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## U.S. SAILORS IN THE WAR OF 1812

Charles E. Brodine, Jr., Michael J. Crawford  
and Christine F. Hughes



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NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER  
DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
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# Foreword

The United States Navy is defined by its history, a shared heritage binding the disparate parts of the American naval community and connecting today's Sailors with those who manned the fleet two hundred years ago. The service's mores and rules of conduct stand solidly on the Navy's illustrious past. This booklet, one in an occasional series, brings our naval heritage into the light once again so that all can learn from it.

The Naval Historical Center strives to acquaint today's Sailors with those who have gone before because a widespread knowledge of this history enhances the fleet's effectiveness, while familiarity with the Navy's heritage strengthens each Sailor's pride in the service. In the rush and pressure of everyday duties and deadlines, naval personnel may set aside the task of looking at history for leisure time, assuming nothing practical for the workday can be gleaned from studying the careers of captains who commanded ships powered by sails and armed with smooth-bore cannon.

Those who make this assumption and neglect history make a mistake. Intangibles like leadership, teamwork, and commitment hold timeless lessons unconnected to technology. Looking at how a naval captain in the War of 1812 exercised command can provide today's Sailors at all levels with a blueprint for leadership and an understanding of what worked and what did not.

Finally, the travails and triumphs of our naval forbears inspire us and prepare us to meet our own crises. Let us look to those earlier American naval leaders who faced long odds and seemingly invincible foes, sometimes overcoming them, sometimes falling before them, but always meeting them with courage. From their example, let us draw strength to confront our own enemies in these dangerous times.

William S. Dudley  
Director of Naval History

# Preface

In each of the three episodes of naval conflict treated in the chapters of this work, a U.S. naval force found itself confronting a superior British naval force. Blockaded in tributaries by significant British squadrons, Commodore Joshua Barney's barge flotilla held out for ten weeks, engaging in several pitched battles until Barney ordered its destruction. Barney's sailors then became foot soldiers and maintained the nation's honor in facing the red-coated foe marching on Washington, when other troops broke and ran at the battle that wits derided as the "Bladensburg Races."

Commodore Thomas Macdonough's Lake Champlain squadron opposed a British squadron possessing significant advantages over his own. The British had a large preponderance of long guns, with the long guns on their flagship alone nearly equaling those of the entire American force. Macdonough's superior seamanship nullified the British advantage, enabling the Americans to throw their heavy short-range carronades into the equation. Still, it was only after enduring one of the deadliest naval battles of the war that the American sailors were able to claim victory. The sacrifice of American lives and limbs resulted in the retreat of an invading enemy army and led to satisfactory terms at the peace table.

For six weeks, a Royal Navy frigate and sloop of war watched Captain David Porter's frigate USS *Essex* in the neutral harbor of Valparaiso, Chile. When *Essex* finally sailed, a gust of wind blew its main topmast overboard, and the American frigate took refuge in a bay near the harbor. There, the British warships stood out of range of *Essex*'s carronades, which were its main armament, and, disregarding the neutrality of the Chilean waters, began a long-distance cannonade of the disabled ship. For two and a half hours the Americans resisted the enemy's superior firepower. At long range, the two British vessels enjoyed an advantage of 288 pounds in weight of metal thrown per broadside compared to *Essex*'s mere 72 pounds. Porter looked for a shift of wind that would enable him to bring *Essex*'s guns into range, or perhaps to take one of the enemy warships by boarding. *Essex*'s flag came down only after the loss of 155 men

eliminated any chance of victory. "Contemporary history," wrote Theodore Roosevelt, "does not afford a single instance of so determined a defense against such frightful odds."

In each of these instances, officers and men of the U.S. Navy demonstrated the courage, honor, and commitment that are the core values of the American naval service. They faced the foe without flinching and refused to give up the fight until conquered by overwhelming force. On Lake Champlain, the outcome was unequivocal American victory. In the Chesapeake Bay flotilla and on board USS *Essex*, stubborn resistance forced the enemy to commit disproportionate resources and held up the application of those resources to other enemy purposes while the resistance lasted.

We, the authors, are historians in the Early History Branch of the Naval Historical Center located at the Washington Navy Yard. Our branch serves the Navy by presenting its history from the American Revolution through World War I. In fulfilling that responsibility we edit a multi-volume publication called *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History*, which consists of transcriptions of original documents concerning the naval history of the War of 1812. The expertise that we have gained from working on that project has helped us to write this booklet.

Our words have been brought to life through the expert typography and design work provided by our colleagues Wendy Leland and Morgan I. Wilbur of *Naval Aviation News*. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of other Center staff: Sheila Brennan, Sandra Doyle, Davis Elliott, Robert Hanshew, Karin Hill, Jennifer Lloyd, and our fellow historians in the Early History Branch: E. Gordon Bowen-Hassell, Dennis M. Conrad, and Mark L. Hayes.

The interpretations expressed herein are those of the authors alone, as are any errors of fact or interpretation.

Charles E. Brodine, Jr.  
Michael J. Crawford  
Christine F. Hughes



# Introduction

Many Americans have heard of the burning of Washington, the defense of Baltimore's Fort McHenry, the writing of the "Star-Spangled Banner," and the Battle of New Orleans. The War of 1812 itself, however, as important as it is in the history of the United States, remains obscure in popular understanding. Acquaintance with the war stands restricted to the fame of a few battles and heroes. Because the war was a formative experience for the United States Navy, it behooves every Sailor to know its history.

The causes of the war were largely maritime and closely related to the rivalry for the control of sea-borne commerce between two great European powers. From the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789 and the subsequent outbreak of almost continual warfare between France and Great Britain, until the year 1812, the United States tread the narrow path of neutrality. Before long, the United States was the world's major trading nation, supplying the warring countries of Europe with large amounts of produce. After 1805, however, the United States' ability to maintain its rights as a neutral became increasingly difficult. Unable to achieve a decisive victory against France's Emperor Napoleon I on land, Great Britain decided to increase economic pressure against France by cutting off its overseas commerce. Napoleon retaliated, and the United States was caught in between. Because the British were more powerful at sea than were the French, American commerce felt British depredations more severely.

The practice of impressment worsened British relations with the United States. The Royal Navy's insatiable need for seamen to man hundreds of ships caused her commanders to seize, or press, men,

whether they were sailors or landmen. Those first to feel the blow were innocents who happened in the way of press gangs in British seaports. At sea, warships halted merchant vessels and took off by force the seamen they needed, whether they were British subjects, Britons who had become naturalized American citizens, or native-born Americans who could not provide convincing proof of citizenship. The British government held that all British subjects were obliged to serve their king when called on, and that naturalization did not sever that obligation. American diplomats rejected these sweeping claims and insisted on recognition of the right of American citizens to be free from impressment. Between 1803 and 1812, the Royal Navy pressed some six thousand American seamen into service.

In 1807, a gross insult to the U.S. flag brought the United States to the brink of war with Great Britain. Just off the Virginia coast, His Majesty's 50-gun ship *Leopard* fired on the U.S. frigate *Chesapeake*, killing three men and wounding sixteen, sent a party on board and removed four men identified as Royal Navy deserters. Pressing men from American merchant vessels was objectionable, but taking men by force from a commissioned warship was outrageous. Although he would have had the backing of the American people, President Thomas Jefferson refrained from asking Congress to declare war. Instead, he expelled British warships from American waters and asked Congress for increased economic pressures on Britain to encourage it to respect the United States' rights as a neutral.

From 1806 until 1812, unprepared for war and ideologically committed to peace, the administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison tried a

number of economic measures—non-importation, embargo, non-intercourse—to pressure both Great Britain and France into acknowledging American rights. None of these experiments succeeded and all caused economic distress at home. By 1812 the administration concluded that the United States had been humiliated for too long and that the national honor required the taking up of arms.

One more factor made Great Britain the more attractive foe. In Canada it held territory contiguous to the United States. Americans believed that British agents from Canada fomented much of their troubles with the Indians. War would enable frontiersmen to strike back. Furthermore, Canada seemed an easy conquest, and Florida, belonging to Britain's ally Spain, tempted as well. France, on the other hand, offered no similar attraction.

On 1 June 1812 President Madison asked Congress to consider war with Great Britain. Congress approved the measure by a close margin and Madison signed it on the 18th.

Madison believed that the most effective way of winning British respect for America's rights was by conquering Britain's Canadian provinces. He recognized that success depended on a speedy conquest of Canada, since aside from its fleet of more than one hundred lightly armed gunboats the United States Navy had only sixteen ocean-going warships, none larger than a 44-gun frigate, to oppose Great Britain's navy of more than six hundred ships, including first-rate ships of the line. The administration also counted on the continuation of Great Britain's war against Napoleon, which required the British to deploy most of its fleet in European waters.

In the course of the war, but notably in its first months, the superiority of U.S. frigate design proved itself on the high seas in single-ship engagements against the British. Later in the war, the Royal Navy established an effective blockade that hindered American naval operations on the high seas. In the meantime, David Porter pursued enterprising *guerre de course* (war on commerce) in the Pacific before his ship, USS *Essex*, was cornered and destroyed by superior forces. During the war, much of the activity of the U.S. Navy occurred on the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain. The sheer size of U.S. naval effort on the lakes is impressive. Military failure convinced the administration that a successful invasion of Canada would depend on naval superiority on the lakes. This led to a massive naval construction race on Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Victory in the Battle of

Lake Erie and cooperation between naval and land forces led directly to victories on land, but the key to control of Upper Canada and invasion of Lower Canada remained Lake Ontario. On that lake, however, the opposing naval forces stalemated each other, and the American naval and army commanders failed to coordinate their efforts effectively.

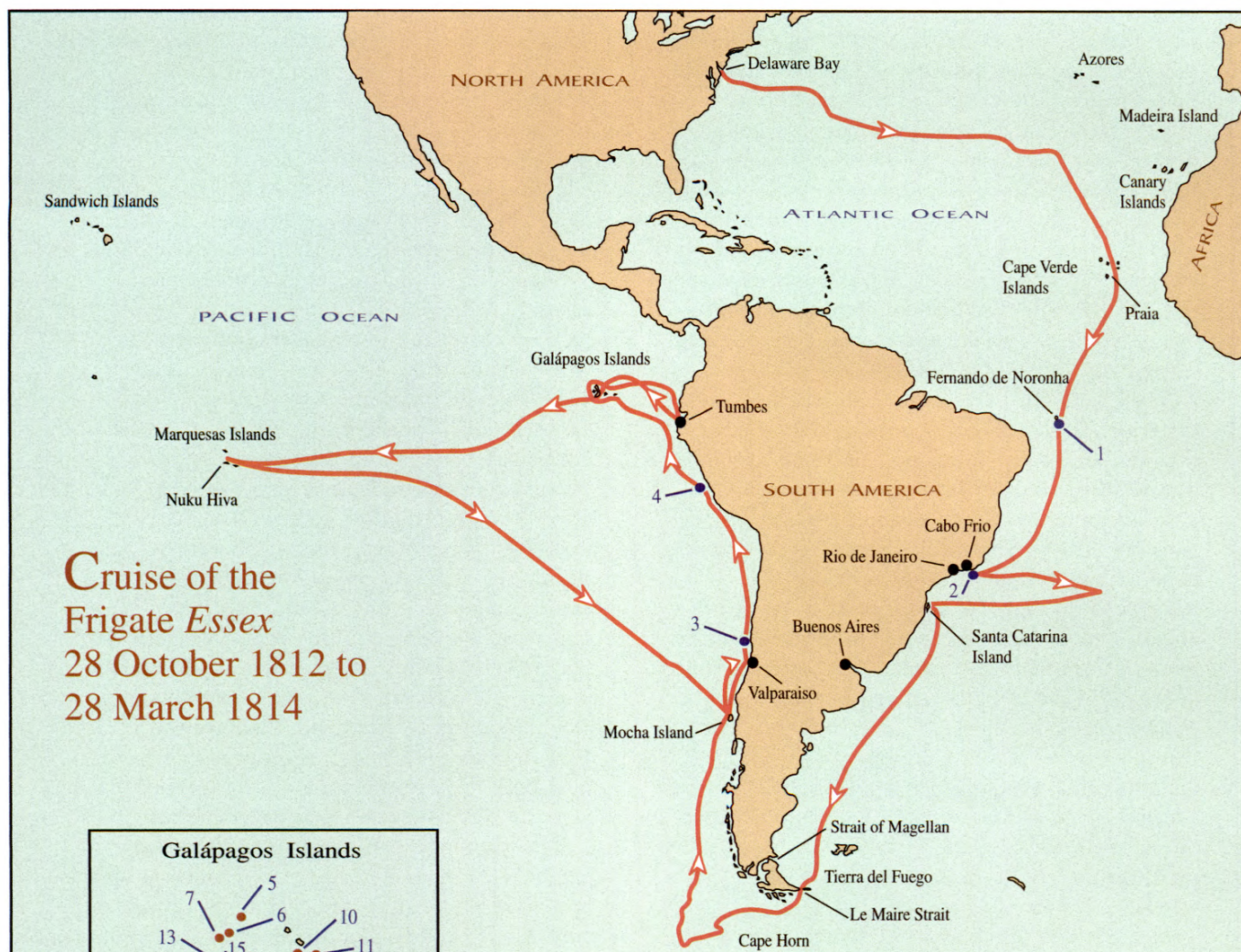
By the later part of the war, it was no longer a matter of invading Canada, but of opposing multiple invasions—from Canada, in the Chesapeake, and in the Gulf of Mexico. Creative tactics by Commodore Macdonough on Lake Champlain foiled the invasion from Canada. In the Chesapeake, naval forces were among the most effective in the insufficient defense of Washington. At the close of the war, elements of the U.S. Navy were central to the victory at New Orleans.

Despite the early American victories in duels between individual ships, the British quickly achieved dominance at sea. From the summer of 1813, Royal Navy ships commanded the waters around the United States, ruining American commerce and laying open the whole of the coastline to attack. On the oceans, the United States Navy was too small to engage a British squadron of any size. Its operations had to be restricted to seeking out lone British warships and raiding British commerce. It could neither challenge the strangling British blockade nor prevent harassment along the American coast and the burning of Washington. Only on the inland lakes, where both sides built fleets from scratch, could the U.S. Navy meet the Royal Navy on nearly equal terms.

The war made manifest the importance of the oceans to America. The need to be strong at sea was now accepted by all parties. There was no talk about putting the Navy back into ordinary (decommissioned and laid up vessels), as had been done following the wars with France (1798–1801) and Tripoli (1801–1806). Rather, the discussion was about how to augment the Navy. In 1816 Congress provided for its gradual increase through the expenditure of one million dollars a year for six years to build nine 74-gun ships of the line, twelve 44-gun frigates, and three steam-propelled batteries for harbor defense.

During the War of 1812, the Navy provided the nation moments of triumph otherwise few and far between. Its victories romanticized and glorified, the Navy became identified as the defender of national honor, economic interests, and individual freedom. During the War of 1812, the United States Navy came of age. Never again would its value be seriously questioned.





#### Key to Captured Vessels

1. British packet *Nocton*, captured December 12, 1812
2. British schooner *Elizabeth*, captured December 29, 1812
3. Peruvian privateer *Nereyda*, captured March 25, 1813
4. American whaler *Barclay*, recaptured March 28, 1813
5. British whaler *Montezuma*, captured April 29, 1813
6. British whaler *Georgiana*, captured April 29, 1813
7. British whaler *Policy*, captured April 29, 1813
8. British whaler *Atlantic*, captured May 29, 1813
9. British whaler *Greenwich*, captured May 29, 1813
10. British whaler *Catherine*, captured June 24, 1813
11. British whaler *Rose*, captured June 24, 1813
12. British whaler *Hector*, captured June 24, 1813
13. British whaler *Charlton*, captured July 14, 1813
14. British whaler *Seringapatam*, captured July 14, 1813
15. British whaler *New Zealander*, captured July 14, 1813
16. British whaler *Sir Andrew Hammond*, captured September 15, 1813



# The Pacific Cruise of the Frigate *Essex*

Charles E. Brodine, Jr.

Of all the cruises undertaken by American warships during the War of 1812, the most remarkable and daring was that of the frigate *Essex* in the Pacific in 1813 and 1814. For more than a year, the Salem-built ship operated in waters in which no American man-of-war had ever before sailed. During that time, *Essex* wreaked havoc among Britain's Pacific whale fishery, upheld national interests in Chile and Peru, and diverted considerable enemy resources toward its capture. What makes these accomplishments all the more extraordinary is that they were carried out thousands of miles from home, in hostile seas far from friendly ports. To keep one's crew fed, clothed, paid, and healthy under such circumstances, as did *Essex*'s commander David Porter, was an exceptional achievement. Had *Essex* returned home safely rather than suffering defeat in combat, its cruise would rank among the greatest in the Navy's history.

The tale of the Pacific cruise of *Essex* is one of the epic stories of the War of 1812. It contains all the elements of a big-screen, high seas adventure: exotic locales, prize taking, ship-to-ship engagements, mutiny, desertion, captivity, heroism, and villainy. Not surprisingly, the deeds of Porter and his men captured the imagination of the American public. And despite the loss of their ship, *Essex*'s commander and crew were welcomed home as heroes. The nation saw in their exploits further evidence that its navy was—in courage, seamanship, and professionalism—the equal of any sea service in the world.

## The Navy's Opening Strategy

From the war's onset, the strategic objective of the Madison administration was to invade and conquer Canada. As the U.S. Navy had only one vessel in service on the Great Lakes at the declaration of hostilities, the Navy Department had to channel its first efforts into seaborne operations and coastal defense. Once the department was able to establish stations and yards on the northern frontier, a greater percentage of its resources went to building up fleets on the northern lakes, until by war's end that theater

became the major focus of the country's naval war effort.

But until this happened, Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton had to decide on how to make best use of the small force at his disposal. In June 1812 the South Carolinian could count only fourteen vessels ready for blue-water service, the largest of these being three 44-gun frigates. Of the 165 gunboats on the Navy's rolls, only 62 were available for coastal and harbor duty. Hamilton deemed it more prudent to concentrate the Navy's few ships in squadrons rather than let them cruise singly. He issued orders for major squadron operations in June and again in September 1812. The objective of these squadrons was twofold: to protect American commerce at sea and to attack the enemy's shipping.

This emphasis on squadron operations would continue for the first six months of the war until the resignation of Hamilton brought William Jones to the secretaryship. Under Jones, the character and purpose of blue-water operations would change for the remainder of the war. The new secretary preferred ships sailing singly or in pairs. He also refined the mission of American cruisers to one overriding objective—the destruction of the enemy's trade and commerce.

## The Mission

*Essex*'s Pacific cruise dates to 9 September 1812 when Secretary Hamilton issued orders for the formation of three cruising squadrons. The secretary selected John Rodgers, William Bainbridge, and Stephen Decatur as his squadron commanders. Each officer was given charge of two frigates and one smaller vessel with complete authority to issue the necessary orders to arrange and outfit them for sea. The secretary gave his three commanders broad discretion in choosing their cruising grounds, recommending only that they select a course of sailing that would best "afford protection to our trade" while annoying "the enemy." Betraying some of the nervousness he must have felt in committing nearly two-thirds of the Navy's fleet to operations at sea,

Hamilton encouraged the squadrons to return to port "as speedily as circumstances" might permit.

*Essex* was assigned to William Bainbridge in *Constitution* along with the sloop of war *Hornet* commanded by Master Commandant James Lawrence. The assignment must have pleased *Essex*'s captain, David Porter, as it reunited him with his friend and former commander Bainbridge. Porter had also served alongside Lawrence in the Barbary Wars. He knew *Hornet*'s captain to be a brave and capable combat officer.

Prior to sending David Porter his cruising orders, Commodore Bainbridge sounded out his friend, William Jones, as to the best cruising grounds for his squadron. The future Navy secretary offered two ideas for Bainbridge's consideration: the first, to cruise in the Indian Ocean—an option fraught with difficulties; and, the second, to cruise off the Brazilian coast and prey on the inbound and outbound East Indian convoys. It was this latter idea that Bainbridge agreed with and the second week of October he sent Porter detailed sailing instructions.

As *Essex* would be sailing on a date and from a port different from those of *Constitution* and *Hornet*, Bainbridge's orders had to provide Porter with the track of the squadron's intended cruise and with dates and places for possible rendezvous. If Bainbridge kept to the schedule he outlined in his orders, then *Essex*, at some point, would be able to unite with its consorts. The commodore provided five different rendezvous points and dates for *Essex* beginning with Port Praia in the Cape Verde Islands on 27 November and ending with St. Helena Island in the South Atlantic in late February 1813. If by 1 April, some "unforeseen cause or accident" had prevented *Essex* from making her appointed rendezvous, Porter was instructed to act according to his own "best judgment for the good of the Service."

Bainbridge's instructions contain no mention of a plan for operations in the Pacific. But according to Porter, he had submitted such a plan to both Hamilton and Bainbridge on separate occasions, and that both men had approved of his ideas. It is certain that Porter's musings on the Pacific date as far back as the summer of 1809 when he proposed making a voyage of discovery to the Pacific Northwest.

## *Essex* and Its Captain

David Porter was superbly qualified to execute the mission set forth in Commodore Bainbridge's cruising orders. The thirty-two-year-old captain was a capable

and resourceful officer with an indefatigable zeal for the service. As a combat commander, he had few peers in the Navy. He trained his crew to a high state of discipline in the use of all shipboard weaponry, from great guns to small arms. His sailors were likewise skilled in the pursuit and attack of enemy ships by boat. Porter himself proved quite adept at employing *ruses de guerre* (tricks of war) to lure enemy vessels under his guns. Physically brave in battle and absolutely cool under fire, David Porter was an inspirational quarterdeck warrior.

Porter's talents were not limited to the military sphere. The frigate commander had great intellectual gifts as evidenced in the journal he kept during his cruise in *Essex*. Published in 1815, Porter's *Journal of a Cruise* is a remarkable document. Much more than a chronological account of *Essex*'s cruise, *Journal of a Cruise* offers vivid descriptions of the peoples and places Porter encountered in his year and a half absence from America. The *Journal* contains commentary on the geography, weather, oceans, animals, and plants of all the places touched at by *Essex* in her sailings. Porter's skilled observations on the manners, customs, and politics of Marquesan society constitute one of the best early ethnographical records we have of that Polynesian culture. The product of a searching and dynamic mind, *Journal of a Cruise* is a memorable retelling of one of the great wartime cruises of the nineteenth century. In the estimation of naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison, it stands as "the best bit of sea literature of the period."

At the outset of hostilities, Porter's *Essex* was stationed at New York. Rated a 32-gun frigate, *Essex* was one of the smallest vessels of that class in the service. Though it initially had the reputation of being a fine sailer, changes in the ship's armament in 1809 and 1810 had dramatically reduced *Essex*'s speed under sail. The alterations in the frigate's main battery (a substitution of carronade guns for long guns) had also rendered the ship a one-dimensional fighting vessel, better suited for combat at close range and boarding actions than long-distance gunnery duels. Thoroughly displeased with his ship's sailing qualities and lack of long guns, David Porter considered *Essex* "the worst frigate in the service," and he lobbied Secretary Hamilton repeatedly for transfer to another command.

While David Porter could do little to alter *Essex*'s shortcomings as a sailing vessel, he could at least compensate for some of the frigate's deficiencies with a well-trained crew. David Farragut, a young midshipman in *Essex*, and Porter's foster son, believed the frigate's company to be the most expert crew in

*continued on page 6*





David Porter, commander of *Essex* on its final cruise.



# A Good Sea Boat

On 16 July 1798 the citizens of Salem, Massachusetts, opened a public subscription to build an armed vessel for the U.S. Navy. The proposed ship was intended to protect American merchantmen from attacks and harassment by vessels bearing the flag of Revolutionary France. As an encouragement to subscribers, the federal government issued interest-bearing securities to those who contributed to the ship's construction. In this way Salem townsfolk pledged more than \$74,000 toward the building of a 32-gun frigate. This frigate, *Essex*, was one of ten "subscription ships" built in port towns from Boston to Charleston during the nation's undeclared naval war with France (1798–1801).

Shipwrights laid down the keel for *Essex* on 15 April 1799. Much of the white oak, metal work, and other materials used in the frigate's construction were purchased locally. The Navy Department bore the cost of rigging, outfitting and arming the ship. Launched in September and ready for its first cruise in December, the new vessel displaced 850 tons, carried a crew of 260 officers and men, and mounted thirty-two long 6- and 12-pounder guns. The ship was christened after the county in which it was built.

In appearance, *Essex* was something of a throwback to an earlier era, resembling more a frigate of the Continental Navy than the larger, more powerful class of that vessel authorized by Congress in 1794—a not surprising circumstance given that its designer, William Hackett, had built several men-of-war for the Continental and Massachusetts State navies during the Revolution, including the Continental Navy frigate *Alliance* along whose lines *Essex* appears to have been modeled. Besides its smaller stature, *Essex* had one other feature that distinguished it from the Navy's new 36- and 44-gun frigates. Unlike the latter vessels, *Essex* did not have a continuous weather deck running fore and aft. Instead, gangways connected its forecabin and quarter decks contributing to its old-fashioned appearance. Though it may have lacked the size and power of the Navy's newer class of frigates, *Essex* was a well-built and well-designed vessel. The ship's handling and speed under sail so impressed its first commander, Edward Preble, that he declared *Essex* "a good sea boat" and the "best model of a frigate (of her rate) in the navy."

THE



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**ENOS BRIGGS.**

SALEM, NOV. 23, 1798.

*Essex's* active service spanned three wars and included a number of notable firsts. It was the first U.S. Navy ship to round both the Cape of Good Hope (1800) and Cape Horn (1813). During the War of 1812, *Essex* had the distinction of capturing the first British warship, HM sloop of war *Alert*, inaugurating a string of naval victories that would inspire Americans and lift national morale. *Essex's* twenty-three captures also rank it among one of the more successful cruisers of the War of 1812.

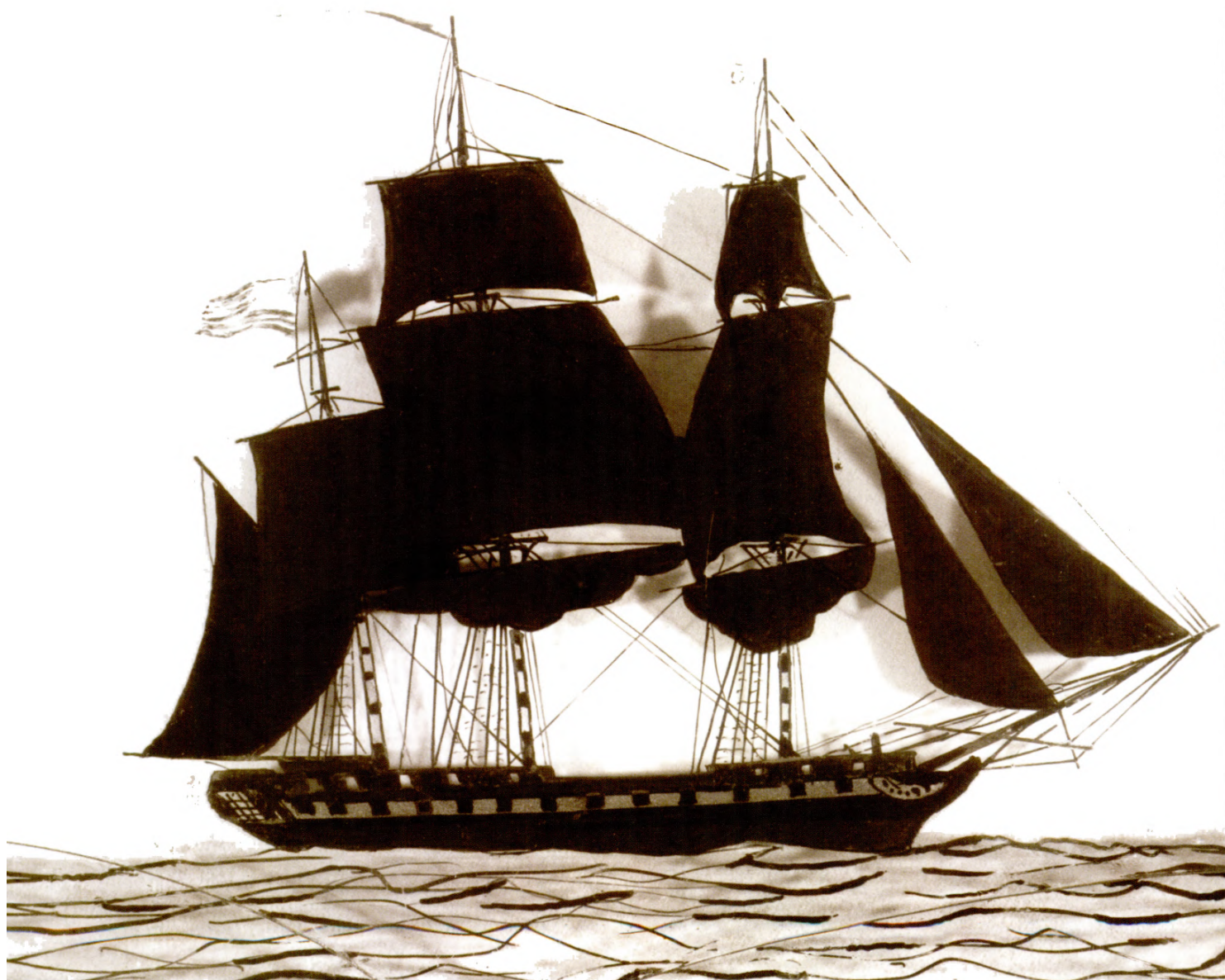
The Royal Navy's purchase of *Essex* following its capture off Valparaiso, Chile, in 1814 closed the American chapter of the Salem frigate's career. The years that followed were marked by neglect and humiliating duty—first nine years spent laid up in the dockyards at Portsmouth, England, then a dozen years as a prison ship on loan to the Irish government at Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire), at the southern end of Dublin Bay. In 1837 the Admiralty struck *Essex* from its list and sold the frigate at auction for £2,010.





*Essex* differed in size, armament, and deck arrangement from the Navy's heavier frigates such as *Constellation* and *Constitution*.





hand-to-hand combat he had ever seen. "I have never been in a Ship," he remarked, "where there were any of the *Essex* Crew, that were not the best stick players on board—Boarding was our forte, and every man was prepared for it, with a dirk made by our armourer out of an old file, a Cutlass that you might shave with, and a pistol." It was this attention to discipline that earned *Essex* the reputation as being one of the "smartest" ships in the fleet.

*Essex* had been slated to accompany John Rodgers on the Navy's first squadron cruise following the declaration of war on 18 June. But the need for last-minute repairs to the frigate's coppered hull and masts prevented its participation in that operation. Once the required repairs were complete, *Essex* put to sea on 3

**Salem, Massachusetts' contribution to the undeclared naval war against France—the frigate *Essex*.**

July on an independent cruise. The frigate ranged between Bermuda and Newfoundland over a two-month period making nine captures including a troop transport and the first Royal Navy warship taken during the war—HM sloop of war *Alert*. The success of this cruise whetted David Porter's considerable appetite for prize money and glory.

No sooner had *Essex* returned home from one cruise than the Navy Department was directing Porter to ready the frigate for another one. He received more specific orders from William Bainbridge during the first weeks of October. Once the length of the cruise to be undertaken became clear, Porter took every step to prepare his ship for extended service at sea. He had the holds stowed to capacity with provisions of all

types, especially fruits, vegetables, and juices to prevent scurvy. Extra stores of all kinds were shipped on board including double supplies of clothing. Porter also issued the officers and men advances on their pay and prize moneys so they could provide themselves with additional comforts for the long cruise ahead.

## First Challenges Under Sail

On 26 October 1812 *Constitution* and *Hornet* made sail from Boston harbor. The third member of the squadron, *Essex*, cleared the Delaware Capes two days later. Once the frigate was underway, Porter set about putting his "ship in prime order for any service." That meant arranging *Essex*'s company of 319 men into watches and messes; making repairs and adjustments to the sails and rigging; organizing and re-stowing the ship's stores and provisions; and exercising the men at their battle stations. Porter also devoted considerable attention to matters relating to his crew's health and morale. He recognized that a fit and cheerful crew meant well-handled sails and smartly served guns.

To promote the health of his men, Porter required the crew to keep their clothing, bedding, and persons clean. In the more "sultry and oppressive" weather of the equatorial latitudes, he kept his men out of the sun and "as free from exercise as possible." He also allowed them to sling their hammocks on the gun deck where the air and temperatures were less stifling. To encourage a spirited crew, Porter laid in stores of fresh provisions whenever possible; ensured his men had time each day for relaxation and amusement; and issued regular payments of wages and prize moneys.

