

= USS Chesapeake (1799) =

Chesapeake was a 38 @-@ gun wooden @-@ hulled , three @-@ masted heavy frigate of the United States Navy . She was one of the original six frigates whose construction was authorized by the Naval Act of 1794 . Joshua Humphreys designed these frigates to be the young navy 's capital ships . Chesapeake was originally designed as a 44 @-@ gun frigate but construction delays , material shortages , and budget problems caused builder Josiah Fox to alter her design to 38 guns . Launched at the Gosport Navy Yard on 2 December 1799 , Chesapeake began her career during the Quasi @-@ War with France and saw service in the First Barbary War .

On 22 June 1807 she was fired upon by HMS Leopard of the Royal Navy for refusing to comply with a search for deserters . The event , now known as the Chesapeake ? Leopard Affair , angered the American populace and government and was a precipitating factor that led to the War of 1812 . As a result of the affair , Chesapeake 's commanding officer , James Barron , was court @-@ martialed and the United States instituted the Embargo Act of 1807 against Great Britain .

Early in the War of 1812 she made one patrol and captured five British merchant ships before returning . She was captured by HMS Shannon shortly after sailing from Boston , Massachusetts , on 1 June 1813 . The Royal Navy took her into their service as HMS Chesapeake , where she served until she was broken up and her timbers sold in 1820 ; they are now part of the Chesapeake Mill in Wickham , England .

= = Design and construction = =

American merchant vessels began to fall prey to Barbary Pirates , most notably from Algiers , in the Mediterranean during the 1790s . Congress responded with the Naval Act of 1794 . The Act provided funds for the construction of six frigates , and directed that the construction would continue unless and until the United States agreed to peace terms with Algiers .

Joshua Humphreys ' design was long on keel and narrow of beam (width) to allow for the mounting of very heavy guns . The design incorporated a diagonal scantling (rib) scheme to limit hogging (warping) and included extremely heavy planking . This gave the hull greater strength than those of more lightly built frigates . Since the fledgling United States could not match the numbers of ships of the European states , Humphreys designed his frigates to be able to overpower other frigates , but with the speed to escape from a ship of the line .

Originally designated as " Frigate D " , the ship remained unnamed for several years . Her keel was laid down in December 1795 at the Gosport Navy Yard in Norfolk , Virginia , where Josiah Fox had been appointed her naval constructor and Richard Dale as superintendent of construction . In March 1796 a peace accord was announced between the United States and Algiers and construction was suspended in accordance with the Naval Act of 1794 . The keel remained on blocks in the navy yard for two years .

The onset of the Quasi @-@ War with France in 1798 prompted Congress to authorize completion of " Frigate D " , and they approved resumption of the work on 16 July . When Fox returned to Norfolk he discovered a shortage of timber caused by its diversion from Norfolk to Baltimore in order to finish Constellation . He corresponded with Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert , who indicated a desire to expedite construction of the ship and reduce the overall cost . Fox , always an opponent of Humphreys 's large design , submitted new plans to Stoddert which called for utilizing the existing keel but reducing the overall dimensions substantially in length and partially of beam . Fox 's plans essentially proposed an entirely different design than originally planned by Humphreys . Secretary Stoddert approved the new design plans .

When construction finished , she had the smallest dimensions of the six frigates . A length of 152 @.@ 8 ft (46 @.@ 6 m) between perpendiculars and 41 @.@ 3 ft (12 @.@ 6 m) of beam contrasted with her closest sisters , Congress and Constellation , which were built to 164 ft (50 m) in length and 41 ft (12 m) of beam . The final cost of her construction was \$ 220 @,@ 677 ? the second @-@ least expensive frigate of the six . The least expensive was Congress at \$ 197 @,@ 246 .

During construction , a sloop named Chesapeake was launched on 20 June 1799 but was renamed Patapsco between 10 October and 14 November , apparently to free up the name Chesapeake for " Frigate D " . In communications between Fox and Stoddert , Fox repeatedly referred to her as Congress , further confusing matters , until he was informed by Stoddert the ship was to be named Chesapeake , after Chesapeake Bay . She was the only one of the six frigates not named by President George Washington , nor after a principle of the United States Constitution .

