

George Washington: Father of the American Navy

On Tuesday October 25, 1774 the First Continental Congress concluded their last piece of business. They approved a petition to their King. “Most Gracious Sovereign We your majesty’s faithful subjects ... beg leave to lay our grievances before the throne.” This long and polite address concluded with the hope “That your majesty may enjoy every felicity through a long and glorious reign over loyal and happy subjects.” The next day, after each member walked solemnly to the desk of the Secretary to sign the petition, the Congress adjourned and that evening they repaired to the City Tavern for an emotional farewell. They were confident that their “Gracious Sovereign” would hear their pleas and answer their grievances. Even the irascible John Adams agreed that it was likely that he would never return to Philadelphia as he recorded in his diary “I shall [never] see this part of the world again.”

George III’s response was hardly gracious. He refused to answer the petition and instead declared the colonies in a state of rebellion. Affairs spiraled downward in the winter and spring of 1775 until finally in the early morning hours on April 19th shots rang out on Lexington Green and later at North Bridge. A war had begun.

Wednesday morning, May 10, 1775 delegates from the thirteen colonies, including John Adams assembled once more in Philadelphia. Their desks were piled high with depositions from men who had fought at Lexington and Concord describing the bloody butchery of the king’s troops. These emotional accounts were accompanied by a letter

from the Massachusetts Provincial Congress imploring the Continental Congress to support “the common cause of the American Colonies.” A “powerful Army, on the side of America,” was the only means “to stem the rapid Progress of a tyrannical Ministry.” Such an army must “be subservient to the civil powers,” and so they argued that since the army “is for the general defence of the rights of America” it ought to be adopted by the Continental Congress. John Adams was confident. “There is a good spirit here,” he wrote. “The Military spirit which runs through the continent is truly amazing.” It took a few weeks, however, for that spirit to sweep the Congress, but finally on June 14th they took the momentous step of raising soldiers to be paid by the Congress and dispatched to Boston. On that day the American army was born.

Who should command this army? The morning of the 14th before Congress convened John Adams invited his cousin Samuel Adams, a fellow Massachusetts delegate, to walk with him “for a little Exercise and fresh air.” He told Samuel that he intended to propose George Washington for Commander in Chief of the army. Samuel was not enthusiastic and thought that the New England delegates might object to a southerner commanding a northern army in New England. That, replied John was precisely the point. The two sections must be joined in the common cause. It was essential that this northern army take on a national, southern tone. Washington was the man.

The afternoon following the vote to raise Continental troops, June 15th, John Adams rose to suggest a commander. John Hancock, of Massachusetts, was sitting in the chair as president. As Adams spoke he described the person he had in mind for command but did

not for the moment mention him by name. As each laudatory adjective passed Adams's lips the look on Hancock's face grew ever more radiant for he was convinced that his friend Mr. Adams could only be talking about him. Then came the moment. Adams announced his choice - George Washington. By prearrangement from their early morning walk Samuel Adams quickly rose and announced his endorsement of Colonel Washington. Hancock nearly fell from his chair. At the same time Washington, stood and left the room. The next day the official nomination was laid before the Congress. By unanimous vote the members elected Washington Commander in Chief.

Eight days later, without returning to Mount Vernon to bid goodbye to Martha, Washington left Philadelphia bound to Massachusetts. He arrived at Cambridge on Sunday evening July 2. The Sabbath keeping New Englanders paid him virtually no attention. The next day July 3 the army paraded before him. It was a simple and brief moment. Washington was not impressed by what he saw. He told his cousin Lund that the "officers were the most indifferent kind of People I ever saw." As for the soldiers in the ranks they were "an exceeding dirty and nasty people."

For his headquarters Washington selected an elegant mansion previously occupied by John Vassal a notorious Tory who had fled the town and taken refuge behind British guns in Boston. The house, however, was already occupied. Two weeks before Colonel John Glover and his Marblehead regiment had taken up residence. Glover was a well known merchant and sea captain and most of his soldiers were Marblehead fishermen. The general trumped the Colonel and so Glover and his men moved elsewhere. Washington,

however, had taken a liking to Glover and his rough hewn sailors. He ordered the regiment to duty as his personal guard.

