

“THE FEWER THE MEN, THE GREATER THE HONOR”:
THE NAVAL DOCTRINE OF REPUBLICANISM IN THE FIRST BARBARY WAR

by

PARKER BLAKE BEDNASEK

Submitted to the Department of History of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for departmental honors

Approved by:

Name

Dr. Marie Brown

Name

CDR. Joseph Cooper

Name

Dr. Sheyda Jahanbani

Date Defended

Abstract

The First Barbary War was a naval conflict fought between the United States and Tripoli from 1801-1805 over the payment of “tribute” to Tripoli so they would not seize American merchant ships. The Jefferson Administration believed that the war would not take more than a few months but it ended up lasting a desultory four years. There were two main theoretical concepts that impacted the war – the idea of the proper role and size of a republican military power and the internal struggle of the U.S. Navy for professionalism and leadership. These two concepts influenced the development of the naval doctrine of republicanism for the U.S. Navy which can be characterized by limited size, firm, yet humane leadership, and aggressiveness toward the enemy. This doctrine is best exemplified by Commodore Edward Preble’s who had a great impact on the young naval officers who fought under him and who would come to lead the U.S. Navy for years afterwards.

Introduction

Our exasperating experiences with the Barbary States of northern Africa, continuing for a generation after the United States had won its independence, constitute an interesting chapter of American history and one from which we may derive permanently valuable lessons.
President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1938

On a frigid February night in 1804 a small ketch, the *Intrepid*, approached the harbor of Tripoli with dogged persistence.¹ The small, select group of men on board, mostly United States naval officers, sailors, and marines, had a dangerous mission to complete. Led by Lieutenant Stephen Decatur Jr., they boarded the captured frigate, the *Philadelphia*, and let her burn for all of Tripoli to see.² This action swung the pendulum of war in favor of the United States.

Months earlier, in October, Captain William Bainbridge of the *Philadelphia* was conducting a patrol off the coast of Tripoli as part of the United States' blockade efforts. Captain Bainbridge's orders were to cruise alongside a schooner, the *Vixen*, yet Captain Bainbridge disregarded these orders from his superior officer. He sent the *Vixen* to scout the coast of Tunis to check the validity of intelligence that said there were two Tripolitan cruisers around the area.³

Around 9:00 AM on October 31, 1803, Captain Bainbridge sighted what he was after – a set of sails trying to sneak into Tripoli's harbor. The *Philadelphia* set a course and the wind pushed the 38-gun frigate at a speed of around 15 knots, chasing down the Arab vessel in a

¹ Naval history during the Age of Sail requires the use of era-specific naval jargon, much of it unfamiliar to us in the twenty-first century. Therefore, I will do my best to provide definitions when I see fit. Dean King, John B. Hattendorf, and J. Worth Estes, *A Sea of Words: A Lexicon and Companion for Seafaring Tales* 2nd ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997). A ketch is a small, two-masted vessel often used for coastal trading... the ketch was also used as a vessel for heaving large mortars toward targets. Other names include bomb-vessel and bomb-ketch.

² A frigate is a fast three-masted fully rigged ship... carrying 20 to 50 guns. Used for scouting and cruising.

³ A schooner is a small sailing ship with two or more masts with the foremast being shorter than the main.

blistering two hours.⁴ As Captain Bainbridge closed in, the unexpected happened – the *Philadelphia* ran aground on Kaliusa Reef, an area unmapped by American cartographers. After undertaking every possible effort to free the *Philadelphia* from the rocks, Captain Bainbridge could see just how hopeless the situation was. Within the hour the *Philadelphia* was surrounded by Tripolitan gunboats when the Tripolitan Admiral “took on board upwards of One hundred Tripolines armed with muskets, sabres... and proceeded to the Attack of the *Philadelphia*.”⁵ Bainbridge and his men were stripped of all their belongings and taken as prisoners and slaves under control of the Bashaw of Tripoli.⁶

The incident was a national embarrassment for the United States. Jefferson was admonished almost daily in the press for the loss of the *Philadelphia* and its crew. One Philadelphia newspaper wrote, “the loss of such a ship is great to our infant fleet is certainly great; but the captivity of 307 men is a matter of serious import” and it was “entirely owing to the niggardly policy of our rulers” that this was allowed to happen.⁷ Lieutenant Decatur’s goal therefore, was to restore some of that lost honor by sending a fiery message to the Bashaw of Tripoli. A captured Arab vessel, the *Intrepid* easily snuck into the Tripolitan harbor late that night without drawing much attention. Decatur pulled alongside the *Philadelphia* and “boarded with sixty men & Officers” and quickly took care of the twenty or so men on board during which

⁴ A knot is the standard measure of speed for a ship. Pieces of knotted string fastened to the ship were fixed at intervals of 47 feet, 3 inches and the number of knots that passed in 28 seconds was the ship’s speed in nautical miles per hour, or “knots.”

⁵ Dudley W. Knox, ed., *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol.III* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 371. Just a note, there have been no grammatical or spelling corrections made when using quotes throughout this paper.

⁶ Chipp Reid, *Intrepid Sailors: The Legacy of Preble’s Boys and the Tripoli Campaign* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 50-53.

⁷ “Modern Economy,” *The Gazette of the United States*, April 24, 1804, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3014137010).

Decatur proudly describes, “I had not a man killed in this affair.” Although no guns were fired in the boarding, the “boarding and contending... gave general alarm on shore” but, Decatur and his men went about their work and “immediately fired her in the Store Rooms, Gun Rooms, Cockpit & Birth Deck.” It was not long until the rigging and sails were engulfed in flame. Fully aware of the developing situation, the Tripolitans arming the batteries began bombarding the *Philadelphia* with mortars while two Tripolitan ships began blasting broadsides in a concerted effort to stop the Americans.⁸

Lieutenant Decatur and his men quickly slipped out of the harbor, pushing the *Intrepid* to its limit. The mission was complete and it considered a victory for the United States Navy – an important victory because the small Navy had not yet won a place among the vital institutions of the United States. Lieutenant Decatur, writing a report to his superior officer, Commodore Preble, simply wanted to “speak of the brave fellows. I have the honor to command, whose coolness and intrepidity was such, as I trust will ever characterize the American Tars.”⁹ ¹⁰ The sentiments expressed were entirely accurate; the United States Navy in this period was characterized by aggressive and courageous actions because of the lack of necessary support from the Jeffersonian-era government. This development of an American, and therefore republican, naval doctrine began during the First Barbary War and particularly with Commodore Edward Preble.

⁸ Batteries are a series of mounted mortar cannons on the shore of a harbor.

A broadside is the simultaneous firing of the artillery on one side of the ship.

Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol. III*, 414.

⁹ The term “tar” is a nickname for a sailor from the fact that sailors’ canvas coats and hats were tarred against precipitation.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

The First Barbary War was primarily a naval-based series of conflicts between the fledgling United States and the Regency of Tripoli between 1801 and 1804. The war stemmed from almost 20 years of frustration on part of the United States which, since declaring independence from Great Britain in 1776, had been the victims of North African corsair activity. These activities included seizure of American merchant ships and cargo and the enslavement of American citizens. The corsairs ceased these activities as long as the United States government paid the rulers of the North African regencies an annual “tribute” along with semi-regular gifts of gold, goods, ships, etc. This was the way the Barbary Coast, which also included Algiers, Tunis, and Morocco, had operated for hundreds of years. The ruler of each of these quasi-independent nations acted as the leader of the corsairs making corsairing a state-sanctioned and state-operated system that was of great economic importance to these countries.¹¹ Long frustrated with the incessant diplomatic requirements of the Barbary States, President Thomas Jefferson’s administration marked a change in the United States policy toward these regencies, primarily Tripoli, when he ordered a naval squadron to sail to the Mediterranean in order to protect American commerce and interests in spring of 1801.

The naval action ended up taking a lot more time and resources than the United States government expected. It was generally believed that a few months of blockading Tripoli with a small naval fleet could force the Tripolitans to cease their piratical activities and pursue peace with the Americans. As it turned out President Jefferson sent four Commodores over the course of the war, all with varying degrees of success, passion, and most importantly, strategy for

¹¹ These nations were quasi-independent because technically these were part of the Ottoman Empire and subject to the sultan’s rule, but the great distance of these countries made them mostly autonomous states.

ending the war.¹² The war was fought in an inconsistent manner which stemmed from the political culture of the early republic era of the United States and the search for effective and professional leadership; the most effective approach was developed only midway through the war. The United States Navy in its infancy did not reap victories from long, arduous strategies that developed over many months with ample resources, rather bold, yet isolated, victories that were the result of the efforts of young officers trying to prove themselves to the nation and to the world.

This thesis will argue that republican naval doctrine first developed during the First Barbary War. There were two main contrasting ideas that led to this doctrine. The first was Jeffersonian republicanism – a limiting idea and force on the size and role of military. The second was the U.S. Navy’s internal development for a professionalized force and effective American leadership. These contrasting ideas were worked into an effective strategy by Commodore Edward Preble, commander of the third squadron sent to Tripoli between 1803 and 1804 and developed into the U.S. Navy’s doctrine toward naval war. This approach came to influence the Navy for the remainder of the age of sail due to Preble’s development of the doctrine and subsequent effect on the culture of the infant Navy.

With a young country eager to make a name for itself and already highly dependent on commerce, why was the development of a strong navy not the foremost of consensual agreements in the Legislative and Executive branches? For a country that prided itself in overseas commerce and its merchant marine a powerful navy seems almost a necessary function

¹² A Commodore is a Captain appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of a squadron. It was not an official rank but a courtesy title given to senior captains because that was the highest rank in the U.S. Navy at the time.

of the government if it were to protect private property rights at all. How much of the decision to not build a strong navy was a function of republican ideology, thrift, or some combination of the two? This leads to the question of how deep would the connection between the United States and Great Britain be? Independence might have severed the formal connection of the colonies and their former mother-state, but these ties went deeper than just legal connections – the two countries shared a cultural bond due to their similar societies which impacted their ideas of navies. The United States was still developing its own sense of itself and its role in the world at this time especially its role with Great Britain and the world-at-large. They had already taken an approach to the Barbary corsairs that had trounced the status quo. Was this due to discrimination against the predominantly Muslim countries or simply because it was the cheapest option in the long-run? These are all things that impacted the United States and the development of its navy. They are also topics that have motivated historians for decades and will be explored in this thesis.

The First Barbary War is a frequently touched upon topic in early American naval history. Although the naval history of the American Revolution and the War of 1812 are popular subjects in the field, the First Barbary War tends to rank even with the Quasi-War as the next most frequent subjects deliberated upon.¹³ This might be because of the fact that the American Revolution and the War of 1812 are bigger events in the grand scope of American history but, it could be argued that the Quasi-War and the First Barbary War are more important in American *naval* history. The history of the First Barbary War tends to be placed in a grand scope – political, social, and martial all combined together. More importance is generally given to the

¹³ The Quasi-War was a naval *guerre de course* (war against commerce) between French Navy and privateers and the American Navy and privateers over neutral shipping rights in the West Indies between 1798-1801.

diplomatic aspects of the war compared to the militaristic aspects, often highlighting only key events. The military operations are generally given as either a backdrop to diplomatic disputes faced by United States Consuls and the Jefferson Administration, or they are featured as mere chapters in books on the history of the United States Navy. What discussion is given to the martial aspect of the Tripolitan War is a chronological analysis of the war – usually from the perspective of the four Commodores, Richard Dale, Richard Valentine Morris, Edward Preble, and Samuel Barron. This presents a problem when looking for conceptual military analysis of the naval operations conducted during the war as it tends to be narrative driven. This thesis will bring greater analysis to the war by introducing two concepts that help explain the U.S. Navy's approach to naval war in this period.

