

Abstract  
WAGING WAR ACROSS THE OCEAN  
By  
Seth C. Warburton  
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Chair: Dr. Michael Palmer  
Major Department: Program in Maritime Studies

The Barbary Wars, fought against Tripoli from 1801-05 and Algiers in 1815, were among the first overseas operations for the young United States Navy. Historians have explored the combat that took place and chronicled the daring deeds of some of America's first military heroes. Also heavily explored are the impact of these conflicts on both the navy and the nation's place in the world. Inadequate attention, however, has been paid to how the wars were managed and won, and that is the focus of this study.

Commanders' decisions outside combat proved far more important than any heroics they displayed in battle. The commodores had a wide range of duties and significant latitude in the direction of their squadrons. The lack of previous naval operations in the Mediterranean and the long time required for cross ocean communications necessitated this. In a war with few actual engagements, commanders made their most important decisions away from the battlefield.

Each year of the conflict, a new commodore relieved the old. Comparing the success of each with that of his predecessor and successor allows an evaluation of each commodore. From the miserable tenure of Richard Morris to the brilliant victory of Stephen Decatur Jr., each commodore demonstrated that good decision-making in areas such as supply, fleet disposition and negotiation outweighed the importance of heroics in battle.

WAGING WAR ACROSS THE OCEAN

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By Seth C. Warburton

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By

Seth C. Warburton

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF THESIS: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Michael A. Palmer, PhD)

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Wade G. Dudley, PhD)

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Nancy L. Spalding, PhD)

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Carl E. Swanson, PhD)

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
HISTORY: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Gerald J. Prokopowicz, PhD)

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE  
SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Paul J. Gemperline, PhD)

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## INTRODUCTION

Before the thirteen colonies broke with Great Britain, ships owned in America conducted a significant overseas trade. After the United States achieved independence, its merchants quickly began to re-expand their commercial operations around the world. Their ships became pawns, however, in the European wars of Britain and France. The heavy-handed practices of both of these nations sparked open conflict with the United States. The War of 1812 against Britain and the Quasi-War with France both sprang from this source. The piratical North African states of Tripoli, Tunis, Morocco, and Algiers, collectively referred to as the Barbary States, also preyed on American merchant vessels.

With the exception of Morocco, geography largely confined the Barbary raiders to the Mediterranean, as their ports bordered the southern shore of that sea. The Pre-Independence trade of the Americans to that sea itself, however, was still a significant part of the whole. “Eighty to one hundred ships, annually, of twenty thousand tons, navigated by about twelve hundred seamen,” carried American wheat, flour, fish, and rice through the Straits of Gibraltar.<sup>1</sup> This trade languished in the days immediately following the revolution because of the Barbary nations’ depredations. Pirates captured three vessels before the Americans had even ratified the Constitution: the *Betsy* by Morocco, and the *Maria* and *Dauphin* by Algiers.<sup>2</sup> The only Barbary state with Atlantic ports, Morocco, signed a treaty of peace with the United States on 28 June 1786, which Congress ratified 18 July of that same year.<sup>3</sup> Morocco promptly released the *Betsy*, and American trade outside the Mediterranean gained a measure of safety. Hopes were

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Mediterranean Trade: Report of Secretary of State to the Congress of the United States*, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers, 1785-1801*, U.S. Office of Naval Records and Library (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 1: 22.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *American Prisoners at Algiers: Report of Secretary of State to the President or the United States*, in *Naval Documents*, 1: 18.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Treaty with Morocco,” 18 July 1787, in *Naval Documents*, 1: 6.

high that the United States could reach a similar agreement with Algiers, strongest of the Mediterranean Barbary powers. These efforts largely failed, and only the Portuguese, also at war with Algiers, prevented continued serious losses to American shipping by closing the Straits of Gibraltar to pirate cruisers. The British, however, engineered a twelve-month truce between Portugal and Algiers in 1793.<sup>4</sup> Though this did not grow to a lasting peace, Algerian vessels were still able to escape to the Atlantic where they inflicted severe depredations on American ships, capturing eleven vessels in less than two months.<sup>5</sup>

This presented a crisis, forcing the government of the United States to act. Congress took steps to appease Algiers with money and naval stores. There was recognition, however, that force would eventually be necessary. On 27 March 1794, therefore, Congress approved the creation of an American navy for the express purpose of protecting trade from the “depredations committed by the Algerine corsairs.”<sup>6</sup> Because of the Quasi-War with France, the Navy was unable to act in the Mediterranean until 1801. Though the United States had secured treaties with all of the Barbary States, those with Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis demanded large sums of money, and the ruler of each constantly threatened war, demanding more payment. When the United States finally decided that the good “faith of Pirates ... [was] but a feeble dependence” on which to place the stake of American commerce and international respect, they were forced to resort to war.<sup>7</sup> The Barbary wars that followed, fought between 1801 and 1805 with a brief resumption of hostilities in 1815, were filled with the heroism of the new United States Navy and Marine Corps. This is how historians usually remember them.

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Church, *Circular to Citizens of the United States*, in *Naval Documents*, 1: 50.

<sup>5</sup> James Simpson to Thomas Jefferson, 25 Nov. 1793, in *Naval Documents*, 1: 55.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Congress, *An Act to provide a Naval Armament*, 27 Mar. 1794, in *Naval Documents*, 1: 69.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Church to Thomas Jefferson, 22 Sep. 1793, in *Naval Documents*, 1: 45.



Many authors have already examined the Barbary Wars, a topic that has inspired numerous books. These works generally focus on one or both of two main themes: terrorism or the birth of the U.S. Navy. Because the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of this conflict occurred simultaneously with the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, several recently published works examine the Barbary conflicts with the goal of comparing them to the modern day. “In the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks ... the United States found itself in a new war much like the one two centuries earlier. ... In truth the Barbary War was America’s first war on terror.”<sup>8</sup> These works are largely concerned with the response of the nation to the pirates, comparing them to modern terrorists. “The nation was forced to confront, for the first time, the vital question of ... whether to give in to or actively fight against terrorism.”<sup>9</sup> These authors draw the parallels of religious animosity, racial tension, government authority to wage war, and power projection problems overseas between the Barbary Wars and the modern conflicts faced by the United States. Even those works written before the modern War on Terror use language such as “holy war of Muslims against the infidel invader” and “dictators ruling in the name of Allah” to overemphasize the religious aspects of the war.<sup>10</sup>

A second group of books uses the Barbary Wars to examine the birth of the U.S. Navy and the growing pains of the young United States. They see the conflict as “an extension of America’s War of Independence.”<sup>11</sup> After winning their independence at home, at a time “when the nation’s future prosperity was very much in doubt,” Americans began to assert their rights overseas and made a statement “to the rest of the world that the United States was not a country

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Wheelan, *Jefferson’s War: America’s First War on Terror 1801-1805* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003), xvii.

<sup>9</sup> Joshua E. London, *Victory in Tripoli: How America’s War with the Barbary Pirates Established the U.S. Navy and Built a Nation* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 11.

<sup>10</sup> A.B.C. Whipple, *To the Shores of Tripoli: The Birth of the U.S. Navy and Marines* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 8.

to be mocked or bullied.”<sup>12</sup> When the United States deemed war necessary, the “confrontation with Barbary pirates would give birth to the U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps.”<sup>13</sup> “Thus, a little band of petty despots along the Barbary Coast were in large part responsible for the formation of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, and not least for weaning a new nation from infancy to adolescence.”<sup>14</sup> Some of these works focus on the military, and others on the situation of the United States in the world, but all embrace the theme of coming of age, whether they mean the United States as a whole or the nation’s naval service.

Many of those authors who argue that the Barbary Wars were a precursor to modern wars on terror go too far. The actions of the Barbary States were more akin to piracy than to Jihad, motivated as much by secular calculations like economics and politics as by religion. One author even goes so far as to call William Eaton’s march across the desert “America’s first covert military op overseas” and attempts comparisons with modern CIA operations.<sup>15</sup> Books that focus on the trouble with the Barbary Nations as the reason for the birth of the U.S. Navy are closer to the mark. Some, however, partially ignore the importance of the antagonistic actions of France and England at sea and Spain on the Mississippi River as an additional impetus for this action.

All of these books, from best to worst, offer the same narrower interpretation of the historical events. For many of these authors, the Americans gained victory by simply deciding to go to war, with the military actions representing an opportunity to exercise America’s new martial prowess. While some of these works acknowledge the importance of the actions of the

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Zacks, *The Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, the First Marines, and the Secret Mission of 1805* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), 10.

<sup>13</sup> London, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Whipple, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Zacks, 10.

American naval officers outside of combat, none primarily focus on this subject or adequately explore the importance of this crucial factor in playing the decisive role in victory. They are far more eager to discuss the heroics of Eaton and Preble and to expound upon the virtue of paying, “Millions for defense, but not a penny for tribute.” It is necessary, then, to fill this gap by detailing how the eventual American victory in the Barbary Wars was attributable to the successful actions of the American commanders, especially those duties outside of military operations.

American victory was far from assured simply because Congress and the Jefferson administration roused themselves and sent a squadron to the Mediterranean. The naval forces sent to deal with the Barbary pirates operated far from home, without any established American base nearby. The commodores of each American squadron were responsible for finding much of the food, water, and other supplies their squadrons needed. To accomplish this, they had to negotiate with neutral powers and use neutral ports for reprovisioning and repair. In addition to those responsibilities, naval captains of the day, when on foreign station, represented the interests of their countries and were sometimes accorded great responsibility in these matters. This resulted from the significant lag time for any communications that had to cross the Atlantic. For example, a letter sent by John Adams in London to John Jay on 25 April arrived on 7 July, with the reply returning to Europe on the last day of that same month: a not a-typical round trip of more than ninety days.<sup>16</sup> For a commander on foreign station to wait that length of time for direction as new situations arose was wholly impossible. In short, “naval commanders ...

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<sup>16</sup> John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 31 July 1786, in *Naval Documents* 1: 12.

assumed responsibility, exercised discretion, and decided their own problems often without suggestion or interference from the government.”<sup>17</sup>

Each American squadron sailed for the Mediterranean under the command of the squadron’s senior captain. This captain was addressed as commodore, a title that unlike admiral, was not a permanent rank, and could shift from one captain to another as more senior officers arrived or departed from the theater of war. Because of the small size of the American navy at the time, even relatively junior officers could find themselves styled commodores if they were the senior officer on station. Despite the largely ceremonial nature of the title, bickering between captains because of questions of seniority was commonplace. Another point of pride for many officers appointed commodore was the presence of a flag captain. A flag captain commanded the vessel in which the commodore sailed, releasing the senior officer from the day-to-day business required in running the ship. With a flag captain, the commodore’s duties were more analogous to those of the admirals in foreign navies, and most officers believed the presence of a flag captain bestowed more prestige on the rank of commodore even though this was not the case officially.

Commodore Richard Dale, commander of the first U.S. Mediterranean Squadron, set sail without knowing that the ruler of Tripoli had already declared war. His orders contained detailed directions for showing the naval force at his disposal around the entire Mediterranean should he find relative peace in those seas. In the case of war with a Barbary Nation, his orders directed Dale to “place [his] ships in a position to chastise them ... by sinking, burning, or destroying their ships and vessels,” leaving the specifics for the commodore to determine.<sup>18</sup> Later commanders sent from the United States, because of the constantly changing military situation,

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Oscar Paullin, *Diplomatic Negotiations of American Naval Officers: 1778-1883* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1912), 59.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Smith to Captain Richard Dale, 20 May 1801, in *Naval Documents*, 1: 466-7.

were little more informed than Dale when they set sail. Morris, Preble, and Barron each faced the reality or likelihood of war with Morocco and Tunis in addition to Tripoli. Like Dale, they had to find new bases and sources of supply and adapt to the constantly changing situation. Each commander was also responsible for a singular balancing act. They had to weigh the requests of the Mediterranean merchants against the advice of American diplomatic personnel and the objectives given by their orders as well as the military necessities of each situation. Using ships for convoying merchantmen, for example, reduced the force and effectiveness of any blockade. Only those commanders capable of combining these necessities into a coherent plan could succeed.

In addition, many naval officers were involved in actual diplomatic negotiations with the enemy. They both assisted the envoys and consuls stationed around the Mediterranean and often played key roles in negotiation. Dale, for example, communicated directly with the bashaw of Tripoli, the bey of Tunis, and the dey of Algiers, as well as with the American consuls in those countries. Morris, Preble, and Decatur received official power to participate in negotiating treaties; Preble, Barron, and Decatur commanded squadrons during treaty negotiations. The American Commodores' efforts in the two Barbary Wars were largely concentrated outside of actual combat. Their success in these roles, both logistic and diplomatic, determined the outcome of the Barbary Wars. Their decisions in these areas provide a method for assessing the effectiveness of each commodore.

No less than the commodores themselves, the men who wrote their orders, the various secretaries of the navy in service at the time, had to walk a fine line. If their orders contained instructions too detailed and limiting, they could force a commodore to act in a way that had no bearing on the situation at hand. Despite a secretary's desire to dictate the actions of his

squadrons, it was impossible to draft a set of orders that would cover every eventuality, forcing them to delegate these duties. If the orders contained too much leeway, however, a commodore could do whatever he wanted, regardless of the actual intent of the government at home. Both of these situations arose during the Barbary Wars. In evaluating the performance of the commodores, therefore, it is also important to examine the authority they received in their orders. The secretary of the navy was also ultimately responsible for the composition of each squadron, both in men and in vessels. The overall fighting power of each squadron, the types of vessels making up the squadron, and even whether the squadrons sailed together or piecemeal greatly influenced each commodore's actions as well.

Though the American navy was still less than a decade old, the squadrons dispatched to the Mediterranean were not the force's first overseas efforts. During the Quasi-War with France, the prevailing winds and northerly course of the Gulf Stream meant that the voyage to the Caribbean from America's large Eastern seaports could be just as long, in terms of sailing days, as a journey to the Mediterranean. Additionally, the long sweep of the Greater and Lesser Antilles meant that the scope of the Quasi-War was similar to that of the Barbary Wars, which ranged across most of the northern coast of Africa. Benjamin Stoddert, secretary of the navy during the Quasi-War, faced challenges similar to those his successors faced. His system of assuring supply by sending store-ships from the United States and having local consuls act to provide for any deficit was essentially the one adopted in the Barbary Wars.<sup>19</sup>

Each chapter that follows will deal with one commodore who served during the Barbary Wars. Examining the results produced by the squadrons of Richard Dale, Richard Morris, Edward Preble, Samuel Barron, and Stephen Decatur provides an idea of their individual

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<sup>19</sup> Michael A. Palmer. *Stoddert's War: Naval Operations during the Quasi-War with France, 1798-1801* (1987; repr., Annapolis, Maryland: The Naval Institute Press, 2000), 85-87.

success. Accounting for the different situation into which each commander sailed, the differences in the fleets they commanded, and the orders of each commander allow a measurement of the commodores against their own possible success as well as each other commodore. The bulk, then, of each chapter consists of description of each commodore's actions and an evaluation of those decisions. Each chapter ends with an overall summation and assessment of that officer's performance. In a war largely lacking in actual engagements, the commodores' actions in the more mundane spheres of their responsibility determined their individual success and the ultimate outcome of the conflict itself.

## CHAPTER 1: RICHARD DALE

As an American representative in France, Thomas Jefferson was as close as any of his countrymen to the Barbary States during the nation's troubles with the pirates soon after the Revolution. In 1786, Jefferson wrote, "War, on the fairest prospects, is still exposed to uncertainties, I weigh against this, the greater uncertainty of the duration of a peace bought with money."<sup>1</sup> Despite the choice of the intervening administrations to pay tribute to the Barbary States, Jefferson carried his earlier opinion with him to the presidency. Soon after taking office in the spring of 1801, Jefferson decided to send a squadron of ships to the Mediterranean to uphold American interests.

The nation's most distinguished naval officer of the time, and the logical choice for command of the Mediterranean venture, was Captain Thomas Truxtun. Commander of the *Constellation* during the Quasi-War with France, Truxtun bested two French frigates in combat, a combat record unmatched by any other American captain. Truxtun had also exercised command of an entire squadron, proving he had the strategic and administrative talent required for such a position. Like most officers of the day, Truxtun could be touchy about matters of precedence within the navy, and during the Quasi-War this touchiness devolved into argument with Captain Richard Dale.

Dale, a Virginian who had captained merchant vessels, served on both sides during the Revolutionary War before finally settling on the American cause in time to commit several acts of singular bravery. Imprisoned by the British no less than three times, he escaped twice: once by tunnel and once by obtaining a British uniform and strolling out. He sailed as a lieutenant with John Paul Jones on the *Bonhomme Richard* and, during the engagement with the *Serapis*,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, July 11, 1786 in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers, 1785-1801*, U.S. Office of Naval Records and Library (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 1: 10.



actually swung across to the enemy's deck on a rope. Having made up for his initial support of the British cause, Dale oversaw construction of the frigate *Chesapeake* after Congress authorized construction of the new vessels in 1794.<sup>2</sup> At the onset of the Quasi-War with France, Dale quickly prepared for action and, before any of the new frigates were ready, his ship, the *Ganges*, took the first war-time cruise of any U.S. Navy vessel.<sup>3</sup>

As more vessels put to sea, Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert found himself a mediator in captains' disputes over seniority. When he began construction of the *Chesapeake*, Dale was the fourth highest-ranking captain in the navy, while the junior Truxtun began building the *Constellation*.<sup>4</sup> But while the *Constellation* continued smoothly to completion, Congress halted *Chesapeake*'s construction after achieving peace with Algiers, depriving Dale of an active position.<sup>5</sup> Now that Stoddert had to assign captains to vessels and appoint squadron commanders, Truxtun argued that his years of active service, while Dale was without a naval command, rendered Truxtun the senior officer. With Truxtun already established in command of the *Constellation* and no more frigates in need of commanders, Dale opted to take a leave of absence until a frigate was available rather than retaining command of the smaller *Ganges*.<sup>6</sup> Though Dale did not put to sea again in a vessel he judged beneath his rank, or indeed serve at all for the rest of the war, his leave was a tacit admission of Truxtun's seniority.

Truxtun, though, declined command of the Mediterranean squadron. The new secretary of the navy, Robert Smith, drafted orders that Truxtun considered too confining in the light of his earlier service; Truxtun later declined command of a second squadron also, when no captain was

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<sup>2</sup> Glenn Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder: The Barbary Wars and the Birth of the U.S. Navy* (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1963), 133-4.

<sup>3</sup> Leonard Guttridge and Jay Smith, *The Commodores* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 22.

<sup>4</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 133-4.

<sup>5</sup> Michael A. Palmer. *Stoddert's War: Naval Operations during the Quasi-War with France, 1798-1801* (1987; repr., Annapolis, Maryland: The Naval Institute Press, 2000), 79.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

available to serve under him on the flagship.<sup>7</sup> Command of the squadron passed to Dale. Though in the view of historian Glenn Tucker Dale possessed “both the experience and resolute character required of a fleet commander,” Dale received command by virtue of his seniority and availability.<sup>8</sup> Dale’s leave of absence during the Quasi-War deprived him not only of the chance to distinguish himself in combat, but also the experience of squadron command. These constituted a heavy price to pay for personal honor, and perhaps demonstrated that Dale’s character was not resolute enough.

Dale received his orders informing him of his appointment on 28 April 1801 and final orders on 20 May after taking his position with the squadron. These orders contained instructions to instruct his junior officers in seamanship, to maintain discipline among his men, to resist insults to his squadron by other nations (but also to be respectful of other foreign powers to maintain peace with them), and to keep proper records of expenditures.<sup>9</sup> Further instructions specifically concerning the Barbary States themselves followed. Dale was instructed to determine, on his arrival in Gibraltar, if any of the Barbary States had declared war on the United States. The different contingencies, ranging from peace with all of the Barbary States, to war with one, a combination, or all of those nations were covered in his instructions.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, Dale received much responsibility, but also limitations in his actions by the very specific instructions provided for each situation. Additionally, his orders contain a good deal of chastening language, reminding him repeatedly to give no offense to anyone and to be careful not to overstep his boundaries for fear of insulting a trading partner or military power. The orders were as limiting as possible considering the autonomy required by an overseas

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<sup>7</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 151.

<sup>8</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 135.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Smith to Richard Dale, 20 May 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 463-4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 465-9.

commander who would be in very tenuous contact with the authorities in Washington. The tone of these orders may be indicative of the low station accorded the secretary of the navy in Jefferson's cabinet. Benjamin Stoddart, the first secretary of the navy, was a competent and energetic administrator who led the navy to success during the Quasi-War under the navy-friendly Adams administration. Jefferson's first three selections for Stoddart's replacement turned the job down, however, and the office was levied onto the brother of a senator from Jefferson's Republican party.<sup>11</sup> Robert Smith was certainly no incompetent, but in the thrifty Republican cabinet he was overshadowed by Albert Gallatin, economical secretary of the Treasury, and much of Smith's time had to be devoted to parrying cost-cutting measures and defending the value of a national navy.

From the *President*, Dale disseminated these orders to the other ship commanders in his squadron: Captain Samuel Barron of the *Philadelphia*, Captain William Bainbridge of the *Essex*, and Lieutenant Andrew Sterett, commander of the schooner *Enterprize*. The squadron then unmoored at three o'clock in the afternoon on 31 May, bound for Gibraltar.<sup>12</sup> On 2 July, after a passage during which "no particular Occurrences worth relating took place," the three frigates arrived in Gibraltar, the *Enterprize* having beaten them there by five days.<sup>13</sup> Here Dale faced the first test of his command, for in the harbor were two vessels of Tripoli's navy. Though the commander of these vessels, the Tripolitan high admiral, asserted otherwise, Dale rightly assumed that their presence meant war with Tripoli, and that these vessels were bound for the Atlantic to prey on American merchantmen. Dale's orders in the case of war with Tripoli instructed him:

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<sup>11</sup> Guttridge and Smith, *The Commodores*, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Log of USS *Essex*, Captain William Bainbridge Commanding, 31 May 1801, in *Naval Documents* I:480.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Dale to Secretary of the Navy, 2 July 1801, in *Naval Documents* I: 497.

You will proceed direct to that Port, where you will lay your ships in such a position as effectually to prevent any of their Vessels from going in or out. The *Essex* and *Enterprize* by cruising well on towards Tunis, will have it in their power to intercept any vessels which they may have captured, by disguising your ships, it will be some weeks before they will know that the Squadron is cruising in the Mediterranean – and give you a fair chance of punishing them.<sup>14</sup>

In light of the situation he immediately faced, Dale largely ignored these instructions, as indeed the situation seemed to dictate. He ordered the *Philadelphia* to remain off Gibraltar to bottle up the two pirate vessels there. He further ordered the *Essex* to convoy a ship containing tribute for the bey of Tunis to that nation. Dale then proceeded with his flagship, the *President*, and the *Enterprize* to Algiers, to deliver the tribute goods that his squadron was carrying.<sup>15</sup>

Secretary of the Navy Smith chartered a merchant ship to carry supplies for the squadron to the Mediterranean. Because of a shortage of water at the port of Gibraltar, Dale left orders for this ship, which was to leave America after the squadron, to deposit its stores at Malaga instead. His orders in this regard instructed him to lay in stores where he thought most convenient, and suggested Gibraltar; but because supplies were being brought on a ship, Dale could direct this vessel wherever he chose. Later, reversing his earlier decision, the commodore wrote a letter to the governor of Gibraltar asking permission to deposit supplies there.<sup>16</sup>

Hindsight suggests Commodore Dale's decisions at Gibraltar were mixed. Certainly, though his orders contain nothing about detaching a frigate at Gibraltar, it would have been unwise to allow two Tripolitan vessels access to the Atlantic where they could have wreaked havoc on American shipping. Similarly, abandoning Gibraltar as the primary base of supply was wise in view of the water shortage there. Without question, however, Dale's orders dictated more offensive actions than he actually pursued. Malaga is barely closer to Tripoli than is

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Smith to Richard Dale, 20 May 1801, in *Naval Documents* I: 461.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Dale to Secretary of the Navy, 2 July 1801, in *Naval Documents*, I: 499.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Dale to General O'Hara, 3 July 1801, in *Naval Documents* I: 499.

Gibraltar itself. When it was apparent that the supply port recommended in his orders would be impractical, it would have been wise to move to a location more central in the Mediterranean. Dale's orders also listed Malta and various Italian ports as possible re-supply areas, and he eventually used them for rewatering, recognizing their usefulness. These ports were more conveniently situated to Tripoli, and it would have been easy to instruct the supply ship to meet the squadron there. Perhaps Dale was concerned that the vessel might be intercepted by the Tripolitans, or perhaps he wanted to view those more convenient ports before committing himself. Whatever his thoughts, Gibraltar remained the fleet's main base, even beyond his own tenure, to the detriment of fleet operations.

Dispatching the *Essex* to guard the tribute vessel may have been prudent, but resulted in further reduction of the force Dale could put to an offensive use. Additionally, while the section of the orders concerning peace with all the Barbary States included the delivery of the tribute on board, his orders stated that, in case of war with Tripoli, Dale was to "proceed direct" to Tripoli.<sup>17</sup> While he was certainly not wrong to ensure the safe arrival of the money entrusted to him, a more aggressive interpretation of his orders would have led him to sail directly for Tripoli. Transferring the tribute to the *Essex*, which he detached to escort another tribute vessel, would have been a possible compromise. This action would have allowed two American vessels to proceed immediately to Tripoli and still ensure delivery of tribute to both Algiers and Tunis.

Perhaps Dale did not expect to find a war on his arrival, and the presence of the Tripolitan warships surprised him at Gibraltar. Whatever the reason, Dale elected to carry out a strategy that fit more closely with the orders he received upon the contingency of peace with all the Barbary States. Sure to cover all his bases, Dale secured the safety of the supply ship, the tribute, and Mediterranean merchants at the same time, but at the cost of delaying offensive

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<sup>17</sup> Samuel Smith to Richard Dale, 20 May 1801, in *Naval Document*, I: 461.

actions. During the rest of the conflict, Dale's actions were largely focused on three areas: giving orders regarding the dispositions of his squadron, maintaining relations with foreign powers (including establishing points of supply), and negotiating with the Barbary States.

Upon arriving in Algiers, Dale found the conditions incorrect to unload any of the money he carried on board. He sent a letter ashore informing the dey of Algiers of the presence of the American squadron in the Mediterranean and then left that harbor for Tunis.<sup>18</sup> There, he sent a letter ashore for the bey and left directions for the *Essex*, which arrived after escorting the very slow, tribute-carrying store ship, *Grand Turk*, to proceed to the port of Barcelona to convoy any American merchantmen there safely out of the Mediterranean, gathering other Americans in the ports along the way.<sup>19</sup> In this same letter, Dale clearly demonstrated that he did not believe it possible to afford protection to every merchant vessel when he wrote, "you are not to understand, that you are to go about convoying one two or three vessels ... when we have objects of more consequence in View."<sup>20</sup> Yet Bainbridge still received permission to escort merchants as far as 11° west, well into the Atlantic Ocean, put in at Lisbon, and escort Americans waiting in-bound at Gibraltar as far as Leghorn, Italy. When the *Essex* was finally ready to rejoin the squadron, Bainbridge was to look first off Tripoli, but Dale wrote that the squadron might be at Malta getting water, "It being the most handy place for that purpose."<sup>21</sup> If the squadron ran out of food, however, he still expected return to Gibraltar.

In light of the letters he wrote to the rulers of Algiers and Tunis, Dale may have been trying to impress these leaders by visiting their ports with his warships. If this was his object and if either of these nations planned an attack, then these efforts were largely successful, as both

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Dale to Dey of Algiers, 21 May 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 470-1.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Dale to William Bainbridge, 17 July 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 515.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 516.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Algiers and Tunis elected to stay out of the war despite a general dissatisfaction with the lateness of American tribute payments.<sup>22</sup> Again, however, Dale tempered the government's more aggressive ideas for his squadron with his own caution. Though his orders called for the entire squadron to lie off Tripoli (two ships on close blockade, the other two more distant) Dale had effectively cut his blockading force in half. Additionally, he fully expected to remove those ships from their station while they sailed half the length of the Mediterranean to replenish their food stocks. In fact, the American displaying the most initiative was William Eaton, American consul in Tunis. On hearing of a shortage of bread in Tripoli, he took it upon himself to declare a naval blockade of that port from Tunis, sending letters to foreign powers and American consuls throughout the Mediterranean.<sup>23</sup> A blockade could only be legal if issued by a power that had enough naval units in place to actually inhibit the vessels of other powers from entering. Even so, by refusing to issue passes for Tunisian grain merchants bound for Tripoli, Eaton created a sort of "paper blockade." This action may have been more effective at keeping supplies from reaching Tripoli at the beginning of the war than the squadron itself.

Upon reaching Tripoli himself, Commodore Dale began a brisk correspondence with both the bashaw and Danish Consul Nicholas Nissen, who had agreed to act in the interest of the United States after American Consul James Cathcart departed. In these letters, Dale announced his intention to commence hostilities unless the bashaw would explain his reasons for declaring war, express a willingness to declare a truce, and prove willing to forge a peace.<sup>24</sup> After receiving no satisfactory answer, Dale began a blockade. The schooner *Enterprize*, however, with less capacity for carrying stores, was growing short of water, so Dale dispatched it to Malta.

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<sup>22</sup> Ray W. Irwin, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers: 1776-1816* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 107-8.

<sup>23</sup> William Eaton to Richard Dale, 24 July 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 528.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Dale to Bashaw of Tripoli, 25 July 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 531.

He sent with its captain, Lt. Andrew Sterett, a letter to the governor of Malta, asking for permission to use that port as a watering station.<sup>25</sup> Dale took care to warn Sterett to keep a tight reign on his ship's crew when ashore, not wanting to incite any animosity with British officials there. Also included in the letter were specific instructions concerning the eventuality of meeting with any vessel of Tripoli, and these instructions were put to use when, on 1 August, the *Enterprize* met and captured the *Tripoli*, a Tripolitan cruiser.

Dale's orders to the *Enterprize* were clear: no prizes were to be taken. If Sterett were to fall in with a corsair he could handle he should "leave him In a situation, that he can Just make out to get into some Port."<sup>26</sup> President Jefferson himself supported this decision, and explained that to perpetrate offensive action against Tripoli, Congress must vote to recognize a state of war, which occurred only on 6 February, 1802, after Dale left the Mediterranean.<sup>27</sup> In this case, it seems that Dale understood and carried out his instructions to the letter and made sure his subordinates did the same. Had Dale ordered this vessel taken as a prize, there could be little doubt about the legality of the capture. Again, the commodore was careful not to overstep the bounds of his orders, interpreting them in the most cautious way.

As it limped back to Tripoli, the *Tripoli* met the *President* cruising outside the harbor. The captain told the Americans that he was a Tunisian and his vessel battered by a French warship, which excuse was good enough for Dale to let him pass.<sup>28</sup> Though the captain and vessel could have been a powerful bargaining chip, their final escape made this American victory no less complete. This incident is also proof of the actual combat prowess of the American navy. Though the *Tripoli* carried more guns and men than the *Enterprize*, it suffered more than twenty

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Dale to Governor of Malta, 30 July 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 535.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Dale to Andrew Sterett, 30 July 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 534.

<sup>27</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 146-7.

<sup>28</sup> Newton Keene to William W. Burrows, 10 Aug. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 546.



dead and thirty wounded, against not a single American even scratched. In even an equal military contest, the Americans had a clear advantage, and during Dale's tenure they never fought a battle they were in danger of losing. In these conditions, the commodore's skills in combat were barely tested; victory rested on his decisions outside combat.

Things so far were going well for the Americans and Commodore Dale. Consul Cathcart, who had fled Tripoli for Leghorn, wrote to Dale offering his services and a useful summation of the action thus far: "we have not lost One Single Ship, we have their Admiral in our power [at Gibraltar] and our operations are not impeded by the contemplation of having a number of our fellow Citizens in Captivity."<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Cathcart urged Dale not to push for peace until the bashaw had learned his lesson by suffering. Along with the news of Sterett's victory, in his next letter to Washington Dale requested a larger force, so that at least four ships could maintain the blockade of Tripoli at all times.<sup>30</sup> Dale replied to Cathcart's letter with confidence that, even though the *President* would have to make for Gibraltar for more food soon, the requested reinforcements from the United States could soon humble the bashaw.

Dale's situation in the area of supply still had not improved. Because the *Enterprize* could not carry any quantity of water outside its own requirements, this ship could not keep the *President* on station by ferrying supplies as Dale's orders instructed. When the *President* was forced to water at Malta, there were no other supplies to be had there. Dale dispatched the *Enterprize* to Sicily to determine if supplies were available there. Without a local supply he would be forced to quit his station by 10 September, little more than a month since arriving off Tripoli, and return to Gibraltar.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> James Cathcart to Richard Dale, 10 Aug. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 545.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Dale to Secretary of the Navy, 18 Aug. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 553.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Dale to James Cathcart, 25 Aug. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 561.

Dale also wrote to representatives of the banking firm that the United States had employed to hold funds for the squadron. Asking them to make arrangements with bankers in Toulon, Cartagena, and Syracuse (on the island of Sicily), Dale ensured that each of the captains in his widely dispersed squadron would be able to access those funds when needed.<sup>32</sup> This action was certainly prudent, but it also suggests that Dale did not intend to consolidate his squadron off Tripoli in the near future, but rather considered it likely that it would remain dispersed throughout the Mediterranean.

Dale also attempted a bit of negotiation with the bashaw during his time on station off Tripoli. Upon stopping a vessel that was trying to enter the harbor, Dale found on board a number of Tripolitans including merchants and soldiers. Through Danish Consul Nissen, Dale tried to establish a rate of exchange for prisoners: those he just took for any Americans taken in the future.<sup>33</sup> The bashaw's response was to propose opening discussions of a truce. Dale, with no orders to make a truce, and having not picked up Consul Cathcart in Leghorn, refused, citing his lack of orders to make a truce.<sup>34</sup> The bashaw, upon hearing this, declared he had little use for any of those men the Americans had captured, but later negotiations fixed the release of three Americans for the twenty-one Tripolitans. Dale sent all the prisoners ashore along with a note which stated that the bashaw should not consider this a "President [sic] in any future negotiation."<sup>35</sup> Obtaining this rate of exchange was certainly not a victory for Dale. Indeed, his early acquiescence to the bashaw's unequal proposal probably resulted from the shortage of food and lengthening sick list on his ship and his lack of patience with diplomatic matters.

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Dale to DeButts and Purviance, 25 Aug. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 560.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Dale to Nicholas Nissen, 31 Aug. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 564-5.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Dale to Nicholas Nissen, 2 Sep. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 568.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

As the *Enterprize* and *President* ran out of stores, sickness spread among the crews. On 2 September, Dale dispatched the *Enterprize* to Gibraltar by way of Malta, where Sterett was to pick up any American merchant vessels and escort them westward.<sup>36</sup> The *President* left the next day “for want of Provisions, and Having Upwards of one Hundred men in the Doctors List.”<sup>37</sup> On his own way back to Gibraltar Dale stopped in Tunis. There he left a message for Captains Bainbridge and Barron of the *Essex* and *Philadelphia*, requiring them, too, to proceed to the Rock, stopping in Leghorn to convoy waiting merchantmen.<sup>38</sup> Meeting, on the way westward, the *Enterprize*, Dale sent the schooner into Algiers to pick up the dispatches of Consul O’Brien there.

The *Enterprize* and *President* heading westward missed the *Essex* and *Philadelphia* heading to the east. The two Tripolitan vessels in the harbor of Gibraltar had been running out of supplies. Having been deprived of supplies by the British, the corsairs deserted in droves, and their leader, the high admiral of Tripoli, smuggled himself out of the port leaving his derelict vessels behind. Captain Barron, considering his job to be finished since the enemy vessels were in no condition to leave port, sailed towards Tripoli.<sup>39</sup> The *Essex*, which had finished convoying almost thirty merchantmen through the straits into the Atlantic, joined the *Philadelphia* on the journey east. These two ships reached Tripoli on the morning of 28 September, one day after Dale anchored at Gibraltar, and left only two days later, not finding the commodore and supplies and sickness becoming a concern.<sup>40</sup> It had taken eighty-seven days since arriving in the Mediterranean before these ships took up stations off Tripoli, and they stayed there for only two.

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Dale to Andrew Sterett, 2 Sep. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 568.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Dale to Secretary of the Navy, 25 Sep. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 580.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Dale to Samuel Barron or William Bainbridge, 6 Sep. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 571.

<sup>39</sup> Log of USS *Essex*, William Bainbridge, 5 Sep. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 570.

<sup>40</sup> Log of USS *Essex*, William Bainbridge, 28-30 Sep. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 586-7.

Throughout his time in the Mediterranean, Commodore Dale walked a fine line in his dealings with foreign countries. Several times Dale diffused situations or made decisions involving U.S. relations with European powers. Off Gibraltar, Dale learned of a tense situation in the Spanish port of Algeciras. Because the Spanish were at war with England, they took a dim view of any vessels putting in at Gibraltar. Spanish gunboats and privateers, operating from Algeciras directly opposite Gibraltar, intercepted a number of American merchantmen intending to wait for convoy into the Mediterranean.<sup>41</sup> Dale immediately wrote to the Spanish governor protesting against this treatment. This letter predicted a negative response when Dale sent the news to the United States, which he warned he “shall lose no time in doing.”<sup>42</sup> Dale also wrote to the U.S. minister to Madrid, informing him of the incident, attributing it to Spanish frustration at the English blockade and that “the Governor has a particular Interest in the Privateers.”<sup>43</sup> The Spanish even detained the ship chartered by the U.S. government to carry supplies for the squadron to Gibraltar for eleven days before releasing it. Dale personally assured the Spanish governor that the ship carried nothing except supplies for the American squadron.<sup>44</sup>

This was not the end of the problems with the Spanish, however. The privateers persisted in bringing in Americans bound through the strait on the pretext that they might stop in Gibraltar. Dale grew more and more impatient and continued to write letters to the U.S. minister to Madrid and to the Spanish officials. He described the plight of Americans:

Every encouragement is given to the Privatiersmen to bring into this place Every American Vessel they can capture. When a Vessel is brought in here, there is no possibility of her getting away again, under one month: when the Governours Privatiers brings in any Vessels he is the Chief Judge of the Cause. ... I think such conduct is a Direct Insult to the United States.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Clement Humphreys to Richard Dale, 28 Sep. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 585.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Dale to Governor of Algeciras, 28 Sep. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 586.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Dale to David Humphreys, 1 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 590.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Dale to Daniel Ludlow, 25 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 594.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Dale to David Humphreys, 19 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 600.

In his letters to the governor of Algeciras, Dale threatened to send news of these incidents both to Madrid and to the United States. He also sought help from his counterparts in the Spanish Navy. Spanish Captain John Atonio de Espino presided over the case of the detained supply ship, and Dale thanked him for his sense of justice in that case.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to detaining American ships, twice in the month of October a Spanish fort fired upon American merchantmen. On 27 October, the fort hit a merchant brig twice, damaging its rudder. A shot from the fort on an earlier occasion killed a seaman in similar circumstances. Dale's rage was clear in his letter to the governor, and concludes with a warning that, the next time, fire will be returned from his squadron, "let the consequence be what it may."<sup>47</sup> After the governor reprimanded the commander of the Spanish fort, Dale wrote a more conciliatory letter, seeking to qualify an unfortunate use of the word savage as only applying to the men of the fort, and not to the whole Spanish nation.<sup>48</sup> While none can fault Dale in this instance for getting angry, it was certainly unwise to compose a hasty and potentially insulting a letter to a Spanish governor. With the ability of Spanish privateers and gunboats to effectively close the straits to Americans, the consequences of Dale retaliating as he threatened may have been more severe than he contemplated. Temper aside, this incident illustrated Dale's pride in his own country. He later wrote, "I can never submit to see the flag of my Country Insulted in that way without resenting it," a clear statement of his nationalism and determination.<sup>49</sup>

Across the bay in Gibraltar, conflict nearly broke out with the English as well. An American seaman deserted from the ship by swimming ashore. When found and brought back in irons, he bribed the sentry watching over him and swam to shore again. There he ran into two

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Dale to John Atonio de Espino, 19 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents* I: 600-1.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Dale to the Governor of Saint Roque, 27 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents* I: 609.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Dale to the Governor of Saint Roque, 30 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents* I: 611-2.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Dale to David Humphreys, 28 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents* I: 611.

American midshipmen on shore leave who recognized him. Angry at being again apprehended, he began loudly berating one of them, John Trippe. Suitably provoked, Trippe stabbed the seaman twice with his sword to subdue him. The commotion attracted the guard, and the seaman then claimed to be a British sailor seeking protection.<sup>50</sup> After the seaman was back on board, Dale reprimanded Trippe for his conduct and hoped that the situation would soon blow over. It did not. The senior British officer at Gibraltar demanded the seaman as a British subject, and when Dale refused, a small altercation took place. After leaving Gibraltar, the seaman died, resulting in Trippe's arrest pending a court martial.<sup>51</sup> Though Trippe was later acquitted, his actions, and those of Commodore Dale, could have caused serious repercussions. While Dale does not elaborate on the small altercation that erupted, it may be imagined that his nationalistic temper was again aroused, and with a similar result.

In a later incident, Dale behaved quite a bit better. After receiving rumors that the Tripolitans had purchased several small armed vessels in Minorca, Dale headed there with the *President*. His letter of inquiry to the governor focused on the positive relations of the two countries that the squadron had previously enjoyed, and his hope that there was no such transaction.<sup>52</sup> Tunisians proved to be the purchasers of one large vessel, and the governor assured Dale that the British had sold no vessels to the state of Tripoli.<sup>53</sup> This situation, like the earlier problems Dale faced, could have erupted into further difficulty considering the tenor that Dale used in some of his correspondence. As the rumors proved unfounded, this situation proved less serious than those he encountered in the strait, but Dale did learn from his earlier struggles and improved his conduct.

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<sup>50</sup> Richard Dale to Secretary of the Navy, 28 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 607.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Richard Dale to the Governor of Minorca, 19 Nov. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 623.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Dale to William Kirkpatrick and John Gavino, 7 Dec. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 628.

