

of war and witnessed men around him dying of starvation and disease before he was finally traded for a British officer.

These early experiences might explain why Preble took that risk in 1803. With his reputation for bravery preceding him, he entered the Mediterranean. There he pursued America's

mission to subdue the Barbary states, and in the process trained a group of officers who would become the backbone of the U.S. Navy. Of this group, known as "Preble's Boys," Isaac Hull, William Bainbridge and Charles Stewart each in turn served as distinguished captains of *Constitution*.

### He Dreamed of the Sea and Glory

On a steamy July afternoon in 1797, a young man raced through the streets of Philadelphia to the shipyard of Wharton & Humphreys bearing good news. Congress had finally agreed to complete three of the frigates it had hired Joshua Humphreys to design. Judging from the excitement that flashed in the dark brown eyes and the dampness of the curls ringing his face, one would have thought the young Stephen Decatur already knew the important roles these ships would play in his life. Against his mother's wishes, he had dropped out of the University of Pennsylvania and taken a job in a shipping office next door to the Wharton & Humphreys yard. His dream was to go to sea. Now the huge hull floating idly beside

the dock would at last be rigged. One day Decatur would command this very ship, *United States*. But before that, he would fight in a squadron under the flagship *Constitution*, another of those three great ships. Decatur's "college" would be the treacherous Barbary Coast brimming with enemy corsairs, and his teacher would be Commodore Edward Preble. Here in the Mediterranean, Decatur would carry out his courageous *Philadelphia* escapade, but he would also lose his younger brother and a childhood friend. How bittersweet it must have been for Decatur to return to the Mediterranean after the War of 1812 as commander of his own squadron to once and for all end the infamous tradition of paying tribute to the Barbary states.

### Monkey Business

Having lost his parents at the age of ten, Anthony Wills slept in a stable behind a tavern where he worked to earn his keep. It was from the sailors who frequented the tavern that the young boy first heard tales of the sea.

One day, a lieutenant recruiting crew for *Constitution* noticed the strapping lad and filled his ears with promises of patriotic adventure and regular pay.

When *Constitution* sailed from Boston harbor in October 1812, Anthony was on board. The crew was in foul spirits, because William Bainbridge, a new commodore with a reputation

for bad luck, had taken command. Nevertheless, Anthony learned his job as a powder monkey, during endless drills racing up and down the ladders carrying gunpowder to the loader. Anthony ate and slept with the crew. He scrubbed the decks, rang the ship's bell for the watches and studied reading, writing and arithmetic. He was glad he had worked hard to learn the ropes when two months later *Constitution* met the enemy. On December 29, 1812, Anthony witnessed the fight of his life and helped to win it. Scrambling up and down the ladders amidst the smoke and hail of gunfire, deafened by cries of the injured and the splintering of wood, Anthony did his part. When the battle was over, his young voice joined the chorus of three huzzahs for victory over *HMS Java*.

### Danger on the Home Front

Abigail Hallam Chew watched with dread as the sky reddened over the nearby town of Stonington, Connecticut under bombardment by British ships. In the days that followed, she drew strength from the knowledge that this small village had repelled the mighty Royal Navy ... until she learned that the English had burned the

nation's capital to the ground! Now it was August 1814, and the enemy were building up their forces again off the coast of her home town, New London.

When the war began, Abigail had tried to ignore it by keeping up with the usual social activities, but now her mind was preoccupied with frightening thoughts. If only her husband were