Jefferson's role as Commander-in-Chief in the First Barbary War that polarizes scholars into two camps: either Jefferson led the U.S. Navy to victory and proved that the United States could stand up neutral maritime rights against a tyrannical and barbaric enemy or Jefferson was a misguided ideologue who did not understand the complexities of naval strategy which only dragged the war out. Many earlier scholars on the war from the late 19th century all the way to the 1970s writing about the war tend to take the latter position while more modern scholars, writing from about the 1980s onward, take the former position.¹⁴ The pro-Jefferson argument tends to emphasize that he was among the first advocates of military force against the Barbary

¹⁴ The negative perspective on Jefferson can be attributed to the writings of Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914), an Admiral in the U.S. Navy and highly influential naval/geopolitical theorist. He was an advocate for large naval fleets as a way to protect commerce in times of peace and war. Jefferson's position was a small, temporary naval fleet that would be activated only when necessary. The positive perspective of Jefferson became popular around the rise of terrorism in the Middle East. Jefferson was an early advocate of military force to subdue the Barbary pirates so scholars, looking to past for answers in the present, saw Jefferson as a beacon of moral fortitude who was the first American to stand up to Middle Eastern maritime terrorism.

Corsairs as he debated the matter with John Adams in 1786. Jefferson, the U.S. Minister to Paris, and Adams, the U.S. Minister to London, both agreed that the Barbary problem should be high on a list of priorities for the new republic. Adams, however, advocated for the more traditional route of tribute payments to the Barbary powers. Meanwhile, Jefferson believed that the route to peace was through war.¹⁵ Pro-Jefferson scholars believed that while the war was not executed to perfection, Jefferson's administration did tackle the problem that had plagued the Americans for nearly twenty years. Anti-Jefferson scholars advocate that Jefferson's naval policy was feckless and weak – the fact that it took four years to “win” the war was a signal that Jefferson did not know what he was doing and it took too long for a coherent and effective naval strategy to be implemented in the Mediterranean. Many scholars argue that the U.S. did not even win the war, as their objective at the beginning was the total rejection of any form of tribute, yet the U.S. continued to pay (reduced) tribute after the peace treaty was signed. The frustrations for the American Navy for a good part of the war were due to the fact that the naval doctrine of the United States Navy was ineffective. This thesis will take the position that Jefferson could have made better decisions to bring about a more decisive victory. If given bounds for a proper strategy and necessary supplies, it is possible that the U.S. could have achieved a more favorable peace treaty in less time.

The Jeffersonian naval doctrine was based on the classical liberal republican interpretation of what a republican military power should be. A Jeffersonian republican was someone who believed in the supremacy of liberty over tyranny, small government over large government, and militia military power over standing military power. Jefferson's primary objective was to achieve naval victory with what he deemed “the smallest force competent”;

¹⁵ Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol. I*, 10.

thus, the United States Navy struggled to achieve decisive results against a considerably weaker opponent.¹⁶ This republican naval doctrine emphasized a small, temporary navy that posed no threat to the supremacy of civil power. These half-hearted measures by the Jefferson Administration were ineffective at providing the assistance needed for the U.S. Navy to fight a war thousands of miles from home. This led to American naval commanders like Edward Preble to pursue an aggressive strategy that constantly pushed the boundaries of the republican naval doctrine. This shaped American naval doctrine into a unique approach to naval tactics and strategy where results were achieved through the heroic acts of junior officers, like Stephen Decatur, which came in isolated events rather than a resolute long-term strategy.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of archivists in the 1930s there is a comprehensive collection of primary source documents in a seven-volume set and edited by Commodore Dudley W. Knox, USN.¹⁷ These documents give a detailed insight into the day to day military operations of the war including the necessary diplomatic details. It contains correspondence with major figures in the war, ship logs, military reports, and almost any other pertinent documents related to the war. The Annals of Congress also proved valuable for understanding the Navalist-Antinavalist debates within the Legislative branch of the United States. Coupled with the rich secondary-source material of the naval history of the early United States, it was possible to understand and contextualize the First Barbary War with such a strong foundation.

This thesis will put forth an argument that will help explain the development of the republican naval doctrine by examining the origins and concepts that influenced the actual

¹⁶ “The Avalon Project: Jefferson: Reports to Congress (2nd).” Text. Accessed September 14th, 2017. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jeffmes2.asp.

¹⁷ Dudley W. Knox, ed., *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol.I-VII* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939).

approach to naval war during the First Barbary War. The first chapter will examine the debate over republicanism and the Navy within the United States. The second chapter will discuss of the internal fight for professionalization in the U.S. Navy officer corps with heavy attention paid to the influence of the Royal Navy. Both of these will be examined in the context of the Barbary War. The third chapter will be a military analysis of the naval operations during Commodore Edward Preble's squadron, to explain why American naval strategy was fought as it was and how it eventually developed into a cohesive doctrine. Commodore Preble's squadron is the best example of pushback within the navy against Jeffersonian naval policy which is why emphasis will be given to the third squadron. The conclusion will discuss the efforts put forth in this thesis with analysis of the importance of this topic for the development of doctrine in early American naval history.

Chapter I: The Debate for the Republic's Soul and its Navy

"But in the case of clashing with the Vessels, Officers, or Subjects of other Powers, we enjoin on you the most rigorous moderation, conformity to right & reason, & suppression of all passions, which might lend to the commitment of our peace and our honor."

Samuel Smith, Acting Secretary of the Navy to Captain Richard Dale, 1801

Thomas Jefferson's decision to send a small naval squadron to the Mediterranean in 1801 was a controversial one even within his own political party, the Democratic-Republicans.¹⁸

Jefferson was a longtime advocate of using naval force to subdue the Barbary Corsairs and had argued for the use of military power to end the payments of tribute to the despots of the Barbary States with John Adams in 1786. Jefferson viewed these payments of tribute as an "eternal increase" that would only be stopped by the "presence of an armed force." Jefferson went as far as to declare himself "an enemy to all these doeurs, tributes, and humiliations."¹⁹ On the other hand, Jefferson had already conceived of limitations for a republican naval force in 1780. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson advocated for a federal navy but considers the "aim at such a navy as the greater nations of Europe possess, would be a foolish and wicked waste of the energies of our countryman."²⁰ Navies were expensive and could potentially cost the tax-payers millions of dollars. They were also symbols of the "tyrannical" governments of Europe and a large navy would be inappropriate for the newly formed republic. In the political environment of the early republic Jefferson was not considered to be a friend to the Navy. President Jefferson

¹⁸ A division of a fleet forming one body under the command of a flag officer. It should be noted also that the U.S. Navy did not have "official" flag officers, but rather Captains that were given the honorary title of Commodore.

¹⁹ Thomas Jefferson, *Letter to James Madison 28 August 1801* in *The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 1776-1826 Volume II*, edited by James Morton Smith (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 1194.

²⁰ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, edited by Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 300-301.

impacted the U.S. Navy's ability to fight the Tripolians in the Mediterranean with his narrow idea of limited republican navy. He did not want a strong navy, and certainly not a permanent one but he did see naval force as the best way to deal with the Tripolitans, and therefore, a necessary evil. He was not alone in this viewpoint as the debate over the size and role of naval forces in the early United States was one of the most highly contested policies, which polarized political figures into two groups: Navalists and Antinavalists.²¹

The Navalists-Antinavalist debate was over the appropriate role and size of a naval force in a republican government – an ideological debate that affected real approaches to the Barbary War. The debate was never about whether the United States should or should not have a navy. The latter position was only championed by a few outliers in Congress, but rather the debate was whether the young nation should pursue a navy that imitated large European fleets or could influence the European balance of power. This was important as it related to the Barbary States because the larger European navies were able to negotiate lower payments of tribute due to their strength and power projection – an idea that seemed attractive to many Americans.

Navalists were advocates for a navy that could influence the geopolitical scene of the early nineteenth century. They wanted a blue-water, standing navy filled with large ships-of-the-line that formed the nucleus of the Royal Navy's dominance on the seas.²² For example, the Royal Navy had more than one-hundred double-decked ships that had more than sixty cannons

²¹ The terms "Navalist" and "Antinavalist" is an anachronistic term used to describe politicians who were pro-navy and anti-navy in the late-19th and early 20th century but is applicable to American politicians in the early republic as well.

Craig L. Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists: The Naval Policy Debate in the United States, 1785-1827* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980).

²² A square-rigged warship having at least two gun decks and designed to be positioned for battle in a line with other such ships. In the Royal Navy at this time, they were ships rated with 60+ guns.

on them. The Americans had a single ship that carried at forty-four guns, not even large enough for ship-of-the-line status. Not only did the Navalists see the Navy as a weapon of war but they also saw it as a political tool. Fisher Ames, a Massachusetts Federalist, lamented in Congress that he “looked forward to the time... if good government continued, it would be in the power of this nation to cope with any European nations, if it was their duty to do so.”²³ Dealing with the Barbary Powers quickly and decisively would be not only a military victory for the United States, but a political one as well. It signaled to the European powers that the United States Navy was a serious and potent force.

For the Navalists, a powerful navy was about being able to bring honor to the young nation and to hold their own against the European powers and being able to protect their commerce from the Barbary corsairs. Not only could a blue-water fleet allow for the protection of commerce on the ocean but it could bring the recognition of greatness of America as a world power that many Navalists like Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Stoddert, and Robert Goodloe Harper so deeply craved. The Royal Navy did not have to trifle with the Barbary Powers even though they still paid tribute. In negotiating how much tribute the Royal Navy paid, they had considerable leverage over the Tripolians considering the Royal Navy was significantly stronger than the Tripolitan Navy and could destroy it many times over.²⁴ It seemed obvious to the Navalists that the remedy to this situation was a navy that could, and more importantly *would* implement defense and offense against the enemies of the United States.

²³ *Annals*, 4th Congress, 1st Session, 882.

²⁴ A pessimistic view on this might be that Great Britain had use for the Barbary corsairs because they could harass the shipping of smaller countries, such as the United States, making the payment of tribute worth it to them in the end.

The Antinavalists preferred a smaller, coastal fleet capable of providing defense to the United States' shores when needed and were generally unfavorable in sending a large powerful fleet to provoke the Barbary Powers with. The Antinavalists had a conception of permanent military forces as weapons of tyranny. Montesquieu, the famed enlightenment writer who many Americans were familiar with, stated:

In republics it would be very dangerous to make the profession of arms a particular estate... One takes up arms in a republic, only to defend the laws and the homeland; it is because one is a citizen that one becomes, for a time, a soldier... In monarchies, the object of men of war is only glory, or at least honor and fortune... they must not have at the same time both the people's trust and the force to abuse it.²⁵

Thomas Jefferson, the leader of the Democratic-Republicans and author of the Declaration of Independence, saw himself as the living symbol of the defining spirit of the United States at this time commonly referred to as the Spirit of '76. The ideals that were fought for included a republican form of government, democracy, and the preservation of liberty against the forces of tyranny. Washington captured the importance of these sentiments beautifully in his first inaugural address saying, "The preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government, are justly considered... staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people."²⁶ The American people, and therefore, their government ruled by the people were special; unlike the autocratic governments of Europe, they were a republic, one that stayed true to the example set by the great Roman republics. Therefore, their idea of political power was different than European ideas.

²⁵ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws, Book 5, Chapter XIX* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 69.

²⁶ George Washington, *First Inaugural Address in George Washington: Writings*, edited by John Rhodehamel (New York: Library of America, 1997), 730.

