

# The Life and Times of John Rodgers

## The First Barbary War, 1801-1805

The First Barbary War was between the United States and the four North African states known collectively as the Barbary States. Three of these were nominal provinces of the Ottoman Empire, but in practice autonomous: Tripoli, Algiers, and Tunis. The fourth was the independent Sultanate of Morocco. The cause of the war was pirates from the Barbary States seizing American merchant ships and holding the crews for ransom, demanding the U.S. pay tribute to the Barbary rulers. United States President Thomas Jefferson refused to pay this tribute.

On 10 May 1801, the Bashaw of Tripoli declared war on the U.S. by cutting down the flagstaff in front of the U.S. Consulate. Algiers and Tunis did not follow their ally in Tripoli. After four years of conflict, peace was established by the signing of a treaty on June 10, 1805.

The war was beneficial to the reputation of the United States' military which had been up to that time relatively untested. The war also showed that America could execute a war far from home. The United States Navy and Marines became a permanent part of the American government and American history.



### John Rodgers' service during the Barbary Wars

Rodgers was placed in command of the *John Adams* on May 3 1802 and ordered to sail for Tripoli where he joined the *Constitution*, the *President* and other vessels. He approached Tripoli and engaged the gunboats and batteries defending the city. Twelve days later he engaged and captured the Tripolitan vessel *Meshouda*, bearing 20 guns.

In May 1805, following Commodore Barron relinquishing his command, Rodgers was made Commodore of the Mediterranean Squadron. The Squadron consisted of 11 ships, *Constitution*, *President*, *Constellation*, *Enterprise*, *Essex*, *Siren*, *Argus*, *Hornet*, *Vixen*, *Nautilus* and *Franklin*, together with a number of gunboats. Rodgers was now in command of the largest American squadron ever to assemble in the Mediterranean. The blockading force was so overwhelming that, after much deliberation, a peace treaty was finally negotiated by the end of July.

When news of the treaty reached Washington in the fall of 1805, President Jefferson ordered all of the ships home with the exception of a frigate and two smaller supporting vessels.

The Life and Times of John Rodgers  
The First Barbary War, 1801-1805



**Preble, aboard USS *Constitution*, seeks a  
valuation of the Moorish Ship *Mirboka***

In August 1802 one of the emperor of Morocco's ships, the *Mirboka*, 22-guns, after capturing an American brig, was taken by the frigate USS *Philadelphia*. Rodgers communicated with the emperor and asked whether he preferred peace or war. Early in October, in a show of strength, Preble and Rodgers moored their fleet in battle array, three hundred yards from shore. The decks were cleared for action. The emperor arrived on October 6 and agreed to give up the prisoners and property that had been captured by his ships, and to reaffirm the treaty of 1786 which his father had made with the United States. On their part the commodores agreed to surrender the Moorish ships *Meshouda* and *Mirboka*. In less than a month Preble and Rodgers had obtained an honorable treaty with Morocco without the payment of a cent for tribute or presents.

In this letter Preble asks Commodore Rodgers, Colonel Tobias Lear and Captain Chauncey for a valuation of the Moorish ship *Mirboka* so the crew and officers of the USS *Philadelphia* may receive the proper financial "encouragement" for her capture.

***I have to request the favor that  
you will go aboard the Moorish  
Ship Mirboka, now at anchor  
in this Bay, prize to the United  
States Frigate Philadelphia  
and state to me, what you  
think, may be her real value as  
she now lays -***

***Edward Preble***

United States Frigate  
*Constitution* Tangier Bay  
14<sup>th</sup> October 1803

Gentlemen,

I have to request the favor that you will  
go on board the Moorish Ship *Mirboka*, now at anchor in  
this Bay, prize to the United States Frigate *Philadelphia*  
and state to me, what you think, may be her real value  
as she now lays -

I have the honor to be  
Gentlemen with great  
respect Y<sup>r</sup> M<sup>o</sup> Obed<sup>t</sup> S<sup>t</sup>  
Edward Preble

Commodore John Rodgers,  
Colonel Tobias Lear and  
Captain Chauncey  
Present



# The Life and Times of John Rodgers

## The First Barbary War, 1801-1805

### Preble, aboard USS *Constitution*, seeks a valuation of the Moorish Ship *Mirboka*

Placed in command of the *John Adams*, on October 22, 1802, Rodgers was ordered to sail for Tripoli to patrol its surrounding waters. Upon arrival in the harbor of Tripoli, he engaged the gunboats and batteries defending the city. After twelve days the *John Adams* encountered the Tripolian vessel *Meshouda*, bearing 28 guns, which Rodgers engaged and captured.

