

Lieutenant Beekman Verplanck Hoffman

Who am I?

I am Beekman Hoffman, the ship's Fourth Lieutenant. I was raised by the Hudson, in the town of Poughkeepsie, where my father is a judge. I have two younger brothers and a sister. I joined the navy seven years ago as a midshipman, when I was just a boy of 15. I came to *Constitution* in March this year, and I had the good fortune to be commissioned Lieutenant after only two months service.



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My work on the ship

A ship couldn't sail without its lieutenants! The First Lieutenant is in charge of the day-to-day running of *Constitution*. The rest of us – we are five in number – help him. When it is my turn on watch I am charged with the safety of the ship, which is a truly awesome responsibility. I must keep the men at their tasks, write up the log, and make sure that we are not taking on water. In battle, I command ten 24-pounders on the after end of the gun deck.



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What do I need to do my job?

Well, nothing more than a loud voice – and authority, beyond my years, perhaps! For I am just 23 years of age and when on watch alone, I may be in charge of seamen much older and more experienced than I. Commanding the obedience of sailors is something all lieutenants must learn when they are midshipmen. The fine uniform helps: when I put it on I feel I have grown at least two inches.



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A truly dangerous moment

In our desperate battle with *Guerriere*, my mettle was tested for the first time. The guns of the enemy ship exploded, setting aflame the cabin wherein I was standing. In the urgency and danger of this mishap, there was no time to be fearful, and I doused the fire forthwith. Fighting in the battle earned me a medal, but fighting the fire won me the esteem of the crew, which I value more!



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My dog outsmarts the crew!

I have a companion here on *Constitution* whose intelligence and dogged determination have justly won him praise. *Guerriere* the terrier has the sharpest senses on the ship. Indeed, he once spotted a large frigate before even the lookout at the mast-head had seen it. For neglecting his duty the lookout received a dozen lashes, but instead I believe *Guerriere* should have been awarded a silver medal!



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Promotion - and a family

I was fortunate enough to serve my country on the frigate *Constitution* right through the War of 1812. As prize-master I brought the captured *Cyane* into New York harbor. Though I was only doing my duty, this action so dazzled my sweetheart Phoebe that she consented to marry me in 1817, and God has blessed us with three little girls. I left the *Constitution* with more credit than I had when I arrived, for I was given a command of my own – first on a schooner, and later a sloop-of-war.



Presentation sword given to Lt. Hoffman for his role in the battle against HMS *Guerriere*.

USS Constitution Museum Collection

Though Beekman Hoffman was uninjured in active service, he contracted a lung infection at the age of 45, and died at his home in Jamaica, New York.