There were other concerns besides health and morale that demanded Porter's attention. For one thing, the ship was so heavily laden with extra stores and provisions that she labored and rolled in foul weather. The resulting strain on the ship's frames and planking opened its waterways, causing flooding below decks and in the holds. Caulking, regular pumping, and the cutting of additional scuttles helped minimize further water damage. Porter also found that the frigate's new rigging "had stretched considerably" since being under sail, rendering the masts insecure. Repairs awaited calm weather when the crew could adjust and tighten the standing and running rigging.

Porter's greatest worry, however, was the state of *Essex*'s food and water supply. As *Essex* would be spending an extended time at sea, far from sure sources of supply, Porter had to make certain the food and water he carried on board did not run out. Threats to the ship's provisions abounded, including

rats and weevils, wastage, spoilage, and pilferage. To stretch his supplies, Porter reduced by one-third the amount of most articles issued in the daily ration. Further relief from the steady drain on the ship's salt provisions was made through the purchase of livestock and fresh fruits and vegetables when *Essex* made port.

Water was by far the most precious commodity in *Essex*, and Porter monitored the consumption of that provision very carefully. He allowed the crew one-half gallon a day for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene. The ship's water stores received some replenishment through the collection of rainwater. Resupply in quantity had to await landfalls and the organization of shore parties to fill *Essex*'s water casks.

## Essex Seeks a Rendezvous

Porter's first rendezvous point with Bainbridge's squadron was Port Praia at the island of São Tiago in the Cape Verde archipelago. *Essex* made this 3,500-mile leg of its cruise in thirty days, arriving at Praia on 27 November. Porter remained there for five days to take on water, food, and wood. Porter's inquiries regarding *Constitution* and *Hornet* revealed that the frigate and sloop had not yet visited the island. The frigate captain thus set *Essex*'s course for the next point of rendezvous, the Brazilian island of Fernando de Noronha.

On 12 December, the lone American cruiser enjoyed its first stroke of good fortune, overhauling and capturing the British packet brig *Nocton*. The packet proved to be a rich prize carrying \$55,000 in specie aboard. Believing *Nocton* to be a likely candidate for purchase into the Navy, Porter dispatched the brig with a prize crew of fifteen to the United States. Two days after *Nocton*'s capture, *Essex* arrived off Fernando de Noronha. There he received a coded letter from Bainbridge instructing him to seek the squadron off the coast of Brazil between Cape Frio and Rio de Janeiro. Without waiting to take on water or provisions, Porter immediately set sail in search of *Constitution* and *Hornet*.

*Essex* arrived off Cape Frio the last week of December and began working the approaches off Rio de Janeiro. Porter failed to meet up with Bainbridge but he did make his second capture of the cruise, the British schooner *Elizabeth*, taken on 29 December. Learning from the schooner's crew that a small, homeward-bound convoy of British merchantmen was not far off, Porter clapped on a full press of canvas and sailed in quest of the enemy shipping. He left behind a small prize crew to sail the leaky schooner to either

*continued on page 10*



# King Neptune Pays *Essex* A Visit

At half past twelve on the afternoon of 23 November 1812, the cry of "sail ahoy" rang out from *Essex's* masthead. Normally, such a call from the frigate's lookout would have resulted in all hands scrambling to quarters as *Essex* prepared to meet the unknown vessel. On this particular day, however, the sail spied was neither merchantman nor enemy warship. Instead it was a small boat commanded by none other than King Neptune himself, the sovereign of the seas. *Essex's* encounter with the mythic ruler of the oceans was no coincidence. Indeed, the entire ship's company except the "greenhorns" must have eagerly anticipated it, for *Essex* was nearing the Tropic of Cancer, and it had long been the custom in the northern Atlantic world to mark a ship's passage into the tropics with a special celebration—a crossing the line ceremony. During this ceremony, senior members of the ship's company donned costumes assuming the roles of King Neptune, his wife, Amphitrite, and other members of his royal retinue. With Neptune presiding, this entourage oversaw the initiation of crewmen who had never before crossed the line (usually inexperienced landmen) into the brotherhood of the deep. The occasion was marked by the free flow of liquor, relaxed discipline, and a carnival atmosphere enjoyable to all save the poor initiates who were given a pretty rough handling.

For seamen in the early sailing navy, the crossing the line ceremony served as a welcome break from the strict rules and routine that governed shipboard life. More importantly it was a rite of passage whereby landmen could claim status as true sailors and "sons of Neptune." That tradition continues in today's naval service, as U.S. warships still mark the crossing of the line—now the equator rather than the Tropic of Cancer—with a visit from Old King Neptune, vigorous though less rigorous initiation rites for the landlubbers aboard, and festive ceremonies.

The following passage, from the journal of Midshipman William W. Feltus, describes the

crossing the line ceremony that took place aboard *Essex* in 1812.

When the ship was supposed to be about on the line the man at the mast head was directed to cry Sail OI & being asked by the officer of the deck where away & what she looked like. he answered a small boat on the Lee bow. then the officer of the deck hailed and asked what boat that was, he was answered that it was Neptunes the god of the seas & that he wished permission to come on board with his train. as soon as It was granted one of the B[oatswain's] Mates with some others being in the fore chains, came over the Bows and mounted their carriage (made of some boards lashed together on an old gun carriage having two chairs lashed thereon for Neptune & his wife) this carriage was drawn by 4 men some with their shirts off & their Bodies painted & others with their trowsers cut off above the knees & their legs painted & their faces painted in this manner accompanied by his Barbers with their razors made of an Iron hoop & constables & Band of music they marched on the quarter deck where he dismounted with his wife and spoke to the Captain for permission to shave such as had not crossed the line before officers excepted, provided that they would pay some rum, this was granted, they immediately got into one of the boats filled with water with all his barbers (those that had not been across the line before were ordered below) and 1 was brought up at a time.

*Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Journal of William W. Feltus, 1812–1814, Collection no. 202.*





Eyewitness sketch of a crossing the line ceremony in the American ship *Tarquin*, 1862.



# An Enduring Tradition



The monarch of the ocean and his royal party pay USS *Maryland* (ACR 8) a visit in 1912. Inset, a certificate awarded to BM1 John Allen of USS *Maryland* (BB 46) following a crossing the line ceremony in 1922.

Rio or America. For two weeks, Porter searched in vain for the convoy before giving up the chase. In frustration, *Essex's* commander set off, once again, for another designated rendezvous spot. This time he pointed the frigate's helm to Santa Catarina Island, five hundred miles south of Rio.

## The Decision to Enter the Pacific

*Essex* made port at Santa Catarina on 20 January 1813. The ship's stores of salt provisions, bread, water, and rum were running low and Porter hoped to replenish them before returning to sea. While he was able to obtain plenty of water and wood, Porter was disappointed in completing the ship's other necessary stores. Even with the reductions he had ordered in the crew's daily rations, the amount of remaining foodstuffs had reached worrisome levels. Adding to Porter's concerns was the disturbing intelligence he had collected from conversations with Portuguese

merchantmen over the month of January. Although some of the information he had gathered was conflicting, taken as a whole, it pointed to serious trouble for *Essex*. He had heard that James Lawrence's *Hornet* had been lost in battle—a report actually false. He also learned that British warships were hunting the remaining American cruisers. The one positive piece of news Porter had received was that *Constitution* had defeated and sunk a British frigate.

Taken together, the state of *Essex's* victuals and the intelligence on enemy activity put David Porter at a crossroads. He could not stay at Santa Catarina without risking blockade. He did not have sufficient provisions to make the voyage home or to sail to St. Helena, the squadron's last rendezvous point. According to Porter, he appeared to have few choices other than "capture, starvation, or blockade." After considering his alternatives, only one possibility seemed to present itself to the American commander—to sail into the Pacific. Contemplating



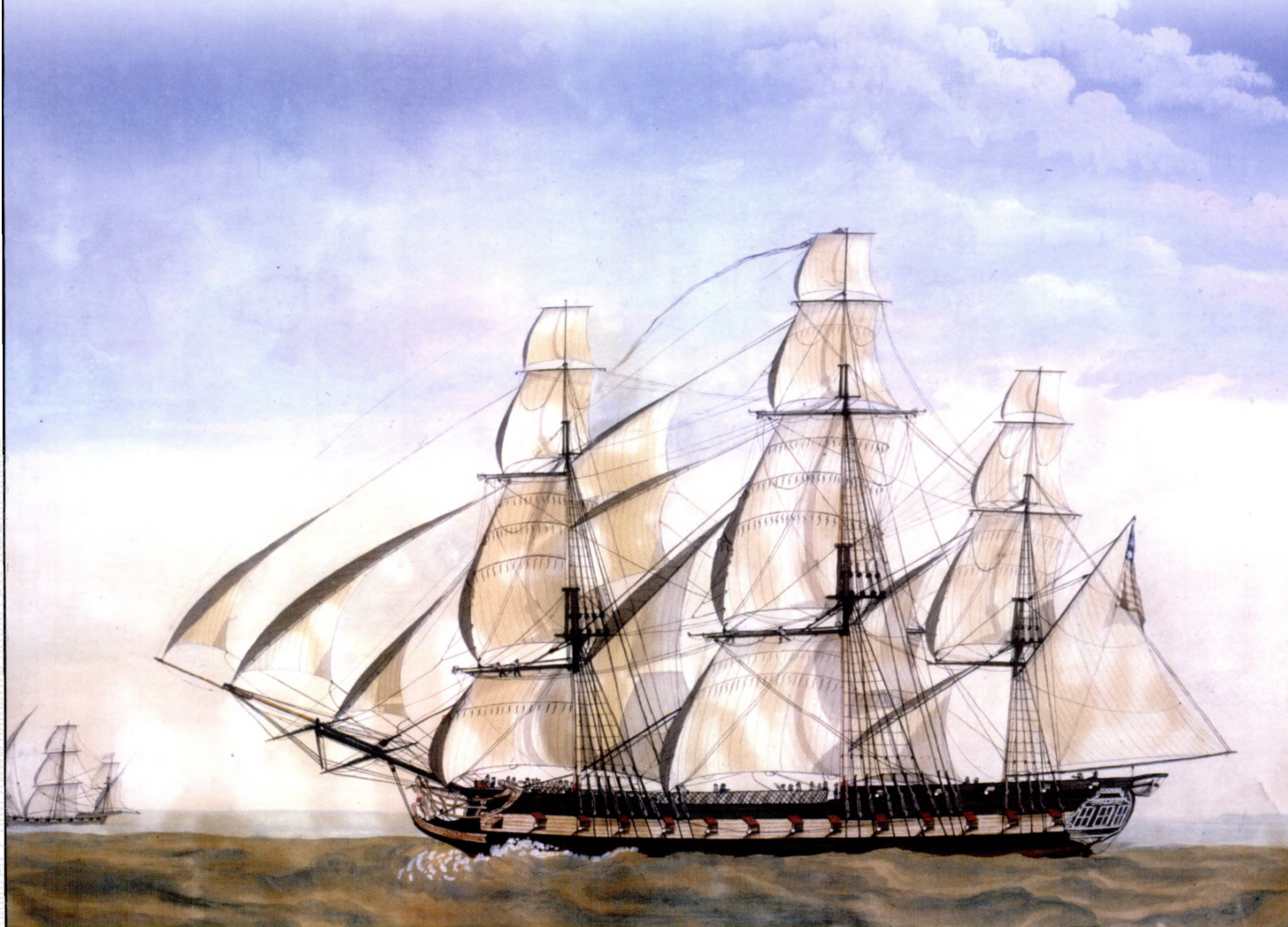
the plan he had laid out to Hamilton and Bainbridge, Porter reckoned he had enough provisions to double Cape Horn and reach the Chilean coast, where he could resupply his vessel. He then would set out to attack the British whale fishery and subsist *Essex* from the prizes he took. Resolved on his course of action, David Porter set sail on 26 January 1813 for the Pacific Ocean.

Despite his conviction that he had made the only decision possible consistent with preserving his ship and continuing his mission, David Porter felt troubled as *Essex* made its way southward. By prematurely exercising the discretionary portion of his orders, the frigate commander knew he was departing from the letter of his instructions. He was also embarking on a risky plan that could easily result in the loss or destruction of his ship and professional censure. Moreover, he was sailing his ship into a "part of the

ocean" notorious for its "violent gales and tremendous and irregular seas." Could *Essex* in its current weathered and leaky state survive such a passage? Porter was also concerned about his men's morale. They had borne much hardship, having spent three months at sea on reduced rations. In all likelihood, their captain would have to make additional reductions in their diet. The enlistments of some of the ship's men were also due to run out soon. Under such circumstances, could Porter expect his crew to follow him willingly into the Pacific?

### From Cape Horn to Valparaiso

*Essex's* passage around Cape Horn and into the Pacific was slow, difficult, and full of hardship. The weather was cold and blustery, accompanied by a pelting mix of rain and hail. Handling the sails and



The only known contemporary painting of *Essex*.



rigging under such conditions was hard, fatiguing work. The frigate constantly shipped water, making conditions for those below decks wet and miserable. A general lack of shoes and warm clothing among the men further contributed to the suffering on board. The ship's provisions were also running dangerously low. Porter claimed that the men's desire for fresh provisions became so great "that a rat was esteemed a dainty, and pet monkeys were sacrificed to appease their longings."

*Essex* rounded Cape Horn on 14 February. Ten days later Porter felt he had gained enough seaway westward of the Cape to set a northward course up the coast of Chile. Believing that the worst of their voyage was behind them, the officers and men of *Essex* began to dream of the glory and prize shares that lay in store for them. Then, early on the morning of 3 March disaster struck. A heavy sea broke over the frigate's decks, shattering much of its upper works and sending a deluge of water down its hatchways. The violence of this blow, the sudden inundation of water below decks, and the darkness of the hour created panic among the crew, who believed the ship was sinking. In later years, David Farragut would recall the events of that night as being "the only instance" where he knew "regular seaman, to be paralyzed by the danger of the sea— Many of the marines & some of the seamen were sunk on their Knees in prayers." The cool-headed behavior of Porter and some of the ship's more experienced officers and hands saved the frigate from catastrophe.

*Essex* continued its northward trek up the Chilean coast until 14 March when the frigate arrived off Valparaiso. The following day, the American warship entered the city's harbor and anchored. Despite his ship's desperate need for food and water, Porter was pessimistic that town officials would grant his requests for provisions. Chile was a colonial possession of Spain, an ally of Great Britain. Moreover, relations between Spain and the United States were strained due to American territorial ambitions in Spanish Florida. Finally, Spanish officials had traditionally viewed all foreign contacts

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## Young Midshipman Farragut



Lieutenant David G. Farragut, as he appeared a quarter century after his adventures in *Essex*.

David Glasgow Farragut was a veteran of fifty years' naval service when the Civil War began in April 1861. Little in Farragut's record at the time suggested the greatness that lay in store for him. His was a career more notable for its length in years than for accomplishments of marked distinction. Yet Farragut



emerged from peacetime obscurity to become the greatest naval officer of the Civil War. Under his direction the Union Navy's West Gulf Blockading Squadron captured New Orleans, wrested control of the lower Mississippi River from the Confederacy, and won the Battle of Mobile Bay. By war's end Farragut was a national hero, celebrated in song and verse. A grateful Congress elevated the Tennessee native to the rank of admiral. Today, Farragut stands as the preeminent American naval officer of the nineteenth century.

How did the man one New York newspaper dubbed "the American Viking" win such acclaim as a sea fighter? For the officers who served under him, the keys to David Farragut's success were no mystery. In their estimation he was the quintessential combat commander: daring, resolute, and utterly fearless, with a gambler's instinct for seizing the main chance. Complementing these qualities were Farragut's active mind, keen judgment, and physical energy. Above all, he was a highly professional officer, a man whom General William T. Sherman called "a thorough man-of-war's man."

This critical blend of talent, character, and training that catapulted David Farragut to Civil War fame was forged over the course of five decades in the Navy. Of these years, perhaps none were more important to Farragut's development as a naval officer than those he served in *Essex* under the command of David Porter. Farragut entered the frigate as a midshipman in August 1811. He was only ten years of age at the time and *Essex* was his first seagoing berth. The frigate would serve as Farragut's schoolhouse and within its wooden walls he began his naval education, steadily acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to command men and ships.

While textbooks had a place in young David's shipboard instruction, he learned his most valuable lessons through hands-on experience, and *Essex*'s far-ranging wartime cruises offered him an invaluable introduction to the possibilities of a sailor's life: the exciting novelty of travel to distant lands; the terror of near-foundering in gale force storms; the tedium of extended months at sea; the exhilaration of first

command; the shocking carnage of ship-to-ship combat; the sobering duty of caring for wounded shipmates; the humiliation of capture and imprisonment. The memory of these experiences remained with Farragut long after he returned home. They contributed in a fundamental way to his maturation and growth as a naval officer.

Equally crucial to the novice midshipman's professional development was his relationship with *Essex*'s commander, David Porter. Porter was David Farragut's foster father, friend, and mentor. In him, Farragut had a figure worthy of emulation for Porter was the very embodiment of a successful naval officer: bold, intelligent, patriotic, and an accomplished warrior and seaman. It was under Porter's tutelage that Farragut gained his first insights into the art of command. He observed the careful attention Porter paid to the management of *Essex*'s crew—to their drill and training, to their health and morale. In later years, Farragut would recall with pride that Porter's *Essex* enjoyed a reputation for being one of the "smartest" ships in the service, its crew noted for their discipline and fighting spirit.

But the most important example Porter set for his young protégé was that of a cool and determined leader in battle. In the engagement between *Essex* and her British blockaders off Valparaiso, Chile, David Porter was the absolute picture of a self-possessed commander directing his ship's defenses amidst the maelstrom of combat. It was Porter's unwavering leadership in this uneven contest that inspired his men to fight on, even in the face of overwhelming odds. A half century later, David Farragut would demonstrate his own quiet steadiness under fire when he led his squadron's vessels into battle, most memorably at Mobile Bay in August 1864. At a critical juncture in that fight, with his ships subjected to a withering cannonade and in danger of sinking from underwater mines, Farragut ordered his flagship *Hartford* to take the squadron's van and lead the way into Confederate waters and to victory. His utterance of "Damn the Torpedoes!" has now become part of U.S. Navy lore. David Porter would have been proud.



with Spain's American colonies with hostility and suspicion.

But the timing of *Essex's* arrival could not have been more fortuitous. As Porter discovered, Chile was in the midst of a struggle for independence from Spanish rule and the Chilean people "looked up to the United States for example and protection." Desirous of keeping the true object of his mission in the Pacific secret, the frigate captain did nothing to discourage his hosts' belief that *Essex* had arrived at Valparaíso to assist their revolutionary efforts.

*Essex's* appearance at Valparaíso was opportune for another reason. The captain of a Yankee whaler represented to Porter the defenseless state of the American whale fishery in the Pacific. He informed the Navy captain that most American ships were unarmed, ignorant of the war, and thus "entirely exposed to attack and capture by armed English ships." In fact, British and Peruvian privateers had already captured numbers of American whalers. *Essex's* entrance into Pacific waters promised an end to this harassment.

## Northward to Peru

On 23 March, with its stores complete, *Essex* made sail from Valparaíso. Porter planned to cruise the waters lying between the coast of Peru and the Galápagos Islands, as this stretch of ocean was known to be "the favourite fishing ground of British whalers." The whole ship was abuzz with talk of the rich prizes that would be taken. No fewer than twenty enemy whalers were said to be on the coast of Chile and Peru. Porter estimated the value of a typical whaler's cargo of spermaceti oil to be \$200,000.

Yet windfalls of prize moneys were not the only things that fired the ambition of *Essex's* people. At Valparaíso the crew had heard confirmed reports of *Constitution's* victory over *Java*. This news made the Salem frigate's crew "pant" for their own opportunity to acquire distinction. Recognizing that there was little chance of attaining combat glory in the Pacific, Porter and his men contented themselves with a service no less essential to the nation: protecting American commerce while destroying "that of the enemy." During *Essex's* Pacific operations, the frigate would proudly fly a motto flag emblazoned with the words, "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights."

Two days out of Valparaíso, Porter gained intelligence of the recent capture of American whalers by the British letter of marque *Nimrod* and the 15-gun Peruvian privateer *Nereyda*. He made all sail in chase

of the two ships. On 26 March *Essex* overtook the Peruvian, liberating twenty-three American prisoners on board. Porter disarmed *Nereyda*, sending the ship into Lima with an explanatory letter to the viceroy of Peru. He then continued in quest of *Nimrod*. While that ship managed to elude capture, Porter did retake one of *Nereyda's* prizes, the whaler *Barclay*, off Callao. Because *Barclay* was too weakly manned to remain on the Peruvian coast, Porter gave its captain, Gideon Randall, permission to sail in company with *Essex*.

As *Essex* worked along the Peruvian coast, Porter ordered the frigate repainted and rigged with a false poop so as to conceal the ship's actual strength and "give her completely the appearance of a Spanish merchant vessel." Such deception enabled *Essex* to confuse the enemy as to its whereabouts and lure potential prizes under its guns. On 11 April, Porter gave up the search for British whalers near the mainland, and shaped a course for the Galápagos Islands.

En route to those islands, David Porter readied his ship and crew for the impending campaign. The frigate's magazines were put in order in expectation of actions with heavily armed whalers. A more important consideration for Porter was the calm winds that prevailed in the Galápagos—winds that might baffle or thwart ship-to-ship pursuit. He therefore made preparations for organizing the ship's boats into a fighting force. Boat crews were selected, plans of attack were laid down, and signals were established. *Essex's* first lieutenant, John Downes, was given command of the attack force amounting to seventy men in seven boats.

## Operations in the Galápagos

*Essex* made the six-hundred-mile voyage to the Galápagos in six days, arriving at that archipelago on 17 April. Lying athwart the equator, this island group was also known as Las Encantadas, or "the Enchanted Islands." To David Porter, they appeared "dreary, desolate," and thoroughly "unsuited for the residence of man." The islands contained numerous active volcanoes affording the *Essex* crew several spectacular shows of natural fireworks. What captured the Yankee sailors' attention most was the remarkable variety of exotic animals that resided on each island—tortoises, lizards, and birds, among others.

Despite their inhospitable character, the islands proved an ideal cruising ground for *Essex*. They afforded the frigate good anchorages for repairs, refreshment, and relaxation ashore. As a frequent stop-

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# Essex in the Galápagos

When David Porter entered the Pacific Ocean, it was with one objective in mind—to attack British whalers fishing off the west coast of South America. The Galápagos Islands offered the American commander the perfect hunting ground for his quarry. The Pacific archipelago was a popular cruising ground for whalers of all nationalities both as a place to stop for refreshment (wood, water, and food) and as locale to hunt the valuable sperm whale. One island in particular, Charles Island, offered the additional attraction of a makeshift mail drop known as “Hathaway’s Post-office.” In a box nailed to a post on this island, outward- and homeward-bound whaling vessels left mail for exchange. The letters left at Hathaway’s post office provided Porter with important intelligence on the movements of British whalers passing through the islands.

Besides laying him close to potential prizes, the Galápagos Islands afforded David Porter one other advantage as a cruising ground—an ample supply of fresh provisions, especially meat. The islands were home to a wondrous variety of exotic animals that when caught, cooked, and served up, proved a welcome substitute to *Essex’s* salt provisions. During their sojourn

in the Galápagos, the frigate’s company feasted on fish, crabs, birds, iguanas, and turtles. But it was the Galápagos tortoise that *Essex* men most highly prized for their mess tables. According to Porter:

No animal can possibly afford a more wholesome, luscious, and delicate food than they do; the finest green turtle is no more to be compared to them in point of excellence, than the coarsest beef is to the finest veal; and after once tasting the Gallapagos tortoises, every other animal food fell greatly in our estimation.

The abundant and edible Galápagos fauna enabled *Essex* to quest for prizes in that archipelago far longer than might otherwise have been possible had only the ship’s regular stores been available for consumption. Save for a six-week-long voyage to Peru to take on water, the Yankee frigate cruised in that island group from mid-April until early October of 1813, capturing a dozen British whalers. In no small way did the leviathan of the Galápagos—the tortoise—contribute to American success.





off point for British whalers, they held the potential for frequent captures. Had it not been for the great scarcity of water in the islands, Porter could have maintained his operations in the Galápagos unbroken.

*Essex's* operations in the Galápagos spanned five and a half months, from 17 April to 3 October 1813. The activities of the ship and its company during this time can be described in three separate phases. In the first phase, from mid-April to mid-June, *Essex* took eight prizes in the Galápagos. John Downes was responsible for making three of these captures, having been given command of the prize *Georgiana* and allowed to cruise separately from the frigate. In the second phase, from mid-June to early July, *Essex* and her prizes broke off their cruising to take on water and wood at Tumbes, Peru. At this time, Downes was given command of the captured whaler *Atlantic*, renamed *Essex Junior*, as a separate cruiser. In the third phase, spanning mid-July to early October, *Essex* returned to cruising in the islands, making an additional four captures, while John Downes escorted four prizes along with the whaler *Barclay* to Valparaiso. After disposing of the prizes at the Chilean port, Downes rendezvoused with Porter again in the Galápagos at the end of September.

The whale ships that *Essex* captured were virtually floating storehouses. Because these vessels had to keep at sea for extended periods of time, they were well-provided with

all manner of naval stores and provisions including canvas, cordage, cables, spars, anchors, paint, clothes, medicines, food, and water. Porter put these materials to good use in keeping his ship repaired and his crew supplied. It would have been inconceivable for *Essex* to remain at sea for so long without the benefit of these captured stores.

Operations in the Galápagos posed a number of challenges for David Porter. The greatest of these was

**John Downes, *Essex's*  
First Lieutenant.**



the scarcity of water. It was obtainable on some islands, but not in sufficient quantities to eliminate shortages. The islands' aridity and hot temperatures only compounded the problems of dehydration for thirsty sailors. Is it any wonder then, that Porter described the one hundred tons of water captured in *Atlantic* as being "an article of more value to us than any thing else she could have had" on board.

Another problem was the disposition of prisoners and ships. The hundreds of men *Essex* captured represented not only a security risk to the ship but a drain on its stores as well. The prizes themselves siphoned away the frigate's manpower, each one requiring drafts of officers and sailors to man them. To some extent the effects of this drain on *Essex*'s manpower were offset by the number of captured whalers (a surprising number of whom were Americans) who were willing to enlist as part of *Essex*'s crew. Ultimately, to rid himself of this unwanted burden, Porter converted several of his prize ships into cartels and shipped his prisoners off to the mainland.

By mid-September, David Porter concluded that there was little to be gained by further cruising in the Galápagos having already scooped up the majority of British whalers in the area. The American captain now turned his attention to preparing his ship for a voyage to the Marquesas Islands. After eleven months at sea, *Essex* stood in dire need of repairs and the Marquesas offered Porter a remote, well-watered location for overhauling his ship undisturbed. The news John Downes brought with him from Valparaiso made the need for immediate repairs all the more pressing—three British warships, the frigate *Phoebe* and sloops of war *Cherub* and *Raccoon*, were now on the lookout for *Essex*. Porter knew he had little chance of prevailing in combat against any of these vessels unless *Essex* was restored to its proper fighting trim.

Besides repairs, Porter was also concerned about the large population of rats infesting the frigate's spaces. The rodents had multiplied to such an extent that they posed a very real danger to the ship and its company. The voracious vermin were literally "eating their way through every part of the ship." The only way to rid the frigate of these pests was to empty and fumigate the ship's holds.

## On to the Marquesas

*Essex* got underway for the Marquesas, or Washington Islands, on 3 October. News of their intended destination put the crew in high spirits. They "could talk and think of nothing," recorded Porter,

"but the beauties of the islands we were about visiting." After an uneventful passage, *Essex* arrived at that island group on 23 October. Two days later the frigate sailed into Taioha'e Bay at the island of Nuku Hiva.

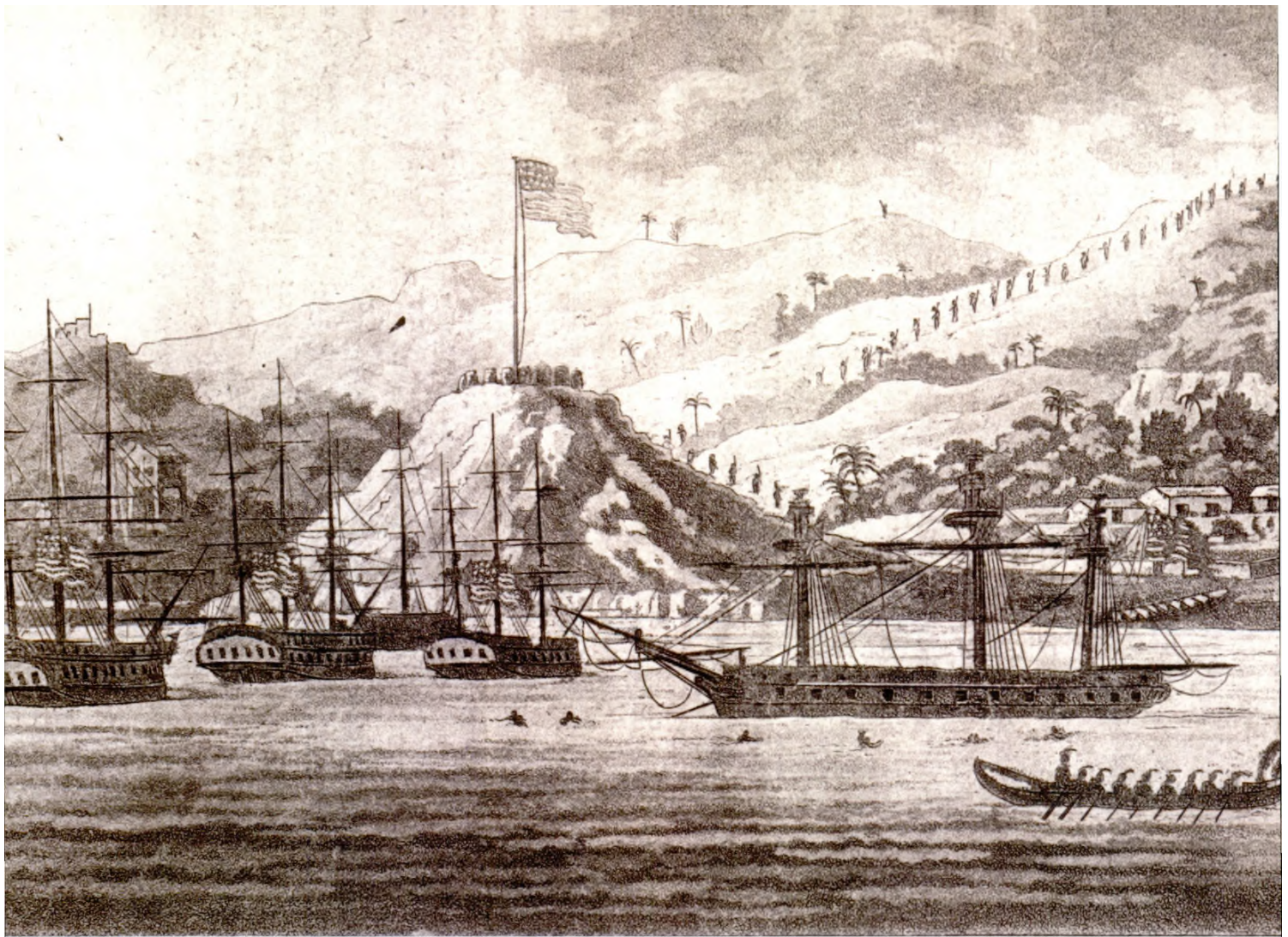
The natives who greeted Porter inhabited the valley of Taioha'e and were part of a tribe known collectively as the Te I'i. Porter described them as tall, well proportioned, and exceedingly handsome. One of their more striking features was the intricate tattooing that covered their bodies. Porter compared the skin of one elderly tattooed Marquesan to that of a "highly wrought piece of mahogany." After a brief period of apprehension, friendly relations were established between the Te I'i and the Americans.

Porter's first order of business was to issue orders expediting the frigate's repair. At his direction, the ship was hauled in close to shore, had its sails unbent, and rigging struck down. Next, the entire frigate's stores, provisions, and ammunition were removed ashore or transferred to the prizes. Large pots containing charcoal fires were then placed below decks with closed hatchways to suffocate the rats. Porter estimated that 1,200–1,500 rodents were destroyed in this way. The ship was then recaulked, rerigged, and painted. A ropewalk was even established ashore to make additional cordage for the ship. Native divers using coconut husks cleaned the ship's hull, which had become fouled with barnacles, moss, and sea grasses.

