



USS Constitution
Museum

TRANSCRIPTION OF

**William Bainbridge's Account
of the Engagement with HMS Java**

USS Constitution Museum Collection [2361.1]

Journal kept by Commd^r Bainbridge U.S. Constitution”

Wednesday 30th Dec^r 1812 Lat 13° .06 South and Long. 38 West, 10 leagues from the Coast of Brazils [sic] – Commences with clear weather & moderate breezes From E.N.E. hoisted our Ensign and Pendant. At 15 minutes past Meridian the strange sail hoisted her Colours and English Ensign, having a signal flying at her main [sketch of a horizontally striped pennant: “red/yellow/red”] - at 1.26 P.M. being sufficiently from the land and finding the ship to be an English Frigate, took in the mainsail & Royal, tacked Ship and stood for the enemy at 1.50 P.M. the enemy bore down with the intention of raking us, which we avoided by wearing – at 2 P.M. the enemy being within half a mile of us and to windward and having hauled down his colours (excepting a Union Jack at the mizen [sic] masthead) induced me to give orders to the officer of the 3rd division to fire one Gun ahead of the enemy to make him show his colours [sic], which being done, brought on a fire from us of the whole broadside on which the enemy hoisted his colours [sic] and immediately returned our fire - A general action with round & grape then commenced, the enemy keeping at a much greater distance than I wished but could not bring him to closer action without exposing ourselves to several rakes - Considerable maneuvers were made by both vessels to rake and avoid being raked. The following minutes were taken during the action -

at 2.10 P.M. – Commenced the action in[?] good Grape & Cannister distance the enemy to windward (but much further than I wished)

2.30. Our wheel was shot entirely away

2.40. determined to close with the enemy notwithstanding his raking, set the fore & main sail & luffed up to close him.

2.50 The enemies [sic] boom got foul our Mizen [sic] Rigging.

3.00 Tahe Heel of the Enemies [sic] Bowsprit & Jim boom shot away by us.

3.05 Shot away the Enemies [sic] Foremast by the board

3.40 Shot away Gaff & spanker boom

3.55 Shot away his mizen[sic] mast nearly by the board

4.05 Having silence the fire of the enemy completely and his colours [sic] in main rigging being down, supposed he had struck, then hauled aboard the courses to shoot ahead to repair our rigging which was extremely cut, leaving the enemy a complete wreck. Soon after discovered that the enemies [sic] flag was still flying - Hove too to repair some of our damage

4.20. The enemies [sic] Main Mast went nearly by the board

4.50. Got very close to the enemy in a very effective Raking position

athwart his bows and was at the very instance of raking him when he most prudently struck his flag, for had he suffered the broadside to have raked him, his additional lose [sic] must have been extremely great as he laid an unmanageable wreck upon the water - after the enemy had struck wore ship and reefed the topsails, then hoisted out one of the only two remaining boats we had left out of 8 and sent Lieut Parker 1st of the Constitution to take possession of the enemy, which proved to be H.B.M. Frigate Java rated 38 but carried 49 guns and manned with upwards of 400 men commanded by Cap^t Lambert a very distinguished officer who lay mortally wounded

The Action continued from the commencem^t to the end of the Fire 1^h..55^m- The Constⁿ had 9 killed & 25 wounded- The enemy had 60 killed and 101 wounded certainly but by a letter written aboard the Constⁿ by one of the officers of the Java and accidentally found it is evident the enemies [sic] wounded must have been considerably greater than as above stated and who must have died of their wounds previously to being removed – the letter states 60 killed & 170 wounded.

The Java had her own complement of men complete and upward of a 100 supernumeraries going to join the British ships of war in the est Indies, also several officer passengers going out on promotion - The force of the enemy in numbers of men at the commencement of the action is no doubt considerably greater than we have been able to ascertain – which is [?] of 400 men – the officer was extremely cautious at discovering the number – By her Quarter Bill she had one man more stationed to each gun than we had -

The Constitution was very much cut in her sails and rigging and many of her spars injured at 7. P.M. the boat returned with Lieut Chads the 1st Lieut of the enemy frigate and Lieut Gen. Hislop (appointed governor of Bombay) Major Walker & Cap^t Wood of his staff – Capt Lambert of the Java was too seriously wounded to be removed [?]

The cutter return^d on board to prize for the prisoners and brought Cap^t Marshall Mas^t & Commd^t of the British Navy who was passenger on board as also several other Naval officers destined for ships in the East Indies -

The Java was an important ship of fitted out in the completest manner to carry Lieut Gen^l Hislop & staff to Bombay and several naval officers for ships in the N. E. I. And had dispatches for S^t Helens Cape of Good Hope and any British [?] in the Indian & China Seas – She had on board copper for a 74 and two brigs building at Bombay and I expect a great many other valuables but everything was blown up in her except officers baggage when we set her on fire at 3 PM the 2^d of January 1813 (nautical time) [sic]

The 2 boats were employed until 1 P.M. bringing prisoners aboard, kept tacking & wearing throughout the

night to keep our position near the prize – at 3 A.M. the 3rd cutter sunk [sic] and we lose her, having now only the 1st cutter left, which was sent at Day Light to bring prisoners from the prize and thus employed the remainder of the day –

Monday 31st December 1812

All these 24 hours backing wearing and laying too [sic], keeping our position near the prize - Receiving the prisoners & wounded on board – employed in repairing our damage in the rigging – Spars, Sails & Hull, which is considerable – several shot holes through the Hull, on and above the waterline – Quarter deck bulwark very much shot – Rudder chains shot off – several shots through the Cutwater and one through the rudder – Fore & mizen [sic] mast shot through – Main Topmast 1/3 cut through, Main Topsail Mast Yard above 12 feet from the end shot away – Spanker boom, Topsail Mast & Gaff shot through & through – Jib boom wounded – Spars in our channels very much shot, many entirely ruined – All boats but 2 greatly shot – our sail very much injured so as to ^{re}quire bending others – The rigging greatly cut to pieces – One of the Carronades injured on the Quarter Deck Compass rails and Binnicals [sic] all shot away -One Ridge Line & Hammock [?] very much injured – received the wheel from the Java and fitted it on board of us.

Lat 13°54' S

Long 36^D.12'.W

W^m Bainbridge

Com. Bainbridge private-
journal of action between the
“Constitution” & Java

Official
- Copy to -
James Madison