Tripoli was, at this time, also at war with Sweden; Swedish citizens, hearing of the American squadron, desired cooperation. Charles Iggestrom, a Swedish merchant, wrote to Commodore Dale asking if the Americans would look after his ships “and see the same, if possible or convenient to you, safe to their ports of destination, knowing that you command a sufficient Force to cruise all over those parts.”<sup>54</sup> Dale certainly did not command a sufficient force to cruise the entire Mediterranean, or see each of Iggestrom’s vessels safe to their ports, but some cooperation with Sweden, which had its own naval force en route to the Mediterranean, presented an opportunity to give the Americans more resources to fight Tripoli. James Cathcart, evicted U.S. consul to Tripoli, had a negative opinion of cooperation with other powers, however. “Our aim is to establish a National character, which we must do, without the assistance of any of the powers of Europe.”<sup>55</sup> Dale seemed less high minded, and more mindful of the fact that one good turn may deserve another, when he expressed his willingness to “give Every protection in my power to the Sweedish Merchants Vessels, that I may meet with.”<sup>56</sup>

Earlier, upon the squadron’s first entry into the Mediterranean, when Dale ordered the *Essex* on convoy duty, he instructed Captain Bainbridge to convoy no vessels save Americans.<sup>57</sup> Captain Bainbridge, however, disobeyed this order and allowed a Swedish ship to sail in convoy from the port of Barcelona.<sup>58</sup> Later during that cruise, another Swede and a Dane took advantage of the same convoy.<sup>59</sup> Bainbridge’s actions may have violated Dale’s instructions, but did not violate the spirit of the orders of the secretary of the navy who stressed that the squadron was to act in a friendly manner toward vessels of all nations, and that the United States wished

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<sup>54</sup> Charles Iggestrom to Richard Dale, 29 Aug. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 563.

<sup>55</sup> James Cathcart to Richard Dale, 17 Sep. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 576.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Dale to James Simpson, 1 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 591.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Dale to William Bainbridge, 17 July 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 515.

<sup>58</sup> Log of USS *Essex*, Captain William Bainbridge Commanding, 9 Aug. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*:544-7.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 547.

continued peace and harmony with everyone.<sup>60</sup> Dale's reversal of opinion on this issue, one of the only in which he exceeded his orders, is a sign of his competence. His own forces were too weak to turn down the possibility of gaining an ally; it would have been fool-hardy to do so, despite Cathcart's objections.

In fact, Sweden dispatched a force of frigates to the Mediterranean after the king of Sweden refused to ratify the initial draft of a treaty worked out with Tripoli.<sup>61</sup> They arrived in the Mediterranean after Dale and sent word through Consul Eaton that they intended to act in concert with the American squadron.<sup>62</sup> Upon hearing this news, Dale excitedly agreed to the advantages of combined operations. Planning to leave the Mediterranean before the winter as per his orders, Dale resolved to leave the *Philadelphia* and *Essex* on station until the next American squadron arrived. The orders to Captains Bainbridge and Barron contained passages instructing them to include Swedish merchant vessels in their convoys, and Dale wrote that should he meet the Swedish commander: "I shall settle a plan of Co-operation with him, in such a way, that there will be little danger of the Merchant Vessels of either Nation being taken by the Tripoline Corsairs."<sup>63</sup>

Late in Dale's tenure as squadron commander, his earlier preparations in securing friendly relations with other ports became important. The *President*, after striking a rock, put into Toulon. Once there, it was a relatively simple matter of writing to his previous contacts in southern France to arrange for the vessel's repairs.<sup>64</sup> Dale was so impressed with the help he received that he wrote to the firm controlling the squadron's finances thanking them for their

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<sup>60</sup> Samuel Smith to Richard Dale, 20 May 1801, in *Naval Documents* I: 465.

<sup>61</sup> James Cathcart to William Eaton, 29 June 1801, in *Naval Documents* I: 493.

<sup>62</sup> N. Frumerie to William Eaton, 14 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents* I: 599.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Dale to David Humphreys, 28 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents* I: 610-11.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Dale to Samadet and Cushing, 7 Dec. 1801, in *Naval Documents* I:629.



agents' actions.<sup>65</sup> The ships that Dale left behind also benefited from these arrangements. While Dale still intended to have the squadron's supplies deposited in Gibraltar, his efforts to secure friendly relations in a wide variety of ports provided valuable assistance to U.S. fleets throughout the Tripolitan War.

While Dale's arrangements with financial and supply organizations were quite favorable, his relations with port officials in Toulon were no better than they were with those in Algeciras or Gibraltar. The French imposed a quarantine of fifteen days, considered short and accommodating by those on shore, on the *President*. Two officials, described by Dale as guards, came on board to enforce quarantine rules. Dale refused to accept them, considering their presence an insult, and sent them ashore, only receiving them back when French naval officers came along-side to reassure him it was a common practice.<sup>66</sup> Before this, however, Dale had already written a number of angry letters to various French and American officials in the neighborhood complaining of this mistreatment.

Dale's orders, which instructed him to start for home by 1 December, did not allow him to spend his time worrying about other nations. Now October, Dale had to make winter plans for the rest of his squadron. He dispatched the *Enterprize* home early to deliver the summer's news to Washington.<sup>67</sup> Included in the packet of dispatches entrusted to Lieutenant Sterett was Dale's recommendation to the secretary of the navy that both the *Essex* and *Philadelphia* should stay in the Mediterranean.<sup>68</sup> Intending to finish the business of the tribute he was carrying for Algiers, Dale left Gibraltar for that port and left orders for each of the other frigates. Contemplating little activity from the Tripolitans, Dale did not intend for the two frigates to relieve each other off

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<sup>65</sup> Richard Dale to DeButts and Purviance, 9 Dec. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*; 631.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Dale to Secretary of the Navy, 13 Dec. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 633-7.

<sup>67</sup> Richard Dale to Andrew Sterett, 2 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 593.

<sup>68</sup> Richard Dale to Secretary of the Navy, 4 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 593-4.

Tripoli, ensuring a constant presence off that harbor. Instead, he ordered the *Philadelphia* to patrol off Tripoli, stopping frequently in Tunis, using Malta and Syracuse, Sicily, as points of supply.<sup>69</sup> Dale instructed *Essex* to ply the waters around Gibraltar, offering the protection of convoy to American and Swedish merchant vessels in the western Mediterranean.<sup>70</sup> Though with two frigates some amount of continuous blockade would be possible, Dale again chose a more passive course.

While this may be another example of Dale's preference for defensive rather than offensive action, he noted in many different letters that he expected no trouble from Tripoli over the winter. The winter weather made it difficult to safely maintain a blockade, as well as for the corsairs of Tripoli to patrol the seas. Captain Alexander Murray, a member of the second squadron, confirmed this, later writing of the Tripolitan navy: "In the Winter Season they seldom venture out nor will it be safe for us to be on this station [off Tripoli] on that Season."<sup>71</sup> The summer's gentler winds not only gained strength, but also turned to blow out of the north. Freshening winds from that quarter threatened to blow blockading ships ashore rather than safely out to sea. Dale finalized these orders, but before their news reached the United States, the secretary of the navy ordered Dale to sail for home and keep only two frigates in the Mediterranean.<sup>72</sup> These orders seem to largely validate Dale's decision and reflect that no one contemplated danger from Tripolitan vessels for the duration of the winter.

As has been mentioned previously, Dale chose to err on the side of caution in most of his decisions. The exceptions, when Dale's impatience led him to dispatch flurries of nasty letters, he generally tempered in a few days. Though cautious, Dale's actions were largely successful,

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<sup>69</sup> Richard Dale to Samuel Barron, 25 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 603-4.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Dale to William Bainbridge, 25 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 604-5.

<sup>71</sup> Alexander Murray to Secretary of the Navy, 30 July 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 218.

<sup>72</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Dale, 14 Dec. 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 639.

and advanced the American cause. Dale was most cautious in his decisions on positioning his vessels. He never committed all of his forces to a single course of action. While this allowed the squadron to be active in many different roles, it prevented them from doing any one job, most notably the continuous blockade of Tripoli, completely. Though this may seem overly timid, a scorecard of his successes suggests that this strategy was largely successful. The *Philadelphia's* presence forced the abandonment of Tripoli's two largest raiders in Gibraltar. *Enterprize* bested another cruiser, the *Tripoli*, and sent it home a useless wreck. The blockade, both the real one and Eaton's paper blockade which Dale eventually endorsed, caused shortages in Tripoli. Perhaps most impressively, the Tripolitans failed to capture a single American ship during Dale's tenure. The best indicators of his effectiveness were the invitations by the bashaw of Tripoli to begin negotiating a treaty for peace. With a few more ships, Dale certainly could have, and certainly would have, carried out a more complete blockade of Tripoli and undertaken all the other tasks as well.

In the area of supply, Dale's results were mixed. Dale's use of the port of Gibraltar as a main supply base was not ideal for operations around Tripoli. But because many of Dale's operations did not take place around Tripoli, Gibraltar was well suited as a port for much of his squadron. In light of the conservative dispositions Dale chose for the squadron, the arrangements he made were quite good. He visited both Malta and Syracuse, the ports most convenient to Tripoli, and established them as watering stations at least, also making contacts ashore. Dale also established a line of credit for each of his ships that they could draw upon in numerous ports. This system proved especially useful when the *President* struck a rock and required repairs. Dale had simply to enter the nearest convenient port, call upon those persons he had prearranged to help the squadron, and the work on the ship began quickly.

While Dale refused to begin treaty negotiations with Tripoli, he did carry out negotiations of a more limited scope with numerous other nations. Dale was certainly quick to anger when he felt the honor of the United States was being in any way impugned, and this is reflected in his correspondence. The numerous issues with the Spanish, the incident of the deserter at Gibraltar, and the French quarantine all sparked some angry comment from Dale. While his actions in these cases could be dismissed as those of a sailor who does not have the patience or subtlety required for negotiation, it must be remembered that all of these incidents resulted in Dale gaining his point. The Spanish released the supply-ship and cashiered the commander of the fort who fired on the American merchants; the British did not force Dale to give up the American deserter or his assailant, and the fleet retained the ability to use Gibraltar; the French shortened the *President's* quarantine from thirty days to fifteen. Though luck undoubtedly assisted him in these situations, the simple sailor Dale acquitted himself well in these diplomatic situations.

Of all the foreign powers that Dale dealt with, his most level-headed discourse concerned Sweden. This was also the area of Dale's greatest success. Beginning with a letter from a Swedish merchant, the relationship between the Americans and Swedes grew to a point where, by the time Dale left the Mediterranean, Swedish warships cooperated with the American squadron in convoying the merchant ships of both nations. Dale even acted against the advice of Consul Cathcart in this instance, after considering the advantages to the squadron and American merchants outweighed the negative arguments. Perhaps Dale's biggest miscue in the area of diplomacy was his failure to meet with Cathcart in Leghorn. As the long-time American representative in Tripoli and a government representative authorized to begin treaty negotiations, Cathcart could certainly have been useful during the commodore's time off Tripoli.

In all, Dale effectively carried the war with Tripoli forward during his time in command. This is in spite of the fact that Dale's ship, the *President*, did not engage the enemy. Commodore Dale's prudent judgment in his duties outside of combat, while not nearly as appreciated as the later military victories, was the most important factor in starting the United States down the road to victory in the Barbary Wars. Many historians, however, lump Dale with his infamous successor, Richard Morris, as timid and ineffectual.<sup>73</sup> To put Dale's service in the proper perspective it is important to remember that Dale sailed on a peaceful mission and arrived in a war zone. The presence of the two Tripolitan vessels in Gibraltar immediately rendered his orders moot, even those sections which addressed war with Tripoli. That Dale chose one of the more conservative paths available to him is true, but to suppose that this rendered his command ineffectual is not. His record, considering his limiting orders and the small size of his squadron, was very favorable.

With the *President* repaired, Dale sailed for the United States, reaching Norfolk on 14 April 1802.<sup>74</sup> Dale's efforts were widely recognized in his own time. After a short rest at home Dale received an offer to command the next squadron, an offer he refused, instead tendering his resignation to retire on the revenue of his previous voyages as a merchant captain.<sup>75</sup> Dale was the first naval officer in American history to command a squadron in the Mediterranean. Naturally for this capacity, his energies were devoted almost completely to pursuits outside of combat. He corresponded with governors, diplomats, officers, and rulers in nearly every nation bordering the western Mediterranean. He acted at all times for the good of his country and in the

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<sup>73</sup> Joseph Wheelen, *Jefferson's War: America's First War on Terror 1801-1805* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2003), 121-4; A.B.C. Whipple, *To the Shores of Tripoli: The Birth of the U.S. Navy and Marines* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 81; Joshua London, *Victory in Tripoli: How America's War with the Barbary Pirates Established the U.S. Navy and Built a Nation* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2005), 107.

<sup>74</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 149.

<sup>75</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Dale, 28 Nov. 1802 and 21 Dec. 1802, in *Naval Documents*, II: 326, 336.

interests of its people. While some later commodores accomplished more, several did far less despite having larger forces, and no other commodore was so limited in his power. Though he will always be rightly overshadowed by the actions of Preble and Decatur, Commodore Dale fully earned the epitaph that would be inscribed on his monument, “an honest man, an incorruptible patriot.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 152.

## CHAPTER 2: RICHARD MORRIS

As had been true of the first American squadron that entered the Mediterranean, the secretary of the navy offered command of the second to Thomas Truxtun, naval hero of the Quasi-War with France. Accordingly, he took command of *Chesapeake*, one of the ships fitting out for the squadron.<sup>1</sup> That same day, Richard Valentine Morris received orders to command the *Constitution*, a 44-gun frigate and sister to the *President*, Dale's flagship of the first squadron.<sup>2</sup> The Navy Department had earlier attempted to remove the conflicts of seniority that kept Truxtun from accepting duty with the first squadron. A letter confirming him as fifth most senior of the ten captains then on the list expressed not only the hope of adding more officers, to maintain one as captain on a commodore's flagship, but also the hope that "the Rank of the respective Captains being now permanently arranged, ... all will serve harmonously with and under each other when they shall be Called into actuate service."<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, this hope proved to be in vain.

President Jefferson decided to dispatch a stronger force to the Mediterranean. The second squadron was to be as large as possible, so large that it would require all of the captains currently on duty, leaving no one available to serve onboard a Commodore's ship.<sup>4</sup> This second captain, called a flag captain, would be responsible for the daily operation of the ship, leaving the Commodore to concentrate on matters concerning the squadron. The situation worsened when Captain Edward Preble, commander of the *Adams*, took ill and had to relinquish his command.<sup>5</sup> When Truxtun suspected he would probably lack a flag captain, he complained of having "much

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Thomas Truxtun, 12 Jan., 1802, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers, 1785-1801*, U.S. Office of Naval Records and Library (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), II: 19.

<sup>2</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 12 Jan., 1802 in *Naval Documents II*: 19.

<sup>3</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Thomas Truxtun, 11 June, 1801, in *Naval Documents I*: 488.

<sup>4</sup> Glenn Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder: The Barbary Wars and the Birth of the U.S. Navy*, (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963), 152.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 27 Jan. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 40.

trouble in organizing a squadron and at the same time attending all the duty in detail on board my own Ship.”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps because of this sense of duty, or more likely because he was conscious of “having a reputation to lose,” Truxtun offered his resignation if he did not sail with a flag captain.<sup>7</sup> It seems likely that Truxtun’s intention was not to resign, but rather to gain his point, and he later accused President Jefferson of forcing him out of the service.<sup>8</sup> Whether Truxtun meant it or not, Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith took Truxtun at his word, accepted his resignation, and appointed Morris in his place. Morris took command of the *Chesapeake*, the new squadron’s flagship, and assumed the rank of commodore.<sup>9</sup>

Richard Valentine Morris was from a politically active New York family. Morris was not present on the list of ten captains earlier sent to Truxtun to clarify issues of rank, despite serving as captain of both the *Adams* and the *New York* during the Quasi-War.<sup>10</sup> Though Morris’s orders came from Secretary of the Navy Smith, the secretary was sufficiently lacking in power that the decision could well have come from Jefferson himself. Whoever made the decision, it may have been politically influenced, because Morris had had an uneventful and short career in the navy thus far. Morris’s family was prominent Federalists, in opposition to Jefferson, but his brother Lewis Morris was one of the congressmen who abstained from voting against Jefferson in the House of Representatives during the disputed election of 1800.<sup>11</sup> This action won Jefferson the election over Aaron Burr and presumably won the Morris family his esteem, though whether it is this that won Richard Morris the job is not at all certain. Morris’s previous naval experience consisted of command of the small frigate *Adams* and a small squadron during

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Truxtun to Secretary of the Navy, 3 Mar. 1802, in *Naval Documents* II: 76.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Truxtun to Aaron Burr, 22 Mar. 1802, in *Naval Documents* II: 94.

<sup>9</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 11 Mar. 1802, in *Naval Documents* II: 82.

<sup>10</sup> Register of Officer Personnel of United States Navy and Marine Corps, Office of Naval Records and Library (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1945), 38.

<sup>11</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 153.



the Quasi-War. Though his squadron's record of captures was good, he received criticism from then Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert for a failure to communicate with his superiors and for his habit of too often calling his entire squadron to rendezvous in port.<sup>12</sup>

Morris was certainly not expecting to assume command of the entire squadron on short notice and must have been taken aback, if only momentarily. He did, however, benefit from Dale's experience in the Mediterranean in significant ways. First, the Jefferson government, on the strength of Dale's recommendation for reinforcement, decided to make an all out effort against Tripoli, bestowing both a reasonably large force and ample powers on Morris. During his time in the Mediterranean, Dale felt his powers so limited that he had ordered his captains not to take prizes, with the result that, when the *Enterprise* captured a Tripolitan corsair, it was set free after being disarmed. Congress, at the behest of the President, undertook to extend the next commodore's power beyond protecting American commerce. Accordingly, on 6 February 1802, Congress gave Jefferson all the power necessary to prosecute an offensive war against Tripoli.<sup>13</sup> The act made it lawful for the president not only to employ the navy to take action to protect commerce, but also to allow the navy to "subdue, seize and make prize of all vessels, goods and effects," of Tripoli.<sup>14</sup> The president exercised this power, and sent new orders to the Mediterranean, changing Dale's original orders and expanding his powers. Though these orders contained the usual caveats discouraging the commodore from offending any other nation, as well as the additional unhelpful requirements that prize vessels be sent to the United States and that prisoners of war not be retained (due to the expense), the American squadron was now fully

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<sup>12</sup> Michael A. Palmer. *Stoddert's War: Naval Operations during the Quasi-War with France, 1798-1801* (1987; repr., Annapolis, Maryland: The Naval Institute Press, 2000), 191.

<sup>13</sup> *An Act for the protection of the Commerce and Seamen of the United States, against the Tripolitan Cruisers.*, 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States, 6 Feb. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 51.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

empowered to take prizes.<sup>15</sup> The new directives arrived too late to assist Dale; Morris received these powers from the outset of his campaign.

Morris's orders also contained specific instructions outlining the goals of his campaign, and suggesting the most appropriate method:

To effectuate the great object of maintaining a squadron in the Mediterranean, which is the protection of our commerce, we must use our best exertions to keep the enemy's vessels in port, to blockade the places out of which they issue, and prevent as far as possible their coming out or going in... Convoy must be given to our vessels as far as it can be done consistently with the plan of blockading.<sup>16</sup>

In stark contrast to the rambling instructions given to Dale, Morris's orders were direct. The squadron's goal was commerce protection, but Secretary Smith made it clear that Morris should aggressively blockade Tripoli rather than provide escort for merchant convoys. Indeed, Morris was only to guard convoys with vessels that were superfluous to the blockade. If a blockade were tight enough, convoy protection itself would be superfluous, for no raiders could escape. In a later letter, Secretary Smith put his instructions even more bluntly. Morris's orders were "to proceed with the whole squadron under your command and lay off against Tripoli," a very clear statement, indeed.<sup>17</sup> Morris could have had no doubt at all about the mission given to his squadron: blockade Tripoli.

Of course, there were other considerations that would occupy some of the new commodore's time, the first of them financial. In addition to the same London firm that handled the finances of Dale's squadron, Smith also gained a contact with a firm in the port of Leghorn (Livorno), Italy.<sup>18</sup> These banks handled the large-scale financial dealings of the squadron, but each vessel's captain also had discretionary funds for any smaller expenses. Though this seemed

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<sup>15</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Dale, 18 Feb. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 60.

<sup>16</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 20 Mar. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 92.

<sup>17</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 20 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 130.

<sup>18</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 1 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 100.

a good system, the frigate *Constellation* received more than its share, and Morris was accountable for retaining this excess, some \$4,800.<sup>19</sup> As during Dale's tenure, Morris's supply ships received orders that sent them first to Gibraltar, where Morris could direct them to a more convenient port if he thought it prudent. Learning from Dale's voyage, Secretary Smith advised Morris that both "economy and humanity" recommend "the establishment of a Hospital" for wounded or sick crewmen of the American squadron, the European establishments having a poor track record of successful recuperation.<sup>20</sup> The location of the hospital, or even to establish one at all, he left to Morris's discretion as well.

Morris also received orders concerning the negotiation of possible peace with Tripoli. The bashaw had evicted James Leander Cathcart, American consul to Tripoli, at the onset of war. Dale largely ignored Cathcart, but Morris was ordered to seek him out in Leghorn, and engage his services, as "the President conceives that the period has arrived when negotiations for peace" could begin.<sup>21</sup> While Morris himself had no powers to negotiate personally, he and Cathcart were to engage to cooperate as much as possible. It was thought that, by bringing both the fleet and a negotiator before Tripoli, in effect "Holding out the olive Branch in one hand and displaying in the other the means of offensive operations, may produce a peaceful disposition" in the bashaw.<sup>22</sup> James Madison, as secretary of state for Jefferson, relayed these orders to Cathcart. Madison instructed Cathcart that opening negotiations before Tripoli was humbled militarily would be injurious, especially if it involved payment. "To buy peace of Tripoli is to bid for War with Tunis," he explained, and perhaps Algiers in turn as well.<sup>23</sup> So, in addition to

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<sup>19</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 1 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 100.

<sup>20</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 5 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 106.

<sup>21</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 20 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 130.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Secretary of State to James Cathcart, 18 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 127.

having orders that should force the bashaw to the bargaining table, Morris was also given, in Cathcart, the tool he needed to end the war completely, an advantage Dale lacked.

Though his orders seemed straightforward enough, Morris, of necessity for a commander on distant station, also received more than enough rope to hang himself. “I shall not point out to you,” wrote Secretary Smith, “the ground you are to occupy in the execution of these instructions,” for “circumstances may arise to induce a frequent change in your position.”<sup>24</sup> A reminder that the nation’s merchants were in dire need of the squadron’s protection accompanied this instruction. Though Secretary Smith asserted blockade was the surest way to protect commerce, he did not repeat those instructions in this letter. It is unfortunate that his final instructions did not contain a reiteration of the main task of his squadron, but Morris could still hardly fail to realize that blockade must be his object. Smith also pointed out the second advantage that Morris would enjoy over Dale: the knowledge of Dale himself. Smith believed that Dale’s advice on all points relating to the first cruise “may serve you essentially in your future operations.”<sup>25</sup>

In his letters to his successor, Dale outlined not only the current dispositions of his forces in the region, but also offered some very sound advice concerning military and extra-military affairs. Foremost on the military side, Dale insisted that “it will be absolutely Necessary” for Morris to procure several gunboats and a bomb vessel.<sup>26</sup> These small craft would have numerous benefits, especially in protecting the squadron from the enemy’s own gunboats in a calm (when their oars could propel them while the lack of wind would render large vessels immobile). Additionally, Dale particularly suggested their use to tighten the blockade, which had previously failed to stop small coastal vessels that the larger American ships could not chase near shore. In

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<sup>24</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 1 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 100.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Richard Dale to Richard Morris, 28 Feb. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 69.

light of the gunboats intended use inshore, and his assumption that the squadron would resume the blockade after the winter squall season, Dale also suggested that Morris find and hire a good pilot who knew the enemy coast.<sup>27</sup>

The rest of Dale's letter dealt with the extra-military functions that had engaged so much of his time in the Mediterranean. He first recommended that Morris seek the service of Danish Consul Nicholas Nissen in Tripoli, who represented the Americans at the bashaw's court in Cathcart's absence. Despite this recommendation, he had much less to say about negotiations with Tripoli directly, perhaps remembering the bashaw's obstinacy in his own talks. Next, Dale apprised Morris that the United States had gained an ally, advising Morris to cooperate with the Swedes, especially for convoying the two countries' merchant vessels.<sup>28</sup> Finally, Dale relayed the dispositions of the fleet then in the Mediterranean. The *Boston*, just arrived from the United States, Dale instructed to patrol off Tripoli. Both the *Philadelphia* and the *George Washington* would return home after the completion of one more round of convoy duty. Last, the *Essex*, under Captain Bainbridge, would guard the two Tripolitan vessels still blockaded in Gibraltar until relieved by vessels of the second squadron. Dale, who spent the winter in Marseille for repairs, sailed for home when "the *President's* bottom [was] ... fully as strong as before the accident."<sup>29</sup> Though he arrived before Morris' departure, inexplicably, the two never met.<sup>30</sup> Certainly Dale should bear some of the blame for this, but it is completely incredible that Morris forsook this opportunity to learn as much as he could before he assumed command.

When Dale stopped at Gibraltar on his way home, he discovered another Barbary nation making war-like moves. The emperor of Morocco sent a request to Dale through James

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Dale to Robert Livingston, 7 Feb. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 52.

<sup>30</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 155.

Simpson, American consul to Tangiers, to lift the blockade of the two Tripolitan vessels in Gibraltar Bay.<sup>31</sup> The emperor wished to send the vessels back to Tripoli, disarmed but loaded with wheat for sale.<sup>32</sup> Certainly, none of this was in the American interest, and Dale denied the request, explaining that Tripoli had brought this war upon itself, and that in any case the president needed to sign off on such a move.<sup>33</sup> Dale even went so far as to suggest the consul personally visit the emperor to explain the situation because, he reasoned, the Moroccans “can do us more Injury than all the other powers put together,” for their ports opened straight to the Atlantic, facing the approaches to the Straits of Gibraltar.<sup>34</sup>

In the emperor’s request, Dale saw impending trouble, and wrote to the secretary of the navy that “war with him is to be apprehended.”<sup>35</sup> Enclosing copies of his correspondence on the subject to Morris, Dale suggested making every exertion to keep peace with Morocco, repeating his earlier warnings.<sup>36</sup> Secretary Smith forwarded this correspondence, along with a letter supporting Dale’s actions and sentiments, to Morris on 13 April.<sup>37</sup> Upon returning home, Dale wrote that he had passed “every information in [his] possession,” to Morris.<sup>38</sup> This information should have constituted a great advantage, especially considering the increased powers that Morris enjoyed. After learning from the partial success of the first squadron, the United States now sent a commander with the knowledge, the military force, and orders empowering enough to win the Tripolitan War.

Richard Valentine Morris’s first action, nevertheless, lacked military zeal. Morris requested, and received, permission to carry Mrs. Morris on board his flagship, hardly an

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Dale to James Simpson, 8 Mar. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 80.

<sup>32</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 155.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Dale to James Simpson, 8 Mar. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 80.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Dale to Secretary of the Navy, 9 Mar. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 81.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Dale to Richard Morris, 9 Mar. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 82.

<sup>37</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 13 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 114.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Dale to Secretary of the Navy, 14 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 117.

indication that he intended to sail directly into action.<sup>39</sup> Morris's flagship, *Chesapeake*, was the slowest of the squadron in preparing for sea, a process that each ship's captain undertook autonomously. While Edward Preble recovered enough to assist in manning and fitting out the *Adams*, a recurrence of his illness left him unable to command it on an overseas cruise.<sup>40</sup> Captain Hugh Campbell replaced Preble, receiving his sailing instructions on 23 April.<sup>41</sup> The other two vessels that initially made up the second squadron had already departed. The *Enterprise*, victor over the *Tripoli*, returned home from Dale's squadron with dispatches and set sail to return to the Mediterranean, still under Lieutenant Andrew Sterrett's command, on 12 February.<sup>42</sup> *Enterprise* arrived at Gibraltar on 31 March where it encountered the *Essex*, still guarding the two enemy vessels in that harbor.<sup>43</sup> The frigate *Constellation*, Captain Alexander Murray, left the United States in the middle of March, arriving in Gibraltar on 28 April, the day after Morris set sail from the United States.<sup>44</sup> There Murray encountered both the *Essex* and *Philadelphia*, which was transiting the strait in the other direction.<sup>45</sup> The core of Morris's squadron was thus roughly equal to that of the first: three frigates (*Chesapeake*, *Constellation* and *Adams*) and the schooner *Enterprise*.

There were two other American vessels in the Mediterranean at this time worth mentioning, however. After the winter storms closed in on Tripoli and made blockade nearly impossible, Dale's squadron proceeded homeward piecemeal. The small frigate *Boston*, Captain Daniel McNeill, arrived in the Mediterranean to maintain the American presence there over the winter. Upon meeting in Toulon, Dale ordered McNeill to patrol off Tripoli after stopping in

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<sup>39</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 2 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 103.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 13 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 113.

<sup>41</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Hugh Campbell, 23 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 133.

<sup>42</sup> *US Squadron in the Mediterranean*, report of the Navy Department, in *Naval Documents II*: 118.

<sup>43</sup> Log of USS *Essex*, Captain William Bainbridge, 31 Mar. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 99.

<sup>44</sup> *US Squadron in the Mediterranean*, report of the Navy Department, in *Naval Documents II*: 136.

<sup>45</sup> Log of USS *Essex*, Captain William Bainbridge, 8 May 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 146.

Tunis to carry dispatches to William Eaton, the consul there.<sup>46</sup> Though McNeill did eventually arrive off Tripoli, his journey was not without some irregularity. Upon arriving in the Mediterranean, McNeill left Malaga, Spain, so precipitously as to leave “behind his third and Fourth Lieut., Lieut. of Marines, Purser, Pursur’s Steward, Wardroom Steward, and two Boys.”<sup>47</sup> As if to prove this earlier misadventure was no fluke, the *Boston* departed Toulon with three French dinner guests aboard, who later had to hire return passage back from Tunis.<sup>48</sup> John Johnson, a marine officer aboard *Boston*, confirmed McNeill’s interesting character. In addition to having his men call him commodore, rather than captain, McNeill’s “regulations and orders are different from any I have ever heard of,” Johnson wrote.<sup>49</sup> Morris’s orders allowed him to retain one vessel of the first squadron if he felt it necessary.<sup>50</sup> The periods of enlistment for the crews of Dale’s original vessels were running short, making *Boston* the logical choice. Despite this, and in keeping with the character of Captain McNeill, he never attempted to make contact with Morris, and made only incidental contact with any ship of the second squadron.<sup>51</sup>

*Boston* shared its winter patrol off Tripoli with the *Gloria*, a private ship hired by Consul Eaton. Despite having neither the authority nor the money to do so, Eaton hired *Gloria* to cruise in the government’s service, sending it off to McNeil on 24 March.<sup>52</sup> The *Gloria*, while prosecuting Eaton’s private (though publicly funded) war, did later bump into Captain Murray and the *Constellation* at Gibraltar. Murray promptly put an end to *Gloria*’s cruise, telling its captain to go his own way, and that *Gloria* was “no longer to be considered as on public

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Dale to Daniel McNeil, 18 Jan. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 25.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Dale to Secretary of the Navy, 24 Jan. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 27.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>49</sup> John Johnson to William burrows, 4 May 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 144.

<sup>50</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 1 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 100.

<sup>51</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 158.

<sup>52</sup> William Eaton to Daniel McNeil, 24 Mar. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 95.



expences.”<sup>53</sup> Despite the questionable legality of Eaton’s hiring a vessel into public service, it is unfortunate that Murray so precipitately ended *Gloria*’s naval career because Morris had both the funds and the authorization to obtain the small vessels needed to maintain a tight blockade. Though the loss of the services of the *Boston* and the *Gloria* represent an opportunity missed, the fault could hardly lie with Morris.

Despite Captain McNeill’s shortcomings in the areas of communicating with his superiors and misplacing dinner guests, he did proceed to Tripoli and remained there until forced away by a lack of supplies. *Boston* captured four small coasting vessels carrying grain into the harbor, which the bey of Tunis later claimed as Tunisian.<sup>54</sup> The *Enterprise*, first vessel of the second squadron to arrive, also appeared off Tripoli. Sterrett accompanied the Swedish vessels still patrolling those waters, helping to deny the entry of at least one other Tunisian vessel.<sup>55</sup> *Enterprise* also assisted *Boston* and the Swedes in driving a Tripolitan vessel ashore and exchanged shots with Tripolitan gunboats when they ventured out of the harbor.<sup>56</sup> After running short of supplies, however, Sterrett too left Tripoli. The squadron’s staggered departure and the gap between Dale’s departure and Morris’s arrival left the Americans without a coherent presence or plan. With no relief available, *Enterprise* left the blockade to the Swedes.<sup>57</sup>

The *Constellation*, the first heavy ship of the second squadron to arrive at Gibraltar, needed supply before assuming its station. Crews of the home-bound *Philadelphia* and *Essex* assisted in watering, while Captain Murray bustled back and forth across Gibraltar Bay asking both the Spanish and British for anchors to replace the two he had lost in transit.<sup>58</sup> Meeting with

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<sup>53</sup> Alexander Murray to Joseph Bounds, 6 May 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 145.

<sup>54</sup> William Eaton to Secretary of State, 4 May 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 142.

<sup>55</sup> William Eaton to Officer Commanding the US Squadron, 12 May, 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 152.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Wadsworth to William Eaton, 17 May 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 154.

<sup>57</sup> John Johnson to William Burrows, 4 May 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 143.

<sup>58</sup> Log of USS *Essex*, Captain William Bainbridge, 3 May 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 141.

no success, Murray instead borrowed one from the *Philadelphia*.<sup>59</sup> By 11 May, the *Constellation* was ready to proceed east, and did so.<sup>60</sup> Stopping at both Algiers and Majorca on his way, Captain Murray arrived in Tunis on 28 May to top off his supplies and gain the latest news from Tripoli. In Tunis, Murray met the *Enterprise*, which he sent west to convoy merchantmen.<sup>61</sup> Off Tripoli, *Constellation* briefly joined *Boston* before both ships again departed to resupply. Captain Murray turned *Constellation* toward Malta and ordered Captain McNeill to seek the rest of the squadron.<sup>62</sup> Instead, McNeill shaped a circuitous course around the Mediterranean and eventually back to the United States without meeting Commodore Morris.

After resupplying, *Constellation* maintained an off and on blockade of Tripoli throughout the summer of 1802. Alone, save for intermittent Swedish assistance, this effort at single-ship blockade proved to be as ineffective as Dale's. Several times, as on 22 July, Captain Murray chased gunboats back into harbor, but captured or destroyed none.<sup>63</sup> Despite Murray's claim to have maintained a "close blockade," the barrier proved porous enough that Murray even contradicted himself in the same report when he stated, "We cannot keep those small Galleys in Port."<sup>64</sup> In fact, the situation was worse than Murray suspected. The gunboat action of 22 July distracted Murray from a corsair escorting the first American prize of the war into Tripoli harbor. The Tripolitans had captured the American brig *Franklin* in June and stopped in both Algiers and Tunis before entering Tripoli, "in view of a Swedish and American Frigate, who never made the least effort to obstruct" the path into the harbor.<sup>65</sup> As proved by the first squadron, and feared by the planners of the second, one or two ships on blockade were insufficient to keep Tripoli at bay.

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<sup>59</sup> Log of USS *Constellation*, Captain Alexander Murray, 30 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 141.

<sup>60</sup> Log of USS *Constellation*, Captain Alexander Murray, 11 May 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 151.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Murray to Secretary of the Navy, 1 June 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 163.

<sup>62</sup> Alexander Murray to Daniel McNeil, 11 June 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 172.

<sup>63</sup> Log of USS *Constellation*, Captain Alexander Murray, 22 July 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 209.

<sup>64</sup> Alexander Murray to Secretary of the Navy, 30 July 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 218-9.

<sup>65</sup> Andrew Morris to James Cathcart, 22 July 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 176.

Not even Morris's outbound voyage went as planned. The *Chesapeake*, mainmast sprung and ballast inefficiently stowed, made a laborious and uncomfortable voyage that ended in Gibraltar on 25 May.<sup>66</sup> Commodore Morris encountered more Moroccan ire while dockworkers replaced *Chesapeake's* mast. The emperor of Morocco declared again that he had purchased the Tripolitan vessels blockaded in Gibraltar and wished to use them to transport surplus grain to Tripoli. James Simpson, the American consul in Tangiers, rejected this plan as "pointedly opposite to the law of nations."<sup>67</sup> Though *Chesapeake* was ready to sail within two weeks, Morris elected to remain at Gibraltar and watch the Moroccan situation.

Without news of any other members of his squadron, Morris relieved the *Essex* of blockade duty, dispatching that ship back to the United States. Along with the *Essex*, a perfectly capable warship that already happened to be on station, Morris sent a letter requesting reinforcements.<sup>68</sup> Staying in Gibraltar was clearly outside the spirit of Morris's orders, which instructed him to push on to Tripoli. If he regarded the Moroccan situation as serious enough to do that, then surely he could have used that same extenuating circumstance to retain the *Essex* at least until the arrival of the *Adams*. This would have afforded Morris the ability to take *Chesapeake* to Tangiers where he could negotiate directly with Simpson and the Moroccans. Instead, he blockaded a deserted and disarmed Tripolitan squadron while he contemplated the possibility of war with Morocco, a nation which at the time possessed not a single ocean-going vessel of war.<sup>69</sup> Two weeks later, the Moroccans evicted Simpson and declared war, forcing Morris into convoying American vessels through the Straits of Gibraltar, guarding them against

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<sup>66</sup> Richard Morris to Secretary of the Navy, 31 May 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 161-2.

<sup>67</sup> James Simpson to Secretary of State, 5 June 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 165.

<sup>68</sup> Richard Morris to Secretary of the Navy, 14 June 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 173.

<sup>69</sup> Ray Irwin, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States With the Barbary Powers: 1776-1816* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 114.

Moroccan gunboats.<sup>70</sup> The fortuitous arrival of the *Enterprise* from the east and the *Adams* from the west allowed for some concentration of American force by the end of July, just as the Moroccans finished outfitting ocean-going raiders, and facilitated the return of Simpson to Morocco to begin negotiations.<sup>71</sup> The presence of the American squadron, and the additional promise of one hundred gun carriages as a gift, were enough to persuade the emperor that peace was the preferable option. He sent word of the peace to Consul Simpson on 6 August.<sup>72</sup>

Since arriving in Europe, Morris had spent two weeks repairing his vessel, two weeks blockading Gibraltar as American relations with Morocco teetered on the edge, and two weeks convoying American vessels. Upon the *Adams*'s arrival, Morris left Gibraltar unguarded, and the presence of these two frigates was enough to bring Morocco to heel. A force of two frigates, the *Chesapeake* and *Essex*, was available weeks before and could, perhaps, have averted the whole crisis. Then, when war did finally erupt, rather than proceeding direct to Tangiers, Morris chose to establish a convoy system, the very measure that his orders labeled as unsuited for success. Referring to the slow pace of diplomatic correspondence with the United States, the emperor, in his offer of peace wrote, "what has happen'd to you now, has been occasioned by your own tardiness and neglect."<sup>73</sup> He could have, however, just as reasonably been describing the Morris's actions. The brief Moroccan war did lead to one positive result: the dispatch from America of another frigate, the *New York*, under the command of James Barron, veteran of the first squadron.<sup>74</sup>

With the end of the Moroccan scuffle, and in accordance with his orders, Morris finally headed toward Tripoli. Against the advice of those orders, however, Morris left *Adams* behind at

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<sup>70</sup> Richard Morris to Secretary of the Navy, 26 June 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 185.

<sup>71</sup> James Simpson to Secretary of State, 27 July 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 211.

<sup>72</sup> Mohamet Ben Absalem Selawy to James Simpson, 6 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 226.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 13 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 232.

Gibraltar to watch the Tripolitan vessels there, taking only the *Enterprise*.<sup>75</sup> Captain Murray of the *Constellation*, having experienced the blockade himself, awaited the commodore at Malta, unsatisfied with the way things were going. Like Dale, Murray had been frustrated while on station by the lack of “small Brigs, & Schooners, that can lay close in with the Land.”<sup>76</sup> Of additional concern was the onset of winter, which last year had rendered blockade on the Tripolitan coast impossible. In addition, while at Malta, Murray attended an interesting meeting with Hamet Karamanli, the deposed former ruler of Tripoli, elder brother of Bashaw Yusef. Cooperation with Hamet, in Murray’s eyes “the Legal Bashaw of Tripoli,” was “certainly a desirable object,” especially considering Hamet’s promise to raise a large army in the Tripolitan hinterlands that could march on the capital.<sup>77</sup>

Murray was certainly not the first American to take notice of the divided house of Karamanli or the potential of reinstalling a friendlier leader in Tripoli. Hamet had become, and would remain, the pet project of William Eaton, consul to Tunis. Eaton, pondering the usefulness of Hamet concluded “that we may use him as an instrument of pacification at Tripoli,” for “his subjects desire his restoration.”<sup>78</sup> James Cathcart, former consul at Tripoli, agreed with Eaton enthusiastically. Securing Hamet’s help, thought Cathcart, “will not only be the means of our concluding peace upon our own terms but will in a great measure insure its permanency.”<sup>79</sup> Both Eaton and Cathcart plotted not to simply support Hamet as a bargaining chip, but rather to depose Bashaw Yusef, inserting Hamet in his place. Accordingly, Eaton

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<sup>75</sup> Richard Morris to Secretary of the Navy, 17 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 237.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander Murray to Richard Morris, 20 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 242.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> William Eaton to Daniel McNeill, 24 Mar. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 95.

<sup>79</sup> James Cathcart to William Eaton, 10 Apr. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 111.

persuaded Hamet in the spring of 1802 to move to Malta rather than to accept a position offered by Yusef in the city of Derne, Tripoli's largest eastern port.<sup>80</sup>

Eaton wrote to both Morris and Secretary of State James Madison, expounding the virtues of his plan in language often excessive and sometimes vitriolic. Declaring Hamet the solution to American problems and criticizing the navy, he preserved his choicest phrases for Captain Murray of the *Constellation*: "Government may as well send out Quaker meeting-houses to float about this sea as frigates with Murrays in command."<sup>81</sup> While criticizing the excessive expenditures and lazy lifestyles of the American squadron, Eaton did not hesitate to provide Hamet with significant funds drawn on the credit of the United States government.<sup>82</sup> When finally apprised of Eaton's plan, Madison allowed the scheme to go forward. In letters to Cathcart and Eaton the secretary of state wrote that "although it does not accord with the general sentiments or views of the United States, ... it cannot be unfair."<sup>83</sup> While wishing Eaton success in his scheme, Madison remitted no money for its prosecution.

