

BATTLE OF DRUMMOND'S ISLAND



LITTLE-KNOWN COMBAT CARRIED OUT BY CHARLES WILKES AND THE USS PEACOCK
DURING THE WORLD-CHANGING US EXPLORING EXPEDITION
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USS *Peacock* engaging HMS *Epervier* on 28 April 1814. *Peacock* had a very long life with the US Navy. In 1828, she was completely broken apart and rebuilt to serve as the flagship for the US Exploring Expedition.

USS *Peacock*, a 22-gun sloop-of-war, arrived at Drummond's Island (known then as Kingsmill Islands and now part of the independent island nation of Kiribati) on 6 April 1841, based on reports that a ship had run aground on the island a few years earlier, and its crew massacred by the islanders, except for a white woman and child who might still be alive. (Drummond's Island was known then and now by the native islanders as *Tabiteuea* (translation "no chiefs"). The largest village on the island was (and is) Utiroa, home to about 1000 people. The natives practiced an indigenous form of egalitarianism where everyone was viewed as equal, hence "no chiefs." In the center of the village was a massive *maneaba*, basically a civic center. Uteri was also the location of the reported massacre.

Peacock was in the third year of the United States Exploring Expedition (known at the time a US Ex. Ex. for short and also known as the Wilkes Expedition). *Peacock's* skipper, Lieutenant William L. Hudson, was second-in-command of the expedition under Lt. Charles Wilkes, who embarked on 18-gun sloop-of-war USS *Vincennes*.

The original *Peacock* was a sloop-of-war built in 1813 and armed with 20 32-pounder carronades and two 12-pounder bow chasers. *Peacock* captured the British brig HMS *Epervier* on 28 April 1814, and in the very last action of the war (six months after the Treaty of Ghent was signed) captured the 18-gun brig *Nautilus* of the British East India Company in the Sunda Strait (now Indonesia). After the War of 1812, she served as flagship for Commodore David Porter's West Indies Squadron, capturing pirate vessels before her crew was debilitated by Yellow Fever and she was temporarily decommissioned. The number of crew losses on *Peacock* is not known, but the 38-gun frigate USS *Macedonian* (captured from the British in the War of 1812) suffered 76 dead from Yellow Fever in the same time frame, and she too had to be laid up). In 1827, *Peacock* was in Honolulu for the signing of a trade treaty with King Kamehameha III. On the way back to