

# Two Famous Fights of War of 1812

## Story of Victories of Hull and Macdonough

Appearing upon page one of the picture section of this issue are reproductions in color of paintings of two famous naval battles of the War of 1812—the engagement between the American frigate Constitution and the British frigate Guerriere, and Lieut. Thomas Macdonough's victory over a British fleet on Lake Champlain.

By WHITLEY NOBLE

WHEN the American Revolutionary war came to an end our newly created republic paid off its seamen and sold its ships of war. Politics mainly, and pacifism, penny-pinching, and a fear of fostering class distinction were responsible.

How short-sighted was this policy was demonstrated soon when Algerian pirates began preying upon American merchant shipping. The United States, helpless in this situation without a navy, was forced to pay out huge sums to ransom numbers of its citizens who had been enslaved by the pirates. Humiliating as this was, it was the cause behind the creation of a new navy, invaluable in the maritime troubles with France and one of the principal means of bringing victory to America in the War of 1812.

Among the vessels built for this new navy was the Constitution, still preserved and affectionately known as "Old Ironsides," a frigate constructed by Cloghorne and Hartly of Boston and launched Oct. 21, 1797. The Constitution paid splendid dividends, even if consideration is given no other exploit than its triumph over the British frigate Guerriere, the first signal victory of the War of 1812.

### Constitution Commanded by Capt. Isaac Hull

On Aug. 2, 1812, the Constitution put out from Boston, in which port it had taken refuge after having out-sailed and outmaneuvered a British blockading fleet off the New Jersey coast two weeks previously. In command of the vessel was Capt. Isaac Hull, already a naval hero as the result of his pursuits of Barbary pirates as commander of the Argus and his service of more than five years as the master of the Constitution. Captain Hull sailed only a few days before official orders arrived at Boston instructing him to keep his ship in the harbor to avoid capture by blockaders.

At 2 o'clock in the afternoon of Aug. 19, in latitude 41 degrees 30 minutes north and longitude 55 degrees west, the lookout on the frigate reported a large sail rising over the horizon. It was the British frigate Guerriere, commanded by Capt. James Richard Dacres, which had been among the blockading ships that chased the Constitution the previous month. The day was sunless, and a fresh wind was blowing from the northwest. The vessels slowly drew together as minutes dragged out into hours.

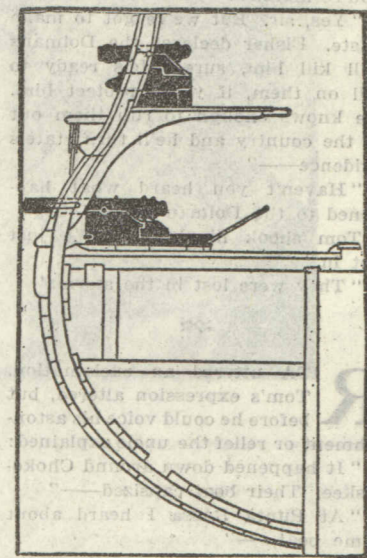
On being informed that the vessel bearing down upon him was an American frigate, Captain Dacres said that he thought it came too boldly to be an American, but added: "The better he behaves the more honor we shall gain by taking him." Dacres promised four months' pay to his men if they should capture the enemy in fifteen minutes. The war had not been in progress long then, and the British commanders were highly optimistic. Then, too, the Guerriere was one of the finest frigates of the royal navy. British naval experts considered American war craft far inferior to their own vessels.

About two hours after the ships had sighted each other the Guerriere opened fire with shots that fell far short of their target. A second round from the guns of the British ship passed over the deck of the Constitution without doing damage. The American vessel replied with an occasional shot from a bow gun as the two craft jockeyed for favorable positions. As Captain Hull crowded on more canvas in an effort to shorten the range, a skillfully directed shot hulled the Constitution, killing two seamen. Still Captain Hull withheld his broadside fire. At 5:45 the ships

were at a relatively short distance apart, and it was then that the actual battle can be said to have started. The movements of the vessels from that time until the end of the engagement are shown in an accompanying chart.