While waiting for Morris's arrival in the central Mediterranean, both Eaton and Cathcart dispatched critical letters to the United States. Though he certainly knew his letters to the United States could not return in so short a time, and was apprised of the problems with Morocco, Eaton's tone grew histrionic: "My exile is become insupportable here. Abandoned by my countrymen in command; no advice from government to regulate my conduct; ... I am left subject, though not yet submissive, to the most intolerable abuse and personal vexation."<sup>84</sup> Cathcart, trying to escape naval influence, wrote a letter on the same subject that, while more blunt, was at least less filled with self-righteousness and self-pity. He requested that Madison

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<sup>80</sup> William Eaton to Officer Commanding US Squadron, 12 May, 1802 in *Naval Documents II*: 152.

<sup>81</sup> William Eaton to Secretary of State, 9 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 229.

<sup>82</sup> William Eaton to Mohamet Caramanli, 6 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 227.

<sup>83</sup> Secretary of State to William Eaton, 22 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 245.

<sup>84</sup> William Eaton to Secretary of State, 23 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 248.

provide a dividing line between the duties of the consuls and the naval officers, to save the consul's power from "the caprice of every gentleman who may command our vessels of War."<sup>85</sup>

The secretary of state, however, at this same time saw the issue differently. Not only did Madison refuse to provide Eaton with funding, leaving Morris the only American with a discretionary budget in the Mediterranean, but he also conferred even more power on the commodore. Through the secretary of the navy, Morris gained the power to negotiate personally with the bashaw. This put him on an equal footing with Cathcart in diplomatic power and ahead of Eaton, whom Secretary Smith listed as not "an authorized agent of the government."<sup>86</sup> This same letter provided the good news that in addition to the *New York*, another small frigate, the *John Adams* (not to be confused with the *Adams*) would also join the squadron. Morris, off to a rocky start, now had a chance to heed his original orders and start on a path toward success. Inhibited by the staggered sailing times of his squadron, Morris was unable to unite his vessels. Now, however, the *Chesapeake* and *Enterprise* were bound east to rendezvous with *Constellation*, a reasonable collection of force.

The lateness of the season dictated that to exploit his new powers and newly combined squadron, these advantages would have to be pressed immediately. Morris hesitated again. With the stormy winter season approaching, when sailing to Tripolitan shores became impractical and keeping station off the port impossible, Morris took no decisive action. Squandering his concentration of force, Morris dispatched the *Constellation* to Gibraltar on escort duty via Toulon for minor repairs.<sup>87</sup> Despite this, in a report to the secretary of the navy, Morris still wrote that "a formidable force is the only means by which peace can be procured with Tripoli," and planned to wait for his reinforcements, and through the winter season, before taking the

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<sup>85</sup> James Cathcart to Secretary of State, 25 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 253.

<sup>86</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 27 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 257.

<sup>87</sup> Richard Morris to Secretary of the Navy, 15 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 296.

offensive.<sup>88</sup> Squandering the possibility of using Hamet to his advantage, Morris told the ex-bashaw that he lacked the authorization for even a meeting, though he would certainly forward Hamet's requests to the United States.<sup>89</sup> Hamet, succumbing to pressure from Tripoli, accepted the post as governor of Derne, leaving Malta and the reach of the American squadron.<sup>90</sup> Another advantage slipped away during this period as well. Just before the winter squalls set in, the Swedes concluded a separate treaty with Tripoli, ending the possibility of cooperation.<sup>91</sup> Even Morris's only real success of his first summer in command, pacifying Morocco, unraveled as his squadron sat in port.

To ease American relations with Morocco after the brief hostility, Consul Simpson finally agreed to grant a passport for the former Tripolitan vessel *Meshouda*, in port at Gibraltar.<sup>92</sup> Though the passport still denied the *Meshouda* the right to enter Tripoli itself, it left the ship free to leave Gibraltar, and certainly rendered the American blockade of Gibraltar unnecessary. Despite this, Captain Campbell and the *Adams* remained on station though he was aware of *Meshouda*'s passport.<sup>93</sup> There the *Adams* would remain to the detriment of Moroccan relations. *Meshouda*'s commander, believing the *Adams* would try to capture him, refused to leave port, instead writing to the Moroccan secretary of state, who in turn sent complaints to Consul Simpson. This caused enough new tension that Simpson requested that a navy vessel remain on station continuously.<sup>94</sup> In this way, the unnecessary presence of the *Adams* created new tension, necessitating the frigate's continued presence in the straits and away from the rest of the squadron.

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<sup>88</sup> Richard Morris to Secretary of the Navy, 15 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 297.

<sup>89</sup> Richard Morris to Hamet Caramanli (agent of), 20 Nov. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 317.

<sup>90</sup> Alexander Murray to Secretary of the Navy, 22 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 246-7.

<sup>91</sup> Richard Morris to Secretary of the Navy, 30 Nov. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 327.

<sup>92</sup> Passport Issued to the Ship *Meshouda*, James Simpson, 27 Sept. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 283.

<sup>93</sup> Hugh Campbell to Secretary of the Navy, 1 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 286.

<sup>94</sup> James Simpson to Secretary of State, 24 Dec. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 337.



Relations among the men in the fleet were deteriorating as well. As the squadron sat in port, boredom set in. Even Morris himself, in one of his infrequent reports, admitted that “nothing of importance has transpired in this quarter.”<sup>95</sup> Even eighteen year old Midshipman Henry Wadsworth ran out of things to do on shore, writing in his diary, “we left Livonine with as much pleasure as we enter’d it, for 20, or 30 days will generally satiate us with any place.”<sup>96</sup> Before leaving Italy for Gibraltar, the *Constellation* sustained numerous desertions, and would suffer an even greater loss.<sup>97</sup> Captain McKnight, commander of *Constellation*’s marines, had long been feuding with naval Lieutenant Richard Lawson. The two fought a duel ashore in Leghorn, resulting in McKnight’s death, and Lawson’s return to the United States under arrest.<sup>98</sup> This was not the last the squadron saw of dueling. At the end of the long winter, the newly arrived *New York* was waiting for the squadron to assemble in Malta. One of its midshipmen fought a duel with an Englishman on shore there, resulting in the Englishman’s death and a worsening of relations with Malta’s governor.<sup>99</sup> Later in spring, two more of *New York*’s junior officers engaged in a duel that resulted in the death of one.<sup>100</sup> In the absence of even attempting a blockade, Morris should have had the squadron busy preparing for service the next summer with drills and exercises at least. Morris did not cause these deadly arguments, but he certainly provided the young officers of his squadron with enough time to pursue their arguments.

The relations between the American diplomats in the Barbary ports were also deteriorating. After the capture of their ship, the crew of the *Franklin* awaited release in Tripoli. Both Cathcart, still consul to Tripoli though evicted, and Eaton, closest to Tripoli in Tunis,

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<sup>95</sup> Richard Morris to Secretary of the Navy, 30 Nov. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 327.

<sup>96</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS Chesapeake*, 4 Nov. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 310.

<sup>97</sup> Log of *USS Constellation*, 14 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 293.

<sup>98</sup> Daniel Carmick to William Burrows, 15 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 293-6.

<sup>99</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS Chesapeake*, 14 Feb. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 362.

<sup>100</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS Chesapeake*, 31 Jan. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 356.

sought the crew's release. Foreign diplomats secured the first successes, however, the British forcing the release of three Irish crewmen and the French obtaining the freedom of two more crewmen who claimed to be Frenchmen.<sup>101</sup> Richard O'Brien, American consul to Algiers, also applied for the freedom of the rest of the crew with the help of the Algerine government. Eaton believed that the Americans should settle their dispute without foreign assistance, and actually wrote to the bashaw of Tripoli in an attempt to scupper O'Brien's plan:

The Dey of Algiers has ordered your Ex<sup>ty</sup> [Excellency] to give up the Americans, and that your Ex<sup>ty</sup> dare not disobey the order. But as we remember your Ex<sup>ty</sup> complained of the intervention of that Dey in our treaty of peace ... we cannot suppose the Dey's interference in the present case can be pleasing ... it would suit better both ... of the parties that all our negotiations should be direct and without the intervention of any other power.<sup>102</sup>

Cathcart also preferred a different avenue to release the prisoners. He reminded both Morris and his contacts in Tripoli that the bashaw had agreed to release the first prisoners he captured as an exchange for Tripolitan prisoners already released by Dale.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, it was the Algerines at the behest of O'Brien who achieved success.<sup>104</sup> Cathcart believed that this action, because O'Brien made a payment to grease the wheels of the transaction, "only served to Embarrass our affairs."<sup>105</sup> Apprised of the captive's release, Eaton fumed that he was out of the loop, learning from a Jewish merchant rather than a fellow consul, "the information comes to him by express – I receive no letters!"<sup>106</sup>

More unfortunately, waiting through the winter cost Morris nearly half of his squadron.

In late October 1802, the secretary of the navy required the return of both *Constellation* and

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<sup>101</sup> James Cathcart to Stephen Cathalan, 28 Aug 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 259.

<sup>102</sup> William Eaton to the Bashaw of Tripoli, 18 Sep. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 279.

<sup>103</sup> James Cathcart to Richard Morris, 12 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 290.

<sup>104</sup> Richard O'Brien to Secretary of State, 11 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 288.

<sup>105</sup> James Cathcart to Richard O'Brien, 25 Nov. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 322.

<sup>106</sup> William Eaton to Secretary of State, 22 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 306.

*Chesapeake*, requiring Morris to choose one of the newly arrived frigates for a new flagship.<sup>107</sup> The message arrived at Gibraltar with the *John Adams* just after the *Constellation* arrived from the east.<sup>108</sup> Morris began concentrating his force in Malta at this time, and had requested that Murray meet him there with as many supplies as he could carry.<sup>109</sup> After learning that his ship had orders for home, however, Murray set out to the west and, instead of supplies, sent only his regards to the Commodore's wife.<sup>110</sup>

American relations with Tunis worsened as the winter wore on. The bey, in person to Eaton and in a letter to President Jefferson, renewed an earlier request for a warship as a part of his tribute.<sup>111</sup> This was the last straw for Eaton, who demanded relief, citing his weariness of "exile and fruitless exertion."<sup>112</sup> Perhaps the only bright spot for the squadron early in the year of 1803 was the capture of a prize, once again by Andrew Sterett and the *Enterprise*.<sup>113</sup> Unfortunately, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the bey claimed the small merchantman was Tunisian and denied that the vessel, though headed to Tripoli, was subject to the American blockade. The Tunisians applied to Eaton for redress which led to further paroxysms of complaint from Eaton, who requested an American naval presence to quiet the bey's protests.<sup>114</sup> Like Morocco the year before, it appeared that Tunis would vie for Morris's attention to the detriment of the effort against Tripoli.

At the end of January, with the storms beginning to abate, Morris dispatched the *Enterprise* to Tunis to announce the squadron's imminent arrival as the rest of the squadron

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<sup>107</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 23 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 306.

<sup>108</sup> William Henry Allen to William Allen, 23 Nov. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 320.

<sup>109</sup> Richard Morris to Alexander Murray, 28 Nov. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 326.

<sup>110</sup> Alexander Murray to Richard Morris, 12 Dec. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 331.

<sup>111</sup> Hamud Bashaw, Bey of Tunis to Thomas Jefferson, 8 Set. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 269.

<sup>112</sup> William Eaton to Secretary of State, 22 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 306.

<sup>113</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS Chesapeake*, 24 Jan. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 348.

<sup>114</sup> William Eaton to Richard Morris, 26 Jan. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 344.

shaped course for Tripoli for the first time.<sup>115</sup> The event proved to be so memorable for its uniqueness that Midshipman Wadsworth (indeed everyone) disregarded the fact that the most useful ship in the squadron for shallow-water blockade was headed elsewhere, instead writing, “ye Tripolitans beware, for the *Chesapeak*, *Newyork* & *John Adams* are coming towards ye in battle array.”<sup>116</sup> The gales, however, still proved strong enough to make the squadron’s stay off Tripoli short and unproductive, at which point they turned toward Tunis. There, Commodore Morris engaged in his first real attempt at diplomacy with a Barbary nation. In Morocco, Consul Simpson had taken the lead, but the Tunisian court’s conviction that Eaton was mad forced Morris to take charge.

Morris’s first move was suitably naive. In his first letter to the bey, Morris wrote, “when Your Excellency is made acquainted with the facts relative to that capture, You will acquiesce,” and “will see the propriety of cautioning your Subjects from having any mercantile transactions with the Enemies of the United States.”<sup>117</sup> The bey, whose economy relied upon taking money from foreign powers, apparently lacked the propriety to acquiesce, and demanded that a Tunisian court ascertain the validity of the prize.<sup>118</sup> After agreeing to this request and providing a gift of gunpowder (to a nation threatening to declare war on the United States), Morris reported ashore with the prize’s papers to make his case.<sup>119</sup> The court, consisting of the bey and his ministers, ruled that most of the ship’s property was Tunisian. Disgusted with the process but feeling unable to do more, Morris guaranteed the return of the cargo in question and prepared to leave.

Not wanting to let such an easy mark escape, the bey found another charge to add to the bill. Morris was unable to understand that his earlier concession simply “paved the way for ...

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<sup>115</sup> Richard Morris to William Eaton, 29 Jan. 1803, in *Naval Documents* II: 356.

<sup>116</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS Chesapeake*, 31 Jan. 1803, in *Naval Documents* II: 356.

<sup>117</sup> Richard Morris to Bey of Tunis, 24 Feb. 1803, in *Naval Documents* II: 364.

<sup>118</sup> Journal of James Cathcart, Tunis, 25 Feb. 1803, in *Naval Documents* II: 351.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 28 Feb. 1803, in *Naval Documents* II: 352.

additional demands,” illustrating his want of skill and experience.<sup>120</sup> Eaton had finally decided to leave, but the bey declared that his debt, more than \$30,000, all of which he had borrowed in the name of the United States, must be paid before Eaton departed.<sup>121</sup> More troubling, the bey detained the commodore himself, as a representative of the United States, on shore until the debt was settled. Even after selling all his property, Eaton still owed a balance of \$22,000, and Morris left Cathcart and Captain John Rodgers of the *John Adams* ashore as insurance while he returned to the *Chesapeake* to arrange payment.<sup>122</sup> Morris paid the debt, collected Captain Rodgers and the consuls, and left Tunis on 10 March, thoroughly bested.<sup>123</sup>

Morris next sailed to Algiers, where Consul O’Brien also wished to retire. Secretary of State Madison appointed Cathcart to that post, but the Algerines refused to have him.<sup>124</sup> The Algerines would accept no accommodation, for which Cathcart blamed O’Brien, and the fleet left Algiers for Gibraltar.<sup>125</sup> Morris transferred his flag to *New York* and sent the *Chesapeake* home, dispatching the *Adams* and *John Adams* on convoy duty.<sup>126</sup> Once more, with his forces united, Morris chose to break them up, this time on convoy duty around the Mediterranean, against his orders. He set out himself, with the *New York* and *Enterprise*, toward Tripoli.<sup>127</sup> Now authorized to negotiate personally, Morris transferred Cathcart to the *Adams*, which carried him back to Italy. While one can imagine that his strong convictions may have made him a poor companion, Cathcart, who explained the situation by claiming, “my presence at the negotiation

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<sup>120</sup> Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations*, 124.

<sup>121</sup> Journal of James Cathcart, Tunis, 4 Mar. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 353.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* 5-6 Mar. 1803, 354-5.

<sup>123</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS Chesapeake*, 14 Mar. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 374.

<sup>124</sup> Richard O’Brien to Richard Morris, 20 Mar. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 376.

<sup>125</sup> James Cathcart to Secretary of State, 30 Mar. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 379-81.

<sup>126</sup> Richard Morris to Secretary of the Navy, 30 Mar. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 384.

<sup>127</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS New York*, 12 Apr. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 389-90.

might diminish his [Morris's] share of the *glory*," could have provided some of the negotiating experience that Morris so prominently lacked.<sup>128</sup>

Another unfortunate accident, however, meant that negotiations, at least for a short while, were unlikely. Sailing to the eastward, some of the *New York's* store of gunpowder exploded on the morning of 25 April.<sup>129</sup> In light of the resulting damage, the death of the gunner and the commodore's secretary and clerk, Morris decided to head once again for Malta.<sup>130</sup> After fulfilling his convoy duties, Captain John Rodgers of the *John Adams* arrived at Tripoli in expectation of finding the commodore. Despite the squadron's absence, the more energetic Rodgers elected to remain on station, frequently exchanging shots with the Tripolitan gunboats and out-lying batteries.<sup>131</sup> Like each of the one-frigate blockades of the past, *John Adams* was unable to close the port or even to closely engage the main fortifications. The blockade did produce one prize, which turned out to be a familiar old foe, the *Meshouda*, bound into Tripoli from Gibraltar.<sup>132</sup> With their prize in company, the *John Adams* met the rest of the squadron in Malta where close examination found "a number of Guns Cutlashes Hemp & other contraband articles" hidden on board *Meshouda*.<sup>133</sup> Commodore Morris, though he did write to Consul Simpson, correctly decided that with three vessels of the squadron gathered, the moment was right to proceed to Tripoli.

The blockade was far from uneventful. Indeed, on the first day the squadron arrived, 22 May, they succeeded in running an enemy ship on shore as it attempted to gain access to the harbor.<sup>134</sup> Soon the *Adams* arrived too, uniting the full squadron off Tripoli.<sup>135</sup> Skirmishes

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<sup>128</sup> James Cathcart to Secretary of State, 5 May 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 398-9.

<sup>129</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS New York*, 12 May 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 403.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Journal of an unknown Frenchman, *USS John Adams*, 7-9 May 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 400-1.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 May 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 402.

<sup>133</sup> Richard Morris to James Simpson, 19 May 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 408.

<sup>134</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS New York*, 22 May 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 416.

between the squadron and Tripolitan gunboats and shore batteries continued, but Morris sought to end the war more quickly. He took advantage of Dale's contacts with Danish Consul Nissen to initiate negotiations.<sup>136</sup> Even the negotiations for the truce to start real negotiations went poorly; Morris conceded that any negotiations would take place ashore, and even guaranteed the safety of any raiders that returned during the talks.<sup>137</sup> The bashaw's demands proved so onerous that, after only one night on shore, the Commodore returned to the fleet.<sup>138</sup> Soon afterward, and after only nineteen days on station, the *New York* sailed north to Malta, leaving the *John Adams* to carry on another stint of solo blockade.<sup>139</sup> Though his orders required him to humble the enemy before negotiating a peace, Morris chose to begin without any offensive action, ensuring his failure. There can be no acceptable explanation for Morris leaving the blockade after such a short time. Thwarted in his efforts to negotiate a peace, Morris abandoned the blockade without undertaking any of the sort of offensive action that could have rendered the bashaw more compliant.

Appropriately, it was as Morris was sitting idly in Malta that Secretary Smith drafted the order for his recall. The orders instructed Morris to transfer to the *Adams* to return home, leaving command of the squadron to Captain Rodgers, though it would be months before this news reached the squadron.<sup>140</sup> The more aggressive Rodgers remained off Tripoli until he ran out of supplies, destroying a large Tripolitan cruiser during this time.<sup>141</sup> The squadron re-united at Malta at the end of June, taking the rest of the summer to convoy American merchantman up

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<sup>135</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS New York*, 26 May 1803, 423.

<sup>136</sup> Nicholas Nissen to James Cathcart, 4 June 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 439-40.

<sup>137</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS New York*, 7 June 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 445.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 June 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 449.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas Hooper to William Eaton, 1 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents II*: 415.

<sup>140</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 21 June 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 457.

<sup>141</sup> John Rodgers to Secretary of the Navy, 22 June 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 459.

the Italian coast.<sup>142</sup> Not only did Morris use the entire squadron to accomplish what a single ship could have, he left Tripoli unguarded. The squadron spent the remainder of the summer occupied with similar operations until Morris finally received his notice of recall in Gibraltar.<sup>143</sup> In accordance with those orders, Morris sailed for home in the *Adams*, putting an end to the longest and most unproductive tenure of any American commodore in the Barbary Wars.

Surprisingly, Morris's recall shocked some of those serving under him. While recording that there were some "discontented officers under his [Morris's] command," Midshipman Wadsworth exclaimed, "damnation! could they treat a Malefactor worse: had he basely fled from Battle: had he cowardly shrunk from fight – could they have taken a step more mortifying, condemn him unheard, unseen."<sup>144</sup> Others, slightly further removed, still sought to excuse some of Morris's actions. James Fennimore Cooper, in his history of the early navy, recorded that the commodore's recall and later dismissal "has generally been considered high-handed and unjust."<sup>145</sup> Nevertheless, after returning home, Morris's explanations of his conduct proved unsatisfactory to Secretary Smith, who convened a court of inquiry that ended in his official censure. President Jefferson himself dismissed Morris from the service.<sup>146</sup>

While this action may have been extreme, it was certainly not unjustified. Upon first arriving in the Mediterranean Morris, like Dale, faced numerous challenges: the staggered arrivals of his ships, problems with Morocco, missing the *Boston*, and his slow start is almost excusable. Though he had, and missed, a few chances to deal with the Moroccan situation quickly, he was not remiss in securing his supply line against the Moroccans. In fact, this

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<sup>142</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, *USS New York*, 10 Aug. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 509.

<sup>143</sup> *Concerning Commodore Morris' Squadron in the Mediterranean*, Secretary of the Navy Smith, 10 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents II*: 527.

<sup>144</sup> Journal and Letters of Henry Wadsworth 1802-1804. Courtesy of the National Park Service, Longfellow National Historic Site. Journal, 12 Sep. 1803, 70-71.

<sup>145</sup> James Fennimore Cooper, *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*, 2nd ed. (1846; repr., Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 164.

<sup>146</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 186.



initiation to the theater excused Morris's inaction that first summer in Cooper's eyes, who instead believed the fault "rested more with those who directed the preparations at home."<sup>147</sup>

Despite the staggered arrival of the squadron, at the end of the summer of 1802, Morris did have his initial force concentrated in Italy. With reinforcements already in the Mediterranean and weeks of good sailing weather ahead, Morris blatantly disobeyed his orders, dispatching his squadron piecemeal on blockade duty. The blame for this action can fall on no shoulders other than Morris's.

Whether his actions that first summer were defensible or not, his actions during the sailing season of 1803 were inexcusable. The combined squadron spent only nineteen days in front of Tripoli. Of that short span, Morris wasted six of those days under truce during fruitless negotiations that could have had no hope of success. The business preceding the squadron's stint off Tripoli was hardly more credible: fruitless negotiations with Tunis and an out of the way trip to Gibraltar. Even when he was on station, Morris's blockade was porous. Though authorized to purchase or hire smaller vessels that could operate inshore and tighten the blockade, Morris failed to do so. This illustrates not only Morris's ineffectiveness, but also the importance all the time Morris wasted during the stormy season. Morris sat in port most of the winter and failed to arrange gunboats for the squadron's use, failed to have supplies brought to a forward port, and failed to address the diplomatic situation in Tunis before he should have been off Tripoli.

There is little question that, if any of the squadron encountered the enemy, victory would have resulted. The superior training and force of the Americans, who certainly did not lack for bravery, made the outcome of any even-matched combat almost certain. Indeed, few seem to have doubted even the commodore's courage, and he even maintained the loyalty of his officers. But any success in battle is contingent on battle being waged at all, and the end result of Morris's

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<sup>147</sup> Cooper, *U.S. Navy*, 159.

inaction in his duties outside of combat was to render action unlikely. Those successful actions, such as the destruction of the grain ships and Tripolitan corsair and the capture of the *Meshouda*, resulted from luck and the individual actions of commanders such as Captain Rodgers and Lieutenant Sterrett.

Many chroniclers of the United States Navy, and even the Barbary Wars, reduce Morris's time in the Mediterranean to a sentence or two, condemning him as useless. This view is just as biased with misunderstanding as that of Morris's officers who defended him. Suggesting that Morris spent "more time ... at dances and balls at various European ports than in the choppy waters off Tripoli," or that he took a "languid tour of Southern European ports," is exaggerated, certainly, but not entirely false.<sup>148</sup> Not false, but it does illustrate the lack of regard that modern historians have for the necessary, but mundane, duties of a commodore, many of which could be accomplished while not on station.

The clear truth is that Morris failed because of his inability to take decisive and aggressive action in duties ranging from hiring gunboats to finding supplies east of Gibraltar. What's more, he failed despite the advantages of wide-ranging powers and a force that, at some points during his command, was considerably stronger than Dale's. Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith wrote perhaps the most appropriate critique of Morris's actions. His will be the final words, for they neatly assess Morris's time in the Mediterranean. Morris's failure "is to be ascribed, not to any deficiency in personal courage on the part of the commodore, but to his

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<sup>148</sup> Richard Zachs, *The Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, the First Marines, and the Secret Mission of 1805*, (New York: Hyperion, 2005), 15; A.B.C. Whipple, *To the Shores of Tripoli: The Birth of the U.S. Navy and Marines*, (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1991), 90.

indolence, and want of capacity. He might have acquitted himself well in command of a single ship, under the orders of a superior, but he was not competent to the command of a squadron.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> *Concerning Commodore Morris' Squadron in the Mediterranean*, Secretary of the Navy, 10 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents II*: 531.

### CHAPTER 3: EDWARD PREBLE

The progress of the Tripolitan War to the spring of 1803 was a gross disappointment to the Jefferson administration. Morris's vacillation led to his recall, but the secretary of the navy understood that the faults were not Morris's alone. Secretary Smith and the Navy Department gleaned some important lessons from their Mediterranean operations. Even before deciding to recall Morris, the department considered significant changes that reflected the realities of the distant war with Tripoli.

The most prominent change was the addition of vessels smaller than frigates to the fleet. *Enterprize's* success, combined with reports of the impossibility of maintaining close blockade with frigates, induced the navy to contemplate using more smaller vessels. The navy solicited the opinions of veterans of the first squadron "with respect to the size ... the fashion of rigging & arming" of any small vessels to be procured.<sup>1</sup> Fixing upon a broadside of between fourteen and sixteen guns, Smith asked Congress to authorize the construction or the purchase of four suitable vessels in January 1803, leaving just enough time for them to be built and sent to the Mediterranean late that summer.<sup>2</sup> The bill authorizing the navy to build or purchase the requested vessels passed through Congress a month later, appropriating \$96,000 for the purpose.<sup>3</sup>

This was not the only sort of smaller vessel that Secretary Smith considered. He also took a keen interest in gunboats, the small, oared craft used by Tripoli, and nearly every other Mediterranean nation, to defend their harbors. Though less common in American service, makeshift gunboats served in the American Revolution and Quasi-War. The same bill

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary of the Navy to William Bainbridge, 23 Dec. 1802, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers, 1785-1801*, U.S. Office of Naval Records and Library (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 337.

<sup>2</sup> Secretary of the Navy to William Eustis, 18 Jan. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 346

<sup>3</sup> *An Act to provide an additional armament for the protection of the seamen and commerce of the United States*. Seventh Congress of the United States, 28 Feb. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 366.

authorizing the small ships also allowed the construction of several gunboats, and Secretary Smith wanted more knowledge of the modern gunboats then in use. To obtain this information, the secretary asked John Gavino, U.S. consul in Gibraltar, to “procure a Model of one of the most approved Gun-Boats ... and send it to me by the first safe opportunity.”<sup>4</sup>

Because gunboat construction was slow to start, Smith had already authorized Commodore Morris to procure several, particularly to deal with the possibility of Moroccan gunboats operating in the Strait of Gibraltar.<sup>5</sup> Former consul to Tripoli James Cathcart highly recommended gunboats and bomb (mortar) vessels for bombardments, as had Commodore Dale.<sup>6</sup> Morris, however, failed to obtain any, writing that he believed gunboats would be impossible to obtain, despite the fact that Cathcart had inserted himself into the diplomatic circles of the Italian peninsula, allowing him to communicate with several nations that owned and operated gunboat squadrons.<sup>7</sup> The next squadron that entered the Mediterranean, then, would have the benefit of a force of brigs and schooners, but could not count on the support of gunboats or bomb vessels unless the new commander achieved more diplomatic success than Morris.

The identity of Morris’s successor was not at all certain. At first, the new squadron was proposed as a further reinforcement of Commodore Morris to replace the ships he currently had on station. After his recall, however, a new commander was required. The nod first went to Richard Dale, commander of the first squadron, but his orders indicated that there would be no possibility of his flagship having a captain aboard.<sup>8</sup> This was the situation Dale had enjoyed

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<sup>4</sup> Secretary of the Navy to John Gavino, 24 Jan. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 347.

<sup>5</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Morris, 31 Aug. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 261.

<sup>6</sup> James Cathcart to Richard Morris, 12 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 292, and Richard Dale to Richard Morris, 28 Feb. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 69.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Morris to Secretary of the Navy, 15 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 297.

<sup>8</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Dale, 18 Nov. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 326.

during his first squadron, so the lack of a flag-captain in the future squadron could be considered a demotion. Apparently, Dale so construed it, for a second letter from Secretary Smith not only reiterated that no captain would be appointed under him, but also that the navy had no plans to create a rank of admiral.<sup>9</sup> Refusing to serve in such a capacity, Dale's resignation was tendered and accepted.<sup>10</sup>

The next candidate called upon was the aging John Barry. Barry was the navy's senior captain, a hero of the Revolution and active during the Quasi-War, but was suffering from an illness that killed him later that year.<sup>11</sup> Barry's infirmity, the resignations of Truxtun and Dale, and Morris's expulsion left the navy with a dearth of senior officers. Eventually, command of the squadron devolved upon Edward Preble, a captain who had not yet been deployed to the Mediterranean because of health issues, but who had an active reputation. In Preble's appointment, Secretary Smith wrote, "to a Gentleman of your activity and Zeal ... to command your most strenuous exertions, I need only inform you that your Country requires them."<sup>12</sup> Politically speaking, Preble's relationships with Charles Goldsborough, chief clerk of the Navy Department, and Henry Dearborn, secretary of war, both old friends from Maine, presumably outweighed his moderate Federalist political stance.<sup>13</sup>

Though he certainly did not lack for connections, Preble had rendered solid service to the navy. Bored with the family farm outside Portland, Maine, his quick temper compelled him to run away to the sea in 1778.<sup>14</sup> Service in the Massachusetts State Navy during the Revolution, and as master of numerous merchant vessels thereafter, was enough to gain Preble the berth of

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<sup>9</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Dale, 10 Dec. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 330.

<sup>10</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Richard Dale, 21 Dec. 1802, in *Naval Documents II*: 336-7.

<sup>11</sup> James Fennimore Cooper, *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*, 2nd ed. (1846; repr., Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 164.

<sup>12</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 21 May 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 411.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher McKee, *Edward Preble: A Naval Biography* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1972), 82, 89.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

first lieutenant of the new frigate *Constitution* at the start of the Quasi-War with France.<sup>15</sup> Promoted to captain in 1799, Preble assumed command of the frigate *Essex* and made the U.S. Navy's first foray into the Indian Ocean, but at the expense of his health which faltered in the tropics and never fully recovered.<sup>16</sup> This disease rendered him unable to command a frigate in Morris's squadron, but he was able to undertake some duties at home. Preble served as an advisor for the construction of the brig *Argus* in Boston.<sup>17</sup> As work on this vessel progressed, Preble also received the duty of readying his old ship, *Constitution*, for Mediterranean service even before he became commodore.<sup>18</sup>

During his earlier service, Preble developed a reputation for professionalism and aggressiveness, traits lacking in Morris's squadron and thus appealing to the administration. Preble expected much from both the officers and men under his command, and disciplined both harshly: the crew with the lash, the officers with bullying and coerced resignations.<sup>19</sup> Another feature of Preble's character made him even more suited for command of a squadron of war. More, certainly than Morris, but also than Dale and many other senior officers in the service, Preble desired glory not just for the United States, though he certainly wanted to raise his nation's stature, but for himself.<sup>20</sup> "The whole service was one of amateurs, on a somewhat shaky foundation," believed historian Fletcher Pratt, and behaved as such under Morris's command.<sup>21</sup> Preble's professionalism and discipline provided the needed foundation for the squadron under his command and his aggressiveness led it on the offensive. Whether the naval

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<sup>15</sup> McKee, 53-4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-6, 81.

<sup>17</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Samuel Brown, 13 Apr. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 390.

<sup>18</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 14 May 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 405-6.

<sup>19</sup> McKee, 174.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>21</sup> Fletcher Pratt, *Preble's Boys: Commodore Preble and the Birth of American Sea Power* (New York: William Sloane, 1950), 26.

administration of the time realized it or not, the combination of these traits made Edward Preble the perfect choice for reversing the trend of timidity established by Morris.

Several negative factors combined to offset the advantages Preble gained from his character and the favorable composition of his fleet for blockade. First, perhaps most serious, was that President Jefferson no longer seemed convinced that Tripoli could be brought to its knees. The naval squadron's mission in the Mediterranean was now "to secure our commerce in that sea with the smallest force competent" rather than offensive action.<sup>22</sup> This decision meant that the extra frigates sent to Morris over the winter of 1802-3 were replacements rather than reinforcements, and also that Preble's squadron was fitted out for blockade rather than bombardment. In addition to the small vessels, Preble only had two frigates, enough to have one heavy vessel off Tripoli at all times.<sup>23</sup> The schooners and brigs were excellent for blockade work, but they carried either light long guns, which could do little damage to heavy fortifications, or carronades, which threw heavy shot, but only a short distance and so were equally useless against shore batteries. Thankfully at least, the two frigates provided, *Constitution* and *Philadelphia*, carried heavy long guns, unlike many of the smaller frigates, such as the previously dispatched *Adams* and *New York*. These had smaller guns "that were nearly useless in a bombardment, while they could not command the shore," because of their deep draught, and had "no other quality particularly suited to the warfare" encountered in the Mediterranean.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, when a frigate shepherded a convoy or showed the flag off a port, the squadron lost a large portion of its firepower, while the smaller vessels could perform the same duty without costing the squadron one of its large vessels. Preble's squadron of five

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Address to Congress*, 15 Dec. 1802, from McKee, 94.

<sup>23</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 21 May 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 411.

<sup>24</sup> Cooper, 165.



smaller vessels and two frigates was ideally suited to blockade Tripoli and protect American commerce, the role to which it was assigned, but not to offensive operations.

The squadron's vessels presented other challenges for Preble as well. Conscious either of the cost of maintaining a squadron or the terms of enlistment of the crews of Morris's squadron, the secretary of the navy required the vessels already in the Mediterranean to return home immediately.<sup>25</sup> To facilitate this, each ship would leave its separate home port as it was ready, arriving in the Mediterranean singly, exactly the situation that plagued Commodore Morris the previous summer. To make matters worse, the vessels of Preble's squadron lagged behind schedule in readying themselves for service. This included not only the new brigs and schooners, but, most seriously, Preble's flagship, *Constitution*. Preble assumed command in May, but the frigate, after years of little use, needed careening to clean and repair its bottom, to have much of its equipment replaced, and to be manned.<sup>26</sup> The delay lasted so long that Preble even felt compelled to write: "I have done all in my power to equip and man her, would to heaven I could have done more!"<sup>27</sup> He even wrote to the secretary of war, his friend Henry Dearborn, explaining that "more than has been done here, cannot be done in the same time with the same number of men in any Port," so that the secretary "may have it in [his] power on proper grounds to defend me from any improper reflections on the tardiness of this equipment."<sup>28</sup> This trouble kept Preble and the *Constitution* in Boston harbor until the middle of August, leaving little of the summer season to operate against Tripoli.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 13 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 474.

<sup>26</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 14 May 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 405; Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 22 May 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 413-4.

<sup>27</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 21 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 494.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Preble to General Dearborn, 19 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 492.

<sup>29</sup> Log of *USS Constitution*, kept by Nathaniel Haraden, 14 Aug. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 511.

A group of officers that included men who would eventually lead the navy to numerous victories in the War of 1812 manned the vessels of Preble's squadron. At this point, however, they were undisciplined, untested, and unknown to Preble. During Morris's tenure, the younger officers had taken to indiscipline marked by numerous duels. Those who had not previously served with a hard captain such as Truxtun or Rodgers initially resented the stern discipline.<sup>30</sup> Preble's fear that the slow pace of fitting out the *Constitution* would reflect poorly on him made him keep his officers and crew working hard, for long hours, even before leaving port. Preble's relative obscurity within the service compounded the situation. While most of the officers were in one of the Caribbean squadrons during the Quasi-war, Preble was on detached service, and his convalescence since then had kept him out of contact with his fellow officers.<sup>31</sup> Those he had not met professionally, he had not met socially either, as (excepting Isaac Hull) the commanders of his squadron's vessels came largely from the mid-Atlantic states, and New England officers were sparse in the rest of the ranks as well.<sup>32</sup>

Preble's orders reflected the softening of offensive objectives settled on by Jefferson. Like Morris, Secretary Smith authorized Preble "to subdue, seize, and make prize of all Vessels, Goods and Effects belonging to the Bey of Tripoli," as allowed by Congress in 1802.<sup>33</sup> Also like Morris, Smith instructed Preble to blockade Tripoli as the best way to provide protection for American commerce, but instead of concentrating his squadron for a potential bombardment, Smith suggested laying part of the squadron off Cape Bon (a natural landfall between Tripoli and the western Mediterranean) to intercept Tripoline corsairs.<sup>34</sup> To make sure that Preble's blockade would be tighter than Morris's, Smith also included the admonition that "no place is to

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<sup>30</sup> McKee, 224-7.

<sup>31</sup> Pratt, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Cooper, 168.

<sup>33</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 13 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 474.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

be considered by you in a state of blockade which is not actually besieged.”<sup>35</sup> The financial and supply arrangements were identical to those made for Morris and Dale. Money was available from firms in London and Leghorn; supplies were sent to Gibraltar and redirected at Preble’s discretion.<sup>36</sup> In addition, Preble received some discretionary funds: \$30,000 loaded on board *Argus* to avoid drawing money in Europe at a poor rate of exchange.<sup>37</sup> The orders also contained the inevitable direction about prisoners, dealing with other friendly nations, and the training of the men and officers.

Preble’s orders reflected Morris’s failure, as the secretary of the navy strove to ensure there would be no repeat of that fiasco. Despite the displeasure with Morris’s conduct, Smith still required Preble to communicate with him, so that Preble could “make a more skilful and advantageous disposition of the force under your direction.”<sup>38</sup> Perhaps because of repeated Tunisian and Moroccan accusations that Morris had unfairly captured their vessels (leading to greatly increased tension with those nations), Smith wrote that he would “scrupulously and without indulgence examine that conduct which shall bring us into collision with any other power.”<sup>39</sup> This warning was so forcefully stated, especially with the shadow that Morris’s recall cast over the situation, that Preble felt compelled to ask if the restrictions even applied to foreign ships running the American blockade.<sup>40</sup> The answer, “that the besieging party has a right to prohibit entirely all commerce with a besieged Town,” made it clear that though other nations need be respected, the blockade still maintained priority in the secretary’s mind.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 13 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 475.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 474-6.

<sup>37</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 22 Aug. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 516-7.

<sup>38</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 13 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 474.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 21 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 494.

<sup>41</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 3 Aug. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 505.

The tensions created, or at least left unresolved, with Tunis and Morocco led Secretary Smith to order that Preble “keep a vigilant Eye” on those nations and to communicate frequently with the American consuls there.<sup>42</sup> Further distancing Preble from negotiations, and ensuring that a professional diplomat would be involved, the secretary of the navy did not authorize him to negotiate directly with Tripoli. Because of Consul Eaton’s expulsion from Tunis, and because Consul O’Brien of Algiers wished to retire, the government appointed a new diplomat, Tobias Lear, to take up the position in Algiers and he alone was authorized to negotiate peace.<sup>43</sup> In an outstanding show of restraint, however, Secretary Smith refused to take all discretion away from his commander observing that, “the varying aspects of our affairs in the Mediterranean . . . render it improper for the government to prescribe to you any particular course of conduct.”<sup>44</sup> Instead, Smith confined himself to stating his confidence that Preble would “maintain the dignity of your station and that the FLAG of your country will not be dishonored in your hands.”<sup>45</sup>

Preble began planning even before he left port, and his ideas were certainly not confined to blockade. He requested permission to hire local vessels, even smaller than the brigs and schooners of his squadron, which could patrol the coast without suspicion. Manned by disguised Americans, these vessels could perform reconnaissance and help stifle the coasting trade.<sup>46</sup> While the secretary allowed Preble to borrow additional vessels, the manning levels of American warships were congressionally mandated, and he could not allow the enlistment of extra officers and men.<sup>47</sup> Whatever additions Preble made to his fleet would have to be manned from his other

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<sup>42</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 13 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 476.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 476-7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 474.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 476.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 16 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 488.

<sup>47</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 28 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 499.

vessels. While this situation was slightly less encouraging than Preble probably hoped, the permission to hire additional vessels constituted an important part of his future strategy.

It is difficult to establish firmly the net effect of the advantages and disadvantages that Preble had in comparison with previous American commodores. Preble's orders were certainly more limited than those of Morris, but the fleet at Preble's command was better suited to accomplish those orders. While the lack of many heavy ships could keep Preble from exceeding his orders, his permission to hire extra vessels, if used liberally, would allow to him undertake an attack if he wished. Preble's greatest disadvantage was the situation he inherited in the Mediterranean. Morris had not settled the Moroccan issue, and tension grew over the capture of the *Meshouda*. Tripoli had barely been blockaded, and the bashaw certainly no longer feared the U.S. Navy, if ever he did previously. The Tunisians, rather than being assuaged by Morris's payment, were emboldened, and after Eaton's expulsion no proper diplomat was present with that nation. To cap a grim situation, war between the French and English loomed, and when resumed, it would create more problems for Preble's squadron. Into this maelstrom sailed Preble, whose greatest advantage was his own conviction to "hazard much to deprive the Barbarians of the means of carrying on a predatory naval War, by destroying their vessels in port, If I cannot meet them at Sea."<sup>48</sup>

Preble's cruise began much like that of Morris: his squadron proceeded piecemeal to the Mediterranean and encountered unexpected tension in that region. Immediately after he received word of *Meshouda's* capture, Consul Simpson in Tangiers wrote to Commodore Morris making it clear that he required word on the exact circumstances of the event in order to "substantiate the necessary proofs ... to be laid before His Majesty [the emperor of Morocco] in Justification."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 9 Aug. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 508.