= = = Armament = = =

Chesapeake 's nominal rating is stated as either 36 or 38 guns . Originally designated as a 44 @-@ gun ship , her redesign by Fox led to a rerating , apparently based on her smaller dimensions when compared to Congress and Constellation . Joshua Humphreys may have rerated Chesapeake to 38 guns , or Secretary Stoddert rerated Congress and Constellation to 38 guns because they were larger than Chesapeake , which was rated to 36 guns . The most recent information on her rating is from the Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships , which states she was rerated " from 44 guns to 36 , eventually increased to 38 " . Her gun rating remained a matter of confusion throughout her career ; Fox used a 44 @-@ gun rating in his correspondence with Secretary Stoddert . In preparing for the War of 1812 Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton directed Captain Samuel Evans to recruit the number of crewmen required for a 44 @-@ gun ship . Hamilton was corrected by William Bainbridge in a letter stating , " There is a mistake in the crew ordered for the Chesapeake , as it equals in number the crews of our 44 @-@ gun frigates , whereas the Chesapeake is of the class of the Congress and Constellation . " Lastly , when sold for scrap by the Royal Navy in 1819 , she was rated as a 48 @-@ gun ship .

Gun ratings did not correspond to the actual number of guns a ship would carry . Chesapeake was noted as carrying 40 guns during her encounter with HMS Leopard and 50 guns during her engagement with HMS Shannon in 1813 . The 50 guns consisted of twenty @-@ eight 18 @-@ pounder (8 kg) long guns on the gun deck , fourteen on each side . This main battery was complemented by two long 12 @-@ pounders (5 @-@ 5 kg) , one long 18 @-@ pounder , eighteen 32 @-@ pounder (14 @-@ 5 kg) carronades , and one 12 @-@ pound carronade on the spar deck . Her broadside weight was 542 pounds (246 kg) .

The ships of this era had no permanent battery of guns ; guns were completely portable and were often exchanged between ships as situations warranted . Each commanding officer modified his vessel 's armaments to his liking while taking into consideration factors such as the overall tonnage of cargo , complement of personnel aboard , and planned routes to be sailed . Consequently , a vessel 's armament would change often during its career ; records of the changes were not generally kept .

= = Quasi @-@ War = =

Chesapeake was launched on 2 December 1799 during the undeclared Quasi @-@ War (1798 ? 1800) , which arose after the French navy seized American merchant ships . Her fitting @-@ out continued through May 1800 . In March Josiah Fox was reprimanded by Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert for continuing to work on Chesapeake while Congress , still awaiting completion , was fully manned with a crew drawing pay . Stoddert appointed Thomas Truxton to ensure that his directives concerning Congress were carried out .

Chesapeake first put to sea on 22 May commanded by Captain Samuel Barron and marked her departure from Norfolk with a 13 @-@ gun salute . Her first assignment was to carry currency from Charleston , South Carolina , to Philadelphia . On 6 June she joined a squadron patrolling off the southern coast of the United States and in the West Indies escorting American merchant ships .

Capturing the 16 @-@ gun French privateer La Jeune Creole on 1 January 1801 after a chase lasting 50 hours , she returned to Norfolk with her prize on 15 January . Chesapeake returned briefly to the West Indies in February , soon after a peace treaty was ratified with France . She returned to Norfolk and decommissioned on 26 February , subsequently being placed in reserve .

= = First Barbary War = =

During the Quasi @-@ War , the United States had paid tribute to the Barbary States to ensure that they would not seize or harass American merchant ships . In 1801 Yusuf Karamanli of Tripoli , dissatisfied with the amount of tribute in comparison to that paid to Algiers , demanded an immediate payment of \$ 250 @,@ 000 . Thomas Jefferson responded by sending a squadron of warships to protect American merchant ships in the Mediterranean and to pursue peace negotiations with the Barbary States . The first squadron was under the command of Richard Dale in President and the second was assigned to the command of Richard Valentine Morris in Chesapeake . Morris 's squadron eventually consisted of the vessels Constellation , New York , John Adams , Adams , and Enterprise . It took several months to prepare the vessels for sea ; they departed individually as they became ready .

Chesapeake departed from Hampton Roads on 27 April 1802 and arrived at Gibraltar on 25 May ; she immediately put in for repairs , as her main mast had split during the voyage . Morris remained at Gibraltar while awaiting word on the location of his squadron , as several ships had not reported in . On 22 July Adams arrived with belated orders for Morris , dated 20 April . Those orders were to " lay the whole squadron before Tripoli " and negotiate peace . Chesapeake and Enterprise departed Gibraltar on 17 August bound for Leghorn , while providing protection for a convoy of merchant ships that were bound for intermediate ports . Morris made several stops in various ports before finally arriving at Leghorn on 12 October , after which he sailed to Malta . Chesapeake undertook repairs of a rotted bowsprit . Chesapeake was still in port when John Adams arrived on 5 January 1803 with orders dated 23 October 1802 from Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith . These directed Chesapeake and Constellation to return to the United States ; Morris was to transfer his command to New York . Constellation sailed directly as ordered , but Morris retained Chesapeake at Malta , claiming that she was not in any condition to make an Atlantic voyage during the winter months .

