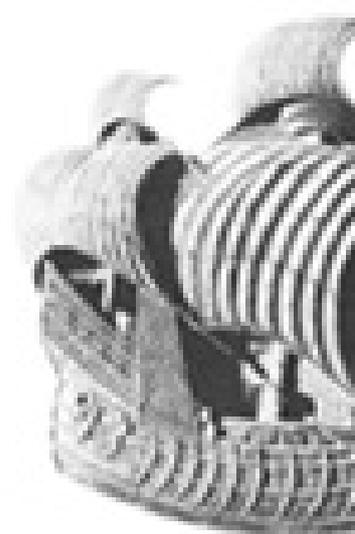


# The Pirate Coast



THOMAS JEFFERSON, THE FIRST MAN  
AND THE SECRET MISSION OF

Richard Za

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## **Also by Richard Zacks**

*The Pirate Hunter: The True Story of Captain Kidd*

*An Underground Education*

*History Laid Bare*

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# The Pirate Coast

THOMAS JEFFERSON, THE FIRST MARINES,  
AND THE SECRET MISSION OF 1805

RICHARD ZACKS



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*To Mr. Robert Berman, mentor and torment*

Cast of Characters (circa 1805)

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**2. Washington City**

**3. American Slaves in Tripoli City**

**4. Home: New England Roots**

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**6. Alone at Sea**

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### **Acknowledgments, Notes, Bibliography, and Credits**

#### *Acknowledgments*

#### *Notes*

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#### *Credits*

#### *Copyright*

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## *Cast of Characters (circa 1805)*

WILLIAM EATON, ex-captain, U.S. Army; ex-consul to Tunis; secret agent

### WASHINGTON

THOMAS JEFFERSON, President

JAMES MADISON, Secretary of State

ROBERT SMITH, Secretary of the Navy

TIMOTHY PICKERING, former Secretary of State, Senator (Federalist, Massachusetts)

STEPHEN BRADLEY, Senator (Federalist, Vermont)

JOHN COTTON SMITH, Representative (Federalist, Connecticut)

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, Senator (Federalist, Massachusetts)

AARON BURR, Vice President (1801-1804), conspirator plotting to invade Spanish territory

### DIPLOMATS

TOBIAS LEAR, U.S. consul general to Barbary Regencies

RICHARD O'BRIEN, former U.S. consul in Algiers

JAMES LEANDER CATHCART, former U.S. consul in Tripoli

NICHOLAS NISSEN, Danish consul in Tripoli

BERNARDINO DROVETTI, French consul in Alexandria, Egypt

ANTOINE ZUCHET, consul in Tripoli for Republique Batave (Holland under Napoleon)

C. BEAUSSIER, French consul in Tripoli

SAMUEL BRIGGS, British consul in Alexandria

MAJOR E. MISSETT, British resident agent at Cairo

### U.S. NAVY

RICHARD V. MORRIS, Commodore of second U.S. Mediterranean Squadron (1802-1803)

EDWARD PREBLE, Commodore of third U.S. Mediterranean Squadron (1803-1804)

SAMUEL BARRON, Commodore of fourth U.S. Mediterranean Squadron (1804-1805)

JOHN RODGERS, Commodore of fifth U.S. Mediterranean Squadron (1805-1806)

JONATHAN COWDERY, assistant surgeon, *USS Philadelphia*

---

GEORGE WASHINGTON MANN, midshipman, *USS Argus*

ELI E. DANIELSON, midshipman, *USS Argus*

FOR OTHER NAVAL OFFICERS, see SHIPS on following page

## U.S. MARINES

PRESLEY O'BANNON, lieutenant

WILLIAM RAY, private and memoirist

## BARBARY AND EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS

YUSSEF KARAMANLI, Bashaw of Tripoli

HAMET KARAMANLI, deposed ruler of Tripoli

MOHAMMED DGHIES, foreign minister of Tripoli

MURAD RAIS (PETER LYLE), admiral of Tripoli

HAMOUDA, Bey of Tunis

AHMET PACHA, Ottoman Viceroy of Egypt

KOURCHIEF, regional Ottoman commander of Demanhour, Egypt

MUHAMMAD ALI, Albanian general commanding Cairo region for Ottoman Empire

TAYYIB, SHEIK, warrior, and camel driver

## MISCELLANEOUS

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, poet

ANNA PORCILE, twelve-year-old Sardinian hostage

ANTONIO PORCILE, count of Sant-Antioco, father of hostage

LORD HORATIO NELSON, British admiral

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, crowned himself Emperor on December 2, 1804

ALEXANDER BALL, British Governor of Malta

RICHARD FARQUHAR, Scottish entrepreneur based in the Mediterranean

ELIZA DANIELSON EATON, William's wife

## SHIPS

USS PHILADELPHIA, 36-gun frigate, Captain William Bainbridge

USS CONSTITUTION, 44-gun frigate, Commodore Edward Preble, then Commodore John Rodgers

USS PRESIDENT, 44-gun frigate, Commodore Samuel Barron, then Captain James Barron

USS CONGRESS, 36-gun frigate, Captain John Rodgers, then Captain Stephen Decatur Jr.

USS ESSEX, 32-gun frigate, Captain James Barron, then Lieutenant George Cox

USS CONSTELLATION, 36-gun frigate, Captain Hugh Campbell

USS INTREPID, 4-gun captured *Mastico* ketch, Lieutenant Stephen Decatur Jr.

USS ARGUS, 18-gun brig, Lieutenant Isaac Hull

---

USS VIXEN, 12-gun brig, Lieutenant John Smith

USS SIREN, 16-gun brig, Lieutenant Charles Stewart

USS NAUTILUS, 12-gun schooner, Lieutenant John Dent

USS HORNET, 10-gun sloop, Lieutenant Samuel Evans

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## *Prologue*

AN HOUR BEFORE DAWN on September 3, 1798, the waves of the Mediterranean tugged at the coast of the island of San Pietro near Sardinia, lullabying the thousand or so sleeping residents. So peaceful was it, so rhythmic and hypnotic the sound—or perhaps it was due to a bottle of local *vino bianco*—that even the two municipal watchmen in the church tower had fallen asleep. So there was no one to puzzle out the faint white flecks of sails growing larger on the pinkish gray horizon, and no one to ring the massive church bells to sound the alarm that a fleet of seven ships was approaching.

Standing silently at the rail of these lateen-sailed ships, visible in faint silhouette, were bearded men in loose billowy pants and turbans, carrying scimitars and pistols. The vessels, packed with over a thousand Barbary pirates from Tunis in North Africa, glided to anchor inside the harbor. The crews quietly lowered small landing boats and began to ferry men ashore. The first group, barefoot and heavily armed, raced to seal off the two roads leading out of town.