<sup>49</sup> James Simpson to Richard Morris, 20 June 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 456.

News of the capture arrived in June. Still waiting for a reply the next month Simpson, warned that an American warship would soon become a necessity to keep the peace as “the Emperours Cruizers are so nearly ready for Service.”<sup>50</sup> Soon afterward, the Moroccans demanded passports for their vessels, which were to set sail with sealed orders, an action which “shews a stroke against some Nation is determined upon,” though their target was unknown.<sup>51</sup> Despite his fears, with no proof of intended attacks on the United States, Consul Simpson could raise no official objection and issued passports for the *Mirboka*, an old vessel of 22 guns, as well as the brand new 30-gun frigate *Maimona*.<sup>52</sup> Despite its age, *Mirboka* had more than enough force to detain any merchant vessel, but the *Maimona* was a much more considerable threat, with the size and speed to range far into the Atlantic Ocean where American merchants had previously been quite safe.

The two Moroccans sailed just before Preble himself left the United States on 14 August.<sup>53</sup> Captain William Bainbridge in the frigate *Philadelphia* arrived at Gibraltar ten days later, the first of Preble’s squadron to arrive.<sup>54</sup> Hearing rumors of Tripolitan vessels cruising to the eastward (but not any news of the Moroccan trouble), Bainbridge cruised in that direction. He found, instead of Tripolines, the *Mirboka* in the company of an American merchant vessel. Suspicious of this odd couple, Bainbridge armed a boarding party that forced its way aboard the *Mirboka* and found the American crew held captive.<sup>55</sup> Every commanding officer of the second squadron received orders from Secretary Smith authorizing them to make prizes of the vessels of Tripoli as well as the same admonishment to respect the vessels of other nations, but without any

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<sup>50</sup> James Simpson to Secretary of State, 9 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 470-1.

<sup>51</sup> James Simpson to Richard Morris, 26 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 498.

<sup>52</sup> James Simpson to Secretary of State, 28 July 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 500.

<sup>53</sup> Memorandum Book of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 14 Aug. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 511.

<sup>54</sup> William Bainbridge to James Simpson, 29 Aug. 1803, in *Naval Documents II*: 518.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

of the leeway given to Preble.<sup>56</sup> Thankfully, Bainbridge did not hesitate to take possession of the *Mirboka*, and escorted both it and the recaptured American safely into Gibraltar, though he did feel compelled to write to Secretary Smith expressing his hope “that you will do me justice in believing that no pecuniary motives influenced me but was solely actuated by the Honor ... of the American Flag.”<sup>57</sup> It was even more to his credit that Bainbridge, unlike Morris with the *Meshouda*, then sent both *Mirboka*’s papers and assurances that “my officers and self have made it a Markd point to treat the Prisoners ... with particular attention of Civility,” to Consul Simpson at Tangiers.<sup>58</sup> After the Moroccan captain admitted having orders to detain American ships, Bainbridge sent this unfortunate news to both Preble and Consul Simpson and headed into the Atlantic in search of *Maimona*.<sup>59</sup>

It was Preble, however, not Bainbridge who encountered *Maimona* at sea. After Preble stopped the vessel, he carefully examined *Maimona*’s papers.<sup>60</sup> Consul Simpson’s passport was present, but Preble’s suspicions were aroused when he discovered that the passport dated from two months earlier, far more than enough time for the short journey to *Maimona*’s stated destination of Lisbon. Accordingly, Tobias Lear, carried as a passenger, went on board to examine the papers further, but found them in order, even recognizing Simpson’s handwriting and signature.<sup>61</sup> In Lear’s judgment, the “Passports appear so clear & correct that, according to our Treaty with the Emperor of Morocco, I should not conceive it advisable to Detain the Ship.”<sup>62</sup> Preble agreed and parted ways, sailing for Tangiers to pay Consul Simpson a visit. While off the town, the *Constitution* “fired a gun and hoisted [the] colors,” but the arranged

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<sup>56</sup> Secretary of the Navy to William Bainbridge, 13 July 1803, in *Naval Documents* II: 477.

<sup>57</sup> William Bainbridge to Secretary of the Navy, 29 Aug. 1803, in *Naval Documents* II: 522.

<sup>58</sup> William Bainbridge to James Simpson, 29 Aug. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 3.

<sup>59</sup> William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, 12 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents* II: 520.

<sup>60</sup> Log of *USS Constitution*, Edward Preble, 7 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 24.

<sup>61</sup> Tobias Lear to Edward Preble, 7 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 23.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

signal being not returned from shore, Preble sailed on to Gibraltar.<sup>63</sup> His simultaneous arrival and revelation of the apparent state of war between the United States and Morocco certainly provided a sharp shock.

Meanwhile, tensions in Tangiers continued to mount. The Moroccans off the *Mirboka* informed Bainbridge that Alcayde Hashash, governor of Tangiers, was solely responsible for issuing the orders to attack Americans, forcing Bainbridge to conclude that Hashash “is much disposed for Hostilities with the US.”<sup>64</sup> Evidently Simpson agreed, for his next letters of complaint he sent not to Hashash, but to the emperor himself, requesting an explanation and a re-establishment of peace.<sup>65</sup> Hashash did not take kindly to this tactic, however, and he summoned the American Consul and assured him that *Mirboka* was not “authorized by him or any other person to capture American Vessels.”<sup>66</sup> After Simpson argued evidence to the contrary, Hashash locked him up, and he remained imprisoned while Preble called off Tangiers.<sup>67</sup> Simpson only gained release after an appeal to the emperor by the consuls of all the other nations represented at Tangiers.<sup>68</sup> The emperor wrote to Simpson denying responsibility for ordering the capture of Americans, asking that the parties involved be delivered to Tangiers “and when the truth shall be made manifest, affairs shall go in their proper Channel.”<sup>69</sup> Despite the emperor’s word, while the hostilities against Americans had initially appeared to be confined to Hashash, word that the governor of Mogadore, another Moroccan port, detained the crew and cargo of an American merchant, seemed to indicate that the emperor must be involved.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Log of USS *Constitution*, Edward Preble, 12 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 29.

<sup>64</sup> William Bainbridge to James Simpson, 29 Aug. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 3.

<sup>65</sup> James Simpson to Emperor of Morocco, 2 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 7-9.

<sup>66</sup> James Simpson to William Bainbridge, 3 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 10.

<sup>67</sup> James Simpson to Secretary of State, 3 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 19.

<sup>68</sup> Emperor of Morocco to Consuls at Tangiers, 11 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 26.

<sup>69</sup> Emperor of Morocco to James Simpson, 9 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 25.

<sup>70</sup> William Court to John Gavino, 5 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 20.



Though they released Simpson from his detention, the Moroccans continued to harden their stance, denying any declaration of war, and demanding the return of both the *Mirboka* and *Meshouda*. The Moroccan secretary of state sent Simpson a singularly patronizing letter which began: “Receive the paper herewith – pay attention to it, and see what you have done to the Flag of Our Master [the Emperor] whom God preserve.”<sup>71</sup> It continued, explaining the situation, though still failing to assume responsibility for it, “A Ship of Our Masters [*Mirboka*] intending to bring a Vessel of yours and detain her until the Tripoline [*Meshouda*] should be returned, and you know what happen’d.”<sup>72</sup> Though this explained the Moroccans’ reasoning, why the Americans should return a Tripolitan vessel to anyone, let alone Morocco, was unexplainable. Nevertheless, the letter warned, if “matters remain as they are, or Our Masters Ship be not sent ... we cannot say what he may then do, for this reason we have admonished and advised you.”<sup>73</sup> Despite this, Simpson still believed that the emperor may have been ignorant of Hashash’s orders and that any negotiation should be carried out with the emperor himself, rather than Hashash, an opportunity provided by the emperor’s imminent arrival in Tangiers.<sup>74</sup> Preble, after *Maimona* slipped through his grasp, was in no mood for the subtle negotiations encouraged by Simpson and would certainly not be swayed by any bluster on the part of the emperor. “You may acquaint the Emperor from me,” wrote Preble to Simpson, that the actions of the *Mirboka* “justify my giving Orders ... to capture and bring into port all vessels belonging to the Emperor of Morocco.”<sup>75</sup> And, should the emperor persist in not taking credit for the actions of his

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<sup>71</sup> Sidy Mehammed Selawy to James Simpson, 12 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 29.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> James Simpson to Edward Preble, 14 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 43.

<sup>75</sup> Edward Preble to James Simpson, 13 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 30.

captains and insist they acted alone, then “it is my intention in future to sink every such vessel as a Pirate.”<sup>76</sup>

A fortunate concentration of force at Gibraltar, with Morris’s squadron coming in from the east and Preble’s from the west, gave Preble the military force to back his strong words. First to join the *Constitution* was the *Philadelphia*, which had been unable to find *Maimona*, and the schooner *Vixen*, fresh from the United States.<sup>77</sup> Next, after separately convoying American merchants from the east, both Morris in the *New York* and Rodgers in the *John Adams*, made port.<sup>78</sup> Soon afterward, the *Adams* also arrived, making a force of five frigates and a schooner, with more small vessels expected to arrive at any time.<sup>79</sup> It was not a foregone conclusion that the ships would be able to cooperate, however. Morris, now relieved of duty as commodore, had orders to proceed home immediately, while newly appointed Commodore Rodgers was running short of food and water on his remaining vessels. Even so, Preble grasped the opportunity given him by chance and “thought it prudent notwithstanding our Morocco business to dispatch the *Philadelphia* and *Vixen*” to Tripoli, using Rodgers’s ships to deal with Morocco while Morris sailed for home in *Adams*, the ship longest on station.<sup>80</sup> This well-considered action was certainly the best course open to Preble at the time. *John Adams*, *New York*, *Constitution*, and the various small vessels represented enough force to deal with the Moroccans, who now had only one warship, and even the cursory blockade that two ships could provide to Tripoli was preferable to no blockade at all.

At this crucial moment, however, personal jealousies threatened to rob Preble of his advantage. John Rodgers, though Preble’s junior in years, was his senior by one spot on the

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<sup>76</sup> Edward Preble to James Simpson, 13 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 30.

<sup>77</sup> Log of USS *Constitution*, Edward Preble, 13 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 42.

<sup>78</sup> Journal of an unknown Frenchmen, USS *John Adams*, 14 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 42-3.

<sup>79</sup> Memorandum Book of Edward Preble, USS *Constitution*, 14 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 45.

<sup>80</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 18 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 56.

captains list by virtue of his early promotion as a reward for his service as first lieutenant on board the *Constellation* when it captured *L'Insurgente* during the Quasi-War.<sup>81</sup> As the senior officer on station, Rodgers felt slighted that Preble continued to fly a commodore's pennant on the *Constitution*, a signal that Preble considered himself in command despite Rodgers's seniority. Preble's reply declared that the pennant was "not hoisted for the purpose of injuring your feelings ... but to designate that I command a Squadron ... independent of any other squadron."<sup>82</sup> In other words, Preble considered his command separate and himself entitled to the honor of a commodore's pennant. Rodgers insisted that "if the date of your Commission is subsequent to mine, that it is not in the power (Even) of the Government, to place you ... in a situation which could afford an opportunity of treating me with Disrespect."<sup>83</sup> Thankfully, both men agreed to temporarily set aside the dispute in order to finish the Moroccan business. Both officers, therefore, flew their pennants, and each of them signed dispatches to Consul Simpson. This stop-gap measure, however awkward, allowed the necessary cooperation to bring Morocco to terms.

Now, when the Americans were most ready, the situation forced them to wait. Preble sent the smaller vessels of his squadron down Morocco's coast, hoping to catch *Maimona* or any prizes taken by that vessel before they returned to port.<sup>84</sup> *Maimona*, however, warned of the American presence by the encounter with *Constitution*, took refuge in Lisbon where it remained for the rest of the conflict.<sup>85</sup> The diplomatic situation mirrored the lack of action on the naval front. Consul Simpson believed that Alcaÿde Hashash was too hostile for negotiation, and the

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<sup>81</sup> John Schroeder, *Commodore John Rodgers: Paragon of the Early American Navy*, (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2006), 15-6.

<sup>82</sup> Edward Preble to John Rodgers, 15 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 46.

<sup>83</sup> John Rodgers to Edward Preble, 15 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 47.

<sup>84</sup> Edward Preble to Richard Somers, 19 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 63 and Edward Preble to Charles Stewart, 19 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 64.

<sup>85</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 1 Oct. 1802, in *Naval Documents III*: 96.

emperor himself agreed to talk with the Americans.<sup>86</sup> The emperor, however, could not or would not change the itinerary of his national tour to proceed direct to Tangiers, but Consul Simpson was able to open talks with Moroccan Secretary of State Mohammed Selawy.<sup>87</sup> In the meantime, during numerous delays that kept the emperor from Tangiers, both sides worked out their strategies. In 1786, the United States had negotiated and ratified a very liberal treaty with Morocco and the current emperor's father. The stipulations included favorable trading measures and no tribute, and the reaffirmation of this treaty became the goal of Preble and Simpson.<sup>88</sup> The Moroccans, on their part, obviously coveted the return of both the *Meshouda* and *Mirboka* as well as the crews of each, with Selawy even going so far as to suggest that the presence of these vessels in Tangier was a precondition for the opening of negotiations.<sup>89</sup>

When the emperor finally did arrive, Preble proved once again his good sense by closely following Consul Simpson's advice. When Simpson suggested that the release of the *Mirboka*, especially, would help negotiations, Preble agreed to surrender that vessel.<sup>90</sup> This allowed Simpson to offer the lure of *Mirboka*'s return "as a proof of the sincere desire of the American Nation," and to push the emperor to "Ratify the Treaty made between the United States and his Father."<sup>91</sup> Though giving up the ship was certainly a concession on Preble's part, the condition of that vessel was poor enough to inspire him to write: "I do not believe we have an Officer in our service that would be willing to attempt to cross the Atlantic in her for ten times the Value."<sup>92</sup> Further, because negotiations would take place in Tangiers, Simpson recommended that Preble come into the bay with as much force as he could muster, firing a salute to impress on

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<sup>86</sup> Emperor of Morocco to James Simpson, 20 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 67.

<sup>87</sup> Muhammad Selawy to James Simpson, 24 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 74.

<sup>88</sup> Edward Preble to James Simpson, 25 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 76.

<sup>89</sup> Muhammad Selawy to James Simpson, 24 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 74.

<sup>90</sup> Edward Preble to James Simpson, 25 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 76.

<sup>91</sup> James Simpson to Secretary of State, 28 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 92.

<sup>92</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 1 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 96.

the Moroccans the foolishness of fighting a full-scale war.<sup>93</sup> Preble agreed to the measure, replying, “I shall salute him & dress ship, and if he is not disposed to be pacific *I will salute him again,*” presumably with loaded cannon.<sup>94</sup> When the emperor finally arrived on 6 October, Preble in the *Constitution*, along with the *New York* and *John Adams*, fired salutes of twenty-one guns, a potent display of naval force.<sup>95</sup> The emperor, apparently impressed, sent a present of livestock to the squadron, but still there was waiting to be done, this time for the arrival of Muhammad Selawy, before the negotiations could begin.<sup>96</sup>

When all the pieces for negotiation were finally in place, the process was suitably quick and satisfactory for each side. Before Preble even went ashore, the emperor issued a declaration of peace with the United States, ordering the American merchant vessel at Mogadore released.<sup>97</sup> This declaration only mentioned the earlier treaty largely as an afterthought, rather than giving it the import that the Americans thought necessary. To gain this concession, Preble not only consented to give up *Mirboka*, but also persuaded Rodgers to release the *Meshouda*, though only after the Moroccans reaffirmed the treaty.<sup>98</sup> On 10 October, Commodore Preble, Consul Lear, and a small staff went ashore to proceed with Consul Simpson to meet the emperor.<sup>99</sup> Expecting formality and splendor, they instead found “a small man, wrapped up in a woolen haik or cloak sitting upon the stone steps of an old castle in the middle of the streets.”<sup>100</sup> Despite his mean appearance, the emperor’s words were anything but; by the end of the day, the Americans had

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<sup>93</sup> James Simpson to Edward Preble, 2 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 97.

<sup>94</sup> Edward Preble to James Simpson, 4 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 102.

<sup>95</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 6 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 108.

<sup>96</sup> James Simpson to Edward Preble, 7 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 110.

<sup>97</sup> *Declaration of Peace between the United States and the Emperor of Morocco*, 8 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 118.

<sup>98</sup> Edward Preble to James Simpson, 8 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 119

<sup>99</sup> Log of *USS Constitution*, 10 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 123.

<sup>100</sup> Ralph Izard Jr. to Mrs. Ralph Izard Sr., 11 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 126.

gained the reaffirmation of the Treaty of 1786.<sup>101</sup> This satisfactory solution to a situation with so much potential for danger was all the more exemplary because Preble accomplished it “without the payment of a cent for tribute or presents.”<sup>102</sup>

With peace reestablished, Commodore Rodgers shaped a course for the United States, while Commodore Preble gathered his squadron at Gibraltar.<sup>103</sup> This lull in the action also provides a good opportunity for an analysis of Preble’s decisions thus far. Preble found himself in a position very similar to Morris upon his arrival off Morocco. When fortuitously given enough force to deal with the problem, Morris squandered the advantage while Preble seized it, economizing his force so as to both blockade Tripoli and assist Consul Simpson in Morocco. Consul Lear wrote, in the middle of the Moroccan crisis, “the Zeal activity and intelligence of Com<sup>e</sup> Preble must afford satisfaction to our Government.”<sup>104</sup> The government agreed; James Madison wrote to Preble, “the terms of the peace, and the honorable manner in which it was restored, have equally impressed.”<sup>105</sup> The composition of Preble’s squadron also proved of assistance in the situation. With the force split between numerous small vessels, instead of concentrated in fewer frigates, Preble was able to watch each of Morocco’s major ports with a brig or schooner, while retaining enough force in Tangiers to facilitate negotiation. Similarly, both Dale and Morris had been compelled to leave a frigate, almost a third of their firepower, in the Straits of Gibraltar to watch the Moroccans, but Preble was able to leave the *Argus*, only one of his six small vessels, leaving him plenty of force to deal with Tripoli. Despite his solid performance, Preble had still to contend with the Mediterranean weather. Already October, his

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<sup>101</sup> Emperor of Morocco to Thomas Jefferson, 11 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 124.

<sup>102</sup> Charles Paullin, *Diplomatic Negotiations of American Naval Officers: 1778-1883* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1912), 70.

<sup>103</sup> Log of *USS Constitution*, 13 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 131.

<sup>104</sup> Tobias Lear to Secretary of the Navy, 26 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 80.

<sup>105</sup> Secretary of State to Edward Preble, 26 Dec. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 297.

first summer of fair weather, the only time suitable for offensive operations, had ended, and further complications would affect Preble's operations even more.

Many of these difficulties resulted from the recent resumption of war between England and France. In the first place, supplies, which had once been easy to obtain in the Mediterranean, became scarce. Rations especially, Preble directed, "should be sent out from the United States as they cannot, in consequence of the War between England and France be purchased in Gibraltar."<sup>106</sup> Even firewood was in short supply and Preble requested that wood and coal for the galley fires should join the list of supplies sent out.<sup>107</sup> Engaged in a war that threatened their nation, the British, who had earlier behaved excellently towards the Americans, were now less inclined to be accommodating. While Preble dealt with the Moroccan situation, the *Meshouda* remained in Gibraltar, serving as quarters for the Moroccan prisoners from both captures. Assigned to guard them was a small crew of Americans, a few of whom took the opportunity to desert months before working off the signing bonus they received in the United States.<sup>108</sup> As the nearest refuge, these experienced sailors found Captain John Gore, of the HMS *Medusa*, to be more than willing to engage their services and hide them from American officers. When seen on board his vessel, Gore refused to return them to the Americans as he deemed the deserters "subjects of his Britanic Majesty and ... finding now that their Sovereign is engaged in a serious War with an inveterate Foe, wish to return, to their own Flag."<sup>109</sup> Lieutenant Charles Stewart, senior American in Gibraltar, fired back that the seamen had volunteered despite already knowing Great Britain was at war, and that Gore did, "by detaining those men whom I have demanded as Deserters & Fellons assume the Violating hand," denying the United States

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<sup>106</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 18 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 59.

<sup>107</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 5 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 147.

<sup>108</sup> Charles Stewart to John Gore, 7 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 112.

<sup>109</sup> John Gore to Charles Stewart, 8 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 113.

the justice of international law.<sup>110</sup> Captain Gore responded, not only asserting that the men would not be surrendered, but also demanding the release of two more American seamen, “being Subjects of his Britanic Majesty and wishing to return to their Duty and Allegiance,” implying that they were held against their will.<sup>111</sup> Lieutenant Stewart, realizing that he could make no headway, referred the matter to Preble.

Edward Preble, of course, was not a man to be cowed by the threats of anyone, especially since, as a former merchant captain and life-long patriot, he bore a deep-seated resentment of the British practice of impressment. Preble joined the exchange of letters with gusto. The deserters were, Preble contested, subjects not of the English king, but instead of the United States, by virtue of taking an oath of allegiance to that nation, and therefore Preble denied that there was any “such person as a *British Subject*, on board of any the Ships of the Squadron” but they were rather “*Citizens* of the United States.”<sup>112</sup> Captain Gore departed Gibraltar before answering, but another British ship, the frigate *Amphion*, provided yet another refuge for American deserters. Preble addressed letters to both Captain Sutton of the *Amphion* and Captain George Hart, senior British officer afloat in Gibraltar at the time. He reminded the British of the deserters’ oaths to the United States, and provided evidence that some of these men had remitted part of their pay to families in the United States.<sup>113</sup> Captain Hart, too, refused to release the deserters, stating “that it is the Orders & Instructions of our Government, on our meeting with Ships of any foreign Nation whatever to demand all such British Seamen.”<sup>114</sup> Captain Preble again asserted that his seamen were all American citizens, making delivery of British seamen to the Royal Navy impossible. “I have not encreased my compliment by impressing Englishmen, or receiving Deserters,” wrote

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<sup>110</sup> Charles Stewart to John Gore, 9 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 120.

<sup>111</sup> John Gore to Charles Stewart, 9 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 121.

<sup>112</sup> Edward Preble to John Gore, 17 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 143.

<sup>113</sup> Edward Preble to George Hart, 20 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 155.

<sup>114</sup> George Hart to Edward Preble, 21 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 156.



Preble almost mockingly echoing the tone of his English counterpart, “although I am ready to receive any Americans who have not voluntarily entered your service.”<sup>115</sup> While this did not return any of the deserters to the American ships, it did induce Captain Hart to pass Preble’s complaint to Admiral Nelson, then commanding the Mediterranean fleet.<sup>116</sup> Finally, in addition to the problems in Gibraltar, the earlier actions of members of the squadron in Malta, the port closest to Tripoli, rendered that base less enticing. An American midshipman, seconded by Lieutenant Decatur, commander of *Enterprize*, killed a British citizen there in a duel, resulting in the issuing of warrants for their arrest.<sup>117</sup>

Though he would never receive satisfaction for the loss of his sailors, Preble did hit on a way to keep it from happening again. While Preble was in the straits, he called only at the still neutral Spanish ports of Cadiz or Malaga, instead of Gibraltar, and when operating off Tripoli, Preble based the fleet out of Syracuse rather than British Malta.<sup>118</sup> The Syracusans welcomed the squadron, believing that its presence would deter raids by the other Barbary States, and gave Preble free use of the port’s warehouses and magazines.<sup>119</sup> To facilitate his operations, Preble sought out American merchants in both Syracuse and Malta and appointed them navy agents, with powers to purchase and house squadron supplies at each of those ports.<sup>120</sup>

Preble recommended that all future supply ships from the United States be sent directly to Syracuse rather than stopping at Gibraltar, and that they be armed, so that no squadron vessel need be pulled away from the blockade for escort.<sup>121</sup> Additionally, if this vessel could be chartered permanently, Preble believed it would serve well by replenishing the squadron at sea,

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<sup>115</sup> Edward Preble to George Hart, 22 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 158.

<sup>116</sup> George Hart to Edward Preble, 22 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 159.

<sup>117</sup> John Gavino to Edward Preble, 12 Dec. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 267.

<sup>118</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 23 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 160-1.

<sup>119</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, 29 Nov. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 243.

<sup>120</sup> Edward Preble to William Higgins 22 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 351.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

facilitating a tighter blockade, and by functioning as a floating hospital from which the men could not desert when they recovered.<sup>122</sup> Preble also wanted further reinforcement beyond a single storeship, because “experience has taught us that, implicit faith cannot be placed in Treaties with any of the Barbary States,” and he wanted at least the reinforcement of a small frigate to guard against a resumption of hostilities from Morocco after the main squadron had passed to the east.<sup>123</sup> In the mean-time, Preble allotted the newly arrived *Argus*, now under Isaac Hull’s command, to watch the straits.<sup>124</sup> With Morocco and his supply situation settled, Preble’s final act at Gibraltar was to write a circular announcement to all Mediterranean nations declaring the port of Tripoli under official blockade, legally establishing his right to exclude neutral vessels from that port.<sup>125</sup>

As earlier noted, when he was assured of Rodgers’s cooperation, Preble dispatched *Philadelphia* and *Vixen* to assume a blockade of Tripoli to keep at least larger vessels from entering or leaving that port. Preble’s orders gave *Philadelphia*’s Captain Bainbridge command, ordering him to check every known corsair cruising ground and rendezvous, using the *Vixen* to scout inshore on the way to Tripoli, “and maintain . . . an effectual Blockade of that place as can be done with the force you have.”<sup>126</sup> At this time the Tripolitan navy consisted of only seven sea-going vessels, each of only enough force to take a merchantmen, and Bainbridge’s vessels could at least keep these larger ships blockaded.<sup>127</sup> The two ships watered at Malta and sailed immediately to Tripoli on 4 October, just as serious negotiations began in Tangiers.<sup>128</sup> When some of the known Tripolitan fleet appeared to be missing, Bainbridge dispatched the *Vixen*

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<sup>122</sup> Edward Preble to William Higgins 22 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 361.

<sup>123</sup> Edward Preble to Isaac Hull, 7 Nov. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 204.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Edward Preble to James Monroe, 12 Nov. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 215.

<sup>126</sup> Edward Preble to William Bainbridge, 16 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 50.

<sup>127</sup> James Cathcart to Nicholas Nissen, 19 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 61.

<sup>128</sup> William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, 4 Oct. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 103.

north to Cape Bon, hoping to intercept them at that prominent land-fall.<sup>129</sup> Soon after, *Philadelphia* spotted a small vessel attempting to sneak along the shore into Tripoli. This was exactly the sort of situation in which *Vixen* would have excelled, but in its absence, Bainbridge decided to give chase with the *Philadelphia*, a chase which ended with the frigate hard aground on an uncharted reef.<sup>130</sup> The Tripolitan gunboat fleet rowed out, took up a position where the *Philadelphia* could not return fire, and commenced a bombardment which induced Bainbridge to surrender.<sup>131</sup> The worth of the smaller vessels was proved even in their absence, for if the *Vixen* had been present it could have fought off the gunboats or assisted in refloating the frigate. Better still, it could have taken up the chase itself, relieving the more cumbersome and deep-draughted frigate from that duty.<sup>132</sup> To make matters worse, *Philadelphia*'s crew failed to disable the ship before the surrender. Within two days, the Tripolines freed the ship and began repairs.<sup>133</sup>

The difficulties in Preble's new position were numerous. Preble sailed eastward by way of Algiers, where he dropped Consul Lear to take up his new post, and shortly afterward met the English frigate *Amazon*, which told him of *Philadelphia*'s capture.<sup>134</sup> Some of his first reactions are contained in his letters and diary entries on and directly after 24 November, the day he learned of the disaster. "If it should not involve us in a war with Tunis and Algiers in consequence of the weakness of our squadron," Preble reasoned, "yet still it will protract the war with Tripoly."<sup>135</sup> Things did appear peaceful in Algiers, where Preble had just left, but there was no telling whether this victory would increase that court's demands on America. Tunisian relations were in a further state of turmoil, with Consul Eaton expelled and Consul Cathcart

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<sup>129</sup> Glenn Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder: The Barbary Wars and the Birth of the U.S. Navv*, (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963), 216.

<sup>130</sup> William Bainbridge to Secretary of the Navy, 1 Nov. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 172.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, 1 Nov. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 171.

<sup>133</sup> William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, 6 Nov. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 173.

<sup>134</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, 24 Nov. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 175.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

rejected by Algiers, Secretary of State Madison decided to shift Cathcart's posting to Tunis. That regency was suitably insulted that a man unfit for Algiers should be their Consul, and rejected him as well, though not before "the extravagant passions of Mr. Cathcart, his *folly*, ... has hurried us to the brink of a war."<sup>136</sup> Even without declarations of war by either of these nations, the prospects of a quick end to the Tripolitan war were bleak.

The *Philadelphia*'s loss effectively halved the squadron's complement of heavy guns. While this did not render *Constitution* unable to perform some bombardment of Tripoli, it meant that the Preble had to use the ship cautiously to prevent any further accident, leaving the squadron entirely without heavy vessels. Preble recognized this, and amended his earlier plan of maintaining a tight blockade throughout the winter as it would be "hazarding too much; for should any accident happen to this ship [*Constitution*] ... the consequences may be dreadful."<sup>137</sup> All hopes for a quick peace with Tripoli were gone, not because Preble was now incapable of offensive action, but because the bashaw now held too many cards for a fruitful negotiation. The *Philadelphia* itself, though too large for the Tripolines to use, could have either been sold to another Barbary power or ransomed back to the United States, either way adding to Tripoline demands.<sup>138</sup> Preble resolved immediately to "hazard much to destroy her [*Philadelphia*]," and so informed Secretary Smith in the same letter which apprised Smith of the *Philadelphia*'s capture.<sup>139</sup> The more serious situation, however, because Preble was powerless to fix it, was the capture of *Philadelphia*'s crew. First, though the prisoners were not extremely abused, the threat of retaliation against the prisoners could curb American actions, and second, a large ransom would be expected for each man, significantly increasing the cost of any peace. Consul Lear

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<sup>136</sup> George Davis to Richard Morris, 16 Sep. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 48.

<sup>137</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 10 Dec. 1803, in *Naval Documents* III: 257.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

learned that soon after the capture, the bashaw expected to make \$1000 dollars per man, though he often had settled with other nations at half that cost.<sup>140</sup> At either price, the cost for this ransom alone exceeded any previous demand for a price of peace. The only method available to Preble to lower the price was to take offensive action against Tripoli and this he resolved to do.<sup>141</sup>

Preble now had several options. His first was to maintain his original plan of blockade. Despite the difficulties of the winter weather, *Constitution* and *Enterprise* set out in December to do just that.<sup>142</sup> While it was unlikely that a blockade that was necessarily porous because of the weather would immediately reduce the ransom, Preble could hardly allow Tripoli to go unwatched, and perhaps score another victory. As it turned out, the blockade opened new possibilities for Commodore Preble, when on the 23 December he captured a small vessel attempting to leave the harbor.<sup>143</sup> The master of this vessel *Mastico* represented it as belonging to the Ottoman Empire, but after a witness testified that it actively participated in the boarding and looting of the *Philadelphia* a month before, the Syracusan courts condemned the vessel as a lawful prize.<sup>144</sup> Renamed *Intrepid*, it exactly fit the description of the type of local craft that Preble had earlier requested permission to hire. William Bainbridge, detained in Tripoli, had also conceived a use for such a vessel. He believed that by sending a disguised vessel into Tripoli, it could get close enough to the *Philadelphia* to come along side and destroy it.<sup>145</sup> The heavy squalls of winter soon forced Preble back to Syracuse, where he continued his planning.

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<sup>140</sup> Tobias Lear to Secretary of State, 24 Dec. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 292.

<sup>141</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 10 Dec. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 257.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>143</sup> Log of *USS Constitution*, 23 Dec. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 288.

<sup>144</sup> Testimony of Salvador Catalano, Vice Admiralty Court of Syracuse, 2 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 180-1.

<sup>145</sup> William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, 5 Dec. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 253.

While Preble did not abandon the blockade for long, he used his time in port wisely, making sure the pieces for a successful summer campaign were in place. First, Preble cultivated relationships with Richard Farquhar and Salvador Bufuttil, men in the service of Hamet Karamanli, William Eaton's former ally and deposed ruler of Tripoli. Hamet had taken his post in Derna, the second largest city in Tripoli, reportedly won a military victory there over his brother's forces, and renewed his requests for American help for an offensive on Tripoli itself.<sup>146</sup> Though Hamet's requests exceeded Preble's resources, Preble pledged what he had available to "assist him against Tripoly."<sup>147</sup> After losing the *Philadelphia*, Preble's ability to help diminished even further, and boosted the bashaw's fortunes enough that Bufuttil decided to press Preble for a pledge of certain support.<sup>148</sup> Preble's inability to provide a binding pledge, and renewed attacks by his brother's forces, convinced Hamet to withdraw from Derna to Alexandria, Egypt, where he continued his pleas to the Americans. Preble, in light of Hamet's seeming willingness, expressed his "wish that earlier notice had been taken of this man," certain that a land assault could crack Tripoli in only a few months.<sup>149</sup> Captain Bainbridge, after viewing the Bashaw's preparations for assault from the sea, agreed that a land siege would be the most productive way to bring Tripoli to terms.<sup>150</sup> Though he continued to receive letters from Hamet's supporters, and continued to express his desire to help him, Preble never considered himself in possession of enough force to dispatch a vessel to Hamet's aid.<sup>151</sup> This convinced Hamet that, like Morris, Preble would never lend wholesale support, and he redirected his pleas to President Jefferson, pleas that would remain unanswered until after Preble's tenure in the Mediterranean expired.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Richard Farquhar to Thomas Jefferson, 15 Nov. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 222.

<sup>147</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 10 Dec. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 260.

<sup>148</sup> Salvador Bufuttil to Edward Preble, 4 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 314.

<sup>149</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 17 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 339.

<sup>150</sup> William Bainbridge to Tobias Lear, 14 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 330.

<sup>151</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 11 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 486.

<sup>152</sup> Richard Farquhar to Thomas Jefferson, 18 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 501-2.

In the light of later events, allowing his cooperation with Hamet to lapse was certainly a poor decision.

Preble was also busy re-opening the channels of negotiation with Tripoli that Morris had ignored. Consul Nissen of Denmark was extremely helpful to Dale and assisted *Philadelphia's* crew in their captivity and in a letter of thanks for that kindness, Preble also expressed a wish for a meeting.<sup>153</sup> The bashaw removed this method of negotiation, however, who insisted in a new treaty with Denmark that Consul Nissen refrain from assisting any nation but his own in negotiations.<sup>154</sup> Even as this avenue closed, however, another opened. Upon hearing of the *Philadelphia's* capture, Robert Livingston, American Ambassador to France, applied to First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte and his foreign minister Talleyrand for help in gaining the release of the American prisoners.<sup>155</sup> Apparently, when Napoleon contemplated the American prisoners, he was “touched with the most lively commiseration for their misfortune,” and ordered his Consul in Tripoli, Bonaventure Beaussier, to work with the United States in freeing them and negotiating a peace.<sup>156</sup>

In addition to contacts within Tripoli, Preble was also in communication with the Tripolitan consul to Malta, who represented himself as authorized to negotiate for peace. He offered various proposals including a truce, which Preble rejected, and an offer to ransom the prisoners at \$500 each, about \$120,000 for the whole.<sup>157</sup> While this was half of the bashaw's earlier asking price, Preble still rejected it out of hand, and declared the Americans “never would consent to pay a cent for Peace or Tribute.”<sup>158</sup> Despite this, when Tripolitan representative

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<sup>153</sup> Edward Preble to Nicholas Nissen, 19 Dec. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 279.

<sup>154</sup> Nicholas Nissen to Edward Preble, 20 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 447.

<sup>155</sup> Robert Livingston to Maurice de Talleyrand, 2 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 308.

<sup>156</sup> Maurice de Talleyrand to Bonaventure Beaussier, 15 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 332.

<sup>157</sup> Edward Preble to Tobias Lear, 31 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 378.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

Gaetano Schembri later visited Tripoli, he assured the bashaw that the Americans would agree to any price for peace and the ransom.<sup>159</sup> When he learned of Schembri's lie, Preble exploded. "Insolent Medlar!" he wrote, "Have you sagacity enough to calculate the pernicious consequence of your Duplicity?"<sup>160</sup> Preble, furious that the bashaw might now expect more from the Americans even then before, concluded that the answer to his question was a simple "No."<sup>161</sup> When Preble arrived off Tripoli, the damage that Schembri had done to the American position was plain. Schembri's dishonesty, combined with the recent large ransoms paid by other nations, encouraged the bashaw to start negotiations at \$500,000, a far larger sum than had earlier been put forward.<sup>162</sup>

Another impediment to a successful negotiation the following summer was the absence of the only empowered American negotiator. After dealing with Morocco, the season was late enough that significant operations off Tripoli were not feasible. Accordingly, Consul Lear took up his position in Algiers rather than remain with Preble through the winter.<sup>163</sup> When the spring arrived, Preble sent a vessel to Algiers to embark Lear and bring him to Tripoli to begin negotiations.<sup>164</sup> Additionally, Preble wondered whether former Consul O'Brien, replaced in Algiers by Lear, could also assist, for, by virtue of spending a decade imprisoned in Algiers, O'Brien knew the language and ways of Barbary as well as, or perhaps better than, anyone.<sup>165</sup> Lear, however, judged the moment inopportune to leave Algiers, as the dey was unhappy that American tribute was a year behind schedule.<sup>166</sup> He did, however, persuade O'Brien to assist in negotiation and told Preble that he would authorize any payment up to \$600 a man for ransom,

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<sup>159</sup> William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, 26 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 526.

<sup>160</sup> Edward Preble to Gaetano Schembri, 19 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 513.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Bonaventure Beaussier to Edward Preble, 28 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 543.

<sup>163</sup> Tobias Lear to Edward Preble, 13 Nov. 1803, in *Naval Documents III*: 217.

<sup>164</sup> Edward Preble to Tobias Lear, 31 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 378.

<sup>165</sup> Edward Preble to Richard O'Brien, 31 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 380.

<sup>166</sup> Tobias Lear to Edward Preble, 23 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 516.



assuming that there would be no additional payment for peace or an annual tribute.<sup>167</sup> With O'Brien's help, and essentially empowered to negotiate by himself through the French consul, Preble had the tools he needed to reach a settlement with Tripoli. He still lacked, however, the desire to settle without first trying military action, and more martial preparations took place simultaneously to those above.

Preble's first order of business was to neutralize the threat of the *Philadelphia*. Then, fortuitously, came to hand the local craft *Mastico*, and an opportunity was born. Numerous letters from Bainbridge to Preble mention the possibility of destroying the *Philadelphia*. If attempted in the winter, Bainbridge mentioned, the Tripolitan gun-boats would be hauled up on the shore to escape storm-damage, leaving an opening for attack.<sup>168</sup> He proposed that "a few boats prepared with combustibles," could be launched from a vessel that arrived off shore "about sun-set so as to prevent her being seen from the shore" and thereby "get into the harbour unnoticed."<sup>169</sup> Whether Preble adopted these ideas, or whether a similar plan occurred to him near the same time, the final plan was similar to that proposed by Bainbridge, substituting the prize vessel for the ship's boats that Bainbridge suggested. Captain Decatur of the *Enterprise* was in company with the *Constitution*, both when Preble learned of *Philadelphia's* capture and when the *Mastico* was captured, and volunteered himself to lead the effort.<sup>170</sup> Decatur manned the *Intrepid*, filled it with combustibles, and set out for Tripoli in the company of the brig *Siren*, which shepherded the smaller vessel through the winter storms.<sup>171</sup> Facing danger from both the weather and the enemy, Decatur succeeded famously, torching the *Philadelphia* and escaping the harbor without the loss of a man. While Decatur deserves the credit for carrying out this exploit,

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<sup>167</sup> Tobias Lear to Edward Preble, 23 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 516-7.

<sup>168</sup> William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, 18 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 347.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Cooper, *History of the Navy*, 175.

<sup>171</sup> Edward Preble to Charles Stewart, 31 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 375.

and Bainbridge seems to have had a hand in its planning, there is plenty of praise left for Preble as well. The incident is a prime example of Preble's use of the resources at hand, in this case an unassuming little ketch, to accomplish his goals.

With the *Philadelphia* burned, Preble turned his attention to obtaining for his use some gunboats and bomb vessels. Preble believed that such vessels would be a key in his summer attacks and was confident that Tripoli "may easily be destroyed or taken in the summer with Gun & Mortar Boats."<sup>172</sup> After Cathcart broached the subject in a letter, Preble wrote back requesting "two or three Gun Boats, and two Mortar Boats with Guns, and 10 inch Mortars complete," as well as skilled bombardiers to work the mortars as no one in the American squadron had experience with that weapon.<sup>173</sup> Cathcart wrote to numerous ports around the Mediterranean inquiring into the loan or purchase of these vessels, and even forwarded Preble plans of his own devising to build them if it should prove impossible to obtain them otherwise.<sup>174</sup> Preble had previously viewed several craft of the type he wanted in the harbors of Messina and Palermo, both then ruled from Naples, and he asked Cathcart to make a trip there, even planning a personal visit to that port.<sup>175</sup> The vessels proved harder than suspected to acquire, however, for both governments and merchants feared retaliation from Tripoli or the other Barbary States.<sup>176</sup> Still, Preble preferred buying or leasing to building, and decided to make his firmest push with the Neapolitans.<sup>177</sup>

The Neapolitan government, reasoned Preble, was the best choice because he had observed that nation's vessels at Palermo, and they too were at (nearly constant) war with

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<sup>172</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 17 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 339.

<sup>173</sup> Edward Preble to James Cathcart, 4 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 311.

<sup>174</sup> James Cathcart to Edward Preble, 30 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 372-3.

<sup>175</sup> Edward Preble to James Cathcart 31 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 379.

<sup>176</sup> James Cathcart to Edward Preble, 19 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 435.

<sup>177</sup> Edward Preble to James Cathcart, 19 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 437.