On June 21 the *John Adams* and *Enterprise* captured the *Mirboka*, a 22-gun vessel belonging to Tripoli. Throughout the summer and early fall *John Adams* operated in that quarter before returning home with the *New York*.



"Sunset over Tripoli" USS *Constitution* (foreground) and USS *John Adams*

Rodgers was absent from the United States more than thirteen months, from October 1802 to December 1803. He had distinguished himself in the two principal achievements of that period in the Mediterranean, the blockading of Tripoli and the establishment of peace with Morocco, although on both theaters of action he was second in authority. In conducting the blockade he played a more important part than did his senior, Commodore Morris, and in bringing the emperor of Morocco to terms he shared the honors with Commodore Preble. In succeeding Morris as commander-in-chief, Rodgers for the first time obtained the command of a squadron and received the title of commodore, an honor that came to him at the age of thirty.

As soon as our affairs with Morocco were settled, Rodgers prepared the "New York," which was now his flag-ship, and the "John Adams," Captain H. G. Campbell, for their return voyage. He sailed from Gibraltar on October eighteenth and arrived at Washington on December 2, 1803. The news of the peace with the emperor which he brought was highly pleasing to President Jefferson, who on December fifth informed Congress in a message of the amicable adjustment of all our differences with Morocco. He said that the conduct of our officers merited entire approbation, and he referred to the promptitude and energy of Commodore Preble and to the efficacious cooperation of Captains Rodgers and Campbell. He also called attention to the gallant enterprise of Captain Rodgers in destroying on the coast of Tripoli a corvette of that power of twenty-two guns; and he recommended that Congress indemnify the captors of the "Meshouda" and "Mirboka." Accordingly a law was passed appropriating to the captors a sum of money equal to one-half the value of the two vessels. (Paullin, 1910)



**Secretary of Navy: Rodgers to replace Morris  
in command of the Mediterranean Squadron**

On September 11, 1803 Rodgers arrived at Malaga where he found Commodore Morris as well as Lt. Richard Somers of the USS *Nautilus*, lately arrived from America. Somers brought dispatches, including this letter from the Secretary of the Navy, which contained the surprising intelligence that Commodore Morris was suspended from his command and Rodgers had been appointed to succeed him.

private June 21. 1803  
Sir,  
We have been for some time  
~~very~~ much displeased with the  
conduct of Capt. Morris.

21 June 1803 private letter, 4 pages, from Robert Smith, Secretary of the Navy, to his friend, John Rodgers  
this letter accompanied Rodgers' official appointment as Commodore of the Mediterranean Squadron

*Private June 21, 1803*

*Sir,*

*We have been for some time much displeased with the conduct of Capt. Morris. He has not done anything which he ought to have done, and despairing of his doing anything and also as a mark of our disapprobation it has been determined to suspend him. .... Neither do I have sense whence he is or what he is proposing to do. I beg you will keep me better informed during that time you will have the command. ....*

*Harass, I instruct you the Tripolines day and night with all the means in your power so as to create some sensations of alarm and thus produce a disposition in them to make peace. Our object is peace. ... upon the arrival of Capt. Preble have orders to return to the United States with the New York and John Adams.*

*... apply in writing to Capt. Morris for a copy of the instructions which he received from the Navy Department as Commanding Officer of the Squadron. If Morris should not wish to return in the Adams, you may give the charge of her to some other officer to bring her home. She must not be detained any time for the accommodation of Morris.*

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## The First Barbary War, 1801-1805

### Secretary of Navy: Rodgers to replace Morris in command of the Mediterranean Squadron

#### Robert Smith

Robert Smith served as Secretary of the Navy from 1801 to 1809 and Secretary of State from 1809 to 1811. He was a member of the famous John Smith patriot and merchant family of Baltimore and a close friend of Rodgers. Before joining the Navy, Rodgers had served several years as master of the ship *Jane*, owned by the Smith family. Rodgers even named his oldest son Robert Smith Rodgers in his honor. Smith finally left the office of Secretary of the Navy in 1809. Jefferson's successor, President Madison, immediately appointed Smith as Secretary of State.