At 6:05 the Constitution delivered its first broadside. Fifteen minutes later a round shot from an American gun cut away the mizenmast of the Guerriere, causing Captain Hull to exclaim: "Hurrah, my boys! We've made a brig of her!"

The Constitution ran ahead, swung its yards, ported its helm, and, ranging across the enemy's bows, gave it a raking broadside. The Guerriere's main yard crashed down. Swinging around, the American ship brought its port battery to bear and gave the enemy another raking. Rigging of the two vessels fouled, and the British captain prepared to



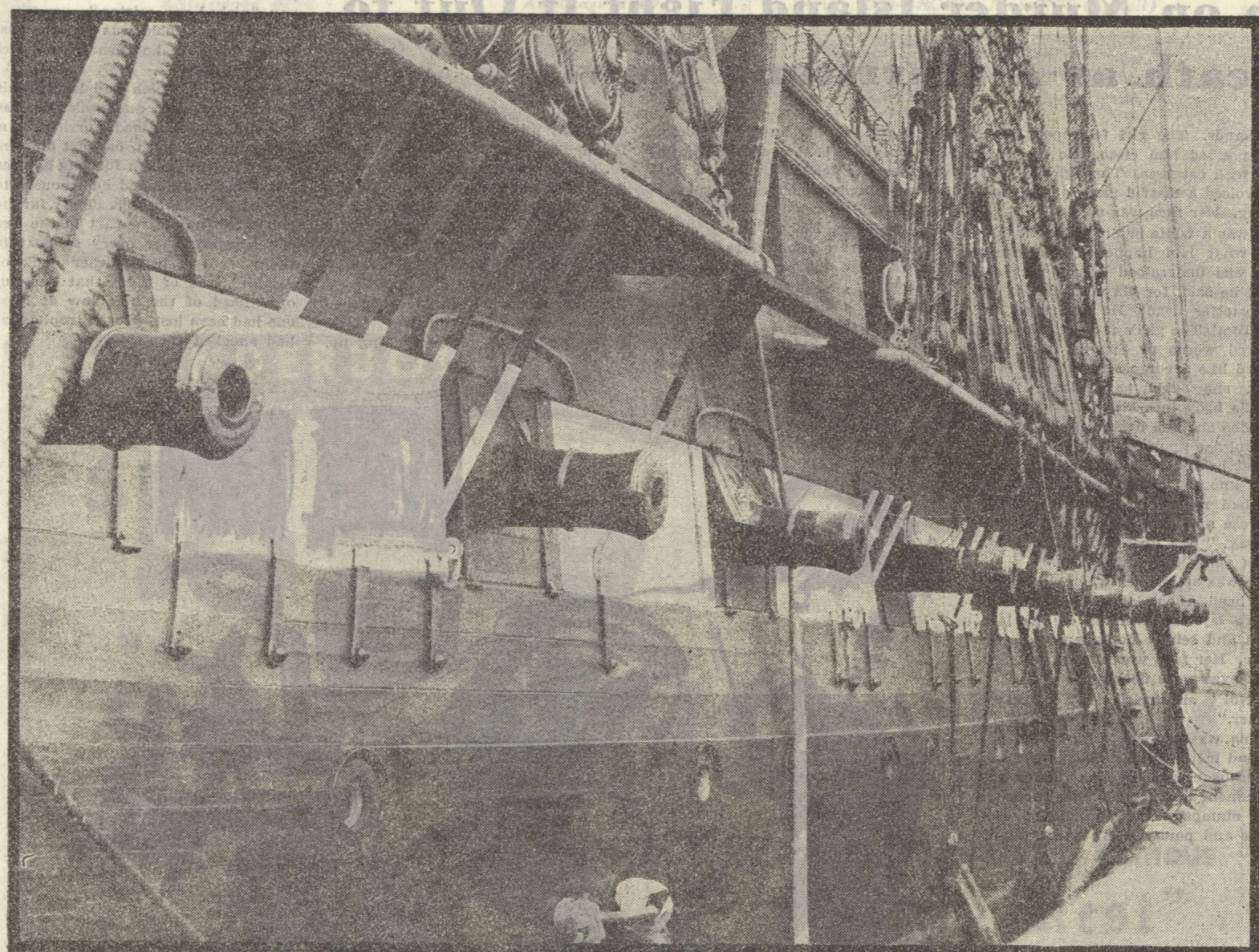
Long guns on main deck of frigate; short guns on spar deck.

