vice-Admiral Jurien de la Gravière comments on this action as follows [Footnote: "Guerres Maritimes," ii, 287 (Septième Édition, Paris, 1881).]:

DIAGRAM [Footnote: It is difficult to reconcile the accounts of the manoeuvres in this action. James says "larboard" where Cooper says "starboard"; one says the *Wasp* wore, the other says that she could not do so, etc.]

[Illustration: Shows the paths of the *Wasp* and the *Frolic* during their battle and the positions of the ships at various times during the battle from 11.32 to 12.15]

"The American fire showed itself to be as accurate as it was rapid. On occasions when the roughness of the sea would seem to render all aim excessively uncertain, the effects of their artillery were not less murderous than under more advantageous conditions. The corvette *Wasp* fought the brig *Frolic* in an enormous sea, under very short canvas, and yet, forty minutes after the beginning of the action, when the two vessels came together, the Americans who leaped aboard the brig found on the deck, covered with dead and dying, but one brave man, who had not left the wheel, and three officers, all wounded, who

threw down their swords at the feet of the victors." Admiral de la Gravière's criticisms are especially valuable, because they are those of an expert, who only refers to the war of 1812 in order to apply to the French navy the lessons which it teaches, and who is perfectly unprejudiced. He cares for the lesson taught, not the teacher, and is quite as willing to learn from the defeat of the *Chesapeake* as from the victories of the *Constitution*—while most American critics only pay heed to the latter.

The characteristics of the action are the practical equality of the contestants in point of force and the enormous disparity in the damage each suffered; numerically, the *Wasp* was superior by 5 per cent., and inflicted a ninefold greater loss.

Captain Jones was not destined to bring his prize into port, for a few hours afterward the *Poictiers*, a British 74, Captain John Poer Beresford, hove in sight. Now appeared the value of the *Frolic's* desperate defence; if she could not prevent herself from being captured, she had at least ensured her own recapture, and also the capture of the foe. When the *Wasp* shook out her sails they were found to be cut into ribbons aloft, and she could not make off with sufficient speed. As the *Poictiers* passed the *Frolic*, rolling like a log in the water, she threw a shot over her, and soon overtook the *Wasp*. Both vessels were carried into Bermuda. Captain Whinyates was again put in command of the *Frolic*. Captain Jones and his men were soon exchanged; 25,000 dollars prize-money was voted them by Congress, and Captain and Lieutenant Biddle were both promoted, the former receiving

the captured ship *Macedonian*. Unluckily the blockade was too close for him to succeed in getting out during the remainder of the war.

On Oct. 8th Commodore Rodgers left Boston on his second cruise, with the *President*, *United States*, *Congress*, and *Argus*, [Footnote: Letter of Commodore Rodgers. Jan. 1. 1813.] leaving the *Hornet* in port. Four days out, the *United States* and *Argus* separated, while the remaining two frigates continued their cruise together. The *Argus*, [Footnote: Letter of Capt. Arthur Sinclair, Jan. 4, 1813.] Captain Sinclair, cruised to the eastward, making prizes of 6 valuable merchant-men, and returned to port on January 3d. During the cruise she was chased for three days and three nights (the latter being moonlight) by a British squadron, and was obliged to cut away her boats and anchors and start some of her water. But she saved her guns, and was so cleverly handled that during the chase she actually succeeded in taking and manning a prize, though the enemy got near enough to open fire as the vessels separated. Before relating what befell the *United States*, we shall bring Commodore Rodgers' cruise to an end.

On Oct. 10th the Commodore chased, but failed to overtake, the British frigate *Nymphe*, 38, Captain Epworth. On the 18th, off the great Bank of Newfoundland, he captured the Jamaica packet *Swallow*, homeward bound, with 200,000 dollars in specie aboard. On the 31st, at 9 A. M., lat. 33° N., long. 32° W., his two frigates fell in with the British frigate *Galatea*, 36,

Captain Woodley Losack, convoying two South Sea ships, to windward. The *Galatea* ran down to reconnoitre, and at 10 A. M., recognizing her foes, hauled up on the starboard tack to escape. The American frigates made all sail in chase, and continued beating to windward, tacking several times, for about three hours. Seeing that she was being overhauled, the *Galatea* now edged away to get on her best point of sailing; at the same moment one of her convoy, the *Argo*, bore up to cross the hawse of her foes, but was intercepted by the *Congress*, who lay to to secure her. Meanwhile the *President* kept after the *Galatea*; she set her top-mast, top-gallant mast and lower studding-sails, and when it was dusk had gained greatly upon her. But the night was very dark, the *President* lost sight of the chase, and, toward midnight, hauled to the wind to rejoin her consort. The two frigates cruised to the east as far as 22° W., and then ran down to 17° N.; but during the month of November they did not see a sail. They had but slightly better luck on their return toward home. Passing 120 miles north of Bermuda, and cruising a little while toward the Virginia capes, they reentered Boston on Dec. 31st, having made 9 prizes, most of them of little value.

When four days out, on Oct. 12th, Commodore Decatur had separated from the rest of Rodgers' squadron and cruised east; on the 25th, in lat. 29° N., and long. 29° 30' W. while going close-hauled on the port tack, with the wind fresh from the S. S. E., a sail was descried on the weather beam, about 12 miles distant. [Footnote: Official letter of Commodore Decatur, Oct.

30. 1812.] This was the British 38-gun frigate *Macedonian*

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