#### Richard V. Morris

Richard Morris was the son of Lewis Morris, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He was appointed as Captain on June 7, 1798 and was in command of *Adams* during the Quasi-War with France. At the reduction of the US Navy after the war with France, Morris was retained as fifth in rank and recalled to command the Mediterranean Squadron in 1802 during the First Barbary War. In command of *Chesapeake*, Morris led an unsuccessful blockade of Tripoli, mostly remaining in Gibraltar for the better part of 1803. Morris was relieved of duty and command of the squadron. Recalled to the United States, Morris faced a court of inquiry which decided that he had not "discovered due diligence and activity in annoying the enemy". On May 16, 1804, Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith, with the agreement of President Thomas Jefferson, revoked his captaincy in the Navy and dismissed him from the service.

#### Rodgers Appointed to Succeed Morris

Rodgers left Leghorn with five merchantmen under his protection on the twenty-fourth of August (1803), and, after calling at Barcelona and Alicante, arrived at Malaga on September eleventh. Here he found the commodore who had recently come from Leghorn with the "New York," and also Lieutenant Richard Somers in the schooner "Nautilus" lately from America. Somers brought dispatches from the government, which contained the surprising intelligence that Morris was suspended from his command and Rodgers was appointed to succeed him. "We have been for some time much disappointed with the conduct of Captain Morris," Secretary Smith wrote to the new commander-in-chief. "He has not done anything which he ought to have done, and despairing of his doing anything and also as a mark of our disapprobation, it has been determined to suspend him. We, besides, can obtain from him no information what he is proposing to do. We have generally to rely upon others with respect to his movements."

On September fourteenth, Rodgers and Morris anchored at Gibraltar, where they found Commodore Edward Preble who had recently come from America with a new squadron, bringing orders for all the vessels of the old squadron, with the exception of the "Enterprise," to return home. Morris sailed for Washington with the "Adams" on September twenty-fifth. Rodgers would have soon followed him with the "New York" and "John Adams" had not a cause arisen for delaying his departure. (Paullin, 1910 extensively quoting this letter.)

# The Life and Times of John Rodgers

## The First Barbary War, 1801-1805



### Commodore Morris' Last Orders To Rodgers

This letter (in full below) contains the last sailing orders from Commodore Morris to Rodgers. It instructs Rodgers, USS *John Adams*, to escort five merchantmen to Gibraltar. Rodgers arrived in Malaga on September 11 where he found Commodore Morris as well as Lt. Richard Somers of the USS *Nautilus*, lately arrived from America. Somers brought the dispatch with news that Commodore Morris was suspended from his command and Rodgers had been appointed to succeed him.

Leghorn, August 20, 1803

It is my intention to employ the US Ship *John Adams* under your command to take the American trade to Gibraltar, and in case of war with Morocco to conduct them as far to the westward as Cape St. Vincents. On your way down to Gibraltar I wish you to call at Barcelona and remain there four days for such vessels as may be able to get ready to join you; from there you will proceed to Alicante and remain two or three days and take in charge the American vessels that are found there bound to the westward-you will call in at Malaga and remain 24 hours for such merchantmen as may require your protection. The steps which would be most congenial to the interests of the US to be proceeded on relative to the *Meshuda* will be, on your arrival at Gibraltar, to have her valued and then go to Tangier and acquaint Mr. Simpson of the nature of the detention of that ship, and hold upon an idea of her being subject to condemnation-this will naturally bring from the Governor of that place the determination of the court of Morocco, and if it should be hostile, persist in having the Moorish captain punished for violating the nature of his passport and a breach of friendship towards the US and intimate that if the Emperor of Morocco will be perfectly satisfied with this request and cause the punishment to be inflicted on his captain you will liberate the captain and crew and you cannot suppose the emperor ever gave instructions for that vessel to act so opposite to the emperors declaration when passports were obtained for her from Mr. Simpson. The government of the US I am sure would view with concern any measure that would involve them in a war with Morocco, and they would cheerfully subscribe to indemnify the captors rather than that event should take place.