order boarders onto the other vessel. He changed his mind. An American boarding party was held up by British fire as the Constitution slowly tore loose from the enemy craft. Thirty minutes after the Constitution had begun pouring its broadsides into the Guerriere all three of the masts of the last-named ship had been shot away. Its hull was riddled by American round shot. At 7 o'clock, after having repaired its rigging, the Constitution drew back by the side of the helplessly drifting Guerriere. The American frigate was ready to continue the fight on through the night. The Guerriere was a wreck. Dacres did not want to give up, but was unable to carry on the battle. He fell to bleking with an American officer sent in a ship's boat to demand his surrender. Short of patience, the American at last warned him of the danger of further opposition. Dacres surrendered and was carried in a wounded condition aboard the victorious American vessel.

### Guns of Yankee Frigate Superior to Guerriere's

Of the 272 men aboard the Guerriere, 23 were killed and 56 wounded. Among the crew of 456 of the Constitution only 7 were killed and 7 wounded. The American vessel was the superior craft in almost every way. It was slightly larger than the enemy, being of 1,576 tons, as compared with the British frigate's 1,338 tons. The Constitution carried 33 long 24-pounders and 22 short 32-pounders, giving it a broadside of 27 guns delivering 684 pounds of metal by actual weight. The Guerriere was armed with 30 long 18-pounders, 2 long 12-pounders, 16 short 32's, and 1 short 18, giving it a broadside of 25 guns, firing 556 pounds of metal.

The main difference in the fighting power of the two ships lay in the difference in the bores of the main



Frowning long guns of the American frigate Constitution 122 years after its famous battle with the British frigate Guerriere. This view shows most of the cannon of a main deck broadside of the historic vessel after its restoration. (Acme photo.)



"Old Ironsides" still is preserved and is one of the most admired relics of the American navy. Here is shown the Constitution at anchor in the harbor of San Diego, Cal. (Acme photo.)

guns. Up to that time British naval experts had contended that long 18's were the best caliber for the main deck battery of a frigate, and ridiculed long 24's as being too heavy for effective work. Guns aboard the Constitution were supplied with sights, accounting for the sharp-shooting against the masts of the Guerriere; guns on the British ship were without sights.

The Guerriere, outclassed, as the data in the preceding paragraphs reveals, and outgated by superior Yankee seamanship, sank on the afternoon of Aug. 21, some time after its crew had been transferred as prisoners to the Constitution. The American vessel returned to Boston Aug. 30. Its commander and crew were given an ovation.

The 28-year-old American naval lieutenant, Thomas Macdonough, "has placed the units of his little squadron in the harbor of the town of Plattsburg, behind the shelter of Cumberland head, ready to receive and give battle to a British fleet under the command of the veteran Capt. George Downie.

There on that calm and bright Sunday morning of 1814 were alligned the American war craft in the order shown in the accompanying chart, as can be seen, is a section of a complete chart revealing the four principal phases of the engagement. Farthest north in the American battle