The United States saw themselves as carrying on the great tradition of ancient Roman republican virtue and the battle against the tyrannical Barbary States was a noble struggle. In American culture, republicanism was not merely a form of government, but a set of ideals and values.²⁷ These virtues included liberty, freedom, community, independence, and incorruptibility. These were believed to be the required virtues for being a good public citizen who was involved in civic life. These were moral beliefs that absolutely dominated the political culture of the United States were highly ubiquitous and was felt even in the decision to go to send a squadron of ships to protect American ships against Tripoli.

The rhetoric and language used by the American people invoked a sense of Roman republicanism and laid out the stakes at hand. *The Raleigh Register* noted that Tripoli's engagements with neutral American shipping were "highly mortifying to civilized nations" and called them "a horde of barbarians" that wished to "annoy without impunity."²⁸ For it was the word "barbarians" that was frequently used to describe the corsairs of Tripoli; Roman authors used the same word to describe the Germanic tribes that eventually conquered Rome by military conquest. The description of the Tripolians as "barbarians" created a dichotomy between the civilized United States who stood for freedom and liberty and an uncivilized Tripoli which was bathed in tyranny and despotism. At the head of the Tripolian corsairs was the Bashaw Karamanli and was described by American sailors as "a man of considerable talent and bravery, mixed with great cruelty."²⁹ He was loyal to no one except the absolute ruler of the Ottoman

²⁷ Gordon Wood, "The Legacy of Rome in the American Revolution" in *The Idea of America: Reflections of the Birth of the United States* (London: Penguin Books, 2011).

²⁸ "Attacks on Tripoli," *The Raleigh Register*, April 9, 1804, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3012647227).

²⁹ "Confirmation of the News of the Peace with Tripoli," *The Norfolk Ledger*, September 11, 1805, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3004777439).

Empire, the Sultan, of which the Barbary states served as a semi-autonomous naval vanguard against enemies of the Sultan. To the Americans, the corsairs respected little more than power and power alone.³⁰ The notions of liberalism were foreign concepts to them; despotic tyranny was more familiar. It was a pillar of American political culture to view themselves as defenders of liberty and to combat the forces of tyranny that impeded on their inalienable rights. But these forces of tyranny were prevalent not only abroad, but at home as well in the form of standing martial forces.

For many, such as Thomas Jefferson, the ideals that the American Revolution was fought for would be sacrificed if they followed the lead of Europe and had a permanent military force. Jefferson wanted a naval force to deal with the Barbary corsairs, but with these republican considerations in mind it was one that was not too large or overly powerful or costly. Jefferson would make no guarantees to the permanency of the Navy. Historian Henry Adams, grandson and great-grandson of two presidents, wrote of the Jefferson Administration, “They were tempted to look upon war as the worst of blunders... for every dollar capitalized in industry” was better spent than “a thousand dollars spent in frigates or standing armies.”³¹ Jefferson’s goal was to seek power and respect for the United States through military means – this meant that long, drawn-out wars were to be avoided if possible. Jefferson preferred to become a shining example of neutrality and commerce that set an example for other nations on what political virtue looked like. However, Jefferson was not totally opposed to the idea of a navy and recognized they had fruitful uses. His preferred vision of a navy was a weak one that could be risen in times of need

³⁰ Michael Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy: American in the Middle East 1776 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 23.

³¹ Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Library of America, 1986), 111.

rather than paraded around the globe full-time in search of war. Standing armies and navies were symbols of the tyrannical Ancien Régime and it was not appropriate for a republican government to have them lest they begin to infringe on the liberties of American citizens.³²

Jefferson identified as an Antinavalist, but his naval policy was not as radical as others. Some vehement Antinavalists defined what the debate was truly about for the most “republican” congressmen. William Branch Giles, a Congressman from Virginia elaborated on the alleged trespasses against Americans’ liberties arguing, “a navy is the most expensive mean of defense, and the Tyranny of Government consists in their expensiveness of machinery.”³³ Jefferson, however, saw a navy that could end payments of tributes as the less expensive route. While Jefferson was the de-facto head of the Antinavalists voices in government, he was not a total ideologue. He pursued a course that he saw as pragmatic rather than being strictly constrained by republican ideology. When the peaceful transition of government happened between President John Adams and President Thomas Jefferson in 1801, Jefferson did not dismiss all members of the navy who had been fighting in the Quasi-War with France. He instead chose to drastically cut the bulk force of men in the navy retaining only a handful of officers and bluejackets while selling off thirteen vessels only to retain six of them.³⁴ It was his right as Commander-in-Chief to increase or decrease the Navy as he saw fit. Reducing the size of the Navy to a significantly smaller size after it had increased during wartime aligned with Jefferson’s Antinavalists views. Jefferson kept the some of the Navy, but it was not to be a force of depredation against the pocketbooks of American citizens and scour the globe in search of war and glory.

³² Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists*, Chapter III.

³³ *Annals*, 3rd Congress, 1st Session., 491.

³⁴ Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists*, 86

Though Jefferson's Secretary of the Navy, Robert Smith, was a moderate Republican Navalist from Maryland, the largest influence on Jefferson's naval policy was exerted by his Secretary of the Treasury, Albert Gallatin – a man who was not in favor of sending an offensive fleet into the Mediterranean. Gallatin, a Swiss-born politician who had served in the House of Representatives and the Senate, was haunted by the idea of a national debt and would do almost anything to reduce it as quickly as he could. For Gallatin, the idea of paying off the national debt the United States had acquired from the American Revolutionary War brought more honor to the United States than navy ever could.³⁵ Gallatin believed that “sound principles will not justify our taxing the industry of our fellow citizens to accumulate treasures for wars to happen we know not when.”³⁶ Gallatin's anti-navalist beliefs were eventually to be resigned to Jefferson's more moderate and pragmatic beliefs about the Navy as he eventually said, “although I been desirous that the measure might be postponed” there was “no doubt that the United States would ultimately have a navy.”³⁷

Jefferson's first squadron was severely limited in what it was capable of doing to the Tripolitans who had declared war on the United States. The U.S. had been attempting to appease the Barbary States since the Washington Administration by paying them all separate tribute, but Tripoli was offended that their payments of tribute were not as large as the other, more powerful, Barbary States. The Bashaw of Tripoli had “ordered his cruisers to sea with an hostile intention to capture American vessels and make slaves of the citizens of the US” according to the U.S. Consul-General to Algiers, Richard O'Brien.³⁸ Nevertheless, Jefferson's stated mission of the

³⁵Ibid., 42. Bluejackets is a term that refers to seaman and stems from the color of their jackets.

³⁶ Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 172.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol.I*, 427.

squadron to the Bashaw of Tripoli was that his naval force was a “squadron of observation” meant to “cultivate peace and commerce” with Tripoli.³⁹ The Jefferson Administration’s policy to deal with the Barbary problem was to send a small squadron to the Mediterranean to deal with the Tripoli’s corsairs because they saw it as the most economical route to take in order to protect American commerce from the trials and tribulations merchants had been facing in the Mediterranean against the terror of the corsairs.⁴⁰ This naval policy was still extremely affected by the ideas of how a republican martial power should behave. This first squadron was meant to tread carefully in dangerous waters and act as policeman for American commerce.

This first squadron was not to be allowed to act on the offensive on their own accord unless a ship was provoked into it and had attack out of necessity. Jefferson maintained a primarily defensive strategy of blockading the coast of Tripoli and attacking Tripolitan ships whenever provoked.⁴¹ However, Jefferson’s “smallest force competent” did not live up to its name as Tripolitan ships cruised in and out the harbor at ease because of a lack of reinforcing power.⁴² With the main force of this squadron being made of three frigates and one sloop spread over a distance of 1000 miles, it was too much to do for so little of a force to have an effective blockade be implemented.⁴³ This “economical” strategy of Jefferson can partially be accredited to the efforts of Gallatin and other Antinavalists who while supporting the President’s decision to

³⁹ Ibid., 470.

⁴⁰ A corsair is a pirate, more particularly the privateers of Barbary, who frequently attacked the ships and coasts of Christian countries. Although largely regarded as pirates, corsairs were often authorized and recognized by their own governments.

⁴¹ The isolating, closing off, or surrounding of a place, as a port, harbor, or city, by hostile ships or troops to prevent entrance or exit.

⁴² The large frigate[s] blockading the coasts would often not be able to chase down the smaller, quicker ships of Tripoli but this will be discussed later in further detail.

⁴³ The U.S. Navy operated from the coast of Tripoli to the Straits of Gibraltar during the war, a distance of around 1000 miles.

deal with the Barbary Corsairs did not want to see the Navy Department's budget explode with what they viewed as unnecessary spending and therefore a burden on the American taxpayer. Unsurprisingly, Gallatin found in his analysis of the Government's budget presented to Jefferson that "hundreds of thousands could be saved in the military and naval establishments."⁴⁴ This meant that the U.S. government could reduce the amount of ships and men in the Navy while still being able to defend themselves against a "weak" enemy such as the Tripolitan Navy. Besides, the belief was that this action would last but a few months.⁴⁵ As the first naval squadron sent to Tripoli found out, this was simply not the case.

Richard Dale, the first commodore sent to the Mediterranean, was given clear policy objectives from the Acting Secretary of the Navy, Samuel Smith. Dale was tasked with the "instruction of our young [officers]... so that they be capable of defending the honor of their Country." More importantly, Dale was to protect American commerce in the Mediterranean and show that the United States no longer stood for unwarranted raises in the prices of the Barbary Corsairs' extortion practices.⁴⁶ However, his orders were to conduct his squadron with the "most rigorous moderation, conformity to right & reason, & suppression of all passions."⁴⁷ Dale was a capable commander who had proven his skill in the past serving under John Paul Jones during the American Revolutionary War and was selected as one of the original six captains in the newly-formed U.S. Navy in 1794.⁴⁸ He was unable to achieve demonstrable results, however,

⁴⁴ Albert Gallatin, "A Sketch of the Finances of the United States," *Writings of Gallatin* III, 100-108.

⁴⁵ Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol. I*, 528.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 465.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 501.

⁴⁸ John Paul Jones was a Continental Navy officer who had served with distinction in the American Revolutionary War, earning international (and somewhat infamous) distinction when his ship, the *Bonhomme Richard*, captured the British ship, *Serapis* off the coast of Scotland.

because the Jefferson Administrations' operational approach for this squadron was purely a defensive one because it was the more economical option. Dale's squadron of just four ships was spread out too thin to maintain any concentration of forces capable of blockading Tripoli effectively while still providing protection to American commerce. Dale's strategy failed, not because of his ability as a commander, but because Jefferson's insistence that Americans not play the role of provocateurs which was a common fear of his trusted colleague, Albert Gallatin.⁴⁹ Gallatin believed that if the United States was to send a naval squadron to Tripoli it should be for the purpose of protecting American commerce only and loose power projection. It was not a strategic failure on part of the United States Navy but rather an operational failure of the Jefferson Administration.

Due to Jefferson's initial economical approach to naval strategy in the Barbary War, morale was low in the Mediterranean. There was but one single engagement that could give hope to the frustrated sailors of Dale's squadron – the decisive victory of the schooner *Enterprize* against the *Tripoli* in August 1801. On a trip to Malta for water, Lt. Andrew Sterett, commander of the *Enterprize* came across a Tripolitan ship looking for American merchantmen. Sterett, flying British colors as a *ruse de guerre*, a common tactic in that time, approached the *Tripoli* with suspicion.⁵⁰ After learning who they were and what they were after, Sterett “discharged a partial volley of musquetry; which the Tripolitan returned by a partial broadside. – This was the

⁴⁹ *Annals*, 4th Congress, 2nd Session, 2129.

