

# CONSTITUTION VERSUS *HMS GUERRIERE*

## Captain Isaac Hull, USN

United States' Frigate CONSTITUTION, off Boston Light, 30 August 1812

I have the honour to inform you, that on the 19<sup>th</sup> instant, at 2 PM being in latitude 41, 42, longitude 55, 48, with the CONSTITUTION under my command, a sail was discovered from the mast-head bearing E. by S. or E.S.E. but at such a distance we could not tell what she was. All sail was instantly made in chase, and soon found we came up with her. At 3 PM could plainly see that she was a ship on the starboard tack, under easy sail, close on a wind; at half past 3 PM made her out to be a frigate; continued the chase until we were within about three miles, when I ordered the light sails taken in, the courses hauled up, and the ship cleared for action. At this time the chase had backed his main top-sail, waiting for us to come down. As soon as the CONSTITUTION was ready for action, I bore down with an intention to bring him to close action immediately; but on our coming within gun-shot she gave us a broadside and filled away, and were, giving us a broadside on the other tack, but without effect; her shot falling short. She continued wearing and manoeuvring for about three quarters of an hour, to get a raking position, but finding she could not, she bore up, and run under top-sails and gib, with the wind on the quarter. Immediately made sail to bring the ship up with her, and 5 minutes before 6 PM being along side within half pistol shot, we commenced a heavy fire from all our guns, double shotted with round and grape, and so well directed were they, and so warmly kept up, that in 15 minutes his mizen-mast went by the board, and his main-yard in the slings, and the hull, rigging and sails very much torn to pieces. The fire was kept up with equal warmth for 15 minutes longer, when his main-mast and fore-mast went, taking with them every spar, excepting the bowsprit; on seeing this we ceased firing, so that in 30 minutes after we got fairly along side the enemy she surrendered, and had not a spar standing, and her hull below and above water so shattered, that a few more broadsides must have carried her down.

After informing you that so fine a ship as the *GUERRIERE*, commanded by an able and experienced officer, had been totally dismasted, and otherwise cut to pieces, so as to make her not worth towing into port, in the short space of 30 minutes, you can have no doubt of the gallantry and good conduct of the officers and ship's company I have the honour to command. It only remains, therefore, for me to assure you, that they all fought with great bravery; and it gives me great pleasure to say, that from the smallest boy in the ship to the oldest seaman, not a look of fear was seen. They all went into action, giving three cheers, and requesting to be laid close along side the enemy.

Enclosed I have the honour to send you a list of killed and wounded on board the CONSTITUTION, and a report of the damages she has sustained; also, a list of the killed and wounded on board the enemy, with his quarter bill, &c.

*Killed and wounded on board the United States' frigate CONSTITUTION, Isaac Hull, Esqr. Captain, in the action with his Britannic majesty's frigate GUERRIERE, James A. Dacres, Esqr. Captain, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, 1812*

Killed—W. S. Bush, lieutenant of Marines, and six seamen,	7
Wounded—lieutenant C. Morris J. C. Aylwin, four seamen, one marine,	<u>7</u>
Total killed and wounded,	<u>14</u>

*Killed and wounded on board the GUERRIERE.*

Killed—3 officers, 12 seamen and marines,	15
Wounded—J. A. Dacres, captain, 4 officers, 57 seamen and marines,	62
Missing—lieutenants Pullman and Roberts, and 22 seamen and marines, supposed to have gone overboard with the masts,	<u>24</u>
Total killed, wounded and missing,	<u>101</u>

The CONSTITUTION rates 44 guns, and mounted 55, her complement 450 men. The *GUERRIERE* rates 38 guns, and mounted 49, her complement 300 men.

Three days before the engagement with the CONSTITUTION, the *GUERRIERE* spoke the JOHN ADAMS, captain Fash, from Liverpool, and endorsed on his register the following lines:

“Captain Dacres, commander of his Britannic majesty’s frigate *GUERRIERE*, of 44 guns, presents his compliments to commodore Rodgers, of the United States frigate *PRESIDENT*, and will be very happy to meet him, or any other American frigate of equal force to the *PRESIDENT*, off Sandy Hook, for the purpose of having a few minutes *tete-a-tete*.”

Captain Hull saved him the trouble of going so far for the desired *tete-a-tete*, which resulted not quite to the satisfaction and pleasure of Captain Dacres.

John Brannan, ed. *Official Letters of the Military and Naval Officers of the United States During the War with Great Britain in the Years 1812, 13, 14, & 15 With Some Additional Letters and Documents Elucidating the History of that Period*. (Washington: 1823), pp. 49–51.