Porter established a work schedule that allowed his men plenty of time for rest and entertainment. Labor on the ships ceased daily at 4 P.M. Each day one quarter of the men were allowed to remain on shore overnight. Women were the chief attraction for the *Essex* men on liberty. To the crew's delight, the customs of Marquesan culture permitted females to engage in as many romantic liaisons as they chose without shame or reproach. For them, Porter observed, sex was "an innocent and harmless amusement." The introduction of lusty sailors among such liberated women was predictable. "All was helter skelter, and promiscuous intercourse," declared Porter, "every girl the wife of every man in the mess, and frequently of every man in the ship." For those seeking other than amorous amusements, time was spent "wrestling, throwing the spear, jumping, and throwing quoits (ring toss)."

Relations between the Nuku Hivans and the frigate's crew were not always as amiable as their shore frolics might suggest. Less than a week after *Essex* arrived at the Marquesan island, Porter found himself caught up in native politics and intertribal warfare. As





the American captain soon discovered, the mountains and valleys that crisscrossed Nuku Hiva divided the island not only physically but politically as well. Thus native alliances and rivalries followed the contours of the island's topography. To remain on good terms with his hosts, the Te I'i tribe, Porter had to fight their enemies in the neighboring valley, the Ha'apa'a. No sooner had fighting with the Ha'apa'a concluded, than Porter felt compelled to wage war against another tribe, the Taipi.

Porter's native opponents were not easily overawed by American firearms and they proved to be expert bush fighters, adept at ambush and attacking from cover. They were also masters in the use



**Native women were one of the chief attractions of Nuku Hiva for *Essex's* sailors.**

of spears and rock-throwing slings. John Downes had a leg bone shattered by one of these sling-thrown missiles. Porter's aggressive "fire and sword" style of campaigning against the Ha'apa'a and Taipi led those tribes to sue for peace with the Americans.

There were also internal threats to David Porter's command. The first of these was a prisoners' plot to seize control of *Essex Junior* and sail her to freedom. Furious that his British prisoners had violated their pledges of good behavior, Porter placed them in irons and set them at hard labor. Discontent also appeared among the frigate's enlisted ranks. Some of the men found the "charms" of Nuku Hiva so alluring that, as the time for *Essex's* departure neared, their





Left, *Essex* under repair in Taioha'e Bay, Nuku Hiva. Porter christened his temporary settlement ashore Madisonville. Below, Mouina, warrior chief of the Te I'i tribe, as drawn by David Porter.

campaign in the Galápagos had been, David Porter now aimed at something grander to cap off his cruise in the Pacific. He intended to seek out combat with the enemy. Knowing that Captain James Hillyar, the commander of HM frigate *Phoebe* would be looking for *Essex* at Valparaiso, David Porter made sail for that port on 13 December.

Remaining behind at Nuku Hiva was Marine Lieutenant John Gamble with orders to prepare three prize ships for sea while awaiting the return of *Essex*. Gamble's detachment consisted of twenty officers and men plus a charge of six prisoners. The Marine commander's situation on the island steadily

willingness to return to sea faded. Stricter discipline and several summary punishments kept all hands to their duty, though the threat of desertion and mutiny remained until the day of *Essex's* departure.

Before he left Nuku Hiva, Porter took the extraordinary step of annexing the island for the United States. He recognized the island's potential as a way station for American shipping in the Pacific. At a special ceremony held on 19 November 1813, the American captain read a formal declaration taking possession of the island. In honor of the president, Porter renamed Nuku Hiva, Madison's Island. While Porter claimed to be acting at the behest of the Nuku Hivans who desired a more permanent connection with their American visitors, it is doubtful whether the natives grasped the true import of Porter's declaration. In the end, the Navy captain's actions proved for naught, as the American government failed to acknowledge the island's annexation.

By the first week of December, the repairs to *Essex* were complete. As personally satisfying as his



*Mouina.*  
*Chief Warrior of the Te I'i.*





Above, Marine lieutenant John M. Gamble who commanded the detachment Porter left at Nuku Hiva in December 1813. Below, a Marquesan war canoe.

deteriorated over the next five months, with breaches in discipline, growing friction with the native population, incidents of desertion, and finally mutiny. On 7 May 1814, mutineers overwhelmed Gamble and his loyal seamen. It was at this critical juncture that the native islanders struck, killing four of Gamble's men. Gamble and his remaining crew of seven made a hairbreadth escape to the Hawaiian Islands only to be captured there in June by HM sloop of war *Cherub*. Gamble and his shipmates would endure a year of captivity before finally being permitted to return home.

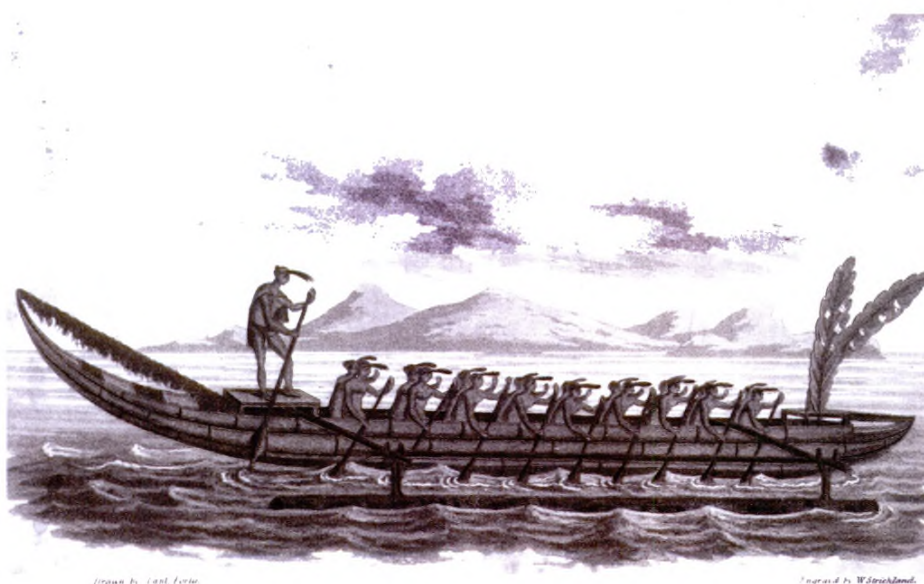
## The Battle

*Essex* arrived off the coast of Chile on 12 January 1814, anchoring in Valparaiso harbor on 3 February. Porter returned to a country whose political landscape had altered dramatically since his visit the previous March. The Carreras, whom Porter styled "my particular friends," were no longer in power, having been stripped of their political and military offices and thrown in prison. With the government torn by faction from within, and the nation threatened from royalist forces without, the entire tone of Chilean sentiment toward the Americans had shifted to open suspicion and hostility.

Porter did not have to wait long for *Phoebe's* arrival, for on 8 February the British frigate sailed into Valparaiso harbor. She was accompanied by *Cherub*, a contingency Porter seems not to have anticipated. The American commander now found himself outnumbered by a superior force in a foreign port whose officials were openly Anglophile. Within

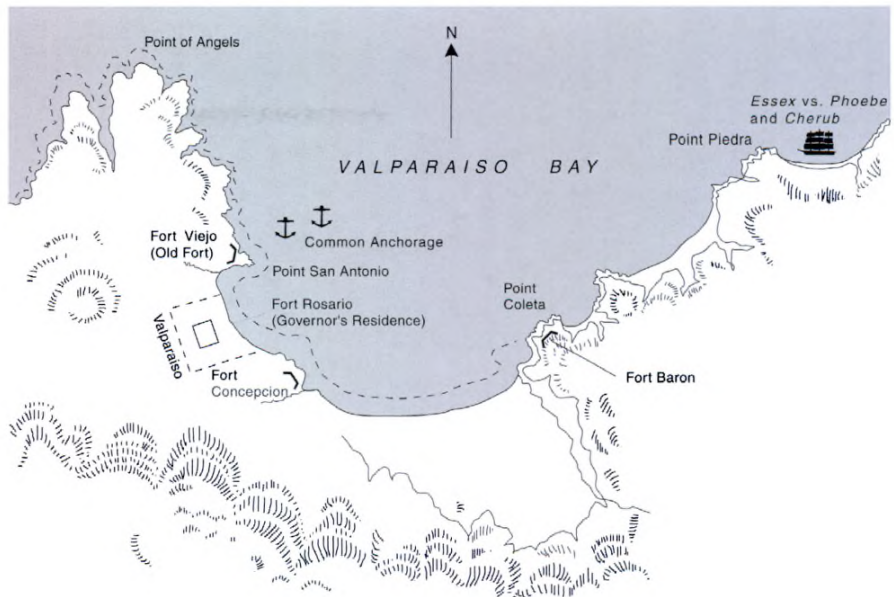
a week Hillyar had stationed his ships in a blockading position off Valparaiso, awaiting the arrival of reinforcements to bottle up, or perhaps destroy, the Yankee cruiser.

Porter would later record in his *Journal* that *Essex* was so superior in point of sailing compared to *Phoebe* and *Cherub* that he believed he could escape their blockade "at almost any time." He remained at Valparaiso specifically to provoke Hillyar into a ship-to-ship combat. Despite





Right, Valparaiso Harbor. Below, James Hillyar, captain of HMS *Phoebe*. Bottom, *Hector*, prize ship to *Essex*, set afire in Valparaiso Harbor on 25 February 1814 to prevent its recapture by the British.



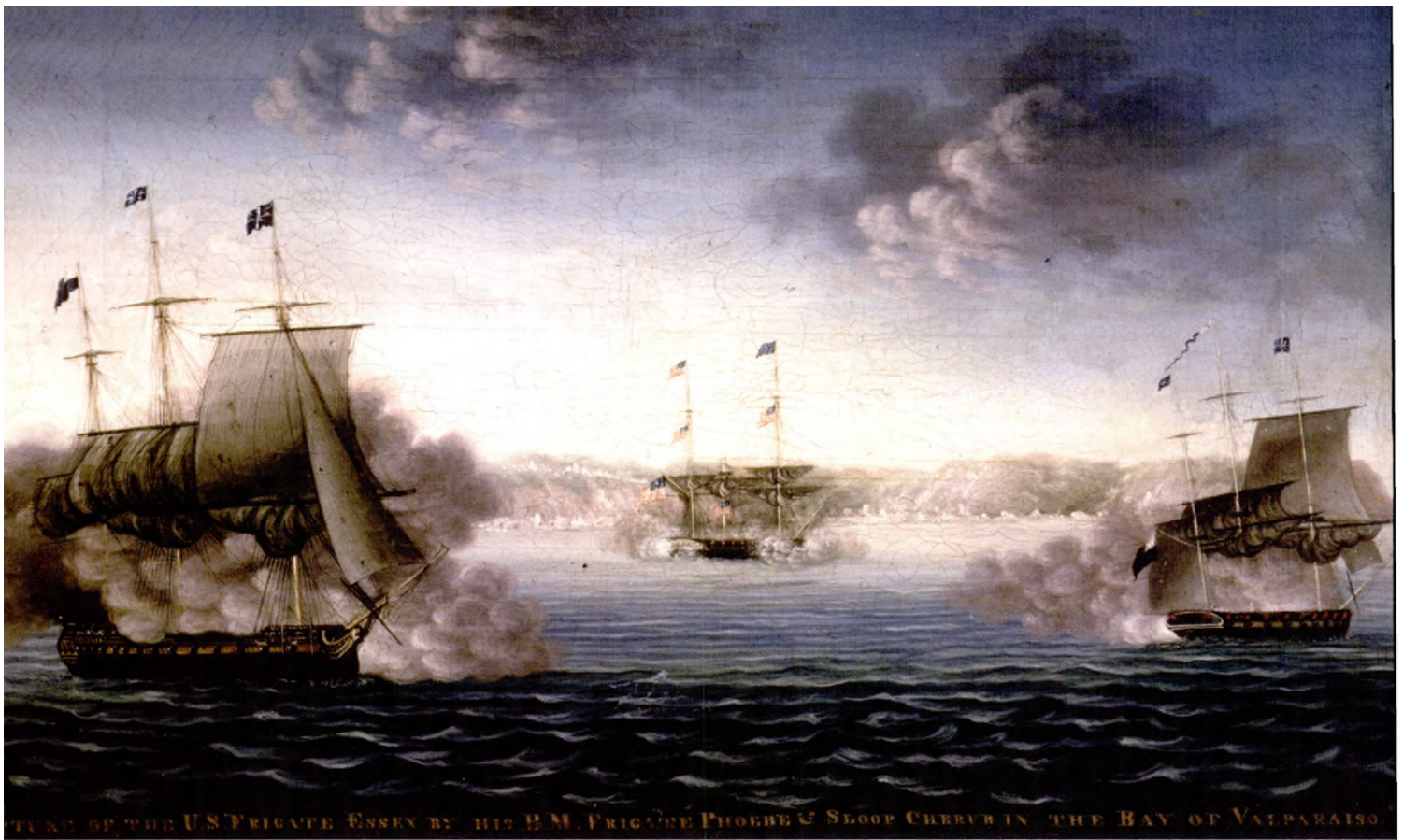
several ploys, Porter was unable to tempt, taunt, or shame Hillyar into accepting his challenge.

When the engagement Porter sought finally happened, it occurred not on the terms he wished, but under circumstances he could not control. On 28 March strong winds drove *Essex* from her anchorage in Valparaiso. Porter seized the opportunity to sail past

his blockaders outside the harbor and run for open sea. But a sudden squall snapped *Essex's* main topmast, compelling Porter to abandon his bid for freedom. Instead he anchored close in to shore on the eastern side of Valparaiso Bay, in waters he considered neutral and thus safe from British attack. Hillyar now deemed the crippled ship fair game and moved in to engage *Essex*. Superior maneuverability and a decided advantage in number of long guns enabled *Phoebe* and







THE BATTLE OF THE U.S. FRIGATE ESSEX BY THE B.M. FRIGATE PHOEBE & SLOOP CHERUB IN THE BAY OF VALPARAISO

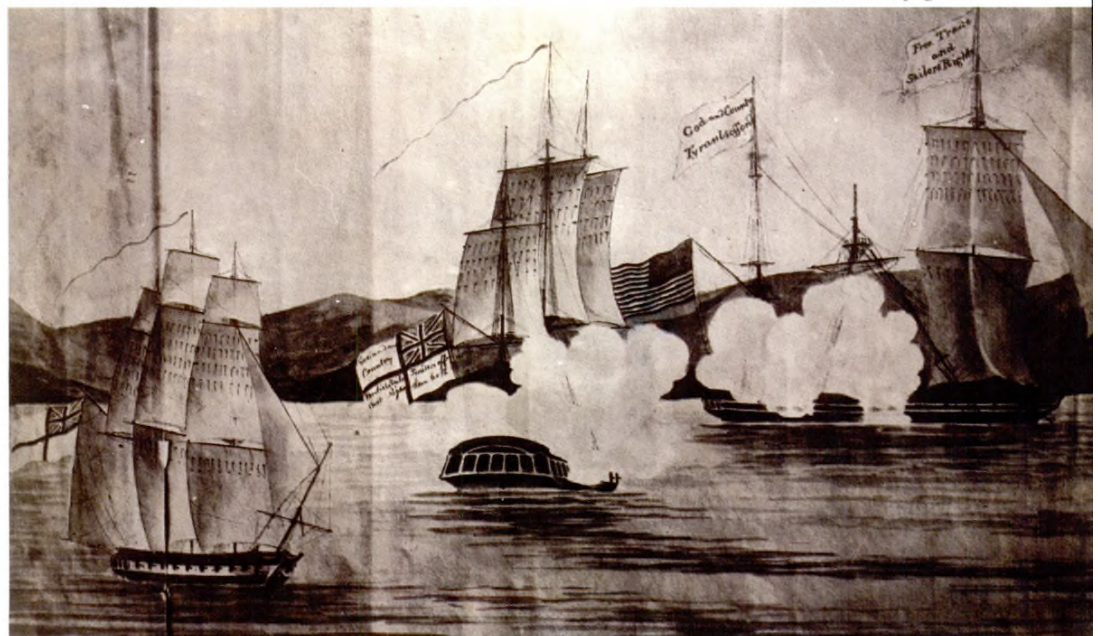
*Cherub* to deliver their fire at *Essex* while remaining beyond the reach of its main battery of carronades. The ensuing battle lasted, with some periods of interruption, nearly two and a half hours. *Essex* took a dreadful pounding, suffering 60 percent casualties before Porter ordered its colors struck.

Porter's decision to seek combat with Hillyar was a mistake. With a service strapped for ships and men,

there was little to gain from such an encounter other than personal glory, nor would the loss of a single British frigate significantly weaken the enemy. By the end of 1813 it had become standard practice for the Navy Department to issue cruising instructions to its officers that included a strict prohibition against giving and receiving challenges. As Secretary Jones would remind his officers, the enemy's "Commerce is our

*continued on page 24*

**Above, *Essex* versus *Phoebe* and *Cherub*, 28 March 1814. Right, this watercolor, originally owned by David Farragut, depicts the motto flags flown by *Essex* and *Phoebe* during the engagement of 28 March.**

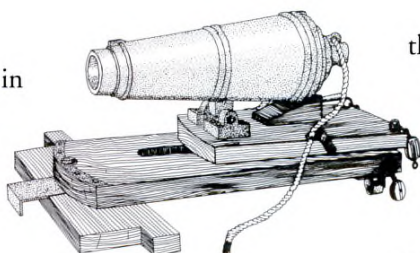




# Carronade Versus Long Gun

When *Essex* engaged *Phoebe* and *Cherub* in its final battle, the American frigate's primary armament consisted almost entirely of carronade guns. First introduced in British warships in the late 1770s, carronades differed in important ways from the long guns traditionally carried by vessels in the age of sail. Carronades, above, had shorter, lighter, more thinly molded barrels than those of long guns, below. They were also mounted on carriages in which a slide, rather than blocks, tackles, and wheels, absorbed the gun's recoil. Because of the carronade's smaller dimensions, lighter weight, and improved recoil system, it was easier to load, train, and fire than the long gun. But the carronade's most noteworthy characteristic was its superior hitting power. Styled the "iron Attila" by author Herman Melville, the carronade was capable of firing shot weighing up to 68 pounds. At close quarters, such heavy projectiles wreaked havoc on ships and personnel, as evidenced in the 1813 engagement between the U.S. sloop of war *Hornet* and HM brig-sloop *Peacock*. In an action lasting less than fifteen minutes, *Hornet's* 32-pounder carronades reduced *Peacock* to a sinking state, killing and wounding more than a quarter of its crew.

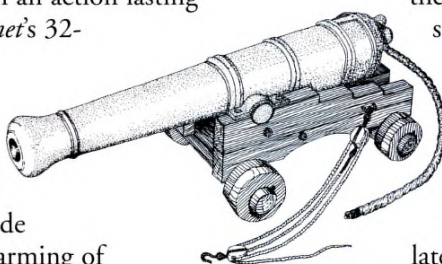
The carronade's qualities of size, weight, and firepower made it an appealing choice for the arming of smaller classes of vessels. A ship substituting 42-pounder carronades for 12-pounder long guns could increase its broadside three and a half fold while decreasing the weight of metal borne on its decks by more than a third. Despite the material advantages offered by the carronade, it had one serious shortcoming in combat—a lack of range. A carronade threw shot and shell only one third the distance of a long gun of equal caliber. Ideal for actions fought within point blank range, the carronade was ill suited to long-distance gunnery duels. A ship armed solely with carronades was



thus limited tactically in how it might fight enemy vessels. Such a ship would have to rely on speed and superior sailing in order to maneuver close enough to render its carronades effective against the enemy.

During the War of 1812, most U.S. Navy schooners, brigs, and sloops of war mounted carronades as their primary battery. American frigates carried a mixed complement of cannon, with carronades being mounted on the spar deck and long guns being mounted on the gun deck. *Essex* was the exception to this. Originally, the Salem-built frigate had been armed with long guns alone, 6- and 12-pounders. Between 1809 and 1810 all but six of *Essex's* long guns were replaced with 32-pounder carronades. While the new guns dramatically increased the weight of metal *Essex* threw in broadside and decreased the total weight of metal it bore on its decks, their addition and arrangement onboard made the frigate top heavy, which in turn diminished its fine sailing qualities.

After assuming command of *Essex* in the summer of 1811, David Porter repeatedly lobbied the Navy Department to change his ship's armament. Porter had "no confidence in Carronades alone," considering them "merely an experiment in modern warfare." In relating his misgivings, Porter described with remarkable prescience the scenario that would



later result in his defeat in the waters off Valparaiso: "Was this ship to be disabled in her rigging in the early part of an engagement, a ship much inferior to her in sailing and in force, armed with long Guns, could take a position beyond the reach of our carronades, and cut us to pieces without our being able to do her any injury." Porter's warning regarding *Essex's* carronades was ignored as were his requests to be transferred to another command. After the capture of *Essex*, David Porter could only ponder what might have been had he been permitted to take on board a few more long guns.



true Game, for there indeed he is vulnerable." The capture of *Essex* demonstrated the wisdom of this dictum.

## The Aftermath

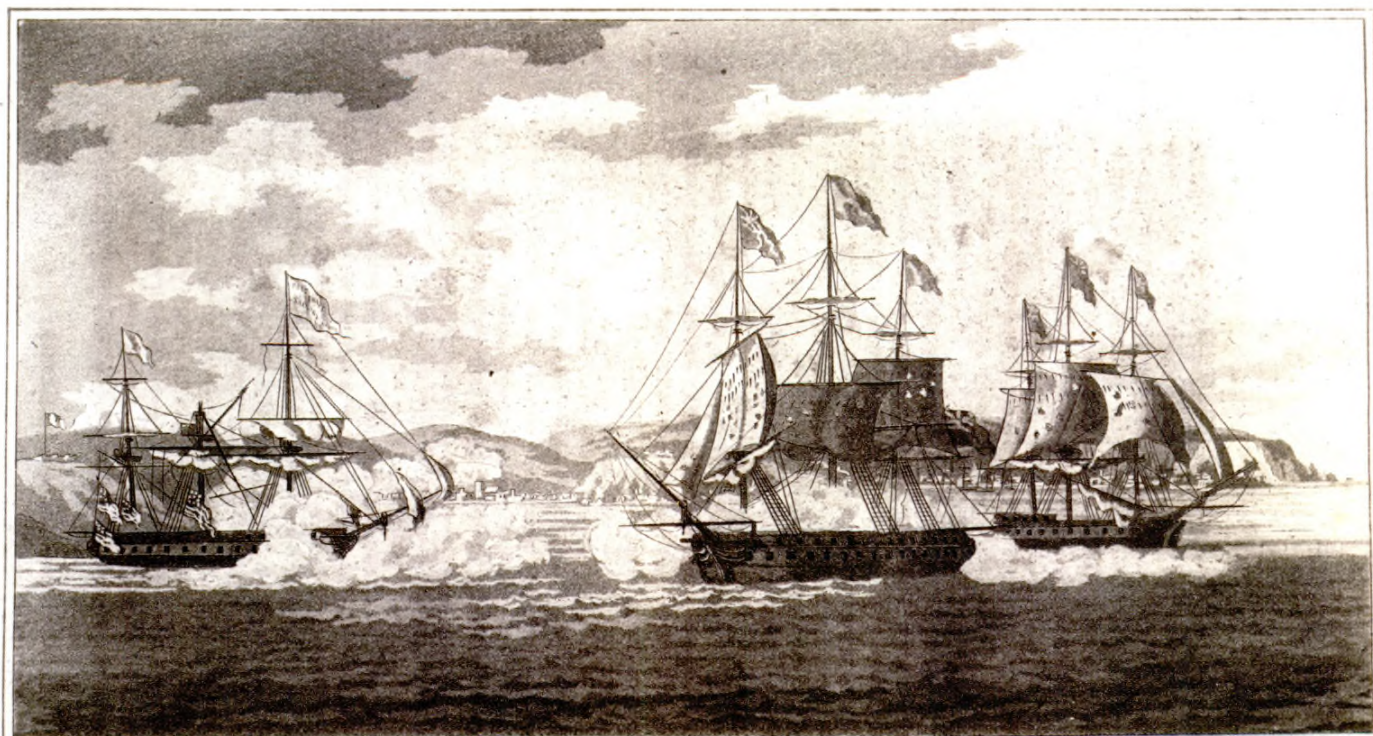
On 27 April David Porter and the majority of *Essex's* survivors set sail for the United States in *Essex Junior*, now serving as an unarmed cartel. The defeated captain and crew arrived in New York in early July and were acclaimed heroes. Although he was publicly lauded for his exploits in the Pacific, Porter sought official vindication of his conduct through a court of inquiry. But Porter was denied this satisfaction, for no sooner had his court convened than the Navy Department ordered its proceedings suspended so that Porter and his crew could proceed to Washington to aid in the defense of the capital. Lacking the venue of a court of inquiry to defend his actions, Porter would use the publication of his *Journal* in 1815 to lay his case before the American public.

In summing up the accomplishments of his cruise, Porter calculated that he had inflicted more than two and a half million dollars of damage on the British whale fishery in the Pacific. He also claimed that *Essex's* success had forced the British government to

*continued on page 26*



Above, John G. Cowell, sailing master of *Essex*, was mortally wounded in the battle with *Phoebe* and *Cherub*. Below, David Porter's drawing of *Essex's* last fight. Right, contemporary broadside paying tribute to *Essex* and its crew.



*Drawn by Capt. Porter.*

*Engraved by W. Strickland.*



# CAPTURE OF THE ESSEX

FREE TRADE



SALON'S RIGHTS

Or, the glorious Victory of the British with the PHOEBE Frigate of 36 guns, and 324 men, and the CHERUB Sloop of War, with 28 guns, and 180 men, over the unfortunate ESSEX FRIGATE, of 32 guns, and 255 men Commanded by Captain DAVID PORTER. An Action fought two hours and 57 minutes, against a double complement of men and force, by an enterprising and veteran Crew of Yankees. The ESSEX has been absent cruising nearly two years; has made numerous Prizes, and has properly now deposited in VALPARAISO, (S. A.) of Two Million Dollars Honor and Prosperity forever render illustrious the Navy of the United States.

SOME two years since, the gallant ship,  
"THE ESSEX," known in Fame, Sirs,  
Just undertook a cruising trip,  
In honor of her Name, Sirs,  
Long time she coasted far and wide,  
And prospering took the notion,  
To climb the "Mountain Wave" and ride,  
And range, 'thro' ev'ry Ocean.  
So on she went, with rapid stride,  
'Mongst Islands, Tribes and Nations;  
And as she mov'd, in all her pride,  
Receiv'd their acclamations.  
With hopes and fears,--thro', "fair and foul,"  
As chanc'd the wind and weather;  
The Crew all hearty--life and soul,  
Kept on their course together.  
Oft times they captur'd British craft,  
And oft in hammocks, swinging;  
Besure a stoic would have laugh'd,  
To hear their gleeful singing.  
Besure 'twould make a Yankee heart,  
With true delight so gladsome;  
To see how each one did his part,  
In work, tight, rough or handsome.  
So pass'd their days, by "glass and log,"  
Attentive to their Duty,  
Nor fear'd John Bull; nor Monsieur Frog.  
Nor shunn'd grog, work, nor beauty.  
Their Captain was a noble soul,  
Belov'd by all the crew, Sirs;  
His word humane would all control,  
His wishes known--to do, Sirs,  
Thus harmony prevail'd throughout,  
Good order at each station;  
Nor ever went the ship about,  
But Mem'ry blest their NAVION.  
So rang'd the ship thro' ev'ry clime,  
And led in train, her prizes;  
With all their wealth, for all the time,  
All Craft of various sizes.  
At last, in Valparaiso port,  
Her treasure all are landed,  
She takes her station by the Fort,  
As she had been commended.  
The PHOEBE FRIGATE then was seen,  
Just "lying off and on," Sirs,  
The Cherub-Sloop of War, I ween,  
Just made a Pair of Monsters!  
They monsters were, in wrath and spite,  
As proven, in the story;  
For in the celebrated fight,  
They lost all right to glory.  
The challenge was believ'd to pass;  
The ESSEX ran out fearless:  
Each one pledg'd Neptune with a glass;  
"Sound hearts and never cheerless."  
But Neptune in a freakful mood,  
Just brush'd a kind of squall, Sirs,  
Along the ship, as out she stood,  
Crack'd topmasts, stays, and all, Sirs.

"Bout ship, and cheerly" (was the cry),  
"And into port again boys;  
"Repair,--be ready--steady--try  
"Your HONOR to maintain, boys."  
For Yankee Tars are ne'er afraid,  
True Bravery is their merit;  
For Yankees never yet were made,  
To feel a want of spirit.  
"Guard well the ship;--for DOUBLE FORCE,  
"Now threaten YOU disaster;  
"Be cool, brave boys, and speed your course;  
"JOHN BULL's an ugly Master!"  
They come with all their COWARD rage,  
With Threats and Gasconading;  
Patriots and British foes engage.  
The PHOEBE and CHERUB seem on fire,  
With smoke commixt with blazing;  
When all at once, they both retire,  
While multitudes are gazing.  
Quick they return, with Double Wrath,  
And Double Force combining;  
Th' eventful day blasts Britain's worth,  
To Blood, their Flag consigning,  
The ESSEX sorely rak'd and gall'd;  
While able to defend her,  
The Essex-Crew are not appall'd.  
They DIE but don't SURRENDER!  
They fearless FIGHT, and fearless DIE;  
And now the scene is over;  
For Britain--nought, but Powers on high,  
Their DAMNING SINS can cover.  
They MURDER--and refuse to save!  
With malice most infernal!!  
Rest, England's Glory, in the grave,  
'Tis INFAMY--ETERNAL!!!  
Brave HULL and LAWRENCE fought your Tars,  
With honorable dealings;  
For great as JOSE, and brave as MARS,  
Are hearts of Humane Feelings.  
Our tears are render'd to the brave,  
Our hearts applause is given;  
Their names, in Mem'ry, we engrave,  
Their spirits rest in Heaven.  
Parol'd see PORTER and his crew,  
In the ESSEX-JUNIOR coasting;  
They home return,--hearts brave and true,  
And scorn the Britons, boasting.  
Arrived--by all around belov'd,  
With welcome shouts and chanting,  
Brave Tars--all valued and approv'd,  
Be such Tars never wanting.  
Should Britain's Sacrilegious hand,  
The "Millions" be for sparing;  
Yet tell her, in her native land,  
Her Deeds are like her Daring!  
That should she not with WISDOM haste,  
Her miscreant CRIMES undoing!  
Her Crown, Wealth, Empire, all must waste!!  
And sink, in endless RUIN!!!

Printed by NATHANIEL COVERLY, 100, Milk Street, BOSTON.





expend more than six million dollars in accomplishing her capture through the deployment of additional ships and men in Asian and Pacific waters. While Porter's figures may be inflated, there is no question that he had dealt the enemy's whale fishery a serious blow or that he had caused the Admiralty to divert large resources

**This portrait of David Porter was painted during his tenure on the Board of Navy Commissioners, 1815–1822.**

to the hunt for *Essex*, resources that would have better served the British war effort elsewhere. It is this aspect of *Essex's* cruise that showed the true potentialities of a war on enemy commerce. It was this type of war—a *guerre de course*—that Secretary of

the Navy Jones believed was best suited to the size and resources of the U.S. Navy.



# Joshua Barney: Citizen-Sailor

Christine F. Hughes

Some men have honor and glory thrust on them while responding to critical events. Joshua Barney did not do his duty—he volunteered for it. What would compel a man of fifty-three years to forsake a comfortable retirement and return to the vicissitudes of war? In July 1813, after residents of the Chesapeake Bay area suffered a brutal three months of marauding by the Royal Navy, Joshua Barney proposed a detailed plan to defend the bay against an anticipated repeat performance by British forces in the spring of 1814. Confronted with mounting demands by coastal citizens for protection, the Department of the Navy could have assigned a younger naval officer to implement Barney's proposal. But this plan had Joshua Barney's imprint written large over it. Secretary of the Navy William Jones, a fellow mariner and merchant, and an astute judge of character, recognized Barney's leadership qualities and immediately ordered him to the command of the Chesapeake Bay flotilla service. Sheer tenacity propelled Barney to buy, build, outfit, and man this flotilla of gunboats and barges. Sheer resolve steadied his hand on the tiller in the face of insurmountable odds. What drove Joshua Barney?