Tripoli. To get the boats, however, the case had to be made to John Acton, Neapolitan prime minister, as the military commanders of the ports lacked the power to strike such a deal on their own.<sup>178</sup> While Preble was busy off Tripoli and with other plans, Cathcart forwarded the American effort, writing to Acton, and arranging a trip to Naples.<sup>179</sup> Preble could afford to attend to other matters first, because while the weather moderated in the spring enough to allow the squadron to resume cruising, gunboats were too frail to be risked until the end of May.<sup>180</sup> As his plans for the gun and mortar boats coalesced, Preble became increasingly convinced that they were the correct implement for ending the war and expected “the Bashaw to sue for Peace as a favour in three days after I reach his Coast.”<sup>181</sup> Fortunately, in applying to Naples, Cathcart and Preble had made the correct choice, and Acton, after conferring with the king of Naples, believed that “if the Commodore could take a trip to Naples, he would be accommodated.”<sup>182</sup> With the blockade tightening and a visit to Tunis, it was 9 May before Preble could to visit Naples.<sup>183</sup> Though it took nearly a week to put his request through proper channels, the Neapolitans finally granted Preble the use of six gunboats, two bomb vessels and all their associated gear “under the Title of a friendly Loan,” to be returned or replaced after the summer sailing season.<sup>184</sup>

Preble, as evidenced above, made the best use of the stormy season of any of the commodores during the Tripolitan War. He alone maintained a blockade, though a weak one, and undertook an offensive operation, the burning of the *Philadelphia*. In the time between cruises, his vessels had a chance to repair damages and prepare themselves for summer.

Additionally, he added to his force the gunboats that each of the previous commodores deemed

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<sup>178</sup> Abraham Gibbs to Edward Preble, 21 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 448.

<sup>179</sup> James Cathcart to John Acton, 5 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 476.

<sup>180</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 11 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 485.

<sup>181</sup> Edward Preble to Robert Livingston, 18 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 499.

<sup>182</sup> John Acton to James Cathcart, 27 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 538.

<sup>183</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 9 May, 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 90.

<sup>184</sup> John Acton to Edward Preble, 13 May, 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 97.

so important. In this operation he was even able to make use of James Cathcart, a man who had proven too abrasive to be much help to either Dale or Morris, though perhaps never meeting face-to-face facilitated this cooperation. While he lost the assistance of Danish Consul Nissen, Preble gained an ally in French Consul Beaussier; likewise, though deprived of Consul Lear's presence, he gained the assistance of Richard O'Brien. As if to re-enact Morris's term, rumbles of discontent arose from Tunis. Additionally, perhaps because of the easy success of the *Intrepid*, Preble developed an overconfidence that characterized his letters in the spring of 1804. Tunis should "not be humoured but beaten," and "Tripoly would soon be brought to any terms we might please to dictate."<sup>185</sup> This overconfidence in his own squadron's abilities may also have induced him to halt any plans he had to cooperate with Hamet, though perhaps he simply did not judge himself possessed of enough force to dispatch a vessel for this purpose. Either way, despite Preble's efforts, he still had much work to do before the gunboats ever fired a shot in anger.

Preble's first task as the weather cleared was to step up the blockade of Tripoli. Preble increased his force off Tripoli, leaving Syracuse in the *Constitution* for that port in March.<sup>186</sup> Even before this, the smaller ships were active off Tripoli, prompting Malta's British government to ask Preble for a special favor. The war with France had cut traditional supply lines to the island, and before Preble's blockade notice the British had paid for a large amount of cattle to be imported from Tripoli, a food source now blocked by Preble's squadron.<sup>187</sup> Preble agreed to let the cattle out provided that the ships entered the port without cargo and left with

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<sup>185</sup> Edward Preble to Robert Livingston, 19 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 504, and Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 3 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 385.

<sup>186</sup> Log of *USS Constitution*, 21 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 510.

<sup>187</sup> W.A. Villetts to Edward Preble, 13 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 328.

only the bullocks.<sup>188</sup> The agent the British contracted with to purchase the bullocks, however, was Gaetano Schembri, the Tripolitan consul in Malta who had given the Americans so much trouble. The first ship to sail with Preble's passport was the brig *St. Cruicifisso*, which *Nautilus* intercepted bound into Tripoli, not in ballast, but rather with a full cargo including "Hemp, Linens, Plank, Building Stone, . . . and 8 Tripoline Passengers."<sup>189</sup> That capture in February was followed quickly by two more in March in similar circumstances, of the merchantmen *Transfer* and *Madona di Catapoliana*, laden with military stores to be sold to Tripoli.<sup>190</sup> Despite a plea from Schembri, the three vessels were adjudicated as fair prizes, and one, *Transfer*, was taken into American service renamed *Scourge*.<sup>191</sup> *Constitution's* First Lieutenant John Dent became *Scourge's* commander, and Preble made acting lieutenants of two of his favorite junior officers, Midshipmen Ralph Izard Jr. and Henry Wadsworth.<sup>192</sup>

Stopping these vessels not only halted commerce with Tripoli, but also added another useful vessel to the American squadron. Though Preble's orders required him to send prize ships home, he instead, as with *Mastico*, had the prizes adjudicated in the Mediterranean, saving the cost in manpower requisite in sending these vessels to America. Later, when the vessels' owners disputed their status as legal prizes, Preble hit on another expedient to reduce the time and manpower necessary to deal with the prizes. One vessel, the *Madona di Catapoliana*, while sailing under Schembri's order, was a registered Russian. The representative of that nation in Naples, when *Madona's* captain relayed a slanted version of his capture, petitioned Preble to release the vessel.<sup>193</sup> Preble returned that the captain had certainly "made many

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<sup>188</sup> Edward Preble to Alexander Ball, 16 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 332.

<sup>189</sup> Edward Preble to Alexander Ball, 24 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 454.

<sup>190</sup> Edward Preble to Gaetano Schembri, 19 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 513.

<sup>191</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 17 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 496.

<sup>192</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 17 Apr. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 35.

<sup>193</sup> P. d'Karpow to Edward Preble 18 May, 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 107.

misrepresentations,” about his capture, which Preble was sure was justified.<sup>194</sup> Though he continued to assert his right of capture, Preble thought “to pay a Compliment to the Russian flag,” by giving the vessel up, and did so.<sup>195</sup> He also relinquished the *St. Cruicifisso*, “the Vessel of little value in Order to prevent litigation and expence.”<sup>196</sup> As summer drew nearer, Preble was less and less willing to see the squadron’s men, money, and time wasted in European prize courts, or the attempt to reach American ones.

Preble’s cruise off Tripoli in March was not simply to establish a firmer blockade either. He fully believed that after a successful attack, the bashaw would negotiate on reasonable terms, and with this in mind he needed to open his negotiations. Preble had already gleaned some useful information on the characters of the main Tripolitan players. After Decatur burned the *Philadelphia* in Tripoli harbor, the bashaw revealed his vengeful side, depriving the prisoners of any sort of comfort.<sup>197</sup> Only the intercession of Minister of Foreign Affairs Sidi Muhammed Dghies could persuade the bashaw to soften their captivity.<sup>198</sup> Not only, reported Bainbridge to Preble, was Dghies the correct man, because of his office, to negotiate with, but he was also the most reasonable high official in Tripoli.<sup>199</sup> On his arrival off Tripoli, Preble contacted the two men who would most influence his negotiations. First, he sent ashore his greeting to French Consul Beaussier, along with Tallyrand’s letter ordering Beaussier to assist with negotiations.<sup>200</sup> Next, he wrote to Dgheis, thanking him for his kindness to the American prisoners, and assuring him of the comfort of the Tripolines who had fallen into American hands.<sup>201</sup> The next day, after reviewing the letter Preble had delivered and making some enquiries, Beaussier visited the

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<sup>194</sup> Edward Preble to P. d’Karpow, 19 May, 1804, in *Naval Documents* IV: 111.

<sup>195</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 5 July 1804, in *Naval Documents* IV: 190.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Nicholas Nissen to Danish Consul Marseilles, 29 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 421.

<sup>198</sup> Sidi Muhammed Dghies to William Bainbridge, 5 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 474.

<sup>199</sup> William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, 26 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 526.

<sup>200</sup> Edward Preble to Bonaventure Beaussier, 27 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 535.

<sup>201</sup> Edward Preble to Sidi Mohamed Dghies, 27 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 535-6.

*Constitution* and later sent a letter to the Commodore outlining the diplomatic situation.

Beaussier advised Preble to release one of his Tripolitan prisoners, allowing word to reach shore that the Americans had treated their prisoners well.<sup>202</sup> The French consul also informed Preble that the bashaw was uninterested in prisoner exchange, would only agree to ransom the prisoners at the same time as negotiating for peace, and even that the bashaw reported himself aware and unafraid of American preparations for war.<sup>203</sup> Finally, Beaussier added his own comments on the situation: “Whatever be the success of your efforts to chastise the regency, your Government will have a great addition to the expence ... and the more damage you cause to be done to the Country, the higher will be their pretentions, be it from Avarice or from obstinacy.”<sup>204</sup>

This letter, because the perspective was so radically unlike Preble’s, certainly came as a shock to the commodore, and poisoned his relationship with his only friendly contact in Tripoli. That Tripoli refused to contemplate a prisoner exchange should not have been a surprise, for each American was worth a handsome ransom, while each Tripoline prisoner was a liability to the Americans who had nowhere to house them and limited funds to feed them. Preble’s belief that the bashaw would release the prisoners before a peace settlement, throwing away Tripoli’s only real advantage in the war, is questionable. The bashaw would only allow a neutral vessel, rather than one of the squadron, to land food, clothing, and other stores for the American prisoners. Despite the fact that Beaussier thought that landing a captured Tripoline would gain this concession, Preble refused to do so. “I am confident,” wrote Preble in his diary, “that the French, English and Swedish Consuls are all in the Bashaw’s Interest. ... We must therefore depend wholly on our own exertions for effecting a peace.”<sup>205</sup> This was Preble’s greatest point

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<sup>202</sup> Bonaventure Beaussier to Edward Preble, 28 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 543.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 543-4.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.

<sup>205</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 28 Mar., 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 545.

of contention with Beaussier. Preble's utter conviction that every ball he lobbed into Tripoli brought him closer to victory and that the Bashaw was a tyrant petty enough to be cowed by any determined assault was irreconcilable with Beaussier's fear that bombardment would prolong the war and increase the price of peace. With his conviction unshaken, Preble sailed northward to deal with Tunis and to gather his forces.

Since Morris's tenure, the bey of Tunis had lodged numerous complaints with the Americans, only one of which, the misdeeds of William Eaton, had Morris resolved. The bey also demanded the gift of a frigate as an increase in the annual stipend the Americans paid, and continued to insist that he deserved reimbursement for Tunisian property on a prize taken during Morris's command.<sup>206</sup> In the spring of 1804, the Tunisian fleet, a far more powerful force than that of Tripoli, began to fit out hastily, with the rumored object of capturing American merchantmen.<sup>207</sup> As Preble himself wrote, the American squadron was "quite inadequate to carry on the Blockade of Tripoli, & watch the coast of ... Tunis."<sup>208</sup> War with Tunis would not only create problems for American merchantmen, but also constitute a danger to the squadron itself. The Tunisians had four small frigates, which in combination would be a match for any of the American vessels.<sup>209</sup> Preble therefore, as he did during the Moroccan trouble, requested a further reinforcement.<sup>210</sup> To keep an eye on the situation, Preble periodically dispatched one of his smaller vessels to Tunis, and one of them, *Enterprise*, had the happy coincidence of arriving there just after a Tripoline cruiser.<sup>211</sup> Though his arrival convinced the Tripolines to sell their ship and return overland to Tripoli, the Tunisian's actions remained threatening.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> George Davis to Edward Preble, 26 Jan. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 359.

<sup>207</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 11 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 485-6.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 14 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 491.

<sup>211</sup> Stephen Decatur to Edward Preble, 15 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 492.

<sup>212</sup> George Davis to Edward Preble, 24 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 522.



Despite his conviction that the Tunisians should “not be humored but beaten,” in Tunis Preble faced the possibility of a war that would ruin his offensive plans and place his squadron on the defensive. Taking the *Siren* with him “to display some forces before Tunis, in order to check their intention of hostilities,” Preble opened communication with the bey.<sup>213</sup> Preble responded to the bey’s demands for payment in recompense for the capture of Tunisian vessels by forwarding the complaints to the United States, claiming that he lacked enough information about the incident which took place during Morris’s command.<sup>214</sup> Additionally, because of his eagerness to be on the attack, and certainly remembering Morris’s horrible experience in Tunis, Preble wrote that he could not come ashore.<sup>215</sup> The bey refused to even read Preble’s offering, instead ordering that Preble settle the matter before he left port and without delay.<sup>216</sup> Preble refused to be detained, reasoning that the bey “must have already resolved on [war], without this frivolous pretext,” and that whether he complied with the bey’s demands or not, the Tunisians would do as they wished.<sup>217</sup> Then, despite a letter from the bey, again insisting that Preble come ashore, the commodore weighed anchor and departed.<sup>218</sup> Preble’s decision, though risky, was sound, for acceding to the bey’s demands, in Morris’s case, brought only more demands, and the payment of a small sum of money would certainly not keep the peace if the bey had already resolved on war. As it turned out, the bey suspended his call for immediate indemnification, extending the deadline to six weeks.<sup>219</sup> Preble, a more reasonable thinker when he was not being

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<sup>213</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 1 Apr. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 1.

<sup>214</sup> Edward Preble to Bey of Tunis, 5 Apr. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 10.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>216</sup> George Davis to Edward Preble, 6 Apr. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 13.

<sup>217</sup> Edward Preble to George Davis, 6 Apr. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 13.

<sup>218</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 7 Apr. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 15.

<sup>219</sup> George Davis to Edward Preble, 9 Apr. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 17.

threatened, later decided that better relations with Tunis were worth the cost of the missing goods and ordered Consul Davis to pay.<sup>220</sup>

Both the meteorological and political climates, nice weather and peace with Tunis, were now right for an attack on Tripoli, but problems persisted. Preble, visiting Messina, source of his borrowed gunboats, found that though the six gunboats were ready, the two mortar vessels would not be serviceable until the end of June.<sup>221</sup> Preble used sailors from the *Enterprise*, then under repair, to transport the gunboats to Syracuse with the help of nearly one hundred hired Neapolitans.<sup>222</sup> Once in Syracuse, manned in part by the crews of *Enterprise* and *Nautilus*, Preble left the gunboats under the command of Stephen Decatur and Richard Somers.<sup>223</sup> There, the crews practiced maneuvers with their new vessels and waited for the mortar boats to be delivered.<sup>224</sup> Leaving most of his smaller vessels off Tripoli, Preble used *Constitution* to supply them while he shuttled back and forth between Tripoli and Tunis.

At Tripoli, little changed, but the bey of Tunis was not long pacified. As with Morris, Preble's acquiescing to one demand redoubled the bey's efforts to gain another. Consul Davis reported that "the Bey, 'tho silent is far from being, in a better humour, than when you left us," and that "his demands, on the Government of the U. States far exceed, any thing anticipated."<sup>225</sup> Especially prevalent was the bey's continued desire for the gift of a ship of war.<sup>226</sup> Unfortunately now that Preble had caved to one of the Bey's requests, his supposition that Tunis would not start a war received corroboration in evidence uncovered by Consul Davis. Tunis was

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<sup>220</sup> Edward Preble to George Davis, 18 Apr. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 37.

<sup>221</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 27 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 123.

<sup>222</sup> Edward Preble to John Broadbent, 28 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 126; Edward Preble to Richard Somers, 28 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 126-7.

<sup>223</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 30 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 130.

<sup>224</sup> Edward Preble to Richard Somers, 3 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 145.

<sup>225</sup> George Davis to Edward Preble, May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 79.

<sup>226</sup> George Davis and Richard O'Brien, *Remarks on the affairs of the US at Tunis*, 29 Apr. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 72-7.

preparing for a defense against a suspected Russian attack, and also apparently on the bad side of the government now in power at Constantinople.<sup>227</sup> Additionally, a mild drought had rendered grain scarce, and food prices were very high in Tunis.<sup>228</sup> Finally, Davis at least believed that Tunis would examine the results of the American attack on Tripoli before acting, and wrote Preble that, “on your success there; be assured Sir depends our future respectability here.”<sup>229</sup> And, though it was the opinion of the American consul rather than of the bey himself, Preble’s frequent visits to Tunis also helped to keep that regency from declaring war. At the least, Consul Davis was able to use Preble’s visits to dissemble to the bey that America had “the full means in those Seas, of checking and punishing, any hostile measures.”<sup>230</sup>

As relationships with Tunis appeared to stabilize, Preble’s inability to work with Beaussier rendered the situation in Tripoli even worse. The commodore was far from alone in his classification of the other consuls at Tripoli as deceitful. Consul Lear noted that “the present State of things makes it politic for other nations that we should be at war with Tripoly,” because once the Americans made peace, the bashaw would move on to a different victim.<sup>231</sup> Bainbridge, too, though acknowledging France’s influence in Tripoli, believed that it would be best coming “direct from France and not through their consul.”<sup>232</sup> Not trusting Beaussier, Preble decided to use Richard O’Brien in his next effort to sound out the bashaw.<sup>233</sup> Preble, as a final attempt to remove the prisoners before his offensive, allowed O’Brien to offer \$40,000 for their release, sending no word of negotiating for peace at the same time.<sup>234</sup> This offer was so low as to be perhaps naive if we are to believe that Preble wished it to be accepted at all; indeed, at the

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<sup>227</sup> George Davis to Secretary of State, 11 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 94.

<sup>228</sup> George Davis to Tobias Lear, 22 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 215.

<sup>229</sup> George Davis to Edward Preble, 12 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 96.

<sup>230</sup> George Davis to Tobias Lear, 22 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 215.

<sup>231</sup> Tobias Lear to Edward Preble, 8 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 164.

<sup>232</sup> William Bainbridge to Tobias Lear, 30 Apr. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 76.

<sup>233</sup> Edward Preble to Sidi Dghies, 12 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 179.

<sup>234</sup> Edward Preble to Richard O’Brien, 13 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 183.

commencement of the war Consul Cathcart had offered the same sum just to suspend hostilities for ten months, and Consul Lear had authorized Preble to pay a much larger sum for the prisoners.<sup>235</sup> What is worse, after an absence of nearly two months, Preble did not attempt to gain information from Beaussier or anyone in Tripoli, sending O'Brien straight into negotiations without meeting the French consul.<sup>236</sup> And while Bainbridge agreed that Beuassier was not on the American side, he, in an earlier letter, outlined a negotiating strategy that corresponded with Beaussier's suggestions. Namely, that the negotiator should not rush ashore uninformed, but "remain on shore, and take them [the Tripolines] when they appear in best humour," negotiating through the foreign minister.<sup>237</sup> Indeed, he even agreed that to effect peace, "the United States must *pay* or attack him by land," rather than any naval bombardment, even condescending to grease a few palms to get the deal done.<sup>238</sup> Preble, happy to agree to Bainbridge's assessments of Beaussier as far as they agreed with his own thoughts, was just as happy to discard the advice of the American closest to Tripolitan affairs.

Indeed Preble, not content merely bypassing Beaussier, wrote a particularly nasty letter to the French consul. Preble promised to forward their correspondence to Paris where, he believed, "the First Consul [Napoleon] expected his mediation would have had more weight with the Bashaw of Tripoly than it appears to have had."<sup>239</sup> Beaussier, for his part, replied that Preble, by making such an insignificant and unrealistic offer as \$40,000, expecting prisoners to be exchanged, and expecting the peace and ransom to be negotiated separately, was not only expecting more than even France could assist with, but insulting France, who had the "right to

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<sup>235</sup> Bonaventure Beaussier to Edward Preble, 13 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 184.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> William Bainbridge to George Davis, 15 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 195.

<sup>238</sup> William Bainbridge to Tobias Lear, 30 Apr. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 76.

<sup>239</sup> Edward Preble to Bonaventure Beaussier, 12 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 180.

expect to be seconded by the two Parties,” Tripoli and the United States, involved.<sup>240</sup> As soon as he learned that the bashaw had rejected O’Brien’s offer, Preble immediately set sail for Tunis, using *Constitution’s* stores to resupply his smaller vessels, allowing them to maintain the blockade.<sup>241</sup> Preble sailed quickly enough that he did not receive Beaussier’s reply, giving him occasion to write another nasty note to the consul when next he visited the port. Believing that Beaussier failed to meet with O’Brien on purpose, Preble wrote that Beaussier “would not give yourself any concern in our Affairs at Tripoly,” not realizing that the bashaw had prevented just such a meeting and it was only Preble’s hasty departure that prevented him from receiving Beaussier’s note explaining the situation.<sup>242</sup> Preble also carried out his threatened tattling and forwarded his correspondence with Beaussier to the American minister in Paris.<sup>243</sup> Even if correct in his estimation that Beaussier was playing a double game, Preble was unwise to distance himself from anyone who could facilitate talks with the bashaw. Unwilling to place trust in any opinion but his own, Preble resolved to try it his own way, making “a general attack by Cannonading & Bombarding the town” and remained confident “that we shall soon have Peace on conditions that we may not blush to acknowledge.”<sup>244</sup>

Preble returned to Messina, collected the bomb vessels, rendezvoused with the gunboats, and prepared for the attack. The bomb-vessels were readied for service on 5 July, a date which Preble correctly calculated would leave only about eight weeks before the weather turned too heavy for the small craft.<sup>245</sup> Wanting to make the most of the good weather season, Preble hit on a method to keep his ships on station even longer. He sailed from Syracuse accompanied by a

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<sup>240</sup> Bonaventure Beaussier to Edward Preble, 13 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 184.

<sup>241</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy 14 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 187.

<sup>242</sup> Edward Preble to Bonaventure Beaussier, 26 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 227.

<sup>243</sup> Edward Preble to Robert Livingston, 29 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 237.

<sup>244</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 14 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 188.

<sup>245</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 5 July 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 189.

store ship that would ferry supplies from Malta or Syracuse to the squadron.<sup>246</sup> The first such vessel was the hired *St. Guiseppe*, laden with water and stores, under command of one of the squadron's midshipmen.<sup>247</sup> Though he had earlier used Syracuse, Malta was far closer to Tripoli, and Preble relied on William Higgins, the navy agent he appointed there, to hire further ships, especially to carry fresh water.<sup>248</sup> Water, the squadron's greatest need, was hard to obtain. Casks had to be begged or borrowed, sometimes from merchants, but more often from the British military at Malta, and the squadron nearly ran dry by mid-August.<sup>249</sup> Preble even pressed the tiny ketch *Intrepid*, used in the winter to burn the *Philadelphia*, into service to carry water, and on reduced rations the squadron was able to scrape by.<sup>250</sup> While the British navy was expert at supplying large squadrons on blockade, the Americans had little to no previous experience. Despite the close call, Preble maintained his entire squadron, plus the extra hands in the gunboats which could carry almost no supplies, in front of an enemy port for two full months. This feat is yet another demonstration that Preble's preparedness in extra-military functions created the opportunity for traditional military success.

Though the season was right, the weather remained unfavorable, and the gunboats struggled accordingly. The small craft were only able to make the journey to Tripoli under tow, and the heavy seas delayed their arrival until the 25 July.<sup>251</sup> To undertake a successful attack, Preble needed a favorable combination of environmental conditions. The current could not be too fast, because the gunboats were poor sailors and heavy to row, and neither could they stand heavy seas, during which they became useless as gun platforms. The wind could not be directly

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<sup>246</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 14 July 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 270.

<sup>247</sup> Edward Preble to John M. Haswell, 27 July 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 314.

<sup>248</sup> Edward Preble to William Higgins, 2 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 332.

<sup>249</sup> Edward Preble to William Higgins, 15 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 418.

<sup>250</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 20 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 438.

<sup>251</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, 28 July 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 293.

off-shore, or the squadron would be unable to get on station, nor could it be directly on-shore, for an on-shore wind would drive any damaged American vessel toward the rocky shore and the Tripolitan cannon. Only on 1 August, did the winds and waves subside enough to make an attack practicable, and two days later the squadron stood inshore for Tripoli to make the first of five general assaults.<sup>252</sup>

The relative success of each of these attacks greatly influenced the negotiating practices that Preble employed. Each assault's success can be measured by the favorable influence it had the negotiations that occurred simultaneously. Even before the attacks began, Preble again initiated negotiations. Though the bashaw refused his offer of \$40,000, Preble asked captured Captain Bainbridge to keep the offer on the table.<sup>253</sup> The Tripolines refused to negotiate through prisoners, and even if they had, the offer was still far below their expectations. Preble's hopes for this small ransom were "too extravagant," believed Beaussier, "to be listened to unless you put yourself in a situation to distress very sensibly this town."<sup>254</sup> This action on Preble's part, allowing a prisoner to attempt a negotiation rather than Beaussier certainly bred even more distrust between the two when the Frenchman found out.<sup>255</sup>

Preble launched his first general attack on 3 August. As the two mortar boats began to lob shells into the town, the six American gunboats engaged nineteen similar Tripolitan craft. The American gunboats closed and boarded the enemy, capturing three, and the brigs and schooners covered them as they retreated with their prizes, while the *Constitution* blazed away from close range at the forts on shore.<sup>256</sup> This action was a considerable success for the Americans, who damaged many of the gunboats they failed to capture, and at least a few of the

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<sup>252</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 20 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents IV*: 294-5.

<sup>253</sup> Bonaventure Beaussier to Edward Preble, 6 July 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 251.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> McKee, *Edward Preble*, 268.

<sup>256</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 20 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents IV*: 295-8.

bombshells found their mark within the walls. As the squadron buried their dead, Preble thought the moment opportune to reopen negotiations, sending letters, along with the most badly wounded of the Tripoline prisoners, into town the following day via a French privateer that happened to be visiting.<sup>257</sup> Beaussier was surprised at the “Efficacious means that you [Preble] have adopted,” and expected that they also had an impact on the bashaw and “will certainly hasten a cessation of hostilities.”<sup>258</sup>

Despite his brilliance in carrying out this first attack, Preble’s attempt at negotiation afterwards was ill considered. Though Preble sent the wounded prisoners on shore that they “may be soothed by the presence of their friends, and by them furnished with fresh provisions,” his letter also included the suggestion that Tripoli release an equal number of Americans.<sup>259</sup> Though Preble probably did have magnanimous intentions, the gesture was misunderstood. The Tripolines believed either that Preble cared too little for the prisoners to bother treating them, or was callously using injured men as bargaining chips in forcing a prisoner exchange.<sup>260</sup> Preble had assembled his fleet, attacked to the utmost of its ability, and promptly checked to see if the bashaw would accept \$40,000. This provided a demonstration to the enemy that Preble had already done his worst. Preble, in the eyes of his biographer and Beaussier, should have been “reinforcing the shock of 3 August with attack after attack until the Pasha [bashaw] himself asked for a parley.”<sup>261</sup> The French privateer left the harbor two days later with the news that, while the bashaw “ardently desired to be at peace,” he could not accept terms that were so

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<sup>257</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 5 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 365.

<sup>258</sup> Bonaventure Beaussier to Edward Preble, 6 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 369.

<sup>259</sup> Edward Preble to Sidi Dghies, 4 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 363.

<sup>260</sup> Bonaventure Beaussier to Edward Preble, 6 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 369.

<sup>261</sup> McKee, *Edward Preble*, 270-271.



humiliating.<sup>262</sup> Beaussier urged Preble to make a more generous offer, but after waiting several days for better weather, Preble went back on the offensive.

On 7 August, the mortar and gunboats went into action once more. This time, they attacked the opposite side of the city from the harbor, the gunboats engaging the more limited batteries in the area to protect the mortar boats which shelled the town itself.<sup>263</sup> Though the bombardment damaged the Tripoline defenses and wrecked part of the town, the Americans lost one of their captured gunboats when it exploded spectacularly, killing half the crew.<sup>264</sup> Though the Tripoline loss certainly was greater than the American, some small consolation could be taken by those on shore, and the idea that they had won some sort of victory was surely compounded when Preble sent onshore a letter doubling his earlier offer of ransom.<sup>265</sup> Though Preble continued to couch his offers in the language of an ultimatum, his offers of ransom continued to rise. While Preble's military skill allowed him to attack and damage the town from the sea more effectively than Bainbridge, Beaussier, or the bashaw though possible, his negotiation seemed to indicate weakness. By doubling his ransom offer, Preble appeared to be beginning to come around to Tripoli's demands even as his fleet continued their attacks. Despite Preble's higher offer, Dghies, who was consulted by Beaussier, considered it to be "still inconsiderable" and that the bashaw still wanted "two or three hundred thousand dollars."<sup>266</sup> But, Dghies told Beaussier, with the minister's influence combined with that of France, an offer of \$150,000 may be accepted, despite the bashaw's determination to fight on.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Bonaventure Beaussier to Edward Preble, 6 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 369.

<sup>263</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 20 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents IV*: 298-300.

<sup>264</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 8 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 376.

<sup>265</sup> Edward Preble to Bonaventure Beaussier, 9 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 389.

<sup>266</sup> Bonaventure Beaussier to Edward Preble, 10 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 393.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

Preble certainly did not realize the potential effect of his weakening stance on the ransom; his mind instead was focused elsewhere, not only on his attacks, but on reinforcements due from the United States. More than Preble's repeated reinforcement requests, the news of the *Philadelphia's* capture had galvanized Jefferson into sending out a more powerful force.<sup>268</sup> Not yet aware of *Philadelphia's* destruction, this squadron consisted of four large frigates, plus the *John Adams*, equipped as a store-ship without most of its armament.<sup>269</sup> As Preble's squadron retired from its 7 August attack, the *John Adams* appeared on the horizon, with much needed supplies and men for the squadron, and with upsetting news for Commodore Preble.<sup>270</sup> With four ships that each needed captains, there were too few captains junior to Preble to fill each position. In fact, two vessels of the new squadron sailed under captains senior to Preble: Samuel Barron and John Rodgers.<sup>271</sup> The sluggish nature of communication between the Mediterranean and United States meant that Secretary Smith was unaware of *Philadelphia's* burning until 22 May, after he had already decided to replace Preble, rather than merely augment his squadron.<sup>272</sup> The *John Adams* informed Preble that these four vessels were not far behind, and thus of course, he would not be in command much longer.

Preble renewed both his attacks and his offers for peace, using the impending reinforcements as a further threat to the bashaw. "I expect them at every moment," wrote Preble to Beaussier, "such a force ... will enable us to destroy all the Sea Port Towns in Tripoly – After their arrival it will not be in my power to offer a single dollar."<sup>273</sup> That Preble's previous ultimatums had gone for little, and his offers for ransom continued to climb, blunted the force of

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<sup>268</sup> Thomas Jefferson, Communication to Congress, 20 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents* III:506-7.

<sup>269</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 7 May 1804, in *Naval Documents* IV: 88.

<sup>270</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 8 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents* IV: 376.

<sup>271</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 22 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents* IV: 115.

<sup>272</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 22 May, 1804, in *Naval Documents* III: 427.

<sup>273</sup> Edward Preble to Bonaventure Beaussier, 9 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents* IV: 389.

this new threat. Preble's desire for personal glory must have been a strong motivation to push for a peace before the reinforcements arrived.<sup>274</sup> Certainly the squadron's other officers were anxious that Preble should have that success for himself.<sup>275</sup> Whatever compulsion Preble felt to finish the deal, he still refused to raise his offer to the \$150,000 that Dghies wanted. Instead, though he believed "that we shall not be able to obtain them [the prisoners] for a less sum," he approved Beaussier to offer \$100,000, believing Dghies's offer might not please the American government.<sup>276</sup> Willing to offer some amount of money, and authorized to offer more than was requested, it is unclear why Preble believed that \$150,000 would be so much more offensive to his government than the \$100,000 he was willing to pay. Preble continued to use thinly veiled mistruths in his attempt to gain a peace. "On the arrival of our whole force," Preble wrote, "one of our frigates is ordered by the president of the United States to proceed to Alexandria to assist the Bashaw's brother."<sup>277</sup> Not only was this merely a guess on Preble's part, it was also, essentially, an admission of his realization that he had neglected the most effective way of defeating the bashaw, and that the force he had at his current disposal was inadequate for the job. As Preble waited for his answer, the attacks continued.

The weather failed to cooperate, and contrary winds and currents convinced Preble to abort several attempts to attack. As night fell on 24 August, however, the winds moderated and the squadron towed the gunboats and bomb vessels into position for a night bombardment.<sup>278</sup> The bomb vessels lobbed shells toward the town from two in the morning until daylight.<sup>279</sup> Four days later, the wind again came fair and the squadron made another attack, this time without the

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<sup>274</sup> Diary of John Darby, *USS John Adams*, 8 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 388.

<sup>275</sup> Diary of John Darby, *USS John Adams*, 9 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 391.

<sup>276</sup> Diary of Edward Preble, *USS Constitution*, 10 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 384.

<sup>277</sup> Edward Preble to Bonaventure Beaussier, 11 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 398.

<sup>278</sup> Journal of F. Cornelius deKraft, 24 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 456.

<sup>279</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 20 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents IV*: 302.

bomb vessels, which had begun leaking after seeing so much heavy use.<sup>280</sup> Again at night, this attack saw the gunboats close with the forts and, with *Constitution*, batter them considerably.<sup>281</sup>

The loss of the bomb vessels as offensive weapons was a significant loss to the squadron in battle, and Preble also suffered a loss in the area of negotiation. Preble allowed Richard O'Brien, anxious to get back to his family, to return to Malta.<sup>282</sup> Perhaps the absence of O'Brien's council persuaded Preble that he would now be able to obtain a prisoner exchange for the forty-two Tripolines he had earlier captured. Though he represented his motivations as "founded in reason and humanity," his squadron would clearly benefit from such an exchange.<sup>283</sup> Preble would no longer have to feed his prisoners and his thinly manned ships would gain the service of the released American seamen. In reply to Preble's letters, Beaussier sent notice that not only was the exchange refused, but the general situation was much less favorable for negotiations. Not one of the bombs from the first night attack had even entered the town, and as for the battering of the gunboats, "the Bashaw seems to care little about the injury done to the Houses ... which is easily repaired."<sup>284</sup> Only the exploding bombs, which through fire could destroy the town, actually fazed the bashaw, while Preble's threats and "Menaces have no other effect than to inflame the mind of the prince."<sup>285</sup> Considering the inconsequential effect of these two attacks, Preble's decision to negotiate once again appeared as weakness in the eyes of the Tripolines, and the bashaw upped his demands to \$400,000.<sup>286</sup> Preble, having failed to tender a lower payment after his successful attacks, could not now achieve peace without a much more considerable sum.

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<sup>280</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 20 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents IV*: 302.

<sup>281</sup> Log of *USS Constitution*, 28 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 472.

<sup>282</sup> Edward Preble to Bonaventure Beaussier, 29 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 481.

<sup>283</sup> Edward Preble to Sidi Dghies, 29, Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 481.

<sup>284</sup> Bonaventure Beaussier to Edward Preble, 29 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 481-2.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.* 482.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

Preble's only recourse was to continue his attacks, but time worked against him, and in more than one way. The rest of the reinforcements had sailed soon after the *John Adams*, and would surely arrive soon. Additionally, as September arrived, each day brought the threat of heavy weather that would force the withdrawal of the unseaworthy gunboats. As the squadron waited for favorable winds, the damaged bomb vessels were repaired in time to take part in another general attack on 3 September.<sup>287</sup> The American gunboats advanced, as in the very first attack, but the Tripolines chose to back water into the harbor rather than fight hand to hand.<sup>288</sup> As he should have from the beginning of his attacks, Preble, rather than sending in an offer after a successful attack, sought to follow it with another, this time with a new tactic that he hoped would shock the bashaw into peace. The Americans readied the well-used ketch *Intrepid* for a final daring attack; loaded with gun-powder and the remaining shells from the bomb vessels, *Intrepid* would become a fire ship, rigged to blow up in the harbor amongst Tripoli's fleet.<sup>289</sup> The *Intrepid* never reached its destination, however, and exploded at the entrance to the harbor before the crew was able to abandon the ship.<sup>290</sup> The weather then interceded to end Preble's attacks, with the wind and waves growing too dangerous for the gunboats by the middle of September.<sup>291</sup> Gradually, Preble disarmed the gunboats, making them more seaworthy, and had them towed to Syracuse, where they were returned to the Neapolitans.<sup>292</sup> While the weather had won the race, the next squadron was close at hand, arriving in Malta on 6 September.<sup>293</sup>

In deference to Preble, his new orders allowed him to choose between staying in the Mediterranean in command of a single ship or returning home. Perhaps, speculates his

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<sup>287</sup> Log of *USS Constitution*, 3 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 503.

<sup>288</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 20 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 304-5.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>290</sup> Log of *USS Constitution*, 4 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 506.

<sup>291</sup> Richard O'Brien to John Gavino, 5 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 517.

<sup>292</sup> Edward Preble to Stephen Decatur, 6 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 522.

<sup>293</sup> Journal of William Eaton, 6 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 520.

biographer, he may have conceded to serve as second in command to Barron, but to also find himself under Rodgers, a man he had been barely able to work with for a month off Morocco, made it certain he would return home.<sup>294</sup> Preble maintained the blockade with *Constitution* and two of the smaller vessels until Commodore Barron arrived, when he handed over both command and all the information he had before leaving for home in the *John Adams*.<sup>295</sup> While this conference is largely a subject for the next chapter, it should be noted that Preble did at least two good turns for Commodore Barron. He had learned the limits of bombardment and encouraged Barron to use Hamet to force a peace, and he agreed to assist in leasing the gunboats and bomb vessels again for the next summer's campaign.<sup>296</sup> Transcending his own disappointment at his supersession and inability to force a peace, Preble should be commended for the assistance he rendered to Barron.

Preble, on arriving home, justly received the accolades of a nation that regarded him as a naval hero. When Thomas Jefferson received Preble's account of the attacks on Tripoli, he relayed it to Congress, writing, "The energy and judgement displayed by this excellent officer, through the whole course of the service lately confided to him ... cannot fail to give high satisfaction to Congress."<sup>297</sup> Those accolades came not just from America, but from those he impressed in his time in the Mediterranean. Alexander John Ball, governor of Malta, regretted "that an officer whose Talents and professional abilities have been justly appreciated," should be replaced.<sup>298</sup> Neither are his admirers confined to Preble's own time, for his daring attacks continue to gain him the praise of historians. "Truly," wrote one, "the U.S navy under Preble ...

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<sup>294</sup> McKee, *Edward Preble*, 308.

<sup>295</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 20 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 307.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>297</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Naval Operations off Tripoli*, Communicated to Congress, 20 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents IV*: 293.

<sup>298</sup> Alexander Ball to Edward Preble, 30 Aug. 1803, in *Naval Documents IV*: 488.

had a glorious beginning.”<sup>299</sup> Though Preble died before the War of 1812, nearly all of the American commanders that gained fame and victory in that war were “Preble’s Boys,” men who had served under and learned from him. Indeed, Preble “stamped his wing of the service with a pattern of conduct that became of infinite benefit to the whole.”<sup>300</sup>

But, in concentrating on the military actions that Preble undertook, historians have overlooked both Preble’s greatest successes and failures as a commodore. Preble’s feats in his extra-military roles were numerous. At the end of his account of his actions, Preble took great “satisfaction to observe that we have neither had a duel nor a court martial in the squadron since we left the United States,” a considerable accomplishment, as demonstrated by the infighting of the subordinate officers of Morris’s squadron.<sup>301</sup> This was not to say there were no problems. Desertion was enough of a problem that it forced Preble to change his desired anchorage from Malta to Syracuse. Additionally, Preble exchanged numerous midshipmen that he found unworthy for those of the previous squadron during the cooperation off Morocco. A few additional junior officers resigned their commissions while in the Mediterranean, a testament to Preble’s hard discipline of both officers and crew. Though hard, there was no question that Preble melded his crews into excellent fighters, most of whom became fiercely loyal.

Preble, more than either of his predecessors, adapted to the situation at hand. Off Morocco, Preble combined vessels of two different squadrons, under two different commands, to affect a lasting peace, while Morris squandered a similar opportunity. When the Tripolines took *Philadelphia*, Preble still created a plan to mount effective attacks. This adaptability combined with his decisiveness to create Preble’s greatest strength: maximizing his force at a specific time and place to achieve his goal. He had the ability to exploit every resource to the fullest, making

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<sup>299</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 333.

<sup>300</sup> Pratt, *Preble’s Boys*, 403.

<sup>301</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 20 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents IV*: 308.

the most of what he had. The clearest example of this was the tiny *Intrepid*. Preble first used it to burn the *Philadelphia* and it ended its life as a fire ship, but in between, it served as a message carrier, hospital, prison, and supply ship. These actions were not simply makeshift expedients, however. Preble's questions about hiring craft in the Mediterranean before he even left the United States foreshadowed the disguise that *Intrepid* would adopt. That he began negotiations for the gunboats well before they were needed, at the same time repairing and refitting his other vessels, proves that it was no accident that his squadron remained concentrated to exert as much force as possible in each attack. Clearly, Preble's successful attacks were dependent on this planning.

Preble had other tasks to undertake to ensure his force operated at full efficiency. Dale could not maintain his squadron off Tripoli for any length of time, while Morris failed even to establish a base of supply east of Gibraltar. Preble, however, despite the increased scarcity of supplies because of the Napoleonic Wars, established an effective forward base of supply and even kept his entire squadron in supply off Tripoli for the two months when it could do the most good. These extra-military exploits allowed Preble to mount effective attacks in which his military performance was also exemplary. That Preble was superior to any of the other commanders in military skill is uncertain, for no one else even attempted a bombardment. The fact that engaged in extensive offensive operations is a testament to his skills in his duties outside of combat.

Preble brought the same confident aggressiveness and decisiveness to all of his functions as a commodore, and these traits generally served him well. The very traits, however, that helped Preble to be so effective in some functions, hampered him in others. Preble believed so strongly in the power of naval force that it blinded him to other actions that could achieve his goal.



Through the winter of 1803-4, Preble worked on numerous ideas to bring peace with Tripoli. When his favorite, using gunboats and bombards to batter Tripoli, came to fruition, he concentrated all his resources on that one and dropped any plan to assist Hamet in a landward assault. These actions were essential to Preble achieving the success he did with the gunboats. He concentrated his energies and force behind one idea, but he chose incorrectly. Here, Preble's confidence in himself and in naval force led him to believe that bombardment was the answer, and this conclusion was especially pleasing to him because he could undertake and oversee the operations himself. Without his confidence and single-minded determination, his attacks would have been sure failures, if they would have occurred at all, but those same traits were equally as responsible for his failure to reason out the most effective way of threatening Tripoli, despite both Beaussier and Bainbridge's opinions to the contrary.

