The Eagle’s Webbed Feet

A Maritime History of the United States
To Defend a New Country

(& Creating a “New” Navy)

“Don’t give up the ship”

“We have met the enemy and they are ours”
Barbary Pirates

• State sponsored piracy of long standing
  • Active piracy
  • Tribute

• After 1783, American vessels were subject to capture
  • However, Portuguese blockade kept them out of the Atlantic

• By 1785, US is routinely paying ransom and tribute to the Barbary States
  • Treaty with Morocco (1783)
  • Treaty with Algiers (1785)
  • 15 years of tribute would follow (up to $1M / year)
The Barbary States
Resurgence

• 1789 – New constitution authorizes a Navy (over significant protests)
  • No action, no money
• In 1793, Portugal ends Gibraltar blockade
  • Algiers then captures 11 American merchant ships in the Atlantic
  • Demands ever increasing tribute
  • Causes Congress to finally act in two ways (Diplomacy & a Navy)
• Naval Act of 1794 (Passed by 2 votes)
  • The “Six Frigates”
  • Manning (incl. marines)
  • Strong opposition led to cancellation clause
• 1796 – Peace accord with Algiers
  • President Washington forces the issue on three frigates
The Six Frigates

• Three 44’s, Two 38’s, and one 36
• Arguably the best frigates in the world at the time
  • Royal Navy report
• Achieved that elusive balance that warships strive for:
  “To outfight anything it couldn’t outrun”
Quasi-War with France

• 1789- French Revolution
  • By 1796 several issues erupt between France and the U.S.
    • Trade deal with England
    • Stopped paying our debt owed to the crown (not the republic)
    • French deployed privateers which seized 316 ships in 1796 alone
    • 1798 – The X,Y,Z affair
  • Congress authorizes completion of the other three frigates and the procurement of a small fleet
  • July 7 1798 – Congress authorized the Navy to attack French warships

• Big American advantage – British blockade of French warships.
Quasi-War with France (2)

• By the end of the war (1800), the U.S. fleet had reach 54 ships of various types, operating in four squadrons against the French.

• Results:
  • Prior to Naval involvement: French captured $\approx 2000$ merchant ships and roamed at will in the western Atlantic & Caribbean
  • After Naval involvement: French captured one U.S. merchant ship and had at least 80 armed vessels captured or destroyed.
  • September 1800, the Convention of 1800 ended the war.

• March 20, 1801 – “You are to cease molesting French vessels”
Quasi-War with France (3)

• Was the Navy a good deal or not?
  • Cost ≈ $6M ($11.8B in today’s money)
  • Import duties saved ≈ $22M
  • Export merchandise transported ≈ $200M
  • In 1799
    • Naval costs - $2M
    • Insurance savings in 1799 - $8.5M
• Many were convinced; however, many were not
  • The neutrality argument

Delaware takes LaCroyable; July 1798
Constitution (Truxton) captures L’Insurgente (Feb 1799)
Jeffersonian Reaction

• At the end of the Quasi War there were 499 officers manning 47 vessels. Naval budget was $2.1M

• Peace Establishment Act of 1801 (Adams slashed the Navy in an effort to save it)
  • 7 vessels with 195 officers (most on half pay)

• Navy to be replaced by gunboats
  • Thinks it will be less expensive (wrong)
  • Thinks it will cause everyone else to “play nice” (wrong again)

“It is of the utmost importance to diminish our expenses. This may be done in the Navy Department”

Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, his Secretary of the Treasury
Jefferson’s Gunboat
The First Barbary War

- 1800 - Adams while slashing the naval budget protected 6 (3) frigates for possible use against the Barbary States.
  - “…to protect our commerce and chastise their insolence..”
- 9 days after Jefferson becomes President, he receives an ultimatum from Tripoli for a substantial increase in tribute.
  - “Flagpole” declaration of war
- Jefferson decides to fight rather than pay
The First Barbary War (2)

• “We have found it expedient to detach a squadron of observation into the Mediterranean Sea”

• In May 1801, the three commissioned frigates plus one schooner deploy.

• Quickly Tripoli losses three of it’s best ships
The First Barbary War (3)

• By 1802, the squadron was up to 8 frigates and numerous supporting smaller vessels
• A blockade was instituted through 1803
• June 1803 – Preble takes command
• The loss of Philadelphia – Oct 1803
  • “The most bold and daring act of the age”
  • Stephen Decatur become household name
• 1804 – An airtight blockade is established
• Early 1805 – Preble relieved (Health)
The First Barbary War (4)

- Battle of Derna (April – May 1805)
  - Consul Eaton & Lt. O’Bannon
  - Tripoli decides to sign a peace treaty
  - All American captives released for $60K
- U.S. squadron pulls out in 1807
  - The *Chesapeake* affair
  - Piracy starts up again.

