

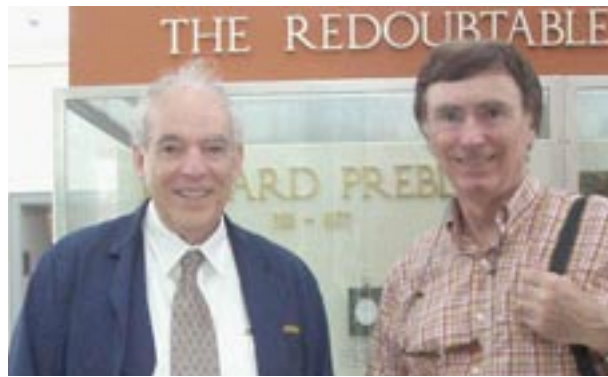
TO THE SHORES OF TRIPOLI



What better place to do research on Commodore Edward Preble than at Preble Hall, Annapolis?

To bring a historical marine painting to life, it often requires forays to maritime museums in order to resolve problems that pertain to either the ships or the event portrayed in the painting. In the case of “To the Shores of Tripoli” there were a multitude of questions that I needed answered before I could go any further with the painting. Most pertained to the Constitution herself, but there were also some questions about the Sicilian gunboat in the right of the sketch that needed clarification.

Fortunately, the Museum at the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis has in their collection many artifacts and paintings concerning the Tripoli War. In particular there is a large painting of the Battle of Tripoli by Michael Corne that had been commissioned by Commodore Preble only a year after the battle. A trip to the Museum at Annapolis was thus essential.



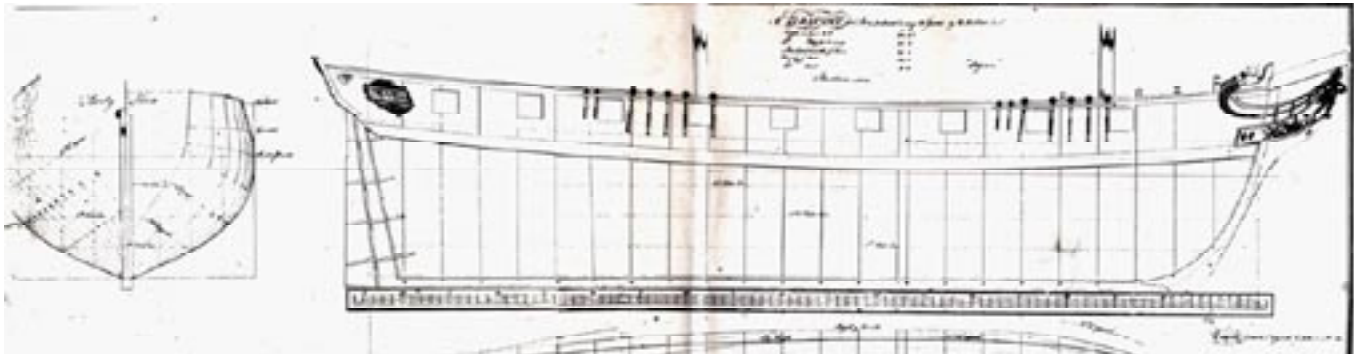
Mr. James Cheevers, Executive Secretary and Associate Director of the U.S. Naval Academy Museum for over 30 years, gave me invaluable help researching my questions about the U.S.S. Constitution and the controversy over its stern and transom. His expertise in historic US Naval vessels is a great treasure for researchers like myself.

The Academy Museum is not only a prime source of information on the USS Constitution, but also has in its collection a model of the USS Siren and a model of a Sicilian gunboat.

When I started this project and made the sketch for the painting I had no idea that a fine detailed model of the Siren existed. I did have copies of the ship's lines which were in the National Archives, but these gave no information with respect to her embellishments. So it was a wonderful surprise to discover that this model of the Siren was at a museum which I intended to visit anyway.

Although the model of the Siren at the Academy Museum is excellent, still there are differences between it and the ship's lines. Where I have found a difference, I have always chosen the ships lines over the model, for these were used to build the original Siren. For example the Wale strip is higher and deeper in the model than the ships lines. Also the model does not have hammock nettings on its cap rail. Although an excellent argument can be made that she never had hammock nettings, I believe she did for two reasons: first it was a common feature in navy vessels of the day; secondly, the Constitution during her stay at Syracuse, Sicily, had hammock netting bulwarks made to protect her crew for the planned attack of Tripoli. If the Constitution was thus protected, why would a far more vulnerable brig be over-

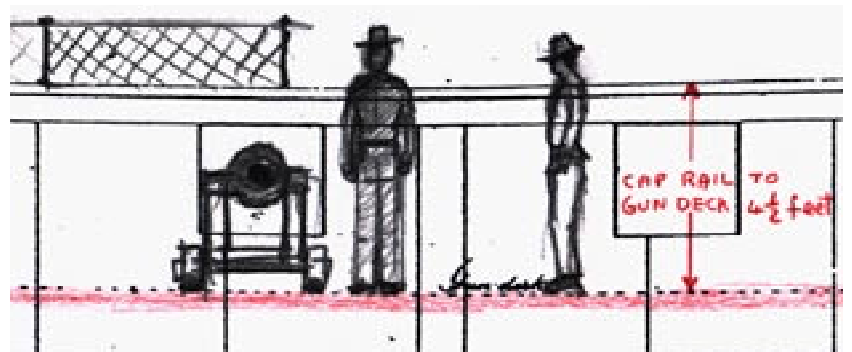
looked which was expected to protect the gunboats? The hammock nettings served three purposes on a ship of war. The first was a means to air the men's bedding, the second was to provide protection for the