I trust I shall be down in Gibraltar to assist you in this affair, but if you should arrive before me you will prepare your ship for sea, and if, War be inevitable protect our commerce against the depredations of the emperor's cruizers. I have one more request to make before I conclude these instructions viz: that if you should fall in with any of the squadron destined to be placed under my command, that you will direct them to cruise between Alicante and Almeria bay in pursuit of the Tripolines for three weeks and then return to Gibraltar for my orders.

Richard Morris

P.S. Tuesday Morning is the time appointed for the convoy to sail

Cap<sup>t</sup>. John Rodgers  
United States Frigate  
John Adams.

P.S. Tuesday Morning is the time appointed for the convoy to sail

20 August 1803 three page letter of Richard Morris, Leghorn (Italy) to Capt. Rodgers, USS *John Adams*  
last page of letter with signature shown above





## U.S. Consul in Russia seeks help from Emperor in securing release of American Prisoners from the USS *Philadelphia* held in Tripoli

The USS *Philadelphia*, which was participating in the American blockade of Tripoli, was captured by the Tripolitans on October 31, 1803 after it ran aground. Its captain, William Bainbridge, and over 300 crew members were captured and imprisoned. On the night of 4 February 1804 a raiding party led by Stephen Decatur sailed into the harbor of Tripoli, boarded the *Philadelphia*, and burned it. The Americans tried on several occasions to ransom the captured sailors, but they were not released until the end of the war in June 1805.

*I hasten to transmit to you a copy of a letter just received from the Grand Chancellor of the Russian Empire in reply to an official note ... on the subject of the fatal disaster which befell a Frigate of the United States in the Mediterranean, in which I solicited the influence of his Imperial Majesty with the Ottoman Porte on behalf of the unfortunate crew .....*

*Levett Harris*

----- US Consul General at St. Petersburg

Consulate of the United States of America  
St. Petersburg, 16 Jan. 1804

Sir,

I hasten to transmit to you a copy of a letter I have just received from the Grand Chancellor of the Russian Empire in reply to an official note I conceived it my duty to address his Excellency on the subject of the fatal disaster which has befallen a Frigate of the United States in the Mediterranean, in which I solicited the influence of his Imperial Majesty with the Ottoman Porte in behalf of the unfortunate crew.

I delayed not a moment to transmit this note on my being apprised of the death of this melancholy intelligence, and I most cordially congratulate your Excellency and the United States on the honorable distinction and regard which his Majesty has so graciously condescended.

I have the honor to be with great respect  
Sir, your most Obedient Servant

*Levett Harris*  
Livingston Esquire  
Ambassador of the United States  
at Paris.

U.S. Consul General  
at St. Petersburg

PRUSSE  
PAR MAASEYCK

A Son Excellence Monsieur  
C. R. Livingston  
Ministre Plénipotentiaire et Envoyé  
Extraordinaire des Etats Unis de  
l'Amérique à la République Française  
à Paris

7 February 1804 letter from the US Consul, St. Petersburg, Russia to US Consul L.L. Livingston in Paris sent via Prussia, Germany with "PRUSSE / PAR MAASEYCK" handstamp and Paris arrival backstamp

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## The First Barbary War, 1801-1805

### U.S. Consul in Russia seeks help from Emperor in securing release of American Prisoners from the USS *Philadelphia* held in Tripoli

The original enclosure sent by U.S. Consul Harris (a message from Aleksandr Romanovich Vorontsov, minister to Emperor Alexander I) to Livingston in Paris, was in turn forwarded to James Monroe in London. At the time, James Monroe was serving as U.S. Minister to Great Britain. On April 15, 1804 Monroe wrote President James Madison on the subject as follows:

*(this letter from the Emperor's minister) contains a very strong testimonial of his friendship for the U. States. The assurance which he gives of the good offices of His Majesty with the Ottoman Porte to obtain of the Bey of Tripoli, the discharge of the men and restitution of the Frigate induced me to acknowledge to his Ambassador here, of the sensibility which I felt to an act which was so humane and honorable to the author. I was led to this by the consideration that as Mr Harris was only vested with the character of a consul such an expression from a person in my place might produce an immediate good effect. I flattered myself that the Knowledge of the friendly disposition of the Emperor towards us might be even serviceable here.*



the February 4, 1804 burning of the USS *Philadelphia* by Stephen Decatur's crew



The Life and Times of John Rodgers  
The First Barbary War, 1801-1805



**A fellow Captain recommends Rodgers visit his future wife  
and "press sail for the Alter of Hymen"**

During the Spring of 1804 Rodgers was in Washington equipping the frigate *Congress* for service. In this letter Capt. Hugh Campbell, who had served with Rodgers in the Mediterranean Squadron commanding the frigate *USS Constellation*, recommends in rather salty language that Rodgers visit Minerva Denison in Havre de Grace. Two years later, when Rodgers was 33 years old and Miss Denison was 22 years old, they were married.