Surprisingly, the leader of this attacking Moslem fleet, the pirate commodore, as it were, was an Italian who had converted to Islam. The ritual had involved losing his foreskin and gaining a new name. He was now Muhammed Rumelli, and in the Lingua Franca slang of the Mediterranean, he was dubbed a *rinigado*, a renegade. Over the centuries, the rulers of the Barbary countries of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli had learned that Christian captains could navigate better than their homegrown Moslem talent.

Another Italian, acting as harbor pilot, had guided the fleet to the perfect anchorage. This fellow from Capri (never identified by name) carried a deeply personal motive for joining the attack. He had married a woman from San Pietro, but she had abandoned him; he was now convinced that she was cuckolding him here on the island. He had turned Turk expressly to seek his revenge.

As the first ray of dawn caught the sails, Muhammed Rumelli gave the signal to “wake up” to the townspeople. The pirates unleashed a sudden unholy thunder. The ships’ cannons bellowed on broadsides. The sailors onshore added a lunatic’s drumroll of small arms fire. The cacophony climaxed as close to a thousand mouths let loose impassioned Arabic war cries and the men rushed into the town. *Allahu akhbar* speeded their pursuit of profit.

The corsairs engulfed the tiny town; they battered down the doors, burst into homes, brandishing torches and scimitars, rousting the stunned citizens from bed and kicking them into the streets. They cursed their victims as *Romo kelb* (“Christian dogs”). The women cowered in corners, trying to avoid what one observer described as “shame and villainies.”

A French naval officer, arriving the next day, found that five women had died in their beds of knife wounds, their bodies entwined in sheets caked with blood. The first female victim, according to local accounts, was the unfaithful wife of that pilot from Capri. A Sardinian historian later called her

“fishwife Helen” who had no idea that her husband’s jealous rage had drawn the enemy to her homeland.

The attackers spent the entire day hauling money, jewels, church silver, silks to the harbor, but by far the most valuable commodity to be stolen walked on two legs: human slaves. Sura 47 of the Koran allowed these Moslem attackers to enslave and ransom any of these captives. Young Italian women would fetch more than the men in the flesh markets of Tunis and Algiers.

The crews dragged the townspeople aboard various ships, tossing them like ballast willy-nilly belowdeck into the holds for the 160-mile voyage. The prisoners wore only what they had slipped on at bedtime on that seemingly unimportant September night, which would turn out to be their last night of freedom for half a decade.

This was life on a Mediterranean island, circa 1798, in the age of Napoleon and Nelson and the waning days of the Barbary corsairs.

The Bey of Tunis, the country’s ruler, had commissioned these seven ships and a thousand men to attack San Pietro. To the Bey, they were his privateers, fighting a legitimate war against Sardinia, which had refused to pay tribute to him for the right to navigate the Mediterranean; to the rest of the world, these seven ships were Barbary pirates, part of a centuries-old extortion scheme.

Fall weather on the Mediterranean can run skittish, and storm winds kicked up. The San Pietro prisoners spent the next four days seesawing in the windowless, foul-smelling dark, appalled at their fate, vomiting, weeping, with no sanitation, and almost no food or water.

That is, all except six young women. “*Six jeunes filles*,” ran a later report in French from a Dutch consul, Antoine Nyssen, in Tunis. “Six young girls, alas, that they were still so, were selected by the Rais [captains] to serve their filthy desires, and the most disgusting forms of volupté were their pastimes during the voyage.”

The ships, nearing Tunis, passed the site of ancient Carthage, and the captains fired off celebratory cannon shots to signal their victory. The city of Tunis lies six miles inland from the harbor, connected by a stagnant reddish-colored lake. The pirates rushed the prisoners aboard small barges; boatmen pushing poles, then strained to follow a winding route indicated by pillars rising a foot or two above the surface. “On these pillars, standing silent, sad, wings furled, seeming like those birds sculpted on tombs, are cormorants,” wrote French novelist Alexandre Dumas, who fifty years later took this same route. Dumas said the birds of prey would suddenly swoop down on some fish swimming near the surface, then calmly return to reassume their cryptlike pose. It’s doubtful that many of the Italian captives noticed the wildlife.

The city soon announced itself by smell as much as by sight. The prisoners later learned that fecal ditches ran along the northern and eastern walls to receive the human waste from 300,000 inhabitants of various races: Moors, Arabs, Turks, Jews, European merchants and diplomats, African and Christian slaves. Runoff from the ditches fed into the stagnant shallow lake, making the fish poisonous to humans but edible by the likes of cormorants, flamingos, and seagulls.

The corsairs, swinging leather straps, herded the filthy, exhausted prisoners through the narrow byways of the whitewashed city on the unusually hot day of September 8, 1798. “I saw them harassed by blows, by fatigue, covered in dust and dying of thirst, dragging themselves along a burning street barefoot, hatless,” wrote the Dutch consul. “There was a huge crowd drunk with joy to see so many Christian victims of the *bravery* of their soldiers.”

These unfortunate captives staggered forward two hours to the palace where the Bey of Tunis Hamouda, in his jeweled turban and diamond-encrusted silk vest, inspected them. For him it was like counting money. Each of the prisoners was now a slave to be sold at his whim. The Bey’s corsairs had

captured an astounding 950 people, including 702 women and children.

~~On the northern coast of Africa circa 1800, blacks and whites could still be sold into slavery. Men were usually peddled near naked, or in dangly shirts, in an outdoor auction; women could be inspected privately in stalls nearby. Unlike slave auctions in the southern United States, male buyers here openly acknowledged lustful desires for their human purchases; matrons inspected the women, and virgins were sold at a steep premium, often with a written guarantee.~~

Of all the fears of people living in the 1780s and 1790s, a fear perhaps exceeding death itself was the terror of being made a slave on the Barbary Coast; in sermon after sermon, it was portrayed as hell in life. (Twenty-one freeborn Americans had spent eleven years in slavery in Algiers from 1785 to 1796, bringing their stories home to the nation.)

Foreign consuls begged the Bey not to break up the San Pietro families, not to sell anyone off to Algerian slave traders. The ruler of Tunis set his opening asking price for the women at 600 Venetian sequins each, about \$1,371 at a time when a U.S. sailor earned \$144 a year. He would charge half that amount for the men. The Bey, to save on the costs of feeding and dressing, then farmed many of the captives out to the leading citizens of Tunis, including the representatives of foreign countries, who accepted the slaves on humanitarian grounds. (Six years later, Tobias Lear, United States consul general to Algiers, would accept two female Italian slaves to work as housekeepers in the consulate. He would expense-account their \$75-a-year upkeep.)