## The Making of a Sailor

Perhaps out of necessity (he was one of fourteen children), Barney exuded an independent spirit from his youth. Born on 6 July 1759 into an upper middle class family whose farm was located near Baltimore, Maryland, and the Patapsco River, Barney early on experienced a landsman's view of maritime life. He liked what he saw. Adventure lured him and at ten he quit school and begged his parents, unsuccessfully, to let him become a seaman. Instead, they steered him to apprentice first at a mercantile firm and then at a countinghouse. A desk job under a roof, however, lacked appeal for the young Barney and his parents relented to a seagoing apprenticeship, which he served first in a Chesapeake Bay pilot-schooner, and then in a small brig that was bound for Liverpool, England, in 1770 and commanded by a stern brother-in-law, William Drysdale. If his parents had hoped this initiation into the hard life of a seaman would end this career choice, Barney soon disabused them of that notion. Wanting more of a reefer's life, Barney followed Drysdale on several merchant voyages to

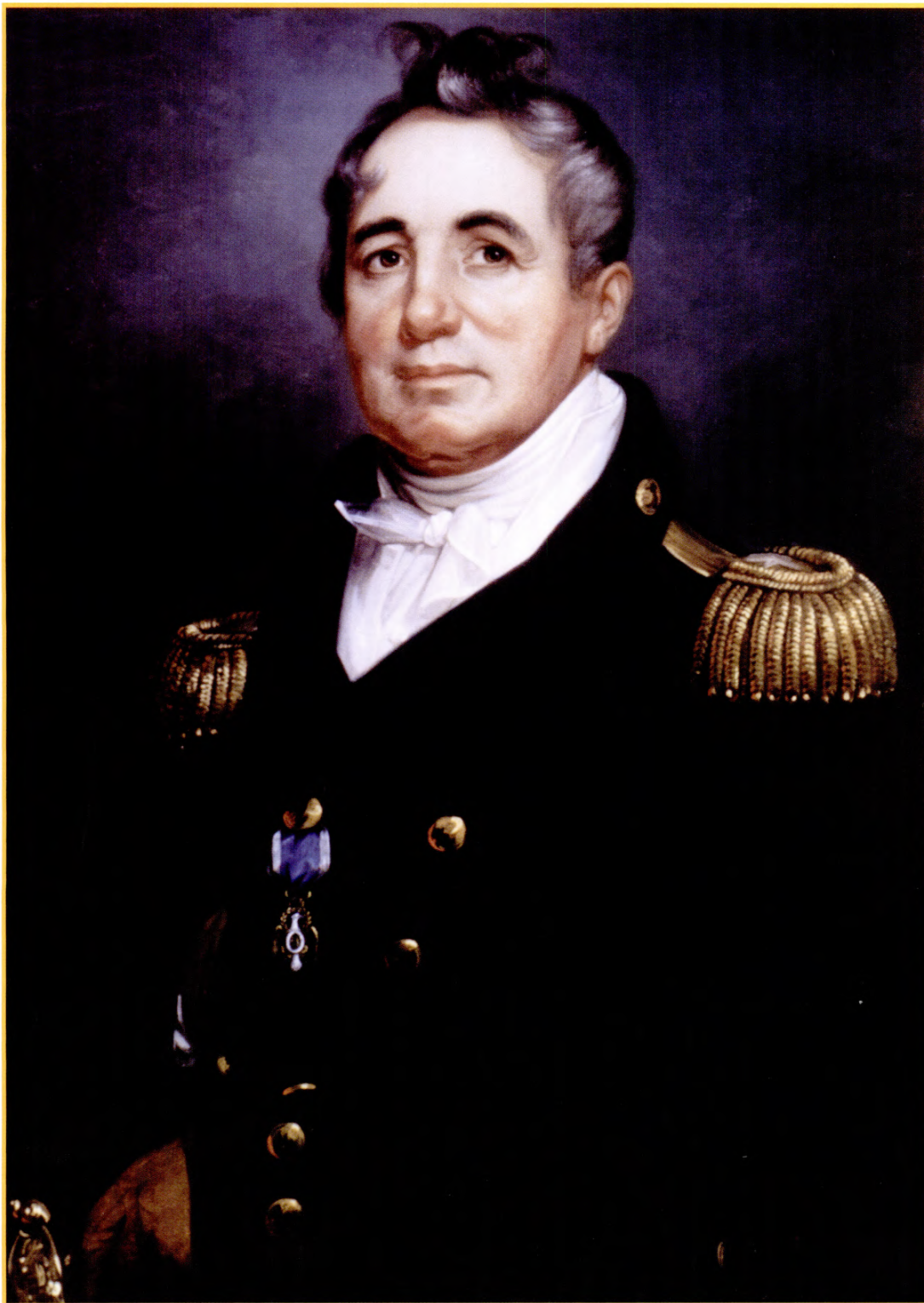
European ports, the last of which catapulted the young sailor into the post of captain when his brother-in-law died during transit. Writing retrospectively about the tremendous responsibility placed on a youth of fifteen and a half to steer a battered ship into Gibraltar for repairs, the taciturn Barney said only, "The whole duty fell upon me." But the young captain's adventures had only begun, because before he returned home in 1775, he traveled throughout Spain, France, and Italy confronting admirals, heads of state, government functionaries, deceptive merchants, and jailors in his quest to sell his cargo. His mission accomplished, the youth returned to his native Baltimore a seasoned mariner, cunning negotiator, and a leader of men.

When Barney sailed on his mercantile trip to Europe in 1774 America was still a British colony. On his homecoming in the fall of 1775, the shots fired at Lexington and Concord had set the stage for independence. Certainly living and working in Baltimore during the early 1770s had exposed Barney to the growing divisions between Parliament and the colonies. His republican inclinations were reinforced on his return to that port when a Royal Navy boarding party searched his ship, letting it go, but not before raising the ire of the crew. Thus began Barney's life-long dislike of the British.

Volunteering was engrained in Barney's psyche. On his return from the merchant voyage, he joined the Continental Navy, serving in the sloop *Hornet* and the schooner *Wasp*. During a two-day battle in May 1776 in Delaware Bay, Barney, in *Wasp*, offered to assist one of the undermanned galleys so that it could engage the enemy. His initiative garnered him a lieutenant's epaulette—and he was not yet seventeen. During the next few years of the Revolutionary War, Barney served his country in the Continental Navy and in a privateer, was captured three times (being exchanged twice and effecting a dramatic escape from Mill Prison, Plymouth, England once), and distinguished himself as commander of a privateer, *Hyder Ally*, in a dramatic engagement with HM sloop *General Monk* in the Delaware Bay. The noted nineteenth-century historian James Fenimore Cooper extolled this April 1782 action as "one of the most brilliant that ever occurred under the American flag" and he complimented Barney for exemplifying time-honored

*continued on page 29*





Above, Baltimore commissioned this portrait of Joshua Barney to commemorate that city's defenders during the War of 1812. Right, *Hyder Ally* engaged the superior *General Monk* during a 26-minute action in 1782. Above right, this almost naive, unheroic portrait of Joshua Barney, painted soon after the Revolution, belies that sailor's years of service and imprisonment during the War of 1812.



Original from  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT  
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



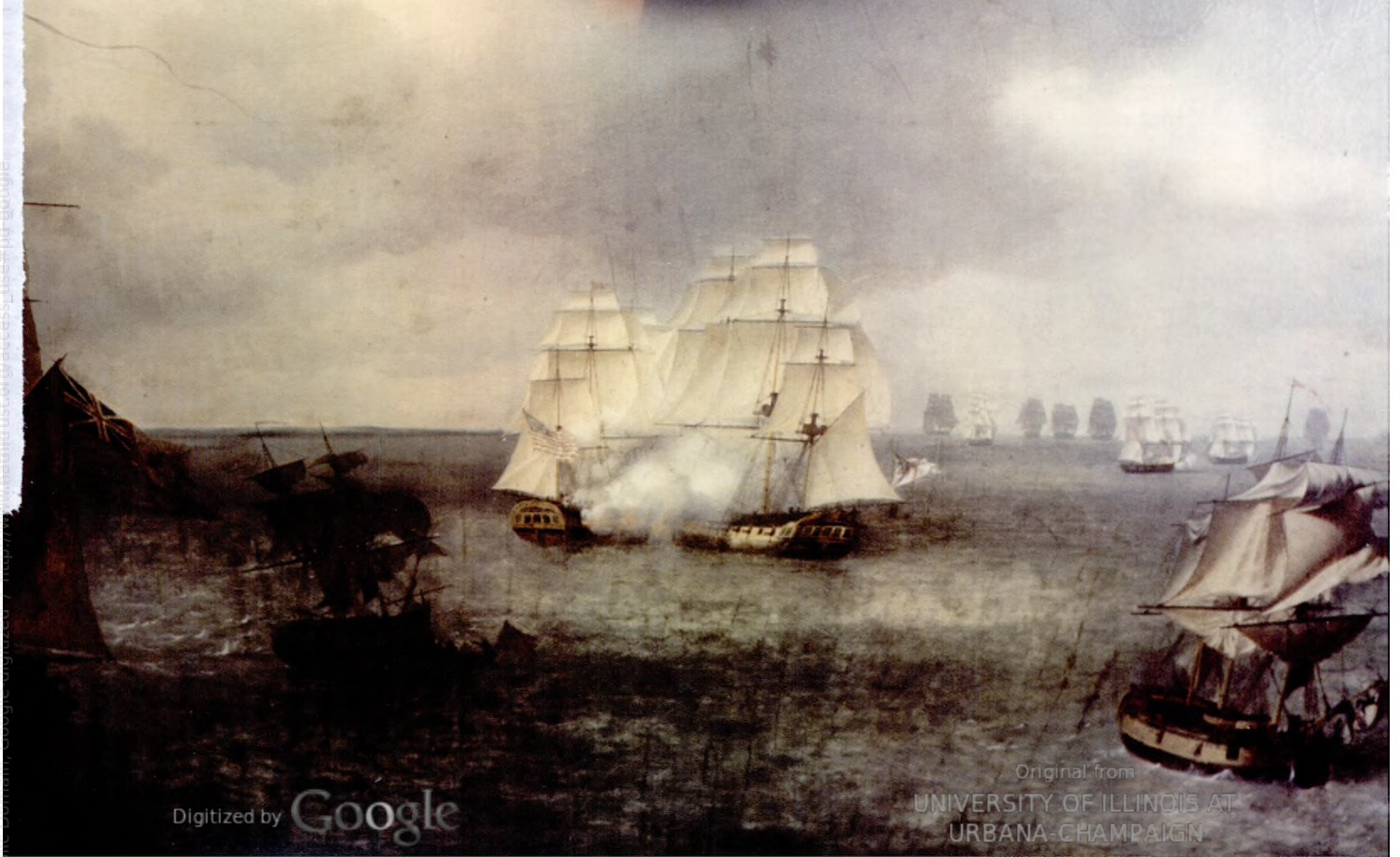
qualities of a naval officer—steadiness, gallantry, and perseverance. Barney continued to serve his country by ferrying dispatches to the American commissioners in France and he was one of the last officers to serve in the Continental Navy. These traits of voluntarism and steadfastness would resurface during the War of 1812.

In 1784 the twenty-five-year-old set out to make his mark in the newly independent America. Barney's postrevolutionary years reflected his peripatetic lifestyle. He undertook various business ventures and engaged in partisan politics as a Federalist supporter, but his heart was tied to the sea and service to his country. Depredations by the Barbary corsairs in the Mediterranean against American shipping in the 1790s culminated in President George Washington's decision in 1794 to reconstitute a navy and to place Barney's name on the officers' list. Barney almost joined the ranks of the fledgling republic's first naval officers, until a perceived slight in his rank forced him to decline an appointment. Private enterprise held the prospect of lucrative returns compared to a captain's salary and his family responsibilities were increasing.

Returning to merchant service

briefly, Barney soon succumbed to the lure of naval life, but this time as a commodore in the navy of the French republic. No doubt animosity toward his former British captors enticed Barney to serve with the French from 1796 to 1802. Ego and profit dominated Barney's stint with the French navy. A commodore's rank was higher than he could achieve at home. But a commodore's rank and financial rewards from owning privateers could only temporarily hold Barney's

interest. Furthermore, the harsh criticism from some Americans for his serving in the French navy when the two countries were locked in an undeclared war (1798–1801) wounded Barney's nationalist pride. Economic concerns and a growing family compelled Barney to return to entrepreneurial pursuits, although he did offer to serve his country again after a British warship fired on and boarded a U.S. Navy frigate in 1807 (*Chesapeake–Leopard* affair). This incident elicited violent demonstrations against Britain's impressment of





# Society of the Cincinnati Medal

In 1783, at the end of the War of Independence, Henry Knox, a major general in the Continental Army, proposed the establishment of a hereditary society of officers who had served in the war. The new fraternal order, the Society of the Cincinnati, was named for Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, a citizen-soldier of early Rome. For the Revolutionary generation, Cincinnatus embodied the ideal of the virtuous, patriotic warrior—a man who sacrificed private pursuits for the sake of defending his country. It was Lieutenant Joshua Barney, in command of the Continental Navy ship *General Washington*, who ferried Major Pierre L'Enfant, the noted French engineer and future designer of the nation's capital, to France in 1783 to oversee the production of the new society's badges. It is believed that L'Enfant gave Barney one of the first medals produced because his badge, now owned by the Society of the Cincinnati, is smaller than the ones sold by subscription. The Society's distinctive medal is cast in the shape of an eagle with a medallion on its body. The obverse of the medallion shows two senators presenting a long sword to Cincinnatus, standing behind a plow. The medallion's reverse depicts a sunburst with Cincinnatus and a plow. Joshua Barney epitomized the quintessential citizen-sailor. He justly deserved this medal.



American sailors. The anti-British fervor subsided and the government mollified those calling for war, but citizens like Barney seethed with resentment over this affront to national honor.

## A Second War with Great Britain

Years passed as both America and Barney pursued peacetime occupations, but the underlying tensions with Britain during the long years of the Napoleonic wars over rights of neutral nations came to the boiling point. The Madison administration's decision to declare war against Great Britain in June 1812 pitted two nations with widely disparate military strengths—the United States Navy had sixteen ships in commission, excluding gunboats, while the Royal Navy counted over six hundred warships. Britain's worldwide commitments scattered her forces, leaving over eighty vessels in American waters at the outset of

the war. It is unclear why Joshua Barney, who had volunteered repeatedly during his lifetime to serve his country, did not seek to join the Navy when war broke out with the British in June 1812. Instead, Barney chose privateering.

Privateering was a legitimate mode of conducting warfare well into the nineteenth century. For a country such as the United States with a small navy, licensing privately owned vessels to harass the enemy, especially its commerce, was cost-effective. Barney was an active man, even at fifty-three. He probably believed he could take advantage of the enemy's initial unpreparedness and plunder their commerce by outfitting his own vessels. Through his own initiative he could take the war to the enemy and not be mired in the bureaucratic exercise of trying to get a captaincy of one of the few ships in commission. No doubt Barney eagerly sought to repay Britain for the maritime restrictions the British had imposed on American commercial interests during



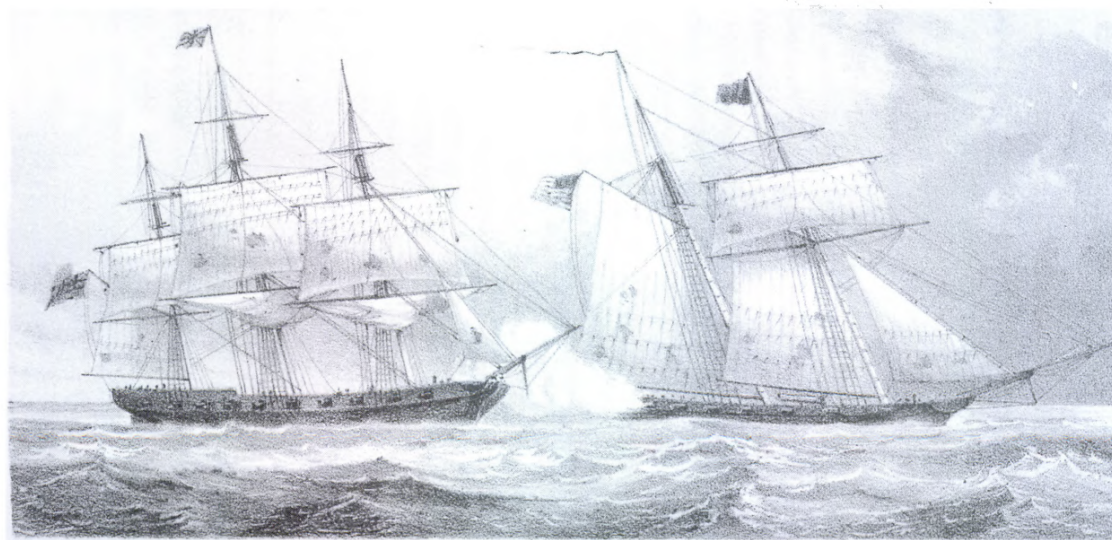
the long years of the Anglo-French wars. In particular, Barney would never forget an incident in 1793 when British privateers took his merchant vessel as a prize on the pretext of its transporting French goods. Barney and two crewmen in a daring assault retook the vessel, but his treatment by the British seamen, and later the expense and humiliation of the Admiralty trial, only increased Barney's loathing of the British.

When war broke out in 1812, Barney got his revenge. The gentleman farmer eagerly left his plow—he had moved from Baltimore to a farm in Elkridge, Maryland, in May—for an armed cruiser, the privateer *Rossie*. The inveterate sea dog scoured the Atlantic for British merchant vessels from July to October. His success at commerce raiding was spectacular, capturing some eighteen vessels valued at one and a half million dollars. The most dramatic



encounter for Barney during his privateering cruise occurred one moonlit night in September 1812 when his schooner *Rossie* battled HM packet ship *Princess Amelia* for a bloody hour, ultimately overpowering the weaker mail ship. Two months later in November 1812 Barney returned to Baltimore and, after balancing the books on a successful undertaking, decided the profit did not warrant further cruises. Barney the businessman retired to his country home but only for a short respite from actively serving his country.

Success at sea for America, whether from naval or private vessels, highlighted the first six months of the war, in sharp contrast to the losses suffered by the U.S. Army on the Canadian frontier. Meanwhile, the British, finding themselves engaged in a two-front war with the French and the Americans, required time to assemble a blockading and marauding force to act against the U.S.



A. Weingartner's Lith. N.Y.

BATTLE between the SCHOONER ROSSIE, and the SHIP PRINCESS AMELIA,  
on the 16<sup>th</sup> of Sept. 1812.

**Top, While serving in the French navy about 1800, Joshua Barney commissioned this portrait of himself in a French uniform. Above, while engaged in privateering at the outbreak of the War of 1812, Joshua Barney's cruiser *Rossie* overpowered the British mail packet *Princess Amelia*.**





Above, Rear Admiral George Cockburn, RN, spearheaded the attack on Washington (shown burning in the background) in August 1814. Right, British landing parties under Cockburn (foreground, right of center) loot and burn Havre de Grace, Maryland, in May 1813. Note the onshore Congreve rocket-launching apparatus in the center background.

coast. The British commander of the North American Station in 1812 was Admiral Sir John B. Warren. Hampered by a lack of ships, an extensive coast to blockade, and his own lethargy, Warren accomplished little early in the war.

### British Campaign in 1813

The Chesapeake Bay's commerce and its proximity to the United States capital attracted the interest of British war planners. By March 1813, the Admiralty had sufficient resources to send a squadron of ships, under Rear Admiral George Cockburn, to blockade the mouth of the bay and to raid the coastal ports and towns. From April to September 1813, the Royal Navy had free reign throughout the bay from Havre de Grace, Maryland, in the north, to Norfolk, Virginia, in the south. The Americans successfully defended Craney Island in Hampton Roads, Virginia, from a British assault but

*continued on page 34*



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# URN BURNING & PLUNDERING HAVRE DE GRACE

3. done from a Sketch taken on the Spot at the time.

ugh.

5. Machine for throwing Rockets.
6. A New Couch part of the Plunder.
7. M. Sarr's Tavern.
8. A British Officer endeavouring to ride over 2 of the Captives.

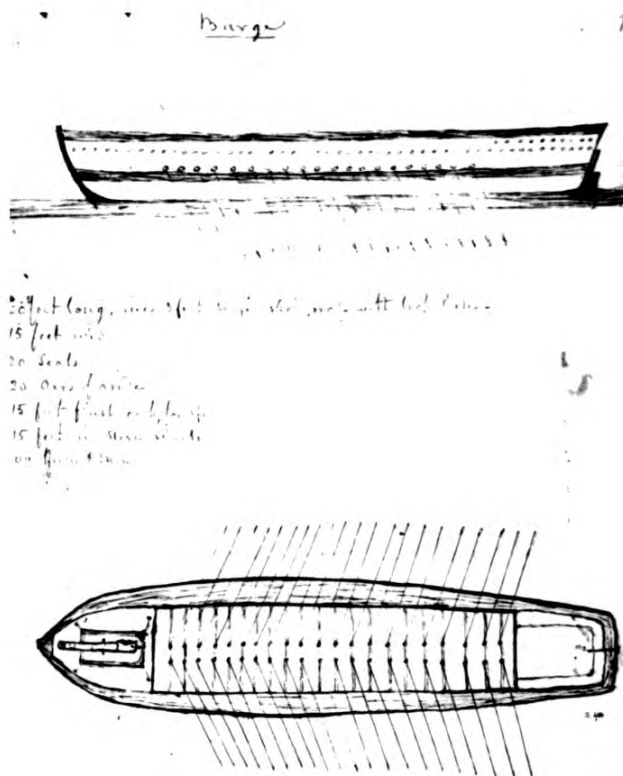


failed to stop hit and run raiding by British seamen and marines who formed amphibious landing parties to steal and destroy tobacco, grain, and livestock along the shoreline of the bay. Respite came only in September when the bulk of the squadron sailed to Bermuda to refit and resupply. Rear Admiral Cockburn left behind a small squadron to maintain the blockade of the mouth of the bay. All knew that the British would return with even greater vengeance in the spring of 1814. Would the residents of the Chesapeake Bay be ready?

## Joshua Barney Has a Plan

The Navy Department lacked sufficient ships to engage the enemy in blue-water battles and to defend the coast. During the spring of 1813, Secretary of the Navy William Jones relied on "a cheap prompt and efficient temporary force" composed of a gunboat and four leased schooners to protect the Chesapeake Bay. The British campaign in the spring and summer of 1813 proved the ineffectiveness of this small force against the marauding British fleet. News of the British depredations propelled Joshua Barney to renewed action. Recognizing that the Navy Department lacked the available resources to fashion a strategic plan, he devised one of his own. Characteristically, Barney outlined a scheme both defensive and offensive in his Independence Day correspondence with Secretary of the Navy Jones. After assessing the enemy's strength on this station ("11 ships of the line, 33 frigates, 38 Sloops of war, and a number of Schooners &c."), predicting their objectives ("the distruction of the City & Navy yard at Washington, the City and Navy yard at Norfolk, and the City of Baltimore"), and dismissing the U.S. Navy's two frigates and gunboats in the bay as ineffective, Barney detailed a plan to build, man, and employ a "flying Squadron" of twenty barges. He even enclosed a sketch of a barge of shallow draft, carrying oars, light sails, and one heavy long gun (a carronade would be added later). This mosquito fleet would protect the port towns by day and harass the British squadron at night—using its speed and maneuverability to escape capture. Barney's plan was a godsend for the harried Secretary Jones who was besieged by bay citizens fearful of another season of looting.

All acknowledged that Barney's manifesto was a great plan. But who would lead? Who had the resourcefulness to oversee the squadron's construction? Who had the integrity and fairness to inspire seamen to sign on at the



In his July 1813 plan to defend the Chesapeake Bay, Joshua Barney enclosed this sketch of the type of barge that would compose his flotilla.

recruiters' rendezvous? Who had the courage and honor to motivate men to follow him, against all odds? Nowhere in his plan did Barney mention himself. But his name was written on every line. He wanted this job. Twenty years before, he had turned down a captain's commission in the newly established U.S. Navy because of a disagreement over rank. Over the ensuing two decades Barney had offered his services to the Navy Department but was ignored. Seniority questions rankled officers of the early Navy. Permitting someone to enter the Navy as a captain would upset the delicate balance. Recognizing that the thorny issue of his rank in the regular Navy precluded his appointment, Barney suggested a novel solution—this particular force would be "separate from, and unconnected with the Navy." Barney had a plan and he wanted to execute it. At fifty-three he cared more about serving his country than reentering the Navy. An ecstatic Secretary Jones readily accepted and devised a special personnel plan for the Chesapeake Bay flotilla that kept it distinct from the regular Navy and directly under the secretary. Barney accepted the challenge to defend the Chesapeake. The next eight months tested his managerial skills in fashioning a mosquito fleet.



## Building a Flotilla

Naval preparedness commenced with purchasing and building vessels. Establishing his command center at Baltimore, Barney acquired, in September 1813, the row galley *Vigilant* from the U.S. Navy and two armed barges from the city of Baltimore. Meanwhile, the Navy sent several gunboats as reinforcements and Barney contracted with a St. Michaels and a Fells Point shipyard to construct barges. The barge was a new class of gunboat (the size of large whaleboats, 40, 50, and 75 feet long) designed by Naval Constructor William Doughty in 1813 for lake, bay, and river service. The rigging of one or two lateen (long, triangular) sails depended on the size of the craft, with the smallest boats carrying oars only. Barney readily changed the specifications of the barges during construction—adding fullness to the ends in order to support heavier cannon. Originally, Barney proposed arming the larger galleys with a 24-pounder long gun aft and a 42-pounder carronade forward and the smaller vessels with an 18-pounder and a 24- or 32-pounder, respectively. Improvisation ruled, however, and ultimately the barge flotilla carried long guns varying in size from 12 to 42 pounds and carronades from 24 to 42 pounds. This flying squadron was indeed built “on the fly.” The two 64.5-foot gunboats, *No. 137* and *No. 138*, were sloop-rigged with twenty oars but they still were Barney’s slowest vessels. His flagship, USS *Scorpion*, completed this little fleet of thirteen barges, a row galley, and two gunboats. This prewar gunboat had undergone numerous alterations and was variously described as a sloop and a cutter in 1814. It mounted a single 24-pounder long gun, one 18-pounder gunnade, and two 12-pounder carronades.



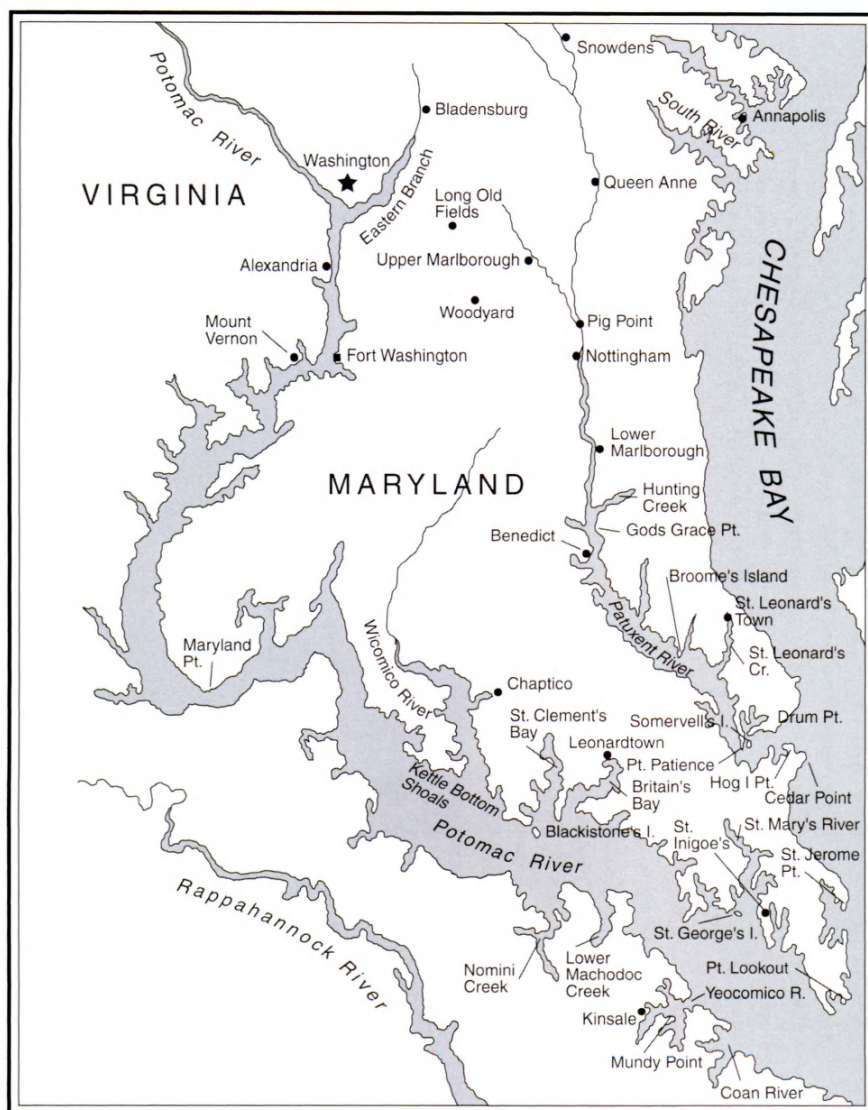
Chesapeake Bay

Barney had little time to waste. When he began to build his squadron in September 1813 the Royal Navy was making one last plundering foray in the bay before most of the squadron sailed to winter quarters in Bermuda. Barney had about seven months to build, outfit, and man his squadron before the British returned in force.

## Recruiting Officers and Men

The flotilla service's larger barges would have a crew of fifty, comprising a sailing master (commanding),





Potomac and Patuxent Rivers

master's mate, gunner, boatswain, steward, cook, ten able seamen, and thirty-four ordinary seamen. The smaller barges were to hold forty men with the number of able seamen and ordinary seamen reduced to eight and twenty-six, respectively.

The recruiting of officers and seamen each presented its own challenges. Naval officers with experience were required for separate commands, such as on the northern lakes. Flotilla service was not career enhancing for junior officers because they could obtain the necessary sea experience only in larger ships. In addition, officers could anticipate more disciplinary problems in the flotilla service because of the barges' close quarters and their proximity to the shore. While regular Navy officers would thus refrain from joining the flotilla service, experienced merchant captains

would refuse naval service because its rigid seniority system would relegate them to the lower ranks. The best solution according to Secretary Jones was two separate services. In August 1813, Jones appointed Barney an acting master commandant in the Navy with the distinct and separate command of a flotilla in the upper Chesapeake. But in April 1814, the Navy Department, deciding to separate the services completely, commissioned Barney as captain and Solomon Rutter and Solomon Frazier as lieutenants in the distinct flotilla service. On the eve of its first encounter with the Royal Navy, the flotilla service had local leaders of "capacity and influence" that Secretary Jones believed necessary to attract enlistments among the bay's craftsmen and seamen.

Barney optimistically predicted that recruiting men would not be difficult. He reasoned that the British blockade of the bay had drastically curtailed the number of merchant vessels getting to sea, thus creating a large supply of unemployed seamen. The recruiting advertisements for the Chesapeake Bay flotilla in the Baltimore newspapers

emphasized patriotic, economic, and social enticements—"an honorable and comfortable situation" for "men out of employ during the EMBARGO . . . with the advantage of always being near their families, and not to be drafted into the militia, or turned over into any other service." Interested men were advised to see the recruiting officers or Joshua Barney. Barney's name and exploits were well known in the bay area and his leadership qualities persuaded many to join.

### Shakedown Cruise

Sightings of British vessels near Tangier Sound, off Annapolis, and the mouth of the Potomac by mid-April drove Barney to take his fledgling fleet on a



shakedown cruise. On sailing from Baltimore on 17 April, Barney's vessels (only thirteen of the squadron) revealed significant deficiencies. After returning to Baltimore to remedy the defects and secure more men, Barney descended the bay again in the beginning of May, but this time with fifteen craft—block sloop *Scorpion*, Gunboats No. 137 and No. 138, and twelve barges. While not encountering the British, Barney found more problems with his "miserable tools." Leaky holds damaged provisions; inadequate space limited the amount of supplies and munitions that could be carried.

Barney returned to Baltimore to make repairs and learned that he and the British squadron had barely missed each other near the Potomac River. Eager for a fight, Barney set out again on 24 May, even though he lacked a full complement of men. On the offensive, the intrepid Barney sought the enemy at its base in Tangier Sound.