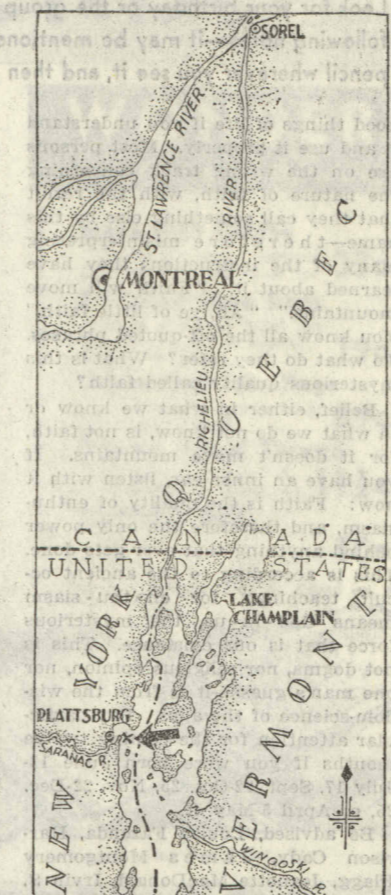
line was the brig Eagle, commanded by Robert Henly, carrying a crew of 150 and armed with 8 long 18-pounders and 12 short 22's. Next was Macdonough's newly built corvette, the Saratoga, with a crew of 240 and carrying 8 long 24's, 6 short 42's, and 12 short 32's. Third in line was the schooner Ticonderoga, a rebel built steamer, under Lieut. Stephen Cassin. This vessel had a crew of 112 and was armed with 4 long 18-pounders, 8 long 12's, and 5 short 32's. Next in line was the sloop Preble, with a crew of 30 and an armament of 7 long 9-pounders. In addition there were in the American squadron the gunboats Borer, Centipede, Nettie, Allen, Burrows, and Viper, each armed with a long 24-pounder and a short 18, and the Ballard, Aylmer, Ludlow, and Vliener, each with a long 12. Crews of the squadron totaled 882 men, and a combined broadside totaled 1,194 pounds of metal.

### British Fleet Seils In to Attack Americans

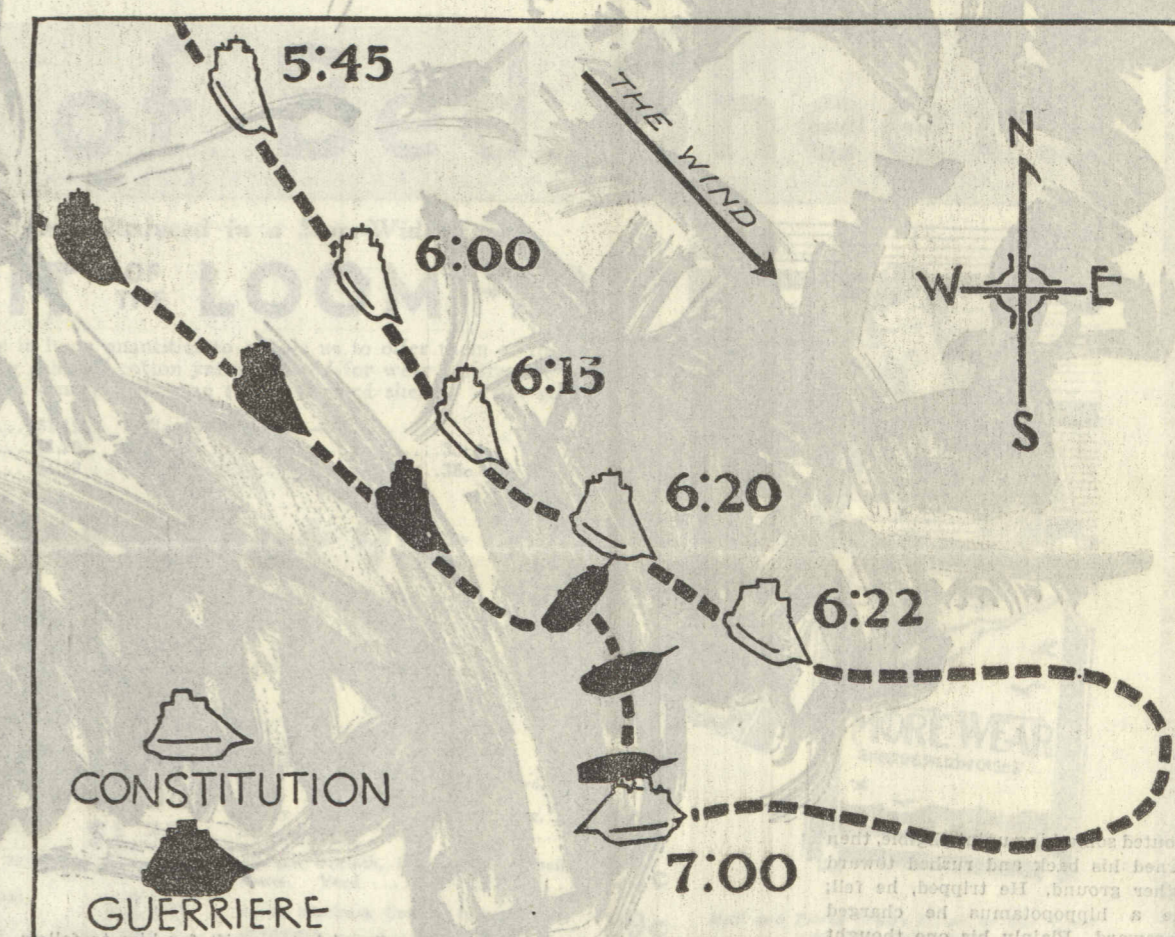
Sailing down with the lightest kind of a wind from the north came the Britishers. There was the frigate Confiance, which had been completed recently at Isle-aux-Noix in the St. Lawrence, the outlet of Lake Champlain. It was a vessel of the ocean-going type, of 1,200 to 1,400 tonnage, carrying a crew of no fewer than 325 men and armed with 31 long 24's and 6 short guns, either 32's or 42's. There were the brig Linnet, armed with 16 long 12's; the sloop Chubb, armed with 1 long 6-pounder and 10 short 18's; the sloop Finch, with 4 long 6's and 7 short 18's; and fourteen gunboats, armed variously with either long 24's or long 18's and with short 32's.

