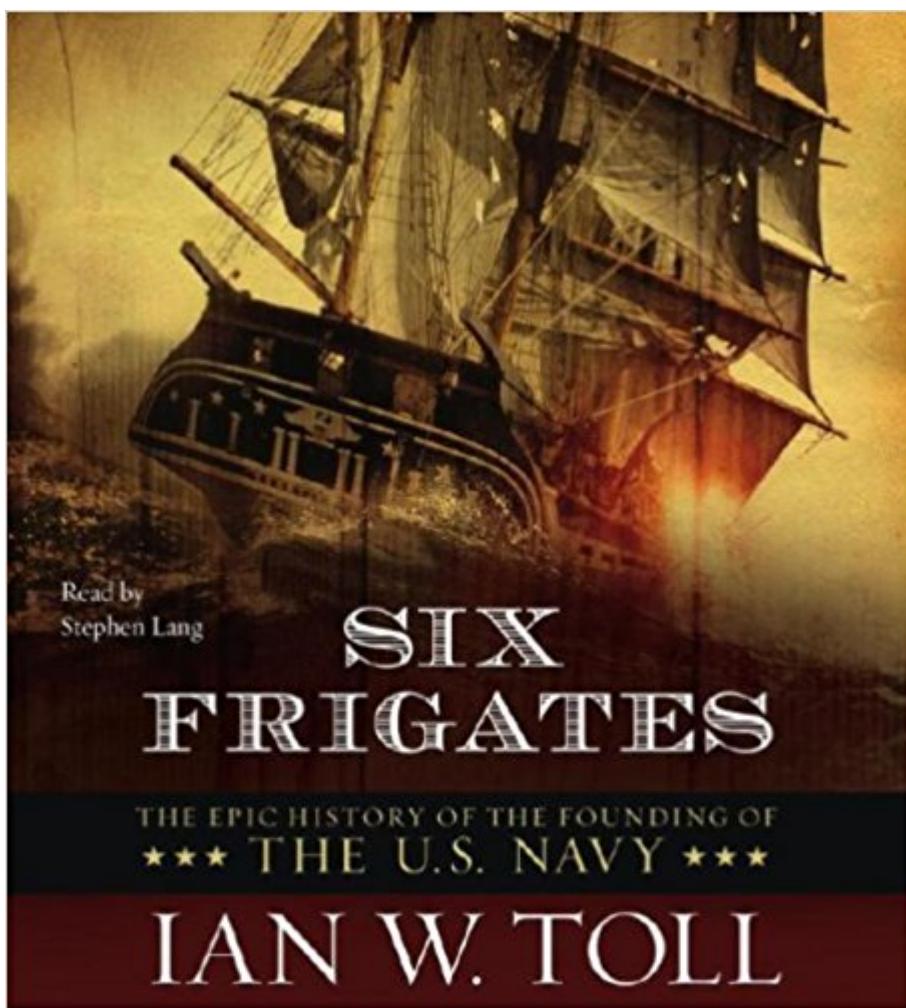


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Six Frigates: The Epic History Of The Founding Of The U.S. Navy



Synopsis

Before the ink was dry on the Constitution of the United States, the establishment of a permanent military had become the most divisive issue facing the young republic. Would a standing army be the thin end of dictatorship? Would a navy protect American commerce from the vicious depredations of the Barbary pirates, or would it drain the treasury and provoke hostilities with the great powers? How large a navy would suffice? The founders -- particularly Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, and Adams -- debated these questions fiercely and switched sides more than once. In 1794, President Washington signed legislation authorizing the construction of six heavy frigates. The unique combination of power, speed and tactical versatility -- smaller than a battleship and larger than a sloop -- that all navies sent on their most daring missions. It was the first great appropriation of federal money and the first demonstration of the power of the new central government, calling for the creation of entirely new domestic industries, and the extraction of natural resources from the backwoods of Maine to the uninhabited coastal islands of Georgia. From the complicated politics of the initial decision, through the cliffhanger campaign against Tripoli, to the war that shook the world in 1812, Ian W. Toll tells this grand tale with the political insight of Founding Brothers and a narrative flair worthy of Patrick O'Brian. In the words of Henry Adams, the 1812 encounter between USS Constitution and HMS Guerriere "raised the United States in one half hour to the rank of a first class power in the world."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. It's hard to imagine a better place for listening to this shrewdly abridged, excitingly