### Spring Campaign Opens

Did the British have grand plans for the bay in 1814? While leaving a small blockading force in the Chesapeake during the fall and winter of 1813–14, Rear Admiral Cockburn returned in late February 1814 eager for another season of marauding. The war in America was of secondary importance to the British until the abdication of Napoleon in April 1814. The end of the European war freed British forces for renewed efforts on the other side of the Atlantic. But even before this occurrence, the Admiralty decided to energize the North American Station by appointing Vice Admiral Sir Alexander F. I. Cochrane to replace the uninspired Warren. The British government had twin designs for 1814: to divert American strength from Canada and to distress the American government and people financially. By ordering Cochrane to increase attacks on coastal towns, the British hoped to prevent further deployment of American forces to the



Left, Vice Admiral Sir Alexander F. I. Cochrane, RN, assumed command of Britain's North American Station in April 1814 and immediately issued a proclamation (below) to entice American slaves to flee their masters.



*By the Honorable Sir ALEXANDER COCHRANE, K. B.  
Vice Admiral of the Red, and Commander in Chief of  
His Majesty's Ships and Vessels, upon the North American  
Station, &c. &c. &c.*

### A PROCLAMATION.

**W**HEREAS it has been represented to me, that many Persons now resident in the UNITED STATES, have expressed a desire to withdraw therefrom, with a view of entering into His Majesty's Service, or of being received as Free Settlers into some of His Majesty's Colonies.

*This is therefore to Give Notice,*

That all those who may be disposed to emigrate from the UNITED STATES will, with their Families, be received on board of His Majesty's Ships or Vessels of War, or at the Military Posts that may be established, upon or near the Coast of the UNITED STATES, when they will have their choice of either entering into His Majesty's Sea or Land Forces, or of being sent as FREE Settlers to the British Possessions in North America or the West Indies, where they will meet with all due encouragement.

*GIVEN under my Hand at Bermuda, this 2nd  
day of April, 1814.*

**ALEXANDER COCHRANE.**

*By Command of the Vice Admiral,*

**WILLIAM BALHETCHET.**

*GOD SAVE THE KING.*

north. In addition, by capturing or destroying agricultural produce and enticing slaves to flee their masters, the British were counting on both economic and psychological warfare to force the American government to terms.

Cockburn kept a low profile in March, deploying his vessels on reconnoitering missions. The squadron could attempt few offensive forays in the bay because of depleted provisions. Once in charge in Bermuda in April, Cochrane set an energetic tone by issuing a proclamation that encouraged American slaves to emigrate to British colonies or join a corps of Colonial Marines and fight against their former owners.



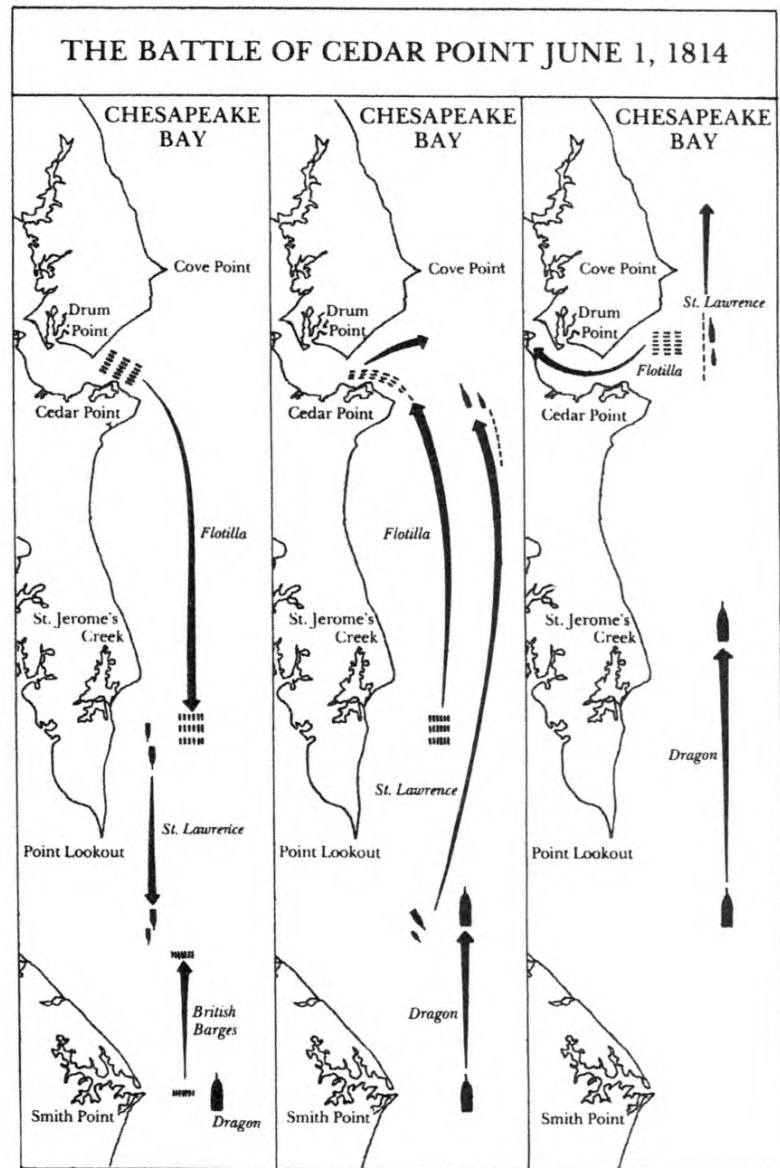
After receiving orders to establish a base of operations in the bay, Cockburn eagerly reported on the attributes of Tangier Island. Fort Albion, which the British began constructing in April, was situated on the southern end of Tangier Island and strategically located for a staging ground for Royal Navy operations in the bay. The American slaves who took advantage of Cochrane's emigration proclamation were trained there.

## Battle of Cedar Point

As soon as he learned about the existence of the Chesapeake flotilla, Cockburn dropped his plans to raid the Eastern Shore towns along the bay and ordered his second in command, Captain Robert Barrie of HMS *Dragon* (74 guns), to take the schooner *St. Lawrence* and some smaller boats to reconnoiter northward. Meanwhile, Barney's fleet of eighteen war vessels, accompanied by a group of merchantmen hoping to reach the Atlantic under the protection of the flotilla, continued on its southward trek to confront the British at Tangier. After seeking temporary shelter in the Patuxent River, the flotilla set sail at three o'clock on the morning of 1 June. The battle for the Patuxent was on. On sighting the British at 9 A.M. in light to calm winds, Barney "gave chase Sails & Oars." Captain Barrie, before discovering the Americans, had sent out reconnaissance boats from his rendezvous spot off St. Jerome's Creek on Maryland's western shore, thus leaving *St. Lawrence* (Barrie's temporary flagship) and a few boats vulnerable to capture. With Barney's squadron bearing down on him, Barrie scurried southward, firing off guns and hoisting signals to alert *Dragon* and the other boat crews to come to his aid.

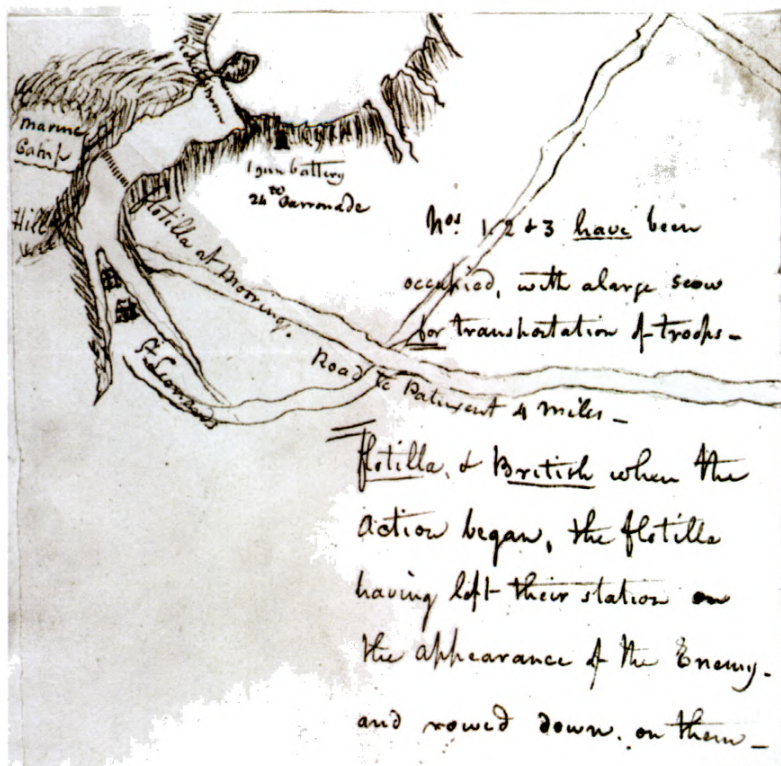
This moment in time might have been Barney's; he had the numerical advantage. Then fate intervened and *Dragon* and seven British barges, responding to Barrie's appeal, appeared. Now the Americans were outgunned. Recognizing that the Potomac River was his closest shelter, Barney raced for it but the wind shifted. He lost the weather gauge to the British as a

southwesterly wind brought with it a squall. With his adrenaline flowing, Barney's seamanship skills came to the fore as he signaled his little fleet to change course "for Patuxent." Pursued by the squall and the British seventy-four, schooner, and barges, Barney's squadron beat a hasty retreat, despite contrary winds and the tide, into the Patuxent. That is, all but the gunboats. The cranky Gunboat No. 137 lagging dangerously in the rear caused the greatest concern. To rescue her, and more importantly the squadron's provisions that she carried, Barney's flagship *Scorpion* and Gunboat



On 1 June 1813 Barney's flotilla chased the enemy until the 74-gun *Dragon* appeared (left frame). A brief engagement occurred off Cedar Point (center frame) before the American flotilla retreated to the safety of the Patuxent River (right frame).





Above and right, Joshua Barney included detailed sketches of St. Leonard's Creek in his correspondence with Secretary of the Navy William Jones.

No. 138 directed their guns on the approaching enemy while the squadron's barges towed the laggard gunboat safely around Cedar Point into the Patuxent. After a short exchange of fire in which the American barges retook the offensive, weather and exhaustion probably overcame both sides. The British force was too weak without *Dragon*, which could not stem the tide, so pursuit was impossible. The Americans sought shelter and the British returned to the bay to regroup. The battle of Cedar Point ended in a draw. While Barney anchored under Drum Point, Barrie returned to his flagship in the Chesapeake to monitor the mouth of the Patuxent and to send urgent requests to Cockburn for smaller vessels—a frigate and brig-sloop—that would be more maneuverable in that river.

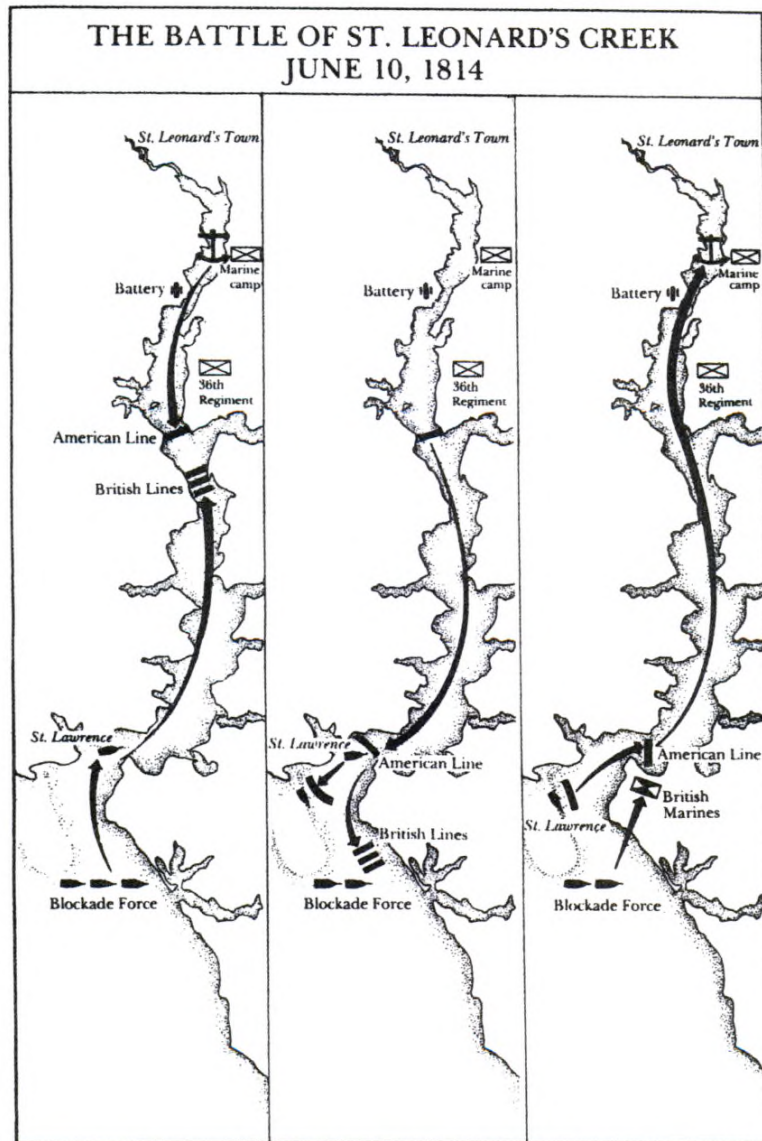
### First Battle of St. Leonard's Creek

The British took this potential threat to their naval supremacy in the bay very seriously. Rear Admiral Cockburn decided temporarily to divert most of his forces, then engaged in blockading the mouth of the Chesapeake and harassing coastal towns, to destroy the American squadron. He ordered the frigate *Loire*,

Captain Thomas Brown, and the brig-sloop *Jaseur*, Commander George E. Watts, to join Captain Barrie's force in the Patuxent. Barrie required the smaller vessels to pursue the Americans aggressively and adopted a conservative stance of waiting patiently for reinforcements before confronting Barney again. Each day brought more support to the British squadron, forcing Barney on 6 June to leave Drum Point and seek refuge farther up the Patuxent River. Barney chose nearby St. Leonard's Creek for safe haven because he knew that only the enemy's shallow-draft vessels could pursue him there and he was confident that his squadron could outfight them. While this decision might have been wise tactically, it was







Above, British barges sailed up St. Leonard's Creek on 10 June 1814 (left frame). Barney took the offensive sending the enemy scurrying back to the safety of its warships (center frame). The American flotilla momentarily held the offensive, until the British regained their composure and sent the Americans flying back to the head of the creek (right frame). Right, the first battle of St. Leonard's Creek, 10 June 1814.

not strategically, as the British could and did blockade him in the creek. During the next two and a half weeks, the two antagonists played a cat and mouse game of skirmishes. The fate of the mosquito fleet hung in the balance.

Barney had become a thorn in Rear Admiral Cockburn's side. Cockburn's mission, until Admiral Cochrane and the expeditionary force arrived from Bermuda, was to cause economic and psychological stress among bay residents with raids on coastal towns,

while charting the region's rivers for future operations. Fearful of a rear-guard attack, the British had to neutralize Barney. Charged with destroying the Americans, Captain Barrie planned to use barges from his squadron to engage and then lure Barney's boats within range of the guns of the frigate and brig-sloop at the mouth of St. Leonard's Creek. Twice-daily attacks by the British on 8-9 June ended inconclusively with spirited fighting







on both sides, but Barney refused to take the bait to pursue the British boats to the Patuxent.

Barney did not relish a defensive posture. He planned a surprise counterattack the next time the British ventured up the creek. Having received reinforcements from Cockburn, Barrie could now count on a flotilla numbering twenty-one barges and boats, a rocket boat, and two schooners (probably six

hundred to seven hundred men). In the afternoon of 10 June, Barrie's boats set out again but this time as soon as they entered St. Leonard's Creek Barney ordered his barges (dismasted for greater speed) to row down the creek to engage the enemy. While Barney positioned his boats in a single line across the creek (his barge prominently in the center), the British formed three lines in opposition. Unlike the previous



encounters, this time the British fought longer and according to Barney “seemed determined to do something decisive.” Barney termed the British disengagement a retreat but it was probably Barrie’s ploy to lure the Americans down the creek. In any event, the cocky Barney pursued with such speed and ferocity that he caught the blockading force unprepared for battle. For a brief time the Americans were ascendant, succeeding in running a fleeing schooner aground. Once the frigate was ready for action and within range, its galling fire sent the little fleet scurrying to a protected shore. Soon the British flotilla chased the Americans back to their anchorage. Thus concluded the first battle of St. Leonard’s Creek or the battle of the barges. The British, stung by the intensity of the American attack, decided to change their strategy. For two weeks both sides reassessed their positions.

## Stalemate

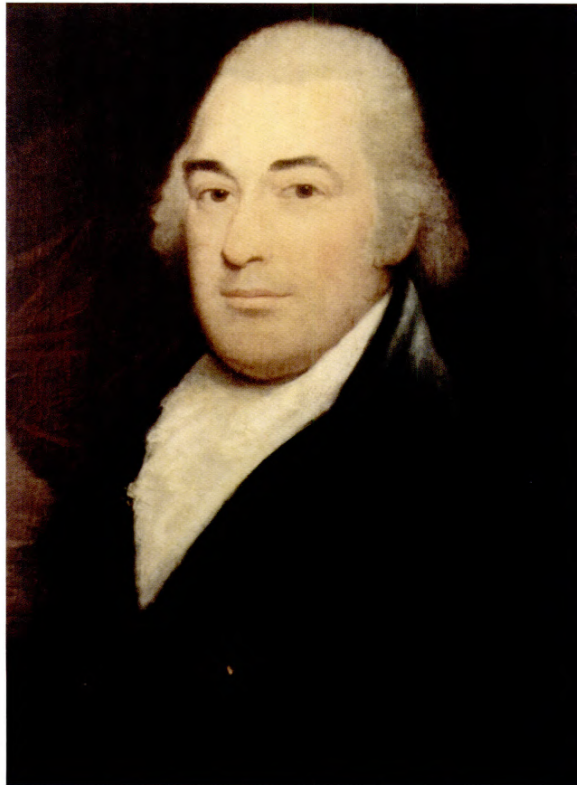
The initial euphoria of staving off a British attack on 10 June and maintaining a stalemate led to an optimistic assessment of the flotilla’s situation. Secretary Jones sent more supplies and marines, and Barney strengthened his position with a small battery. In a series of letters to Barney over a ten-day span, however, Jones reevaluated American and British strategy in the Chesapeake. The blockade of the American flotilla forced the secretary to question the value of protecting a fleet of barges, while leaving Washington and Baltimore, possibly the real British targets, defenseless. Jones also had to contend with public complaints about the mounting economic losses stemming from the increased tempo of British looting along the Patuxent—a strategy designed to lure Barney from the creek. Politically, Jones could not

justify supporting the beleaguered flotilla. At first the Navy secretary devised an unorthodox plan to move the neutralized fleet overland via wagons across Calvert County to be refloated on the Chesapeake Bay. Barney rejected his superior’s proposal as unworkable. He foresaw problems arising on the bay side where the British, no doubt benefiting from local spies, would be

waiting to attack them when they reached the shore. While this plan was scuttled, Jones could not let the flotilla’s situation drift, as each day brought fresh reports of tobacco stores burned or stolen by the British.

By mid-June 1814, Rear Admiral Cockburn also was reevaluating his strategy in the Chesapeake Bay. After strengthening the force blockading Barney, to the detriment of the blockading squadron at the mouth of the bay and the establishment of the Tangier Island base, Cockburn decided to recall this concentrated force and leave a minimal one to bottle up the American commodore. Meanwhile, Captain Barrie initiated more raids along the Patuxent River, hoping a pillaging campaign would draw Barney out to defend area ports. The British were content, for the time, to continue the stalemate in St. Leonard’s Creek; Secretary Jones was not.

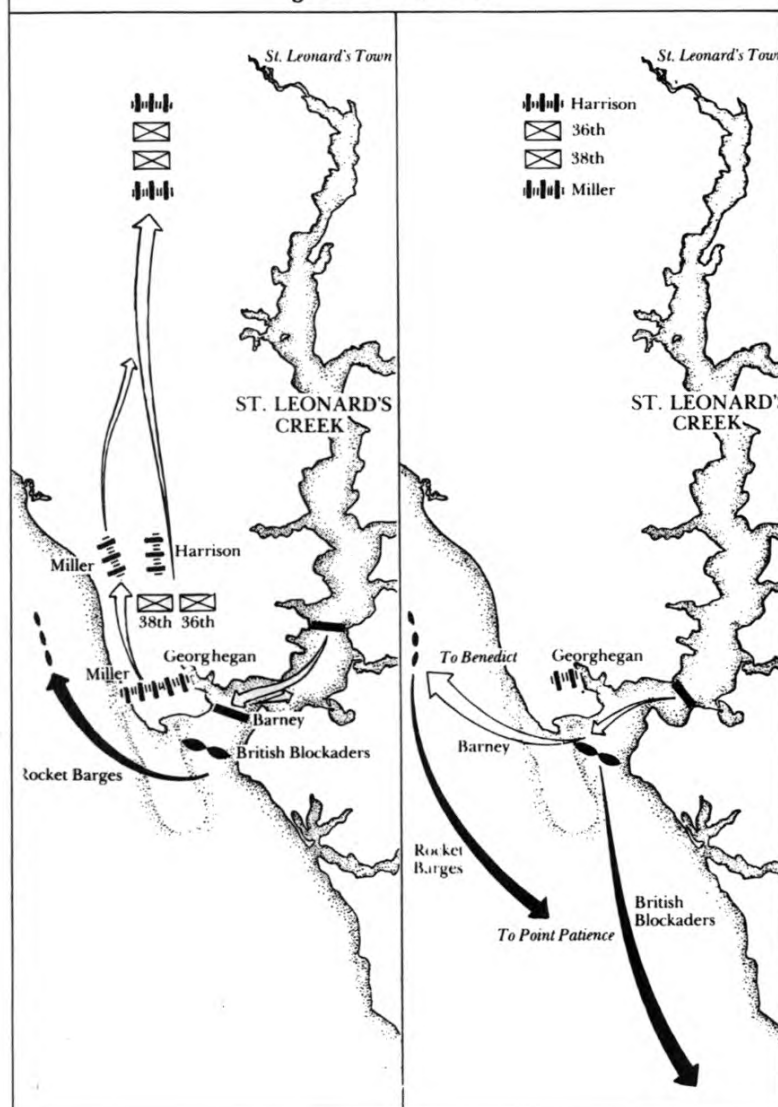
Economic and military considerations forced Jones to order the scuttling of the Chesapeake Bay flotilla. Writing on 25 June, Cockburn boasted that his squadron “has cost the Enemy around us more than a Million of Dollars.” While this figure was probably an exaggeration, fear was palpable along the coastal towns. Jones calculated that the fleet was valued at \$25,500—not worth defending when the flotillamen were needed elsewhere. On 20 June, therefore, Jones ordered Barney “to destroy effectually the whole of the flotilla under your command, after stripping them of every moveable article.” The Navy Department would



**As secretary of the navy in the summer of 1814, William Jones wrestled with the problem of deploying the department’s limited resources.**



## THE BATTLE OF ST. LEONARD'S CREEK JUNE 26, 1814



A combined attack at the mouth of St. Leonard's Creek, from the American battery on a high bluff point and Barney's flotilla, commenced at daybreak on 26 June 1814 (left frame). The flotilla rowed out of the creek (right frame).

assign Barney and his men to other barges in Baltimore and Washington. For Jones, the barges were just "bare Hulls." Not so for Barney. The flotilla had consumed his life for the past year. His protracted and fierce efforts to raise the blockade demonstrated his valor and stamina. But now duty required he follow orders. Although this citizen-sailor felt "a depression of Spirits on the occasion, indescribable," he began to execute his orders. Fortunately, Jones reconsidered his order to dismantle the flotilla and left the decision to

Barney. Of course, Barney chose to fight. But how?

## Second Battle of St. Leonard's Creek

Control of the high ground at the entrance to the creek was key to the flotilla's escape. Thomas Brown, the Royal Navy captain left in charge of the British blockading squadron when Captain Barrie departed for Halifax, Nova Scotia, recognized this. Reporting to Cockburn on 23 June soon after taking command, Brown noted that if "the Enemy possess a decent proportion of Spirit and enterprise I imagine from the thick woods near the entrance of the creek, and on the opposite Bank of the River, they might get Guns that would oblige us to drop further out," leaving a gap for a possible escape. Brown further reflected on the serious implications of a viable American naval force when he told Cockburn,

should you have any hopes of an Army arriving, that could attack their capital it would be very necessary that Barneys Flotilla should be pent up the Creek, as so strong a Force up the River where Boats only could approach might be a considerable annoyance to any force going there.

The British feared that Barney's little fleet might harass an invading force.

Captain Brown's words were prescient. Barney could not be penned in long. The plight of the little flotilla, aroused the "Spirit and enterprise" of government officials. The credit for transforming Barney's status from defensive to offensive lies with an army engineer, Colonel Decius Wadsworth, Commissary General of Ordnance. His recommendation to establish batteries on the high ground at the mouth of the creek was immediately approved by Secretary of the Navy Jones who then coordinated with the Marines and Army to send the men, guns, and supplies required to effect the



**In the second battle of St. Leonard's Creek, 26 June 1814, Joshua Barney's flotilla escaped its British blockaders.**

flotilla's escape. Meanwhile, the British were oblivious. Their intelligence from local spies reported increased military activity but Captain Brown judged it to be defensive in nature.

Frenzied hours of preparation preceded the second battle of St. Leonard's Creek. Barney sent a contingent of flotillamen under Sailing Master John Geoghegan on the evening of 25 June to assist the Army and militia units to erect a breastwork on some highlands at the mouth of the creek. Armed with spades and pick axes, Geoghegan's men worked furiously for three hours after midnight only to be told by Colonel Wadsworth to start again at another location. Chaos reigned but somehow the battery was ready at dawn to shower shot on a sleeping British squadron. The Americans planned a coordinated barrage from their guns above to coincide with the flotilla's massed assault below. But miscommunications delayed Barney's arrival for forty-five precious minutes, giving the British time to reset the elevation of their guns to reach the American battery. The latter's guns proved ineffective because of their poor placement. Luckily the British lobs were equally misdirected.

Just as they rebounded from the surprise battery attack, the British squadron was taken aback by the second surprise of the morning—Barney's flotilla, hidden behind the point until the last moment, propelled itself into the fray with a vengeance. Captain Brown was stunned. He dropped *Loire* back into the Patuxent and lowered its guns against the flotilla. But in those critical first moments before Brown could bring *Loire's* guns to bear, the frigate was seriously hulled. The two sides continued to exchange fire furiously but when the American battery ceased firing, the flotilla's exposed position forced Barney to retreat back up the creek. Fortunately for Barney, Captain Brown at the same moment, not knowing his favorable situation, decided to retreat to Point Patience to make repairs. In his after-action report, Brown incongruously stated that he had believed "the Flotilla might be induced to follow." But Barney was no fool. He knew when to fight and when to run. Seizing the opportunity of calm winds, Barney's barges rowed



down the creek and up the Patuxent River away from the mortified Brown and the becalmed *Loire*.

Barney was exuberant. Writing to his brother Louis the day after the battle he could not contain his euphoria.

Yesterday morning at the point of day we woke up our enemies. . . . thus we have again beat them & their Rockets, which they did not spare, you see we improve, first, we beat a few boats which they thought would make an easy prey of us, then they increased the number, then they added schooners, and now behold the [*two*] frigates, all, all, have shared the same fate, I next expect, ships of the line; no matter we will do our duty— . . .







# The Congreve Rocket and the War in the Chesapeake

It hissed. It roared. It swooped. And it sputtered. It terrified and panicked its human targets. The British used the Congreve rocket in America during the War of 1812 and Americans along the Chesapeake Bay bore the brunt of its wrath.

Sir William Congreve (1772–1828) did not invent the rocket. The Chinese had experimented with gunpowder propulsion at least as early as the thirteenth century. Congreve improved its performance and promoted its deployment as a new weapon in the British military arsenal. Besides refining the rockets technically (range and accuracy) and mass-producing them at the Royal Military Laboratory in Woolwich, England, Congreve perfected their use with enhanced land and sea launchers. The modern era of rocketry began with Congreve's research and development program in the early nineteenth century as an innovative response to the Napoleonic threat. Congreve's first successes in using his rockets at the bombardments of

Boulogne (1806) and Copenhagen (1807) ensured their place in future military planning.

When the war with America broke out in 1812, Congreve had the benefit of half a dozen years to perfect both the rockets and their delivery system. Cost and portability were their main advantages over conventional artillery. Rockets were inexpensive and easy to produce, use, and transport. On land, they were carried in wagons and launched via a simple tripod; at sea, they were stored until needed and then launched via a simple framework. Capable of being mounted in the smallest vessels and requiring little



attendant tackle or equipment, the rapid-firing rocket was a versatile shipboard weapon. Congreve assessed the advantages of rocketry afloat thus:

Every vessel, every boat in the navy, becomes capable of the powers of the bomb ship, as far as the throwing carcasses is concerned, by having only a few boxes of rockets and a frame put on board her. . . . The saving, therefore, that attaches to this mode of throwing carcasses afloat, instead of the ordinary method where the vessel is expensive, is constructed on purpose, and fit for little else, is almost incalculable.



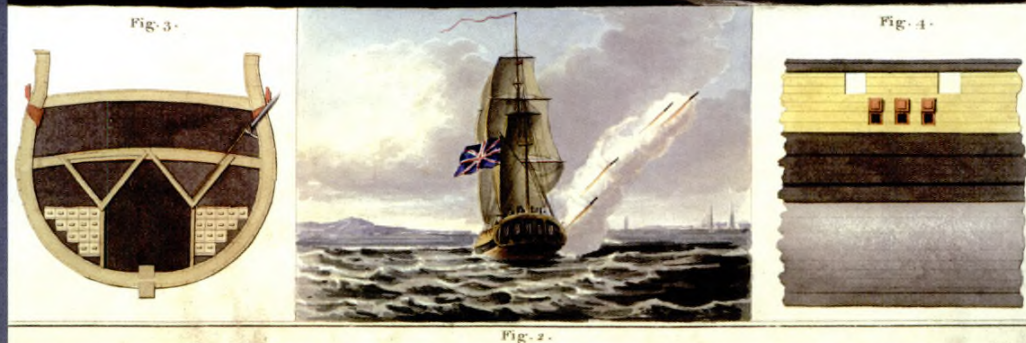
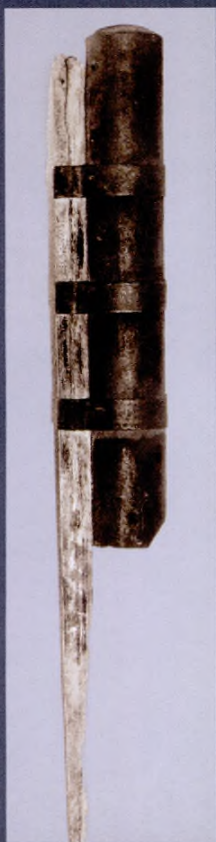
**Top, William Congreve. Bottom, two launches throwing rockets: the lead boat is in the act of firing—the crew retires into the stern sheets and a marine artilleryman discharges a rocket by a trigger-line, leading aft; in the second boat the artillerymen are loading a rocket by lowering the frame.**

The Congreve rocket when combined with good tactics could give an opponent a military advantage when used against unseasoned troops. But the Congreve was no miracle weapon, as evidenced by the British amphibious defeat at

Craney Island, Virginia, on 22 June 1813. Poor planning by Rear Admiral George Cockburn and a vigorous American defense were factors in the British defeat, despite their deployment of 2,400 men and two Congreve rocket units. While Congreve rockets had little effect at Craney Island, the British did continue to use them in raids throughout the bay until most of the squadron dispersed in the fall. When the British returned in the spring, both the bay's towns and Barney's fleet had to confront the Congreve rocket.

Indeed the Congreve rocket became an important part of the Royal Navy's arsenal against Barney in





Above, Congreve adapted rockets to any ship by using scuttles or openings on the side of the hull. Left, this Congreve rocket, with part of the original stick still attached, was found in Stonington, Connecticut, after the British bombarded that town in August 1814.

1814. After their first encounter on 1 June off Cedar Point, Maryland, Barney prophetically noted:

During the firing, the enemy advanced a Barge which threw Rockets, but as they cannot be directed with any certainty they did no Execution, but I find they can be thrown further than we can our shot; and conclude from this Essay, this will be their mode of Warfare against the flotilla.

The Congreve's range worried Barney, as did its occasional accuracy. During a skirmish on 9 June in St. Leonard's Creek, one rocket scored a direct hit on a barge and killed a flotillaman. But Barney's sailors were not deterred and continued fighting despite their leader's fears that "this kind of warfare is much against us, as they can reach us, when we cannot reach them." After the flotilla's successful escape from the creek on 26 June, Barney could boast "thus we have again beat them & their Rockets, which they did not spare, you see we improve."