Washington was quick to reconnoiter his position. He rode the lines surrounding Boston and set up observation posts on several hills to observe the British in the town. Within a few days reports arrived in Cambridge detailing the fact that British supply ships were entering and leaving the port unescorted and unarmed. Capturing these tasty morsels, Washington decided, would serve a two fold purpose – deny the British much needed supplies while at the same time supply his own army. What he needed were ships.

From local informants Washington learned that several vessels in the ports of nearby Essex County available. They would need guns, crew and an official commission. Congress had given Washington no authority to wage war at sea, but as commander in chief he interpreted his powers to include using army funds to hire vessels and his authority as commander certainly gave him the power to detail soldiers to man the vessels. Anxious to strike at the British by water Washington summoned Colonel Glover to headquarters. He told him his plan and asked for Glover's advice. The Colonel was enthusiastic and told him that he was willing to offer one of his own vessels the schooner *Hannah* for Continental service. As for crew, Glover picked men from his own regiment, and for captain he put forth an old Marbleheader Nicholas Broughton. Washington agreed. *Hannah* became the first vessel in the American Navy.

At 10:00 on the morning of September 5, 1775 with the aid of a fair breeze, *Hannah* cast off from the wharf in Beverly harbor and stood out into Massachusetts Bay. *Hannah's* first voyage was nearly her last. She was chased down by a British frigate and took refuge in Gloucester Harbor. This was the beginning of a very bad cruise. Washington soon learned that among sailors passion for prize money was a far more powerful engine than patriotism. Broughton and his crew paid no attention to Washington's instructions that *Hannah* was only to attack vessels "in the service of the ministerial army" these Marblehead rascals went on a spree taking several vessels including one belonging to John Langdon of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a high son of liberty. Washington apologized to Langdon, and promised to punish Broughton and his men for their "Mutinous behaviour." To make matters worse when he ordered the vessel returned to Langdon *Hannah's* crew refused to turn the ship over. Washington had them arrested and hauled to Cambridge.

Although he had misgivings at Glover's urging Washington decided to give Broughton a second chance. He ordered him to sail to the mouth of the St. Lawrence River and intercept supply vessels bound to Quebec. Broughton completely ignored his orders, made sail for Charlottetown on Prince Edward Island, landed and kidnapped two of the islands leading citizens. Washington was furious. He ordered Broughton to Cambridge. An eye witness described the scene when Broughton knocked on the door of Washington's headquarters. "[The general] met [him] on the steps of the door. He appeared not pleased." A few days later Broughton was cashiered. Exasperated by the behavior of these undisciplined miscreants Washington wrote to Congress, "The plague,

trouble and vexation I have had with the crews of the armed vessels, are inexpressible. I do not believe there is not on earth a more disorderly set.”

Despite this troubled launching at Boston Washington had learned the usefulness of a naval force. During the course of the siege of the town he commissioned seven more small vessels to prey upon the British. Altogether they captured 55 British ships bringing to the American camp an enormous quantity of cannon, muskets, uniforms, shot, and gunpowder.

News of the success of Washington’s schooner squadron encouraged naval minded members of Congress, mostly from New England and led by John Adams, to bring to the floor of Congress a motion that would establish a continental navy. The motion passed on October 13, 1775, henceforth recognized as the birthday of the American Navy.

In his first campaign Washington, the commander chosen for his military experience, had shown himself an astute observer of the importance of sea power. Aside from a brief youthful dalliance about becoming a midshipman in the Royal Navy and a voyage to the West Indies Washington had no experience at sea. But when there was no navy he created one. Using the broadest interpretation possible of his powers from Congress, he bought vessels, outfitted them and recruited crews. He had even commissioned captains to command them and instructed them on their missions. Congress’s actions on October 13 simply ratified what the Commander in Chief of the American Army had already done. He had fathered the navy.

From Boston Washington took his army to New York. Here the naval tide turned against him. Having awoken from its slumber the Royal Navy massed the greatest concentration of ships ever sent overseas at New York. Washington's forces were surrounded by water yet he had no naval force at his disposal. Admiral Lord Howe and his brother General Sir William Howe enjoyed undisputed control of waters around New York. With mobility on the water they chose the places for battle and it was only through their own ineptness that they failed to employ that advantage to bag the American army. Washington's daring crossing from Brooklyn and his subsequent escape into New Jersey were accomplished thanks to equal measures to the boldness of the American commander and British lassitude.