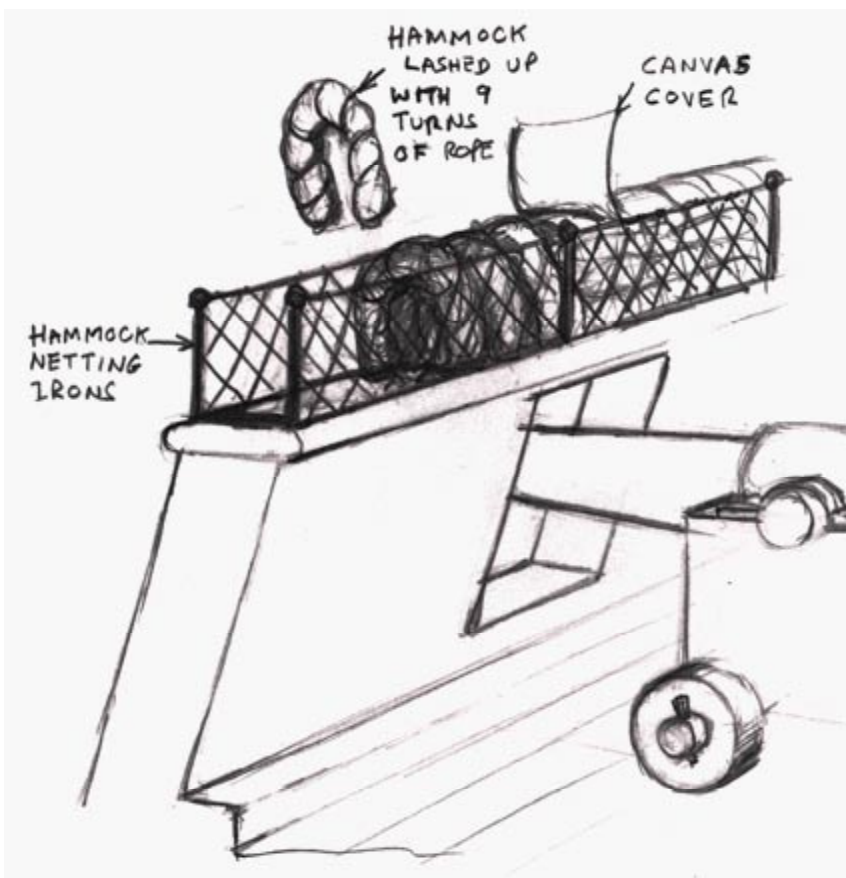
The lines of the Siren Shows a typical naval brig of the day. The ships lines shows a wale or rubbing strake that is clearly a foot or so below the badge window while in the model the whale is touching the badge window. Also to note is that there are no hammock nettings on the model. There are no hammock nettings on the ships lines also, but hammock nettings and such are never shown on ships lines.

men operating the guns from small arms' fire, and the third was to allow the hammocks to float free if the ship sank as the hammocks were the sailors' life preservers.

The bulwarks, especially on small vessels, usually only came up to a man's shoulder. Thus, by adding hammock nettings, the mens' heads could be protected from musket fire.



The lower deck of a man of war was a crowded damp, dark place, especially in a navy brig where the men were quartered below the water line. By placing their blanket and hammock in the nettings, the bedclothes had at least a fair chance of drying out. The procedure was for the blanket to be rolled up inside the hammock. The hammock was then lashed tightly with nine turns of rope. This bundle was then



folded over and placed in the hammock nettings so that hammocks were stacked vertically. However, in a brig such as the Siren there may not have been enough space in the nettings to stack them vertically and instead they would have been stacked horizontally. It was claimed that a properly lashed hammock could keep a man afloat for a considerable time.



There is no image that I am aware of that shows the actual embellishments of the stern of the Siren. This model at the Preble Museum is, I suspect, an imaginative reconstruction by the model maker..and a very good one. I am using this design on the painting as I don't think it can be improved on. It captures the style and balance of the period. The model is only sparsely painted. I will be putting the garlands and embellishments against a very dark background which was the fashion in 1804.



The painting so far.

I have spent more time than usual getting the sky right for this painting. From the beginning I wanted a sky that did not draw attention away from the main subjects of the painting. I also wanted it to blend in with the battle smoke so that it enhanced the feeling that the viewers world was the battle scene. The Siren is the viewers lead into the painting and is placed so as to form part of an arc with the Constitution. The gunboat is placed so as to bisect this arc and lead the eye to the double round fort in the background. The standing and running rigging of the Siren is now almost complete along with the flag and commission pennant. At present I am working on the the stern embellishments, figures onboard and the battle smoke from her broadside along with the smoke passing through her rigging. Once the Siren is complete, I will finish the double round fort in the left of the painting. This is contrary to how I normally work, which is to finish the background first, then move in steps to the foreground. However, there are some complexities in this painting that are forcing a different approach.