

Sailor's Story  
*Peter Adams*

## Boatswain's Orders

Some will call me a traitor, but that's not how I see it. My name is Peter Adams, and I was born an Englishman. I served on HMS *Prince of Wales* during the long war with Napoleon, and when I received my discharge, I came to America. Ships and the sea were all I knew, so I got myself appointed a boatswain's mate in the United States Navy. I sailed on the *President* and then transferred to *Constitution* in 1810. On April 18, 1812, they made me a Boatswain (we sailors pronounce it "bosun") while we were in port at Hampton Roads, Virginia. With my promotion, I now made \$20.00 every month.

My shipmates say I am a confident man, with a deep voice, but that may just be because my duty requires my orders be heard throughout

the ship. I am obligated to supervise and discipline the crew.

I summon the men to their duties and guide them in their work, and see that their work is done without noise. I carry a silver call (or Boatswain's 'pipe') on a lanyard around my neck; it is my badge of office.

My main task is to keep the ship's miles and miles of rigging and planking in good order. In addition to my daily inspections, I supervise the men when we drop or weigh anchor, and frequently make reports to the First Lieutenant.



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## Honored Consult and Victorious Battles

On the 19th of August 1812, we spotted a ship on the horizon. Captain Hull took out his telescope and stared at her for a long while. I was standing by, and at last Hull turned and said, "Adams, what do you think of that vessel?"

"Don't know, sir," I replied. "I can't make her out, sir. But I think she's an Englishman."

"So do I," added Hull. "How long will it take to flog her, Adams?"

"Don't know sir!" I replied. "We can do it, but they're hard fellows on salt water."

"I know that," continued the captain; "they are rather a hard set of fellows, sure enough.

But don't you think we can flog them in two hours and a half, Adams?"

"Yes, sir!" said I, with all the coolness imaginable, "Yes, sir! We can do it in that time, if we can do it at all."

I knew that's what he wanted to hear. The captain turned away with a smile, and almost instantly had all sail set and the ship drawing towards the stranger, with a smacking breeze to jog her along.

Sure enough, we beat the *Guerriere* that day. I was on board when we beat the *Java*, too. My, we were a proud bunch of sailors.



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## After Constitution

After my service on *Constitution*, I transferred to USS *Chesapeake*. On June 1, 1813, the *Chesapeake* sailed out to fight HMS *Shannon* off Boston light. After a quick, fierce battle *Chesapeake*, commanded by our Captain James Lawrence, surrendered to the British. That day was my last: the *Chesapeake* lost 252 men wounded or killed, and I was counted among the latter.