The fortunes of war, however, often fluctuate. When British reinforcements arrived in the bay in August 1814, a joint army-navy force succeeded, as its

commander, Major General Robert Ross, later reported, in overwhelming the Americans at Bladensburg, Maryland, on 24 August, leaving "the British Masters of the Field." The British attributed their success at Bladensburg, despite being outnumbered, to the steadiness of their battle-tested veterans and to the effect that the Congreve rocket had on the raw American militia. The rout at Bladensburg permitted the British to invade the nation's capital just hours later. But again victory switched sides as, less than three weeks later, the Americans stopped an advance by land on Baltimore, and withstood a naval bombardment of Fort McHenry at which Congreve rockets were used. Though hostilities did not cease for another five months, this engagement at Baltimore effectively ended the British presence in the Chesapeake except for a skeleton squadron that conducted sporadic raids.

The legacy of the Congreve rocket lives on in a line in America's national anthem. Francis Scott Key witnessed the bombardment of Fort McHenry while detained on a Royal Navy ship and penned these words that eventually became part of the "Star-Spangled Banner," *And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.*



**A composite illustration of the events surrounding the capture of Washington, 22–25 August 1814: the destruction of Barney's flotilla near Pig Point, Maryland (foreground), the Battle of Bladensburg (top right), the burning of the city and the Navy Yard (top left).**

squadron was just a few miles away up the Patuxent River at Nottingham when the main British force came ashore.

Anticipating the worst, Secretary Jones on 20 August directed Barney to send the flotilla with a skeleton crew further up the Patuxent with orders to destroy it if pursued by the enemy. Meanwhile, Barney was to "retire before the enemy toward this place [*Washington*] opposing his progress as well by your arms, as by falling trees across the road removing Bridges, and presenting every other possible obstacle to his march." The end of the line for the flotilla came just beyond Pig Point—the shoal water dictated that. Barney's caretaker crew, following his orders, scuttled the fleet on the approach of Rear Admiral Cockburn on 22 August. The action near Pig Point removed the thorn. The capital at Washington was now the target.

Barney and his four hundred battle-hardened flotillamen now became foot soldiers. Recognizing that an invasion force was just days away from the unprepared capital, Secretary Jones was not exaggerating when he wrote Barney that "your force on this occasion is of immense importance and is relied upon with the utmost confidence." Jones knew he could depend on the flotillamen. Through his leadership over the past months, Barney had forged a team. They had suffered together, with Barney always in the van. They stuck together now in their country's greatest peril.

Anxious to unite forces with the militia and Army defenders, the flotillamen left behind their personal belongings in their ill-fated barges and marched to Woodyard, Maryland, where they found the operational commander, Brigadier General William Winder, and his troops on 22 August. A contingent of about 120 marines under Captain Samuel Miller, who were directed by Secretary Jones to serve under Barney, joined the commodore's force of four hundred seamen. Barney was ready but General Winder, still unclear of British intentions, retreated to the Washington Navy Yard on the evening of 23 August. The initiative had shifted to the British.

## The Battle of Bladensburg

After a frantic night conferring about strategic matters and with little sleep, Winder arose at sunrise on 24 August still undecided where to assemble his

troops. Meanwhile, the British broke camp about 5 A.M. and, after a feint toward Washington, marched to Bladensburg, Maryland. Conflicting intelligence reports delayed American reaction until 10 A.M., when Winder finally accepted that the British were heading to Washington from the north. All American forces were ordered to Bladensburg to stand and repulse the enemy's forces. However, Barney's flotillamen and marines were detached to blow up the bridge nearest the navy yard when the enemy approached. Recognizing that this was an inefficient use of his manpower, Barney persuaded President James Madison and his Cabinet to detail a smaller force for this task. Always wanting to be in the thick of things, Barney immediately sprang to action.

The August day's heat did not deter him. Bringing up the distant rear of a long column of cavalry and infantry racing the five miles from the navy yard to Bladensburg, Barney's flotillamen, marines, and five carriage guns arrived at the battle site after fighting had commenced. Utter confusion dominated the scene, as lack of time and proper leadership precluded an orderly defense. No matter. The cool-headed Barney assessed the situation quickly and placed his cannon across the Washington Road. He deployed the majority of the flotillamen and the marines to protect his right flank. Out of range of the first British thrusts across the bridge, Barney's men watched as other American units initially repulsed the enemy. Gradually the veteran redcoats persisted and as Barney later reported, with







WASHINGTON THE CAPITAL OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA WAS TAKEN BY THE BRITISH FORCES UNDER MAJOR GEN<sup>l</sup> ROSS  
 who burnt and destroyed their Dock Yard with a Frigate and a Sloop of War, the Arsenal, Senate House, President's Palace, War Office, Treasury and the Great Bridge.  
 Published by C. Phillips, 101 N. 3rd St. Phila. Engraved by Wm. Smithfield.

E The Dock Yard and Arsenal burnt.  
 F The River Frigate and Sloop of War.  
 D The Great Bridge destroyed.  
 H The President's Palace.

"our own Army retreating before them apparently in much disorder," the enemy tried three times to advance via the main road, only to be "totally cut up." When the British began to outflank him, Barney saw the last vestige of the Army and militia, posted to support his position, retreat. But the flotillamen and marines held fast. An enemy marksman shot Barney's

horse. As the British pressed forward, Barney later reported:

We had the whole army of the Enemy to contend with; Our Ammunition was expended. . . . at this time I received a severe wound in my thigh, Capt. Miller, was

*continued on page 52*



# Where is the Chesapeake Bay Flotilla?

Joshua Barney's body is buried in Allegheny Cemetery, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—far from the sea. Seeking his fortune and a new life one last time, the fifty-nine-year-old Barney sold off his Maryland holdings in 1818, uprooted his family, and was enroute to settle on land he owned in Kentucky when he died. While we know where Barney's remains are, historians, archaeologists, and local history enthusiasts continue to ponder the final resting place of his flotilla.

Why should we care about some old wooden vessels? The Chesapeake Bay flotilla played a vital role in the War of 1812. The citizens of Maryland and the U.S. government mobilized to defend the bay against British depredations. Under the leadership of Joshua Barney, this group established a flotilla whose battles in June 1814 with the Royal Navy in St. Leonard's Creek were the most significant naval engagements fought in Maryland—ever.

Now another partnership has formed. Historians, archaeologists, and cultural resource managers from the state of Maryland and several U.S. government agencies have joined together over the last twenty-six years to develop a research design to evaluate the extant remains of the Chesapeake Bay flotilla. A historic treasure lies in the silt of St. Leonard's Creek and the Patuxent River. Some of this time capsule of maritime history has already been mined; more searching and sifting remains.

The historical record indicates that the flotilla rests at two sites. When Joshua Barney took advantage of a becalmed Royal Navy during the engagement on 26 June 1814 and rowed his fleet from St. Leonard's Creek to safety up the Patuxent River, he left the unwieldy Gunboats *No. 137* and *No. 138* at the head of that creek, to be scuttled if threatened with capture. The location of the rest of the flotilla is probably mired in mud in the upper reaches of the Patuxent River near Pig Point, now Bristol. The first archaeological investigation began here.

Salvage operations at the Patuxent site to recover cannon, anchors, cable, stores, shot, and small arms

began two months after the vessels were scuttled in August 1814. The boats themselves were allowed to settle deeper in the mud until 1978 when Donald Shomette, director of Nautical Archaeological Associates, proposed a joint venture with the Calvert Marine Museum of Solomons, Maryland, to conduct an underwater archaeological survey of the entire Patuxent River. After securing a grant from the United States Department of the Interior that the Maryland Historical Trust would administer, the Shomette team surveyed the Wayson's Corner area on the upper reaches of the river during June 1979. The divers found nothing of substance during this first exploration except a broken turtle shell. Returning the following June to this now-dubbed Turtle Shell Wreck, the diving team excavated a submerged vessel and soon uncovered many well-preserved artifacts. These mainly comprised six categories: surgical and dental instruments, military hardware, carpentry tools, domestic shipboard articles, maritime artifacts, and architectural features. The project directors used historical and archival resources to determine that this boat was either from the flotilla or one of the merchant vessels seeking the protection of the flotilla. Though the evidence was not entirely conclusive, the team tentatively identified the vessel as Barney's flagship, the block sloop *Scorpion*.

This three-year project spurred the state of Maryland to build a conservation lab at the Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum in St. Leonard to preserve the artifacts found at the site. Today those items are on display at The Navy Museum, Washington Navy Yard, D.C., and the Calvert Marine Museum.

Lack of funding ended further surveying for fifteen years. In 1995 the Maryland Historical Trust contracted again with Donald Shomette to find the remaining vessels. Changing sites to Grover Cove in St. Leonard's Creek where the documentary record indicated that Barney's two gunboats were, Shomette's team of students from an East Carolina University underwater archaeology field school





**A 1980 archaeological dive at the site where Joshua Barney's scuttled Chesapeake flotilla was thought to rest uncovered artifacts such as a grog ration cup, a gunner's pick, a toothkey, surgical scissors, and apothecary crockery.**

program found two vessels in its 1998 and 1999 field operations. Among the 293 artifacts that this project recovered were .69- and .75- caliber musket shot, brass military buttons, a gunflint, a single canister or grapeshot, and copper sheathing nails. The vessels themselves were the correct size and had the burn marks indicative of British attempts to destroy them. The Chesapeake Flotilla Project determined that these vessels were Gunboats *No. 137* and *No. 138*. Through the funding and support of the state of Maryland, the National Park Service, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Naval Historical Center, it has been possible to study the archaeological record of Barney's flotilla.

Interest in the fleet continues because the mystery of its location persists. The 1977–80 survey of the Patuxent River site yielded only one vessel, whereas sixteen vessels from the fleet went to the bottom. There is some evidence from other contemporary maps that the fleet is several miles north of the Pig Point location mentioned by the British. Another theory is that the Patuxent River has significantly changed its course over the years because of silting and that the fleet is buried in mud flats. In any event, there are still many dedicated people who continue to volunteer their time and energy to trudge through knee-deep muck in pursuit of a fleet of barges that so valiantly tried to defend the Chesapeake Bay during the War of 1812.





Wounded, Sailing Master Warner Killed, actg. sailing Master Martin Killed, & sailing Master Martin wounded, but to the honour of my officers & men, as fast as their Companions & mess mates fell at the guns they were instantly replaced. . . . Finding the enemy now compleatly in our rear, and no means of defence I gave orders to my officers and men to retire—Three of my officers assisted me to get off a Short distance—but the great loss of blood occasioned such a weakness that I was compelled to lie down, I requested my officers to leave me, which they obstinately refused, but upon being Ordered they obeyed, one only remained.

As Barney lay bleeding on the battleground at Bladensburg with a bullet in his thigh, Rear Admiral Cockburn and Major General Robert Ross, commander of the British expeditionary force, came to his side on learning who he was. The hated British had once more captured the old sea dog. These officers, however, saw not an enemy, but an honorable sailor. According to Barney, they accorded him “the most marked Attention, respect, and Politeness.” Besides having a surgeon dress his wound, General Ross granted Barney his parole (freedom of movement until exchanged), thus sparing him the ignominy of captivity.



**Top, the City of Washington presented this sword to Joshua Barney for his “intrepidity and valor” at the Battle of Bladensburg, 24 August 1814. Above, one of many engravings of Barney rendered during the nineteenth century.**

Barney recuperated at his home in ElkrIDGE during August and September 1814, missing the burning of Washington and the unsuccessful British bombardment of Fort McHenry. The bullet wound would bother him the rest of his life but the pain could not stop him from returning to Baltimore in the fall to pressure Congress to compensate his men for back pay owed and personal belongings lost when the barges were scuttled. Frustrated with an ungrateful Congress, and demoralized with his “Non-discript functions,” Barney tendered his resignation in early January 1815 to a Navy Department that not only refused to accept it but instead presented him with a much-delayed captain’s commission. Flattered by the new secretary of the navy’s recognition of his “talents and bravery” as well as his “honor and fame,” Barney withdrew his

resignation. Despite rumors of peace, Barney pledged not to “lay down my sword, until death, or a peace” should at last free him from serving his country. Peace came first—the war ended in February 1815. But lead poisoning from the bullet wound may have eventually caused his death in 1818. The citizen-sailor Joshua Barney committed his life to defending his country. One battle often defines some naval heroes. Two wars defined Barney’s heroism.



# The Battle of Lake Champlain

Michael J. Crawford

On 11 September 1814, the U.S. Navy squadron on Lake Champlain won the most decisive naval engagement of the War of 1812. The U.S. squadron completely defeated its British counterpart and denied the enemy naval mastery of Lake Champlain. The failure of the British squadron to gain naval supremacy, in turn, forced the commander of a British invasion force to break off a land assault in mid-battle and withdraw his army to Canada. The American victory at the Battle of Lake Champlain also contributed directly to the signing of a peace more favorable to the United States as it persuaded British negotiators to drop demands for territorial concessions from the Americans.

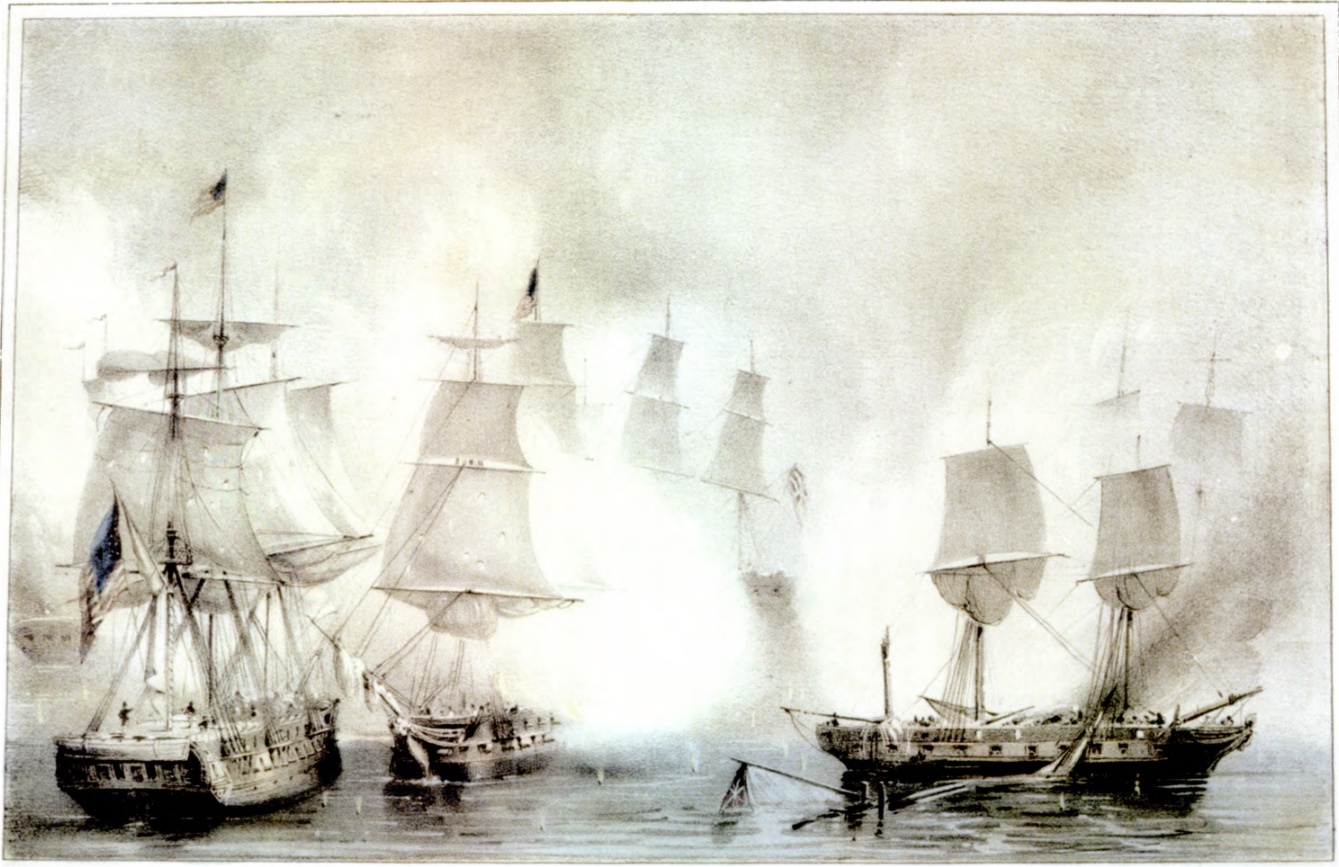
The Navy's story of the Battle of Lake Champlain is a story of planning, preparation, and perseverance. The U.S. Navy earned its victory through a placement

of its ships that maximized their firepower while minimizing the opposing squadron's advantages, prudent preparation and wise execution, and courageous perseverance during one of the deadliest naval battles of the entire war.

## A Strategic Waterway

Lake Champlain is a long and narrow body of water, stretching 125 miles and ranging in width from one-half mile to fourteen miles. It flows northward along the border of New York and Vermont, with its northern extremities extending several miles into Canada.

During the eighteenth-century wars of empire, both French and British forces employed the lake as an invasion route. Early in the American Revolution,



### MR. DONOVAN'S VICTORY ON LAKE CHAMPLAIN.

American Force: 11 vessels carrying 80 Guns, & 820 men.  
Loss: 57 killed, 58 wounded.

AFTER AN ACTION OF 2 HOURS, & 2 MINUTES.

6.

British Force: 17 vessels, carrying 95 Guns, & 1050 men.  
Loss: 84 killed, 116 wounded.

Original from

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT  
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

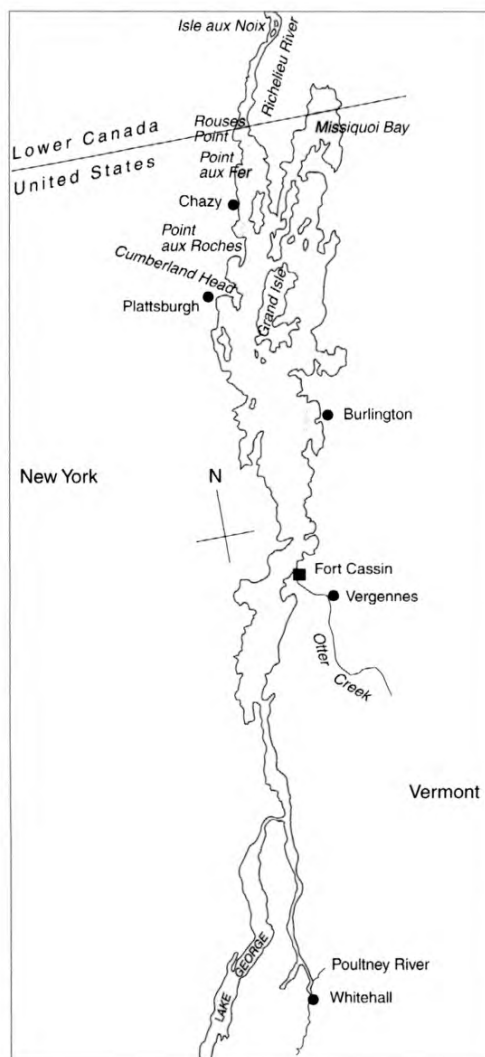


Continental Army forces traveled north down Lake Champlain and the Richelieu and St. Lawrence rivers to capture Montreal and besiege Quebec City. In 1776, British forces drove the Americans back into Lake Champlain. Delayed by having to build armed vessels to engage and defeat an American squadron at Valcour Island, the British resumed their southern advance in 1777. As the British army under command of "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne advanced south of Lake Champlain, Americans cut their supply route and, with New York and New England militia rallying to the Continental Army in defense of their region, gradually outnumbered them. In the end, Burgoyne surrendered his army at Saratoga, New York.

Despite its strategic importance historically, during the War of 1812 Lake Champlain remained relatively quiet until 1814. U.S. military efforts to conquer Canada concentrated further west along the St. Lawrence River and on the Niagara Peninsula. While the U.S. Army prepared to invade Canada, the U.S. Navy sought naval mastery of Lakes Ontario and Erie, deemed essential to the success of such an invasion. The U.S. Navy built a fleet of capital ships on Lake Ontario, at Sackets Harbor, New York, but the Royal Navy built an equally impressive fleet at its Lake Ontario base, Kingston, Ontario. The two navies also built rival squadrons on Lake Erie. American naval victory on Lake Erie in 1813 secured the Northwest for America. But U.S. conquest of Canada was no closer as long as the rival fleets stalemated each other on Lake Ontario.

### Naval Rivalry on Lake Champlain

Although Lake Champlain was a secondary theater of the War of 1812 until 1814, both the Americans



Lake Champlain

and the British began contending for control of the lake early in the war.

Lieutenant Thomas Macdonough, a veteran of the wars in the Mediterranean against the Barbary Powers, arrived in October 1812 to take over the American squadron, which consisted of three 11- and 12-gun sloops, and two gunboats armed with one bow gun each. Macdonough maintained naval superiority until June 1813, when his subordinate, Lieutenant Sidney Smith, foolishly and contrary to orders, sailed two of the sloops, *Eagle* and *Growler*, into the Richelieu River where they were cut off and captured.

By the autumn of 1813, Macdonough, through purchase and construction, regained naval mastery of the lake. During the winter of 1813–14, he built a shipyard at Vergennes, Vermont, up Otter Creek, a winding waterway that provided protection from surprise raids. There he began construction on the 26-gun ship *Saratoga*, as well as several gunboats. He also had *Ticonderoga*, the hull of which had been intended for a

commercial steamship, refitted as a sloop of war.

The British sent Commander Daniel Pring, RN, to take command of the captured American sloops. He used them as the nucleus of a squadron, building additional vessels at Île aux Noix, in the Richelieu River, downstream from Lake Champlain. On 9 May 1814, Pring sailed into the lake with his new 16-gun brig *Linnet*, five sloops, and thirteen gunboats. Unable to fight his way past a battery guarding the mouth of Otter Creek, Pring gave up an attack on the American shipyard at Vergennes. After raiding a few settlements along the shores of Lake Champlain, he returned to his base at Île aux Noix.

Macdonough brought his squadron out into the lake on 20 May and sailed to Plattsburgh, New York. There he received intelligence that Pring was building a large ship, *Confiance*. In response, Macdonough

*continued on page 56*



# The Battle of Valcour Island

In Lake Champlain just a few miles south of Plattsburgh Bay lies Valcour Island, where, on 11 October 1776, during the American Revolution, another American squadron, using tactics similar to Macdonough's, confronted an earlier British naval squadron.

The American fleet on Lake Champlain in 1776 sailed under the command of Brigadier General Benedict Arnold of the Continental Army. Arnold picked the location of Valcour Island to fight the British for sound tactical reasons. First, the crews of the American ships were composed almost entirely of landsmen who could not be expected to maneuver their ships effectively against a squadron directed by Royal Navy officers and manned by experienced sailors. They would do better fighting from the ships at anchor, using their vessels as stationary gun platforms. Second, the British fleet was more heavily armed than the American. The broadside of the British fleet outweighed that of the American fleet by about 500 pounds to 265. The Americans would do well if they could prevent the ships of the British fleet from acting in concert. By anchoring in the channel's narrows, Arnold could prevent the British sailing vessels from working into firing position more than one at a time. Third, if the British did not have prior intelligence, they would not know where the American fleet was until they had sailed past the southern end of Valcour Island. If the British ships were sailing southward with a northerly breeze, they would then face the difficult task of sailing into the wind in order to engage the American ships. It made the most sense for Arnold to engage the British under the circumstances that would best minimize the superiority of their guns. To that end, a better post than the narrows of Valcour Island could not have been found.

The engagement lasted from before noon until nightfall. Unable to maneuver most of their principal vessels within range, the British suffered relatively light damage. In contrast, when Arnold



**The American strategy at the Battle of Valcour Island, 11 October 1776, foreshadowed Macdonough's strategy thirty-eight years later.**

and his officers assessed the condition of the American fleet, they concluded that the American flotilla could not survive another such encounter with the British fleet. The Americans took advantage of the dark night, heavy fog, and a wide gap left between the British deployment and the New York shore to slip past silently in the night.

Although defeated in the Battle of Valcour Island in October 1776, the fleet served the cause of American Independence well by forcing a delay in the British army's advance southward along the Lake Champlain corridor. That delay led, the next campaigning season, to the capitulation of the British army to American arms at Saratoga, New York.

The American victory at Saratoga meant that New England would not be cut off from the rest of the rebellious states. It also helped persuade the government of France that America could continue its fight for independence. France declared war against Great Britain confident that its new ally, the United States, would not reconcile prematurely with their common foe.

When, a generation later during America's "second War of Independence," a few miles to the northward, in Plattsburgh Bay, Thomas Macdonough defeated another more powerful British fleet using tactics similar to those used by Arnold, the victory had similarly far-reaching diplomatic effects.





**This portrait of Thomas Macdonough shows him in a heroic pose, with the scene of his famous victory in the background.**

obtained permission to build the brig *Eagle*. Although much smaller than *Confiance*, the brig could be launched quickly and would make Macdonough's squadron a near match, at least in the number of guns, for Pring's.

### British Plans for a Northern Offensive

The British in Canada were on the defensive until 1814. In that year the strategic situation changed dramatically, and the Champlain Valley became a crucial arena of the war. On 11 April, Napoleon I, Emperor of France, abdicated unconditionally and

accepted exile to the island of Elba. Peace in Europe freed thousands of veteran British soldiers to serve in the war against America. By mid-August, more than 13,000 British troops had arrived in Canada from Europe. Canada's Governor General Sir George Prevost, with orders from London to employ those forces offensively, organized 10,000 into an invasion force. Their objective was to occupy a portion of the United States along the border with Canada to use as a bargaining chip at the peace negotiations then under way at Ghent, Belgium.

Logistical difficulties ruled out a campaign to the westward. The demands of naval shipbuilding at Kingston on Lake Ontario monopolized the transport otherwise needed to supply the British army. An invasion along Lake Champlain beckoned as an attractive alternative. If the British occupied the Champlain Valley, they could demand its cession in any peace treaty and make a future American invasion of Canada by that route impractical.

The British army could march into the valley either through Vermont, to the east of Lake Champlain, or through New York, to the west of the lake. Vermont cattle, spirited across the border, however, were an important source of food for the British army, and the Federalist Party, opposed to the war, controlled Vermont's state government. An alien army on their native soil might arouse Vermonters' opposition, cut off supplies of cattle, and give the state to the pro-war Democratic-Republicans. With these conditions in mind, Sir George Prevost prepared to invade the United States along the New York side of Lake Champlain.

### U.S. Land Defenses

Major General George Izard, in command of the U.S. Army in the Lake Champlain region, established his headquarters at Plattsburgh. By late July 1814, he had 5,000 soldiers under his command. On 31 July he moved 4,500 of them to the town of Champlain, New York, near the Canadian border.

On 2 August, unaware of the rapid massing of British forces on the border, U.S. Secretary of War John Armstrong in Washington sent orders to Izard to march his army to Sackets Harbor, on Lake Ontario.



From Sackets Harbor, Izard was to assist the American army on the Niagara Peninsula and to threaten Britain's Lake Ontario naval base at Kingston.

The notion of withdrawing in the face of a powerful enemy poised for an invasion of the Champlain Valley dismayed Izard, but the unconditional order left him no choice. He wrote Armstrong:

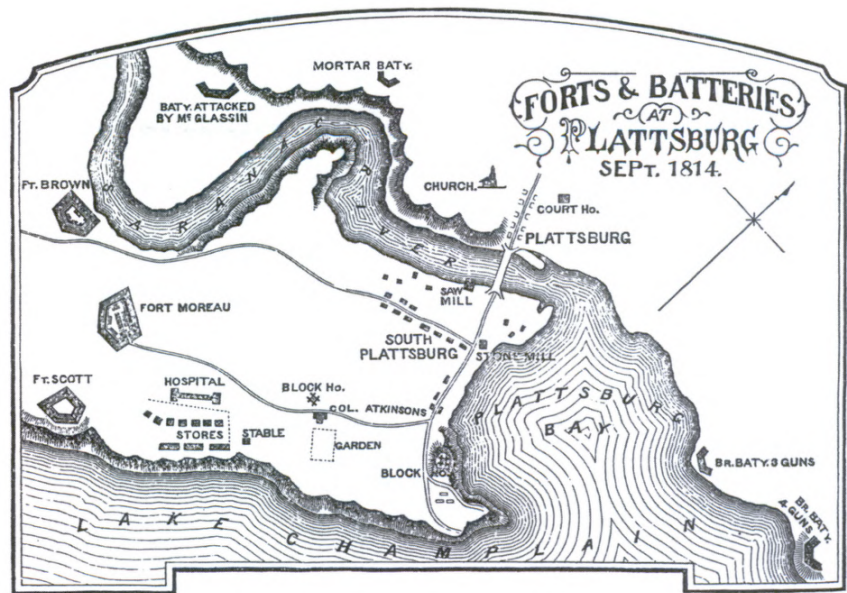
I will make the movement you direct, if possible; but I shall do it with the apprehension of risking the forces under my command, and with the certainty that every thing in this vicinity, but the lately erected works at Plattsburgh and Cumberland Head, will, in less than three days after my departure, be in possession of the enemy.

On 29 August, Izard withdrew his forces from Champlain and started westward with 4,000 men. At Plattsburgh he left Brigadier General Alexander Macomb in command of 1,500 soldiers, including some 300 sick and invalid, in addition to an infantry regiment and a troop of light dragoons requisitioned from the New York militia.

Macomb concentrated his forces at Plattsburgh, behind the Saranac River. After flowing generally eastward, the Saranac turns north at Plattsburgh, running through the town, parallel to the Lake Champlain shore, before emptying into Plattsburgh Bay. At the river's bend, guarding the approach to the narrow peninsula between the river and the lakeshore, stood three large earthworks, Fort Brown, Fort Moreau, and Fort Scott, built under the direction of Major Joseph Totten, USA, an engineer trained at the United States Military Academy. Two bridges crossed the river, the upper bridge west of the forts, and the lower bridge, downstream to the north. A blockhouse south of the lower bridge over the Saranac and a stone mill near the river's mouth protected the northern end of the peninsula.

## The British Advance

Prevost led his army across the border on 1 September. On the third the British reached the town of Champlain and on the fourth moved on to Chazy.



On the sixth, advancing British troops clashed with U.S. troop detachments at Beekmantown. In three skirmishes they drove the Americans back into Plattsburgh and across the Saranac. Safely across the bridges, the Americans tore up their planks. British soldiers crossing Dead Creek, at the head of the bay, came under fire from several of Macdonough's gunboats in Plattsburgh Bay, which the British drove off with artillery.

From the seventh to the tenth of September, Prevost erected batteries in preparation for an assault on the American fortified position. Prevost delayed that assault in anticipation of acting simultaneously with the Royal Navy's attack on Macdonough's squadron, which posed an otherwise unanswerable threat to his supply line. If the American squadron remained free to operate on the lake, the British army could not count on the safe arrival of foodstuffs and other necessities and would have to withdraw to Canada even if victorious at Plattsburgh. In the meantime, the Americans strengthened their defensive works and grew in numbers as New York militia and Vermont volunteers converged on Plattsburgh. By the time of the battle, Macomb had some 4,700 troops, regulars, militia, and volunteers, to oppose the approximately 8,000 of Prevost's that faced him.

## The Rival Squadrons Prepare for Battle

In number of ships, guns, and crew, and in weight of broadside, the two squadrons that fought the Battle of Lake Champlain were closely matched. (Note: In the discussions that follow, the figures given for weight of shot fired by the two squadrons may convey a false



sense of exactness, since the sources disagree on the armament of various vessels, especially those of the British squadron. For comparison's sake, nonetheless, the ratios are approximately correct.)

	<u>American</u>	<u>British</u>
Vessels	14	16
Guns	86	93
Men	882	937
Broadside	1,206 lbs.	1,158 lbs.

Two factors, however, gave the British great advantages. The first was the British squadron's preponderance of long guns. The opposing squadrons differed in their mix of long guns and short-range carronades (short, light, iron cannon) and columbiads (heavy guns, combining the qualities of gun, howitzer, and mortar). The long guns at the Battle of Lake Champlain fired iron balls weighing 6, 12, 18, or 24 pounds each. Their most effective range was 1,000 yards and under. The carronades, recognizable by their stubby profile, fired balls weighing 18, 24, 32, or 42 pounds. Their most effective range was 300 yards and under. The columbiads at the Battle of Lake Champlain fired 6- and 18-pound shells.

Taken together, the long guns of the British squadron fired a total of 1,056 pounds of shot, compared with only 780 for the American squadron. The British would bring overwhelming force to the battle if they could engage the American squadron at long range and prevent it from closing the distance.