⁵⁰ A *ruse de guerre* is a catch-all term for a military tactic that relies on the art of deception in order to gain the upper-hand on an opponent. It was common at this time for ships to fly other nations nationalities that their opponents might be friendly with in order to engage them successfully without them trying to flee. Sam Willis, *Fighting at Sea in the Eighteenth Century: The Art of Sailing Warfare* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2008), 236.

commencement of a hard-fought action... and continued for three hours.”⁵¹ During the course of the engagement, the Tripolitans attempted to board the *Enterprise* three times but were met with “great slaughter” each time.⁵² The Tripolitan captain hoisted their colors down three times only to resume fighting after the Americans let their guard slightly down. In the end, the *Tripoli* was utterly destroyed having received “18 shot between wind and water.”⁵³ The Americans had a total of zero casualties that day while the Tripolitans had thirty men killed and thirty men wounded including the captain and first lieutenant.

This engagement showcased the apparent skill and efficiency with which the Americans could fight the enemy at hand when given the chance. Throughout this engagement, the Americans sailors were outgunned and outmanned yet they still achieved a decisive victory. Despite their frustrations with Jefferson’s restrictive naval policy, the actions of the *Enterprise* raised the morale of the entire Navy. This is evidence of the capabilities of the U.S. Navy to defeat their Tripolitan enemy when given the opportunity to face them. This is the type of approach to the war that was more effective for Americans. They prided themselves on being able to overcome great odds and attack aggressively with a fighting spirit. This cathartic release of skill and power relieved the Navy of its perceived impotence and gave it confidence that it was able to use later in the war when they were able to act on the offensive. If Jefferson had allowed a larger squadron to be sent in 1801, the possibility was there for more victories such Lieutenant Sterett and the crew of the *Enterprise* had.

⁵¹ Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol. I*, 538.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 539.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Although the United States Congress later allowed their navy to act on the offensive with future squadrons, a vital chance was missed when much of the Tripolitan Navy was staggeringly weakened during the onset of war in 1801. Many of their ships were laid up at port either due to repairs or lack of manpower while their Admiral, a Scottish renegade sailor named Peter Lyles who now went by Murad Reis, was trapped on a 28-gun frigate with only 40 men by the *Philadelphia* at Gibraltar. Although Murad Reis did not play an important role in the war, his capture might have been symbolic of the strength and might of the U.S. Navy in this early stage and critical period. Because of the lack of American patrolling force and inability to attack first many of the Tripolitan ships were able to recover their strength and escape the blockades. The lack of force on part of the United States Navy was not enough to bend the Bashaw to the United States' will despite their loose power projection. Commodore Dale of the first squadron woefully lamented as his time began waning in the Mediterranean with the second squadron on their way by saying, "I hope the government will send out a sufficient force with orders to act in such a way as to put it out of their power of ever attempting [the capture of American vessels] again."⁵⁴ Dale wanted Jefferson to send a stronger force that was able to destroy the entirety of the Tripolitan Navy for good. This was a common theme of Commodore Dale's correspondence with other naval officers, diplomats, and other government officials and a persistent theme throughout the entirety of the war. Disappointed with the force he had been given, Dale had faith that Jefferson had no choice but to make the right decision to send more ships and more men into the struggle for the honor of the United States and the rights of Americans to engage in free trade. These merchant ships were protected by the men actively trying to adequately develop

⁵⁴ Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol. II*, 16-17.

the United States Navy into a professional navy instead of an amateur one. Jefferson's naval effort early in the war were disappointing and disheartening to the sailors in the Navy.

Chapter II: Amateurs, Professionals, and the Royal Navy

*“Our Navy at this time, when its character is to form, ought to be commanded by men who, not satisfied with escaping censure, will be unhappy if they do not receive and merit praise; by men who have talents and activity, as well as spirit, to assist a judicious arrangement for the employment of the force under their command or to cure the defects of a bad one.”*⁵⁵

Benjamin Stoddert, Secretary of the Navy, 1799

In late March of 1802, the United States had been at war with Tripoli for almost a year. A period much longer than what the Jefferson Administration had envisioned when it first sent a squadron to deal with the belligerent Tripolitans and their requests for higher tribute payment. When it came time to send a second squadron to the Mediterranean to replace the first, there was one man that the Secretary of the Navy, Robert Smith, had in mind for a new commodore: Captain Thomas Truxtun, hero of the Quasi-War against France.

Captain Truxtun had been the victor of the two most successful actions during the Quasi-War. The first engagement was the total victory of his ship, the *Constellation* against the larger French frigate, *L’Insurgente*, off the coast of Nevis in the West Indies. Captain Truxtun led the *Constellation* to a decisive win, despite *L’Insurgente* having more guns and nearly one-hundred more men, through tact, strategy, and skill. The French suffered over seventy men killed while the Americans had but three men wounded.⁵⁶ The second engagement was won by Captain Truxtun while he was at a clear disadvantage showcasing his fortitude and capabilities as a naval officer. The battle between the *Constellation* and *La Vengeance* lasted nearly two days and even though Captain Truxtun was heavily outgunned by the larger French ship and suffered from a

⁵⁵ Christopher McKee, *Edward Preble: A Naval Biography 1761-1807* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1972), vi.

⁵⁶ Eugene S. Ferguson, *Truxtun of the Constellation: The Life of Commodore Thomas Truxtun, U.S. Navy 1755-1822* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1956), Chapter 33.

broken mast throughout the action, it was the fortitude shown by Captain Truxtun that willed the *Constellation* to a celebrated victory for the United States Navy, and therefore, the country.⁵⁷

Yet, when offered command of a new squadron with a chance to further enshrine his name into the annals of American history, Truxtun declined the position. His reasoning was this:

Having a reputation to lose which I am very tenacious of, I should consider myself wanting in that duty which I owe to myself and to my family if I was to proceed without being placed in a situation similar to Commander of the Squadron now in the Mediterranean and if this cannot be I must beg leave to quit the service.⁵⁸

The highest technical rank in the United States Navy at this time was that of Captain.

Commodore was an honorary title given to captains in charge of a small fleet of ships, but nothing less than a real flag-officer title was enough for man like Thomas Truxtun.⁵⁹ He felt as if he was not being given the honor and duty which he deserved. The Jeffersonian spirit of the United States viewed naval titles such as “Admiral” or “Commodore” as aristocratic folly meant to dispel the principles in which they stood for. Knowing it was impossible to grant Truxtun a higher rank, Robert Smith “regretted that it had not been made at an earlier period so as to... ask from you a reconsideration of the subject”; nevertheless, Smith was left with no choice and accepted Truxtun’s resignation.⁶⁰ Federalist newspapers lamented Truxtun’s resignation commenting that “this news must give pain to every American, as the nation loses one of its bravest and most gallant officers.”⁶¹ Jeffersonian newspapers dismissed Truxtun’s resignation with humor by saying that the Navy “was in danger – imminent danger of being *frowned* out of

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 36.

⁵⁸ Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol.II*, 76.

⁵⁹ A flag officer is a naval officer above the rank of captain, as a fleet admiral, admiral, vice-admiral, rear admiral, or commodore, who is entitled to display a flag indicating his or her rank.

⁶⁰ Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol. II*, 77.

⁶¹ “Few Die, and None Resign,” *The Gazette of the United States*, April 9, 1802, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3014131063).

existence by the mighty – the wondrous Thomas Truxtun.”⁶² Regardless of how the public dealt with Truxtun’s resignation of his commission, what mattered most was his reason for doing so. That reason was precisely because Truxtun felt like he had to quit the navy in which he had remarkably fought for because it refused to evolve beyond a service of amateurs.

The rank of a flag-officer was a serious distinction that could have signaled the United States was serious about ensuring naval success and winning the war. If Truxtun had been given the rank of flag-officer that would mean something rather important – he could devote his full time and effort into developing a naval strategy that was effective and manageable. The day to day necessities of managing a ship of war such as repairs, supplies, discipline, and navigation would be left to the captain of the ship. At a time when a lot of the U.S. Navy was still untrained, the duty of turning junior officers and crew into proper sailors was the duty of a ship’s captain. A flag-officer was able to circumvent these trifles and devote all of his time focusing on developing the means and strategy of the squadron. This division between strategy and daily duties was one of the key factors that separated a professional navy from an amateur one.

While the Jefferson Administration had an Antinavalist bent, the officers, both military and civil, in the United States Navy during the First Barbary War were decidedly Navalist. Many of them were Federalists, which were seen as the pro-navy political party since it was concentrated in the northern states where they relied on industry and overseas commerce as a path to prosperity. There was nothing more they admired than that of the professionalism and effectiveness of Great Britain’s Royal Navy as they wanted to emulate the power and success of the British Empire – something largely due to their powerful navy.

⁶² “Communication,” *The National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, June 23, 1802, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3017443682).

For success in the Mediterranean, the U.S. Navy needed a solid framework to build from. Using Great Britain as a model for the Navy was obvious because the Royal Navy was Great Britain's reason for achieving their strong geopolitical status. Robert Goodloe Harper, a Congressman from South Carolina, argued this in 1792:

How has Britain been enabled... to maintain her own power, and to arrive at her present high pitch of consequence in the scale of nations? It was that navy, and the wealth which commerce, protected by it, poured into her lap, that enabled her to support, with glory, so unequal a contest [against France].⁶³

In the fight for a professional service in the vein of the Royal Navy and therefore the greatness of the United States, it took men like Captain Thomas Truxtun to build it from the ground up using the navy of Great Britain as an obvious model in which to start from due to their prowess in all matters maritime-related.

The United States Navy had been brought up in a trial by fire during the Quasi-War. For while many American naval officers served in the Continental Navy or the various state naval militias during the American Revolutionary War, the navy ceased to exist for almost 20 years. The Quasi-War saw the United States' first serious naval action since the Revolutionary War. Disputes over payments of debts to France due to the French Revolution led to an undeclared conflict between French privateers and American sailors in the West Indies. It was here that many U.S. naval officers got their first taste of war and proved their mettle. The Quasi-War proved to be an effective training ground for many of the officers who would fight in the First Barbary War.

Truxtun was the principal naval officer seeking to develop the Navy a professional culture in the Navy from its beginnings to the end of the Quasi-War. He tried to base this culture

⁶³ *Annals*, 5th Congress, 3rd Session, 2843.

as one similar to the Royal Navy. In his *Remarks, Instructions, and Examples Relating to the Latitude and Longitude Also the Variations of the Compass*, Truxtun asserted:

Notwithstanding the prejudice that exists in our nation against the British government, for their spoliations and many unprovoked cruelties exhibited on our citizens, yet I think none can be much so, as not to acknowledge them, at this time, the first maritime power on this globe, with respect to naval tactics, discipline, and the general management of ships at war; they are therefore a proper example for us to imitate in our infancy.⁶⁴

For in Truxtun's own history, the Royal Navy had made a lasting impression on him in his youth that seems to have stuck with him for the rest of his career as a sailor. In 1771, Truxtun was taken aboard the British ship, *Prudent*, by a press gang.⁶⁵ Despite the rather unfortunate circumstance Truxtun was placed into he soon began to take a certain liking into life in the Royal Navy. He embraced the routine and discipline that came with being on a ship-of-war and although he chose to sail in the merchant service afterward, Truxtun was influenced by the laws, customs, and traditions of the Royal Navy for the rest of his life.⁶⁶ He understood the Royal Navy maxim that a professional and effective navy begins and ends with the commander of the ship; for it was he who must retain absolute control of the ship or else all order could break down thus rendering a battleship useless in times of war.

The type of leadership necessary to make a quality Royal Navy officer was something that the Royal Navy instilled in their officers. First, a naval officer must act with confidence and the utmost control. Contemporaries of that time likened a naval vessel as a small world where the captain is king within his realm.⁶⁷ This adherence to authority and clear power structure

⁶⁴ Thomas Truxtun, *Remarks, Instructions, and Examples Relating to the Latitude and Longitude Also the Variations of the Compass* (Philadelphia: T. Dobson Publishers, 1792). Online.

