The First Barbary War (1801–1805), also known as the Barbary Coast War or the Tripolitan War, was the first of two wars fought between the United States of America and the North African states known collectively as the Barbary States. These were the independent Sultanate of Morocco, and the three Regencies of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, which were quasi-independent entities nominally belonging to the Ottoman Empire.

Background and overview

Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, although nominally governed by the Islamic Ottoman Empire, had been largely independent Muslim states since the 17th century. The monarchy of Morocco, which had been under its current government since 1666, was well known by the time of the Barbary Wars for supporting piracy.[1]

Britain and France had come to uneasy ententes with the pirates; a combination of military might, diplomacy, and extorted payments had kept ships flying the Union Flag or French flag more or less safe from attack. As British colonists before 1776, American merchant vessels had enjoyed the protection of the Royal Navy. During the American Revolution, American ships came under the aegis of France due to a 1778 Treaty of Alliance between the two countries.

Burning of the frigate Philadelphia in the harbor of Tripoli, February 16, 1804, by Edward Moran, painted 1897, depicts a naval action of the First Barbary War.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>1801–1805</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Northwest African and Mediterranean coasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>United States victory, peace treaty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belligerents</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Barby States</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Ottoman Empire regencies)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commanders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Dale</td>
<td>Hassan Bey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Eaton</td>
<td>Murad Reis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Preble</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>4000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Ships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 US Marines and Soldiers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Mercenaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Mercenaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casualties and losses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Ships destroyed</td>
<td>800 dead, 1200 wounded at Derne plus ships and crew lost in naval defeats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Marines killed, 3 wounded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian/Arab Mercenaries killed and</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
However, by 1783 America became solely responsible for the safety of its own commerce and citizens with the end of the Revolution. Without the means or the authority to field a naval force necessary to protect their ships in the Mediterranean, the nascent U.S. government took a pragmatic, but ultimately self-destructive route. In 1784, the United States Congress allocated money for payment of tribute to the Barbary pirates and instructed her British and French ambassadors (John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, respectively) to look for opportunities to negotiate peace treaties with the Barbary nations. Unfortunately, the price demanded for these treaties far exceeded the amount that Congress had budgeted.

Ambassador Jefferson argued that paying tribute would encourage more attacks. Although John Adams agreed with Jefferson, he believed that circumstances forced the U.S. to pay tribute until an adequate navy could be built. The U.S. had just fought an exhausting war, which put the nation deep in debt. Federalist and anti-federalist forces argued over the needs of the country and the burden of taxation. Jefferson's own Democratic-Republicans and antinavalists believed that the future of the country lay in westward expansion, with Atlantic trade threatening to siphon money and energy away from the new nation on useless wars in the Old World. The U.S. paid Algiers the ransom, and continued to pay up to $1 million per year over the next 15 years for the safe passage of American ships or the return of American hostages. Payments in ransom and tribute to the privateering states amounted to 20 percent of United States government annual revenues in 1800.

Jefferson continued to argue for cessation of the tribute, with rising support from George Washington and others. With the recommissioning of the American navy in 1794 and the resulting increased firepower on the seas, it became more and more possible for America to say "no", although by now the long-standing habit of tribute was hard to overturn.

In 1786 Jefferson and John Adams went to negotiate with Tripoli's envoy to London, Ambassador Sidi Haji Abdrahaman or (Sidi Haji Abdul Rahman Adja). They asked him by what right he extorted money and took slaves. Jefferson reported to Secretary of State John Jay, and to the Congress:

The ambassador answered us that [the right] was founded on the Laws of the Prophet (Mohammed), that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have answered their authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as prisoners, and that every Mussulman (or Muslim) who should be slain in battle was sure to go to heaven. [3]

**Background: Power vacuum in the Mediterranean**
The Knights Hospitaller, also known as the Knights of St. John, had begun their occupation of Rhodes in 1309. They created a new identity as the "Knights of Rhodes" and began to engage the Barbary Pirates in naval warfare, as part of their greater war on the Ottoman Empire.