*After a long silence I take up my pen to say  
Howde, ye. ... Pray, have you been to Havre  
(de Grace, Maryland) lately, if not dash on  
by the first conveyance as I am respectfully  
informed that your presence there will be  
very acceptable to a certain fair one - whose  
smiles will no doubt enable you to weather  
away the capes of difficulty, Steer clear the  
shoals of Adversity, then stand in under  
press of sail for the Alter of Hymen, which  
come within hail of and cast anchor in the  
bay of Consolation, then heave head and  
stern & ride out a life in the Harbour of old  
age ....*  
Hugh Campbell

Philadelphia 10<sup>th</sup> March - 04  
Dear Sir -  
After a long silence I take up  
my pen to say Howde, ye, with a hope  
that it may find you in good health  
& full enjoyment of all the pleasures  
that Washington affords - I go for Charles  
- ton in a few days, where I flatter myself  
most Lively pleasures wait me -  
staying there two or three months  
on to Washington by Land - pray  
you been to ~~Havre~~ Havre lately, if not  
by the first conveyance. as I am  
fully informed that your presence

25  
Cap<sup>t</sup> John Rodgers  
Navy - U. S. States  
Washington

10 March 1804 letter from Hugh Campbell in Philadelphia to Rodgers in Washington, D.C.

Philadelphia postmark and rate for double letter as this enclosed a letter to be given to Isaac Chauncey





**Captain Stewart, USS *Siren*, details the death in action  
of Lt. James Caldwell, Commander *Gun-Boat no. 9*, off Tripoli**

Charles Stewart was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the US Navy in March 1798. After brief command of USS *Chesapeake* in 1801 and service in USS *Constellation* in 1802, Stewart sailed to the Mediterranean in command of the brig USS *Siren*. There, he participated in the destruction of USS *Philadelphia* after her capture by Tripoli, helped to maintain the blockade of Tripoli, and distinguished himself in assaults on the enemy in August and September 1804. During the War of 1812, he made two brilliant cruises in the USS *Constitution* in 1815 capturing two British warships.

*How painful is the task to announce to you the death of your brother James. He was put in command of the Gun-boat No.9 on the 7th inst. proceeded to attack the enemies batteries, where his boat was blown up soon after the action commenced - tis supposed by a red-hot ball fired from the enemy. In the performance of a generous and humane act he met his fate, it must be some consolation for you to know it. At the time of her exploding he and Mr. Dorsey was carrying the Boatsw<sup>n</sup> Mate aft, who had his leg broken and much injured. They were administering to him every assistance and comfort. Your Brother is universally lamented by the Squadron, for whoever knew him, loved and Esteemed him ...*

*Chs. Stewart*

*Siren off Tripoli Aug. 9<sup>th</sup> 1804*  
*Dear Sir*  
*How painful is the task to announce to you the death of your Brother James. He was put in command of the gun-boat No. 9 on the 7<sup>th</sup> inst. proceeded to attack the enemies Batteries, where his boat was blown up soon after the action commenced - tis supposed by a red-hot ball fired from the enemy. In the performance of a generous & humane act he met his fate, it must be some consolation for you to know it. At the time of her exploding he and Mr. Dorsey was carrying the Boatsw<sup>n</sup> Mate aft, who had his leg broken & much injured, they were administering to him every assistance and comfort. Your Brother is universally lamented by the Squadron, for whoever knew him, loved and Esteemed him - the loss we have sustained in two such excellent young men, is great indeed, and the task to announce the loss of my young friend is most severe. I remain with*  
*great regards,*  
*Yours truly,*  
*Chs. Stewart*  
*David Caldwell Esq.*

*6*  
*David Caldwell Esq.*  
*Philadelphia*

9 August 1804 letter from Capt. Charles Stewart, USS *Siren*, off Tripoli to David Caldwell, Philadelphia carried to Marsala, Sicily and then, per Brig *Commodore Barry*, in 87 days to Philadlphia  
1 December 1804 (per docket), entered mails with ship rate "6" due for a letter addressed to port of entry