Among the San Pietro prisoners, one young girl stood out. Strikingly beautiful and of aristocratic birth, Anna Maria Porcile was twelve years old, a ripe age on the Barbary Coast, a marriageable age. She was the granddaughter of the Count of Sant-Antioco, the admiral of the Navy of Sardinia. Brought up in a strict Catholic household, Anna had led a sheltered life; private tutors taught music, literature, and dance to this naturally vivacious girl.

The Bey, to keep loyalty high among his officers, decided to allow his six corsair captains to select one female each as his own personal slave. The admiral of the fleet, Rais Muhammed Rumelli, chose Anna.

Rumelli was quoted as saying he “had fixed his desire on her”; he intended her as his concubine unless someone would immediately buy her from him for the record asking price of 16,000 piasters, almost \$5,000 (the price of a mansion in Manhattan).

Anna’s entire family had been captured in the raid, including her mother, Barbara; her father, Don Antonio; and her two sisters. While the negotiations for the rest of the slaves could drag on over months via shipboard messages to and from Sardinia, Anna’s fate must be decided quickly. Rumelli demanded an answer. Anna’s father desperately tried to find financing. He naturally turned to fellow Italians who happened to be in Tunis, and he fortunately found a Tuscan merchant, one Felice Borzoni, who would loan him the entire sum. The man paid Rais Rumelli and Anna was suddenly free . . . almost.

She was the human collateral for her father’s loan . . . the Bey would not grant a *tiskara*, a passport, to her until the loan was repaid. With Anna as hostage for her father’s return, Don Antonio Porcile was allowed to travel to Europe to raise the money, but in the chaos of the Napoleonic Wars he failed. So the Tuscan merchant sold the debt to the aged prime minister Mustapha Coggia, a man known for his wisdom, courtliness, and complete lack of teeth.

The months of 1799 slipped by, and these white-skinned slaves joined the 2,000 or so slaves of various hues laboring in Tunis. Negotiations dragged on . . . the price for the women dropped in half to 300 Venetian sequins . . . the exasperated Bey, to encourage a speedier payment, sold eleven to slave traders of Algiers; nonetheless, the king of Sardinia, harassed by Napoleon, was unable to redeem her.

countrymen. Italian slave mothers gave birth to dozens of new slaves in Tunis.

On October 10, 1800, eighty-seven-year-old Mustapha Coggia—who held the Porcile debt—died, and all the prime minister's possessions passed to the Bey of Tunis. The very next day, the Bey demanded that the Porcile family pay off the debt immediately or else the Bey said he would reclaim the lovely Anna and add her to his seraglio. Or, more ominously, he said he might instead auction her off in the slave markets of Istanbul. (Since the Bey made little secret of his preference for men over women—his foreign minister Yussef Sapatapa, a thirty-three-year-old former slave, was his lover—selling Anna was the likelier scenario.)

That afternoon, Anna and her mother and her sisters tried desperately to figure out a way to raise the money. Her grandfather, the admiral, had died, and her father, the new count, was at that moment in Sardinia, still trying to amass the huge sum with absolutely no success. The pirates had stolen everything. His credit was suspect. European banking was a mess. The mother and her daughters were running out of options and time. They considered the various consulates, such as British, French, Danish, and the Catholic Redemptionist charities, Jewish moneylenders, European merchants.

On that afternoon of October 11, 1800, frantic, they presented themselves at the door of the consulate of the United States of America, a fledgling nation that trumpeted itself as a bastion of freedom; they sought refuge under the red-white-and-blue flag, which then had fifteen stars and fifteen stripes and was represented in Tunis by one of the most unlikely diplomats ever to be forgotten by history: William Eaton.

A former army captain, Eaton had recently been court-martialed and convicted. He was impetuous, hardheaded, argumentative. His loud voice cut through conversations; his ramrod-straight stance inspired respect; his Dartmouth education added polysyllables to his vocabulary. Diplomacy, he had very little; he was blunt-spoken, exceedingly direct. He once wrote of the feeble efforts of the U.S. Navy that “a fleet of Quaker meeting houses would have done just as well.” This bulldog of a man, age thirty-five, stood 5'8", with deep-set large blue eyes. A friend described his eyes as “expressive of energy, penetration and authority” but also of “impatience and disquietude.”

Eaton had arrived in Tunis the previous year on the little merchant brig *Sophia* and was immediately appalled. “Here I am . . . under the mad rays of a vertical sun reflected and refracted from wall and terraces of white-washed houses, hotter than tobacco & rum, with plague and scorpions suspended over my head, menacing death, surrounded by brutal Turks, swindlers, jews, perfidious Italians, miserable slaves, lazy camels, churlish mules, and savage arabs—without society and without amusement. Is not this enough to constitute a hell?”

His irritation only grew as he observed slavery close-up. “For my part, it grates me mortally when I see a lazy Turk [a Moslem] reclining at his ease upon an embroidered sofa, with one Christian slave to fan away the flies, another to hand him his coffee and a third to hold his pipe. . . . It is still more grating to perceive that the Turk believes he has a right to demand this contribution and that we, like Italians, have not the fortitude to resist it.” (The U.S. government, with a huge debt from the Revolutionary War, found it cheaper to pay off Tunis—and keep the pirates away—than to fight against them.)

Eaton, a New England patriot, was appalled that the United States would pay bribes to pirates and was deeply annoyed at having personally to hand out diamond-encrusted watches, gold watches, pairs of gold-mounted pistols, gold tobacco boxes, silks, and many other items to sixty different government officials in Tunis from the Bey and admiral down to the infamously ugly eunuch who guarded the Bey's harem, the dark-skinned giant with the raspy mewling infant's voice.

The Porcile women stood crying before William Eaton. Anna's honor hung in the balance.

“Imagination better than language can paint their distress,” Eaton later wrote. From a conviction about freedom that literally had its roots near Plymouth Rock with Eaton’s great-great-grandfather, he could not abide this form of persecution.

Against all common sense, Eaton agreed to guarantee a six-month loan for Anna’s father, allowing himself to stand as surety for the repayment of \$5,000. “I ransomed your daughter,” Eaton later wrote to the count, “because being in my house, both the honor of my flag and my own sensibility dictated it.” If at the end of six months Count Porcile couldn’t pay, then Eaton was obligated to do so.

What is striking is that Eaton at that moment had absolutely no money. At least, none of his own and yet he was committing to pay a small fortune to rescue an Italian slave girl. Impetuously. For Honor. William Eaton, throughout his life, would be drawn to commit deeds that he considered righteous and others would consider reckless.

His flurry of letters to Count Porcile received eloquent replies but no money.

And in June of 1801, the homosexual lover of the Bey, Yussef Sapatapa, told Eaton that he must repay the \$5,000. Eaton, after failing to raise money through trading ventures, was now forced to borrow the large sum from a Tunisian merchant named Unis ben Unis.