read audio version of Toll's impressive history of the founding of the United States Navy than aboard some sort of seagoing vessel. One of Patrick O'Brian's warships would be perfect, but anything from a smaller sailboat to the Staten Island Ferry would be almost as auspicious. Veteran actor Lang, his voice instantly recognizable from films and television, never lets that familiarity take over. He trusts instead to Toll's virtuoso combination of details large and small (everything from the uniquely horrible ways men died during sea battles to the greed of shipbuilders and their representatives in government) to keep listeners intrigued—changing his voice in subtle ways when he brings to life the real words of American and British naval heroes from Lord Nelson to the officers who won the war of 1812. Lang is a lucid guide through the stormy seas of politics and commercial intrigue surrounding the birth of the U.S. naval fleet, which would soon surprise the world—especially the British navy, which thought of itself as invincible. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Not confined to sea battles, Toll's history of the U.S. Navy's formative decades, from the mid-1790s to the War of 1812, rounds out affairs by anchoring the nascent navy to its financial supports. Navies are not inexpensive, and the costs of building and maintaining ships appear lightly but persistently in Toll's narrative. It centers on the first vessels purpose-built for the navy, the half-dozen frigates of which the USS Constitution moored in Boston today is the last survivor. Besides money, their construction involved politics; the Federalists favored the naval program (creating the Department of the Navy in 1798), while Jefferson's parsimonious Republicans were more diffident. Toll is as insightful about the essential domestic and diplomatic background as he is with his dramatizations of the naval engagements of the new navy, which produced a crop of national heroes such as Stephen Decatur. The maritime strategy and the highly developed sense of officers' honor, which influenced where particular battles occurred, emerge clearly in this fluent account. Vibrant and comprehensive, Toll makes an impressive debut. Gilbert TaylorCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Excellent book both from the writing style and content. Although most of us are familiar with the Revolutionary War few really understand where the phrase "from the shores of Tripoli" sung in the Marine Corps Hymn originated. Also, most people recognize that "Old Ironsides" describes our country's most famous ship The USS Constitution but exactly why was this ship so named? These are but of few of the tidbits contained in this documentary on the causes for America getting into the not so famous War of 1812 and why it was necessary for establishing a United States Navy built

around six frigates. Also we learn why these frigates were able to take on and defeat in several sea battles what was considered the strongest navy in the world at the time - The Royal Navy. We learn also why American captains and crews were able to fight so effectively and bravely in these sea battles. We are also given the opportunity to learn in depth about our ships most famous and not so famous captains. Another insight not often covered in typical US history courses is the political interactions between the Federalists and Republicans that had such an influence on what type of navy was first started and then what finally evolved toward the United States becoming a major sea power, with the famous "White Fleet" sent around the world by President Teddy Roosevelt.

Ian Toll's telling the story of the founding of US Navy is a terrific read that entertains and educates. Toll takes us back to the early years of our nation and how Maritime trade and agrarian farming were our primary economic activities. Our President John Adams is faced with Barbary pirates capturing our merchant ships costing us tremendous economic losses. Congress authorizes our first 6 frigates to be built to defend our merchant vessels. The story takes us through the design, building and outfitting these first men of war. America's new Navy is able to defend our merchant ships and defeat the Barbary Pirates. Toll writes about our new Naval officers, their courage, struggles, sacrifices and victories along with loss and death. These 6 frigates go on to defend our country in the war of 1812 with England and set America's Navy's place in the world.

I highly recommend this book. It was well written and flowed. I especially enjoyed his description of the sea battles. Graphic at times with sufficient detail to bring them alive. Learning about the politics of the times made me realize the more things change the more they stay the same. I look forward to getting back to Boston and visiting Old Ironsides now that I have in depth knowledge of its history and why it is so special in American history.