# The Life and Times of John Rodgers

## The First Barbary War, 1801-1805

### Captain Stewart, USS *Siren*, details the death in action of Lt. James Caldwell, Commander *Gun-Boat no. 9*, off Tripoli

#### U.S.S. *Siren*

The USS *Siren* was commissioned in September 1803 with Lt. Charles Stewart in command. The brig departed Philadelphia in August 1803 and sailed carrying presents and money to the Dey of Algiers.

The *Siren* was involved in the attack to destroy the captured USS *Philadelphia*. Before the attack *Siren* tied up alongside *Intrepid* to transfer some of her crew for the assault on *Philadelphia*. Aboard *Intrepid*, under the command of Stephen Decatur, sailors from both ships succeeded in burning *Philadelphia*.

Toward the end of March, *Siren* captured the armed brig *Transfer* belonging to the Pasha. Stewart renamed her USS *Scourge*. She then participated in the attacks on Tripoli in August and September 1804. The ship continued to support the squadron's operation against Tripoli which forced the Pasha to accede to American demands.



etching of James R. Caldwell

#### James R. Caldwell

Caldwell was appointed a midshipman 22 May 1798. During the Quasi-War with France, he served in the frigate *United States*, schooner *Experiment* and armed ship *Ganges* in the West Indies.

Commissioned a lieutenant in 1800, from late 1801 into 1803 Lieutenant Caldwell was an officer of the frigate *Constellation* during the initial phase of the war with Tripoli. In mid-1803, he returned to the Mediterranean in the brig *Siren* to participate in further operations. Caldwell distinguished himself in a boat action on 7 July 1804 and also took part in an attack on 3 August that resulted in the capture of three vessels that were taken into the Navy as gunboats. One of these, Gunboat Number 9, was under Caldwell's command when the U.S. squadron again bombarded Tripoli on 7 August 1804. While hotly engaged with an enemy battery, a hot shot penetrated her magazine and *Gunboat Number 9* blew up. Lieutenant Caldwell and eleven others were killed or mortally wounded in the explosion.



# The Life and Times of John Rodgers

## The First Barbary War, 1801-1805



### Commodore Barron Directs the Fleet from Malta

Commodore Barron, sick in Malta, orders Rodger, aboard the USS *Constitution*, to sea in search of enemy ships. With attached Heads of Instruction for the entire squadron under his command.

The lengthy postscript to Rodgers mentions that he had recently received information of two Tripoline Corsairs off Sardinia each carrying six guns and a crew of fifty.

*La Valette Malta 28 Feby 1805*

*for:*

*You are hereby directed to proceed with the United States Frigate under your command, off the Harbor of Tripoli, and thence to cruise Westward or Eastward as you may deem most advisable. You will remain on that Station for the space of Twelve or Fifteen days, at the expiration of which you will return to this port unless in your opinion it should be expedient to prolong this time. In case of your falling in with any of the United States Vessels cruising in that direction, you will please communicate with the Commanders, if you have received any information with regard to the Essex or should any want occur that in your judgment, an Alteration in their Instructions necessary, you make such arrangements as are best calculated to promote the Service in which we are engaged. I enclose*

(postscript):

*The unfortunate indisposition under which I have so long labored and from which my recovery is slow and gradual incapacitates me from acting personally with that energy and promptitude which are nevertheless the favorite object of my wishes. I therefore leave it to you, Sir, to act in the course of the cruise on which you are destined, as well with regard with your own operations as those of the other vessels of the Squadron, in such a mode as will approve itself to the service to our country & to ourselves.*

---- Sam. Barron

*The unfortunate Indisposition under which I have so long labored and from which my Recovery is slow & gradual incapacitates me from acting personally with that energy & promptitude which are nevertheless the favorite objects of my wishes, I therefore leave it to you Sir to act in the course of the Cruise on which you are destined as well with regard to your own operations as those of the other vessels of the Squadron in such a mode as will approve itself to the Service to our country & to ourselves.*

*Sam. Barron*

28 February 1805 Lavalette, Malta, orders for the fleet (*Constellation*, *Vixen*, *Nautilus*, *President*, and *Essex*) plus 2 page postscript to Commander Rodgers, USS *Constitution* giving him free reign to alter any orders



## A Prisoner of the Bashaw of Tripoli writes Rodgers

Letter of Midshipman James Renshaw, while prisoner at the Castle of the Bashaw in Tripoli, to Captain John Rodgers, US Frigate *Constitution* at Malta or Syracuse.