Morris now had the ships New York , John Adams , and Enterprise gathered under him , while Adams was at Gibraltar . On 30 January Chesapeake and the squadron got underway for Tripoli , where Morris planned to burn Tripolitan ships in the harbor . Heavy gales made the approach to Tripoli difficult . Fearing Chesapeake would lose her masts from the strong winds , Morris returned to Malta on 10 February . With provisions for the ships running low and none available near Malta , Morris decided to abandon plans to blockade Tripoli and sailed the squadron back to Gibraltar for provisioning . They made stops at Tunis on 22 February and Algiers on 19 March . Chesapeake arrived at Gibraltar on 23 March , where Morris transferred his command to New York . Under James Barron , Chesapeake sailed for the United States on 7 April and she was placed in reserve at the Washington Navy Yard on 1 June .

Morris remained in the Mediterranean until September , when orders from Secretary Smith arrived suspending his command and instructing him to return to the United States . There he faced a Naval Board of Inquiry which found that he was censurable for " inactive and dilatory conduct of the squadron under his command " . He was dismissed from the navy in 1804 . Morris 's overall performance in the Mediterranean was particularly criticized for the state of affairs aboard Chesapeake and his inactions as a commander . His wife , young son , and housekeeper accompanied him on the voyage , during which Mrs. Morris gave birth to another son . Midshipman Henry Wadsworth wrote that he and the other midshipman referred to Mrs. Morris as the " Commodore " and believed she was the main reason behind Chesapeake remaining in port for months at a time . Consul William Eaton reported to Secretary Smith that Morris and his squadron spent more time in port sightseeing and doing little but " dance and wench " than blockading Tripoli .

= = Chesapeake ? Leopard Affair = =

In January 1807 Master Commandant Charles Gordon was appointed Chesapeake 's commanding officer (Captain) . He was ordered to prepare her for patrol and convoy duty in the Mediterranean

to relieve her sister ship Constitution , which had been on duty there since 1803 . James Barron was appointed overall commander of the squadron as its Commodore . Chesapeake was in much disarray from her multi @-@ year period of inactivity and many months were required for repairs , provisioning , and recruitment of personnel . Lieutenant Arthur Sinclair was tasked with the recruiting . Among those chosen were three sailors who had deserted from HMS Melampus . The British ambassador to the United States requested the return of the sailors . Barron found that , although they were indeed from Melampus , they had been impressed into Royal Navy service from the beginning . He therefore refused to release them back to Melampus and nothing further was communicated on the subject .

In early June Chesapeake departed the Washington Navy Yard for Norfolk , Virginia , where she completed provisioning and loading armaments . Captain Gordon informed Barron on the 19th that Chesapeake was ready for sea and they departed on 22 June armed with 40 guns . At the same time , a British squadron consisting of HMS Melampus , Bellona , and Leopard (a 50 @-@ gun fourth @-@ rate) were lying off the port of Norfolk blockading two French ships there . As Chesapeake departed , the squadron ships began signaling each other and Leopard got under way preceding Chesapeake to sea .

After sailing for some hours , Leopard , commanded by Captain Salusbury Pryce Humphreys , approached Chesapeake and hailed a request to deliver dispatches to England , a customary request of the time . When a British lieutenant arrived by boat he handed Barron an order , given by Vice @-@ Admiral George Berkeley of the Royal Navy , which instructed the British ships to stop and board Chesapeake to search for deserters . Barron refused to allow this search , and as the lieutenant returned to Leopard Barron ordered the crew to general quarters . Shortly afterward Leopard hailed Chesapeake ; Barron could not understand the message . Leopard fired a shot across the bow , followed by a broadside , at Chesapeake . For fifteen minutes , while Chesapeake attempted to arm herself , Leopard continued to fire broadside after broadside until Barron struck his colors . Chesapeake only managed to fire one retaliatory shot after hot coals from the galley were brought on deck to ignite the cannon . The British boarded Chesapeake and carried off four crewmen , declining Barron 's offer that Chesapeake be taken as a prize of war . Chesapeake had three sailors killed and Barron was among the 18 wounded .