Washington and his army had come perilously close to ruin in 1776. British naval supremacy had almost destroyed them at New York. While the later American victories at Trenton and Princeton were remarkable they were tactical in scope. With their command of the sea the British held the strategic initiative. Washington could only respond to the enemy's movements. The years 1777-78 were particularly woeful for the Americans as the British captured Philadelphia, Savannah and Newport and continued to hold New York. At nearly every turn Washington had been baffled, hampered and perplexed by British movements on the water. The one bright spot in this somber picture was the American victory at Saratoga. That triumph, in one of the ironic twists of our Revolution was made possible by a naval battle fought 200 miles from the sea on Lake Champlain. In the fall of 1776 an American squadron commanded by Benedict Arnold met a British force at Valcour Island. Arnold's lake squadron lost the contest but by

challenging the British the Americans had traded space for time. Valcour Island delayed the British long enough that they had to put off their plans for an invasion until the following year 1777. Thus granting the Americans time to prepare and meet and defeat them at the battle of Saratoga.

News of the victory at Saratoga reverberated well in Paris. The French ached for revenge against the British for their humiliation in 1763. Since the beginning of the war they had been supplying the American army with considerable quantities of guns and munitions. But not ready to risk war with Britain, and uncertain that the Americans could carry off their revolution, they had sent their aid in great secrecy. Saratoga gave them confidence that the Americans could win. In February 1778 they became our allies.

France's entry into the Revolution turned the war on its head. What had begun as a family squabble was now a world war. No longer did the British enjoy the initiative at sea. To meet the threat of the French the British Admiralty acted to deploy squadrons to defend the home islands, possessions in the West Indies, Africa, and India. North America was now only one of many theaters of war. In the spring 1778 news arrived that a French naval force under Admiral d'Estaing was headed for New York. The specter of a French fleet descending on the American coast forced the British to consolidate their positions. Garrisons at Philadelphia and Newport were dependent upon supply by sea, and they were now dangerously exposed. The British had lost free use of the sea.

With energy and enthusiasm Washington seized the moment. He had already shown himself an able tactician. He was now the grand strategist and master of coalition warfare, a commander determined to use sea power to defeat the enemy.

D'Estaing's visit proved disappointing. Washington wanted desperately to return to the scene of the crime – New York. Having lost there because of the lack of naval power he envisioned returning with naval power. Alas, D'Estaing was not so keen and preferred instead to launch an attack on Newport. The Americans assembled a land force and awaited D'Estaing's fleet. After a brief indecisive encounter with a British force off Point Judith a summer storm swept down Narragansett Bay driving both squadrons seaward. After the storm passed D'Estaing, pleading that his ships needed repair, gave up the Newport attack and headed for the safety of Boston harbor. Washington was deeply disappointed, but he knew better than to openly criticize his ally. In the meantime through his trusted confidant Marquis de Lafayette he pressed the French to send another fleet with an army.

In 1779 D'Estaing returned with a fleet and soldiers to North America for a joint attack against Savannah, Georgia. He rendezvoused with an American force commanded by Benjamin Lincoln. To the embarrassment of Lincoln and D'Estaing Savannah was a repeat of Newport. The allied attack was repulsed with heavy losses.

In July 1780 affairs turned for the better when the Comte de Rochambeau arrived at Newport with 5500 soldiers and a powerful naval squadron. Within hours of learning of

the arrival of the French Washington dispatched Lafayette to Rochambeau with a plan for joint operations. “[I]n any operation” he wrote his French ally, “Naval superiority is to be considered a fundamental principle.”

Unfortunately, little was accomplished in 1780 as the French settled into the amiable environs of Newport while Washington remained encamped north of New York City.

On May 21, 1781 Washington and Rochambeau met at Wethersfield, Connecticut to discuss plans for the coming campaign. Once again Washington urged that New York be the target of a joint operation. Rochambeau agreed and both generals began preparations for the attack. One week after the Wethersfield meeting, however, astounding news arrived. Admiral De Grasse was in the West Indies with a powerful fleet and he wished to come north to assist Rochambeau and Washington. He would, he wrote, bring his entire fleet as well as a force of 3300 soldiers. He planned to be off the coast by mid July, but he would have to leave by mid October. Most importantly, he told the generals, he would not attack New York. He preferred to strike the enemy in Chesapeake Bay.

