

The Barbary War was the first war waged by the United States outside national boundaries after gaining independence and unification of the country.

The four Barbary States of North Africa - Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli - had plundered seaborne commerce for centuries. Surviving by blackmail, they received great sums of money, ships, and arms yearly from foreign powers in return for allowing the foreigners to trade in African ports and sail unmolested through the Barbary waters. They demanded tribute money, seized ships, and held crews for ransom or sold them into slavery.

During the Crusades (1095-1295), Muslim pirates operating from bases in North Africa had plundered ships carrying Crusaders and pilgrims and sold many Christians into slavery. By the sixteenth century, Spain and the Ottoman Turks were pitted in a struggle for supremacy in the Mediterranean. Piracy, which for both Christians and Muslims was a dimension of the conflict between the opposing powers, lured adventurers from around the Mediterranean to the Maghribi coastal towns and islands.

By the end of the 18th Century the effectiveness of Tripoli's corsairs had long since deteriorated, but their reputation alone was enough to prompt European maritime states to pay the tribute extorted by the pasha to ensure safe passage of their shipping through Tripolitanian waters. American merchant ships, no longer covered by British protection, were seized by Barbary pirates in the years after United States independence, and American crews were enslaved.

In 1799 the United States agreed to pay \$18,000 a year in return for a promise that Tripoli-based corsairs would not molest American ships. Similar agreements were made at the time with the rulers of Morocco, Algiers, and Tunis.

In May, 1801, the United States refused to succumb to the increasing demands of the Pacha of Tripoli; in return, the Pacha declared war against the States. While Tripoli was not a strong power and little effort was necessary to watch and blockade it, the fear was that the other Barbary powers would join against the United States.

The United States sent naval squadrons into the Mediterranean under the slogan of "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute!" Under the leadership of Commodores Richard Dale and Edward Preble, the Navy blockaded the enemy coast, bombarded his shore fortresses, and engaged in close, bitterly contested gunboat actions.

On 16 February 1804 LT Stephen Decatur led 74 volunteers into Tripoli harbor to burn the captured American frigate *The Philadelphia*. British Admiral Lord Nelson called the raid "the most daring act of the age".

In 1805 Marines stormed the Barbary pirates' harbor fortress stronghold of Tripoli, commemorated in the Marine Corp Hymn invocation "To the Shores of Tripoli." First Lieutenant Presley O'Bannon is remembered for heroism in the battle for Tripoli. O'Bannon's Marines were the first U.S. forces to hoist the flag over territory in the Old World. The "Mameluke" sword, carried by Marines officers today, was presented to O'Bannon in 1805.

Following the War of 1812 two naval squadrons under Commodores Decatur and Bainbridge returned to the Mediterranean. Diplomacy backed by resolute force soon brought the rulers of Barbary to terms and gained wide spread respect for the new American nation. Decatur obtained treaties which eliminated the United States paying tribute. In the years immediately after the Napoleonic wars, which ended in 1815, the European powers forced an end to piracy and the payment of tribute in the Barbary states.