Naval authorities aver that in

fighting ability the Confiance and the Linnet together, because of their concentration of long guns, should have been more than the equal of the whole American squadron. The British long guns were capable of a broadside of 660 pounds of metal, as



Arrow points to cross in Plattsburg harbor, where Macdonough won his victory.



Battle chart of the Constitution's victory over the Guerriere, showing movements of the vessels throughout the engagement.

compared with a broadside of 480 pounds from American long guns. American short guns were capable of a broadside of 714 pounds of metal; British of a broadside of 564 pounds. The crews of the British fleet, according to an estimate by Theodore Roosevelt, totaled 937 men, or 55 more than the total of the American crews. There is considerable uncertainty, however, as to the relative strength of the forces, as only estimates are available for the British.

Apprised by lookouts in a ship's boat stationed off Cumberland head, the American squadron was ready for action when the British fleet arrived and hung in a line in the wind just off the headland. The Britishers sailed into the bay, the Chubb farthest north in the line, the Linnet next, and then the Confiance and Finch in order. Downie's craft almost at once was crippled and driven away by fire from the guns of the Ticonderoga, drifting helplessly toward Crab Island, at the south of the harbor.

### Enemy Sloop Quickly Put Out of Action

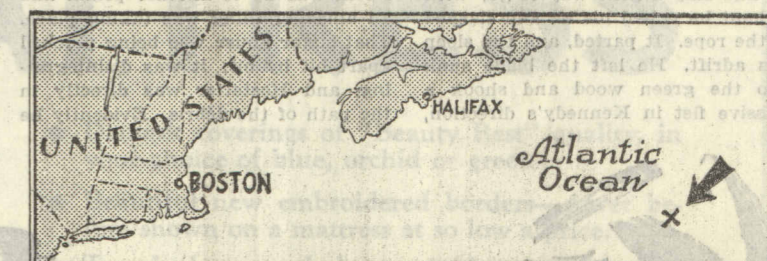
The Chubb and the Linnet took positions near the Eagle, and the Confiance sailed up abreast of the Saratoga. The Eagle was swung to a position for raking the Chubb. One broadside was enough. The British sloop was put out of action; it drifted down wind past the Saratoga, was boarded by Americans, and finally was surrendered with but five of its crew still able to stand.

