

United States – East Coast MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON INNER HARBOR



Our Flag Was Still There



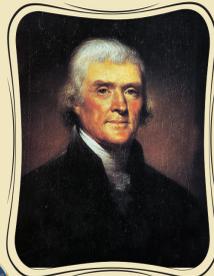
USS Constitution and HMS Guerriere, August 19, 1812. (U.S. Naval Academy Museum)



Commodore William Bainbridge, one of USS Constitution's wartime commanders. (U.S. Naval Academy Museum)



Officers and crew of HMS Shannon boarding and capturing USS Chesapeake, June 1, 1813. (Naval History & Heritage Command)



President Thomas Jefferson. (Library of Congress)

Boston, the U.S. Navy, and the War of 1812

On the eve of the War of 1812, even before the United States Congress declared war against the United Kingdom, the federal government recognized that Boston would play a crucial role in the conflict. The city would augment the nation's sea power as a naval base, a source of naval recruits, and a depot of naval supplies. Commodores John Rodgers and Stephen Decatur of the United States Navy independently recommended Boston as a naval base. The narrowness of the entrance to the harbor made the city highly defensible, and, in fact, the commander of the British North America Station believed it would require at least 12,000 ground troops to capture the city.

During the war, Boston and the Charlestown Navy Yard served as homeport for the city's beloved "Old Ironsides," the frigate *Constitution*, which had been launched from a private Boston yard in 1797 and earned fame and its nickname during the war. The U.S. frigates *Chesapeake*, *Congress*, *President*, and *United States* also used Boston as a base in the course of the war. One of the Navy's first ships of the line, *Independence*, launched from the Charlestown Navy Yard, and the U.S. sloop of war *Frolic* was built in a private yard in Boston during the war. Boston merchants purchased the armed schooner *Commodore Hull*, originally built as a privateer, and loaned it to the Navy for coastal convoy escort to protect commercial shipping from depredations by British privateers.



Captain James Lawrence. (U.S. Naval Academy Museum)

The British Admiralty recognized that the winter climate, with its promise of violent winter storms from November to

March, would challenge any blockading squadron. Sure enough, the British struggled to maintain a naval blockade of Boston and regretted their frequent failures when American warships, singly or in whole squadrons, slipped through the cordon of Royal Navy ships. When Captain James Lawrence sailed *Chesapeake* directly from Boston Harbor into combat with the blockading HM frigate *Shannon* rather than escape into the open ocean, he lost the battle, his life, and his ship but earned immortal fame with his battle cry, "Don't give up the ship!"

Naval supplies freighted from Boston to the forces fighting on Lake Ontario helped ensure that the U.S. Navy's ships there were adequately armed and fitted out to meet the enemy in battle. Sailors from navy ships at the Charlestown Navy Yard and those recruited at naval rendezvous in Boston transferred to the Great Lakes in 1813 and served at the victorious Battle of Lake Erie, preserving the states of the Old Northwest for the United States. Sailors similarly recruited at Boston in 1814 helped win the Battle of Lake Champlain, causing the precipitous retreat of the invading army and ensuring that the United States had a strong negotiating position at the peace talks that led to the Treaty of Ghent of Christmas Eve, which ended the war.

President Thomas Jefferson signed legislation establishing the U.S. Coast Survey in 1807, tasking it with creating charts of the nation's coastal waters so America's young shipping industry could thrive. Today, America's coastal waters remain as central to the nation's prosperity as they were 200 years ago, and mariners continue to trust the accuracy and precision of the nation's navigational charts, still provided by NOAA's Office of Coast Survey.