

The 'Barbary Wars' and Their Philadelphia Connections

Twenty-first century news reports, are almost daily filled with accounts of piracy, occurring within the Gulf of Aden & Indian Ocean, off the Horn of Africa, by Somalian *corsairs*. Such acts of piracy or terror are nothing new within the world of *Islamic jihad* or 'holy war,' which has been carried on for centuries against the Western world, even to the present-day.

Either as the result of Ottoman Turkish invasions in Eastern Europe, to fleets of Barbary corsairs from North Africa journeying northwards into the Atlantic, attacks and enslavement were a frequent fear of communities, as well as ship's crews and would-be colonists to the New World. Between 1609 & 1616 alone, some 466 British vessels and their passengers were captured on the high seas and enslaved in the North African 'Barbary States' of Morocco, Tripoli (today's Libya), Algiers & Tunisia, creating a demand for what one recent author has referred to as 'White Gold,' or European slaves.

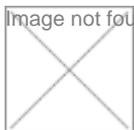
Not until the Presidencies of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams & James Madison, would the threat to American ships and shipping finally be dealt with and resolved, during the 'Barbary Wars' of the early 19th-century. However, prior to these events, literally thousands of individuals would rot, starve, die or experience years of servitude in North Africa, such as the crew of the Philadelphia ship, *Dauphin*, taken captive west of Lisbon, on the 30th of July, 1785.

The master of the *Dauphin*, Richard O'Brien (1758-1824), would be in bondage to the Muslims for some ten years, after which he would return as Consul-General to Algiers. An outbreak of the bubonic plague alone, would bring about the demise of 200 Christian slaves, from January to May of 1787, including crew members of the *Dauphin*. O'Brien's correspondence and journal, available here at the Society, written while a captive in North Africa, is both informative & essential, in understanding those trying times in American history. He would eventually return to Philadelphia, serve in the state legislature and die in Pennsylvania in 1824.

While a prisoner in Algiers, O'Brien would write the following entry in his journal, for February 19, 1790:

"Picture to yourself your Brother Citizens or Unfortunate Countrymen in the Algerian State Prisons or Damned Castile, and starved 2/3rd's and Naked. ..The Chains of their Legs, and under the Lash...Beat in such a Manner as to Shock Humanity...No Prospects of ever being Redeemed or Restored to their Native Land & Never to See their Wives & Families...Viewing and Considering of their approaching Exit, where 6 of their Dear Country-man is buried with thousands of other Christian Slaves of all nations...Once a Citizen of the United States of America, but at present the Most Miserable Slave in Algiers."

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O'Brien's, *Remarks & Observations in Algiers: 1799*

Just a few days prior to the seizure of the *Dauphin*, the Boston ship, the *Maria*, was also taken by Algerian pirates off the Cape of St. Vincent on July 25, 1785. On board this vessel was James Leander Cathcart (1767-1843), who would be enslaved in Algiers for eleven years, but would eventually become a clerk for the *Dey*, an important Islamic official, by which he was enabled to serve as a mediator along with Colonel David Humphreys, America's Minister to Portugal, thus creating the Treaty of Algiers in 1796, which would temporarily halt hostilities between the United States and that Muslim nation.

After being freed, James L. Cathcart would come to Philadelphia in 1796, along with twelve survivors of the crew of the *Maria*. He would marry Philadelphia resident, Jane B. Woodside in 1798, while their daughter, J. B. Newkirk, would write an account of her father's captivity entitled, *The Captives, Eleven Years a Prisoner in Algiers*.

On June 5, 1798, the Philadelphia brig *Mary*, with its cargoe and crew were captured by Algerian pirates, causing Richard O'Brien to write from Algiers and "forewarn all citizens of the United States of the danger they run in risqueing {sic} their liberty, vessels, and property..." (*The Philadelphia True American & Commercial Advertiser*, January 18, 1799).

Present-day Bainbridge Street in Philadelphia, is named after Commodore William Bainbridge (1774-1833), who ran aground the brig, *Philadelphia*, off Tripoli in 1803, after which he and his crew were held captive for 19 months. Long after his captivity he would die in Philadelphia of pneumonia, and was buried in Christ Church within the city limits.

Eventually the famed naval hero and officer, Stephen Decatur (1779-1820), would also be intregally involved in the Tripolitian War with the Barbary Pirates and is buried in St. Peter's churchyard in Philadelphia.

The No. African states of Tripoli, Algiers, Morocco, and Tunisia would cease their hostilities with the United States temporarily, with the assault on the Tripolitian city of Derna, taken by U.S. marines in 1805, since appeasement, ransom, tribute, and diplomacy had failed to stop the conflict.

Not till 1815, during the Presidency of James Madison, would the 'Barbary Pirates' and their 'acts of terror' against Americans finally come to end. But this did not transpire until some estimated **one million** Europeans & citizens of the United States, would endure abuse, incarceration, enslavement and even death, within North Africa, a systematic *jihad* that had been raging for over 200 years.

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania has a very large collection of both primary & secondary correspondence, publications, as well as graphic materials, pertaining to the 'Barbary Wars' or America's '*First War on Terror*,' fought against Islamic *jihadists* attempting to carry out a 'Holy War,' then as today, against the West on the high seas.

Links

[1] https://hsp.org/sites/default/files/legacy_files/richard_obrien.jpg