In February of 1803, to show some force and fend off any threat of war, the United States sent armed ships to Tunis. An old Barbary maxim states: “Whoever acts like a sheep, the wolf will eat.” So the young United States did not want to be mistaken for a sheep. Commodore Richard Morris, with Captain John Rodgers, arrived with three heavily armed frigates. The mission seemed successful; the odd new nation across the Atlantic did indeed have a navy. But as Commodore Morris, in a blue uniform with gold epaulets, was about to embark to cross that stagnant lake to go to the harbor, he was suddenly arrested . . . because of the thousands of dollars of debt of William Eaton. The highest ranking U.S. Navy officer found himself surrounded by Tunisians wielding scimitars, and he was forced to return to the city. “It was impossible to apprehend that the respect attached to the person of the Commodore would be violated,” Eaton wrote. “It is unprecedented, even in the history of Barbary outrage.”

Commodore Richard Morris—a scion of the wealthy Morris family of Vermont, whose brother had cast the deciding ballot to elect Jefferson over Burr—was furious with Eaton. He assumed that the man’s debts were mostly personal. Eaton, Morris, and Unis ben Unis walked to the palace where Bey Hamouda, wearing a jeweled silk cloak, greeted them on his luxurious sofa. Eaton vehemently denied that he had ever promised to repay Unis ben Unis whenever the American squadron arrived. Unis demanded payment of \$22,000 . . . of that, \$5,000 came from Eaton’s ransom of Anna and \$10,000 came from Sapatapa claiming that Eaton had promised him a large bribe, and the remaining \$7,000 from a commercial dispute. Eaton snapped. He called the Bey’s lover, the foreign minister, a “thief” to his face and said all he had experienced in Tunis was “violence and indignity.” The Bey, unaccustomed to contretemps, shouted over and over that Eaton was mad. Eyewitnesses said that the Bey’s lip trembled, and he oddly clutched his mustache as he yelled: “I will turn you out of my kingdom.” When the Bey had calmed down, he told the commodore: “The Consul is a man of a good heart but a bad head. He is too obstinate and too violent for me. I must have a consul with a disposition more congenial to the Barbary interests.”

Commodore Morris had no appetite for remaining in Tunis, for fighting for the loudmouthed consul. He agreed to replace Eaton and to pay off the \$22,000. He later wrote: “As security for the money paid by me, I insisted on Mr. Eaton assigning all his real and personal estate to the government.”

On March 10, 1803, Eaton boarded the USS *Chesapeake*. Disgraced as a diplomat, he was on the

verge of ruin. He was returning home to his wife, financially devastated. This last twist was ironic since Eaton had accepted the post of consul to Tunis in the hopes that he might make enough money to re-enter his marriage as the financial equal of Eliza, a widow of a wealthy Revolutionary War general. “[I hope] the hour is not far distant,” he had written to her before the disaster, “when I may demonstrate to the world that it was not Mrs. Danielson’s fortune but her person that Captain Eaton married.”

In his official report, Morris stated that “[Eaton] appeared to be a man of lively imagination, rather credulous. And by no means possessed of sound judgement.”

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Within two years, this disgraced diplomat would lead a band of eight marines, *eight*, and seven hundred foreign mercenaries, the dregs of Alexandria, on a mad hopeless mission to march across the hell of the Libyan desert. He would try to finance the mission with the funds owed to him for ransoming Anna, the Italian slave girl. Thomas Jefferson would send Eaton on America’s first covert military op overseas, to try to overthrow the government of Tripoli in order to free the *three hundred* American sailors enslaved there. This man on the verge of personal ruin, joined by his handful of marines, including violin-playing Presley O’Bannon, would surprise-attack Tripoli’s second-largest city, and they would achieve a near miraculous victory. He would help stamp the then second-class service, the United States Marines, with a new reputation for courage. His exploits would lead future generations of Americans to sing proudly: “From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli, we will fight our country’s battles on the land and on the sea.”

In 1805, in the first decades of our North American experiment in democracy, when the nation’s future prosperity was very much in doubt, William Eaton made one of the loudest statements to the world that the United States was not a country to be mocked or bullied. While politicians and military officers mouthed the same patriotic phrases, Eaton risked his life to back up his statements. He helped set a national tone of defiance and daring.

But in William Eaton’s flinty outspokenness and fearlessness, there lurked the seeds of his own destruction. Thomas Jefferson could not abide the man’s relentless belligerence. The aftermath of victory in Tripoli for Eaton would be less than sweet. After taking on Tripoli and the Barbary pirates, he would challenge and defy Thomas Jefferson. It would be a battle between unequals, and no good can come of that.

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## CHAPTER

## *Tripoli*

*Would to God that the officers and crew of the Philadelphia had one and all determined to prefer death to slavery; it is possible such a determination might save them from either.*

—COMMODORE EDWARD PREBLE TO SECRETARY OF THE NAVY ROBERT SMITH

§ THE CARPENTERS WHO BUILT the USS *Philadelphia*, in addition to their craft skills, demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for alcohol. The project overseer, a Thomas FitzSimons, noted in his expense accounts that he had purchased 110 gallons of rum a month for thirty carpenters. Sober math reveals that each man working six days a week consumed about a pint of rum a day.

The stout frigate showed no ungainly lines. The carpenters, sharpening their adzes hourly, had hewed the live oak floated north from Georgia into a 147-foot keel; they had pocked each side of the ship with fourteen gunports and sheathed the bottom with copper to defeat sea worms and barnacles. As befitting a ship built in the nation's capital, famed sculptor William Rush had carved an enormous figurehead: a Hercules. No ship of the United States would sport a Virgin Mary (religion) or a King Louis (monarchy), but a muscular classical hero had proven acceptable.

The *Philadelphia*, launched in 1799, added key firepower to the U.S. Navy, since the entire American fleet in 1803 consisted of six ships. By contrast, England—then fending off Napoleon's attacks—floated close to six hundred vessels in its Royal Navy. While Admiral Nelson stymied the French with thunderous broadsides, the Americans with a bit of pop-pop from their Lilliputian fleet hoped to overawe the least of the Barbary powers, Tripoli.

Now, in October of 1803, the USS *Philadelphia*, a 36-gun frigate, was prowling the waters off the coast of Tripoli, trying all by itself to enforce a blockade. Very few nations would have even bothered with something as forlorn as a one-ship blockade, but the United States—only a couple of decades old—wasn't exactly brimming with military options.

In 1801, just after the inauguration of Thomas Jefferson, Tripoli (modern-day Libya) had become the first country ever to declare war on the United States. The ruler, Yussef Karamanli, had ordered his Janissaries to chop down the flagpole at the U.S. consulate to signal his grave displeasure with the

slow trickle of gifts from America. Jefferson, when he learned the news, had responded by sending a small fleet to confront Tripoli and try to overawe it into a peace treaty.