To protect Rome from Islamic invasion, in 1530 Charles V deeded the islands of Malta to the knights. The newly christened "Knights of Malta" widened their war against the pirates and their Ottoman masters to include the entire Mediterranean. From the 16th century until 1798, Malta served as a bastion defending Europe against the corsairs and pirates of Algeria and Barbary, and Christian nations respected her and kept friendly relations with the Order. Thus, Malta flourished in this golden age of the Order's history, and the pirate's booty was brought to the island, sold, and the money filled the Treasury of the Order. [1] (http://louishenwood.com/history/no23.html)

In 1798, Napoleon seized Malta *en route* to his campaign in Egypt. Requesting safe harbor to resupply his ships, he waited until his ships were safely in port, and then turned his guns on his hosts. The Knights of Malta were unable to defend themselves from this internal attack. After holding the Barbary Pirates in check for centuries, they were forced to leave their island stronghold. Napoleon's actions created a power vacuum in the Mediterranean which the pirates exploited.

**Declaration of war and naval blockade**

On Jefferson's inauguration as president in 1801, Yussif Karamanli, the Pasha (or Bashaw) of Tripoli, demanded $225,000 from the new administration. (In 1800, Federal revenues totaled a little over $10 million.) Putting his long-held beliefs into practice, Jefferson refused the demand. Consequently, in May of 1801, the Pasha declared war on the United States, not through any formal written documents but by cutting down the flagstaff in front of the U.S. Consulate. Morocco, Algiers, and Tunis soon followed their ally in Tripoli.

In response, Jefferson sent a group of frigates to defend American interests in the Mediterranean, and informed Congress. Although Congress never voted on a formal declaration of war, they did authorize the President to instruct the commanders of armed vessels of the United States to seize all vessels and goods of the Pasha of Tripoli "and also to cause to be done all such other acts of precaution or hostility as the state of war will justify."

The frigate USS *Enterprise* defeated the 14-gun Tripolitan corsair *Tripoli* after a fierce but one-sided battle on August 1, 1801.

The American navy went unchallenged on the sea, but still the question remained undecided. Jefferson pressed the issue the following year, with an increase in military force and deployment of many of the navy's best ships to the region throughout 1802. USS *Argus*, USS *Chesapeake*, USS *Constellation*, USS *Constitution*, USS *Enterprise*, USS *Intrepid*, USS *Philadelphia* and USS *Syren* all saw service during the war under the overall command of Commodore Edward Preble. Throughout 1803, Preble set up and maintained a blockade of the Barbary ports and executed a campaign of raids and attacks against the cities' fleets.

**Battles**
In October 1803, Tripoli's fleet was able to capture USS *Philadelphia* intact after the frigate ran aground while patrolling Tripoli harbor. Efforts by the Americans to float the ship while under fire from shore batteries and Tripolitan naval units were unsuccessful. The ship, its captain, William Bainbridge, and all officers and crew were taken ashore and held as hostages. The *Philadelphia* was turned against the Americans and anchored in the harbor as a gun battery.

On the night of February 16, 1804, a small contingent of U.S. sailors in a captured Tripolitan ketch rechristened USS *Intrepid* and led by Lieutenant Stephen Decatur, Jr. were able to deceive the guards on board the *Philadelphia* and float close enough to board the captured ship. Decatur's men stormed the vessel and decimated the Tripolitan sailors standing guard. To complete the daring raid, Decatur's party set fire to the *Philadelphia*, denying her use to the enemy. Decatur's bravery in action made him one of the first American military heroes since the Revolutionary War.

Preble attacked Tripoli outright on July 14, 1804 in a series of inconclusive battles, including a courageous but unsuccessful attack by the fire ship USS *Intrepid* under Captain Richard Somers. *Intrepid*, packed with explosives, was to enter Tripoli harbor and destroy itself and the enemy fleet; it was destroyed, perhaps by enemy guns, before achieving that goal, killing Somers and his crew.