Renshaw was a crew member of the USS *Philadelphia* that had ran aground in Tripoli harbor and was captured. The officers were imprisoned in the Bashaw's Castle. This is a lengthy letter to his former commander thanking him for his friendship and that he has gained with the *Philadelphia*'s commander William Bainbridge. Mentions that he has just received word that his brother was killed in a shipwreck.

*Castle of the Bashaw in prison  
Tripoli, April 15<sup>th</sup> 1805—*

*Castle of the Bashaw in Prison, April 15, 1805*

*... The Tartare not returning so soon as we expected, .. I am determined .. to at least acknowledge my thanks for your friendly information through our mutual friend Capt Bainbridge.*

*...The energetic measures pursued by our able commander, and his gallant followers, has tended in great measure to alleviate our feelings and insure us our emancipation by the ensuing summer. ...*

*James Renshaw*

*Tripoli, April 14<sup>th</sup> 1805.*

*Captain John Rodgers  
U.S. Frigate Constitution  
Via Malta & Malta or  
Syracuse.*



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## The First Barbary War, 1801-1805

### A Prisoner of the Bashaw of Tripoli writes Rodgers

The USS *Philadelphia*, which was participating in the American blockade of Tripoli, was captured by the Tripolitans on October 31, 1803 after it ran aground. Its captain, William Bainbridge, and over 300 crew members were captured and imprisoned. On the night of 4 February 1804 a raiding party led by Stephen Decatur sailed into the harbor of Tripoli, boarded the *Philadelphia*, and burned it. The Americans tried on several occasions to ransom the captured sailors, but they were not released until the end of the war in June 1805.



### Rodgers Corresponds with Prisoners at Tripoli

Several times during the spring (of 1805), Rodgers communicated with Bainbridge, sending him letters and clothing for himself and men. Since all correspondence was censored by the Tripolitan officials, Rodgers was unable to write as freely as he wished, but he succeeded in hinting to the unfortunate captain (Bainbridge) that the prospects of his release were bright. "Chance has placed you in a situation which requires patience and fortitude to withstand," he wrote. "Fortitude I know you possess, and patience you must summon to her aid a little longer. The officers of every denomination in the squadron participate in your sufferings ; every nerve will be exerted in your behalf, and every face will beam with pleasure the day that fate shall decree you and your fellow sufferers free men. Patience! Pray make my regards to Messers. Porter and Renshaw, and be pleased to inform Mr. Renshaw that his friends in Philadelphia are well ....(Paullin, 1910)

### James Renshaw

Renshaw was appointed a midshipman in 1800 and was serving aboard the USS *Philadelphia* during the blockade of Tripoli. On October 31, 1803 the USS *Philadelphia* ran aground in the harbor and Captain William Bainbridge, and over 300 crew members including Renshaw were captured and imprisoned. On the night of 4 February 1804 a raiding party led by Stephen Decatur sailed into the harbor of Tripoli, boarded the *Philadelphia*, and burned it. The Americans tried on several occasions to ransom the captured sailors, but they were not released until the end of the war in June 1805.

In 1807 Renshaw commanded *Gunboat No. 6* enforcing the Embargo laws. During the War of 1812 he served as commandant of the USS *Rattlesnake* when it was captured by the HMS *Leander* on June 22, 1814. The *Rattlesnake* was armed with 22 guns, which were thrown overboard before the capture.





## Commodore Barron Orders USS *Constitution* to Convoy Supplies to Prisoners at Tripoli

In March 1805 Rodgers outlined a plan for conducting the blockade, intercepting the enemy's cruisers, and providing an auxiliary force for offensive operations, which he sent to a very ill Commodore Barron in Malta. Rodgers believed that the attack on Tripoli should be made before the first of June. No word was received by Rodgers until May 26, 1805 when Peace Commissioner Tobias Lear arrived and notified him of Barron's resignation. Rodgers assumed command of the squadron with the *Constitution* as his flagship.

