



Who was John Barry?

Not many people know Commodore John Barry's story. Did you know that he lived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania but he was born in Ireland in 1745? Why is he important to America? He is important because he fought bravely to help our country win independence from England and its King. He is known as "The Father of the American Navy."

Our Story Begins...

In 1766, at age 21, Barry went to sea as a merchant ship captain for a Philadelphia trading company. His ship, The Barbadoes, sailed out of Philadelphia, his home port.

Sailing back and forth between Philadelphia and the islands of the West Indies, Barry became a great ship's captain. Merchant ships carried supplies back and forth to different places. The owners of the ships made money from selling these goods. The owners shared the money with the captain and crew of the ships. In the West Indies trade, John Barry became famous for never losing a single ship from storms or pirates.

For nine years, he learned all he could and became an experienced captain. When Barry arrived back in Philadelphia, the colonies were at war with Great Britain.

In 1775, when the American colonies and the Continental Congress needed to build a navy to protect itself from the powerful ships of the King, Barry volunteered to help.

How the Navy Was Born

As our American colonies fought to win independence from England (which is also known as Great Britain) during the Revolutionary War, we had very few ships to protect us.

Because of the war, there was very little time to build ships, and after most ships were built, they were captured or destroyed by the British.

John Barry was given the very important task of putting together our navy. It was his job to turn merchant ships into ships that could fight for our country.

When his work was finished, John Barry was made a Captain in the Continental Navy. He was also put in command of his first ship, the *Lexington*.

In 1776, during his first battle at sea, Barry's *Lexington* fought and won a battle with a British ship called the *Edward*. He defeated the English in one hour. It gave our new country hope that we could defeat the British.

Late in 1776, Barry was given command of another ship that was being built called the *Effingham*. But while waiting for his new ship to be ready, Barry led a group of sailors who helped General George Washington's army and fought at the battle of Princeton in New Jersey.



In November of 1777, as the English were making their way up the Delaware River toward Philadelphia, Barry was forced to sink the *Effingham* so the English could not use it for themselves in battle.

But even though Captain Barry no longer had a ship, he was still able to carry out a bold adventure using the only boats he could find – small barges that could sail down the Delaware River and hide.

Barry's mission was to harass and prevent enemy shipping in the Lower Delaware River, and fight off whatever came his way.

And Barry did just that!

John Barry had a plan. He led his men in small boats. They attacked English supply ships, captured the English crews, and made these ships part of our new American fleet.

Back to the Sea

In September of 1778, Barry was assigned to a ship called the *Raleigh*. Unfortunately, shortly after leaving the port of Boston, the *Raleigh* was chased by powerful English ships and trapped off the coast of Maine. Barry lost this ship when one of his officers surrendered it to the British while Barry was gone. He was taking his wounded crew to a village on the coast of Maine using longboats. Many of Barry's crew were captured and the *Raleigh* became an English ship.

A Ferocious Fight

Barry's most famous naval battle happened off the coast of Newfoundland on May 29, 1781. (Newfoundland is a country which is now part of Canada and is located north of the United States). Barry's ship, the *Alliance*, fought two smaller British ships. Barry's cannons fired first and struck one of the English ships.

Unfortunately, his ship couldn't move in the water due to a lack of wind for the sails. A large sailing ship needs a lot of wind to turn around so it can point its cannons at the enemy.

The two smaller British ships had oars and were able to row and move close to the *Alliance*. They shot and badly damaged Barry's ship. His crew fought bravely until Barry was wounded. Barry remained on deck until he passed out from losing blood. He was carried below deck by his men.

As the battle increased, the *Alliance's* flag was shot away. Barry's second in command wanted to surrender. But Barry refused and would not give up.

Suddenly the wind began to blow and the *Alliance* was able to turn and fire its cannons at the other ships. The terrible battle lasted nearly four hours and the British lost two ships. Eleven men died, including one of the two captains, and 25 were wounded.



Games and Activities for Kids

JOHN BARRY

FATHER OF THE AMERICAN NAVY



After the War

After the Revolutionary War, a navy was no longer important to the new United States government. So Barry went back to sailing merchant ships and even made voyage to China.

In 1794, under President George Washington's orders, the Navy was made a permanent protector of the country in case of future wars. President Washington selected John Barry to be senior Captain of the U.S. Navy.

The Father of the Navy

On February 22, 1797, George Washington called Barry to the President's Mansion which was then in Philadelphia. Barry's job was to supervise the building of the United States Navy's new fleet. This fleet would have new ships that included his own flagship, the *United States*.

The United States was christened and slid into the Delaware River on May 10, 1797.

Barry held the title of Commodore and served as commander of the entire United States fleet under Presidents Washington, Adams and Jefferson. He commanded all American ships during the naval war with France (1798-1800) and personally captured several French merchant ships.

Barry remained head of the Navy until his death on September 13, 1803. Commodore John Barry received special honors in a full military burial in Old St. Mary's Churchyard in Philadelphia.

Commodore John Barry's accomplishments are celebrated each year. In 1992, the United States Congress officially designated every September 13th as "Commodore John Barry Day."

Outside of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, there are only two American patriots honored with a statue. At the front entrance stands the figure of our first President, General George Washington, commander of our country's army.

At the rear entrance, a statue of Commodore John Barry, *Father of the American Navy*, stands and points to the Delaware River, the place where he fought for our country's freedom from England.

In that very same direction is a bridge named in honor of Commodore John Barry.

The Commodore Barry Bridge opened in 1974 and crosses the Delaware River. It joins the states of Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

If Commodore John Barry was here today, he would see a strong and tall bridge that crosses the river he knew so well.

(What do you think he would say?)



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