This single mindedness also led Preble to pick and choose the orders he wished to follow. Preble was specifically authorized to purchase or borrow vessels while he was in the Mediterranean, but not to hire crews. Preble, short of manpower, borrowed not only the gunboats from the Neapolitans, but a portion of their crews as well, incorporating them into the crews of his vessels and Americans into the gunboat crews. Preble's orders concerning prizes were equally as clear and equally disobeyed. Ordered to send prizes to American courts to be adjudicated, Preble returned one to Morocco, two to their merchant owners, brought *Transfer* into service as *Scourge*, and made similar use of the *Mastico/Intrepid*. While he did make one abortive attempt to send one of the vessels across the Atlantic, it proved more expedient to return the vessel to its owner rather than spending time and money on litigation or time and manpower sailing the vessel to the United States. Though Lear authorized him to negotiate with Tripoli, this certainly exceeded Preble's original orders. Preble's single-mindedness, that trait which

allowed his attacks to be successful, also justified him, in his own mind, to ignore parts of his orders to accomplish his own goals. In fact, Preble seems justified in doing so, for his victories far outweighed any irregularities in the eyes of the government, and he received nothing but praise.

It was Preble's self-confidence and single-mindedness, again, that convinced him that Beaussier was working for his own self-interest or in league with the bashaw. While both Bainbridge and Lear seemed to confirm that Beaussier had other motives, diplomats that had been longer in the Mediterranean had different views. Robert Livingston, American minister in Paris, would certainly not have enlisted French aid if he thought that their consul would be of no service. The American consul in Leghorn, Thomas Appleton, believed Beaussier to be "a person of much discernment and solid understanding," even noting that Beaussier, during the last outbreak of hostilities between England and France, had been delivered by the bashaw as a prisoner to an English admiral.<sup>302</sup> Indeed, he wrote to Livingston, "it requires a singular confusion of ideas to imagine that Mr. Beaussier should ... prefer the interests of the Bey[Bashaw] to the positive instruction of his Sovereign."<sup>303</sup> Various historians have taken each side on the question of Beaussier's motivations, but it is certain that even if he was not the best choice for a negotiator, he was the only choice available. Beaussier, a diplomat tasked by his government to help ransom the prisoners and restore peace between the United States and Tripoli, attempted to do just that. Other powers, including France, paid Tripoli handsomely, and even with all the skill in the world it seems impossible that he could be expected to force the bashaw to accept only a paltry ransom. Preble, so certain of his ability to force a peace with bombardment, was far too willing to discard Beaussier's cautions that a bombardment would not

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<sup>302</sup> Thomas Appleton to Robert Livingston, 23 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 450.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

be enough. As it turned out, Preble achieved far more with bombardment than Beaussier ever thought possible, but eventually even Preble realized that the force at his disposal was inadequate to reduce the ransom below \$150,000.

In addition, Preble's attempts at negotiation were similarly hampered by his "good" qualities. "The same qualities" notes Preble's biographer McKee, "that made him a strong executive and field commander, handicapped him in his duties as a diplomatist."<sup>304</sup> He was so confident that one great attack would gain victory, that even before he attacked, he sent in an offer for a paid peace, believing that surely those ashore would share his views. After each attack, confident of the destruction he had wrought, Preble sent in new offers, sure that the bashaw would want peace. These tactics of negotiation made Preble appear to be anxious for peace, to be negotiating from a position of weakness, although the wording of Preble's offers made it clear that the commodore believed himself to be in the driver's seat. His forceful language, in turn, came across as bluster. The squadron's attacks would have caused much more alarm if they had been unaccompanied by any sort of offer, making Preble appear to have the resolve to knock the whole city apart before he settled for a dishonorable peace. How ironic, then, that Preble in fact did possess the resolve to do anything to garner a peace with little or no price, and that this determination led him to sabotage his own efforts. When the bashaw's ransom dropped to \$150,000, Preble finally gave extended thought to the consequence of his haggling. This price was well below the maximum established by Lear and, confronted with an offer which he was empowered to accept, Preble realized that different tactics could have forced this number even lower. From that point on, Preble's attacks came unexpectedly, sometimes at night, sometimes during the day, testing and battering each point of Tripoli's defenses, and without any overtures of peace from the Americans. Faced with a reasonable offer, Preble's

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<sup>304</sup> McKee, *Edward Preble*, 297.

desire to make an honorable peace for his nation outweighed his personal desire for recognition as the commander who subdued Tripoli. When he realized he had not chosen the most effective way to reduce the Bashaw's demands, Preble refused to raise his offers and made sure that Commodore Barron's squadron would have access to the most effective means possible.

It is to Preble's great credit that he came to realize his earlier mistakes. Despite criticizing Beaussier earlier, Preble later came to follow his advice in attacking without negotiation. Despite realizing near the end that either the weather or reinforcements would keep him from the glory of forcing Tripoli to peace, he did not compromise his ideals, but changed his tactics to the next squadron's benefit. Despite dropping the plan to cooperate with Hamet, when he grasped its full merit Preble eventually advocated the use of that avenue to enforce a peace. For these reasons, as much as for his positive qualities, despite his initial failures off Tripoli, Edward Preble deserved every word of credit he garnered during the Barbary Wars and every word he continues to earn. This final positive quality, to learn from his own mistakes, makes it doubly a shame that he was superseded. There can be little doubt that the experience Preble gained during his first summer off Tripoli would have led him to sure victory in his second, and having learned a bit of negotiation, perhaps have secured a peace without price.

## CHAPTER 4: SAMUEL BARRON

While Preble busied himself in heating up the Tripolitan War, Jefferson's Federalist adversaries followed suit in the election fight of 1804. Federalists used each set-back in the war to advance their position. When news of the largest set-back of all, the capture of the *Philadelphia* and its crew, reached the United States, the Federalist outcry was strong enough that Jefferson had to counter the event with bold action.<sup>1</sup> He decided to send to the Mediterranean an overwhelming force to end the war on favorable terms. The secretary of the navy ordered into commission four frigates: the *President*, *Congress*, *Constellation*, and *Essex*.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the rationale was more than purely political. By sending a larger force and hopefully achieving military success, the Americans could command a cheaper price for the ransom of the *Philadelphia*'s crew, or perhaps no price at all. Success against Tripoli could also influence the aggressiveness of the other Barbary Powers, which would certainly view a large ransom to Tripoli as an invitation to attack American vessels themselves. The new squadron, consisting of those four frigates and all of the small ships of Preble's squadron, was to combine so much force "as to leave no doubt of our compelling the existing Enemy to submit to our own terms, and of effectually checking any hostile dispositions ... by any of the other Barbary Powers."<sup>3</sup>

Though word of the Preble's daring attacks did not reach the United States until the fourth squadron had sailed, his previous accomplishments already made him the most successful commander to date: concluding the Moroccan crisis, burning the *Philadelphia*, averting war with Tunis, and blockading Tripoli. This fact clouded the administration's decision to send more

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 141.

<sup>2</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 7 May 1804, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers, 1785-1801*, U.S. Office of Naval Records and Library (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 88.

<sup>3</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 22 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 114.

frigates. Both naval tradition and Congressional regulations dictated that frigates be commanded by full captains.<sup>4</sup> There were only three captains on the navy list junior to Preble, and one, Bainbridge, was in a Tripolitan prison.<sup>5</sup> Thus, of necessity, Preble was superseded, despite the reluctance of Secretary of the Navy Smith to oust an effective commander.

Captains, it seems, were not nearly as scarce in 1804 as they had been the previous two years, for not only were captains found for the four vessels, but the commodore, Samuel Barron, was permitted to have a flag captain to serve under him on the vessel of his choice, the *President*--strongest and fastest of the four.<sup>6</sup>

Samuel Barron and his brother James, in command of the *Essex* for this cruise, were products of a nautical family. Their father was the commander of the Virginia State Navy during the Revolution.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the fact that Barron hailed from Jefferson's home state, and was perhaps the most prominent Southerner in the navy, made him a more appealing pick to be the next commodore. Second in seniority of the squadron's officers was John Rodgers, perhaps the only captain to retain respectability from Morris's squadron, and certainly experienced in dealing with the Barbary States. The other captains were Hugh Campbell, another veteran of Morris's squadron, and George Cox, serving under the commodore on the *President*.<sup>8</sup> These four ships, rather than being replacements for Preble's vessels, were additions, and the *Constitution* and the brigs and schooners would stay in the Mediterranean. In addition, Barron received the secretary of the navy's authorization to obtain as many gunboats as Barron wanted.<sup>9</sup> The heavy frigates,

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<sup>4</sup> Glenn Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder: The Barbary Wars and the Birth of the U.S. Navy* (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1963), 335.

<sup>5</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 22 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 115.

<sup>6</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 335.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 22 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 115.

<sup>9</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Samuel Barron, 4 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 148.

the versatile brigs and schooners, and the potential to add gunboats made Barron's command the largest, most powerful, and most capable fleet dispatched from the United States.

Barron received a part of his instructions, his authorization to capture or destroy Tripoline property, direct from President Jefferson.<sup>10</sup> In light of Morocco's abortive war and Tunis's threats, Barron also received authorization "to proceed against any other of the Barbary Powers which may commit hostilities against the United States, in the same manner, and to the same extent."<sup>11</sup> The bulk of his orders, however, as before, came from Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith. By this time, Smith had issued orders to underachieving Morris and zealous Preble, and his orders reflected this, defining for Barron the upper and lower levels of acceptable conduct. Barron's instruction in dealing with neutral nations provides a good example. Smith repeated his warning that the government would "scrupulously and without Indulgence examine that conduct which shall bring us into Collision with any other power."<sup>12</sup> Smith also, because he worried about the legality of Preble's blockade, warned Barron that only a port which was blockaded in a way "to create an evident danger of entering it," constituted a legal blockade under international law.<sup>13</sup> Vessels attempting to enter a less than scrupulously blockaded port were not valid prizes. The strongest measure the squadron could take was to turn them away. As previously noted, however, Jefferson himself made sure that Barron had no misgivings about his power to respond to the actions of any Barbary State, whose ships were most likely to attempt to squeeze past the blockade, with whatever force he felt necessary.

In other areas, Secretary Smith must have felt either Preble had overstepped his bounds, or just neglected to change an unfortunate order. Despite Preble's difficulty in doing so, he

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Barron, 31 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 132.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Samuel Barron, 31 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 134.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

ordered Barron to send every vessel he captured “into some port of the United States.”<sup>14</sup> Preble had been unwilling, and essentially unable, to sacrifice any of the crew of his short-handed vessels to send his captures across the Atlantic to the United States. Additionally, the most common type of craft that attempted to run the blockade was small and useful only in the coasting trade, barely even able to make an Atlantic crossing. As for prisoners, Smith suggested that Barron “effect an exchange,” or, if that be refused, to give them to another nation at war with Tripoli, “with a reservation that they shall be restored to the United States,” in the event of peace, or failing any of this, to dispose of them “so as not to be at any Expence to the United States.”<sup>15</sup> Though most of Preble’s attempts to trade his prisoners were then in the future, he had already failed to exchange those captured with the burning of the *Philadelphia*, as Dale and Morris had failed at the same object previously. The second option seems naive in the extreme, for it was unlikely that any nation would care for prisoners at their own expense merely to give them up when they could benefit the Americans in negotiations for exchange or peace. That there was still no provision made for effective care of prisoners is a bit remarkable, but Barron suffered no more than the other commodores on this count.

Most of Barron’s orders were very similar to those given to earlier commodores, with the exception of those addressing the capture of the *Philadelphia*. Preble had used the funds available for the squadron to help allay the material wants of the *Philadelphia*’s crew by sending them food and clothing. Various American consuls in the Mediterranean pitched in as well. Under Barron’s command, Secretary Smith decided to formalize the process, directing Barron to open communication with the *Philadelphia*’s purser, Richard Spence.<sup>16</sup> As ship’s purser, Spence knew the situation of each of the prisoners and, in captivity with them, could adequately judge

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<sup>14</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Samuel Barron, 31 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 134.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-5.



their needs. This order removed a task from Barron's responsibility, and made sure that he could concentrate more closely on planning than on providing for American prisoners. Additionally, anxious to be cleared of personal wrong-doing for the loss of his ship, Captain Bainbridge wrote to the secretary of the navy, requesting an official court of enquiry to establish his culpability. Secretary Smith directed Barron to accommodate this wish as soon as Tripoli released the American captives, with Captains Rodgers, James Barron, and Campbell as members of the court.<sup>17</sup> While this added very slightly to Barron's list, the bashaw's conviction to ransom the prisoners only as part of the peace agreement meant that Barron would be unhindered with this duty until the war ended.

Barron's orders were neither unnecessarily confining, nor did they overburden him with ancillary tasks. Where Preble's orders were the consequence of Morris's ineptitude, Barron benefited from Preble's handling of the war. As had been the case during Preble's command, only Tobias Lear, American consul to Algiers, had the authority to negotiate, allowing Barron to concentrate his efforts on more martial pursuits. Lear, ordered to gain peace without a price and only "in the last instance" to pay, was in his second year in Algiers and more likely to be free to take time away from his consular duties.<sup>18</sup> Preble had also dealt firmly with both Morocco and Tunis, and while there was no guarantee of continued peace, it seemed much more likely that they would present no trouble than they had when Preble sailed. These were not the only weights lifted from Barron's shoulders either. With an officer to run the daily workings of his flagship, Barron was relieved of the duties associated with that role. Additionally, the situation allowed him to transfer his person between the squadron's ships as necessary without tying him to his flagship, as Preble had been bound to *Constitution*. Three of the four frigates of Barron's

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<sup>17</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Samuel Barron, 31 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 135-6.

<sup>18</sup> Secretary of State to Tobias Lear, 6 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 155.

squadron, the *Essex* being the exception, were heavy enough to mount the large cannon needed to batter the Tripolitan fortifications. Added to this force was the *Constitution* and all of the smaller vessels already in the Mediterranean, making Barron's force both more powerful and more versatile than any previous squadron. The crews of the vessels already in the Mediterranean were both experienced and battle hardened. Of the new captains, all had served in previous squadrons, and Rodgers had experience both on the blockade and in negotiation with Morocco. Below the rank of captain, however, "the ships going out are not officered agreeably," wrote Secretary Smith.<sup>19</sup> This was balanced by the fact that among the junior officers already on station ranked some of the most enterprising and competent men in the navy, all of whom had seen action under Preble. In all, Barron's balanced orders and the power of the squadron he commanded made him the commodore best equipped not just to blockade, but to batter Tripoli and coerce peace.

The only real drawback that Barron faced was the government's expectations. "All that a sound mind, an ardent Zeal and daring valor could achieve with the force committed to Commodore Preble, has been performed by him," wrote Secretary Smith in Barron's orders.<sup>20</sup> He continued, outlining Barron's duty: "[Preble's] force, however is not adequate to the accomplishment of our purposes, we therefore have put four additional Vessels in commission. ... With this force it is conceived that no doubt whatever can exist of your coercing Tripoli to a Treaty upon our own terms."<sup>21</sup> There is no question, especially with Preble achieving so much with so little, that Secretary Smith and the government expected much of Barron and his squadron. If they had predicted Preble's August and September attacks, the expectation for a quick peace would certainly have been even more overwhelming. Thankfully for Barron, at least

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<sup>19</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Samuel Barron, 1 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 139.

<sup>20</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Samuel Barron, 6 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 152.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-3.

these events were still in the future, and he would not have to sail with another commander's victories looming over his head. Even so, the goal of Barron's squadron was not blockade, or even bombardment, but the establishment of a treaty of peace "without any price or pecuniary concession whatever."<sup>22</sup> Smith finished his orders by instructing Barron to provision and man his vessels and "proceed off Tripoli with all practicable dispatch," and ended by registering his "wishes for your success and glory."<sup>23</sup>

A final and perhaps most important addition to Barron's squadron was William Eaton. Eaton had earlier served as American consul to Tunis, where his dealings with both that regency and the American navy had been less than cordial. The bey of Tunis grew weary of Eaton's undiplomatic conduct and expelled him from his post. The bey also compelled Eaton to repay his large, and mostly private, debt, accrued in failed and allegedly underhanded personal business dealings: a debt that fell largely upon the public funds of Morris's squadron. Despite his personal failings in business and diplomacy, Eaton did not hesitate to criticize the navy's actions. Eaton firmly believed that the path to victory against Tripoli was to install on the throne the bashaw's deposed brother, Hamet. Secretary of State James Madison sent him to the Mediterranean to gain Hamet's cooperation in just such an attempt. Eaton's use, however, and whether to cooperate with Hamet at all, was left entirely to Barron's discretion.<sup>24</sup> Eaton's brief orders to "receive instructions from and obey the Orders of Commodore Barron," were certainly clear in defining his position in the chain of command, however, the same tenacity that allowed Eaton to succeed in goading Hamet into action also made him abrasive and hard to work with.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Secretary of State to Tobias Lear, 6 June 1804, *Naval Documents IV*, 155.

<sup>23</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Samuel Barron, 6 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 154.

<sup>24</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Samuel Barron, 6 June 1804, *Naval Documents IV*, 153.

<sup>25</sup> Secretary of the Navy to William Eaton, 30 May 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 121

In Eaton, Barron held a wildcard; if used properly, Eaton could significantly help the squadron, but he had already proven himself capable of making delicate situations very much worse.

Before leaving the United States, however, Barron ran into problems even more serious than a cranky diplomat. The vessels of his squadron, plus the *John Adams* rigged as a supply ship, converged at Hampton Roads singly during the month of June, from whence they were to sail as a squadron for the Mediterranean.<sup>26</sup> The *John Adams* took on supplies for Preble's squadron and set off on 26 June, but the rest of the squadron faced delays in preparing the ships for sea.<sup>27</sup> Captain Rodgers of the *Congress*, never one to quibble with words, became incensed with the lack of both the material he required and the cooperation of the shore establishment. Addressing a dock-yard supervisor, he wrote, "It is your Interest to pray that my Head may be Knock'd off before I return, for be assured if you are not punished before that period I will revenge the Injury you have done me, with my own hands."<sup>28</sup> The extra time in port gave the recently enlisted sailors extra time to think about their decision to sign on board for two years of service. Tensions in the flagship's crew grew to such a height that an anonymous letter, complaining of unfair and hard usage, and signed "Unhappy Slaves" found its way to Commodore Barron.<sup>29</sup> After ferreting out the author, Barron convened a court martial to try the man on the charge of inciting mutiny. Headed by Rodgers, the court ordered the mutineer flogged around the fleet, receiving "three hundred & twenty lashes" and his shaved head branded "with the Word MUTINUS."<sup>30</sup> These difficulties delayed the squadron, supposed to be ready to sail as soon as they arrived at Hampton Roads, until the end of that month. Finally, on 30 June,

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<sup>26</sup> Journal of William Eaton, 9-26 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 175.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> John Rodgers to Benjamin King, 15 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 193.

<sup>29</sup> Samuel Barron to John Rodgers, 19 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 203.

<sup>30</sup> John Rodgers to Samuel Barron, 23 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 218.

the squadron was ready to depart for the Mediterranean, and did so a few days later when the wind came fair.<sup>31</sup>

The delays did not stop after the squadron left port, however, and their outward passage serves as a reminder of the dependencies of naval operations upon the wind. It was not until 12 August that the first vessel of Barron's squadron touched at Gibraltar, a passage of thirty-eight days.<sup>32</sup> For two weeks the squadron made good time, and passed the Azores after only fifteen days, a point far more than half of the journey by distance.<sup>33</sup> Thereafter the wind blew consistently from the east, forcing the Americans to tack back and fourth, sailing many miles north and south to gain eastward progress.<sup>34</sup> The wind was so uncooperative that Barron decided to split the squadron, allowing each captain to use his ship's best point of sail to make it to Gibraltar.<sup>35</sup> While the tactic sped the voyage to some extent, the contrary wind and the delays in outfitting prevented any possibility of the squadron arriving off Tripoli in time for offensive operations.

Though the squadron made poor time on the crossing, their arrival at Gibraltar was timely, for Morocco seemed once again on the verge of hostilities. The emperor of Morocco, in a charitable mood, gathered the surplus wheat of his nation's harvest and proposed to send it to Tripoli as a gift to that city's poor.<sup>36</sup> While James Simpson stopped this enterprise by refusing to issue a passport for any ship bound to Tripoli, Alcayde Hashash, once again in the emperor's favor, used threatening language in demanding Simpson's compliance.<sup>37</sup> Once again, the American squadron met with the Moroccan frigate *Maimona* at sea, this time bound to the port

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<sup>31</sup> John Rodgers to Secretary of the Navy, 30 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 239.

<sup>32</sup> John Rodgers to Secretary of the Navy, 12 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 403.

<sup>33</sup> Journal of William Eaton, 12 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 407.

<sup>34</sup> John Rodgers to Secretary of the Navy, 12 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 403.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> James Simpson to Samuel Barron, 1 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 329.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

of Larache, where the Moroccans seemed to be gathering their force as if in preparation for an attack.<sup>38</sup> Altogether, however, the situation was not nearly as serious as the one Preble faced, for while the emperor “expressed great concern at not being able to send this Wheat to Tripoly,” he did not commit to military action because of it.<sup>39</sup> Simpson remained convinced that the Moroccans still desired peace, and so informed Barron, who thanked the consul for the information and confirmed Simpson’s judgment in refusing a passport for any vessel bound to Tripoli.<sup>40</sup> Still, Barron believed that the concentration of Morocco’s navy was adequate proof of “hostility against some commercial nation,” and a threat that could not be ignored.<sup>41</sup> Barron chose Rodgers to stay on the scene with *Congress* and *Essex* “until it is ascertained whether his measures are hostile, or Friendly towards the U’States,” and if it proved friendly to proceed to rejoin the rest of the squadron.<sup>42</sup> While two frigates constituted a large force to leave behind, Barron cannot be faulted for being wary of the Moroccans after the events of the previous year. In leaving command in Rogers’s hands, he made a wise choice, for not only had Rodgers dealt with the Moroccans once before, but his aggressive nature made it certain that he would not stay away from the action off Tripoli even a day longer than required.

Barron himself realized that the situation with Morocco, while tense, was not so pressing as to delay his own progress towards Tripoli. After very quickly replenishing at Gibraltar, Barron proceeded up the Mediterranean, his decision made before *Essex* even made port.<sup>43</sup> As soon as the wind was fair, on 16 August, Barron, with *President* and *Constellation*, left port.<sup>44</sup> Barron’s quick decision in this situation is admirable, for only by moving quickly could he hope

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<sup>38</sup> John Rodgers to Secretary of the Navy, 12 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 402.

<sup>39</sup> James Simpson to Secretary of State, 13 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 409-10.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel Barron to James Simpson, 13 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 411.

<sup>41</sup> Samuel Barron to John Rodgers, 14 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 414.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Barron to James Simpson, 13 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 411.

<sup>44</sup> Journal of William Eaton, 16 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 421.

to assist an offensive off Tripoli during that summer. As soon as the *Essex* arrived, Rodgers also departed Gibraltar and headed down the Moroccan coast to find the Moroccan fleet and discern their motives.<sup>45</sup> The *Essex*, meanwhile, patrolled the straits, defending American commerce in case of hostilities.<sup>46</sup> Rodgers arrived at Larache only to find that the single warship inside, the *Meshouda*, was far from ready for sea, with most of its rigging disassembled.<sup>47</sup> The *Maimona* and *Mirboka* lay in Sallee “apparently ready for sea,” but “within the bar” suggesting they were not immediately prepared to leave.<sup>48</sup> After cruising off the port for a few days, Rodgers, convinced that no hostilities were imminent, sailed to Tangiers.<sup>49</sup>

At Tangiers, Rodgers communicated with Consul Simpson to determine the most appropriate course for the future. During Rodgers’s absence, Simpson received more encouraging news. A letter from Muhammed Selawy had arrived which indicated that while the emperor was “exceedingly displeased, at having been prevented from sending their ships to Tripoli,” he also had no immediate intention “to Act against us.”<sup>50</sup> Simpson, who was familiar with Sallee, believed also that with the warships inside the bar there, it was not “likely they will come out again this season.”<sup>51</sup> Even Simpson, who always appreciated a naval force nearby, thought that at least one of Rodgers’s frigates could leave the station without any danger.<sup>52</sup> Rodgers concurred and, leaving the *Essex* at Gibraltar to make minor repairs and watch the Moroccans, sailed to meet the squadron off Tripoli.<sup>53</sup> Rodgers’s decision was a good one. Nothing, wrote Simpson, short of peace with Tripoli could completely bring to rest issues with

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<sup>45</sup> John Rodgers to James Barron, 17 Aug. 1804 in *Naval Documents IV*, 424.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Log of *USS Congress*, 19 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 432.

<sup>48</sup> John Rodgers to James Simpson, 27 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 467.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> James Simpson to John Rodgers, 26 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 464.

<sup>51</sup> James Simpson to John Rodgers, 27 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 468.

<sup>52</sup> James Simpson to John Rodgers, 26 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 464.

<sup>53</sup> John Rodgers to James Barron, 30 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 486.

Morocco, as the Moroccans had a certain affinity for their co-religionists.<sup>54</sup> The watch of one frigate was enough to ensure Morocco did not take entering a war lightly, but the only way to ensure permanent peace was to end the war with Tripoli. For that objective, the *Congress* would be of far more use elsewhere.

The voyage from Gibraltar to the east was nearly as frustrating as that across the Atlantic. “It is, perhaps, unfortunate that the arrival of the squadron had not been more seasonable,” wrote William Eaton after arriving at Malta in the *President*, but even Eaton could admit, “it is the fault of the elements alone.”<sup>55</sup> There were headwinds and calms aplenty to navigate, and Barron’s two ships did not reach Malta until September, just as Preble made the last of his attacks and decided to suspend offensive operations for the year. This extra time in transit gave William Eaton the opportunity to pitch his ideas to Commodore Barron. Eaton made sure that Barron understood the “advantages of cooperating with Hamet Bashaw against Tripoli: and the probable disadvantages of acting without his cooperation.”<sup>56</sup> Upon arrival at Malta, Eaton quickly established contact with Hamet’s friends there and wrote that despite Hamet’s flight to Egypt, “the advantages calculated to result from a co-operation with him seem not to have diminished,” since last Eaton was in the Mediterranean.<sup>57</sup> The long passage since Gibraltar also meant the squadron needed water before proceeding to meet Preble, and had to suffer a period of quarantine before gaining access to the port, delaying them even more.<sup>58</sup> It was only on 10 September that Barron finally met Preble off Tripoli. Preble, in no mood to serve as third in command of the new squadron, requested instead that Barron grant him leave to return to the

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<sup>54</sup> James Simpson to Samuel Barron, 30 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 486.

<sup>55</sup> William Eaton to Secretary of the Navy, 6 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 526.

<sup>56</sup> Journal of William Eaton, 21 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*, 445.

<sup>57</sup> William Eaton to Secretary of the Navy, 6 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 525.

<sup>58</sup> Samuel Barron to James Cathcart, 7 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 2.



United States after returning the gunboats and balancing his accounts.<sup>59</sup> Barron complied with Preble's request, giving him the use of the *John Adams* to conclude his business and return home.<sup>60</sup>

Preble, however, did render Barron a service before his departure. Mindful of the limited effects of his actions, Preble encouraged Barron to use every weapon at his disposal, including Hamet.<sup>61</sup> Preble's testimony combined with Eaton's overtures convinced Barron of the importance of using Hamet, and he immediately dispatched "Eaton to Alexandria in search of Homet Bashaw," to cooperate with naval attacks the following summer.<sup>62</sup> Eaton embarked on the speedy *Argus* for the passage to Malta, where he gained contact with Hamet's supporters there.<sup>63</sup> Richard Farquhar, still in Hamet's service at Malta, was delighted with the prospect and confirmed that the time still seemed ripe for the operation.<sup>64</sup> Salvatore Bufuttill, Hamet's representative at Syracuse, agreed and promised that Hamet had even already recruited a large army.<sup>65</sup> Though Barron did give Eaton permission to seek out the bashaw, and a ship with which to do so, he did not allot a large sum of money for the expedition. This suspected slight encouraged "extreme mortification" in Eaton who claimed to be "destitute of commission, rank, or command: and, I may say, consideration or credit."<sup>66</sup> Eaton later solved most of these problems on his own, styling himself a general, recruiting an army, and paying for the whole thing, as he had before in Tunis, by drawing from government funds, himself directing the secretary of the navy to set up a fund of \$50,000 at Malta in order to finance the expedition.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Edward Preble to Samuel Barron, 10 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 13.

<sup>60</sup> Samuel Barron to Edward Preble, 11 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 15.

<sup>61</sup> William Eaton to Secretary of the Navy, 18 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 33.

<sup>62</sup> Samuel Barron to Isaac Hull, 13 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 20.

<sup>63</sup> Journal of William Eaton, 15 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 26.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Farquhar to Samuel Barron, 15 Oct. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 85.

<sup>65</sup> Salvatore Bufuttill to Samuel Barron, 1 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 110.

<sup>66</sup> William Eaton to Secretary of the Navy, 18 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 33.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Promises from Hamet's representatives to repay any expenses after Hamet took the throne even encouraged Barron to relent in part, ordering Isaac Hull of the *Argus*, to provide from that ship whatever support Eaton required in the way of stores, ammunition, and money.<sup>68</sup>

Eaton left for Alexandria in the *Argus* on 14 November on a trip that took him many months to complete, but which ended in possession of the Tripolitan city of Derne.<sup>69</sup> For much of this journey, Eaton was beyond contact, and even when in contact rarely condescended to follow orders, and so the legendary march across the desert largely falls outside the scope of this thesis.

It is possible, then, to examine this decision now. Along with the wildly positive outlooks of Eaton and Hamet's messengers, Barron also received negative comments about the viability of the scheme. Tobias Lear was perhaps the loudest detractor of the Hamet enterprise. "He is now in Egypt, driven by his brother from Derne, where it is presumed he might have made a stand had he been a man of any force or influence; which, from the best account I can collect, he is not."<sup>70</sup> William Bainbridge, imprisoned in Tripoli, wrote that if his freedom hung on Hamet's success, "I am decidedly of an opinion that our Country had better abandon us to our unfortunate fate," and that it would be wasteful to provide any aid to "the poor effeminate fugitive Brother of the Bashaw."<sup>71</sup> Barron, taking into account these opinions decided to go ahead with the measure anyway for, he reasoned, "it may have a good effect ... it cannot I think, have an ill one."<sup>72</sup> Though his reasoning boiled down to a simple argument, it was still well considered and proper. In the stormy winter season, bombardment and close blockade were impossible. It was precisely then, therefore, the squadron could spare a vessel for this duty.

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<sup>68</sup> Samuel Barron to Isaac Hull, 10 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 134.

<sup>69</sup> William Eaton to Secretary of the Navy, 13 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 140.

<sup>70</sup> Tobias Lear to Secretary of State, 3 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 114.

<sup>71</sup> William Bainbridge to Tobias Lear, 11 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 136.

<sup>72</sup> Samuel Barron to Tobias Lear, 13 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 139.

Barron had only to invest the time, money, and stores of one of his vessels to achieve what could be a monumental success and which, even if it failed, could not probably result in any terrible loss.

With *Argus* on its way to Egypt, Barron had to consider the situation in the other Barbary States. From Tangiers, Consul Simpson had largely favorable news about the attitudes and abilities of the Moroccans. Though Alcaide Hashash, again in the emperor's favor, had raised a large sum to build and equip new gunboats, these vessels would not be ready for many months, and the larger Moroccan vessels remained inactive.<sup>73</sup> Some of these same vessels later left port, but their mission proved to be a period of repair in Lisbon rather than further attempts to intercept American commerce.<sup>74</sup> To ascertain the Moroccans' object, James Barron followed them to Lisbon in *Essex*.<sup>75</sup> Assured that the Moroccan fleet would not soon be ready for offensive operations, the younger Barron left the Straits and sailed east, where he joined the fleet at Malta on 29 October.<sup>76</sup> Moving eastward along the Barbary Coast, Algiers was quiet enough that the consul there, Tobias Lear, felt justified in leaving his post to join the squadron and facilitate negotiations with Tripoli.<sup>77</sup> Preble, reporting to Barron that he had returned all the gunboats, saw fit to add that the bey of Tunis "requires good looking after."<sup>78</sup> That very bey, however, had his own country to look after at that moment, for the harvest of that fall of 1804 was meager, and he devoted the government's full resources to feeding the people rather than to any warlike pastime.<sup>79</sup> With blockade nearly impossible, and with all of the Barbary Powers

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<sup>73</sup> James Simpson to James Barron, 11 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 15-16.

<sup>74</sup> James Simpson to Secretary of State, 6 Oct. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 74.

<sup>75</sup> William Jarvis to Secretary of State, 6 Oct. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 74-5.

<sup>76</sup> Log of USS *Congress*, John Rodgers, 29 Oct. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 105.

<sup>77</sup> Tobias Lear to Timothy Mountford, 15 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 24.

<sup>78</sup> Edward Preble to Samuel Barron, 17 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 30.

<sup>79</sup> George Davis to Secretary of State, 26 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 51.

unusually complacent, fate presented Barron with the time and means to plan and prepare for his offensive of next summer.

Barron's efforts to ready his squadron for the next summer's action largely confined themselves to three different problems. First, Barron needed to ensure that the squadron could once again have access to gunboats for his own summer operations. Though Barron had authorization to obtain and use gunboats and bomb vessels, his instructions did not inform him how to do so. Additionally, Barron needed to maintain the squadron's good standing at the convenient ports of Malta and Syracuse. Finally, Barron's vessels needed to be in prime material condition and served by full, experienced crews when good weather returned. All the smaller vessels would be well into their second year of continuous service by the summer, and needed refit and repair, most especially the *Enterprise*, veteran of every single previous squadron. At the same time, he established a rotational blockade of the squadron's vessels in sections consisting of a frigate and at least one smaller vessel.<sup>80</sup> This approach was one of the more cautious open to Barron at the time; he kept only enough vessels off Tripoli to ensure there would be no repeat of the *Philadelphia* disaster, but not nearly enough for a full blockade. While cautious, this decision was also prudent, and if followed ensured that his crews would be fresh, and his vessels would have ample time to refit over the winter months.

Despite the docility of the Barbary States, other factors lined up against Barron as he began his preparations. During his time in charge, Preble, because the business of supplying the American squadron and caring for its sailors ashore was brisk, came to exercise a great deal of influence over Syracuse's government. The squadron often ignored laws, especially those requiring incoming ships to perform a period of quarantine, and only Preble's discipline kept the Americans from further abusing their status. In Preble's absence off Tripoli, the governor of

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<sup>80</sup> George Davis to Secretary of State, 26 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 51.

Syracuse reported that all discipline was lost, and his subjects made constant complaints of American abuses.<sup>81</sup> In light of these difficulties, Barron left the initial blockade of Tripoli to John Rodgers, departing himself to visit Syracuse and Malta to ensure he could still supply the squadron.<sup>82</sup> Further, war between England and France resumed, threatening to expand into the Mediterranean again, and this war could easily involve some or all of the ports the Americans used.<sup>83</sup> Even if the ports themselves were not under blockade, commodities would certainly be in shorter supply. Additionally, in British ports the old issue of British deserters seeking refuge in American ships could flare up at an instant, making Syracuse more attractive, for as Tobias Lear put it, “the Americans are in fact commanders of the Town.”<sup>84</sup> Though the city’s residents may not have shared Lear’s sentiment, it was true that American influence still extended further in Syracuse than in Malta.

Even as Commodore Preble returned the gunboats he had used so effectually, Barron confronted uncertainty about regaining their services in the next summer. The looming threat of a wider European war, which could choke off supplies to Malta or Syracuse, could also produce a need for the borrowed gunboats in their home country. Nevertheless, Preble met with assurances that there would be plenty of gunboats available the next summer, and reported to Barron that “the Neapolitan Government are disposed to render you every assistance in their power.”<sup>85</sup> Pleased, Barron replied to Preble asking him to apply at Naples for “fifteen Gun and Six Mortar vessels.”<sup>86</sup> Preble, accordingly, put forward his request to the head of the Neapolitan military on 15 December, but faced an unusual wait of six days before receiving any reply.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Marcello de Gregorio to Edward Preble, 19 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 40.

<sup>82</sup> Samuel Barron to John Rodgers, 23 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 46.

<sup>83</sup> Abraham Gibbs to Joseph Barnes, 24 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 47.

<sup>84</sup> Tobias Lear to Secretary of State, 3 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 116.

<sup>85</sup> Edward Preble to Samuel Barron, 8 Oct. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 80.

<sup>86</sup> Samuel Barron to Edward Preble, 15 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 143.

<sup>87</sup> Edward Preble to General Forteguerra, 15 Dec. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 194.

The reply was even more discouraging than the wait. “The Coasts of the Two Kingdoms being continually molested by ... the Barbary Regencies,” came the reply, the king of Naples had elected to use the gunboats “for the safety of the coasts,” rather than lend them again to the Americans.<sup>88</sup> After dispatching the bad news to Barron, Preble departed immediately for the United States, where he hoped to find an alternate solution to providing the squadron with the gunboats that he considered so crucial to success.<sup>89</sup> Even before leaving the Mediterranean, Preble hit upon a scheme to hire local craft from Sicily and mate them with cannon and mortars purchased from the British at Gibraltar or Malta to function at least as make-shift gun vessels.<sup>90</sup> Unwilling to take this initial no for an answer, Barron wrote to Neapolitan Prime Minister John Acton, the man who had helped Preble the previous summer, and repeated his request for assistance, noting that gunboats involved in offensive actions would certainly help to make the Italian coast safer.<sup>91</sup> Prospects for receiving help from this quarter, however, suddenly seemed bleak. Preble could only assume that “some Interest more powerful than ours, has been working against us,” and believed that both the English and French had ample reason to keep the gunboats out of American hands.<sup>92</sup>

With the promise of ready gunboats evaporating, Preble represented Barron’s need for gunboats to the Navy Department upon his return to the United States. Even before his arrival, one naval officer, John Shaw, had applied to the secretary of the navy for permission to lead American built gunboats against Tripoli, believing that a large model with certain modifications could make the trip.<sup>93</sup> Naval architect Josiah Fox also believed that a properly constructed

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<sup>88</sup> General Forteguerra to Edward Preble, 21 Dec. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 205.

<sup>89</sup> Edward Preble to Samuel Barron, 22 Dec. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 207.

<sup>90</sup> Edward Preble to James Barron, 23 Dec. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 209.

<sup>91</sup> Samuel Barron to John Acton, 10 Jan. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 271.

<sup>92</sup> Edward Preble to Tobias Lear, 23 Dec. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 208.

<sup>93</sup> John Shaw to Secretary of the Navy, 8 Jan. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 255-6.

gunboat could make an Atlantic crossing, and had an example, one of ten separately building around the nation, ready to be launched by 23 February.<sup>94</sup> Preble met with Secretary Smith soon after, and added his weight to the matter, convincing the secretary to order the hastening of the construction of each of the ten gunboats to a state of readiness to cross the Atlantic.<sup>95</sup> The secretary anticipated that the boats could be in the Mediterranean by the beginning of July, shepherded across the Atlantic by *John Adams*, again equipped as a supply ship, and relayed this information to Barron.<sup>96</sup> Armed with the experience of using gunboats in combat, Preble agreed to assist in the construction of two gunboats and two bomb vessels at Boston.<sup>97</sup>

Problems with securing additions to his fleet aside, Barron used the fall and winter to make sure the whole of his fleet was well manned and sea-worthy. After Preble left the fleet, command of the *Constitution* devolved on newly promoted Stephen Decatur, but he soon swapped his larger command for Captain Rodgers's smaller vessel. After being a year on station, *Constitution* was well short of its full complement of crew and lacking in some vital stores. Accordingly, Barron directed Rodgers to take *Constitution* to Lisbon, "and there Ship as many good Men as you can procure."<sup>98</sup> On his return, Rodgers was to stop at as many ports as necessary to bring back the required crewmen and to speak with Consul Simpson to check on the situation in Tangiers. Typically stormy winter weather accompanied Rodgers's journey to Lisbon; by the time he reached his destination, the *Constitution* stood in need of "three new Topsails, a new Foresail & Mainsail & Bowsprit," though Rodgers estimated that these could be procured in the time occupied in finding sailors.<sup>99</sup> Even before serving a week of Lisbon's

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<sup>94</sup> Josiah Fox to Secretary of the Navy, 23 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 366.

<sup>95</sup> Secretary of the Navy to George Harrison, 7 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 394.

<sup>96</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Samuel Barron, 7 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 395.

<sup>97</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 15 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 414.

<sup>98</sup> Samuel Barron to John Rodgers, 27 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 163.

<sup>99</sup> John Rodgers to Secretary of the Navy, 30 Dec. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 226.

mandatory fifteen day quarantine, however, Rodgers began chaffing at the delay and received the bad news that the renewed European warfare had convinced most of Lisbon's seamen to enlist in the British navy.<sup>100</sup> A few days more delay convinced Rodgers that the American consul to Lisbon was playing him false, and the captain even went so far as to threaten a duel, effectively ruining any prospect that remained of obtaining a sufficient number of men.<sup>101</sup> The resumption of the Napoleonic wars rendered seamen in short supply in most of Europe, and even had Rodgers been able to reconcile his differences with the consul, it is likely that the squadron would still lack men. Barron needed a second source of sailors for his fleet.

While Rodgers did succeed in meeting at least his vessel's material needs in Lisbon, his poor relations with Consul Jarvis led Barron to seek other locations for his ships to receive refits. In search of friendlier aid, Barron sent the schooner *Enterprize*, commanded by Master Commandant Robinson and worn down by continuous service in the Mediterranean since the first squadron, to the Adriatic.<sup>102</sup> Venice, the best equipped Adriatic port at that time, fell under the rule of Austria, a nation that showed every indication of pursuing a neutral course in the war engulfing the continent, and whose main effort, even if it did enter hostilities, would be on land.<sup>103</sup> American Adriatic trade, however, was heaviest with Trieste, so that port rather than Venice maintained an American consul, and was Robinson's first stop. He found "every Art particularly ship-building in infancy" and only "one Yard of any consequence in that place & in that not season'd timber sufficient for our use."<sup>104</sup> To facilitate the ship's repair, William Riggins, American consul to Trieste, procured a berth for *Enterprize* in the famous Arsenal of

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<sup>100</sup> William Jarvis to John Rodgers, 1 Jan. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 245.

<sup>101</sup> John Rodgers to William Jarvis, 5 Jan. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 258-9.

<sup>102</sup> William Riggins to Secretary of State, 1 Jan. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 247.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Thomas Robinson to Secretary of the Navy, 27 Jan. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 309.