⁶⁵ A press gang is a group of men, commanded by an officer who (forcibly) impress men for service in the navy or army.

⁶⁶ Ferguson, *Truxtun of the Constellation*, 11-12.

⁶⁷ John Horsfield, *The Art of Leadership in War: The Royal Navy From the Age of Nelson to the End of World War II* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), 12-13.

within the ship was the only way to keep the ship safe whether in battle or not. This social order and ingrained sense of obedience held the ship together in times of peace and war. Therefore, if the captain of the ship was at the top rung of a naval vessel's social order, everything that happened on board was the responsibility of the captain. This paternalistic relationship between a superior naval officer and his junior officers and crew was aristocratic in nature and reflected the oligarchic nature of English society at the time. Deference was a powerful ethos within British and American society during the late 18th and early 19th century.⁶⁸ It was believed that there were those who God had ordained to lead and those who God had ordained to follow.⁶⁹ Deference to authority was a key factor in ensuring naval success where doing your duty was usually the difference between life and death. This autocratic theory of what naval leadership should be was directly antithetical to the ideas of the United States government which was both democratic and republican. Good American naval leadership presented itself as fair and just while still commanding a tight grip on the ship.

Truxtun's style of command was to hold a firm and unwavering hand on the government of his ship which stemmed from the leadership style he observed and read of from Royal Navy officers. While still remaining just and fair to his men, Truxtun asked for nothing less than perfection from them while at his station of command. The standards for gunnery were raised on his ships; this meant quicker firing rates and less "accidents" with gunpowder and fire which could cause deadly fires aboard the ship. This allowed his ships such as the *Constellation* to take on larger and more powerful French ships during the Quasi-War. Truxtun's men understood that

⁶⁸ Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A Knopf Inc., 1991), Chapter 1.

⁶⁹ Christopher McKee, *A Gentlemanly and Honorable Profession: The Creation of the U.S. Naval Corps, 1794-1815* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 223.

in order to achieve victory in war they must put their full faith into their commander. They understood that “hierarchy, respect, obedience, and discipline are essential to the efficient functioning” of a ship if it was to succeed in battle.⁷⁰ Truxtun’s leadership style was one of the most important aspects of the Royal Navy that could be directly translated into the new U.S. Navy

Jefferson and his administration continued to make naval decisions for the Mediterranean squadron that hindered the development of an effective approach, especially in terms of leadership. When Dale’s squadron was to be relieved of duty after roughly a year at sea, the commodore chosen for the second squadron was a truly baffling selection – Richard Valentine Morris. Exactly why Jefferson had chosen Morris is unknown. He had served in the Quasi-War but with little distinction and showed for little zeal to accomplish much else. It is rumored that the selection of Morris as commodore of the second squadron was a payment of a political debt by Jefferson. One of Morris’ relatives was a Federalist congressman from Vermont who had cast the tiebreaking vote in the election of 1800 between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr.⁷¹ Regardless of why he was chosen for commodore, Morris’ actions reflect that he was a poor choice to lead a U.S. naval squadron.

Morris was given greater ability to wage war in the Mediterranean as the Navy was now allowed to exert force upon Tripolitan ships without having to have been engaged by them first. Despite this important development in strategical approach, Morris did nothing with it. In fact, Morris took over one year to reach Tripoli because he was traveling around the Mediterranean

⁷⁰ Sam Willis, *Fighting at Sea in the 18th Century: The Art of Sailing Warfare* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2008), 90.

⁷¹ Glenn Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder: The Barbary Wars and the Birth of the U.S. Navy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 153.

with his wife and child. During this time, he seemed more interested in socializing with British naval captains in ports of call such as Malta and Gibraltar rather than conducting a coherent strategy for winning the war. At one point, Commodore Morris' ship spent five consecutive months at the Grand Port of Valetta conducting personal matters unrelated to the war. This was precisely the mark of amateurism that the Navy was trying to avoid. Even if Morris was a tactical genius, which he was not, this is a serious dereliction of duty for a naval officer in a theater of war and further reflected that he was not the type of leadership the Navy needed to win the war.

During Morris' time as commodore his subordinate officers were left totally unsupported. Captain Alexander Murray of the *Constellation* had been maintaining the blockade alone. With no smaller ships to help chase the smaller Tripolitan blockade-runners, the *Constellation's* logs were filled with lines such as "At 5 Tripoli Bore South distant 6 leagues. At 7 gave up the Chace."⁷² There was no problem sighting Tripolitan ships coming in and out of the harbor, but Murray larger frigate was not fast enough to catch the small, quick blockade runners. Murray was beyond frustrated. Like so many others, he appealed to Morris for more ships to be sent by the Jefferson Administration but it did not happen. After lifting the blockade in the middle of the summer, Morris was recalled to America and suspended from duty. Jefferson stripped him of his commission without court-martial for neglect of duty. The second squadron was a total disaster due to the lack of an effective naval strategy in part by the lack of guidance by Morris and the refusal of the Jefferson Administration to send the enough ships to maintain a coherent blockade strategy. Morris was a poor leader because he refused to act as one. An effective naval officer

⁷² Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol. IV*, 207.

must assert their dominant role with distinction and clarity, but Morris acted as a man uninterested in prosecuting war. Morris faced the Naval Board of Inquiry upon his return to the United States where they found him to be derelict in his duty. President Jefferson was “satisfied” that it was “not the public interest that [Morris] should be longer continued in command of the navy” and that he should be “revoked of [his] commission.”⁷³ On the other hand, there were naval officers who displayed an excess of despotism in their roles – the complete opposite of the uninterested Morris.

The enlisted men who served aboard the American ships in the war, however, were not infatuated with the attempted emulation of “strong” Royal Navy leadership from some of the officers serving in during the war. William Ray, a U.S. Marine who was among those captured during the grounding of the *Philadelphia*, was particularly dismayed by the treatment of American sailors during the First Barbary War. His memoirs of the war, written in 1808, state, “The British have the most powerful navy on the ocean, and the best seaman in the world; and if they treat their tars with cruelties, so must Americans.”⁷⁴ Ray’s thoughts on the U.S. Navy’s emulation of the Royal Navy had gone too far, for the United States was different than Great Britain – it was a land of liberty and freedom. He continued to ask:

Are such cruelties authorized by the constitution of our country? Is it a crime so atrocious – so degrading, to enter voluntarily into the service of the United States, that a man must no longer be considered a citizen of America?... or is a man, when he is once aboard a man of war, dead to all justice, to all humanity, to all sense of feeling? And must be treated like a slave – an outcast of society – a villain – a beast?⁷⁵

⁷³ “Official,” *The Scioto Gazette*, June 4, 1804, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3004776666).

⁷⁴ William Ray, *Horrors of Slavery or, The American Tars in Tripoli*, edited by Hester Blum (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 46.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

Ray further reports that, “every cruel officer we had on board was a warm partisan for British precedents.”⁷⁶ Clearly, the despotic leadership style of some American officers attempting to be more like their equivalents in the Royal Navy bordered on wanton cruelty. Ray believed that some American naval officers were just as bad as his Tripolitan jailors under the jurisdiction of the Bashaw of Tripoli. While the war was fought started for economical and not race, the Americans did have a distinct idea of the Tripolitans as “others” to themselves. The Tripolitans were not white, practiced a different religion, spoke a different language, and had an illiberal government. It was one thing to compare American naval officers to the British who the Americans shared a common cultural experience with, but to compare American naval officers to the Tripolitans themselves was a strident critique of the officer corps in the Navy. Ray equalizes them saying that some officers conduct would, “disgrace the character of a savage despot” and “stamp an indelible stigma on the name of an American officer.”⁷⁷

There was an officer who displayed a third way of leadership – Commodore Edward Preble. Sent to replace the negligent Commodore Morris, Commodore Preble’s leadership style might be considered more appropriate for the navy of the United States, a nation that prided itself as defenders of liberty and a liberal society. What worked for the Royal Navy, or the very least a poor imitation of it, did not mean that it would indefinitely work for the United States Navy. Preble managed to strike a balance between stiff, unwavering leadership while still displaying mercy and justice. And this leadership style did not go unnoticed for William Ray wrote on Preble, “The brave man is never a cruel one. The dauntless Preble is... humane as he is brave.”⁷⁸ Preble was the type of leader that was needed in the Mediterranean. Not only did his conduct

⁷⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 46.

toward his officers and men be revered, but even more so was his bravery and willingness to bring the war to a decisive end.

Edward Preble was a man whose apotheosis came during a brief period later in his life but whose actions created a lasting impact on the culture of the United States Navy. It is known that his ship was run in a similar vein to one of his few close associates in the Navy, Thomas Truxtun. For Preble demanded excellence from his crews and his ship was run under the thumb of strict military discipline. He was one of the few officers who was truly looking to advance the Navy past amateur status and into the realm of the professionalism of the Royal Navy while still holding on to American values with his firm, yet just way of running a ship. He learned these American leadership values while serving in a naval capacity for the United States for most of his adult life.

Edward Preble was a Yankee from the territory of Maine who had run off to a life of sea during the American Revolutionary War at the age of 17. As a young man, he served aboard the *Protector* and the *Winthrop* both naval ships in the Massachusetts State Navy.⁷⁹ After the war, Preble turned to the merchant service and the busy, yet uneventful, life that it entailed all while making voyages to the West Indies, the European Continent, and even to the Far East. It was not until 1799 that Preble gained his commission in the newly-formed United States Navy as a Lieutenant. His main action of the Quasi-War was serving aboard the *Pickering*, a 14-gun brig, as Lieutenant Commandant. It was relatively uneventful service without any action of real

⁷⁹ During the American Revolutionary War, 11 out of the 13 colonies raised “naval militias” much in the vein of the army militias that are so often associated with the war. While most were weak and primarily focused toward coastal defense, Massachusetts’ Navy was among one of the stronger ones that had a decently effective blue-water force. However, most of the Massachusetts’ State Navy would be destroyed in the disastrous Penobscot Expedition in 1779.

consequence occurring.⁸⁰ While he had been a sailor for most of his adult life in times of war and peace, he had thus far served without much formal distinction that many other captains had earned either in the American Revolutionary War or the Quasi-War. Yet Preble was rated to be one of the most capable officers that sailed under Captain John Barry's squadron during the Quasi- War.⁸¹

Preble was sent as commodore precisely because of the fact that he was a relatively unknown entity within the navy and was thought by the Jefferson Administration to bring little distraction with him into a war that had gone on for longer than they thought.⁸² Jefferson's expectations of Preble were to more or less maintain the status quo while bringing back a focus that was lost under Morris. That meant a blockade strategy that would hurt Tripoli while minimizing American expenditures. Preble would instead do the opposite as he pursued an aggressive strategy meant to bring the war to Tripoli and destroy their ability to wage war. He was the man who had the "talents and activity, as well as spirit, to assist a judicious arrangement for the employment of the force under their command," as expressed by the First Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert.⁸³ Although it was the best decision that the Jefferson Administration made throughout the entirety of the war, Preble's spirited pursuit of victory was not what Jefferson expected.

⁸⁰ McKee, *Edward Preble*, Chapter 3.

⁸¹ John Barry was one of the original officers who had served in the Continental Navy of the American Revolutionary War and was the first naval officer to receive his commission from President George Washington in 1797. A highly respected name in the early history of the United States.

⁸² Fletcher Pratt, *Preble's Boys: Commodore Preble and the Birth of American Sea Power* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), 27.

⁸³ Benjamin Stoddert was Secretary of the Navy during the Quasi-War and is credited much with the establishment of the Department of the Navy as a competent bureaucratic force.