Washington knew as did De Grasse and Rochambeau, that a sizeable British army under General Cornwallis had assembled in northern Virginia. Several months earlier Washington had dispatched a small corps of Continentals under Lafayette to Virginia watch and harass the enemy.

Everything hinged on De Grasse. He was coming, but precisely when? In anticipation Rochambeau marched from Newport on June 6 and joined Washington at White Plains. For the moment the British believed that New York City was the target. General Clinton, the British commander, fearful of an attack on the city, ordered Cornwallis to retreat to the Virginia coast and rendezvous with a fleet being sent to bring troops back to New York.

On August 14 Washington and Rochambeau received the news they had been awaiting, De Grasse had arrived at the Chesapeake. The next 60 days was one of the most extraordinary periods in American history. In a series of quick and brilliant moves several thousand French and American troops left their lines north of New York City, marched south around the British without alerting them to their movements. Simultaneously, French ships took on board supplies and heavy siege guns at Newport and laid a course towards the Chesapeake. While the land and naval forces converged Lafayette was ordered to pin Cornwallis and not permit him to escape by any land route.

As the allied land forces converged De Grasse did his part. His fleet arrived and took up their position near the Chesapeake Capes. When Clinton finally recognized the trap that had been set in Virginia it was too late. On September 5 off the Virginia Capes De Grasse turned the British squadron back. Pressed on the land side, cut off by sea Cornwallis surrendered. The victory at Yorktown was an extraordinary example of the use of combined arms (army and navy) in coalition warfare. Not until WW II would American armed forces participate in similar campaigns.

Thanks to Washington, and his strategic sense of sea power, we secured our independence, but it took another half decade to form a nation. During those years we learned that our republic had been born into a hostile world from which a sea minded nation could not retreat.

In the Mediterranean the Barbary States, Morocco, Tunis, Algiers began to prey upon American ships. The weak Confederation government was powerless to defend our ships and sailors. From Paris the American minister Thomas Jefferson advised Congress that the situation was perilous. He warned that unless we had a navy our trade might be ruined by these corsairs. Weakness at sea would embolden even the “smallest powers in Europe [to] dictate to us.”

Jefferson’s advice went unheeded. Despite the fact that more American vessels were seized and additional American sailors were captured and left to rot in the prisons of North Africa, the Confederation Congress failed to act

The formation of the federal government offered new hope. When Washington took office on April 30, 1789 he was not unaware of America’s troubles abroad. In his notes for this first inaugural address he reminded his fellow citizens of their sea faring traditions. He noted the men in prison and the cargoes seized by the corsairs. He was confident, however, that the new nation would defend itself at sea. “[O]ur people,” he noted “have a natural genius for Naval affairs,” and so “It will be in our choice to train

our youths to such industrious and hardy professions as that they may grow into an unconquerable [naval] force.”

Yes, it was our choice, but unfortunately in the early days of the republic both the President and the Congress made the wrong choice. While Washington stood on the balcony of Federal Hall to take his oath of office nearly two dozen American seamen were languishing in the dungeons of the Dey of Algiers. Chained and beaten they lived in fear of their lives. When Jefferson asked the French foreign minister the Comte de Vergennes to intercede on behalf of the American prisoners Vergennes replied that there was little he could do, for only things that counted with the Algerines were “money and fear.”

The first President and the first Congress turned away from the plight of these terrified sailors pleading as their excuse that the infant republic had neither the money to ransom these unfortunates nor the resources to build a navy.

The North African corsairs were a petty naval nuisance that could be avoided but in the spring of 1793 the world erupted in an explosion that the new nation could ignore. France and England declared war.

In the face of this crisis Washington issued a Proclamation of Neutrality, but in a world at war neutrality was a hollow claim. Neither belligerent wished us well. Soon privateers and warships flying both flags were taking American ships. We were defenseless at sea.

While Washington and the Congress pondered neutrality from Portugal came urgent news. Algerine corsairs had passed the Straits of Gibraltar and were seizing American vessels in the Atlantic. The situation was so dangerous that David Humphreys the American minister in Lisbon expected that the corsairs would ravage “even the coasts of America.” Humphreys wrote to the President that circumstances made “a naval force indispensable.”