Word of the incident spread quickly upon Chesapeake 's return to Norfolk , where the British squadron that included Leopard was provisioning . Mobs of angry citizens destroyed two hundred water casks destined for the squadron and nearly killed a British lieutenant before local authorities intervened . President Jefferson recalled all US warships from the Mediterranean and issued a proclamation : all British warships were banned from entering US ports and those already in port were to depart . The incident eventually led to the Embargo Act of 1807 .

Chesapeake was completely unprepared to defend herself during the incident . None of her guns were primed for operation and the spar deck was filled with materials that were not properly stowed in the cargo hold . A court @-@ martial was convened for Barron and Captain Gordon , as well as Lieutenant Hall of the Marines . Barron was found guilty of " neglecting on the probability of an engagement to clear his Ship for action " and suspended from the navy for five years . Gordon and Hall were privately reprimanded , and the ship 's gunner was discharged from the navy .

= = War of 1812 = =

After the heavy damage inflicted by Leopard , Chesapeake returned to Norfolk for repairs . Under the command of Stephen Decatur , she made patrols off the New England coast enforcing the laws of the Embargo Act throughout 1809 .

The Chesapeake ? Leopard Affair , and later the Little Belt Affair , contributed to the United States ' decision to declare war on Britain on 18 June 1812 . Chesapeake , under the command of Captain Samuel Evans , was prepared for duty in the Atlantic . Beginning on 13 December , she ranged from Madeira and traveled clockwise to the Cape Verde Islands and South America , and then back to Boston . She captured six ships as prizes : the British ships Volunteer , Liverpool Hero , Earl Percy , and Ellen ; the brig Julia , an American ship trading under a British license ; and Valeria , an

American ship recaptured from British privateers . During the cruise she was chased by an unknown British ship @-@ of @-@ the @-@ line and frigate but , after a passing storm squall , the two pursuing ships were gone the next morning . The cargo of Volunteer , 40 tons of pig iron and copper , were sold for \$ 185 @,@ 000 . Earl Percy never made it back to port as she ran aground off the coast of Long Island , and Liverpool Hero was burned as she was considered leaky . Chesapeake 's total monetary damage to British shipping was \$ 235 @,@ 675 . She returned to Boston on 9 April 1813 for refitting .

Captain Evans , now in poor health , requested relief of command . Captain James Lawrence , late of the Hornet and her victory over HMS Peacock , took command of Chesapeake on 20 May . Affairs of the ship were in poor condition . The term of enlistment for many of the crew had expired and they were daily leaving the ship . Those who remained were disgruntled and approaching mutiny , as the prize money they were owed from her previous cruise was held up in court . Lawrence paid out the prize money from his own pocket in order to appease them . Some sailors from Constitution joined Chesapeake and they filled the crew along with sailors of several nations .

Meanwhile , Captain Philip Broke and HMS Shannon , a 38 @-@ gun frigate , were patrolling off the port of Boston on blockade duty . Shannon had been under the command of Broke since 1806 and , under his direction , the crew held daily gun and weapon drills lasting up to three hours . Crew members who hit their bullseye were awarded a pound (454 g) of tobacco for their good marksmanship . In this regard Chesapeake , with her new and inexperienced crew , was greatly inferior .

= = = Chesapeake vs Shannon = = =

Lawrence , advised that Shannon had moved in closer to Boston , began preparations to sail on the evening of 31 May . The next morning Broke wrote a challenge to Lawrence and dispatched it to Chesapeake ; it did not arrive before Lawrence set out to meet Shannon on his own accord .

Leaving port with a broad white flag bearing the motto " Free Trade and Sailors ' Rights " , Chesapeake met with Shannon near 5 pm that afternoon . During six minutes of firing , each ship managed two full broadsides . Chesapeake 's first broadside was fired while the ship was heeling , causing most hits on Shannon to strike the water or waterline causing little damage to Shannon although carronade fire caused serious damage to Shannon 's rigging . A second round of fire was more effective , landing hits on Shannon ' s 12 pounder shot locker . Chesapeake ' s 32 lb carronades punished Shannon 's forecastle , killing three men , wounding others and disabling Shannon ' s nine pounder bow gun . However Chesapeake suffered far more heavily in the exchange as accurate British fire caused heavy losses among American gun crews and crippling losses to the men and officers on Chesapeake 's quarterdeck . A succession of helmsmen were killed and her wheel itself was destroyed . At the same time , her foretopsail halyard was shot away causing the ship to lose maneuverability .

