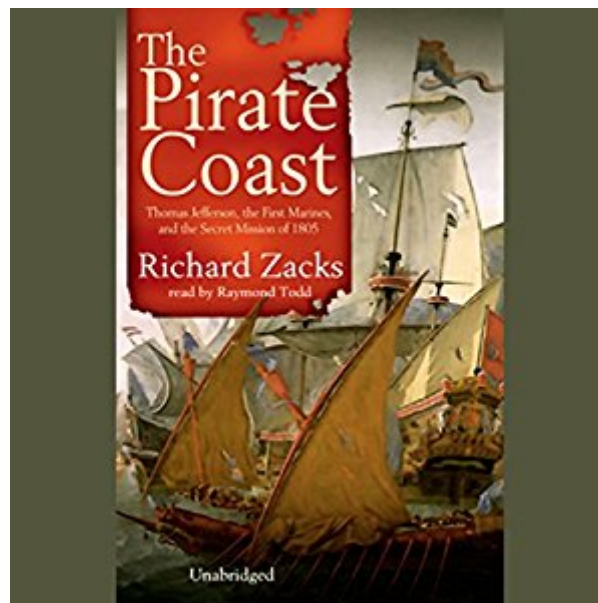




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The Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, The First Marines, And The Secret Mission Of 1805



Synopsis

A real-life thriller -- the true story of the unheralded American who brought the Barbary Pirates to their knees. In an attempt to stop the legendary Barbary Pirates of North Africa from hijacking American ships, William Eaton set out on a secret mission to overthrow the government of Tripoli. The operation was sanctioned by President Thomas Jefferson, who at the last moment grew wary of "intermeddling" in a foreign government and sent Eaton off without proper national support. Short on supplies, given very little money and only a few men, Eaton and his mission seemed doomed from the start. He triumphed against all odds, recruited a band of European mercenaries in Alexandria, and led them on a march across the Libyan Desert. Once in Tripoli, the ragtag army defeated the local troops and successfully captured Derne, laying the groundwork for the demise of the Barbary Pirates. Now, Richard Zacks brings this important story of America's first overseas covert op to life.

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Customer Reviews

Richard Zacks' excellent history, *The Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, the First Marines, and the Secret Mission of 1805*, was published in 2005. It tells the timeless and yet timely tale of America's first major covert operation which was led by the now almost forgotten William Eaton. He was an ex-captain in the US army and former consul to Tunis who was dispatched by President Jefferson to north Africa on a mission to liberate the crew of the USS Philadelphia. The Barbary pirates of north Africa (see earlier post, *The Shores of Tripoli, Jefferson in London and the Birth of the US Navy*, 4/20/12) had been terrorizing, kidnapping and enslaving westerners for centuries. An old a Barbary

maxim statures: "Whoever acts like a sheep, the wolf will eat." Most Western nations had simply opted to pay tribute to the wolf rather than confront the pirates. After the American revolution, the USA no longer had the protection of the Royal Navy on the high seas. In 1803 the entire American fleet consisted of six ships. The Philadelphia, launched in 1799, was a 36-gun American frigate commanded by Captain William Bainbridge (the same Bainbridge after which Bainbridge island in my adopted home state of Washington is named). The US did not want to be mistaken for a sheep and, therefore, dispatched the Philadelphia to the Mediterranean. Bainbridge had orders to confront the Barbary pirates, instead he managed on October 31, 1803 to run his ship aground in Tripoli harbor. The crew of 307 officers and sailors was captured and held hostage by Yussef Karmaanli, the Bashaw of Tripoli. Yussef has the distinction of being the first foreign ruler to ever declare war on the United States. William Eaton was a flinty New Englander who had served in the continental army during the American Revolution, attended Dartmouth college after the war and served as the American consul in Tunis. Jefferson and his secretary of state, James Madison, opted to dispatch William Eaton to try to effect the release of the American hostages. Yussef Karmaanli had a brother Hamet who was his political rival for the throne of Tripoli. The Jefferson administration hoped Eaton would stir up a civil war that would topple Yussef and liberate the American sailors. It was therefore, the libertarian Jefferson who first implemented an American policy of using a covert force to effect a "regime change" in a foreign country. William Eaton had some choice words in support of aggressive American action against the pirates of the Barbary coast. He said, "If the Congress do not consent that the government shall send a force into the Mediterranean to check the insolence of those scoundrels and to render the United States respectable, I hope they will resolve at their next session to wrest the quiver of arrows from the left talon of the (American) Eagle...and substitute a fiddle bow or a cigar in lieu." Eaton was given the vague title of "Navy Agent of the United States for the Several Barbary Regencies". With long delays in orders due to the communications realities of the time, Eaton had been granted great latitude to get the job done. In spite of a lack of personnel, money and resources Eaton managed to link up with Hamet and lead a rag tag band of US marines (ten in all), Greeks soldiers and native mercenaries on a 500-mile overland desert journey from Alexandria to Derne in Tripoli. Eaton, greatly outnumbered, led these and US naval forces in the battle of Derne on April 27, 1805 and triumphing over the Bashaw's forces capturing the fortifications of Derne in what is now Libya. His faithful Lieutenant Presley O'Bannon of the US marines raised the American flag over a foreign fort for the first time in history. The Marine hymn owes its reference to the "shores of Tripoli" due to this battle. With the capture of Derne and a US naval blockade of Tripoli, victory seemed to be within the grasp of the American forces. Jefferson, however, had been secretly