The second factor giving the British squadron a great advantage was the fact that its firepower was concentrated in a single ship. The guns of the new ship *Confiance* represented a full half of the weight of metal that the squadron could deliver in a single discharge of all its guns and more than a third of the squadron's broadside. The long guns on *Confiance* alone nearly matched the long guns of the entire U.S. squadron.

The British squadron operated under disadvantages as well. *Confiance* was incompletely equipped. It was launched only on 25 August and shipwrights were still working on the interior spaces the morning of the battle. The crewmembers were new to the ship and to each other. Many, including soldiers borrowed from the army, joined the ship only a day or two before the battle and had no time to familiarize themselves with the ship or to learn to work together. The first practice at the guns was on 9 September. The commander, himself, was new to the squadron. At the end of July, perhaps in recognition of the importance of the theater, the Royal Navy placed a captain, Peter Fisher,

in command, reducing Commander Pring to second in command. Fisher hardly had had two months to familiarize himself with his command and the geography of Lake Champlain when on 3 September, the third day of the British army's invasion of New York state, Captain George Downie, RN, arrived from Lake Ontario and replaced Fisher in command of the British Lake Champlain fleet.

On the same day, Thomas Macdonough sailed his squadron into Plattsburgh Bay and took up a defensive position at anchor. He realized that the strategic situation gave him the opportunity to maximize his tactical advantages. The British squadron commander would be obliged to attack in order to prevent the U.S. squadron from supporting the U.S. land troops when the British army launched its assault. Macdonough, on the other hand, was under no necessity of sailing out to engage the British squadron on the lake, where the enemy's preponderance of long guns would tip the odds in its favor.

Macdonough therefore decided to fight from anchor. He placed his ships in a defensive formation far enough from the town of Plattsburgh to prevent enemy ships from supporting the British land assault. The position was also close enough to Cumberland Head, which forms the eastern shore of Plattsburgh Bay, to force the British squadron to fight within range of carronades. Although their range was less than that of long guns, shot fired from carronades had greater impact because of their greater weight. For this reason, carronades were often called *smashers*. A battle fought at short range would favor American victory, since in short guns the U.S. squadron outgunned the British by 1,288 pounds of shot to 808.

On Lake Champlain, the winds tend to blow either from the north or from the south. Macdonough knew that only a north wind would enable the British squadron to sail south toward Plattsburgh. Having rounded Cumberland Head, in order to attack the American squadron in Plattsburgh Bay, the British ships would have to turn northward, sailing against the wind. The shallow draft of the ships, required by the lake's shoals, would make such a maneuver difficult. The British ships would have to advance slowly against the wind, bow on, exposed to the American squadron's broadsides, unable to reply with their own cannon until in position to engage.

Macdonough formed his ships in a line running northeast between Crab Island, a small island that forms the southwestern extremity of Plattsburgh Bay, and Cumberland Head. A shoal extending north of

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# Anchored for Battle

As a professional naval officer, Thomas Macdonough knew recent naval history and was aware that there were precedents for his decision to fight from anchor. In the most important of these, the Battle of the Nile and the Battle of Copenhagen, the anchored fleets met total disaster. In a third, the less-well-known Battle of Algeciras, the anchored fleet narrowly escaped defeat only through the providential dying of the wind.

On 1 August 1798, British Admiral Horatio Nelson discovered the squadron of French Vice Admiral François Paul Brueys d'Aigalliers anchored in Aboukir Bay, near the mouth of the River Nile. Brueys's thirteen ships of the line were anchored in a line, but otherwise unprepared for battle. Without hesitation, Nelson ordered his own thirteen ships of the line to attack at once. A portion of the British ships managed to circle round the French line and attack from the shore side while the remainder engaged from the side facing the sea. As the British cruised systematically down the line, each French vessel found itself opposing concentrated fire from both sides. The final tally was ten French ships captured, one run aground and burned, and two escaped.

At Copenhagen in the spring of 1801, a Danish fleet of eighteen ships of the line took a position along the seafront in a line running from north to south. The Trekroner forts protected the north and shoals prevented the position from being turned. The Danes believed that the attacking British fleet would have to approach from the north and sail past the forts, whose guns would give the British ships a severe beating before they could engage the Danish fleet. Nelson, second in command of the British fleet, however, discovered a passage by which he believed ships could attack from the south, avoiding the forts. With half the fleet, ten ships of the line, two 50-gun ships, and the smaller



At the Battle of the Nile, 1 August 1798, a fleet fighting at anchor met complete disaster.

vessels, he made the attempt on 1 April. Although three of Nelson's ships of the line failed to make it through, the remainder of his command captured or sank all but three of the Danish warships.

On 6 July 1801, in Algeciras Bay, on the Mediterranean coast of Spain near the British stronghold of Gibraltar, a British squadron of seven ships of the line, under command of Rear Admiral Sir James Saumarez, attacked a French squadron of three ships of the line and one frigate under Rear Admiral Charles Alexandre Linois. Linois had anchored close inshore under the protection of four land batteries. The British attack faltered because of the uncertain wind. When a light breeze sprang up, Linois ordered the French anchor cables cut and the ships run ashore to avoid capture. Before this maneuver could be completed, the breeze died and the British aborted the battle. Afterward, the French took possession of one British ship that had run aground, and the British withdrew another from the active list because of heavy battle damage.

With history in mind, Macdonough knew the risks he ran when he anchored in Plattsburgh Bay. But he minimized those risks. He countered the possibility of being doubled, and he made sure his anchored ships would nevertheless retain a degree of mobility. By winning the battle from anchor, Macdonough made history.



the island prevented enemy vessels from circling round the rear of the American line. A battery consisting of one or two 6-pounders on the island was to be manned by invalids from the island's improvised army hospital. A mile and a half north of the island, Macdonough positioned the sloop *Preble* (7 guns), Lieutenant Charles Budd, with its bow to the northwest. Next in line, two hundred yards distant, came the schooner *Ticonderoga* (17 guns), Lieutenant Stephen Cassin, followed at one hundred yards by the flagship, *Saratoga* (26 guns). The brig *Eagle* (20 guns), Master Commandant Robert Henley, anchored at the head of the line. Macdonough distributed his ten gunboats in the gaps between the ships, but west of the line. During the battle, the gunboats did not remain at anchor, but moved about by means of their oars.

Macdonough took one more precaution, a precaution that won the battle for him. He had each of the four anchored vessels equipped with springs, or hawsers, attached to their anchors in such a way as to allow the vessel to be turned 180 degrees and bring a fresh broadside battery against the enemy. Bights, or loops of rope, held the springs under water, protected from gunshot damage.

### Commodore Downie Attacks

On 3 September, Pring brought his British gunboats from Île aux Noix into Lake Champlain to cover the British army's left flank. The next day, he established a battery on Isle La Motte, to protect an army supply depot at the mouth of the Little Chazy River. On 8 September, Downie brought up the larger vessels of the fleet. Its magazine still unfinished, *Confiance* towed a boat carrying its gunpowder.

On 7 September, Downie received a dispatch from General Prevost urging him as soon as possible to join in a

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## The Prayer Before the Battle



This portrait of Thomas Macdonough in civilian attire and spectacles suggests a contemplative scholar rather than a man of action.

*The pious and brave Macdonough—the professor of the religion of the Redeemer—preparing for action, he called on God, who forsook him not in the hour of danger: may he not be forgotten by his country.*

Toast at a public dinner in Plattsburgh a few days after the Battle of Lake Champlain

U.S. law has always promoted religion and morality in the Navy. *An Act for the Better Government of the Navy*, adopted in 1800, required commanders of U.S. naval vessels to exemplify virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination, and to suppress and correct immoral practices among all those placed under their command. Each commander was to see that the chaplain, if one was attached to his ship, performed divine



service twice a day, "in a solemn, orderly, and reverent manner," and preached a sermon on Sundays. The commander was to cause as many of the ship's company as could be spared from duty "to attend at every performance of the worship of God."

Like the general population, naval officers varied in degree of devotion to religion. For the majority, performance of religious duties was formal, if not perfunctory. Thomas Macdonough, however, was one who enjoyed a reputation for real piety. A letter of advice he wrote to one of his subordinates, Acting Lieutenant John T. Drury, reflects the commodore's genuine religious convictions.

Drury was despondent over a covert operation in which he had played a principal part that had led to the accidental shooting death of a civilian. Macdonough wrote him:

You my good sir can, I am sure or at least I sincerely hope can, lay your hand on your heart and acquit your conscience and feelings to God of being intentionally, directly or indirectly instrumental in the unfortunate occurrence—I say I hope—I believe you can, then let me advise you to do it in your room with your door and window shut, asking with a penitent and unfeigned heart forgiveness of him who has said that he is always ready to forgive and receive all humble and penitent supplications. Let me advise you, my dear sir, to bring your mind to this state and the heaviest weight will be taken off, leaving you reconciled to yourself and to your God.

Macdonough had heard that Drury had turned to alcohol to drown the feelings of guilt that oppressed him. "Now let me advise you in the most earnest and strong manner to refrain from such a mode of quitting and alleviating your feelings," the commodore admonished.

Your own good sense will I trust and sincerely hope point out the fallacy of such a remedy. It will be momentary and returning to the same thing again be the sure and natural consequence which will ultimately terminate in destruction

and misery to yourself, and be to your family an everlasting sting of bitter pain and regret. No, my dear sir, you would do extremely wrong even to indulge at all in this deceiving and destroying substitute to exterminate any affection of the mind. Believe me it leads to ruin, certain ruin.

In addition to friendly and heartfelt advice, Macdonough offered Drury a berth in his next sea command, thus proving to the young man that Macdonough had no ill will toward him and giving him hope for his future.

On the morning of 11 September 1814, after the enemy squadron had hove into sight, the *Saratoga's* decks had been cleared, and all was in readiness for action, Macdonough knelt on the quarterdeck with his officers and men around him, and committed the outcome of the impending battle to Divine Providence with these words from the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*.

O Most powerful and Glorious Lord God, the Lord of hosts, that rulest and commandest all things; thou sittest in thy throne judging right: And therefore we make our address to thy Divine Majesty, in this our necessity, that thou wouldest take the cause into thine own hand, and judge between us and our enemies. Stir up thy strength, O Lord, and come and help us; for thou givest not always the battle to the strong, but canst save by many or by few. O let not our sins now cry against us for vengeance; but hear us thy poor servants begging mercy, and imploring thy help, and that thou wouldest be a defence unto us against the face of the enemy: Make it appear that thou art our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

It is said that there are no atheists in foxholes. Macdonough's solemn act of public prayer on board *Saratoga*, however, was not the act of one who turns to God only in the hour of danger, but was consistent with the commodore's known character.



simultaneous naval and land action. On each subsequent day, Prevost sent an increasingly insistent request to commence the attack. On 8 September, Downie wrote to Prevost: "I stated to you that the Ship was not ready—she is not ready now, and until she is ready, it is my Duty not to hazard the squadron before an Enemy, who will even then be considerably superior in force."

The British commodore finally agreed to sail into battle the morning of 10 September. "I rely on any assistance you can afford the squadron," he told Prevost. Prevost had his troops ready at 6 A.M., but the British squadron could not make headway against a contrary wind and at 10 A.M. Downie called off the attack.

At 3:30 A.M. on 11 September, the winds having shifted, Downie weighed anchor. When the squadron reached Cumberland Head, shortly after daylight, it fired blank charges—the agreed-upon signal for the British army to begin its assault.

After calling his commanders on board *Confiance* to explain his battle plan, Downie reconnoitered the American position from his gig. At about 8 A.M., the commodore having returned to his ship, the squadron hoisted sails, rounded Cumberland Head, and moved to the attack. Downie's intent was to concentrate his squadron's fire on *Saratoga*, for if the Americans' principal ship were disabled, the smaller warships could not withstand *Confiance*'s gunfire.

The sloop *Finch* (11 guns), Lieutenant William Hicks, led the attack. Hicks' assignment was, with the assistance of the gunboats, to engage *Ticonderoga* and *Preble* at the southern end of the American line. Downie's flagship *Confiance* (37 guns), the brig *Linnet* (16 guns), Commander Pring, and the sloop *Chubb* (11 guns), Lieutenant James McGhie, followed in that order. Downie hoped to pass the northern end of the American line, come about, fire on *Eagle* with the starboard battery, and then bring *Confiance* to anchor athwart the main objective, *Saratoga*. *Linnet* and *Chubb* were to finish off the injured *Eagle* before joining in the attack on *Saratoga*.

## The Naval Engagement in Plattsburgh Bay

The U.S. brig *Eagle* fired the first shots of the engagement, but the British fleet was still out of range. *Linnet* fired next, but only one of her shots reached *Saratoga*. *Saratoga*'s first shot, from a long 24-pounder that Macdonough himself sighted, raked *Confiance*'s deck from bow to stern, with deadly effect. The entire American line then commenced action.

Inconstant and shifting winds and heavy damage received in approaching the American line, including the loss of both of *Confiance*'s bow anchors, frustrated Downie's plan. Unable to reach the head of the American line without taking unacceptable losses, Downie ordered *Confiance* to drop anchor when it came opposite *Saratoga*.

In advance of *Confiance*, *Linnet* and *Chubb* engaged *Eagle*. About a half hour into the battle, having failed to anchor and with rigging and sails cut up, *Chubb* became unmanageable. The British sloop drifted southward, coming between *Confiance* and *Saratoga*, where *Chubb* struck its colors. The Americans took control of the drifting vessel as it passed through their line.

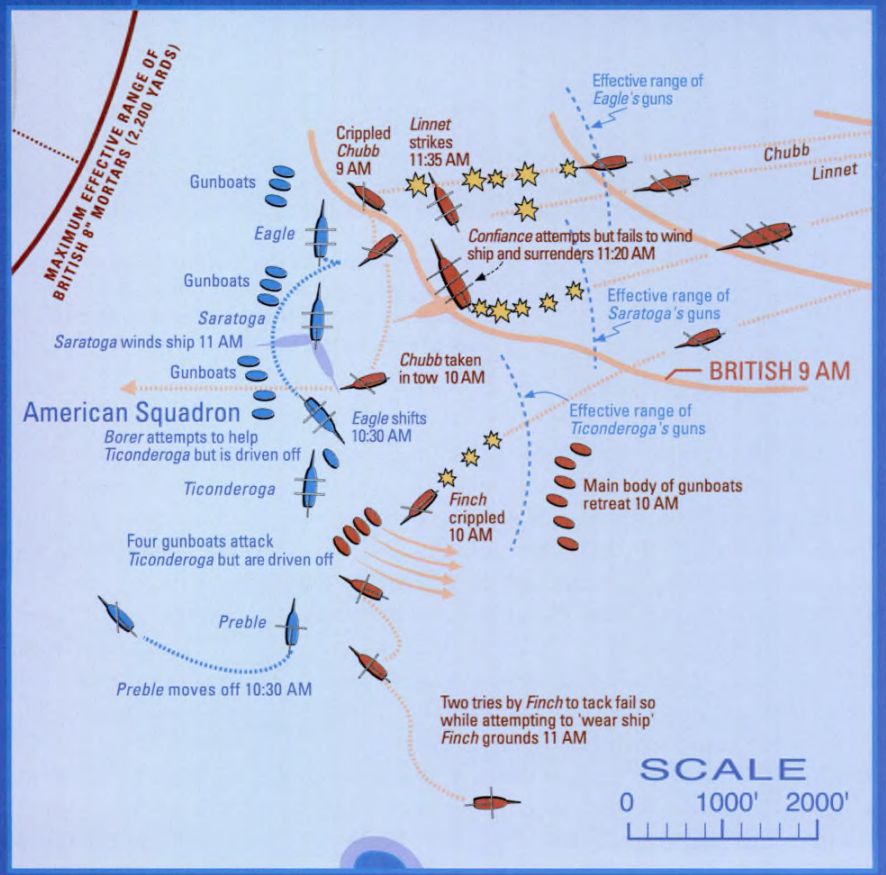
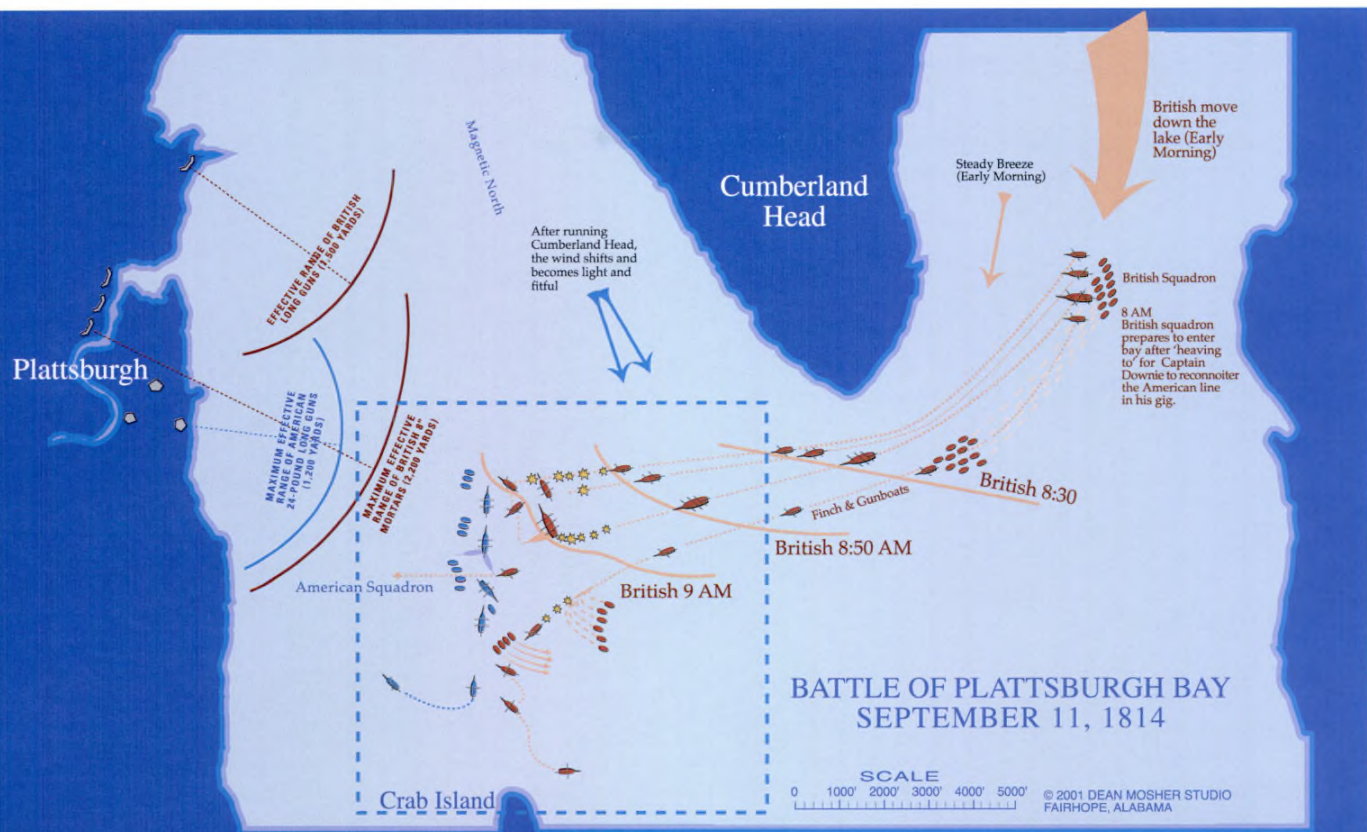
*Eagle* sustained the combined fire of *Linnet* and *Chubb*, before *Chubb* was disabled. To this was added that of *Confiance*'s forward guns, which came to bear on the American brig when a rising wind turned the ship. After *Eagle*'s entire starboard battery had been silenced, Henley cut the cable and, sheeting home his topsails, came about and ran down along *Saratoga*'s unengaged side. By coming to between *Saratoga* and *Ticonderoga*, Henley brought *Eagle*'s fresh port battery to bear on *Confiance*; but *Eagle*'s change of position also exposed *Saratoga* to *Linnet*'s raking fire.

*Confiance*'s first broadside, from sixteen 24-pounders, double shotted, carefully aimed, and deliberately fired, had devastating effect, killing and wounding forty of *Saratoga*'s crew. Among the slain was Lieutenant Peter Gamble, killed when a shot split a quoin (a wooden block used to elevate or depress a gun's barrel) and drove part of it against his breast. With his first lieutenant sick, ashore, Macdonough was left with no other commissioned line officers on board to support him.

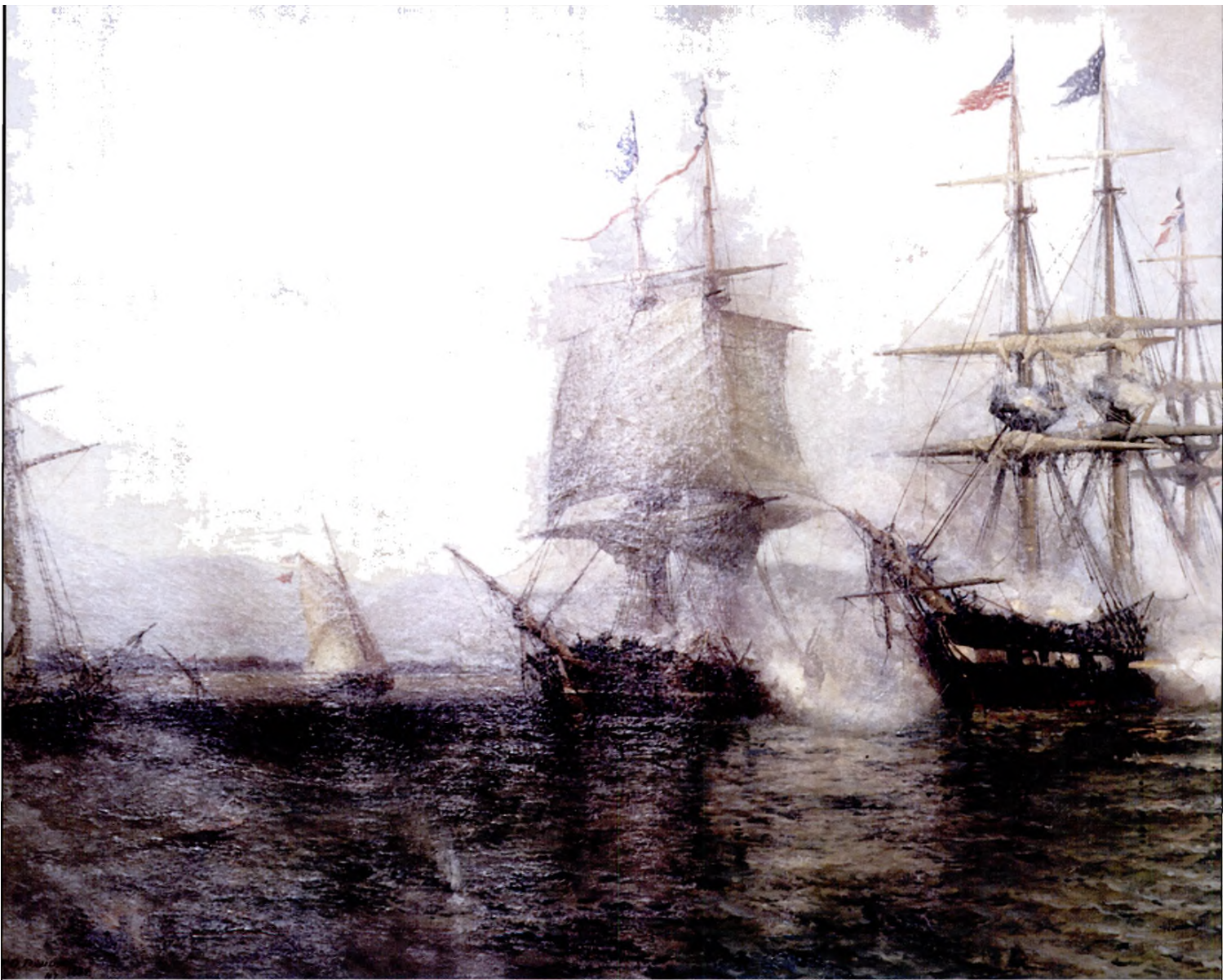
The two flagships settled down to a slugfest and the carnage on both ships was horrific. About fifteen minutes after *Confiance* opened fire, a shot from *Saratoga* knocked one of *Confiance*'s guns off its carriage and into Downie's groin, killing him. In the Royal Navy it was not unusual for petty officers' wives to go to sea with their husbands, and during the battle the Grim Reaper did not discriminate between the sexes. The wife of *Confiance*'s steward was below decks binding up the wounded when a cannonball tore through the side of the ship, carried her across the vessel, and killed her. On board *Saratoga*, Macdonough was knocked out twice, once when the spanker boom fell on him, and once when a shot took off a gun captain's head and drove it into the commodore's face. Both times, Macdonough regained consciousness and resumed direction of the battle and,

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because of the shortage of lieutenants, sighted one of the guns. Acting Lieutenant Elie Vallette was knocked off his feet by the head of another seaman severed from its body by a shot.

Hot shot from *Confiance's* furnace twice set *Saratoga* afire.

Each subsequent firing from *Confiance* became less effective. This owed in part to the quoins working loose and causing the guns to point high. One by one, the guns on both ships were disabled. After the battle, it was found that several of *Confiance's* guns became useless when their untrained crews improperly loaded them, ramming home shot without powder cartridges for example. Some of *Saratoga's* guns became ineffective because their excited crews overcharged them, which decreased the impact of their shot and eventually disabled them.

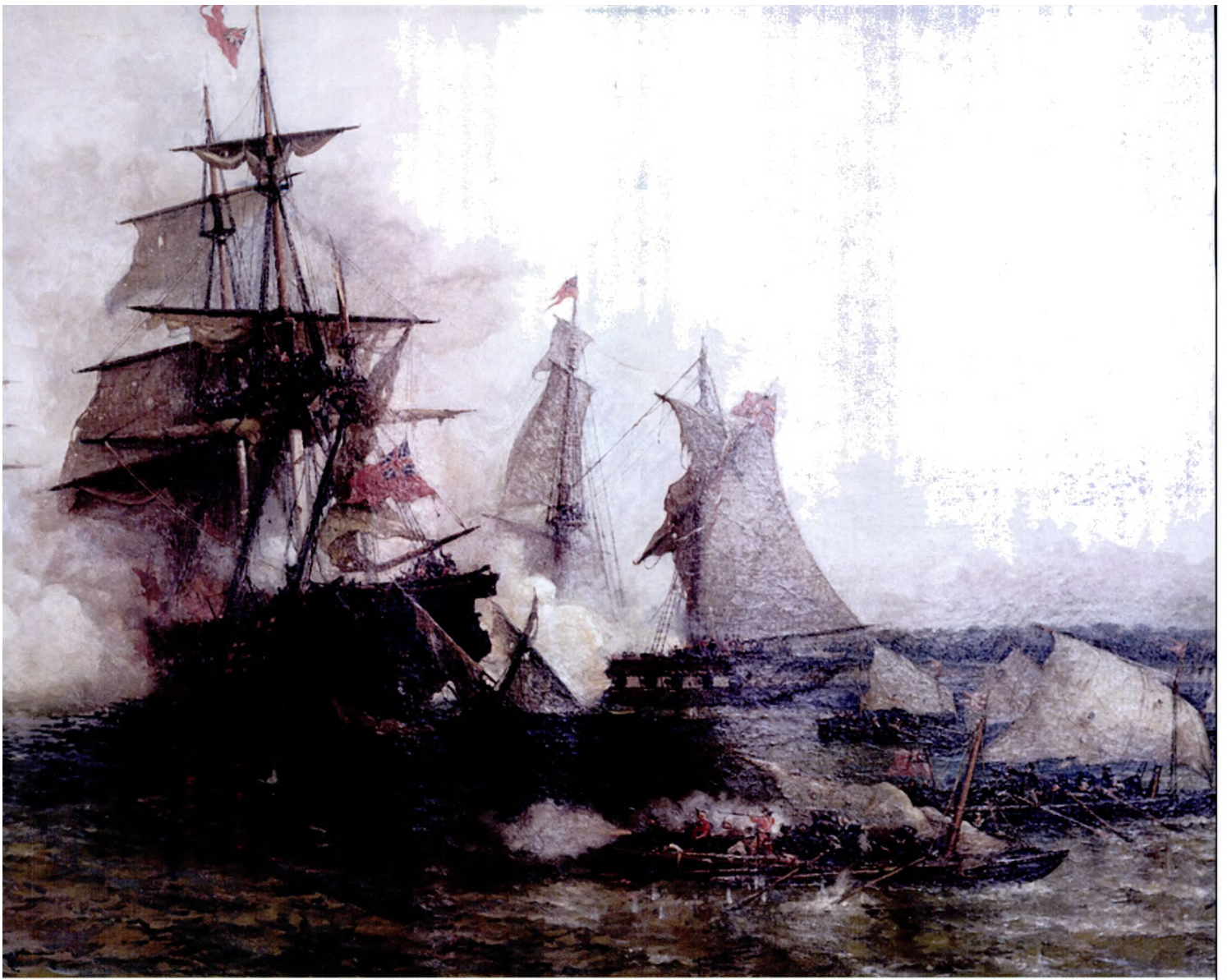
**In this painting of the Battle of Lake Champlain, the artist has reduced distances between warships to increase the drama of the scene.**

At the southern end of the line, *Finch* had been unable to reach its assigned station opposite *Ticonderoga*. After sustaining the combined fire of *Ticonderoga* and *Preble* during its approach, the

British sloop took a position from which its guns bore on both vessels. Supported by four gunboats, *Finch* concentrated its fire on *Preble*. To avoid the raking fire, little *Preble* withdrew from the line; it never returned to the fray. *Finch* and the four gunboats then turned their fire on *Ticonderoga*. About an hour into the battle, badly cut up and waterlogged, *Finch*, unable to tack, drifted, and grounded on the shoals off Crab Island. There it exchanged fire with the island battery.

Four of the British gunboats continued to attack *Ticonderoga* after *Finch* had disengaged. Several times the gunboats approached within a few feet in





attempting to take the schooner by boarding. *Ticonderoga's* officers and men displayed coolness under fire. Lieutenant Cassin directed the return fire of musket and grapeshot from *Ticonderoga's* taffrail, exposing himself to the storm of grape and canister shot. Seventeen-year-old Midshipman Hiram Paulding, a future rear admiral, had charge of *Ticonderoga's* eight-gun battery. Finding the match rope for firing his guns defective, Paulding used pistol flashes to touch off *Ticonderoga's* cannons. The British gunboats withdrew after sustaining heavy casualties. Then *Ticonderoga* directed its fire against *Confiance*.

About this time, the guns on board the two principal ships fell silent. The last gun in action on board *Saratoga* broke off its carriage and fell down a hatch. On board *Confiance*, the four guns that had not been disabled were too encumbered with wreckage to be worked.

Now Macdonough's careful preparations proved their worth. His orders to have *Saratoga* wound round were successfully executed and the fresh port battery was brought into play. Lieutenant James Robertson, who succeeded to *Confiance's* command when Downie was killed, tried to execute the same maneuver. But lacking *Saratoga's* carefully planned anchor placement, *Confiance* was unable to complete the turn. The ship hung up when under *Saratoga's* raking fire. Sinking, water above the gun deck, the wounded in danger of drowning, and the crew refusing to stand to quarters, *Confiance* struck its colors. *Linnet* held out against *Saratoga* another fifteen minutes before striking. Unable to get off the shoal, when he saw that the other British ships had surrendered, Hicks struck *Finch's* flag.