Unable to maneuver , Chesapeake " luffed up " and her port stern quarter caught against the side of the Shannon amidships and the two ships were lashed together . Confusion and disarray reigned on the deck of Chesapeake ; Captain Lawrence tried rallying a party to board Shannon , but the bugler failed to sound the call . At this point a shot from a sniper mortally wounded Lawrence ; as his men carried him below , he gave his last order : " Don 't give up the ship . Fight her till she sinks . "

Captain Broke boarded Chesapeake at the head of a party of 20 men . They met little resistance from Chesapeake 's crew , most of whom had run below deck . The only resistance from Chesapeake came from her contingent of marines . The British soon overwhelmed them ; only nine escaped injury out of 44 . Captain Broke was severely injured in the fighting on the forecastle , being struck in the head with a sword . Soon after , Shannon 's crew pulled down Chesapeake 's flag . Only 15 minutes had elapsed from the first exchange of gunfire to the capture .

Reports on the number of killed and wounded aboard Chesapeake during the battle vary widely . Broke 's after @-@ action report from 6 July states 70 killed and 100 wounded . Contemporary sources place the number between 48 ? 61 killed and 85 ? 99 wounded . Discrepancies in the number of killed and wounded are possibly caused by the addition of sailors who died of their

wounds in the ensuing days after the battle . The counts for Shannon have fewer discrepancies with 23 killed ; 56 wounded . Despite his serious injuries , Broke ordered repairs to both ships and they proceeded on to Halifax , Nova Scotia . Captain Lawrence died en route and was buried in Halifax with military honors . The British imprisoned his crew . Captain Broke survived his wounds and was later made a baronet .

= = Royal Navy service and legacy = =

The Royal Navy repaired Chesapeake and took her into service as HMS Chesapeake . She served on the Halifax station under the command of Alexander Dixie through 1814 , and under the command of George Burdett she sailed to Plymouth , England , for repairs in October of that year . Afterward she made a voyage to Cape Town , South Africa , until learning of the peace treaty with the United States in May 1815 . Later that year a report was made concerning Chesapeake 's performance in British service . Her captain observed that she was strongly constructed , but criticized the excessive overhang of the stern . He concluded that she was not a suitable ship to serve as a model for copying . Her speed under sail was not particularly impressive : 9 kn (17 km / h ; 10 mph) close @-@ hauled and 11 kn (20 km / h ; 13 mph) large . In July 1819 the Commissioners of the Royal Navy put her up for sale at Plymouth . A Portsmouth timber merchant purchased her for £ 500 ; he dismantled the ship and sold her timbers to Joshua Holmes for £ 3 @, @ 450 . Eventually her timbers became part of the Chesapeake Mill in Wickham , Hampshire , England , where one can still view them . In 1996 a timber fragment from the Chesapeake Mill was returned to the United States . It is on display at the Hampton Roads Naval Museum .

Almost from her beginnings , Chesapeake was considered an " unlucky ship " , the " runt of the litter " to the superstitious sailors of the 19th century , and the product of a disagreement between Humphreys and Fox . Her ill @-@ fated encounters with HMS Leopard and Shannon , the courts @-@ martial of two of her captains , and the accidental deaths of several crewmen led many to believe she was cursed .

Arguments defending both Humphreys and Fox regarding their long @-@ standing disagreements over the design of the frigates carried on for years . Humphreys disowned any credit for Fox 's redesign of Chesapeake . In 1827 he wrote , " She [Chesapeake] spoke his [Fox 's] talents . Which I leave the Commanders of that ship to estimate by her qualifications . "

Lawrence 's last command of " Don 't give up the ship ! " became a rallying cry for the US Navy . Oliver Hazard Perry , in command of naval forces on Lake Erie during September 1813 , named his flagship Lawrence , which flew a broad blue flag bearing the words " Dont give up the ship ! " The phrase is still used in the US Navy today .

Chesapeake 's blood @-@ stained and bullet @-@ ridden American flag was sold at auction in London in 1908 . Purchased by William Waldorf Astor , it now resides in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich , England , along with her signal book . The Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in Halifax , Nova Scotia , holds several artifacts from the battle including the mess kettle , and an officers chest from Chesapeake . One of the 18 pounder guns from Chesapeake is mounted beside Province House , the Nova Scotia Legislature .