Venice.<sup>105</sup> Robinson's reception there was all that the Americans could have wished. Immediately upon *Enterprise's* arrival, the commander of the shipyards met Robinson for a tour. The professionalism of the officers and artisans at work, and the profundity of supplies greatly impressed the Americans. Within three days, the arsenal's hundreds of laborers had hauled *Enterprise* out of the water and a thorough examination revealed rot so deplorable that Robinson wrote, "to sum up all, it's only necessary to inform you that in addition to building a new schooner we have to pull to pieces an old one."<sup>106</sup> Despite the poor condition of the vessel, to Robinson's satisfaction, work began immediately. By 13 April, only three months after work began, Robinson reported that the Venetians had re-launched the *Enterprize* ("in very great stile indeed"), and the vessel was ready to rejoin the squadron by 1 May.<sup>107</sup> In addition, knowing the squadron's lack of gunboats, Robinson fixed a large 24-pounder cannon on a swivel mounting on *Enterprise's* center-line, an armament that would allow his ship to participate effectually in any close bombardment of Tripoli.<sup>108</sup> By seeking new outlets for supply and repair work, and perhaps by sending a more temperate commander, Barron succeeded in forging new relationships that helped keep his squadron in fighting trim.

Barron viewed Robinson's reports of cooperation and abundance in Venice with satisfaction, and decided to make an effort in that region to procure gunboats for the fleet. After Preble's earlier negotiations failed, he recommended that Barron attempt to jury rig a fleet of gun and mortar boats from small local craft (Preble recommended sparosaras or trabaccoloes), wedded with weapons borrowed from the British at Gibraltar or Malta.<sup>109</sup> While the small craft were available, the likelihood of the Americans finding extraneous weaponry, especially

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<sup>105</sup> Williams Riggins to Secretary of State, 1 Jan. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 247.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Robinson to Secretary of the Navy, 27 Jan. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 309-10.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas Robinson to Samuel Barron, 13 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 507.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Edward Preble to Tobias Lear, 23 Dec. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 208.

valuable mortars, in British ports was essentially nil. Robinson's descriptions of the supplies and material in the Arsenal induced Barron to renew his search for gunboats from that quarter. He dispatched his brother James to Venice "to procure the loan from the Government of that place of two Bomb Vessels," at least.<sup>110</sup> Failing in this effort, the commodore ordered James Barron to procure armaments that could be fitted onto the local Sicilian craft and the ammunition and accoutrements necessary to use them in battle.

James Barron arrived in Venice, was as impressed as Robinson with the facilities, and soon struck up a correspondence with Robinson, while Barron shuttled between Venice and Trieste in his efforts. Initial inquiries found that suitable craft for gunboats and bombards, and large caliber canon were available. The one weapon the Commodore most desired, however, large mortars, presented a difficulty.<sup>111</sup> Only the Austrian government in Vienna could authorize the sale of any weaponry, and while there was both shipping and some large cannon in private hands, the only mortars were those of the Austrian military.<sup>112</sup> By April though, Robinson and James Barron made some progress even with the mortars, and Robinson reported that if time allowed, these weapons also could be obtained.<sup>113</sup> James Barron, through a contact of Robinson's, purchased two gunboats, though unarmed, on 20 April, with funds provided by the commodore through Consul Riggins.<sup>114</sup> At Trieste, despite some problems with the local authorities, who perhaps thought it imprudent to be seen helping the Americans in their ventures against Tripoli, James Barron purchased even more vessels suitable for gunboat conversion.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Samuel Barron to James Barron, 3 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 387.

<sup>111</sup> James Barron to Thomas Robinson, 23 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 448.

<sup>112</sup> Thomas Robinson to James Barron, 3 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 479.

<sup>113</sup> Thomas Robinson to Samuel Barron, 13 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 507.

<sup>114</sup> James Barron to Thomas Robinson, 20 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 526.

<sup>115</sup> James Barron to Thomas Robinson, 23 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 530-1.

In addition, the younger Barron found the small American merchant vessel *Franklin*, former prize of the Barbary Pirates, and bought it, believing it capable of carrying a mortar.<sup>116</sup>

Besides the difficulties with readying his squadron, Commodore Barron had another problem of a more personal nature, his own health. Almost as soon as Barron arrived in the Mediterranean, Eaton recorded “The Commodore in ill health,” in his diary.<sup>117</sup> Already, his captains reporting hard weather, Barron had settled on his plan of rotating blockade, so his ship was not immediately needed off Tripoli, and when it was, his flag captain could certainly take command, making Barron’s illness a concern more distant than immediate.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, Barron was able to go ashore to facilitate his recovery, an action that may have been justifiable just as an administrative measure for the winter as well.<sup>119</sup> He appointed Captain Rodgers to the role of commander at sea, and authorized Rodgers to “hoist the broad pendant on board the Constitution, & give such orders for the safety of the squadron, from time to time, as may be most proper.”<sup>120</sup> As the autumn wore on, Barron’s health deteriorated, and it appeared that his recovery might be so slow as to inhibit even his logistical duties over the winter.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, at the end of November the disease, “a complaint of the liver,” threatened Barron’s very life.<sup>122</sup> His indisposition forced Barron to delegate some of his tasks; for some time, Captain Rodgers wore the commodore’s broad pennant as officer in charge of the blockading portion of the squadron.<sup>123</sup> Barron also issued orders through his subordinates, especially his brother James, after the younger Barron joined the squadron from Gibraltar.<sup>124</sup> While this delegation of duties, and his

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<sup>116</sup> Thomas Robinson to Secretary of the Navy, 23 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 532.

<sup>117</sup> Diary of William Eaton, 27 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 56.

<sup>118</sup> Hugh Campbell to Samuel Barron, 24 Oct. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 96.

<sup>119</sup> Diary of John Darby, 7 Oct. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 78.

<sup>120</sup> Samuel Barron to John Rodgers, 13 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 139.

<sup>121</sup> Tobias Lear to Secretary of State, 3 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 116.

<sup>122</sup> William Henry Allen to William Allen, 14 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 141.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> James Barron to Stephen Decatur, 28 Dec. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 223.

earlier decision to rotate the squadron before Tripoli, allowed the squadron to continue its minimal blockade, by far the most important winter tasks were administrative, and these must have suffered. Only in February was the commodore even fit to sail from Syracuse to Malta, and this only to “try the air” of a new place and hope for healthful benefits.<sup>125</sup> The move provided at least some benefit, for by the middle of February, though his aide still assisted in issuing orders to the fleet, “the commodores health [was] visibly improving.”<sup>126</sup> Not all on-lookers agreed with that diagnosis, and even at the end of April Tobias Lear observed that Barron still suffered.<sup>127</sup>

In addition to making ready for the military aspects of the upcoming summer’s campaign, Barron also needed to plan his diplomatic strategy for ending the war and retrieving the *Philadelphia’s* crew. Nearly every literate American in the Mediterranean was willing to, and did, offer advice on dealing with the bashaw: much of it contradictory, almost all of it tainted with overconfidence despite four years of failure. Certainly, Preble had learned the previous summer that offering to treat after every military encounter was a poor way to deal with the problem. George Davis, temporary American consul at Tunis, echoed these sentiments. In a letter to Secretary of State James Madison, Davis explained that any negotiator should make but a single offer, for “every offer that is made him [the bashaw], not only adds to his Insolence; but increases his pretensions in a double ratio.”<sup>128</sup> Davis was also the principal conduit for information between the fleet and Captain Bainbridge in Tripoli, and he and Bainbridge commonly exchanged secret messages written in lime-juice, which only became visible when heated. By this means, Bainbridge and other sympathizers with the American cause in Tripoli made known their opinions on the subject. Almost alone, perhaps understandably due to his

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<sup>125</sup> George Dyson to Edward Preble, 9 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 341.

<sup>126</sup> Robert Denison to Stephen Decatur, 19 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 361.

<sup>127</sup> Tobias Lear to Timothy Mountford, 30 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 559.

<sup>128</sup> George Davis to Secretary of State, 26 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 53.

situation, Bainbridge advocated that the Tripolines be treated with the same courtesy as any nation. He believed that while the bashaw was changeable and greedy, his advisor “Sidi Muhammed Deghies ... has a just idea of conducting negotiations in a respectable manner.”<sup>129</sup> Any American negotiator, in Bainbridge’s view, must be properly empowered and prepared to stay in the city for a few days, qualifications possessed by Tobias Lear. Unlike the previous summer, Consul Lear was available for direct negotiations with Tripoli. His presence ashore was a boon to the Americans because they no longer needed to rely on foreign agents to act as go-betweens. Indeed, Bainbridge believed “that an American will answer much better than any Frenchman” in negotiations.<sup>130</sup> Lear, who remained with Barron through the winter, was confident “that our Force will readily bring the Bashaw to terms of peace without any pretensions to payment” and even thought it “*possible* that the Bashaw hearing of the formidable preparations against him,” might treat for peace even before military actions commenced.<sup>131</sup> Bainbridge was far more skeptical of obtaining a cost-free peace. Hearing estimates from American newspapers that his crew could be ransomed for four hundred dollars apiece, he expressed surprise, believing “four times the sum” to be more accurate.<sup>132</sup>

As divided as opinion was, Tobias Lear remained convinced that the Americans could gain peace without much effort. Though acknowledging Bainbridge’s fears, Lear maintained his favorable outlook and wrote to Barron that conditions in Tripoli, namely that the bashaw “was greatly distressed for money and everything else necessary for carrying on the war,” seemed favorable.<sup>133</sup> As the spring approached, while the bashaw remained obstinate, others in the Tripolitan government seemed as disposed to treat for peace as Lear had thought. Sidi

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<sup>129</sup> William Bainbridge to George Davis, 14 Oct. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 83.

<sup>130</sup> William Bainbridge to Samuel Barron, 16 Mar. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 416.

<sup>131</sup> Tobias Lear to Secretary of State, 3 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 115-6.

<sup>132</sup> William Bainbridge to Tobias Lear, 11 Nov. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 136.

<sup>133</sup> Tobias Lear to Samuel Barron, 12 Dec. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 182.

Muhammad Dghies, Tripolitan foreign minister, extended feelers through Danish Consul Nicholas Nissen to persuade the Americans to negotiate. “Dghies has personally too much Interest in the tranquility and Security of the trade of Tripoli not to” seek peace, Nissen wrote.<sup>134</sup> If a negotiator would come ashore for talks, the method Dghies believed would be most favorable, then Dghies would personally guarantee the representative’s safe return.<sup>135</sup> Dghies also met with Bainbridge, who through invisible ink, conveyed the same message to Barron, and added his recommendation that negotiations begin even before any attack take place. “Peace could be effected” Bainbridge thought, for \$120,000 even before an attack was made, “but if the attack should not prove as successful it is very probably that such a sum would not release us.”<sup>136</sup> The Tripolitan perception of the size of Barron’s fleet, wrote Bainbridge, was so exaggerated that the “apprehension I believe is worse than the attack itself would prove.”<sup>137</sup> Secretary of State Madison disagreed. Reviewing his earlier orders to Lear, Madison found no reason in April to change them, noting that the squadron could renew its attacks on Tripoli “when the season opens, with equal animation on a much larger scale.”<sup>138</sup> Lear, too, was determined that the offer to treat for peace come from the bashaw himself, for Lear considered the American force imposing enough that the bashaw would be inclined to make the first move.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, Lear believed the Americans could “not again hazard a rejection,” an indication that he wanted, and thought it possible, to gain through force the upper hand in any negotiation.<sup>140</sup> It took until April, with the beginning of summer’s good weather, for the bashaw to finally make such an offer. Tripoli wanted \$200,000 combined to provide for peace and ransom, a sum that Lear

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<sup>134</sup> Nicholas Nissen to Samuel Barron, 18 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 422.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 421-3.

<sup>136</sup> William Bainbridge to Samuel Barron, 22 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 438.

<sup>137</sup> William Bainbridge to Tobias Lear, 7 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 474.

<sup>138</sup> Secretary of State to Tobias Lear, 20 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 524.

<sup>139</sup> Tobias Lear to William Bainbridge, 28 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 462.

<sup>140</sup> Tobias Lear to Joseph de Souza, 28 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 463.

deemed “inadmissible, as we shall never pay a Cent for peace,” though he was willing to discuss paying a ransom for the prisoners in the Bashaw’s hands.<sup>141</sup> Payment for peace, effectively paying the first installment of a yearly tribute, and paying for the ransom of prisoners, had long been separate in the minds of the Barbary States, who expected both. Clearly, however, American intent in the beginning of the war was to pay no sum whatever: an intent that was now banished from the mind of the nation’s chief negotiator.

While Barron considered each of these disparate dimensions of his duty, the passive blockade of Tripoli continued throughout the winter. Rarely was more than half the squadron actually off the coast, and generally their blockade was distant unless a spell of calm weather allowed them inshore. In one such stretch of calm weather on 19 October, Captain Rodgers rowed inshore at night and sounded some of the approaches to the harbor.<sup>142</sup> In general, however, the winter blockade was far more tedious, and despite effectively interdicting trade while the weather was fair, regular periods of fog, wind (or lack of it), and storm allowed vessels to enter or leave Tripoli with good odds of slipping past the Americans. Indeed, later during the same patrol during which he sounded the coast, Rodgers had to report, “four small coasting Boats loaded with Wheat” made an escape, “which they effected in consequence of light Winds & hazy Weather.”<sup>143</sup> In addition to stationing vessels off Tripoli, for the first time Barron also ordered members of his squadron to patrol off the eastern ports including Benghazi and Derne.<sup>144</sup> Additional vessels patrolled northward, often stopping at Tunis to receive news from that quarter, and waiting off Cape Bon, a logical landfall for Tripolitan raiders bound for the western

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<sup>141</sup> Tobias Lear to George Davis, 24 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 535.

<sup>142</sup> John Rodgers to Samuel Barron, 27 Oct. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 102.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Robert Denison to John Rodgers, 21 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 365.

Mediterranean.<sup>145</sup> Despite these patrols, it was not just merchant vessels that escaped Tripoli. In March, two small corsairs escaped, later touching at Tunis where George Davis reported their presence to the commodore.<sup>146</sup> Though those vessels took no American prizes, they certainly illustrated the blockade's porous nature. The escape also hinted at the advancing season, for the Tripolitans generally kept their ships laid up, sometimes even hauled up on shore, during the stormy winter. Off Tripoli, Captain Rodgers also observed evidence that the weather had begun to turn favorable. By 19 March, he reported, "the weather was generally very fine which enabled us to preserve a close Blockade."<sup>147</sup>

Even as the naval action appeared ready to commence, William Eaton, transported to Egypt the previous fall, marched back into the scene at the head of a motley, mutinous, and miserable army. Though Eaton received most of the credit for bringing Hamet and his followers into the fight, his success would scarcely have been possible without the naval support rendered him by Commodore Barron and the rest of the squadron. Isaac Hull in *Argus* conveyed Eaton to Alexandria where he left the ship to find Hamet, using all of Hull's discretionary funds in the process and borrowing against the credit of the United States for even more.<sup>148</sup> By the time Eaton actually left Alexandria, the expedition was nearly \$20,000 in debt: it is no wonder that one of Barron's more prominent quibbles with Eaton grew out of the issue of funding, especially since no express money for the expedition was included in the squadron's budget.<sup>149</sup> Perhaps more serious, and certainly a result of an even more egregious example of Eaton's disregard for authority, was the disagreement arising from a formal treaty that Eaton enacted, joining the causes of Hamet and the Americans. In return for Hamet's promises of reimbursement and good

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<sup>145</sup> Samuel Barron to John Rodgers, 28 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 377.

<sup>146</sup> George Davis to Samuel Barron, 8 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 398.

<sup>147</sup> John Rodgers to Samuel Barron, 19 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 425.

<sup>148</sup> Isaac Hull to William Eaton, 24 Dec. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 214.

<sup>149</sup> William Eaton to Samuel Barron, 14 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 353.



relations after the war, Eaton agreed that the United States would return Hamet to power in Tripoli.<sup>150</sup> This treaty represented a sham both politically and practically as Eaton possessed neither the authority to enter into a treaty nor the military force necessary to topple the current Tripolitan regime.

The correspondence between Barron and Eaton slowly devolved into argument, though to his credit, Barron still provided much of the support that allowed Eaton to succeed. Barron's initial reaction to Eaton's spending and signing of treaties was uneasy. He cautioned Eaton to "tread with the utmost circumspection" for the true object of contacting Hamet was to gain mutual support, "not to fetter [ourselves] by any specific or definite attainment *as an end*."<sup>151</sup> Barron also correctly foresaw that installing Hamet on the throne would be disaster for the American prisoners in Tripoli, and was probably an unattainable goal anyway. In a report to the secretary of the navy, Barron confessed "some uneasiness arising out of an apprehension that [Eaton] has taken a wider scope in his Engagements ... than is compatible with the ideas & intentions of Government."<sup>152</sup> Despite his misgivings, Barron loaded both *Argus* and *Hornet* with all the necessary supplies, dispatching those vessels to Bomba, a small port about sixty miles east of Derne, the most eastward of Tripoli's major ports and Eaton's first objective.<sup>153</sup> Eaton recorded that word of the navy's appearance at Bomba instantly changed the mood of his army "from pensive gloom to inthusiastic gladness."<sup>154</sup> Perhaps the only implement that Eaton desired more than the food and money delivered by *Argus* and *Hornet* was a pair of field pieces which arrived later on board *Nautilus*.<sup>155</sup> On 27 April, as the ships bombarded the town's

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<sup>150</sup> Convention between the United States of America and his Highness, Hamet Caramanly, Bashaw of Tripoli, 23 Feb. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 367-8.

<sup>151</sup> Samuel Barron to William Eaton, 22 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 439.

<sup>152</sup> Samuel Barron to Secretary of the Navy, 6 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 485.

<sup>153</sup> Samuel Barron to Isaac Hull, 23 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 446.

<sup>154</sup> Journal of William Eaton, 10 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 499.

<sup>155</sup> Samuel Barron to John Dent, 15 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 511.

seaward defenses, Hamet and Eaton stormed Derne's fortifications, capturing the city after a short but sharp fight that culminated in a charge by Marine Lieutenant Presley O'Bannon upon the main enemy position.<sup>156</sup> This signal victory, an astonishing feat considering the difficulties involved, gave a boost to the American cause, which had been relatively inactive since Preble's departure. While the victory at Derne remains associated with Eaton, only the navy's interventions on at least three separate occasions prevented the entire enterprise from failure. First, Barron loaned Eaton a ship and money to begin the journey, then he prevented mutiny and starvation with the supplies at Bomba, and finally he provided Eaton with the firepower necessary to capture Derne.

Unfortunately, the victory also gave Eaton some perceived political capital, which he immediately brought to bear on Commodore Barron. Immediately after the battle Eaton renewed his call for money, falsely representing that the secretary of the navy had promised \$50,000 to support the venture.<sup>157</sup> On the subject of unilaterally signing a treaty with Hamet, Eaton wrote:

I think it is not presuming too far to conclude, that the unlimited discretion vested in the Commander in Chief in regard to all the exigencies of the War, and particularly as it relates to the object in view, extends to every matter necessary to its accomplishment. The instructions of the Secretary of the Navy, certainly cannot mean to tie him down to any limited application.<sup>158</sup>

In reality, of course, the secretary of the navy certainly did mean to limit the power held by both Eaton and Barron. As earlier noted, Eaton's orders clearly placed him under Commodore Barron's command, with only such discretionary powers as Barron himself saw fit to give him. Barron too, outside of military matters, answered to Tobias Lear and lacked the authority to honor Eaton's treaty.

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<sup>156</sup> Isaac Hull to Samuel Barron, 28 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 547-8.

<sup>157</sup> William Eaton to Samuel Barron, 29 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 550.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

Eaton's protestations were even more incredible considering his opinion of his own Arab allies. "I can not conceal my apprehensions," he wrote, "that without more military talent & firmness, than exists either in himself or the *Hordes* of Arabs who attach themselves to him," Hamet could have further impact on the war.<sup>159</sup> On the long march from Alexandria, in fact, Hamet's followers succumbed to "frequent fits of despondency, amounting sometimes to mutiny."<sup>160</sup> This, perhaps, was an understatement, for outright mutiny confronted Eaton on numerous occasions during the march. In one of the more dramatic incidents, Eaton, O'Bannon, and the Christian mercenaries stood to their arms in the face of a charge from Hamet and two hundred of his followers.<sup>161</sup> The situation was only resolved when cooler heads amongst Hamet's inner circle rode their own horses between the two opposing forces allowing Eaton, ostensibly Hamet's subordinate, to regain control of the situation. In spite of such incidents, Eaton believed that his own honor and that of his country demanded that the Americans place Hamet on the throne. "It wou'd seem incumbent on the honor of the Government," Eaton suggested to Barron, to place Hamet "out of the power of an incens'd and vindictive enemy."<sup>162</sup> While it was certainly an honorable sentiment that Hamet and his followers, whom Eaton dragged from safety through the Libyan dessert, not be sacrificed after the Americans had gained the peace they desired, it certainly overlooked the object of both Eaton's expedition and the entire war. Eaton even went so far as to write, "If Hamet Bashaw is to be used *solely* as an instrument, to the attainment of an Object, exclusively to the advantage of the United States ... I cannot persuade myself that any bonds of patriotism dictate to me the duty of having a Chief

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<sup>159</sup> William Eaton to Samuel Barron, 29 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents* V: 552.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 553.

<sup>161</sup> Journal of William Eaton, 8 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents* V: 490-1.

<sup>162</sup> William Eaton to Samuel Barron, 29 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents* V: 552.

Agency, nor indeed any, in so extraordinary a Sacrifice.”<sup>163</sup> Of course, having already guaranteed by treaty that he would place Hamet on the throne, Eaton had essentially passed the buck to Barron and Lear to decide Hamet’s fate. Though the capture of Derne was an undoubted testament to his fortitude and bravery, Eaton’s insistence on the impossible goal of toppling the current Tripolitan government certainly added to Barron’s difficulties, and just when offensive naval action should have been commencing.

Though the season was still early, the Americans clearly needed to transition from preparation to action. With this in mind, Rodgers began to draw down the blockade, sending his vessels to port with orders to submit “your requisitions for such Stores, as the [vessel] may require for this Summers Expedition.”<sup>164</sup> The disadvantages of a minimal blockade paled in comparison to the advantages of concentrating force during the decisive summer season. Even despite the smaller blockading force, at times consisting of only his own *Constitution*, the finer weather allowed Rodgers to make a few captures. On 24 April, he took an armed xebec trying to enter Tripoli with two prizes of its own, and sent them in to Barron for reasons “two obvious to require commentations.”<sup>165</sup> Rodgers’s *Constitution*, which had already received a partial refit earlier at Lisbon, remained in fighting trim, and the rest of the squadron approached that standard of readiness as well. Of the frigates, *President* and *Constellation* had traded shifts off Tripoli, but each received plenty of time in Malta or Syracuse to prepare for the season, as did *Congress*. *Essex* returned from the Adriatic newly ready for service in May. Of the smaller vessels, only

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> John Rodgers to John Smith, 18 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 521.

<sup>165</sup> John Rodgers to Samuel Barron, 25 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 539.

*Siren*, which patrolled the Straits of Gibraltar, and *Enterprize*, scouring the Adriatic for gunboats after its refit, were unavailable by late spring.<sup>166</sup>

In addition to the force already in the Mediterranean, the government, prodded and then assisted by Preble, had already prepared reinforcements to bolster Barron's forces. Because of the success of his efforts the previous year, Preble gained popular acclaim and the ear of the government, meeting with navy officials and even President Jefferson.<sup>167</sup> In response to Preble's praise of the gunboat as an ideal platform for use against Tripoli, the navy began planning the construction of a squadron for service in the Mediterranean to be ready by the summer of 1805.<sup>168</sup> In all, construction began on ten gunboats, built in different American ports, and all to the designs of various naval commanders. Preble himself superintended the construction of two of these boats, and two bomb vessels besides, at Boston and Portland.<sup>169</sup> Work progressed quickly, and by March the secretary of the navy issued orders for the commanders of nine of them (the other he deemed unable to cross the Atlantic) to enlist crews for the voyage to the Mediterranean.<sup>170</sup> Shortages in skilled labor sufficiently delayed the construction of the bomb vessels, so that they could not be finished "in season to reach the Squadron in the Mediterranean, before the last of August," perhaps too late to contribute to that summer's fighting.<sup>171</sup> Also taking advantage of early summer's fine weather to join the squadron were a pair of store ships, the *Ceres* and *Ann*, carrying general provisions as well as shot and powder for the gunboats.<sup>172</sup> A final addition, the small frigate *John Adams*, its guns stored in the hold to facilitate carrying almost five hundred sailors to distribute to the squadron, also readied to sail. Each of these ships,

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<sup>166</sup> Movements of United States Naval Vessels in the Mediterranean, September 1804 – May 1805, enclosed chart in *Naval Documents V*.

<sup>167</sup> Memorandum Book of Edward Preble, 4 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 389.

<sup>168</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Thomas Jefferson, 7 Dec. 1804, in *Naval Documents V*: 176.

<sup>169</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, 15 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 414.

<sup>170</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Commanders of Gunboats 25 Mar. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 451.

<sup>171</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 9 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 492

<sup>172</sup> Secretary of State to Tobias Lear, 20 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 524.

in addition to the nine gunboats, had departed singly or in small groups for the Mediterranean by mid-May.<sup>173</sup> By 4 July, the first of the gunboats, shepherded by *John Adams*, reached Syracuse and the rest of the squadron.<sup>174</sup>

These craft, however, arrived only in time to bear witness to one of history's great anti-climaxes. The Americans had already agreed to pay Tripoli to end the war. Barron's rise from his sick bed proved to be too slow; as days of calmer weather slipped by, Barron completely relinquished command of the squadron to Rodgers on 22 May after a conference with Tobias Lear.<sup>175</sup> Rodgers had resumed his command of the blockade, and was off Tripoli in *Constitution* when he received the news upon the arrival of *Essex* with Tobias Lear on board on 26 May.<sup>176</sup> Lear received, a month earlier through the Spanish consul in Tripoli, an offer from the Bashaw to end the war for \$200,000 to include both peace and ransom. Though he remarked, "these terms are inadmissible," at the time, he must later have come to believe that they provided a solid foundation for beginning negotiations.<sup>177</sup> During the same conference, Lear convinced Barron not simply to pass on his command, but also to authorize Lear to proceed with negotiations with Tripoli; at least one historian believes that Lear had a far easier time coaxing this order out of Barron because of the commodore's illness.<sup>178</sup> Despite earlier writing that, before negotiation, the bashaw should be made "more sensible of our Force, and demonstratively convince'd of our capacity to use it," Rodgers apparently made no objection to Lear immediately opening negotiations.<sup>179</sup> Barely a week after arriving off Tripoli, three days of which the parties spent

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 524-5.

<sup>174</sup> Pascal Paoli Peck to officer of US Brig *Argus*, 4 July 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 363.

<sup>175</sup> U. S. Squadron in the Mediterranean, Navy Department report, in *Naval Documents V*: 9.

<sup>176</sup> Movements of United States Naval Vessels in the Mediterranean, September 1804 – May 1805, enclosed chart in *Naval Documents V*.

<sup>177</sup> Tobias Lear to George Davis, 24 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 536.

<sup>178</sup> Charles Oscar Paullin, *Diplomatic Negotiations of American Naval Officers, 1778-1883* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1912), 86.

<sup>179</sup> John Rodgers to Tobias Lear, 17 Apr. 1805, in *Naval Documents V*: 518.

waiting for a storm to die down, Lear had signed the preliminary articles of the peace treaty, bargaining the bashaw down to \$60,000 in exchange for encouraging Hamet to withdraw from Derne.<sup>180</sup> Though this act ended the war, Barron, two weeks before, had ceded his influence over the outcome.

Opinion concerning the end of the war varied widely, even at the time of the treaty's signing. Though the treaty did not mention future American tribute, both sides understood that gifts, especially "the custom of giving a present upon the appearance of a new consul" would continue, writes historian Ray Irwin.<sup>181</sup> In addition, while Lear could claim that the United States had not bought peace, but only ransomed the *Philadelphia*'s crew, the war's end was certainly dependent on payment taking place. Despite this, the loudest detractor of the peace objected for entirely different reasons. Having already taken the time to sign his own treaty with Hamet, William Eaton was incensed that the interests of the United States, in Lear's eyes at least, counted for more than his own ideal ending to the war. Though Eaton's complaints about the abandonment of Hamet provided ammunition for later Federalist attacks on Jefferson's government, the treaty passed by a comfortable margin in the Senate.<sup>182</sup> Outside of political alliances, the passage of time is responsible for the most dramatic shift in views concerning the treaty.

Though originally viewed favorably, more recent opinions have largely denounced the payment rendered for peace. Obviously, Lear viewed the treaty as sufficiently honorable, and Barron gave his approval while Rodgers made no argument. William Bainbridge, almost from the beginning of his imprisonment, viewed a ransom as the only possible way to end the war. In

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<sup>180</sup> U. S. Squadron in the Mediterranean, Navy Department report, in *Naval Documents* V: 9-10.

<sup>181</sup> Ray W. Irwin, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 154.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-60.

1821, S. Putnam Waldo (an early Stephen Decatur biographer) remarked that not only the “politician who is governed solely by money logic,” but also the “dignified and patriotic statesman ... would unhesitatingly give his assent to this treaty.”<sup>183</sup> James Fennimore Cooper, writing in 1839, remarked simply “thus terminated the war with Tripoli.”<sup>184</sup> Considering Cooper’s willingness to extol the virtues of his subjects, and even forgive their mistakes (such as Preble’s with the fireship) this is perhaps a case of damnation by faint praise. Later opinions consider the treaty everything from “unwise” to proof that “Lear in his zest for a treaty conveniently forgot” the actual aims of the war.<sup>185</sup> The treaty was certainly less beneficial than could have been hoped for, considering the size of the American force present, the imminent reinforcements and Eaton’s success at Derna. Of more import in this study than the terms of the treaty is the temerity that Barron displayed in ceding his responsibility to Rodgers and Lear.

Barron certainly made the wrong choice in sending Lear to begin negotiations at the same time as he passed control of the squadron to Rodgers. In the first place, if Barron believed that his health was so compromised that he needed to pass full command of the squadron to Rodgers, then certainly he was in no fit state to instruct Lear to begin negotiations. Even if his health forced a change in command, Barron could have just as easily left the decision of when to begin negotiations with Rodgers. Lear’s orders made it clear that only should “adverse events and circumstances ... render the campaign abortive” was he authorized “in the last instance” to offer a price for peace.<sup>186</sup> The campaign was far from abortive; Derne was perhaps its greatest success. Time was also far from a pressing matter. At the end of May, the entire summer of fair

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<sup>183</sup> S. Putnam Waldo, *The Life and Character of Stephen Decatur* (Hartford, Connecticut: P. B. Goodsell, 1821), 149-150.

<sup>184</sup> James Fennimore Cooper, *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*, 2nd ed. (1846; repr., Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 221.

<sup>185</sup> Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations*, 157; Glenn Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 420.

<sup>186</sup> Secretary of State to Tobias Lear, 6 Jun. 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 155.



weather for naval operations lay ahead; Preble's operations lasted until the end of September. Barron, then, should have been under no illusion that Lear had the authority to insist on offering money to the bashaw, and certainly must have known that peace could not have been secured at this time without payment. Though, unlike previous commodores, Barron did not himself have authority to negotiate, his orders dictated that he and Lear should "cordially co-operate ... to effectuate a termination of the war."<sup>187</sup> Perhaps his illness so weakened Barron that he forgot the power of his position and succumbed too quickly to Lear's arguments to treat. Realizing that even if he retained overall command, he would not lead the squadron off Tripoli that summer, perhaps Barron felt enough self-pity to forget that the honor of the nation hung on the outcome of the war. Historian Glenn Tucker describes Barron's leadership as so "enfeebled" that it surpassed even Morris's ineptitude.<sup>188</sup> While this is not true of most of Barron's tenure, even when he lay sick in bed, it was certainly true of this, Barron's last act as commodore.

Though this was undoubtedly a poor end for Barron, his actions at the beginning of the campaign were largely praise-worthy. Barron correctly divined that the Moroccan situation in 1804 was far less serious than the crisis the year before. Leaving Rodgers behind, he pushed on to the main theater of war. His orders for Rodgers ensured that the two frigates left behind would catch up with the main force as soon as possible. Marked by quick decision making and cooperation with Consul Simpson, this effort provided a good model for Barron's future dealings with Tripoli. Upon arrival off Tripoli, the stormy season had advanced so much that even Preble had already decided to suspend full-scale operations for the winter. Though Preble wanted to leave the Mediterranean, Barron was perceptive enough to mine his predecessor for information,

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<sup>187</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Samuel Barron, 6 June 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 153.

<sup>188</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 420.

and have Preble lobby the Kingdom of Naples for continued use of the gunboats. These beginnings demonstrated the capability and decisiveness necessary in a successful commander.

A final decision, also made at the beginning of his command, led to America's most signal victory of the entire campaign. Against the judgment of Tobias Lear and others, Barron sent William Eaton to Alexandria to search for Hamet. Just as important as sending Eaton in the first place was Barron's continued support for the operation. There is no doubt that this success lay primarily with Eaton's force of will. Without the navy, however, Eaton would have faced sure failure on several occasions. The *Argus* carried Eaton to Alexandria and financed his expedition up the Nile to find Hamet. At Bomba, the first convenient port along the march to Derna, two vessels met Eaton with the supplies and money necessary to prevent mass desertion and mutiny among Eaton's army. The firepower to take Derna came in the form of field pieces obtained by Barron and transported to Eaton onboard *Nautilus*. While several vessels bombarded the town from seaward, the core of the force that stormed Derna's defenses was a marine detachment from the fleet. Barron's material support, including the field pieces, continued even after Eaton had severely overstepped his responsibilities by signing his accord with Hamet. Smart enough to separate the military benefit of supporting Eaton from his personal misgivings over the man's conduct, Barron walked an admirable middle ground. Without conceding too much authority, or allowing himself to be bound by Eaton's promises to Hamet, Barron still gained Eaton's valuable service. Eaton himself and many a historian later have vilified Barron for dishonorably using Hamet only to further American aims, then discarding him after the war. Against this must be set the military reality that a complete overthrow of Bashaw Yusef would probably have been impossible. Additionally, Secretary Madison made it clear in his orders that the cause of the United States was not to be tied to the cause of Hamet. Only

Eaton, who had also at least once compelled Hamet forward on the march at gunpoint, had actually, though illegally, promised Hamet the throne of Tripoli.

It was only as the enforced inactivity of the winter season set in that Barron confronted his first adversity. Barron's largest problem was the lack of the gunboats that Preble had previously used. After a brief peace, war between England and France had reopened the year before, and threatened to expand to include other Mediterranean nations. Though the real reason for the Neapolitans to withhold their gunboats is unclear, American speculation fell upon the diplomatic influence of both France and England. Whatever the cause, Barron had to act quickly to ensure that his fleet would have these necessary craft for the summer's campaign. The commodore's in-theater response was not entirely successful. Barron tasked his brother James with finding suitable craft and weaponry in the Austrian ports for cobbling into a makeshift gunboat fleet. While these efforts did not bring gunboats to Syracuse promptly at the start of the season, the Americans could likely have fielded some sort of gunboat force given the ordnance and hulls purchased by that time. Preble's efforts in America, however, rendered Barron's limited success in the gunboat search largely moot. Though Barron wrote in support of the idea, the activity of Preble and Secretary of the Navy Smith produced a flotilla of nine gunboats as well as two bomb vessels. These vessels began arriving in July, and considering that Preble's own operations the year before had not begun until August, they certainly arrived in time to play an immediate role in any fighting.

Gunboats were far from Barron's only troubles. The unease of public opinion in Syracuse demanded immediate smoothing, that Barron accomplished successfully enough to retain that port as a base. This was fortunate, for though Malta continued to serve as a base, the war between France and England rendered supplies scarce at that port. This forced Barron, like

the commodores before him, to seek out new points of supply. Barron was particularly successful in this regard. He and the navy agents in Syracuse provided for all but the most haggard of the squadron. The *Constitution*, under Captain Rodgers, Barron dispatched to Lisbon. Though the venture, through either Rodgers's impatience or Consul Jarvis's mismanagement, did not prove entirely successful, the effort at least rendered *Constitution* battle-ready once more. Not content with this middling result, Barron sent *Enterprize* up the Adriatic to the Austrian controlled port of Venice. Then neutral, the city's officials were more than obliging and completely overhauled the American warship.

During the winter, Barron also decided to pursue a policy of limited blockade. The squadron's ships rotated between Syracuse and Tripoli, with one frigate on station at all times, accompanied by one or more smaller vessel. The advantages of this strategy were clear. The rotation meant that ships had plenty of time to resupply between deployments without hiring tenders to ferry supplies. The system was also flexible. If a special task, like assisting Eaton's march or searching for gunboats, called for dispatching a ship, then the ship was available. If a ship needed more significant repairs, Barron could withdraw it from the rotation altogether as needed. Those ships in good order remained that way because they were not strained by long, continuous service. That this plan allowed for less than a complete blockade is also true, however. For this reason, historian Glenn Tucker sarcastically writes that Barron's great achievement was "to keep the ships always separated and never once concentrated in a show of force off Tripoli."<sup>189</sup> In fairness, however, it should be noted that for much of the winter the weather was foul enough that two ships were barely worse than twenty. None of the commodores maintained their entire squadron off Tripoli in the winter, and Barron cannot be condemned for this. Additionally, the circular blockade, combined with his success in finding

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<sup>189</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 428.

refits for his vessels, meant that Barron could have decisively concentrated his squadron during the decisive season.

Barron's final act, however successful his earlier actions, must be the basis of the final word on this commodore's time in command. That Barron suffered from a debilitating illness for much of the winter and could not recover in time for operations in the summer was not his fault. In the winter, even despite the illness, Barron still issued the necessary commands to keep the squadron running. Summer operations demanded a leader to command from the quarterdeck, and as Barron felt he could not undertake this duty, his decision to abdicate in favor of Rodgers was the correct one. In yielding the squadron to Rodgers, Barron should also have yielded the full duties of the squadron's command. Instead, he ordered Rodgers simply to assist as Lear negotiated an end to the war. Barron took this decision after a series of meetings with Lear, who apparently persuaded the commodore to adopt the strategy of negotiation. That Lear, responsible for the diplomatic side of the conflict, should also have been involved so heavily on the military side is a sign of Barron's weakness in that moment.

The decision to negotiate ran contrary to orders from the government, and also contrary to plain logic. It was true that Eaton and Hamet almost certainly could not have taken Tripoli itself, and true too that their victory at Derne provided a boost to the Americans. It is equally true, however, that Eaton's force could have accomplished more. With naval support, there was no reason that Tripoli's other eastern ports, like Benghazi, would not have fallen as well, increasing the pressure on the bashaw. On the naval side, even without gunboats, a more complete blockade was now possible. If, for the second straight summer, Tripoli's raiders had gone without prizes then the Americans' negotiating status would have improved even further. Under Preble, the *Constitution* had ranged close enough to some of Tripoli's fortifications to deal

them significant damage. Barron had not only that same ship, but also three more heavy frigates capable of similar exertions. The presence of brigs and schooners lent a measure of safety to the big ships as the frigates operated in shallows. With the smaller ships present to chase away enemy gunboats, a repeat of the *Philadelphia* disaster was unlikely. Finally, gunboats themselves, nine built in the United States and perhaps more cobbled together from purchases in the Adriatic, were available long before the end of the summer. About the same time of year in 1805 as Preble's attacks commenced the year before, two bombards had even arrived from the United States, well ahead of expectations. Even with half this force on station, Barron's fleet would have been just as powerful as Preble's. Using Preble's success in supplying his fleet on station as a blueprint, the fleet could have mounted similar attacks in 1805. That Lear was able to negotiate the price from \$200,000 to \$60,000 is an illustration of the weakness of the bashaw's position even at the beginning of the summer. It is likely that the balance of power could only shift even further in the Americans' favor.

In the light of Barron's final decision, it is hard to consider his command a successful one. Barron's mission was to end the war, so it seems superficially odd that his decision to negotiate a peace should be the act that condemns his tenure to mediocrity. This outcome must be balanced against all the factors that favored Barron's success. Despite commanding the most powerful fleet of all the commanders, a fleet that would have grown only more powerful as the campaign season wore on, Barron's fleet did not lob a single ball at Tripoli's defenses. Unlike the other commanders, Barron's fleet had the assistance of a land force, Eaton and Hamet's army. These advantages can be added to the fact that Barron's responsibilities were often less onerous than those of his predecessors. Barron had a flag captain to run his ship, a negotiator to handle the diplomacy, and the support infrastructure established by Dale and honed by Preble.

In this light, the payment of any price for peace constituted a failure, and it was Barron's decision that facilitated that failure.

## CHAPTER 5: STEPHEN DECATUR

If former officers of the United States Navy held court in some afterlife, Stephen Decatur could not be other than their chief justice. Decatur's rise to fame occurred during the Tripolitan War, when in 1803 he received his first command, and when during the same year he led the expedition that burned the USS *Philadelphia*.<sup>1</sup>

Despite his earlier successes, his "greatest triumph" came during the last stage of this conflict, when in 1815 he "not only secured peace with Algiers, but also ensured that the other Barbary States would remain quiescent."<sup>2</sup> There can be little doubt that Stephen Decatur had a mind for tactics, and this, combined with his skill and luck in battle, has made his stature legendary. But the triumph referred to above by Decatur biographer Spencer Tucker, Decatur secured with only a modicum of battlefield heroics. He secured victory with quick thinking and clever negotiation. In 1815, the opponent was Algiers, not Tripoli. America, and her navy especially, enjoyed a more prominent reputation abroad after the successes they scored against the British in the War of 1812. Despite these differences, Decatur faced many of the same challenges as the commodores that sailed against Tripoli. With little naval presence in the Mediterranean since the remnants of Barron's squadron sailed home, Decatur's challenges mirrored those of his predecessors enough that comparison between them is possible.

Stephen Decatur Jr., like many American naval officers of the day, came from a seafaring family, grandson of a French naval officer who emigrated to England's American colonies. Stephen Sr., a privateersman in the Revolution, took his son on several merchant

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Stephen Decatur, 27 May 1803, in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers, 1785-1801*, U.S. Office of Naval Records and Library (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), II: 424; Edward Preble to John Gavino, 18 Feb. 1804, in *Naval Documents III*: 422.