Commanders of the Mediterranean Squadron, 1801 to 1806, with date command assumed on station:

1. Richard Dale - July 1, 1801
2. Richard Morris - May 25, 1802
3. John Rodgers - September 11, 1803
4. Edward Preble - September 1803
5. Samuel Barron - September 10, 1804
6. John Rodgers - May 26, 1805
7. Hugh Campbell - May 27, 1806

*As soon as the United States Frigate under your command (the USS "Constitution") is ready for sea you are directed to proceed off the coast of Tripoli taking under your convoy the Ketch Eliza with supplies for the American Prisoners. .... When you arrive off the station (the coast of Tripoli) you will adopt such dispositions for the blockading the Enemy's harbor and scouring the coast as you may deem expedient.*

---- Sam. Barron

*Lavalette (Malta) 1<sup>st</sup> April 1805*  
*Sir,*  
*As soon as the United States Frigate under your command is ready for Sea, you are directed to proceed off the Harbor of Tripoli taking under your convoy the Ketch Eliza with Supplies for the American Prisoners. On falling in with the Constellation you will assume her Station, and direct Captain Campbell to return immediately to this Port or to Syracuse. - As the crew of that ship has been affected with the small Pox I suggest to you the propriety of her going into Syracuse in preference to this place; however you will ascertain from Captain Campbell the present State of his Crew, & give him such written Instructions on this head as you may think proper. - You are directed to return the Brig Viper on the Station until she is relieved by some of the small vessels - The Nautilus may be expected here from Sicily in four or five days and it is my present intention to dispatch her immediately to the Coast of Tripoli for that purpose. When you arrive off the station, you will adopt*  
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# The Life and Times of John Rodgers

## The First Barbary War, 1801-1805

### Commodore Barron Orders USS *Constitution* to Convoy Supplies to Prisoners at Tripoli

La Vallette (Malta), 1st April 1805

As soon as the United States Frigate under your command is ready for sea you are directed to proceed off the coast of Tripoli taking under your convoy the Ketch *Eliza* with supplies for the American Prisoners. On falling in with the *Constellation* you will assume her station and direct Captain Campbell to return immediately to this port or to Syracuse. As the crew of that ship have been affected with the Small Pox I suggest to you the propriety of going into Syracuse in preference to this place; however you will ascertain from Captain Campbell the present state of his crew & give him such written instructions on this head as you may think proper. You are directed to retain the Brig *Vixen* on the station until she is relieved by some of the small vessels. The *Nautilus* may be expected here from Sicily in four or five days and it is my present intention to dispatch her immediately to the Coast of Tripoli for that purpose. When you arrive off the station you will adopt such dispositions for the blockading the Enemy's harbor and scouring the coast as you may deem expedient.

Accompanying the present you will find a letter from Mr. Davis at Tunis dated the 8th ult. giving an account of the situation of the two Tripoline Corsairs that have taken shelter in that Regency-they remained in the same situation on the 19th when the *Nautilus* left the Bay. Should the winds prove favorable it may not be inadvisable for you or the smaller vessel to stretch towards Sousa and from thence to look into Tunis Bay in order to watch their motions. The propriety of this arrangement will depend on circumstances; you will therefore act in it at your own discretion. The term of your cruise I leave entirely to yourself as well as general dispositions. I shall dispatch the *President* Frigate to join you as soon as possible & whenever you think the coast sufficiently guarded, you will return to this island or to Syracuse as circumstances and arrangements may direct.

Saml. Barron

Capt. John Rodgers  
U States Frigate *Constitution*

#### Samuel Barron

Samuel Barron was the son of a merchant captain named James Barron who became Commodore of the tiny Virginia State Navy during the American Revolution. Samuel became a midshipman on the frigate *Dragon* and served in the Virginia State Navy during the latter part of the Revolutionary War before he joined the fledgling United States Navy.

In 1798, Barron was placed in command of the *Augusta* and took part in the Quasi-War with France. During the First Barbary War, he commanded the *President* and relieved Edward Preble near Tripoli. In 1805 he turned over command of his squadron to John Rodgers and returned to the United States due to poor health. He died in 1810 at the age of 45.

Samuel Barron's son, Samuel Barron served with distinction in the United States Navy, until he resigned his commission in April 1861 to join the Confederate States Navy during the Civil War.