The Confiance and Linnet then concentrated their superior fire on the Saratoga and the Eagle, hurling solid shot, some of which had been heated to a red-hot heat, into the timbers of the Yankee vessels. The Eagle was forced to cut its cable (the four principal American vessels all had been at anchor at the beginning) and take up a new position south and slightly west of the Saratoga. British gunboats swarmed about the Ticonderoga and the tiny sloop Preble, the last named being driven out of the action by their guns.

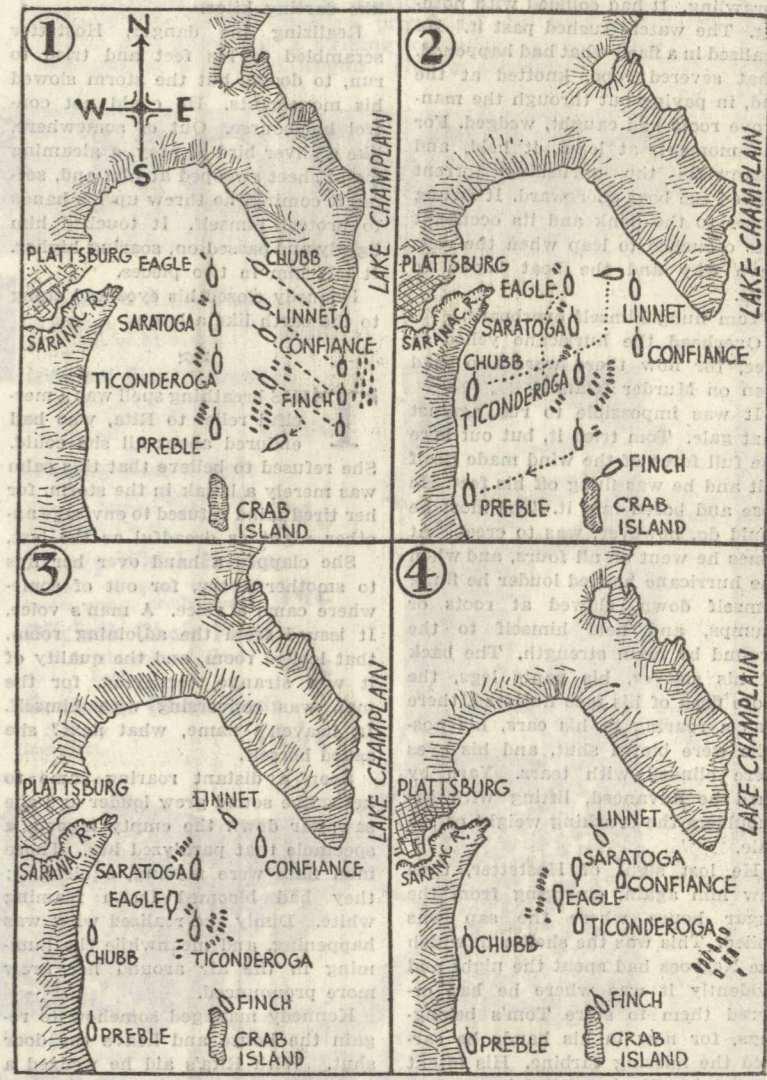
The Saratoga, with but little assistance from the Eagle, fought it out with the big frigate and the brig Linnet, twice being set afire by their red-hot shot. Swinging by means of a stern anchor, the Saratoga brought fresh guns to bear on the Confiance. This was the turning point of the battle. (The



Capt. Isaac Hull



Cross marked by arrow indicates approximate position off Boston at which the Constitution triumphed over the Guerriere.



(Adapted from Speers' "The History of Our Navy.") Principal phases of Lake Champlain battle. 1—Attack by British. 2—Preble, Finch, and Chubb out of action. 3—Confiance and Linnet concentrate fire on Saratoga. 4—Positions at end.



Lieut. Thomas Macdonough