The rigging of the American squadron's larger vessels was too cut up for them to get under sail in chase of the British gunboats, and Macdonough

*continued on page 68*



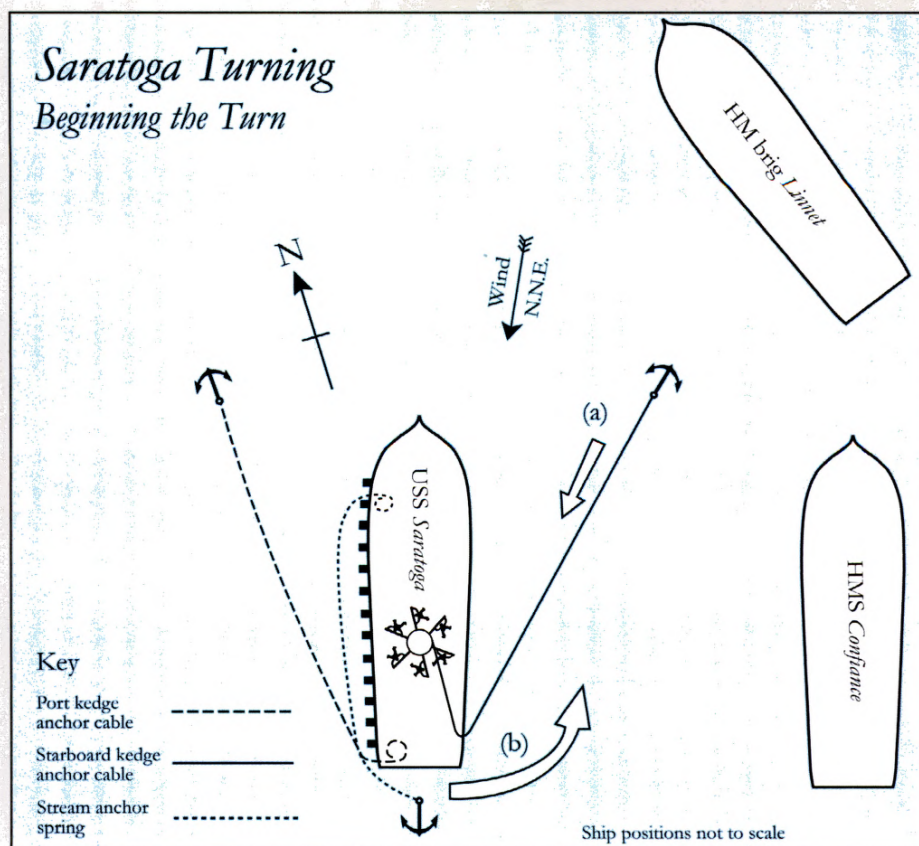
# How Macdonough Turned the Battle Around

When all the guns on the engaged side of his flagship, *Saratoga*, were disabled, Commodore Thomas Macdonough pivoted the ship 180 degrees, bringing a fresh battery to bear against the enemy, and thereby won the Battle of Lake Champlain. Even the most clearly written account of the maneuver can be confusing. The diagrams displayed here provide a simplified illustration of how the crucial turn was accomplished. The accompanying text describing the sequence is taken from an account that drew on the recollections of then-living participants. It first appeared in 1839 in James Fenimore Cooper's *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*.



**Shortening the starboard kedge anchor cable (a) pivoted the stern (b).**

"The stream anchor suspended astern, was let go accordingly. The men then clapped on the hawser that led to the starboard quarter, and brought the ship's stern up over the kedge; but here she hung, there not being sufficient wind, or current, to force her bows around."





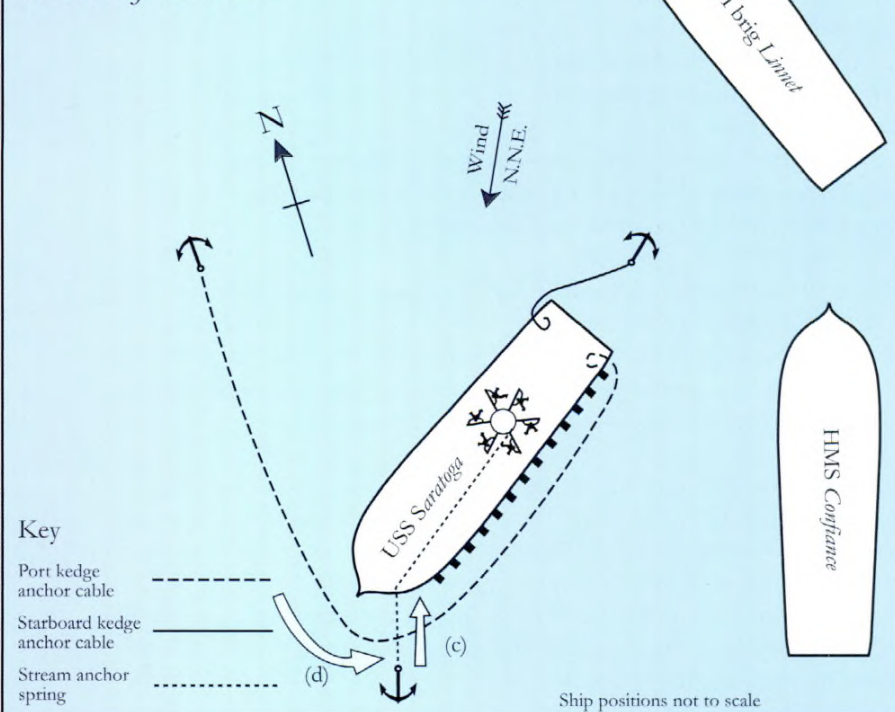
Shortening the stream anchor spring (c) pivoted the bow (d).

"A line had been bent to a bight in the stream cable, with a view to help wind the ship, and she now rode by the kedge and this line, with her stern under the raking broadside of the *Linnet*, which brig kept up a steady and well-directed fire. The larboard [port] batteries having been manned and got ready, Captain M'Donough ordered all the men from the guns, where they were uselessly suffering, telling them to go forward. By rowing on the line, the ship was at length got so far round, that the aftermost gun would bear on the *Confiance*, when it was instantly manned, and began to play. The next gun was used in the same manner, but it was soon apparent that the ship could be got no farther round, for she was now nearly end-on to the wind."

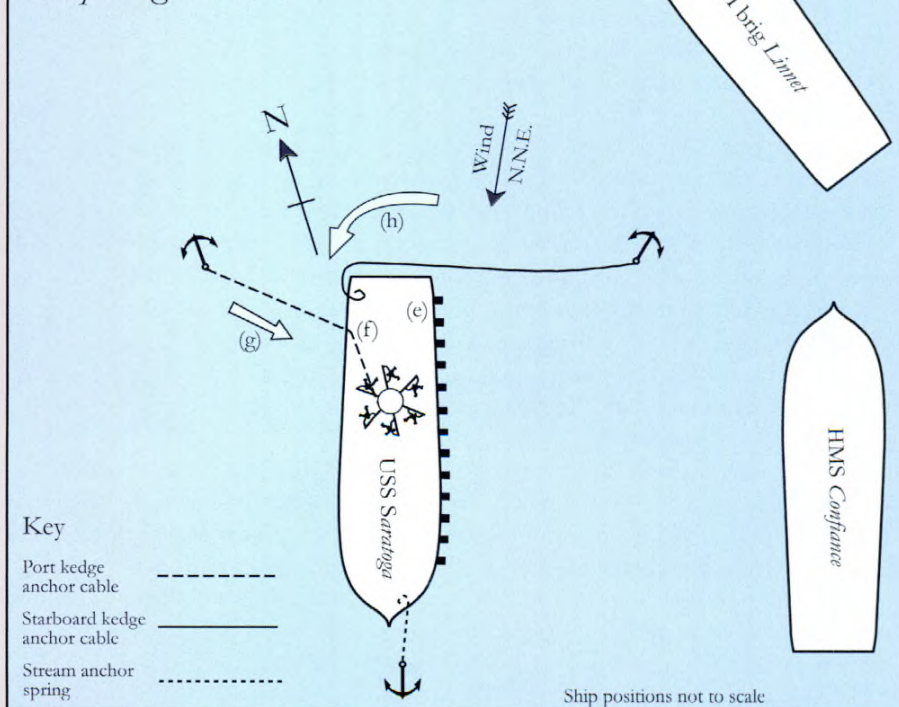
The port kedge anchor cable was transferred from the port quarter (e), to the starboard quarter (f), and then shortened (g), pivoting the stern (h).

"At this critical moment, Mr. Brum, the master, bethought him of the hawser that had led to the larboard quarter. It was got forward under the bows, and passed aft to the starboard quarter, when the ship's stern was immediately sprung to the westward, so as to bring all her larboard guns to bear on the English ship with fatal effect."

### *Saratoga Turning Middle of the Turn*



### *Saratoga Turning Completing the Turn*





recalled his own gunboats from the pursuit in order to help man the pumps of the sinking British ships. When they realized that they were not being pursued, the crews of the British gunboats rowed to safety around Cumberland Head and worked their way back to Île aux Noix.

After two hours and twenty minutes of slaughter, the battle was over. A civilian who watched the battle from Cumberland Head reported, "The firing was terrific, fairly shaking the ground, and so rapid that it seemed to be one continuous roar, intermingled with spiteful flashing from the mouths of the guns, and dense clouds of smoke soon hung over the two fleets."

"The havoc on both sides was dreadful," recalled British Midshipman William Lee, a participant on board *Confiance*:

I don't think there are more than five of our men, out of three hundred, but what are killed or wounded. Never was a shower of hail so thick as the shot whistling about our ears. Were you to see my jacket, waistcoat, and trowsers, you would be astonished to know how I escaped as I did, for they are literally torn all to rags with shot and splinters.

Killed, hospitalized, and slightly wounded, casualties on the American side numbered roughly 200 and on the British at least 250. Some 450 killed and wounded out of the total of 1,800 men involved in the engagement equates to a casualty rate of one in four. The Americans had 52 killed and sent 58 to the hospital with serious wounds. The British lost an estimated 180 dead and wounded in *Confiance*, 50 in *Linnet*, and 40 in *Chubb* and *Finch*, and an unknown number in the gunboats.

## The Land Engagement

In accordance with his understanding with Downie, Prevost ordered his batteries to commence a bombardment of the American positions across the Saranac River as the British squadron began its attack on the American squadron. Contrary to Downie's expectations, however, British troop movements across the Saranac did not begin until 10 A.M., nearly two hours into the naval battle.

British troops made feints at the lower and upper bridges, but the main movement was to cross at Pike's Ford, some three miles up the Saranac. Unaccountably having failed to reconnoiter, the British got lost and took an hour to find the ford. American militia guarding the ford initially scattered in the face of superior numbers, but once reinforced, they rallied to meet the attack. It was unlikely, though, they could have maintained their position in face of the British regulars. The British assault, however, never came. The attackers, confident of victory, paused to discover the meaning of cheering heard among the American troops and were dismayed when orders arrived from Prevost calling off the attack.

Prevost knew that without naval mastery of Lake Champlain a British victory on land would not have any permanence. The British army could certainly have captured Plattsburgh, even if storming the American fortifications would mean significant casualties. But they would not have been able to hold the town if their supply lines had been required to run overland, where they would be vulnerable to the Americans. Prevost did not want to repeat the mistakes Burgoyne made in 1777 and was unwilling to sacrifice men for the glory of a meaningless victory.

**This view of the Battle of Lake Champlain from the west shows *Confiance* receiving fire from *Saratoga*'s fresh battery and from *Eagle*. Note the lateen-rigged galleys right and left.**





During the night of 11–12 September, therefore, the British withdrew from their positions on the Saranac and started back to Canada. They abandoned large supplies of provisions and munitions and lost hundreds of soldiers by desertion in the course of the retreat.

The Duke of Wellington, England's greatest living general and victor over Napoleon's armies in the Peninsular War, agreed with Prevost that a withdrawal was necessary once the naval battle was lost. No Canadian invasion of the United States, he said, could succeed without naval superiority on the lakes.

## The Vanquished

In their testimony in the courts-martial of Daniel Pring and the other naval officers who survived the battle, the British naval officers attributed their defeat to the British army. Prevost, they said, had pushed Downie into the battle before *Confiance* was ready and the crew trained. Downie consented to attack under conditions that nullified the advantage of his superiority in long

guns only because he believed the British army would at the same time initiate its assault on the American position behind the Saranac. Had the British army attacked sooner and captured the American batteries, the British squadron could have, at the very least, run under their protection. The British army had no opportunity to respond to the navy's criticisms. Prevost demanded a court-martial to clear his name but died ten days before it was scheduled to sit.

Blame for the British naval defeat in Plattsburgh Bay rests squarely with the Royal Navy, according to David C. Skaggs, Thomas Macdonough's most recent scholarly biographer. He concludes that Royal Navy officials showed too little interest in providing the men and materiel necessary to ensure victory on Lake Champlain in 1814. As a result, the British fleet that sailed from Île aux Noix in early September was ill prepared to meet its American foe in combat. Illustrative of this was the condition of the squadron's most powerful warship, *Confiance*, at the time of the battle. The British flagship was inadequately equipped

*continued on page 71*





# Saratoga's Fighting Gamecock



The crowing rooster on the gun carriage in this 1859 engraving, entitled "McDonough Pointing the Gun," gives evidence of the popularity of the story of the *Saratoga's* fighting gamecock.

As the American warships rode at anchor in Plattsburgh Bay in anticipation of the opening shots of the Battle of Lake Champlain, a chicken coop lay on the deck of the flagship, *Saratoga*. Inside the chicken coop strutted a gamecock brought on board by some of the crew. All was hushed on board as *Saratoga* gradually came into range of the approaching enemy's long guns. *Saratoga's* crew watched as *Linnet* fired its first broadside and all but one of the shot failed to hit home. That one ball happened to strike the chicken coop, breaking it apart. The cock, liberated from his prison, flew up and settled on a gunslide. Undaunted, he flapped his wings and lustily crowed defiance to the world. This act of animal courage broke the tension. The men gave

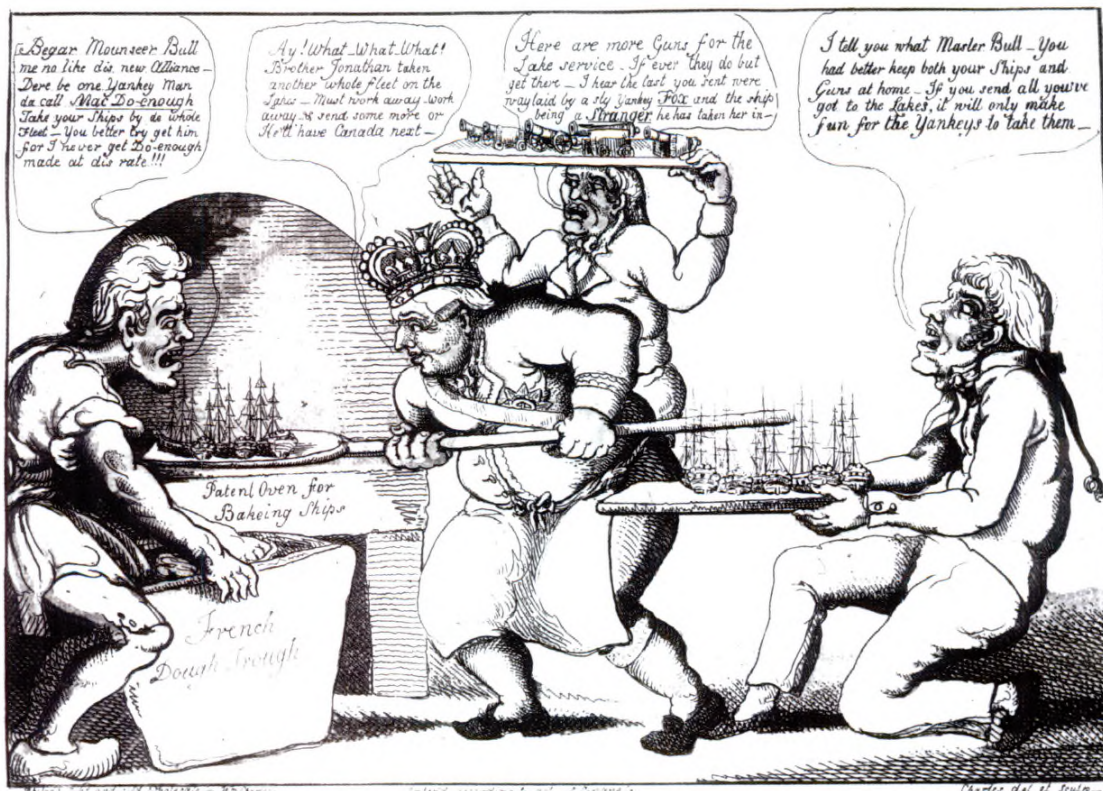
three spontaneous cheers, viewing the incident as an augury of victory.

A patriotic rhyme written near the end of 1814 alludes to this unusual incident:

O, Johnny Bull, my joe, John  
Behold on Lake Champlain,  
With more than equal force, John,  
You tried your fist again;  
But the cock saw how 'twas going,  
And cried 'Cock-a-doodle-doo,'  
And Macdonough was victorious,  
O, Johnny Bull, my joe!

(John Bull is used as a personification of Great Britain.)





*JOHN BULL making a new BATCH of SHIPS to send to the LAKES*

and undermanned; its crew was poorly trained and lacked esprit de corps; and its captain was an eleventh-hour appointment unfamiliar with his officers and men. Critical delays in readying *Constance* for sail only increased the odds the British squadron faced by allowing Macdonough time to complete and add *Eagle* to the American fleet.

Despite the criticisms of Downie's officers that the squadron's defeat was due to Prevost's failure to capture Plattsburgh and the American land batteries, there is little to justify such complaints. For even if the regulars had captured the American guns, those cannon lacked the range to bring Macdonough's fleet under fire. It was Royal Navy apathy, not British military ineptitude, that lost the Battle of Lake Champlain.

Because of the British withdrawal back across the border after the Battle of Lake Champlain, Great Britain could not expect territorial concessions from the United States. Therefore, the British peace negotiators dropped those demands, paving the way for the treaty of peace signed on Christmas Eve 1814.

**This cartoon reflects British reaction to their loss at the Battle of Lake Champlain and the waste of resources invested in the struggle. The reference to "Fox" and "Stranger" alludes to the capture by New Hampshire privateer Fox, three days before the Battle of Lake Champlain, of H.M. transport Stranger, which was carrying cannon for the northern lakes.**

## The Victors

On the morning of 11 September, immediately after securing control of the British ships that had struck their colors, Macdonough had the American and British wounded moved to

the hospital on Crab Island. There, over the next four days, Dr. James Mann, USA, performed more than thirty amputations.

The corpses of the American and British enlisted killed in the battle were buried together in trenches, and on 14 September the bodies of the dead officers from both sides were interred in Plattsburgh's Riverside Cemetery after a solemn ceremony.

Macdonough paroled the surviving British officers, who wrote him letters of thanks for their "honorable treatment," and for his "unbounded liberality and humane attention."

Macdonough reported the victory to the secretary of the navy on the day of the battle in a single sentence, "The Almighty has been pleased to Grant us a signal victory on Lake Champlain in the capture of one Frigate, one Brig and two sloops of war of the enemy." Two days later he wrote a report summarizing





Above, Thomas Macdonough, victor of Lake Champlain; below, Macdonough's gold-mounted flintlock pistols, engraved with a scene depicting his victory on Lake Champlain, presented by the state of Connecticut; bottom, medal issued to honor Stephen Cassin for his role in the American victory on Lake Champlain; Congress awarded similar medals to Thomas Macdonough and Robert Henley.

the action and dispensing credit among his officers and men.

The whole country celebrated Macdonough's victory. Congress rewarded him with the rank of captain, made retroactive to 11 September, as well as a gold medal and a vote of thanks. The states of New York and Vermont gave him gifts of land and his native state of Delaware presented him a sword and a silver tea service and ordered his portrait painted. The state of Illinois



created McDonough County in his honor within two months of his death (10 November 1825) and named the county seat Macomb, after the American general at the defense of Plattsburgh.

As a young man, Theodore Roosevelt, a future president of the United States, published a book called *The Naval War of 1812* in which he gave Macdonough high marks for his performance at the Battle of Lake Champlain. Having studied all of the naval engagements of the war, Roosevelt had a solid basis for his judgment. That appraisal can aptly stand as the final words of this chapter. Roosevelt wrote:

Macdonough in this battle won a higher fame than any other commander in the war, British or American. He had a decidedly superior force to contend against . . . and it was solely owing to his foresight and resource that we won the victory. He forced the British to engage at a disadvantage by his excellent choice of position; and he prepared beforehand for every possible contingency. His personal prowess had already been shown at the cost of the rovers of Tripoli, and in this action he helped fight the guns as ably as the best sailor. His skill, seamanship, quick eye, readiness of resource, and indomitable pluck, are beyond all praise. Down to the time of the Civil War he is the greatest figure in our naval history.



# Suggested Reading

## David Porter and *Essex*

Lewis, Charles L. *David Glasgow Farragut*. 2 vols. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1941–43.

Long, David F. *Nothing Too Daring: A Biography of Commodore David Porter, 1780–1843*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1970.

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## Thomas Macdonough and the Battle of Lake Champlain

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# Illustration Credits

Front cover and inside front cover: Battle of Lake Champlain, by Julian O. Davidson. Oil painting. Courtesy of Battle of Plattsburgh Association, Plattsburgh, N.Y. [www.battleofplattsburgh.org](http://www.battleofplattsburgh.org). Photographed by John Wayne Photographix, Plattsburgh, N.Y.

Front cover insets: Details from Thomas Macdonough, by unknown artist. Oil painting. Courtesy of United States Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Md.; Joshua Barney, by Rembrandt Peale. Oil painting. Courtesy of The Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Md.; David Porter, by unknown artist. Oil painting. Courtesy of United States Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Md.

Back cover: First battle of St. Leonard's Creek, 10 June 1814, by Tom Freeman. Watercolor. © Tom Freeman and SM&S Naval Prints, Forest Hills, Md.

Inside back cover: Airman Lisa Kilgore on board USS *Essex* (LHD 2). Photograph by PHAR Howerton.

Opposite p. 1: Cruise of the frigate *Essex*. Map by Morgan I. Wilbur, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 3: David Porter, by unknown artist. Oil painting. Courtesy of United States Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Md.

p. 4: "The Salem Frigate. Take Notice!" Advertisement. Published in *Salem Gazette*. Negative



32,507. Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.

p. 5: USS *Essex*, by unknown artist. Bone model. Courtesy of Naval Sea Systems Command. On exhibit at The Navy Museum, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 6: U.S. frigate *Essex*, by Isiah Whyte. Oil on glass. Negative 27,798. Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.

p. 9: "Crossing the Line," by Edward H. Haskell. Pencil sketch. Journal of the ship *Tarquin*. Negative 12,590. Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.

p. 10: Crossing the line ceremony held on board USS *Maryland* (ACR 8) in 1912. Photograph. Courtesy of Lloyd Harmon, Photographic Section, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 10 inset: Crossing the line certificate. Courtesy of Rare Book Room, Navy Department Library, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 11: U.S. frigate *Essex*, by Joseph Howard. Watercolor. Negative 11,764. Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.

p. 12: David G. Farragut, by William Swain. Oil painting. Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

p. 15: Land tortoise. Engraving. Image JC4234. Courtesy of Hulton Archive/Getty Images, New York, N.Y.

p. 16: John Downes, by unknown artist. Oil painting. Courtesy of United States Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Md.

p. 18: "Woman of Nooahceevah." Engraving after a drawing by David Porter. Published in David Porter, *Journal of a Cruise made to the Pacific Ocean, by Captain David Porter, in the United States Frigate Essex, in the Years, 1812, 1813, and 1814*. . . . 2 vols. Philadelphia, Pa.: Bradford & Inskeep, 1815.

pp. 18–19: "Madisonville in Massachusetts bay—*Essex* and her Prizes." Engraving after a drawing by David Porter. Published in David Porter, *Journal of a Cruise*. . . . 2 vols. Philadelphia, Pa.: Bradford & Inskeep, 1815.

p. 19: "Mouina. Chief Warrior of the Tayehs." Engraving after a drawing by David Porter. Published in David Porter, *Journal of a Cruise*. . . . 2 vols. Philadelphia, Pa.: Bradford & Inskeep, 1815.

p. 20: John M. Gamble, by unknown artist. Oil painting. Courtesy of Captain Sherwood Picking,

USN, Photographic Section, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 20: "War Canoe." Engraving after a drawing by David Porter. Published in David Porter, *Journal of a Cruise*. . . . 2 vols. Philadelphia, Pa.: Bradford & Inskeep, 1815.

p. 21: Valparaiso Harbor. Map by Morgan I. Wilbur, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 21: James Hillyar, by unknown artist. Watercolor. No. MNT0004, © National Maritime Museum, London, England.

p. 21: Burning of the prize *Hector*, by William B. Hoff. Pen, ink, and wash drawing. Courtesy of Navy Art Collection, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 22: "Capture of the U.S. Frigate *Essex* by his B.M. Frigate *Phoebe* & Sloop *Cherub* in the Bay of Valparaiso," by George Ropes. Oil painting. Negative 11,763. Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.

p. 22: *Essex* versus *Phoebe* and *Cherub*, by unknown artist. Watercolor. Courtesy of Naval Historical Foundation, Washington, D.C.

p. 23: Carronade gun and long gun. Pen and ink drawings. Published in Kevin J. Crisman, *The Eagle: An American Brig on Lake Champlain during the War of 1812*. Shelburne, Vt.: New England Press, 1987.

p. 24: John G. Cowell, by unknown artist. Oil painting. Courtesy of Marblehead Historical Society, Marblehead, Mass.

p. 24: "The Victory." Engraving after a drawing by David Porter. Published in David Porter, *Journal of a Cruise*. . . . 2 vols. Philadelphia, Pa.: Bradford & Inskeep, 1815.

p. 25: "Capture of the *Essex*." Printed broadside. Negative 12,199. Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.

p. 26: David Porter from life, 1818–1819, by Charles Willson Peale. Oil painting. Courtesy of Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, Pa.

p. 28: Joshua Barney, by Rembrandt Peale. Oil painting. Courtesy of The Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Md.

pp. 28–29: *Hyder Ally* captures *General Monk*, by Louis-Phillipe Crépin. Oil painting. Courtesy of United States Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Md.

p. 29: Joshua Barney from life, ca. 1784–1793, by Charles Willson Peale. Oil painting. Courtesy of



Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, Pa.

p. 30: Joshua Barney's Society of the Cincinnati medal. Courtesy of The Society of the Cincinnati, Washington, D.C.

p. 31: Joshua Barney, by Jean Baptiste Isabey. Miniature watercolor on ivory. Courtesy of The Daughters of the American Revolution Museum, Washington, D.C.

p. 31: *Rossie* versus *Princess Amelia*, by unknown artist. Engraving. Published in George Coggeshall, *History of the American Privateers and Letters-of-Marque, during Our War with England in the Years, 1812, '13 and '14*. . . . New York: published by the author, 1856.

p. 32: George Cockburn, by John James Halls. Oil painting. No. BHC2619. © Courtesy of National Maritime Museum, London, England.

pp. 32–33: George Cockburn and British raiding party loot Havre de Grace, Maryland. Watercolor. Courtesy of The Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Md.

p. 34: Barge for defending the Chesapeake Bay, by Joshua Barney. Sketch. Record Group 45, Area File 11, Microfilm No. 625, Roll No. 405, Frame No. 0145. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

p. 35: Chesapeake Bay. Map by Morgan I. Wilbur, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 36: Potomac and Patuxent Rivers. Map by Morgan I. Wilbur, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 37: Alexander F. I. Cochrane, by Sir William Beechey. Oil painting. No. 9211. © Courtesy of National Maritime Museum, London, England.

p. 37: Proclamation of Alexander F. I. Cochrane. Printed broadside. Admiralty 1/508, fol. 579. Courtesy of The National Archives, London, England.

p. 38: Battle of Cedar Point, 1 June 1814. Map published in Donald G. Shomette, *Flotilla: Battle for the Patuxent*. Solomons, Md.: Calvert Marine Museum Press, 1981.

p. 39: Upper part of St. Leonard's Creek, 10 June 1814, by Joshua Barney. Pen and ink drawing. Record Group 45, Miscellaneous Letters Received, Microfilm No. 124, Roll No. 64, between No. 1 and 2. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

p. 39: St. Leonard's Creek, 10 June 1814, by Joshua

Barney. Pen and ink drawing. Record Group 45, Miscellaneous Letters Received, Microfilm No. 124, Roll No. 64, between No. 1 and 2. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

p. 40: First battle of St. Leonard's Creek, 10 June 1814. Map published in Donald G. Shomette, *Flotilla: Battle for the Patuxent*. Solomons, Md.: Calvert Marine Museum Press, 1981.

pp. 40–41: First battle of St. Leonard's Creek, 10 June 1814, by Tom Freeman. Watercolor. © Tom Freeman and SM&S Naval Prints, Forest Hills, Md.

p. 42: William Jones, by Gilbert Stuart. Oil painting. Courtesy of Navy Art Collection, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 43: Second battle of St. Leonard's Creek, 26 June 1814. Map published in Donald G. Shomette, *Flotilla: Battle for the Patuxent*. Solomons, Md.: Calvert Marine Museum Press, 1981.

pp. 44–45: Battle of St. Leonard's Creek, 26 June 1814, by Irwin Bevan. Watercolor. Courtesy of The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, Va.

p. 46: William Congreve, by James Lonsdale. Oil painting. Courtesy of Frederick I. Ordway III Collection.

p. 46: Two rocket boats. Hand-colored engraving. Published in William Congreve, *The Details of the Rocket System*. . . . London: J. Whiting, 1814. Courtesy of Anne S. K. Brown Military Library, Brown University, Providence, R.I.

p. 47: Stonington rocket. Courtesy of Old Lighthouse Museum, Stonington, Conn.

p. 47: Rocket ship and cross section. Hand-colored engraving. Published in William Congreve, *The Details of the Rocket System*. . . . London: J. Whiting, 1814. Courtesy of Anne S. K. Brown Military Library, Brown University, Providence, R.I.

pp. 48–49: "The Taking of the City of Washington . . . by the British Forces Under Major Genl. Ross on Augt. 24, 1814. . . ." Copy of engraving. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

p. 51: Some artifacts recovered from the 1980 archaeological survey of the tentatively identified U.S. block sloop *Scorpion*. Courtesy of The Navy Museum, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 52: Sword presented to Joshua Barney by the City of Washington. Courtesy of The Society of the Cincinnati, Washington, D.C.



p. 52: Joshua Barney. Engraving after a painting by Alonzo Chappel. Published in Evert A. Duyckinck, *National Portrait Gallery of Eminent Americans*. . . . New York: Johnson, Fry & Co., 1862.

p. 53: "McDonough's Victory on Lake Champlain," by N. Currier. Lithograph. Courtesy of Navy Art Collection, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 54: Lake Champlain. Map by Morgan I. Wilbur, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 55: "The Battle of Valcour Island," by Vladimir Zveg. Oil painting. Courtesy of Navy Art Collection, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 56: Thomas Macdonough, by John Wesley Jarvis. Oil painting. Courtesy of Art Commission of the City of New York.

p. 57: "Forts & Batteries at Plattsburg Sept. 1814." Map published in Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1869.

p. 59: "The Battle of the Nile, Ensuing Morning," by Robert Dodd. Engraving. Courtesy of Navy Art Collection, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 60: Thomas Macdonough, by Joseph Wood. Oil painting. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. W. Murray Crane, 1949. (49.146) Photograph © 2003 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, N.Y.

p. 63: "Battle of Plattsburgh Bay September 11, 1814." This map by artist Dean Mosher was based on the consensus of scholars assembled at a conference held in Plattsburgh, New York, in 1999. The participants included Dr. James C. Bradford, Texas A&M University; Walter P. Rybka, Senior Captain, brig *Niagara*; Gerard T. Altoff, author and historian, National Park Service; Col. David Fitz-Eng, USA (Ret.), author; with special thanks to Dr. Kevin J. Crisman, Texas A&M University, and Dr. David C. Skaggs, Professor Emeritus, Bowling Green State University.

pp. 64–65: Battle of Lake Champlain, by Julian O. Davidson. Oil painting. Courtesy of Battle of Plattsburgh Association, Plattsburgh, N.Y. [www.battleofplattsburgh.org](http://www.battleofplattsburgh.org). Photographed by John Wayne Photographix, Plattsburgh, N.Y.

pp. 66–67: How Macdonough Turned the Battle Around. Diagram by Michael J. Crawford and Morgan I. Wilbur, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

pp. 68–69: "Macdonough's Victory," by Edward Tufnell. Watercolor. Courtesy of Photographic Section, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 70: "McDonough Pointing the Gun," by F. F. Walker, after J. R. Chapin. Engraving. Courtesy of Photographic Section, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

p. 71: "John Bull making a new Batch of Ships to send to the Lakes," by William Charles. Cartoon. T-14654, Toronto Public Library (TRL), Toronto, Ontario.

p. 72: Thomas Macdonough, by unknown artist. Oil painting. Courtesy of United States Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Md.

p. 72: Commodore Thomas Macdonough's pistols. Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

p. 72: Thomas Cassin medal. Courtesy of Photographic Section, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

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Today's Sailors carry the fighting spirit forged upon the decks of the U.S. Navy's early warships, exhibited here by Airman Lisa Kilgore on board USS Essex (LHD 2) as she aims a .50 caliber machine gun.



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The travails and triumphs of our naval  
forbears inspire us and prepare us to meet  
our own crises . . .



from their example,  
let us draw strength to confront our own enemies  
in these dangerous times.