Humphreys’ letter caught a rising tide of American nationalism. Pride as well as the interests of commerce demanded that America arm at sea. Washington was convinced that action had to be taken. In his annual message of December 3, 1793, he told Congress bluntly: “If we desire to avoid insult, we must be able to repel it; if we desire to secure peace ... it must be known that we are at all times ready for war.” After receiving the President’s message the House went into secret session to debate the issue, and on January 2, 1794 by the narrowest of votes, 46 to 44, they approved three resolutions.

appropriate additional money for diplomatic expenses

provide a naval force

appoint a committee to devise a plan for the navy

Under the third resolution, nine men were appointed a select committee. Six of the members were pro navy Federalists, and of the three Republicans only one Nathaniel Macon from North Carolina was anti navy.

The committee worked quickly reported on January 20. According to the report, six warships would be sufficient to deal with the threat from Algiers, four frigates of forty four guns and two smaller ships of 36 guns each. The total cost was put at \$688,000 with an annual operating bill of \$250,000. Both figures, as the congressman from Virginia James Madison was quick to point out, were ridiculously low.

Eighteenth century navies were bipolar. They had two principal types of ships, large battleships (ships of the line) mounting 74 guns or more and smaller faster vessels carrying 36 guns called frigates. The unusually large size of the proposed 44's raised speculation that more was intended in the report than just meeting the Algerine threat. The suspicion was not misplaced, for these 44's were super frigates, more powerful than any other frigates afloat and able, under special conditions, to hold their own against larger ships of the line. Washington and his pro navy allies in the Congress had more in mind than simply chastising the Barbary corsairs.

On February 6 the House took the report under consideration and resolved to "go into a Committee on the state of the Union." The naval debate was underway.

The issue, whether or not to have a navy, split was along sectional lines, the north generally in favor and the south opposed. One southerner however was clearly in favor – the President. After nearly a month of debate the Washington revealed his hand by sending to the House a series of documents, including the letter from Humphreys,

supporting the creation of a navy. Upon reading these communications, there was, one congressman noted, “no alternative” but to have a navy.

Despite Washington’s efforts passage of a naval bill was not certain until supporters offered a small compromise. They agreed to insert a preamble stating that the purpose of the bill was to secure American commerce against the Barbary corsairs and that if peace was achieved with Algiers construction of the ships would cease. The bill passed the House 50 to 39 on March 10. Action was even speedier in the Senate where members voted approval on March 19. Washington signed the act on March 27.

Since Congress had yet to create a department of the navy the task of building and manning these new ships fell to the Secretary of War Washington’s old comrade in arms Henry Knox. Although Congress had stipulated the number of vessels and their size they had given the administration wide discretion. The President and Secretary could either buy merchant vessels and convert them or build new vessels. If the administration decided on new vessels they could determine who would design and build them as well as the location for their construction.

President Washington and Secretary Knox shared a naval vision. They were determined to launch a navy with warships that might not only scatter the corsairs but at the same time earn the respect of European powers and demonstrate to them the new republic’s firm resolve to defend its rights at sea. Buying lubberly merchantmen would not serve

their purpose. They would build new ships designed by a Philadelphia shipwright, Joshua Humphreys.

Washington and Knox knew Humphreys from the days of the Revolution. He had built and outfitted dozens of vessels for the American cause including one of the original Continental frigates *Randolph*. Humphreys presented a bold plan.

Humphreys told Knox that his frigates “would give us a superiority over any of the European frigates and would render all their frigates of little or no effect in a contest with us.” Humphreys never mentioned, nor did Knox or Washington remind him, that Congress had specifically ordered that the ships were to be used against the Algerine corsairs. The corsairs were forgotten. These warships had a nobler purpose. They would Knox wrote be ships “worthy of the national character.”

Knox took Humphreys’ plans to the President. It took Washington less than a day to respond. The President ordered that six frigates be constructed along the plans laid out by Humphreys, 4 of 44 guns, the super frigates, at Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Norfolk and two of 36 guns, conventional frigates, at Portsmouth, New Hampshire and Baltimore. All were to be built in private yards under government supervision.

Even in a nation that prided itself on its seafaring traditions this was ship building on a scale previously unimaginable. Never before had Americans built vessels as large. To add to the challenge Knox and Washington insisted that these frigates be constructed of

the best materials available. For their frames this meant using live oak, huge trees growing along the southern coast, and for their decks the best northern white pine would be cut. Miles of rigging, acres of canvas, and cannon cast strong enough to throw heavy shot were all required. By order of the Secretary of War and the President these materials were to be the very best. Timber, iron, cordage and canvas were delivered to the ports, workmen hired, keels laid, and names chosen.