<sup>2</sup> Spencer Tucker, *Stephen Decatur: A Life Most Bold and Daring* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2005), *xvi*.



voyages before both accepted positions as midshipmen in the new United States Navy on the eve of the Quasi-War with France.<sup>3</sup> While the elder Decatur had a much more active war than his son, the navy's success against France and the far-sighted policies of Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert assured that Stephen Jr. could continue in the navy as a profession, an opportunity unavailable to previous generations of American officers.<sup>4</sup> Decatur gained promotion to lieutenant after only a year as a midshipman. Despite the pairing down of the navy under the Jefferson administration, Decatur preserved his rank through the short peace until the outbreak of war with Tripoli.

Decatur first sailed to the Mediterranean in Dale's squadron as first lieutenant of the *Essex*, under Captain Bainbridge, then in Morris's squadron as first lieutenant of the *New York*. Neither of these billets offered much in the way of naval action, because the main duty of each ship was convoying friendly merchantmen. Despite the unwelcome inaction, Decatur used his "practical skill [as] an accomplished naval disciplinarian," judged by an early biographer to be the basis for his later success, to remake each of the crews under his command into an effective unit.<sup>5</sup> The squadron's idleness under Morris insured the constant mixing of American sailors and officers with local citizens during extended stays in port. These stays often produced tension that the commodore failed to curb. One duel between two American junior officers ended in the death of marine Captain James McKnight, the husband of Decatur's older sister.<sup>6</sup> In another instance, an experienced duelist provoked an American midshipman into a duel and then challenged.<sup>7</sup> Hearing of the upcoming duel, Decatur installed himself as the boy's second and

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<sup>3</sup> Robert J. Allison, *Stephen Decatur: American Naval Hero 1779-1820* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 1-16.

<sup>4</sup> Michael A. Palmer. *Stoddert's War: Naval Operations during the Quasi-War with France, 1798-1801* (1987; repr., Annapolis, Maryland: The Naval Institute Press, 2000), 129.

<sup>5</sup> S. Putnam Waldo, *The Life and Character of Stephen Decatur* (Hartford, Connecticut: P.B.Goodsell, 1821), 59.

<sup>6</sup> Spencer Tucker, *Stephen Decatur*, 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, 14 Feb. 1803 in *Naval Documents II*: 362.

insisted on a firing distance of but four paces, perhaps hoping that the challenge would be dropped. The duel went ahead, however, resulting in the death of the English opponent and the wrath of Malta's governor.<sup>8</sup> In response to the governor's complaints, Morris stripped Decatur of his duty. Decatur returned home with Morris when Secretary of the Navy Smith recalled the commodore.

Morris's board of inquiry resulted eventually in his dismissal.<sup>9</sup> For Decatur, being on the wrong side of Morris was no condemnation in the eyes of the government. Preble's squadron, now fitting out, included a handful of smaller vessels, and Decatur gained command of one, the brig *Argus*, soon after his return.<sup>10</sup> Decatur directed the launching and fitting out of this vessel and saw it manned and equipped. When he arrived in the Mediterranean, however, Decatur exchanged the larger *Argus* with Isaac Hull's schooner *Enterprize*, giving the senior Hull the larger command.<sup>11</sup> Decatur arrived to find a squadron that bore little resemblance to the one he left only months earlier. According to historian Fletcher Pratt, Commodore Preble recognized that "wars are won by fighting," and focused the energy of the squadron's young officers toward the enemy.<sup>12</sup> Gone were the long stays in ports and the duels that such stays occasioned. It was Preble, more than any other early American naval figure, who shaped the officer corps of the young navy, and it was Decatur, more than any other officer, who embodied those principles and carried them throughout his career.

On the last day of October 1803, the frigate *Philadelphia* ran aground on the shoals in the mouth of Tripoli harbor. As the tide went out, the ship's deck tilted at an extreme angle

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<sup>8</sup> Journal of Henry Wadsworth, 14 Feb. 1803 in *Naval Documents II*: 362.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Smith, Secretary of the Navy, *Concerning Commodore Morris' Squadron in the Mediterranean*, 31 Aug. 1803 in *Naval Documents II*: 526-31.

<sup>10</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Stephen Decatur, 27 May 1803 in *Naval Documents II*: 424.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 9 Nov. 1803 in *Naval Documents III*: 209.

<sup>12</sup> Fletcher Pratt, *Preble's Boys: Commodore Preble and the Birth of American Sea Power* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), 403.

rendering its guns ineffective. Tripolitan gunboats encircled the frigate and forced its surrender.<sup>13</sup> It was at this point, more than at any other during his career, that simple luck played a part in Decatur's advancement. Preble's squadron had separated. Preble himself focused on Morocco, while some of the smaller ships convoyed merchantmen past the threat of Morocco's raiders. As the squadron reunited to proceed to Tripoli, *Enterprze* was the first ship to rejoin the commodore after Preble received the news of *Philadelphia*'s capture.<sup>14</sup> Preble and Decatur together formulated a plan for the frigate's destruction. Though William Bainbridge, *Philadelphia*'s former captain, now prisoner of Tripoli, suggested in a letter to Preble a plan for the frigate's destruction, it is probable that the idea sprang from the active mind of Preble or with Decatur himself.<sup>15</sup>

Wherever the plan originated, the commodore had refined and finalized it by the beginning of spring's fair weather. Preble directed Decatur to take command of a small vessel of a familiar Mediterranean type that had earlier fallen into the squadron's hands. With the support of the schooner *Syren*, he directed Decatur to use his "Intrepidity and Enterprise" to effect the *Philadelphia*'s destruction.<sup>16</sup> Decatur's supply of these two attributes was immediately necessary to maintain control of his volunteer crew through numerous unexpected hardships: gales and putrid rations.<sup>17</sup> It is a testament to Decatur's presence of command that, despite these additional difficulties, his crew remained loyal and executed the boarding and burning of the *Philadelphia* with precision. Decatur gave the credit for this accomplishment to his crew, "who's coolness and intrepidity was such, as I trust will ever characterize the American tars."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> William Bainbridge to Secretary of the Navy, 1 Nov. 1803 in *Naval Documents III*: 171.

<sup>14</sup> Log of USS *Constitution*, Sailing Master Nathaniel Haraden, 28 Nov. 1803 in *Naval Documents III*: 242.

<sup>15</sup> William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, 5 Dec. 1803 in *Naval Documents III*: 253.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Preble to Stephen Decatur, 31 Jan. 1804 in *Naval Documents III*: 376-7.

<sup>17</sup> Statement of Lewis Heerman, 26 Apr. 1826 in *Naval Documents III*: 420.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Decatur to Edward Preble, 17 Feb. 1804 in *Naval Documents III*: 414.

At home in America, Decatur was the primary focus of the attention of the public and government. The secretary of the navy promoted Decatur immediately to the rank of full captain, a move that catapulted him ahead of many of his erstwhile seniors.<sup>19</sup> Congress, equally pleased and not to be outdone, awarded Decatur a ceremonial sword for his “gallantry, good conduct and services” in the attack on the *Philadelphia*.<sup>20</sup>

Unaware of his blossoming stardom in the United States, or even of his promotion, Decatur continued his service with the Mediterranean squadron under Commodore Preble. Despite losing his second most powerful vessel, the commodore remained determined to take offensive action against Tripoli, rather than merely maintain a blockade. To position heavy guns within close range of the harbor’s defenses, Preble hired gunboats: shallow-draft vessels mounting a single large cannon in the bows. These craft did “not sail or row even tolerably well ... and cannot be navigated with safety,” and in fact their only real virtue was that their draft allowed them to approach Tripoli Harbor without the danger of grounding, as the *Philadelphia* had.<sup>21</sup> Preble entrusted command of the squadron’s six gunboats to Decatur who led them into action on 3 August.

While assaults on Tripoli continued throughout August, this first action remains the most famous, and was Decatur’s most important. As the gunboats approached the harbor, the Tripolitans deployed nineteen gunboats to oppose the Americans’ six.<sup>22</sup> Leading the charge, Decatur caught one enemy gunboat, boarded, and took it a prize before it could retreat to the safety of the harbor.<sup>23</sup> Decatur’s brother, Lieutenant James Decatur, also captured an enemy

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<sup>19</sup> Secretary of the Navy to Stephen Decatur, 22 May 1804 in *Naval Documents* III, 427-8.

<sup>20</sup> Resolution Concerning the Burning of the Former US Frigate *Philadelphia*, approved in Congress 27 Nov. 1804 in *Naval Documents* III: 428.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 18 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents* IV: 293-4.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, 18 Sep. 1804, in *Naval Documents* IV: 295.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Decatur to Edward Preble, 3 Aug. 1804, in *Naval Documents* IV: 345.

gunboat in the fighting. After surrendering, however, the captain of that vessel shot Stephen, delivering a mortal wound.<sup>24</sup> This treacherous act prompted Decatur to cast off his tow, turn his gunboat back toward the entrance to the harbor, chase down the offending captain, and kill him personally in hand-to-hand combat, taking his second enemy gunboat of the day.<sup>25</sup> Barron brought word that the navy had confirmed Decatur's promotion, and he assumed command of the ship Preble left behind. Though he remained in the Mediterranean for much of the remaining campaign, Decatur's next real activity came when he returned home, where he and Preble were received with parties, dinners, and formal balls in cities up and down the east coast.

There can be no question that the experience Decatur gained under Preble's command helped his own later efforts. Decatur's two successful battles were founded on Preble's military aggressiveness and resourceful planning. First, Preble recognized the importance of offensive action. Where his predecessors often failed to maintain a blockade, Preble bombarded the city's defenses. Preble also used every possible resource in his planning. The greatest blows the Americans struck during the Tripolitan War came from a tiny, captured merchant vessel and a fleet of borrowed gunboats and mortar vessels. Even Preble's failures provided valuable lessons. By negotiating far too readily with the bashaw, Preble squandered the negotiating advantages that his attacks had won. Military action could not be an end in itself, for even a successful action could hurt a war effort if coupled with poor diplomacy. In Preble's actions, Decatur found an outstanding blue-print for military success and several lessons to learn in diplomatic negotiation.

As Decatur's career continued its upward course, America's position in the Mediterranean and in the world declined. The invalid, Barron, left his squadron to Captain, now

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Somers to Edward Preble, 4 Aug. 1804 in *Naval Documents IV*: 344.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Decatur to Edward Preble, 3 Aug., 1804, in *Naval Documents IV*: 345.

Commodore John Rodgers who sailed his fleet from Tripoli to troublesome Tunis. The bey of Tunis took every opportunity to harass the Americans during the Tripolitan War, and Rodgers deemed that with the current concentration of American force, the time was right settle relations with that nation. He sailed into harbor, queried peace or war, and the bey promised peace.<sup>26</sup> Certainly the American fleet was impressive, and though Tripoli made \$60,000, it took them four years to do so, time they could have spent extorting money from easier marks. Even with Barbary assurances of peace, the government determined to leave some presence in the theater, and Rodgers's return in 1806 prompted the fitting out of a new fleet the next year under the command of James Barron, previous commodore Samuel's younger sibling.<sup>27</sup>

Barron's flagship, the frigate *Chesapeake*, had scarcely left harbor before the British vessel *Leopard* compelled it to stop with three broadsides before hauling off four British deserters who had signed on board. The *Chesapeake-Leopard* affair not only sent the United States farther down the road to war with Britain, it also ended the American presence off the Barbary coast and caused problems for Decatur as well. By this time, he commanded naval operations in Norfolk, the port *Chesapeake* limped to in tatters. Secretary Smith passed command of the battered frigate to Decatur, who saw the ship repaired. After fears of imminent war receded, Decatur served on the court of inquiry that found Barron partially responsible for the calamity, suspending him from service for five years and beginning a life-long animosity.<sup>28</sup>

Decatur could spare little thought for a personal quarrel, however, because he was absorbed in naval duties in the run up to the War of 1812. When war finally arrived, Decatur commanded the frigate *United States*. If he thought the round of social engagements after the

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<sup>26</sup> Glenn Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder: The Barbary Wars and the Birth of the U.S. Navy*, (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1963), 428-30.

<sup>27</sup> Allison, *Stephen Decatur*, 85.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 89, 96.

Tripolitan War were excessive, the celebrations that followed his capture of the British frigate *Macedonian* proved him wrong.<sup>29</sup> In his next command, Decatur was less fortunate. The frigate *President*, itself a Tripolitan War veteran, fell prey to a superior British squadron, and both the ship and its disheartened captain became British captives. The *President's* capture occurred only a few months before the war's end, and the successful negotiation of a peace with Britain overshadowed this loss. Before even standing before the usual court of inquiry into the loss of his last vessel, Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Crowninshield offered Decatur the command of a squadron outfitting for the Mediterranean. While this was unusual, historian Frederick Leiner points out that he was the obvious choice. Of the five captains more senior, one was too elderly, one occupied a cabinet position, one was overseas and in disgrace, and the next, Captain Bainbridge, accepted the command of the second Mediterranean squadron and the new *Independence*, the first line of battle ship in the United States Navy.<sup>30</sup> After building his career fighting against one Barbary state, Decatur now readied to fight another.

With its bright moments of success against the British in the War of 1812, the American navy was popular with the public and growing quickly. In the Tripolitan War, there is no question that the balance of the action went in the Americans' favor. The peace largely mitigated those military victories, and the Americans not only paid for peace, but mounted no concerted attack for almost a year before beginning negotiations. These actions hardly constituted a deterrent to the other, stronger Barbary nations. Algiers, courted by Britain, declared war on the United States in 1812 and began pursuing American shipping. Competing against the entire Royal Navy for prizes proved difficult, and the Algerines captured only the

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<sup>29</sup> Pratt, *Preble's Boys*, 103.

<sup>30</sup> Frederick Leiner, *The End of the Barbary Terror: America's 1815 War Against the Pirates of North Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 59-61.

brig *Edwin*.<sup>31</sup> The peace with England did not include Algiers. With a fleet of American merchant vessels ready to take to the seas, the Algerine fleet represented a danger. Even apart from this problem, the Algerines held *Edwin's* crew and believed they could demand both ransom and the tribute the Americans failed to pay during the War of 1812. To subdue the Algerines and protect American commerce in the Mediterranean, President James Madison dispatched a pair of squadrons. Congress agreed, and voted for war on 2 March 1815.<sup>32</sup>

Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Crowninshield formed two well-balanced forces to send against Algiers. During the Tripolitan War, the Americans proved the value of small craft and the virtues of the heavy American frigates. The first squadron's composition reflected perfectly the service requirements of the North African station. It consisted of the "*Guerriere* and *Constellation* Frigates, the *Ontario* and *Epervier* Sloops, and the five small vessels [*Flambeau*, *Spark* and *Firefly* Brigs, *Torch* and *Spitfire* Schooners] ... together with the Frigate *Macedonian* if she can be equipped in time."<sup>33</sup> The *Macedonian* was, in fact, ready in time for Decatur's departure and joined the first squadron. The *Epervier* and *Ontario*, moreover, were not sloops in terms of their rigging, but rather ship-rigged sloops of war (miniature frigates), and as such were not counted as 'small ships.' The squadron had substantial firepower; the *Constellation* and *Macedonian* were both conventional frigates of 36 and 38 guns respectively, while the flagship *Guerriere* was a brand new 44-gun ship built to similar specifications as the famous earlier frigates *Constitution*, *President*, and *United States*. The small craft could work close in shore to interdict light vessels traveling near the shoals. They also packed enough fire power by themselves to serve as convoy escorts; the *Enterprize* that Decatur had commanded under Preble

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 22-3.

<sup>32</sup> "A Bill for the Protection of the Commerce of the United States against the Algerine Cruisers", *Annals of Congress*, 13<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1854), vol. 28: 284-91.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin Crowninshield to Stephen Decatur, 15 Apr. 1815, from *The National Archives Record Group 45, T829, Confidential Letters Sent by the Secretary of the Navy*. Hereafter cited as *Confidential Letters*.



had earlier beaten the Tripolitan raider *Tripoli*, and was similar in size to the schooners and brigs included in the first 1815 squadron.

Of all the American squadrons fitted out for the Mediterranean, this one represented both the most balanced and powerful force of the lot. The first two squadrons, under Commodores Dale and Morris, contained only one smaller vessel each and failed to maintain a choking blockade. Preble's squadron had numerous shallow draft vessels but only two frigates. When *Philadelphia* ran aground, his squadron's firepower was halved. Only Commodore Samuel Barron's squadron was similar in size and balance, a similarity that allows comparison between the success of the two commanders.

The instructions Crowninshield issued to Decatur were concise and clear. The secretary of the navy "authorized and directed [Decatur] to subdue, seize and make prize of all Vessels, goods and effects, belonging to the Dey or subjects of Algiers."<sup>34</sup> Additional and more specific orders directed Decatur to "use your utmost exertions to intercept and capture the [Algerine] cruising vessels which may be at Sea" for the purpose of protecting American commerce.<sup>35</sup> With these two directives, Decatur received direction as clear and concise as any previous commodore. Earlier commodores often used fleet assets to convoy merchant vessels rather than focusing on the enemy fleet and port. Earlier, Secretary of the Navy Smith waited until his second commodore, Morris, to issue such orders. Crowninshield understood this danger from the first and drafted his orders to leave no doubt about the fleet's objectives. Knowing that the best way to defend American commerce was to remove Algerine raiders from the sea, Crowninshield made sure that Decatur would not be tempted to remain passive. Decatur's aggressiveness perhaps renders this point moot, but the distances involved in such an operation

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<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Crowninshield to Stephen Decatur, 15 Apr. 1815, from *Confidential Letters*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

forced Crowninshield to draft orders that would stand against time, distance, and any surprises that may have awaited Decatur beyond Gibraltar.

Crowninshield was also adamant that the squadron establish a blockade of Algiers as early as possible. The timidity of both the commodores and American foreign relations often combined to thwart effective blockade during the Tripolitan War. A lack of small vessels had rendered earlier blockades of Tripoli ineffective, but Crowninshield had already removed this possibility by sending a well-balanced squadron. Decatur was not only to lay his ships off of Algiers, but to publicly “declare the Port of Algiers in a State of Blockade.”<sup>36</sup> This, Crowninshield hoped, would forestall the diplomatic questions of legality that plagued the blockade of Tripoli. Before his famous trek across the Libyan desert, William Eaton as American consul in Tunis, issued a “paper blockade” by refusing to sign passports for Tunisian vessels headed for Tripoli. Eaton’s counterpart at Algiers, Consul O’Brien, refused to do the same for fear of provoking a response, and the Tripolitan blockade fell apart after a successful start.<sup>37</sup> Later in that war when Preble seized the initiative and put Tripoli back under blockade, he circulated a declaration of blockade to both the Barbary nations and to the consuls of the European Mediterranean nations. This drew the ire of numerous nations, especially France, and in the end the United States government refused to recognize Preble’s complete authority to prevent neutral vessels not carrying contraband from entering Tripoli.<sup>38</sup> It seems the government at the time was especially wary of provoking the ire of any other nation, but this was not as true in 1815. Whether the United States as a nation had matured or whether Crowninshield was simply more aggressive (and probably for both reasons) there was no ambiguity about the blockade that Decatur was to effect. The American blockade would strictly prohibit “the

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<sup>36</sup> Benjamin Crowninshield to Stephen Decatur, 15 Apr. 1815, from *Confidential Letters*.

<sup>37</sup> Glenn Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 149.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

intercourse by ingress or egress of all Vessels of any nation whatever,” after the blockade had been established and publicly declared.<sup>39</sup> While Crowninshield did caution Decatur to proceed fairly with other nations, in 1815 the United States would not curry favor with the European powers, but instead expect “of them no more than justice.”<sup>40</sup>

Decatur, like the other commodores, still received his share of discretion. Crowninshield gave Decatur free reign to pick the port of rendezvous for the squadron in the Mediterranean. While he recommended the port of Cagliari on Sardinia, a port that welcomed the Americans during the Tripolitan War, he directed Decatur to “be governed by circumstances and your good judgment” as this decision would be better made in the Mediterranean than “here in the Department.”<sup>41</sup> Decatur could also have established a hospital on shore if he chose, and in making this decision he was to be “governed by the actual State of things in Europe.”<sup>42</sup> In general, and in all things, Decatur was to use his “own discretion in directing the operations of [his] squadron in such a manner as to produce the most effect upon the Enemy.”<sup>43</sup>

Finding a base for supply and establishing a hospital are tasks given with a long war in mind, and this is where Crowninshield made his largest miscalculation. He wrote, in fact, that “it is considered that the squadron at present under your command is not sufficiently strong to attempt offensive operations against the town and Batteries of Algiers.”<sup>44</sup> The American experience against Tripoli supported his reasoning. Only one commodore, Edward Preble, undertook real bombardments of Tripoli’s battery and though the attacks reduced the bashaw’s asking price for peace, they did not encourage capitulation. While Decatur’s squadron included

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<sup>39</sup> Crowninshield to Decatur, 15 Apr. 1815, *Confidential Letters*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

more large ships than Preble's, it lacked the mortar-equipped bomb vessels and the gunboats that Preble used so effectively in inshore bombardments. Crowninshield's answers to the fortifications at Algiers were the 74-gun *Independence* and the bomb vessels of the second squadron under Bainbridge. Decatur was to make the Mediterranean safe for American merchants by capturing those Algerine vessels then at sea and bottling the rest in Algiers, a task for which his fleet was ideally suited.

Crowninshield had also learned from the past in other areas. Earlier commodores spent at least part of their time dealing with money matters. Each commodore, and often each ship's commander, sailed with funds to use in the squadron's business. Sometimes the funds went to good uses, like funding Eaton's desert offensive. Sometimes, however, they were not, as when the Bey of Tunis extorted squadron funds from Commodore Morris. Instead of leaving money matters to Decatur, Crowninshield appointed the American Consul Richard McCall in Barcelona, to be the Navy Department's Mediterranean financial representative.<sup>45</sup> Decatur also received assistance with negotiations. Instead of relying on the friendly consuls of other nations in Algiers, as the first three commodores had, Decatur's fleet included a professional diplomat, William Shaler. He cooperated with Decatur to achieve a treaty, further lightening the commodore's duties.<sup>46</sup>

The fleet only began preparing for deployment in the late spring of 1815. On 21 April the schooner *Torch* shifted its anchorage within New York harbor to ride next to the *Macedonian* where these two ships, whose logbooks are the only surviving ones from this squadron, waited until 18 May for the rest of the fleet to assemble.<sup>47</sup> On 20 May, at 3 PM, Decatur ordered the

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Log of US Schooner *Torch*, 21 Apr. 1815, the National Archives, Record Group 24, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Logs of Ships and Shore Stations. Hereafter cited as *Torch Log*.

squadron to get underway; within half an hour the fleet was under sail, and within another half hour had crossed the bar and assumed sailing stations.<sup>48</sup> The Atlantic crossing was not smooth; only a few days out of New York, a gale overtook the squadron which separated some of them and forced the *Firefly* to turn back.<sup>49</sup> The squadron's first rendezvous was Gibraltar, and the *Torch*, *Spitfire*, and *Ontario*, the three ships separated from the squadron arrived there independently. As the main body of the fleet neared the Straits of Gibraltar the Americans began to encounter European traffic. In hopes of some news of the Algerine fleet, Decatur stopped and spoke to a Portuguese schooner on 12 June and a Spanish vessel the next day.<sup>50</sup> In Cadiz, Decatur received the news he hoped for. The enemy was out: "three of the enemy's frigates are off Alicante," a point not far eastward along the Spanish coast.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile the *Torch*, with the *Spitfire* off Gibraltar, learned that the Algerines were cruising off Cape Trafalgar in the other direction, patrolling the Atlantic approaches to the straits.<sup>52</sup> With the squadron reunited the next day off Gibraltar, Decatur hesitated only long enough to gather his ships into sailing order.

Decatur turned east, into the Mediterranean, trusting his intelligence from Cadiz and the eyes of the American lookouts who had spotted nothing suspicious in the Atlantic. After only three days cruising near Alicante, the squadron sighted a large ship during the afternoon of 17 June.<sup>53</sup> When approached by the squadron, this vessel, though wearing neutral English colors, quickly increased sail to run. The squadron, which also hoisted the Union Jack, just as quickly sailed in pursuit.<sup>54</sup> The chase proved to be a large, though slow, warship. Within an hour, the

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<sup>48</sup> Log of USS *Macedonian*, 21 May 1815, the National Archives, Record Group 24, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Logs of Ships and Shore Stations. Hereafter cited as *Macedonian Log*.

<sup>49</sup> Leiner, *Barbary Terror*, 90.

<sup>50</sup> *Macedonian Log*, 12-13 June 1815.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 June 1815.

<sup>52</sup> *Torch Log*, 13 June 1815.

<sup>53</sup> *Macedonian Log*, 17 June 1815.

<sup>54</sup> Diary of Peter Potter, onboard U.S. Schooner *Spitfire*, 17 June 1815, the National Archives, Record Group 45. Hereafter cited as Potter Diary.

fleet, with *Constellation* in the lead, drew close enough to open fire after their quarry refused to stop.<sup>55</sup> The *Torch* and *Ontario* came up and began their own cannonades, and the latter “raked her [the chase] severely.”<sup>56</sup> Soon the *Guerriere* and *Epervier* did likewise and, severely outgunned, the “enemy struck to the squadron ... prove[ing] to be an Algerine Frigate mounting 46 guns.”<sup>57</sup> Of the Americans, *Epervier* deserved the most honors for it “ran up close to her [the chase] and poured in her broadside very gallantly,” the close range fire doing more damage than the larger ships in the American squadron.<sup>58</sup> The real credit was due, however, to Commodore Decatur, for with odds of nine against one the outcome of the fight itself was never in doubt. By hunting for intelligence, making a quick decision upon evaluating that intelligence, and keeping his squadron concentrated where he determined the enemy would be found, Decatur won this fight before the first shot had even been fired. The rewards were great. The prize proved to be the *Meshouda*, flagship and most capable vessel in the Algerine navy, under the command of Algiers’s most capable officer, Rais Hamidou, who perished in the battle.<sup>59</sup>

Only a few days later, Decatur had a chance to strike another blow. Shipping was abundant just inside the straits and, while the *Macedonian* towed the prize slowly eastward, he sent the small ships inshore to investigate strange sails. Only two days later, the squadron sighted a suspicious brig close to shore. When approached, the vessel “came to anchor, hoisting Algerine Colors.”<sup>60</sup> The brig was so close to the shore that the water was too shallow for the frigates, or even *Ontario*, largest of the sloops of war, to approach. Indeed, the brig lay close enough to shore to be within Spanish waters. Decatur, before taking action, recalled the *Torch*,

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<sup>55</sup> *Torch* Log, 14 June 1815.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Macedonian* Log, 17 June 1815.

<sup>58</sup> Potter Diary, 17 June 1815.

<sup>59</sup> Leiner, *Barbary Terror*, 91-97.

<sup>60</sup> *Torch* Log, 20 June 1815.

closest of the squadron's small ships, sending it closer to shore to seek sure "intelligence of the strange sail."<sup>61</sup>

When confronted with a similar situation in 1801, two enemy vessels anchored in Gibraltar Bay, there was never any question of Commodore Dale cutting them out. He instead left a frigate there to keep them in port, an action that deprived Tripoli of their vessels, but which also deprived Commodore Dale of one of his squadron's ships. In fact, during that conflict, it was the Spanish who infringed on the neutral rights of the United States by interning American vessels that passed the Straits of Gibraltar.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps because he witnessed these unwelcome Spanish interventions, perhaps because his orders did not instruct him to yield to every nicety demanded by foreign nations, or perhaps because he was merely more aggressive, after confirming the brig was an Algerine, Decatur ordered the small vessels of the squadron to "stand in for the Enemy and if he would not come off to commence an action with him."<sup>63</sup> The *Epervier* led the way, anchored close to the Algerine brig, and opened the action. The *Torch*, just behind, "came to anchor within Musket shot ... immediately commenced firing," and it was not long until the other vessels joined in.<sup>64</sup> The Algerine brig *Estedio* struck its colors after being boarded by the squadron's boats and joined the *Meshouda* on the way to a prize court in Cartagena.<sup>65</sup> The *Macedonian* missed this action; employed in towing the *Meshouda*, it was quite a distance away when the log recorded "cannonading to the N.E."<sup>66</sup> The rest of the squadron's large ships also missed the engagement. Still, as in the last action the Americans held enough of an advantage in numbers that the outcome was never really in doubt.

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<sup>61</sup> *Torch* Log, 20 June 1815.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Dale to David Humphreys, 19 Oct. 1801, in *Naval Documents* 1: 600.

<sup>63</sup> *Torch* Log, 20 June 20 1815.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Leiner, *Barbary Terror*, 106.

<sup>66</sup> *Macedonian* Log, 20 June 1815.

While Decatur's orders instructed him to send prizes to the courts in the island of Sardinia, he had no intention of going even that far into the Mediterranean.<sup>67</sup> His next stop was Algiers, for with two impressive bargaining chips already safely stored in a neutral harbor and his squadron between the rest of the Algerine raiders and their home port, Decatur believed he had a chance to end the war quickly. On 27 June, Decatur's squadron, still together as a concentrated force, arrived off of Algiers, anchoring there the next day.<sup>68</sup>

Upon anchoring, the *Guerriere* hoisted the flag of Sweden, a signal for Swedish consul Norderling, who handled American affairs in Algiers since the American consul's ejection.<sup>69</sup> Norderling rowed out with an Algerine official who carried a letter ashore from President Madison. Though the letter made it clear that the United States would continue the fight until Algiers ceased any demand for tribute, Decatur added a finer point with a verbal message, saying "my officers have come out to fight and put themselves in practice."<sup>70</sup> The Algerine representative, captain of the Algerine marine, was surprised at the confidence of the American negotiators and opined that there was little Decatur's fleet could do to injure Algiers. Pointing out strength of Algiers's batteries, he also expressed confidence that his fleet was safe in some neutral port when Decatur, with the same impeccable timing that allowed him success in battle, led out the senior surviving officers of his prizes.<sup>71</sup> This induced the Algerine to ask the Americans' terms, suggesting a cease-fire during which the two sides could negotiate a treaty. Knowing the bargaining advantage he held by being between the Algerine fleet and their home port, Decatur refused a cease-fire "declaring that should a vessel appear off the harbor, and had a

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<sup>67</sup> Crowninshield to Decatur, 15 Apr. 1815, *Confidential Letters*.

<sup>68</sup> *Macedonian Log*, 27-28 June 1815.

<sup>69</sup> Glenn Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 456.

<sup>70</sup> Potter Diary, 2 July 1815.

<sup>71</sup> Pratt, *Preble's Boys*, 108.



boat with the American prisoners not been on board” his flagship, that the enemy vessel would be taken.<sup>72</sup>

After only a short wait, just such a situation as the commodore had foreseen arose; a sail crept over the horizon, clearly making for Algiers.<sup>73</sup> As the squadron prepared to sail and intercept this vessel, a boat put off from shore, pulling fast for the *Guerriere* with the *Edwin*'s crew huddled on board. After Decatur was satisfied that all the American prisoners were present, and that the treaty, with no tribute, had been signed, “peace was announced to be considered between the Dey of Algiers and the President of the United States.”<sup>74</sup> Lamenting the potential prize that was sailing toward them, Peter Potter, surgeon aboard the *Spitfire*, wrote, “how unlucky that this peace was not delayed one day,” so that the Americans could make another prize.<sup>75</sup> Decatur, though, had gained his objective and certainly weighed the loss of a single prize lightly against the gain of a treaty without American payment.

In fact, Decatur's achievement was far greater. The treaty included an Algerine indemnity for the seizure of American property, \$10,000 in return for the *Edwin* and the suffering of its crew.<sup>76</sup> After gaining this spectacular result, Decatur sailed immediately to Tunis, and then Tripoli in turn. These nations had not attacked American vessels themselves, but each fell on the British side of neutrality during the War of 1812. When an American privateer sent British prizes into each of those ports, the local authorities detained them and turned them over to the British.<sup>77</sup> In each of these ports Decatur demanded and settled similar treaties,

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<sup>72</sup> Potter Diary, 2 July 1815.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 June 1815.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Leiner, *Barbary Terror*, 189-94.

<sup>77</sup> Ray W. Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers: 1776-1816* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 180.

without American tribute, and each treaty included recompense for these nations' misdeeds.<sup>78</sup> This difference in the American attitude on each side of little more than a decade is marked. Diplomatic historian Ray Irwin especially noted the "tremendous difference" between sending "representatives, cap in hand, to the governments of Europe to beg protection, to that later date when Decatur ... dictated to the rulers of Barbary the sole conditions upon which they could avert hostilities."<sup>79</sup> Though certainly, America had a higher international standing in the world in 1815 than 1805, most of the credit for this change rests with the negotiator.

In the course of four months, Decatur had achieved against all the Barbary States what four squadrons and four years could not accomplish against the weakest of those states. Decatur, alone of all the commodores, proceeded to a negotiation with his own demand, rather than answering that of a Barbary prince. Decatur proved himself able to recognize diplomatic advantages as well as military ones, and he seized both. Perhaps no cleaner, clearer, or quicker victory has ever been achieved by American arms.

Decatur did, in some ways, sail to the Mediterranean in a more favorable position than some of the other commodores. Crowninshield's orders provided Decatur with a balance of direction and discretion. With the squadron's finances provided for by someone else and an official diplomatic representative assigned to the fleet, Decatur was closer to a pure military commander than any of the previous commodores. The government's new position in the world after the War of 1812 meant that Decatur also had the discretion he needed in dealing with European powers. As opposed to Dale, who historian Spencer Tucker notes, sailed with orders that "virtually ensured that he would accomplish nothing," Decatur could not have asked for

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<sup>78</sup> Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 462-3.

<sup>79</sup> Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations*, 204.

clearer or more aggressive orders.<sup>80</sup> His short time in the Mediterranean meant that he did not have to struggle to find friendly ports or supplies for the squadron. Decatur, one astute biographer noted, was absent from the United States only 187 days, but this makes his achievements all the more remarkable; “We may fruitlessly search the annals of navigation, from the time the magnetic needle was discovered ... down to this period and discover no parallel.”<sup>81</sup>

One other factor certainly assisted Decatur; the Barbary States’ place in the world had declined. The year of 1815 saw the end to Britain’s war with the United States, but also the end to the Napoleonic Wars, and, indeed, the end to an entire century of near-constant European warfare. Historian Frank Lambert, who examines the Barbary Wars from an Atlantic World perspective, notes that the great powers of Europe not only condoned the system of Barbary tributes, they encouraged it.<sup>82</sup> The Barbary States restricted trade competition from nations which were too weak to oppose them, allowing the larger powers to reserve this trade for themselves. The Barbary States survived amongst, and even received tribute from, large European nations that could have destroyed them by being masters of playing those nations against each other.<sup>83</sup> With Europe constantly at war, the Barbary States negotiated an ever-shifting series of treaties making sure to demand large tributes only from nations that were too preoccupied to do something about the Barbary threat. With the final defeat of Napoleon came an end the Barbary States’ happy situation. Though the British had encouraged the Algerines to declare war on the United States in 1812, the dey must have known that the British would not now offer support. In fact, only a year after Decatur secured peace with Algiers, the city was

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<sup>80</sup> Spencer Tucker, *Stephen Decatur*, 26.

<sup>81</sup> Waldo, *Life and Character*, 259-60.

<sup>82</sup> Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 42.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

reduced almost to rubble by the bombardment of a combined British and Dutch naval force.<sup>84</sup> Only fifteen years later, Algiers's fortunes sunk low enough that the nation succumbed to invasion and became a French colony.

Even the several advantages that Decatur enjoyed over the previous commodores cannot reduce his achievement. That Secretary Crowninshield judged Decatur's squadron too weak to compel Algiers to peace is proof that Decatur did not enjoy every advantage he could have. Decatur's force, though ideally suited for its mission of running down Algerine raiders and blockading Algiers, did not have the power to compel Algiers to capitulate to bombardment. The bomb vessels and gun boats needed for an effective assault sailed later with Bainbridge. Further, Algiers had long been the largest Barbary state, commanding more raiders than Tripoli and protected by stronger fortifications. Decatur's goal was no less daunting than his predecessors', and his achievements of six months outshone all of theirs of five years.

This war, like the Tripolitan War, encompassed few actual engagements, and even more than in that previous war there was never any doubt that the Americans would win those fights. Taking one ship with an entire squadron did not tax Decatur's military skill, and neither Morris nor any other American commodore could have failed to take these prizes. Additionally, his force was not strong enough to destroy Algiers by naval bombardment and did not carry a large enough force for a land assault. Almost no amount of ineptitude could fail in those two engagements, and no amount of military genius would allow a few frigates to level the defenses of Algiers.

Decatur had only one way to force the enemy to sign the treaty and he found it. Instead of leaving a few ships here and there to convoy merchants, Decatur concentrated his force. Instead of blockading the Algerine brig in Spanish waters, Decatur cut it out. Instead of offering

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<sup>84</sup> Leiner, *Barbary Terror*, 168.

to begin negotiations, Decatur made demands and prepared to back them with force. By then inserting his concentrated fleet in a position to capture the Algerine fleet as they returned to port singly, this threat of force was enough to compel Algiers to submit. It was Decatur's grasp of the situation that allowed him to win the most decisive victory in war that had been yet achieved by the United States, and to win it "in the way which reflected honor on the United States ... the way the American people wanted it done," the way that only he, of all the officers of the early United States Navy, could have done it.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Glenn Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder*, 464.

## CONCLUSION

Other historians have used their own evaluations of the progress of the Barbary Wars to evaluate each of the commodores. Almost universally, they raise Preble and Decatur into the pantheon of early American naval heroes, while ignoring (and sometimes ridiculing) the remaining commodores. An evaluation of all of these men based on a complete picture of their decisions, and not solely their combat with the enemy, reveals more subtle delineations.

One commodore stands apart from the others at each end of the spectrum. Clearly, the most successful was Decatur. While he faced only one opponent, Algiers, that nation in 1815 was far better equipped than any of the United States' earlier Barbary foes, yet he established a permanent treaty on the best possible terms within months of his departure from the United States. The least successful, clearly, was Morris. Though he spent as long in the Mediterranean as anyone, he accomplished the least, probably making the situation worse for his successor.

The other three officers require more careful scrutiny. Dale, Preble, and Barron achieved some level of success but ultimately fell short of a completely positive outcome. None of these commanders faced entirely similar conditions or exercised control of the same resources, and any comparison must be subjective. One important condition, the Jefferson administration's expectations for the war, changed in a way to make the jobs of each subsequent commander easier than the preceding commodores. As the war continued, the government became ever more eager for it to reach a successful conclusion. Each fleet the navy dispatched, therefore, was more capable than the last. In general, each commodore had greater powers or resources than the previous commodore to prosecute the war. Dale, for example, sailed with orders so limiting that he believed he did not even have the authority to capture Tripolitan warships. On the other hand,

Barron sailed with the administration's blessing to attempt to install a different ruler in Tripoli if he so chose.

With these factors in mind, Barron has the least to recommend him, despite the fact that he finally forced Tripoli into a treaty after four years of warfare. Even with all the advantages of a large fleet and liberal powers to make war, Barron settled for a peace treaty without even using much of his military force. Both Dale and Preble arrived in the Mediterranean only to learn that an unanticipated state of war existed: Dale with Tripoli, and Preble with Morocco. Preble's force was shorter on firepower, though probably more capable, and his orders more liberal without requiring too much of him. He used these factors to force peace with one opponent and successfully attack the other, actions that rank him above the first of the Barbary commodores, Richard Dale, whose failure to be more aggressive lessened the effect of his efforts. Dale had a poorly balanced fleet, constricting orders, and held command for only a limited time. Despite these factors, Dale did lay the groundwork for the future success of naval operations in the Mediterranean.

The efforts each commander devoted to extra-military affairs were directly related to their overall success in the war. Interestingly, this pattern holds no relevance when considering simply the military side of the action. Decatur captured only a few vessels, always with overwhelming superiority in force; these were not actions that required much in the way of military skill or extreme heroism. Engagements in which the outcome was in little doubt reflected little martial glory on their commander. Dale's fleet, on the military side, was nearly as successful as Decatur. He blockaded the enemy's two largest ships until their abandonment, and then *Enterprize* captured a third vessel, ensuring it was not useful to the Tripolitans before releasing it. The parallels between the two commodores' arrivals in the Mediterranean are

interesting. Each almost immediately met the two largest of the enemy's vessels. Decatur, with the luck to meet his foes at sea, gained a pair of bargaining chips, while Dale found his quarry secure in a British port. The vagaries of chance gave Decatur an opportunity for successful negotiation and forced Dale to split his force, leaving some vessels to guard the enemy in Gibraltar. It seems unlikely, based on Dale's other actions, that he would have attempted a diplomatic move as inspired as Decatur's, but the scale of the military victory was essentially the same in each case. Both commodores deprived the enemy of the use of two warships, yet Decatur is the military hero. It was Decatur's daring outside of combat that sealed his victory and his fame.

Preble's case is an almost exact reversal of Decatur's, but just as surely illustrates the importance of those duties outside of combat. Preble first demonstrated his resourcefulness by using a tiny prize vessel to destroy the captured *Philadelphia*, and then in acquiring gunboats and bomb vessels for use off of Tripoli. With such a small force, any attack required the presence of Preble's entire fleet, but only his flagship had the capacity to carry months' worth of stores. To keep the supplies coming, Preble appointed representatives ashore to hire private supply ships to ferry essential goods to the squadron. Though hardly a giant leap in thinking, no other commodore made similar arrangements. It was this decision that made Preble's attacks possible. Once made, however, Preble's failures in negotiation mitigated the impact of his assaults. To follow every attack with a request for peace eventually convinced the bashaw that the Americans had already done their worst. In the end, Preble offered a similar amount of money to that which Lear eventually included in the final treaty. It is perhaps fortunate for Preble's reputation that the bashaw rejected this offer, for now historians can focus on Preble's attacks while still



criticizing the final treaty. The record of the one commodore resourceful enough to actually mount attacks on Tripoli makes clear the importance of a fleet commander's other duties.

Each commodore, from best to worst, proved over and over again the importance of the full range of tasks entrusted to naval commanders. Not only did a commander have to make effective decisions outside of combat just to undertake, and succeed in, military operations, but those decisions often superseded the importance of those military operations. While the military victories of the Barbary War remain fresh in historical memory and public imagination, the real victories over each of the Barbary States were the treaties eventually signed with each one. Decatur gained these victories, and proved that victory in the earlier war with Tripoli was possible, by making daring decisions in the more mundane areas of his duties, outside of combat.

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