1. Short review: :-D (rating: 5 out of 5 stars -- I love it.)
2. Long review:
2.1. What I liked: Impressive sources: diaries and letters of captains, officers, midshipmen, and ordinary sailors.
2.2. What I did not like: The lack of textual coverage of the incident of the USS Baltimore under the command of Isaac Phillips. Toll covered it in a footnote. Twenty-eight years after the occurrence, Phillips published his account of the incident. Phillips was dismissed from service -- that is, cashiered -- by order of President John Adams for allowing British officers to employ force aboard the Baltimore while it was still under his command; that is, he had not surrendered. The dismissal set a precedent that remained unique until 1970 when Coast Guard Commander Ralph Eustis allowed Russian

sailors to use force aboard the USCGC Vigilant to return Simas Kudirka to their Russian trawler. (Kudirka was seeking asylum.) Wikipedia says that Eustis was given a non-punitive letter of reprimand. This is false. Eustis was cashiered, and those above him in the chain of command were given the option to retire or be cashiered. One of my friends, Wes Miller, sat the Coast Guard investigation board on the Kudirka incident. The board recommended court martial for Eustis, but the President overrode their recommendation and cashiered Eustis and cited the Baltimore incident as precedent. Wes and I argued the propriety of the dismissal many times. I think an incident that occurred in 1798 that echoed in the 20th century deserves more than a footnote.

2.3. Who I think is the audience: American naval history buffs.

2.4. Is the book appropriate for children to read? Yes. No worries.

2.5. On the basis of reading this book, will I buy the author's next book? Yes.

2.6. Summary: From the title, you would expect *Six Frigates* to be about the original six frigates of the United States Navy. It is that and more. At first I was displeased with the attention Mr Toll gave to the politics of the creation of the Navy, but that may be because I studied the creation of the Navy in depth years ago and can recall a great deal of it in excruciating detail. Ask anyone who has ever conversed with me on the subject. However, Toll soon rewarded my reading with details I did not know. Like the fact that Joshua Humphreys, the architect of the American big frigates, had to compromise the original six that he intended to be built as 44s to build only three 44s, two 38s, and one 36 (the runt of the litter Chesapeake). (The Chesapeake is often listed as a 38, and like all warships of the era, she carried more guns than she was rated for, but the truth is the Chesapeake was shorter than her sisters, and 36 describes her better than 38.) Toll covered the War of 1812 with more detail on the actions at sea than Forester gave, but his conclusions echoed Forester's. Toll covered the Quasi-War with France and Thomas Truxtun's command of the Constellation in action against L'Insurgente and La Vengeance. Something I did not know: the Constellation mounted 24-pounders when she fought L'Insurgente, but Truxtun found they made the Constellation top heavy and swapped them for 18-pounders. The Constellation fought La Vengeance with 18-pounders on her gun deck. Toll covered both the First Barbary War and the Second Barbary War. (There was not much to the Second Barbary War. The Navy sailed in and blew hell out of any ship the Algerines put in the water.) Toll covered William Bainbridge's loss of the USS Philadelphia and his and his officers' surprisingly luxurious captivity in Tripoli. Toll also covered the brutal conditions of the seamen in captivity. The Algerines put them to work like slaves on public works. Once Edward Preble sailed into the Mediterranean with an American squadron, things got hot for the Algerines. Preble put matters to rest in Tangiers and Tunis before he made his base in Syracuse. The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was already at war with the Algerines and happily lent Preble six

shallow-draft gunboats to use to bombard Tripoli. Preble sailed to Tripoli and proceeded to do just that. In time, a peace was concluded with the Dey of Algiers, and the Americans went away. Toll details the pig's breakfast President Jefferson made of the navy with his erroneous notions of naval militia manning unseaworthy gunboats. Those damned gunboats were useless. They could not sail and they could not fight. Toll covered the Chesapeake-Leopard affair and the Little Belt affair in extraordinary detail. If you have an interest in the early US Navy, this is a book you must have in your library. YMMV.

I had read Mr. Toll's books about the Pacific war with great interest and approval, but I admit that I stayed on the fence about buying this one for several months. I needn't have worried. The early American politics described herein is absolutely fascinating, and sea battles under sail turn out to be much more exciting than I expected. The technical aspects here are handled in an almost breezy style that is extremely informative without ever becoming boring. Many of the personalities in the narrative were larger than life in their day, and the exploits described in this book were very daring, verging on amazing. Stephen Decatur was a hero of mine as a boy, and it was great to place him more in the context of his period. All in all, a great read, and highly recommended.

One review touted this book as akin to Patrick O'Brian, which I must say is more than a bit of a stretch given my reading through the works of O'Brian several times. On the other hand, if you're searching for a book which develops the history of the founding of the US Navy against the background of the politics of the day as well as from the threats to American trade by the Royal Navy, Barbary Pirates, and others, you will find this book fact-filled and interesting. I found the pace a bit slow, but it was well worth reading.

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