- Results:
  - Military reputation
  - Experience
  - Navy & Marine Corps now a permanent part of U.S. Government but..........
  - America has still not learned the real lessons of sea power
Jeffersonian Reaction (2)

• The fleet is laid up or scraped with a very few exceptions
  • The Navy is capped at 1169 officers and men total
• From 1805 to 1807 the “Gunboat Fleet” is created.
  • 263 gunboats
  • Very expensive
  • International joke (Royal Navy report)
• Two driving misconceptions about a Navy
  • Would cause the British to be threatened and therefore attack
  • If we don’t bother anyone else, they won’t bother us
The Slide towards War

• Steady degrade in relations with England from 1805 until 1812
  • Orders-in-Council (1805)
  • Impressment (≈ 10,000 sailors between 1799 and 1812)
  • Native-Americans (The 60 year War)
  • Canada
• The Chesapeake/Leopard incident – June 1807
• December 1807 – Embargo Act (All US ships)
  • March 1809 - Non-Intercourse Act (Trade with England and France)
  • May 1810 - Macon Bill #2 (Trade with England or France)
• January 1809 – Congress orders all laid up ships restored to service
• May 1811 – President/Little Belt affair
HMS Leopard

Chesapeake

June 1807

James Barron
The Slide towards War (2)

• Congress in confusion
  • Coastal states want a navy and do not want war
  • Western frontier states do not want a navy but want a war
  • U.S. demands an end to Orders-in-Council and impressment

• The “War Hawks” get their war
  • June 16, 1812 – Orders-in-Council are rescinded
  • June 18, 1812 – U.S. declares war (19-13 vote in the senate)

• This was a war the British absolutely did not want and the Americans absolutely were not ready for
Naval Comparison

• U.S. – 16 ships including 7 frigates (500 guns in all)
  • And 165 useless gunboats (?)
• Royal Navy – 1042 ships (lots of guns)
  • What counts is what’s in North America
  • 4 squadrons (7 Ships-of-the-line & 32 Frigates) (110 vessels & 2000 guns in all)
  • Which is bad enough
• The Americans had two advantages:
  • A ≈ two month advantage in knowing that there was a war
  • The Royal Navy was a little busy fighting the Napoleonic War
• “On to Canada!”
  • A complete fiasco
• American privateers were soon active
• However, at sea a series of frigate battles brought elation to the U.S. and real concern to the British
  • *Essex/Alert* (Porter) (plus takes 9 prizes and then runs wild in the Pacific for a year)
  • *Constitution/Guerriere* (Hull) – August 1812
  • *Wasp/Frolic* (Jones) (sloops) – October 1812
  • *United States/Macedonian* (Decatur) – October 1812
  • *Constitution/Java* (Bainbridge) – December 1812
  • *Hornet/Peacock* (Lawrence) – February 1813
1812 (2)

“..anyone who had predicted such a result of an American war this time last year would have been treated as a madman…..”

London Times

- December 1812 – The British declare a blockade of all U.S. ports and orders an end to frigate battles.
Essex Runs Wild In the Pacific

1. British packet Noxon, captured December 12, 1812
2. British schooner Elizabeth, captured December 29, 1812
3. Peruvian privateer Nereyda, captured March 25, 1813
4. American whaler Barclay, recaptured March 28, 1813
5. British whaler Montezuma, captured April 29, 1813
6. British whaler Georgina, captured April 29, 1813
7. British whaler Polycy, captured April 29, 1813
8. British whaler Atlantic, captured May 29, 1813
9. British whaler Greenwich, captured May 29, 1813
10. British whaler Catherine, captured June 24, 1813
11. British whaler Rose, captured June 24, 1813
12. British whaler Hector, captured June 24, 1813
13. British whaler Charlton, captured July 14, 1813
14. British whaler Serapis, captured July 14, 1813
15. British whaler New Zealander, captured July 14, 1813
16. British whaler Sir Andrew Hunmond, captured September 15, 1813
• The Navy can conduct a “guerre de course” but the era of the frigate battles is over (with three post blockade exceptions)
  • *Chesapeake/Shannon* – June 1813 (“Don’t Give Up the Ship”)
  • *Enterprise/Boxer* – September 1813 (Burrows)
  • *Constitution/Cyane & Levant* - February 1814 (Stewart)
• The Royal Navy blockade essentially neuters the American Navy
  • In addition to severely limiting trade
The Importance of Lake Erie