For more than two centuries, the Barbary countries of Morocco, Tunis, Algiers, and Tripoli had been harassing Christian ships, seizing cargo and capturing citizens. Algiers once boasted more than 30,000 Christian slaves, including one Miguel Cervantes, *before* he wrote *Don Quixote*. European powers in the 1500s and 1600s fought ferocious battles against Moslem pirates like Barbaros. However, over time, a cynical system of appeasement had developed. The nations of Europe paid tribute—in money, jewels, and naval supplies—to remain at peace. England and France—in endless wars—found it cheaper to bribe the Barbary pirates than to devote a squadron to perpetually trawling the sea off Africa. At its core, expediency outweighed national honor.

When the thirteen American colonies split off from mother England, they lost British protection. The United States found itself lumped in the pile of potential Barbary victims, alongside the likes of Sardinia and Sicily. (From 1785 to 1815, more than six hundred American citizens would be captured and enslaved. This nuisance would prove to be no mere foreign trade issue but rather a near-constant hostage crisis.)

Jefferson wanted to send a message that the United States, with its fresh ideas, refused to pay tribute, but the war with Tripoli was dragging on. Jefferson's first two U.S. fleets had failed to inflict more than scratches on the enemy, and the president expected results from this latest armed squadron.

The USS *Philadelphia* cruised off the coast of North Africa on the lookout for enemy vessels. The youngest captain in the U.S. Navy, William Bainbridge, had drawn the plum assignment. While the U.S. Navy was still evolving its style of command, twenty-nine-year-old Bainbridge, from a wealthy New Jersey family, clearly valued discipline. "I believe there never was so depraved a set of mortals as Sailors," he once wrote. "Under discipline, they are peaceable and serviceable—divest them of that and they constitute a perfect rabble." During one nine-month stretch on an earlier voyage, he had placed 50 men of a 100-man crew in irons and flogged 40 of them at the gangway. Charming to fellow officers, he didn't allow common seamen ever to address him, no matter how politely. One sailor who came back home later, standing on what he described as the "maindeck of America," said he expected he would have an easier time speaking to President Jefferson than Captain Bainbridge. This same disgruntled tar said that the captain often addressed crewmen as "You damn'd rascal" and that Bainbridge also cheered on the boatswain's mates, administering cat-o'-nine-tails to a sailor's back with words such as "Give it to him! Clear that cat! Damn your eyes or I'll give it to him."

In spring of 1803 when the *Philadelphia* had needed a crew, most potential recruits knew nothing about Bainbridge's reputation as a rough commander. They also didn't know Bainbridge's service record included two of the blackest incidents in the history of the young navy.

William Ray, native of Salisbury, Connecticut, certainly didn't. It's unusual in this era for an articulate "grunt," a private, to record his impressions in a memoir, but Ray did just that. (His *Horror of Slavery*, an extremely rare book, provides a counterpoint to the usual self-aggrandizing officer's letters and memoirs.)

William Ray, 5' 4 ½", thirty-four years old, had failed at many professions. His general store . . . long shuttered; his schoolroom . . . now vacant, and in the latest mishap, he had fallen sick en route from New England and had lost a newspaper editing job in Philadelphia. So Ray, penniless, exasperated, discouraged, and inebriated, headed down to the Delaware River to call it a day and a life and to drown himself.

There, through the haze, he saw flying from a ship in the river the massive flag of the United States, fifteen stars and fifteen stripes. A drummer was beating the skin trying to encourage

enlistment. Ray weighed his options: death or the marines. He weighed them again. At the birth of the Republic, the marines ranked as the lowliest military service, paying \$6 a month, one-third of the wages of an experienced sailor. The entire marine corps totaled fewer than 500 men, and though its true marines wore fancy uniforms and carried arms, they basically came onboard ship to police the sailors and prevent mutiny or desertion. The major glory the U.S. Marines could then claim was its Washington City marching band, which the local citizens of that swampy outpost loved and President Thomas Jefferson despised.

Ray enlisted. Rarely was a man less suited for the marines than diminutive William Ray. As a former colonist who had lived through the War of Independence, he detested tyranny, whether it be that of King George III or his new captain, William Bainbridge. Onshore he saw “liberty, equality, peace and plenty” and on board ship, he said he found “oppression, arrogance, clamour and indigence.”

Ray, still smarting that he couldn’t find a job onshore in “prosperous” America, was appalled to discover his new maritime career required addressing thirteen-year-olds as “Sir” and treating the like “gentlemen.” The *Philadelphia*’s officer list included eleven midshipmen, all in their teens. “How preposterous does it appear, to have brats of boys, twelve or fifteen years old, who six months before had not even seen salt water, strutting in livery, about a ship’s decks, damning and flashing off experienced sailors,” complained one veteran sailor, who called the job of midshipmen a “happy asylum” for the offspring of the wealthy too vicious, lazy, or ignorant to support themselves.

Ray once saw a midshipman toss a bucket of water on a sleeping sailor who, as he woke, spluttered some curses. When the sailor recognized it was a midshipman, he tried to apologize, saying he didn’t expect “one of the gentlemen” to be tossing water. Captain Bainbridge had the sailor thrown in irons and flogged. “You tell an officer he is no gentleman?” shouted Bainbridge at the man’s punishment. “I’ll cut you in ounce pieces, you scoundrel.”

In that era of sail, navy ships were so crowded that sailors slept in shifts: Half the crew rocked in the foul-smelling dark while the other half performed the watch. Some captains allowed the men six consecutive hours of sleep; Bainbridge allowed four.

A marine comrade of Ray’s, David Burling, fell asleep on watch . . . twice. The second time, he was chained in the coal hold until three captains could be gathered for a court-martial. “It will give me infinite pleasure to see him hanging at the yardarm,” Bainbridge was overheard saying.

Despite Ray’s shock at seaboard life under Bainbridge, the *Philadelphia* for its few months at sea had performed well enough. Then Commodore Edward Preble in mid-September had sent the vessel along with the schooner *Vixen*, on the important mission to blockade Tripoli. Preble represented the third commodore (i.e., ranking squadron captain) in three years to command the small U.S. fleet in the region; the last two men—Commodore Richard Dale and Commodore Richard Morris—were both accused of spending more time showing their epaulets at dances and balls at various European ports than in the choppy waters off Tripoli. Preble, a no-nonsense New Englander, was eager to blockade and to capture hostile ships even in the stormy fall weather. He hoped to choke the enemy’s economy.

Now, on October 31, 1803, in the half light of dawn around 6 A.M., the lookout on the *Philadelphia* hovering high above the deck, spotted a sail far off on the port bow. Standing orders required alerting the captain. A distant ship, a mere swatch of white at first, usually remains a complete unknown for quite a while. Thanks to elaborate rules of warfare in the early nineteenth century, deception was viewed as an acceptable strategy in the early stages of encountering another ship. (For instance, the *Philadelphia* carried half a dozen foreign flags, including the Union Jack, a Portuguese pennant, and a Danish ensign; Bainbridge a month earlier had used the British colors to trick a Moroccan ship in

furling canvas and laying by.)