His pursuit of an aggressive naval strategy (with limited resources) toward Tripoli that led them closer to victory than any other Commodore who had served in the Mediterranean thus far.⁸⁴ While politics dictates strategy according to Carl von Clausewitz, famed military theorist, Preble did his best to push the limits of Jefferson's preference for passive policy and attempted to institute an aggressive approach. For he understood the Mahanian theorem that war must be conducted offensively and aggressively once declared. The enemy must be struck down into submission and without remorse in order to keep the war to the minimum time necessary.⁸⁵ His attitude was transcendent past his own ship and gave confidence to the rest of his subordinate officers and the Navy as a whole.

⁸⁴ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (London: Penguin Books, 1832). Strategy is the art and science of using resources to obtain political objectives.

⁸⁵ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Interest in American Sea Power, Past and Present* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 320.

Chapter III: Preble's Boys

*No more of Truxtun; Preble all outbraves
A greater hero never rode the waves
Round the drear coast his squadron's wings are spread
And the hungry billows crave the future dead*⁸⁶

It was August 3, 1804, just before noon, when the culmination of Commodore Edward Preble's naval strategy toward Tripoli came to fruition.⁸⁷ The long-awaited direct assault on the harbor of Tripoli was to see the first large-scale clash between the defenses of Bashaw Yusuf Karamanli and the war-ready squadron of Commodore Preble. Sitting between the Americans and a glorious victory were the rock-solid fortifications mounted with 115 heavy cannons along the shore of Tripoli, a few small brigs, and nineteen gunboats manned by the Tripolitan Navy ready to fight to the death for the protection of their home.⁸⁸ Preble's plan was to be more aggressive and bring the fight to the Bashaw himself. This meant the destruction of Tripoli Harbor, where his castle lay, and the destruction of their defensive harbor gunboats.

The officer whose conduct proved to be most noteworthy, at least according to American accounts of the actions, the young lieutenant Stephen Decatur Jr.⁸⁹ Commodore Preble had placed Lieutenant Decatur in charge of the second division of American gunboats. Decatur,

⁸⁶ Ray, *Horrors of Slavery*, 82.

⁸⁷ Julian Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London: Longmans, Greens, and Co., 1911), 129. Maritime strategy is described as the art of assembling the utmost force at the right time and place.

⁸⁸ Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol.III*, 336. Gunboats were small vessels, roughly 60 feet long, that had one bow-mounted one long cannon that typically only fired in the direction of the bow (front of a boat). Typically used for coastal defense.

⁸⁹ American accounts of these actions tend to be characterized as "heroic" or "gallant" or "courageous." Whether this is an effort to impress outside observers such as Europeans, sell the necessity of the Navy to countrymen back at home, or an example of genuine patriotism is a subject up for debate.

eager to prove himself further after leading the mission to blow up the *Philadelphia*, was given the signal by his commander and “bore down on their line of boats... which were moored within two cable lengths of their Batteries, – I boarded and carried two of them, and was successful in bringing them off.”⁹⁰ For it was Decatur’s every “intention to board” the enemy’s vessel and slash them down one by one the “Turkish” way – with his cutlass.^{91 92}

Soon after Decatur’s successful engagement, he learned of the devastating demise of his brother, James Decatur, and led an action that came to characterize the First Barbary War. His brother after successfully engaging one of the Tripolitan gunboats saw the “Tripolitan colors hauled down”, signifying complete surrender. But as James Decatur was coming onto the gunboat to take possession of his prize, he was “shot through the head by her treacherous commander.”⁹³ The devastating news enraged Stephen Decatur. He immediately sailed toward the Turk commander who had deceitfully slain his brother in pursuit of mortal justice. Decatur, armed with his cutlass, engaged the “gigantic” Tripolitan commander where the two were soon fighting to their harrowing death. Decatur received several wounds to the arm and lost hold of his cutlass where he was soon pinned down by the Turk and his “superior” strength. The end seemed nigh for Decatur but, out of pure tenacity, Decatur was able to wrestle from his trouser pocket a pistol which he after “giving it the proper direction, fired.”⁹⁴ The Tripolitan officer’s

⁹⁰ Ibid., 345.

⁹¹ Ibid. A cutlass is a short sword with a wide, flat, and slightly curved blade, more suited to cutting than thrusting.

⁹² According to western belief at the time, the Barbary corsairs were not renowned for their seamanship or gunnery skill. Instead, they were famed for their courage and valor in the heat of battle. Their preferred method of attack was to board the enemy’s ship and engage in hand-to-hand combat. This was an “old-fashioned” method of naval war that dated back to the days of Roman galleys compared to the modern methods of maneuvering until a ship had the advantageous position.

⁹³ Ibid., 347-348.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

body went cold and limp; Decatur, for the second time that day, stood victoriously on the enemy's deck and had succeeded in avenging his brother.

After the day's fighting was done Preble's officers, including Decatur, met with him to recount the battle's accomplishments and were surprised to learn of his disappointment. Right on the deck of the *Constitution*, Preble was particularly dismayed with Decatur and his "victory" – a victory that only destroyed three of Tripoli's gunboats, far less than Preble's expectations. He demanded to know why the young Lieutenant's "accomplishments" had fallen short of these desired results and why he had not captured more.⁹⁵ Though the First Battle of the Gunboats was successful on paper for the Americans, it was not the decisive victory that Preble's strategy hinged upon in order to win the war. Preble felt the mounting pressure of his country to achieve results in the Mediterranean in spite of the fact that the Jefferson administration refused to give Preble the support he needed. Preble's officers had performed their duty, and they had performed it well. Their bold and heroic action was, however, a duty of necessity they had to perform because of the lack of proper means to carry out a more effective naval strategy although one less daring.

Commodore Preble, sent to replace Morris, was the American leadership that the Navy needed to reinvigorate the sailors and achieve the most demonstrable results from an effective strategy despite the lack of support from the Jefferson Administration. Preble knew that his strategy had to be aggressive in order to turn the tide of the war. Preble did not just want to stop the increase of tribute payments but to never have the "occasion in future to pay [Tripoli] a cent for peace or tribute. This I pledge to do, or perish in the attempt."⁹⁶ No longer was the blockade

⁹⁵ James Fenimore Cooper, *History of the Navy of the United States of America* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Co., 1853), 216-218.

⁹⁶ McKee, *Edward Preble*, 201.

of Tripoli to be the cornerstone of naval strategy in the Mediterranean. While it still maintained an important role, the crux of Preble's strategy was the attack on Tripoli itself to force Bashaw Karamanli to sue for peace or else face total destruction.

To accomplish this strategic vision, Preble knew he needed more ships to guarantee success – ships that he relied on the Jefferson Administration to send. Preble sent constant appeals to the Secretary of the Navy for, at minimum, one more frigate and one additional smaller vessel in addition to his present squadron of six ships. The time to strike was coming soon, for summer was to be the best time to execute an aggressive attack on Tripoli's shores. Preble pleaded with the Secretary of the Navy in March 1804, saying:

I feel extremely desirous of serving my country... Give me the means and I will do it by rendering the purchase of peace or payment of tribute totally unnecessary in this Eastern world. In the meantime, everything shall be done that our little squadron is competent to, and, I hope, more than can be reasonably expected from it.⁹⁷

In the meantime, he went about acquiring small craft such as gunboats and bomb ketches that could easily approach the rocky shores of Tripoli from the King of Naples.⁹⁸ After acquiring six gunboats and two bomb ketches along with other supplies required for war from the King of Naples, Preble made his way for Tripoli to enact the assault on Tripoli's shores.⁹⁹

Preble knew that without the reinforcements the Jefferson Administration failed to send, the Navy was facing an uphill battle. His outlook on the assault was less than favorable:

The city of Tripoli is heavily fortified and defended by a large force of gunboats. I am astonished that our government have not sent out a reinforcement of ships... The season for action has already arrived... I shall be obliged to attack Tripoli under many

⁹⁷ Knox, *Documents Relating to the First Barbary War Vol. III*, 499.

⁹⁸ With the capture and subsequent destruction of the *Philadelphia*, Preble was left desperately wanting another frigate in which he envisioned patrolling the Straits of Gibraltar and keeping an eye on the Morocco and Tunis in case they declared war on the United States.

⁹⁹ Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol. IV*, 97.

disadvantages for want of more ships or I shall lose the season by letting it pass off without attempting anything. This I am determined not to do.¹⁰⁰

The lack of support meant that Preble attempted to find a way to achieve victory regardless of these disadvantages. He knew his time was limited as commodore of the squadron as the Jefferson Administration was already sending a replacement squadron as of June 1804. That meant in order to end the war and win glory, it was going to take an extraordinary effort.¹⁰¹ It was in this that Preble turned to his tactical commanders. These were the young officers who Preble had developed a paternal affection for (and the feeling was reciprocated) and now he relied on them to create the decisive victories the Navy was determined to achieve. The blockade could never be effective without the necessary amount of ships which most of the time were out protecting American commerce. The assault was never a guaranteed success without the additional support that Preble needed. It took heroic efforts by the young junior naval officers to bring glory to the Navy. These efforts, like those of Stephen Decatur, might have been rendered unnecessary if the Jefferson Administration had given the strategic level commanders the support they so often asked for.

The 1804 summer campaign of Preble's squadron ultimately failed in terms of Preble's goal of bringing the war to a decisive end before he was replaced as commodore. The new squadron being sent with Commodore Samuel Barron at the helm, who superseded Preble and thus revoke his "commodore" title. Preble, with his lack of firepower support in the form of frigates and other smaller ships, became reliant on the small one-cannon gunboats he had acquired from Naples to help carry out the planned assault. These gunboats proved to be a less-

¹⁰⁰ McKee, *Edward Preble*, 239.

¹⁰¹ The replacement squadron was led by Samuel Barron, a captain technically senior to Preble, which meant that Preble would lose command of the Mediterranean as soon as he arrived.

than-effective substitute for actual ships of war. Their shallow draught allowed them to navigate the rocky shoals of Tripoli and come closer than any frigate could to the shores of Tripoli.¹⁰² However, these boats were designed primarily with defensive purposes to protect the coastlines. These gunboats had a difficult time making their way across open water and any assault using them had to be abandoned at the first sign of foul weather. As evidenced in the First Battle of the Gunboats, Americans could be successful when facing off directly against the Tripolitans. Due to the lack certainty of the gunboats and the stout defensive batteries on Tripoli's shores, Preble's decisive victory that he desperately craved eluded him despite multiple assaults on Tripoli itself through the summer campaign. Still, Preble's multiple assaults using a combination of gunboats and regular ships-of-war impressed the Tripolitans. William Ray, the U.S. Marine captured from the crew of the *Philadelphia* reported from his imprisonment that the "Turks told us that the Americans were all drunk, or they would not have ventured as they did, and fought so furiously."¹⁰³

Within the waning weeks of the summer, Preble knew that the squadron sent to replace him was going to be there by the end of September. This led to make one last daring effort to strike the Tripolians and bring the war to an end. With the aggressive campaign of 1804 coming to a close as the weather turned began to turn more and more foul, Preble held a council of war with his subordinate senior officers.¹⁰⁴ It was there that Preble came to the decision to once more call upon the small ketch used to infiltrate the Tripolitan harbor in order to blow up the

¹⁰² Draught, or draft is the vertical distance between the waterline and the bottom of the hull (keel), with the thickness of the hull included.

¹⁰³ Ray, *Horrors of Slavery*, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Knox, *Documents Relating the First Barbary War Vol. IV*, 460-461.

Philadelphia – the *Intrepid* would be turned into an “infernal”, or a fireship.¹⁰⁵ This was a naval tactic that dated back centuries and was meant to literally blow a hole through the enemy’s defense in order to provide an exposed area and break through the enemy’s weakened defenses. It seemed like precisely the decisive tactic that Preble needed to bring the war to an end before he relinquished his command in the Mediterranean.