proceeding down a double-tracked strategy, having also appointed Tobias Lear, formerly George Washington's private secretary, as US consul general to the Barbary Regencies with the task of negotiating a quick peace with Bashaw Yusef. Lear was a Harvard graduate who had embezzled from his boss, Washington and most likely destroyed some of his Washington's private correspondence, particularly with Jefferson. This naturally endeared Lear to Jefferson. Lear succeeded in making peace with Yusef by promising to abandon Derne, give up the naval blockade of Barbary ports and pay the sum of \$60,000 for the release of the Philadelphia crew. Christopher Kelly is the author of *Â America Invades: How We've Invaded or been Militarily Involved with almost Every Country on Earth* and *Â Italy Invades*

Captivating account of the Barbary Coast War (1801-1805) in which President Jefferson sent a naval force to take on the Pasha of Tripoli and put an end the seizure of American vessels and the extraction of ransom and tributes for safe passage. An interesting part of the story describes how a handful (8) of marines organized outcast tribes and led a successful land campaign (from Alexandria to Tripoli) against the Pasha. The feat is strikingly similar to the initial operations in Afghanistan in which small teams of special ops warriors organized and led northern Afghan tribes in a rout of the Taliban. In the Tripoli operation, however, despite having routed the Pasha's forces, the marines received an order to end the campaign just as they were about to enter Tripoli and seize the Pasha. Why they were denied an well-earned heroic victory is a case study in bureaucratic bungling and poor communications. At the time, the only communications between the naval force and Jefferson was by way of messages carried by ship. Further complicating matters was that Jefferson relied on information and advice from a arrogant, incompetent diplomat who continually fed Jefferson misinformation and bad advice. The result was that Jefferson erroneously called off the assault on Tripoli moments after the marines had achieved certain victory. Worse yet, the bad advice caused Jefferson to settle the conflict by agreeing to pay the Pasha's demands of tribute. This has to be the origin of the saying, "snatching defeat from the jaws of victory". Despite this ignominious ending, however, the actions and achievements of the marines at Tripoli were indeed heroic, and a justifiable source of pride for the corps memorialized in "the Marine hymn". Highly recommended.

As a recorded book, *The Pirate Coast* is excellent. The reading is crisp and intelligent. It is a wonderful companion for the hours you will spend listening to the account of early U.S. military intervention in the Muslim world. This is not the first retelling of this relatively obscure incident. Other

works have covered all, or parts of the campaign in very commendable style. This book, however, goes into intricate detail about the exploits of the U.S. Consul William Eaton, and his subsequent feud with the Jefferson Administration over their failure to live up to their promises to him. It should serve as a cautionary tale to those who expect any Administration to "stay the course" when the political winds change. The sorry fate of Eaton makes a rather depressing conclusion to an otherwise exciting true story of the earliest adventures of the American Marines and American "activist" diplomats.

Filled in a hole in my learning about history of US. Am afraid I lost a bit of respect for Thomas Jefferson though. Politics seems to be the same throughout history.

This work meanders. There are great moments recounted, but then we are suddenly sent off into another time and place to take up a subplot. Other accounts of these events are better and respect the readers need for a linear theme. I am 32% of the way through it and there has been very little Thomas Jefferson, a lot of Pirate Coast and almost no Marines. We learn a lot of unimportant facts which sometimes feel like the author has crossed the centerline to hyperbole. I suppose the various subplots of this history have their place and provide motivation for the characters, but I suspect the level of detail about these events can be condensed. I am about ready to move on to something else, finishing this book only when trapped in an airport with nothing left on my kindle but this story.

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