Though a captain might trick another vessel to sidle close, the etiquette of battle demanded that he fly his true colors before opening fire.

The USS *Philadelphia*, at that moment about thirty miles east of Tripoli, was already flying the American flag to announce the blockade. As Captain Bainbridge peered through the spyglass, he watched the other ship suddenly raise the yellow-and-red-striped flag of Tripoli. This amounted to a dare, a taunt. Any other colors, especially British or French, would have made the U.S. ship less eager to pursue.

Bainbridge ordered all possible sail to speed the chase of this 12-gun enemy corsair. Pigtailed men scurried to set the sails. A strong breeze coming from the east and southeast allowed both ships to ignore the danger of drifting too close to the shore to the south. The Tripoli vessel sprinted due west while the *Philadelphia*, farther off the coast, had to zigzag landward to try to catch up.

Officers barked, and the men smartly obeyed. Beyond patriotic zeal, another incentive spurred the crew: prize money. In the early navy, officers and men received shares of legally captured vessels. The roping of a gold-laden ship could change an officer's life and dole out more than rum money to a common sailor.

The chase was on. The men eagerly scampered up the ratlines to unfurl yet more sail, the topgallants. Standing 190 feet above the deck on a rope strung along a topgallant yardarm, as the frigate rolled in the waves, the men were tilted over the sea from starboard, then over the sea to port over and over again.

The *Philadelphia* proved slightly faster than its quarry, and within three hours of traveling at about eight knots (nine-plus miles per hour), it reached within cannon shot for its bow chasers. The Tripoli ship, much smaller, smartly hugged the shore to tempt the *Philadelphia* to follow landward and accidentally beach itself. Bainbridge kept the *Philadelphia* at least one mile offshore. The port of Tripoli began to loom in the distance . . . at first a minaret then a castle.

"Every sail was set, and every exertion made to overhaul the ship and cut her off from the town," Ray wrote. "The wind was not very favourable to our purpose, and we had frequently to wear ship. constant fire was kept up from our ship, but to no effect. We were now within about three miles of the town, and Captain Bainbridge not being acquainted with the harbour, having no pilot nor any correct chart, trusted implicitly to the directions of Lieutenant Porter, who had been here several times and who professed himself well acquainted with the situation of the harbour. We however went so close in that the captain began to be fearful of venturing any farther, and was heard by a number of our men, to express to Lt. Porter the danger he apprehended in pursuing any farther in that direction and advising him to put about ship."

David Porter, then a twenty-three-year-old lieutenant, and a six-foot bull of a man, would go on to achieve a remarkable and controversial career. He would almost singlehandedly wipe out the British whaling fleet in the Pacific during the War of 1812. He would help root out the pirate Jean Lafitte from New Orleans, but his reluctance to follow orders would ultimately lead to court-martial. He was indeed, a bit of a wild man.

A year earlier, he had killed a fellow in a Baltimore saloon during a brawl while trying to land new recruits. Six months after that, his aggressiveness had surfaced again, this time against the enemy. The U.S. squadron—under Commodore Morris—had trapped in a cove eleven small Tripoli merchant ships carrying wheat; Porter took four men in an open boat at night to sneak in and scout the enemy ships. He discovered that the Moslem merchants had tucked all the vessels by the shore, unloaded their bales of wheat into breastworks, and were now backed on land by a thousand militiamen. Port

begged permission, and received it, for the foolhardy mission to attack in open boats to try to set fire to the wheat. Within a stone's throw of the shore, he was shot through his left thigh, and another was grazed his right thigh. His men managed to set fire to the wheat, but the Moslems eventually succeeded in extinguishing the blaze. Porter—though bleeding profusely—begged permission to attack again, but Morris refused.

Now as the *Philadelphia* skirted the shore, Porter encouraged Bainbridge to go deeper into the harbor; he also gave orders that three lead-lines be cast and recast to look for any perilous change in the depth of the water. Two lieutenants and one midshipman oversaw sailors who slung forward a lead weight, itself weighing as much as twenty-eight pounds. If the toss was timed right, the lead weight would strike bottom as the ship passed, giving a true vertical depth by a reading of colored markings tied to the rope. The men sang out lead-line readings of at least eight fathoms (or forty-eight feet of water), plenty for a ship that needed a little over twenty feet in depth.

The city of Tripoli stood about three miles away. The enemy ship looked too far ahead to catch. Captain Bainbridge granted Lieutenant Porter permission to fire a few more rounds before heading out to sea. Porter, not shy, unleashed quite a few. A diplomat in town hearing the last burst of cannon fire called it a “fanfaronade,” that is, a braggadocio, or a mad fanfare of farewell.

Porter then relayed the captain's order to haul the ship about and head out to sea. The topgallant sails used in the chase were furled, ropes were tied to change the angle of the sails. Bainbridge sent Porter up the mizzen topmast, the sternmost of the three masts, so he could use the spyglass to assess the vessels in Tripoli harbor as the *Philadelphia* headed back out to sea.

Lieutenant Porter, in his blue uniform with a single gold epaulet, was halfway up the mizzen rigging, about seventy-five feet above the deck, when he felt himself flung forward hard. Porter gripped the ropes as they flung him backward now.

The *Philadelphia* had beached itself on an uncharted reef; the bow rode up on this shelf of sand and rested several feet above its normal water level. Bainbridge later said he couldn't have been more surprised than if this had occurred in the middle of the ocean.

In the first moment of shock, Captain Bainbridge coolly gave the next order: full sail ahead to try to surmount and pass the reef.

Bainbridge hadn't ordered any soundings to determine the height of the reef fore or aft, or to ascertain where the deep water lay. The ship, with wind in its sails, rose up and beached itself high on the reef. Lieutenant Porter would later confirm Bainbridge's command at a Court of Inquiry. “As the sails were instantly set to force her over the bank,” testified Lieutenant Porter, who added a touch of cattily: “After this did not succeed, Captain Bainbridge asked the witness's opinion.”

At that moment, the Tripoli blockade runner, which had been darting away, now hove to and rolled out its guns for the first time. A couple miles beyond that vessel, more than a dozen ships bobbed inside Tripoli harbor. (The U.S. schooner *Vixen* would have come in handy now, but Bainbridge had sent it away toward Tunis two weeks earlier to scout for other ships.)

*Philadelphia* was stuck in Tripoli. Anyone on duty in the Mediterranean knew the consequences of being captured: Barbary slavery. For many of the 307 men aboard, it evoked a greater fear than the shipwreck, which brought quick death, because Barbary slavery was portrayed as long, humiliating death-in-life.