While time was against Preble as he had to act quickly with the planning of the proposed fireship attack, he believed that he did have an excellent commander leading the assault. Leading the attack was one of his protégés, Lieutenant Richard Somers who had recently proven himself worthy of such an honor during the summer campaigns assault on Tripoli where he commanded a division of gunboats. With him was be his second-in-command, Lieutenant Henry Wadsworth along with four enlisted volunteers. With over 150 barrels of gunpowder aboard the small ketch, the *Intrepid* would blow up not only all of the gunboats in the harbor, but also the battery walls and half the town as well if the plan was executed as expected. The expedition seemed cursed from the moment they set sail. For two consecutive nights, the wind behaved erratically causing the crew of the *Intrepid* to abandon the assault and the enemy’s defense to be alerted to some suspicious behavior out past the harbor. On the night of September 4, 1804, the third and final assault was finally attempted. Following in the *Nautilus*, meant to take the crew of the *Intrepid* to safety if the attack was a success, Midshipman Charles G. Ridgely described the fateful moment in which “the awful explosion took place. Right in front of his very eyes the *Intrepid* exploded and “the flash illuminated the whole heavens around, while the terrible concussion

¹⁰⁵ A fireship is a vessel filled with combustibles and explosions and set to drift among enemy ships to destroy them.

shook everything far and near. Then all was hushed again, and every object veiled in a darkness of double gloom.”¹⁰⁶

William Ray described the aftermath of the explosion from his prison cell saying, “the whole squadron waited with the utmost anxiety, to learn the fate of the adventurers... but waited in vain.”¹⁰⁷ Something had gone terribly wrong aboard the *Intrepid* and it had blown up prematurely. Richard Somers and his crew were dead. The only damage sustained in the explosion was the complete loss of the *Intrepid* for it had not yet gone far enough to do damage to Tripolitan ships in the harbor or the town itself. Preble’s planned decisive victory amounted to nothing less than a tragic loss for the American Navy. Preble himself wrote that the loss of was nothing less than a tragedy and that the crew of the *Intrepid* displayed “conspicuous bravery, talents, and merits. They uniformly distinguished themselves in action; were beloved and lamented by the whole squadron.”¹⁰⁸ This had been Preble’s last hope to win the war outright and it had failed miserably. Preble relinquished command to the new commodore, Samuel Barron, who, despite having the firepower that Preble pleaded for, returned the strategy of a partial blockade of Tripoli.¹⁰⁹ However, Preble left the Mediterranean having succeeded Truxtun as the preeminent naval hero in American culture as a “greater hero never rode the waves.”

The war came to an anticlimactic end under Captain John Rodgers as the United States negotiated a diplomatic peace treaty with the Bashaw in 1805. Two things made the Bashaw realize the war was too costly to continue on with: the sustained effect of the blockade being maintained as it returned to the focal point of American Mediterranean strategy was becoming

¹⁰⁶ Knox, *Documents Relating to First Barbary War*, 509.

¹⁰⁷ Ray, *Horrors of Slavery*, 93.

¹⁰⁸ Pratt, *Preble’s Boys*, 226.

¹⁰⁹ Technically Samuel Barron was the fourth Commodore of the Mediterranean Squadron but due to sickness Captain John Rodgers was effectively in-charge of operations.

costly on the Tripolitan economy and “General” Eaton, who was making his way toward Tripoli Harbor after his army’s victory in Derna.¹¹⁰ William Eaton was a former U.S. Consul to Tunis who had previously served as a captain in the Continental Army. Eaton, like Preble, was dismayed with the continued payments of tribute and wanted them to cease forever. Jefferson gave him loose permission to form an “army”, which was never ratified by the House or Senate, that consisted of eight marines and around 500 Arab, Greek, and Turkish mercenaries. Their goal was the installment the Bashaw’s brother, Hamet as the ruler of Tripoli, who the current Bashaw had led a coup against nearly a decade ago. Now a self-appointed general, Eaton made his way across the harsh and arid desert from Egypt to Tripoli where his mercenary army took the city of Derna with the intention of closing in on the city of Tripoli and making an assault on the Bashaw’s stronghold. Before this could happen, the diplomatic peace was agreed upon and Eaton had to end his efforts. This was not before Eaton and his ragtag army successfully took the city of Derna in Tripoli. Eaton’s march did have an effect on the Bashaw who considered Eaton’s army to now be a legitimate threat to his rule. The flag of the United States had been risen over conquered foreign land for the first time in history.¹¹¹ If given more support by the Jefferson Administration, Eaton’s army, if successful, would have bring the war to an end that was favorable to the United States – similar to if the Navy had been given more support.

The peace treaty with Tripoli was not an unanimously popular decision back in the United States, however, a few things came out of the peace treaty that were cause for celebration.

¹¹⁰ Louis B. Wright and Julia H. MacLeod, *The First Americans in North Africa: William Eaton’s Struggle for a Vigorous Policy Against the Barbary Pirates, 1799-1805* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945).

¹¹¹ Lieutenant Presley O’Bannon of the United States Marine would raise the flag over Derna which was to be a moment forever enshrined in the Marines’ Hymn with the line “to the shores of Tripoli.”

The American public celebrated the release of Captain Bainbridge and the crew of the *Philadelphia* from imprisonment proudly exclaiming “OUR COUNTRYMAN ARE FREE.”¹¹² Preble’s return to the United States was also celebrated as he came back a renowned national hero due to his bold and harrowing pursuit of victory against the Barbary corsairs. *The Maryland Gazette* reported on the Fourth of July celebration of the following year Preble returned that the citizens of Annapolis honored Preble and the Navy in their festivities. They celebrated, in order, “Commodore Preble and his brave band... the departed heroes who fell in our struggle for Independence and chastising a Tripolitan tyrant” and finally “the Navy of the United States” which they then hoped would “increase from gunboats to 74’s” to become a “terror to free-booters and pirates, and the only necessary passport to fair trade with all nations.”¹¹³ Many other cities and towns had similar celebrations to honor Preble and the aggressive way in which he had conducted the war while commander. Preble’s thoughts on the way in which the war ended were blunt. He simply thought that the diplomatic peace was “at the sacrifice of national honor” due to the capitulations that the United States made, which included continued payment of tribute and \$60,000 dollars paid to the Bashaw for the release of the crew of the *Philadelphia*.¹¹⁴ He also thought that a continuance of his aggressive naval strategy that sought much more destruction to Tripoli might have given the Americans a more favorable position in the negotiations of peace.

¹¹² “Important and Highly Interesting Intelligence!!!,” *The Maryland Gazette*, September 5, 1805, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3012079940).

¹¹³ “The return of that epoch, ever to be joyfully commemorated by the sons of Columbia as the birth day of their independence, was universally hailed by the citizens of Annapolis,” *The Maryland Gazette*, July 10, 1806, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3012080356).

¹¹⁴ Reid, *Intrepid Sailors*, 236.

The effect Preble's campaign had on the Navy is evident in the small, going-away gift that the Commodore's subordinate officers gave to him before he left the Mediterranean in November of 1804 to leave him with their thoughts and feelings. It was simply a short letter that read:

We the undersigned officers of the squadron late under your command cannot in justice suffer you to depart without giving you some small testimony of the very high estimation in which we hold you as an officer and commander. It is under these impressions, Sir, that we beg leave to apprise you, that your supercedence in a command in which you have acquired so much honor to yourself and your country, is by us deeply regretted.

As you are about to return to your country, we all join most cordially in wishing you a pleasant passage, and sincerely hope that our Countrymen may generously bestow upon you that which your important services so richly deserve, and believe us sincere in saying that we shall largely participate in any future event that may add to your fame and happiness.¹¹⁵

Fifty-two of the most capable officers in the Navy, including Stephen Decatur, who had signed the letter considered themselves "Preble's Boys" – Preble and his tenacious naval strategy had made a great impact on these impressionable young men that lived with them for the rest of their lives. This meant much to Preble as he frequently referred to these junior officers as his "cubs" showcasing that the paternalistic relationship between Preble and these men was reciprocal. The officers under Preble considered him to be the foremost influence on how they carried themselves and naval strategy throughout their careers. Many of them went on to be Commodores themselves and other senior officers in the Navy. They were the generation of men who would make up the first generation of the United States' first professional navy, thus ensuring that the lessons that Preble taught them would continue for generations to come.

¹¹⁵ Knox, *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol. V*, 118.

Though Preble succumbed to tuberculosis in 1807, his spirit lived on through the men who had served under him in the Mediterranean.¹¹⁶

Preble and his time as commodore greatly influenced the young men who would carry on through his legacy through the development of a naval doctrine for the United States Navy that was inherently republican. There are three main aspects to the republican naval doctrine of the United States that can be delineated. The first principle is a navy that is limited in size, yet still effective. A common theme throughout the First Barbary War was the commodores' requests for more ships. While this was not granted, the United States Navy did have the capability to send more ships in the form of ephemeral privateers or begin building more ships – they just chose not to. This was done out of the association of large military forces with despotic governmental rule. Politics dictated military policy and strategy in this regard. This meant that the United States Navy at the time would never rival the Royal Navy in size which could deploy over 100 ships at a time. Instead they would rely on a few, dependable frigates which would be supported by smaller vessels. Preble dealt with this obstacle by trying different strategies such as his gunboat strategy which used more easily acquired naval weapons. The second principle is American naval officer leadership. The Navy would be influenced by the Royal Navy and their absolutist style of naval leadership, but it would be molded into something more American. Americans prided themselves in being free men and protectorates of liberty. In order for these ideals to coexist with firm naval leadership, the most effective rulers would have to be conscience of their men as well. Preble is the unrivaled commodore of this style of leadership during the war. He did maintain a firm and tight grip over his squadron, but he was still revered

¹¹⁶ Tuberculosis hindered Preble throughout much of his later adult life and was actually the reason he did not join the war until 1803 when he was selected as commodore.

by his men, officers and enlisted alike, for being a benevolent soul. Many of his protégés took note of this and became some of the most beloved officers in the Navy. The third and final principle was aggressiveness in tactics and strategy. Preble realized that the conventional strategy of a naval blockade was not working well for the United States. Blockades worked up to a certain point, but Preble understood that the goal of a blockade should be to engage the enemy in a weakened state. His summer campaign of 1804 was the most aggressive of any approach to the war by any commodore. Although he would fail to achieve a decisive victory due to lack of firepower, he did come close and he did do serious damage to the Bashaw and Tripoli. Americans officers and sailors would come to value this fighting spirit and take pride in being aggressive, even in the face of unequal odds. These principles would be developed by Preble into a naval doctrine that recognized republican limitations and made good use of them. This was to be Preble's legacy – a coherent approach to naval warfare that would guide and direct his “boys” throughout their careers as naval officers as well as their men. The spirit of Preble's naval doctrine of republican was felt throughout the Navy long after he passed away in 1807.

Conclusion

“Hitherto the American seaman had never been heard of except in connection with two or three engagements with French frigates, and some obscure skirmishes against the Moors of Tripoli; none of which could possibly attract attention in the years that saw Aboukir, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar. And yet these same petty wars were the school which raised our marine to the highest standard of excellence... the American learned, by receiving hard knocks, how to give them.”

Theodore Roosevelt, 1882

In 1815, the Navy returned to the Barbary Coast to combat the most powerful of all the Barbary Powers, Algiers, for the same reason that a squadron had been first sent by Jefferson in 1801. The Dey of Algiers saw the War of 1812 as a means to renew their predatory practices of the theft of American commerce and impressing American sailors into their navy or slave labor as they now demanded an increase in their payment of tribute.¹¹⁷ It was to be a short and decisive war. The tactics that Preble had employed, or had at least wanted to, were quickly incorporated into the stratagem of Commodore Stephen Decatur for bring about a quick and decisive end to Algerian corsairs. The strategical lessons that Preble had taught Decatur were successful to bring about the realization of Preble’s same objectives in the First Barbary War.