The turning point in the war came with the Battle of Derna (April-May 1805). Ex-consul William Eaton, who went by the rank of general, and US Marine First Lieutenant Presley O'Bannon led a mixed force of 500 United States Marines, Greek, Arab and Berber mercenaries on a remarkable overland march across the desert from Alexandria, Egypt to assault the Tripolitan city of Derna.

With support from American ships, the expeditionary force captured the city. This action, memorialized in the Marine Hymn — "to the shores of Tripoli" — gave the American forces a significant advantage.

**Peace treaty and legacy**

Weared of the blockade and raids, and now under threat of a continued advance on Tripoli proper and a scheme to restore his deposed older brother Hamet Karamanli as ruler, Yussif Karamanli signed a treaty ending hostilities on June 10, 1805. Although the Senate did not approve the treaty until the following year, this effectively ended the First Barbary War.

Article 2 of the Treaty reads:

> The Bashaw of Tripoli shall deliver up to the American Squadron now off Tripoli, all the Americans in his possession; and all the Subjects of the Bashaw of Tripoli now in the power of the United States of America shall be delivered up to him; and as the number of Americans in possession of the Bashaw of Tripoli amounts to Three Hundred Persons, more or less; and the number of Tripolinio Subjects in the power of the Americans to about, One Hundred more or less; The Bashaw of Tripoli shall receive from the United States of America, the sum of Sixty Thousand Dollars, as a payment for the difference between the Prisoners herein mentioned.

In agreeing to pay a ransom of sixty thousand dollars for the American prisoners, the Jefferson administration drew a distinction between paying *tribute* and paying *ransom*. At the time, some argued that buying sailors out of slavery was a fair exchange to end the war. William Eaton, however, remained bitter for the rest of his life.
about the treaty, feeling that his efforts had been squandered by the State Department diplomat Tobias Lear. Eaton and others felt that the capture of Derna should have been used as a bargaining chip to obtain the release of all American prisoners without having to pay ransom. Furthermore, Eaton believed the honour of the United States had been compromised when it abandoned Hamet Karamanli after promising to restore him as leader of Tripoli. Eaton's complaints generally fell on deaf ears, especially as attention turned to the strained international relations which would ultimately lead to the War of 1812.

The First Barbary War was beneficial to the military reputation of the United States. America's military command and war mechanism had been up to that time relatively untested. The First Barbary War showed that America could execute a war far from home, and that American forces had the cohesion to fight together as Americans rather than Georgians or New Yorkers. The United States Navy and Marines became a permanent part of the American government and the American mythos, and Decatur returned to the U.S. as its first post-Revolutionary war hero.

However, the more immediate problem of Barbary piracy was not fully settled. By 1807, Algiers had gone back to taking American ships and seamen hostage. Distracted by the preludes to the War of 1812, the U.S. was unable to respond to the provocation until 1815, with the Second Barbary War.

Monument

The *Tripoli Monument* (http://www.dcmemorials.com/index_indiv0003204.htm), the oldest military monument in the U.S., honors the heroes of the First Barbary War: Captain Richard Somers, Lieutenant James Caldwell, James Decatur, Henry Wadsworth, Joseph Israel, and John Dorsey. Originally known as the *Naval Monument*, it was carved of Carrara marble in Italy in 1806 and brought to the United States as ballast on board the USS Constitution (Old Ironsides). From its original location in the Washington Navy Yard it was moved to the west terrace of the national Capitol and finally, in 1860, to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland.

See also

- Barbary pirates
- Barbary treaties
- Military history of the United States
- Second Barbary War

References

1. ^ Rees Davies, British Slaves on the Barbary Coast (http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/white_slaves_01.shtml), BBC, 1 July, 2003

Further reading


**External links**

- Treaties with The Barbary Powers:
  (http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/barbary/barmenu.htm)
- http://www.deanesmay.com/archives/000374.html#000374
- http://www.victoryintripoli.com/
- http://www.slate.com/id/2157314/

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