In colonial days, preacher Cotton Mather had described Barbary slaves as living for years in dark, narrow pits with a crosshatch of bars above, and their taskmasters were “barbarous negroes.” Gallatin's slaves also lived to tell of being chained naked to an oar, forced to row ten hours at a stretch. Slave crews facing forward, pushed the forty-foot-long oars by rocking back to near horizontal, as though in

grotesque limbo contest, and then lurching with full strength, again and again. During hard chase they were sustained by a wine-soaked rag shoved in their mouths.

Accounts of North African slave auctions showed white Americans treated like black slaves. Rituals varied, but in one account an American stated that after being purchased: “[I] was forced to lie down in the street and take the foot of my new master and place it upon my neck.” Another described being forced to lick the dust along a thirty-foot path to the throne of the Dey of Algiers.

John Foss survived captivity in Algiers, and his popular account ran in several American newspapers in the late 1790s, fleshing out the nightmare. He wrote of prisoners routinely shackled with forty-pound chains, forced to perform sunrise-to-sunset labor ranging from digging out sewers to hauling enormous rocks for a harbor jetty. He matter-of-factly described the most common Barbary punishment for *light* infractions: bastinado of 150 strokes. “The person is laid upon his face, with his hands in irons behind him and his legs lashed together with a rope. One taskmaster holds down his head and another his legs, while two others inflict the punishment upon his breech [his buttocks] with sticks, some what larger than an ox goad. After he has received one half in this manner, they lash his ankles to a pole, and two Turks [Moslems] lift the pole up, and hold it in such a manner, as brings the soles of his feet upward, and the remainder of his punishment, he receives upon the soles of his feet.”



American and European accounts depicted a slave's life in Barbary as an unending hell of tortures, including the bastinado (left) and forced circumcision (right).

With cheery thoughts such as these running through their heads, the crew and officers of the *Philadelphia* worked desperately to free the 150-foot-long vessel off Kaliusa Reef.

Porter advised Bainbridge to consult all the officers. They quickly suggested lowering a boat to sound the depth all around the ship. The bow lead drew only twelve feet as far back along the ship to the foremast—at least six feet less depth than required—but the stern still floated free with plenty of deep water there. Clearly, the ship needed to back up. The *Philadelphia* was pointing to the northeast when the winds flowed briskly to the northwest directly across the beam of the ship, a decidedly unhelpful direction. The officers recommended putting the sails aback, that is, facing them into the wind by tying off the yardarms to move the ship backward. That amounted to the exact opposite tack from Bainbridge's original command.

The American sailors noticed a flurry of activity taking place on the ships in harbor; the men of Tripoli were racing to ready their vessels; speed was vital for both sides. “I could not but notice the striking alteration in our officers,” wrote Private Ray. “It was no time to act the haughty tyrant—no time to punish men for snoring—no time to tell men they had ‘no right to think’ . . . It was not ‘go ye dam'd rascal’ but ‘come, my good fellow, my brave lads.’ ”

The men tied the sails, prepared the canvas. The blustery winds pushed against backed sails, but instead of inching the *Philadelphia* backward, the strong breezes tipped the ship far over onto its leeward side till the gunports hovered just above the waterline. A few more inches of tip and water would rush in. This unexpected result caused the deck not only to slope downhill (from the elevated reef) but also to lean left. Carved Hercules looked drunk and falling sideways at the masthead. Worse, this careening caused one bank of eighteen cannons to point into the water, and the cannons on the other side to aim high into the sky.

The one enemy gunboat—downwind—kept up a fitful fire from a respectful distance, but so fitful that almost all balls splashed harmlessly in the water.

The American officers, to lighten the bow quickly, ordered the men to cut the ship's three heavy bow anchors; no one wanted to part with valuable equipment, but this was an emergency; the sailors chopped with axes at the fat cables. The ship still stuck firm. Then the officers ordered the crew to shift the heavy cannons to the stern. The gun carriages must be unchained and the men must lash ropes to the cannon barrels and wooden gun carriages to ease them down the tilted gun deck. The men, who could barely outstretch their arms in the cramped areas belowdeck, now tried to haul 2,000-pound cast-iron long-barreled cannons in a hurry.

The gun crews—trained to load, fire, swab, reload in battle rush—strained to pile the humongous weapons in the stern. That hard maneuver failed to free the bow, so the officers told the men to hoist and toss many of the 2,000-pound cannons overboard. They jettisoned most of the twenty-eight beautiful long guns capable of shooting eighteen-pound balls and the sixteen stubby carronades that plunked thirty-two-pound balls . . . except for a handful on the quarterdeck and in the stern cabin. Sailors shot-put cannonballs into the harbor water. The men sought out heavy articles everywhere—from barrels to ballast—and cast them overboard. Even David Burling, the marine imprisoned for sleeping, was freed from the coal hold to lend a hand.

With massive effort, the crew lightened the vessel by sixty tons, but the *Philadelphia* still stuck fast. Meanwhile, the blockade runner continued to line up a broadside of its guns and to fire. The balls, surprisingly, either whizzed through the rigging or fell harmlessly in the water. Not a single shot caused a direct hit. No splinters flew. The *Philadelphia*, with most of its remaining guns underwater and aimed askew, couldn't fire back. Bainbridge later compared himself to a chained helpless animal.

While the crew worked hard over the ensuing hours, several more gunboats, finally readied, stirred out of Tripoli harbor. (A gunboat might carry 50 to 75 men and sport a half dozen or so cannons.) The number of enemy gunboats sailing to attack the *Philadelphia* is up for debate. According to Private Ray, only one gunboat risked passing by the *Philadelphia*'s stern to get upwind while two others remained almost out of gunshot downwind. Captain Bainbridge, however, pegged the ultimate number at nine.

As an occasional cannonball whizzed overhead, the men labored and the officers remained calm. The Americans were sitting ducks in an arcade where the customers couldn't hit the side of a barrel. The carpenter and his men tried to chop away enough of a cabin wall to allow at least one cannon to bear on the Tripoli gunboat upwind. The gun crew fired several shots, but the cannon failed to roll so far enough, and the blast caused a small fire. The men doused the flames quickly and abandoned using the cannon.

George Hodge, the boatswain, a non-commissioned officer, suggested using the ship's boats to try to float out the huge stern anchor a distance behind the ship, drop it, and then try to haul or warp the ship backwards. Ideally, the anchor's giant triangular flukes would bury themselves in the sandy bottom; the men would turn the capstan to pull on the anchor cable. Bainbridge rejected his idea and

later stated enemy gunboats “commanded the ground” where the anchor would have had to have been dropped. Hodge and many sailors privately grumbled that the effort was well worth the risk.