What would these frigates be called? This the President must decide. The Secretary of War sent to him a list. It had a certain Anglophile ring to it. *Protector*, *Defender*, *Fortitude* and *Perseverance* were suggested. These were names drawn from the history of the Royal Navy. Washington discarded those and instead he ordered that the frigate at Portsmouth, New Hampshire would be *Congress*, for the body that authorized construction; Boston's super frigate would be christened *Constitution* in honor of the document she was built to defend. At New York *President* would be on the stern; Philadelphia's frigate would be *United States*; at Baltimore she would be *Constellation* to honor the flag; and in Norfolk the name would be *Chesapeake*, perhaps to honor Washington himself. This would be truly an American navy.

Despite delays, caused principally by the difficulty of cutting and transporting live oak, the frigates began to take ship, that is, until March 1796 when good news and bad news arrived.

On September 5, 1795 the United States and Algiers signed a treaty. The treaty was expensive and humiliating. We agreed to pay ransoms and bribes to the Dey of Algiers totaling more than a million dollars and to build and present to the Algerines a frigate – *Crescent*. In retrospect all this treaty accomplished was to prop up a system of blackmail, bribery and piracy that would in a short time come back to haunt us and with which we would eventually deal in a direct and effective manner. For the moment, however, no one seemed to care. The Senate ratified the treaty and the President signed it.

The Naval Act of 1794 had stipulated that if peace was secured with Algiers the President was required to halt construction on the frigates. Washington was unwilling to do this. A few days following the Treaty's ratification he informed the House and Senate that in his judgment suspending construction of the frigates would not be in the public interest and would indeed cause "derangement" and leave America defenseless. He asked the Congress to revise the legislation.

Washington's message exploded in the Congress. The real issue was now on the floor. Would America recognize its commercial interests? Engage with the world and defend itself at sea? The debate was stormy, but in the end a compromise was achieved, three of the frigates would be completed and three would remain on the stocks. The first of the completed frigates *United States* slid into the Delaware River on May 10, 1797. On

September 7 *Constellation* was launched at Baltimore and on October 21, 1797

Constitution made her entrance into Boston harbor where she remains today the oldest commissioned warship afloat in the world.

Within a short time these vessels would be tested in combat. They and their crews would not be found wanting. These “fir built frigates” were victorious against the French in the Quasi War; they defeated the Barbary States; and they would even gain laurels in battles against the Royal Navy in the War of 1812. Washington’s vision, Humphrey’s designs and brave American sailors proved the worth of a navy built to defend the Republic.

On December 7, 1796 Washington appeared before the Congress to deliver his eighth and last State of the Union Address. He spoke at length about America’s relations with other powers. “Neutrality.” He told the members, “is not a sufficient guard against the depredations of Nations at War.” He noted that “The protection of a naval force is indispensable,” and that “To secure respect to our flag requires a naval force.” We ought”, he said, “begin without delay, to provide materials for the building and equipping of Ships of War so that a future war may not find our commerce in the same unprotected state in which it was found by the present.”

Too often to justify an American retreat we read and hear Washington’s misquoted admonition from his Farewell Address about “entangling alliances.” (Two words by the way that he never used). Our first President was not an isolationist. Washington was a visionary and a realist. His vision of America was not nation remote and isolated. He saw

a powerful republic engaged with the world. But he was also a realist. We must be ready to defend ourselves in that world for “There can be no greater error to expect, or calculate upon real favors from Nation to Nation. Tis an illusion which experience must cure, which a just pride ought to discard.”

Not far from here John Paul Jones resides in great splendor in a crypt beneath the chapel of the United States Naval Academy. Many claim him to be the father of the American Navy. In Philadelphia in the quiet cemetery of St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Church lies John Barry. The first captain commissioned by Washington in the Federal Navy. He too is celebrated as the Father of the American Navy. Farther north beneath the Unitarian Church in Quincy Massachusetts rests John Adams. Recognizing his role in establishing the navy in the Revolution he is sometimes celebrated as the Father of the American Navy. It would seem that the Navy’s paternity is uncertain. No, this evening let me assure you that 21st century historical forensics has settled the issue. The DNA evidence is in. George Washington is the father of the United States Navy.