- By 1813, both sides recognized the importance of the Lake
The Battle of Lake Erie

• The deciding factor in the war in the west
• Oliver Hazard Perry takes command – March 1813
• Both side build and float in as many ships as they can
• 10 September – the British attack with six vessels (two being brigs of 20 guns)
  • Perry has 9 vessels, the largest being 2 brigs of 20 guns
• The Battle of Lake Erie is a smashing American victory
  • British lose all six ship for the loss of one American brig
  • Erie is now an American lake
• “We have met the enemy and they are ours”
first shot 11:45 A.M.

Lake Erie

Barclay (U.K.)

10 A.M.

Perry (U.S.)

Put-in-Bay

7 A.M.
1814

- April – Napoleonic Wars end releasing British troops & ships
- British plan to invade through Lake Champlain while creating a major diversion in the Chesapeake Bay
- They also plan an invasion of New Orleans
- In June negotiations commence
- Again both sides recognizing that control of the Lake was a prerequisite to invasion rapidly try to build “fleets” in the Lake
- Forces ended up being well matched
  - U.S. – 14 vessels (10 gunboats) (2264 tons) and 86 guns (1900 pounds of throw weight)
  - Britain – 16 vessels (12 gunboats) (2400 tons) and 88 guns (2150 pounds of throw weight)
Battle of Lake Champlain

- 11 September, 1814
- Macdonough’s preparations
  - Plattsburgh Bay (carronades)
  - Springs lines
  - Exercises
- Total American victory
  - Captured all four of the British non-gunboats
- The “False Nile”
  - "a most notable feat, one which, on the whole, surpassed that of any other captain of either navy in this war."
- The threat of invasion along the Hudson River is over
- This along with Lake Erie convince the British to seek peace
The Chesapeake “Diversion”

• Summer 1814 – 16 British ships and 5000 troops
• Worked it’s way up the Bay burning and looting
• Washington burned in August
• Baltimore attacked in September
  • Fort McHenry
• Lake Champlain puts and end to this campaign
• British decide to attack New York and New Orleans
• Wellington refuses command and calls for an end of hostilities because Britain did not have “a naval superiority on the lakes.”
The Treaty of Ghent

• Stated war aims achieved and both sides very tired of the war
• Treaty ratified in Washington on February 18, 1815
• Terms
  • All occupied territory returned
  • Pre-war Canadian boundary restored
  • U.S. acquires fishing rights
• Not mentioned
  • Impressment
  • Ship seizures
  • Indian affairs in the west
Results

• British lost at least 1500 merchants to the U.S. “Guerre de Course”
  • British insurance rates skyrocketed
• Blockade reduced U.S. exports from $107M in 1807 to $7M in 1814
• However, Americans were satisfied that their honor as an independent nation had been upheld.

• The Navy was a big winner.
  • In the 14 single ship actions, the United States had won 12
  • “Preble’s Boys” were household names and recognized as American heroes
  • Most of the traditions and attitudes of the U.S. Navy were established
  • There would be no more “gunboat” navies for America
Preble & “His Boys”
The Second Barbary War

• Algiers had returned to piracy as soon as the American Squadron of Observation had left in 1807.

• Now that the War of 1812 was over, Congress decides to end this problem once and for all
  • Two squadrons sent to the Mediterranean (Decatur and Bainbridge)

• June 1815, Decatur captures the Algerian flagship (46 guns) and one other Algerian ship (of 22 guns).

• Proceeds to Algiers and begins negotiation (mixed with threats of destruction)
The Second Barbary War (2)

- In July the Dey of Algiers capitulates

- Terms:
  - U.S. returns the two captured ships and 500 prisoners
  - All American captives returned
  - No further tribute demands
  - Full shipping rights to the United States

- A Mediterranean squadron was left to watch over U.S. interests
  - It’s still there!

- Seeing how it was done, the British did the same thing in 1816 and the power of the Barbary Pirates was broken forever.
Stephen Decatur
(1779 – 1820)

“Our Country! In her intercourse with foreign nations, may she always be in the right; but our country, right or wrong.”
Questions or Comments?