

In 1794, an English shipwright,* Mr. Joshua Humphreys, resident at Philadelphia, gave in estimates of the cost of building three seventy-four gun ships, to measure sixteen hundred and twenty tons, American measurement, about seventeen hundred and fifty English. Before, however, the keels of these vessels had been much more than laid, Mr. Jay's treaty restored the amicable relations between England and America, and it was resolved to convert the vessels, begun as seventy-fours, into frigates. This was done by contracting the breadth about three feet and a half, and not connecting the quarter-deck and fore-castle, so as to give in reality only one continuous tier of guns,—thus were these seventy-fours converted into enormous sixty-two gun frigates. A frigate, the Constellation, begun at the same time, and originally intended to class as a forty-four, was in a *similar manner* reduced to the rate of a thirty-six. It appears from the estimates rendered to Congress that the original intention had been to construct two forty-fours and a thirty-six; but, by the new arrangement it was confidently expected that the sphere of utility of these vessels would be widely extended. "It was expected (*vide estimates*) from this alteration, that they would possess in an eminent degree, the advantages of sailing, that separately they would be superior to any single European frigate of the same rate and of the usual dimensions; that if assailed by superior force, they would be always able to lead a-head; that they could never be obliged to go into action but on their own terms, except in a calm; and that in heavy weather they would be capable of engaging double-decked ships." These were the principal advantages contemplated in thus rating vessels of this heavy scantling as forty-four gun frigates. Having thus shown that in designating these "line of battle ships in disguise" by their true titles we have not greatly erred, we shall add a few remarks on the Constellation, nominally a thirty-six gun frigate. "Even here (*says James*) was a frigate more than equal to any French or English frigate of the largest class carrying long eighteen-pounders, and, be it remembered, in the year 1811, France did not own any, and England only three frigates (Cornwallis, Indefatigable, and

Endymion) that carried long twenty-four-pounders." The Constellation was a sister frigate to the Chesapeake, and "had ports for mounting on her two broadsides (*vide James*) fifty-four guns." Had the Americans, possessed no stronger frigates than the heaviest of these, Europeans would not have been so surfeited with tales of American naval prowess.

An object of paramount importance to the Americans was, the capture of the homeward bound West India fleet, supposed to be on the coast, and known to be under the convoy of but one thirty-six gun frigate, and a sloop of war. This fleet had left Jamaica on the 20th May, and had passed Havana on the 4th June, at 3, a. m.: on the 23rd (*five days after the declaration of war*) the American Commodore spoke a brig, and ascertained that, four days previous, in lat. 36° long. 67°, the Jamaica fleet had been seen, steering to the eastward. In that direction he immediately proceeded, and, at 6, a. m., that day made out a large sail to the northward and eastward, standing directly towards them. This was the British thirty-six gun frigate, Belvidera, Capt. Byron, then on the look-out to intercept a French privateer schooner, hourly expected from New London. Capt. Byron having a few days before, spoken a New York pilot boat, and ascertained what was likely to happen, finding his private signals unanswered, and coupling this circumstance with the efforts of the Americans to close, was no longer in doubt as to the hostile intentions of the approaching squadron, and immediately tacked and made all sail, hoisting his colors. The American squadron did the same, the two commanders displaying their broad pennants; and, by signal, the frigates and the sloops hauled to the wind in chase. For twelve hours the chase was continued, during which time the Belvidera kept up a steady stern fire, firing upwards of three hundred round shot from her two cabin eighteen pounders. Commodore Rodgers, in the President, the leading frigate of the squadron, finding himself by this time three miles astern, shortened sail. The Belvidera suffered only from the fire of the President, (as the shot of the Congress, the only other vessel that got up, all fell short,) and her loss amounted to two killed, and twenty

First objects of the War, chase of Belvidera — Escape of English homeward bound fleet of West Indians.

† *Vide James*, part 8, page 2.