Now deeper into the afternoon, the officers regarded the situation as desperate. They suggested a radical move, and Bainbridge concurred: chop down the foremast. With topmast and topgallant perched above, this stout pole towered 176 feet. Bainbridge hoped it would fall to the right, and that would cure the ship’s tilt left or, even better, without the weight, the ship would float free. The carpenters wielded axe blows on the right side of the base; oak chips flew. They chopped it down, but the men hadn’t planned their tree-cutting well enough. The foremast fell to the left and, even worse, yanked the main topgallant mast with it. The decks tilted more. The bow was a mess of tangled ropes and shattered masts.

Around 3 P.M. Bainbridge yet again called all his officers together to consult on the situation. (At this time, Ray observed three more gunboats just leaving the harbor, which would have brought him total to six potential attacking vessels.) Bainbridge saw the decision in stark terms: surrender or fight against overwhelming odds, with scant means of self-defense. (While the Tripoli ships might eventually prove overwhelming, up to that moment, not one cannonball had hit the deck of the *Philadelphia*, nor were any sailors killed or wounded.)

What many men aboard didn’t realize was that William Bainbridge had *already* surrendered a U.S. Navy ship; he had *already* gained the unwelcomed distinction of becoming the first officer in the history of the United States Navy (after the end of the War of Independence) to surrender.

A half decade earlier, back in 1798, the United States was fighting an undeclared war against France over commerce, mainly against Caribbean privateers. Bainbridge, then a twenty-four-year-old lieutenant, was given command of the *Retaliation*, eighteen guns, and 140 men, joining a small squadron of three American ships off Guadeloupe. Commodore Alexander Murray was chasing a French privateer when on the morning of November 20, 1798, he reconnoitered with Bainbridge. He spotted two large sails in the distance. Murray consulted Bainbridge, who informed him that he had spoken earlier with a British warship, and he was convinced these two arriving ships were also British—then our ally.

Murray in the *Montezuma* sailed off after a French privateer, leaving Bainbridge in the *Retaliation* who headed in the direction of the arriving sails. He gave the flag signal agreed upon for encountering British ships. No answer. He drifted closer. He gave the signal for American ships and received a muddled answer.

By now, the large frigates were bearing down upon him. The first ship, 36 guns, fired across his bow and hoisted the tricolor of Revolutionary France. The second ship, a 44-gun leviathan, arrived and Commodore St. Laurent of the *Volontaire* demanded that Bainbridge surrender. Without firing a shot, after having carelessly sidled up to unknown ships, William Bainbridge ordered the Stars and Stripes to be lowered, and he surrendered.

The men aboard the *Philadelphia* also might not have been aware of another stain on Bainbridge’s navy record. After being released from prison in Guadeloupe, Bainbridge had somehow avoided censure and was made a captain and sent on a mission commanding the *George Washington* to deliver naval supplies and other tributary gifts to Algiers in 1800. Bainbridge navigated across the Atlantic without incident, but once in Algiers he allowed the harbor pilot to guide him to a berth directly under the massive guns of the fortress. The Dey of Algiers then arrogantly demanded that Bainbridge run an errand for him, carrying presents to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul. Bainbridge objected, as did the American consul, Richard O’Brien, who pointed out the Algiers–United States treaty called for American *merchant* vessels to run emergency errands but certainly not U.S. Navy

ships. The Dey threatened war.

With *George Washington* tucked under the massive guns of Dey Bobba Mustapha, Bainbridge found himself constrained to agree to run the Dey's errand. To add insult to injury, the Dey demanded *George Washington* sail under the Algerian flag. Bainbridge agreed to this as well, and the 100-foot-long American pennant was struck. As a midshipman noted in the ship's log: "The Algerian Flag hoisted on the Main top Gallant royal mast head [the ship's highest point] . . . some tears fell at the Instance of national Humility."

Bainbridge delivered to Istanbul: 4 horses, 150 sheep, 25 horned cattle, 4 lions, 4 tigers, antelopes, 12 parrots, as well as 100 African slaves, many of them females bound for the harems.

When William Eaton, then consul in Tunis, heard of Bainbridge's mission, he was appalled. "History shall tell that the United States first volunteered a ship of war, equipt, a carrier for a pirate. It is written. Nothing but blood can blot the impression out. I frankly own, I would have lost the peace and been myself impaled rather than yielded this concession. Will nothing rouse my country?"

Aboard the *Philadelphia* in Tripoli harbor, at 3 P.M., Captain Bainbridge consulted with his officers, asking their opinion on surrender. "We all answer'd that all was done," wrote William Knight, sailing master. "Nothing remain'd but to give the ship up."

Although not a single cannonball had hit the ship, causing any leaks, Bainbridge apparently perceived a danger of being sunk; he regarded further defense as fruitless and further delay as a possible death sentence for everyone aboard.

Bainbridge now faced a rather unusual problem . . . one that most captains rarely face in the course of a long career. Obviously he didn't want to hand the Bashaw of Tripoli an immaculate 1,200-ton frigate. He needed to scuttle and sink his own ship but do so at a stage-managed pace that would allow all his crew to exit safely. Timing would be crucial. (Many sailors couldn't swim, including Bainbridge.)

Bainbridge ordered the gunner to drown the gunpowder magazine. In case of fire, a supply of water stood at the ready to soak the explosives. The gunner, Richard Stephenson, used a key to gain access to a stopcock, which he turned to send water into the magazine. Bainbridge also ordered the carpenter to bore holes in the ship's oak-and-copper-sheathed bottom. Carpenter William Godby and his two assistants, turning T-shaped augers and pounding sharpened chisels, pierced an unspecified number of holes in the bow below the waterline. Seawater sprayed in. First it spritzed onto puddles in the hold, then it began to rise. More water. Within an hour, one eyewitness said it reached four feet in the hold. Bainbridge decided it was time for him to surrender once again.

The *USS Philadelphia* carried four American flags: The largest was twenty-two feet by thirty-eight feet; the Stars and Stripes announced the ship's nationality at a great distance; they proclaimed that nationality to the men serving on board.

"About four o'clock, the Eagle of America, fell a prey to the vultures of Barbary—the flag was struck!!" wrote Ray.

"Many of our seamen were much surprised at seeing the colours down, before we had received any injury from the fire of our enemy, and begged of the captain and officers to raise it again, preferring even death to slavery. The man who was at the ensign halyards positively refused to obey the captain's orders . . . to lower the flag. He was threatened to be run through and a midshipman seized the halyards and executed the command, amidst the general murmuring of the crew."

The captain tore up the signal books; a midshipman tossed them overboard; the men rushed to destroy and fling seaward: battle-axes, pikes, cutlasses, pistols, muskets, anything that might be useful to the enemy. They took axes to the captain's furniture and generally rampaged throughout the ship.

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