The United States had seen Jefferson’s “squadron of observation” fail once, but they did not make the same mistake twice. In March of 1815, the United States decided that rather than approach the corsairs with a weak blockade in mind, the United States sent Stephen Decatur with a squadron of three frigates and seven smaller ships, which was more than capable of delivering destruction to the all of the Barbary States. Not far behind was a second squadron commanded by Commodore William Bainbridge ready to go soon after Decatur arrived in the Mediterranean.

¹¹⁷ The War of 1812 was fought between the United States and Great Britain, essentially over the impressment of American sailors into the Royal Navy. This war occupied much of the U.S. Navy leaving its commerce shipping to fend for itself between 1812 and 1815.

This was an outright show of the power and might of the United States Navy that worked and worked quickly. On his way to Algiers, Decatur's squadron easily captured the flagship of the Algerian Navy, the *Meshuda*, thus significantly weakening the Dey of Algiers hand. Decatur secured a peace treaty in July, some four months after leaving the United States. and this time, the United States not make any capitulations as they had done in the First Barbary War. They were coming from the absolute position of power by letting their cannons in the Algerian harbor doing all the talking for them. The Dey of Algiers knew he was outmatched and was forced to sign a peace treaty. Decatur had finished what Preble had wanted to achieve, but could not because of Jefferson's limitations. The legendary corsair, Hamidou Rais, was dead which was the last of the great corsairs.¹¹⁸ The Navy secured the release of white American slaves and received a sum of money for cargo taken from American ships. There was to be no more tribute and piracy. Decatur had ended the Barbary "terror" forever.¹¹⁹

The American return to the Mediterranean to combat Algiers and its decisive ending were a historical lesson on how the First Barbary War could have been administered. The Americans might have been victorious in the end as the Bashaw of Tripoli backed off of his demand for an increase in tribute, yet it was still a pyrrhic victory for the Navy. The war cost much more time, effort, and money than it was originally believed by the Jefferson Administration. It was an overestimation of power that the administration made at the beginning of the war as they believed a couple of frigates employed in a weak blockade could bring Tripoli to capitulation. The Navy had the power to do this, as evidenced by the Quasi-War, but the idea republican

¹¹⁸Adrian Tinniswood, *Pirates of Barbary: Corsairs, Conquests and Captivity in the Seventeenth-Century Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), 279.

¹¹⁹Frederick C. Leiner, *The End of Barbary Terror: America's 1815 War Against the Pirates of North Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

military restraint and weariness of strong naval power projection led to Jefferson Administration to miss an opportunity to land a decisive blow quick and early. Under Commodore Morris, the war stagnated under his poor and negligent leadership and no further progress or attempts were made to improve the likelihood of success in the war. Commodore Preble displayed the most aggressive strategy of all the commodores and be the one most likely to land a decisive blow that could win the war with the terms of peace on the indefinite side of the United States. But under Jefferson's refusal to send more ships, guns, and men, Preble lacked the firepower and supplies necessary to bring about this decisive attack. The return to the weak blockade thus led the war back into the routine of the previous commodores and a peace was only brought about because of the Bashaw's belief that the war was costing too much. Instead of a war of attrition, the more useful strategy toward Tripoli should have been a war of destruction such as Preble's campaign was.

The war changed the United States and the Navy in a few different ways. One, it realized one of Jefferson's fears – the permanence of the institution of the Navy within the American government. The war had won a lot of support back home in the United States as the "heroic" exploits of the American sailors had been extensively covered in the American press. The first military monument in the United States was dedicated to the lives of those lost in the Tripolitan War such as Richard Somers and James Decatur and given a place of honor in the nation's capital of Washington D.C. The war had turned the men of the Navy into heroes and its value was recognized across the nations.

The development of a doctrine of an American naval power was crafted and molded into an effective approach was one the most important outcome of the First Barbary War. While still not a leviathan of naval power like the Royal Navy, the U.S. Navy could still be effective with a

limited, yet still strong, force and aggressive strategy. The officers who took up the vanguard of the Navy after the war were no longer held down by the initial Jeffersonian limitations in the First Barbary War. They did take to heart the lessons that they had learned from Edward Preble, who was by far the most effective fighting commander during the war. They had taken his aggressive, tenacious spirit and imbued it into the very core of the United States Navy, which now combined with a force more than that was more than just competent, was able to deliver decisive victories against the enemies of the United States.

Without understanding the concept of a republican idea of military power and the fight for professionalization within the U.S. Navy itself, it is difficult to understand the way the First Barbary War was fought and its outcome. Jefferson's idea of republican military power explains why the squadrons constantly lacked guns and ships necessary to employ a decisive strategy. Jefferson feared the permanence of the Navy which would lead to increased taxation and therefore increased strain on the liberty and livelihood of the American citizens. In the end, this belief ended up dragging the war out for four years and cost millions of dollars to prosecute. However, in 1805 the Navy had been ingrained into the American conscience for four years as leading the battle for liberal beliefs against despotic "barbarians", Jefferson's fear of a permanent navy was realized as a result of his own action. The First Barbary War gave the Navy its opportunity to prove its worth and create its own cultural importance in the United States.

The fight for professionalization within the Navy explains the actions taken by American naval officers. As they desired to bring honor and glory to their country by going above and beyond their duty and carrying out dangerous missions to bring success in the war. They desired to demonstrate their value to the United States, to Great Britain, and to Europe by showing they were more than an amateur force. The Royal Navy might have been the framework from which

the U.S. Navy was built from, but the War in Tripoli turned that framework into something uniquely American. It gave the Navy opportunity to become more than a crude copy of the Royal Navy, but a uniquely American navy with American values.

The First Barbary War had immense impact on the standing of the United States within the world as shifted their Navy from a temporary institution to a backstay of American government able to display power and force on the world's oceans. It directly led to the professionalization of the previously amateur navy in the decade prior. The war developed an effective American naval doctrine by showing what strategies worked and what did not despite some rough, yet valuable lessons. Without these "hard knocks", the Navy could not have developed into a powerful and capable force. The First Barbary War was not the first learning experience of many officers in the navy, but it was the most important one of this era. The first generation of professional naval officers learned valuable lessons in this war that would stick with them throughout their career. The naval doctrine of republicanism was to be Preble's legacy and the most important lesson of all that he imparted upon his junior officers. With Preble's dying words he said, "to die on a bed of glory would be something."¹²⁰ However, his actions in the summer of 1804 and its impact would later impart the gift of glory to his "boys," the glory which he so deserved.

¹²⁰ McKee, *Edward Preble*, 354.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Annals of Congress, 3rd Congress, 1st Session., 491.

Annals of Congress, 4th Congress, 1st Session, 882

Annals of Congress, 4th Congress, 2nd Session, 2129.

Annals of Congress, 5th Congress, 3rd Session, 2843.

“Attacks on Tripoli,” *The Raleigh Register*, April 9, 1804, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3012647227).

“Communication,” *The National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, June 23, 1802, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3017443682).

“Confirmation of the News of the Peace with Tripoli,” *The Norfolk Ledger*, September 11, 1805, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3004777439).

“Few Die, and None Resign,” *The Gazette of the United States*, April 9, 1802, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3014131063).

Gallatin, Albert "A Sketch of the Finances of the United States," *Writings of Gallatin III*, edited by Henry Adams. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Sons, 1879.

“Important and Highly Interesting Intelligence!!!,” *The Maryland Gazette*, September 5, 1805, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3012079940).

Jefferson, Thomas. “Letter to James Madison 28 August 1801,” *The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 1776-1826 Volume II*, edited by James Morton Smith. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995.

Jefferson, Thomas. “Notes on the State of Virginia,” *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, edited by Merrill D. Peterson. New York: Library of America, 1984.

Jefferson, Thomas. “Reports to Congress (2nd)”. William C. Fray and Lisa A. Spar, Co-Directors. The Avalon Project at the Yale Law School: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. New Haven: The Avalon Project, 1996. Text. Accessed September 14th, 2017. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jeffmes2.asp.

Knox, Dudley W., ed. *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers Vol.I-VI*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939.

“Official,” *The Scioto Gazette*, June 4, 1804, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3004776666).

“Modern Economy,” *The Gazette of the United States*, April 24, 1804, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3014137010).

Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de. *The Spirit of the Laws, Book 5, Chapter XIX*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Ray, William. *Horrors of Slavery or, The American Tars in Tripoli*, edited by Hester Blum. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008.

“The return of that epoch, ever to be joyfully commemorated by the sons of Columbia as the birth day of their independence, was universally hailed by the citizens of Annapolis,” *The Maryland Gazette*, July 10, 1806, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers (GT3012080356).

Truxtun, Thomas. *Remarks, Instructions, and Examples Relating to the Latitude and Longitude Also the Variations of the Compass*. Philadelphia: T. Dobson Publishers, 1792. Online.

Washington, George. “First Inaugural Address,” *George Washington: Writings*, edited by John Rhodehamel. New York: Library of America, 1997.

Secondary Sources

Adams, Henry. *History of the United States of America During the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson*. New York: Library of America, 1986.

Cooper, James Fenimore. *History of the Navy of the United States of America*. New York: G.P. Putnam & Co., 1853.

Corbett, Julian. *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. London: Longmans, Greens, and Co., 1911.

Ferguson, Eugene S. *Truxtun of the Constellation: The Life of Commodore Thomas Truxtun, U.S. Navy 1755-1822*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1956.

John Horsfield. *The Art of Leadership in War: The Royal Navy from the Age of Nelson to the End of World War II*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980.

King, Dean, John B. Hattendorf, and J. Worth Estes. *A Sea of Words: A Lexicon and Companion for Seafaring Tales* 2nd ed.. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997.

Knox, Dudley W. *A History of the United States Navy*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1936.

- Leiner, Frederick C. *The End of Barbary Terror: America's 1815 War Against the Pirates of North Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Mahan, Alfred Thayer. *The Interest in American Sea Power, Past and Present*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012.
- Mahan, Alfred Thayer. *The Influence of Seapower upon History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1890.
- McKee, Christopher. *A Gentlemanly and Honorable Profession: The Creation of the U.S. Naval Corps, 1794-1815*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991.
- McKee, Christopher. *Edward Preble: A Naval Biography 1761-1807*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1972.
- Morris, Richard Valentine. "The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th ed. *Encyclopedia.com*. (February 8, 2018).
- Oren, Michael. *Power, Faith and Fantasy: American in the Middle East 1776 to the Present*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.
- Pratt, Fletcher. *Preble's Boys: Commodore Preble and the Birth of American Sea Power*. New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950.
- Reid, Chipp. *Intrepid Sailors: The Legacy of Preble's Boys and the Tripoli Campaign*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012.
- Symonds, Craig L. *Navalists and Antinavalists: The Naval Policy Debate in the United States, 1785-1827*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980.
- Tinniswood, Adrian. *Pirates of Barbary: Corsairs, Conquests and Captivity in the Seventeenth-Century Mediterranean*. New York: Penguin Press, 2010.
- Tucker, Glenn. *Dawn Like Thunder: The Barbary Wars and the Birth of the U.S. Navy*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963.
- Willis, Sam. *Fighting at Sea in the 18th Century: The Art of Sailing Warfare*. Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2008.
- Wood, Gordon. *The Idea of America: Reflections of the Birth of the United States*. London: Penguin Books, 2011.
- Wood, Gordon. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. New York: Alfred A Knopf Inc., 1991.

Wright, Louis B. and Julia H. MacLeod. *The First Americans in North Africa: William Eaton's Struggle for a Vigorous Policy Against the Barbary Pirates, 1799-1805*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945.