

Navy and Marines vs. Piracy, Africa, 1843

The Barbary Wars of 1801-18045 are perhaps the best known US action launched to put down piracy on the high seas. Less known were landings staged by the Africa Squadron in 1843. Assembled by Secretary of the Navy Abel P. Upshur to help enforce the Anglo-American Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842, the Africa Squadron consisted of the *Decatur*, *Porpoise*, *Saratoga*, and *Macedonian*, under the command of Commodore Matthew C. Perry. Although principally responsible for enforcing the ban on the slave trade, the squadron was also tasked with investigating and punishing piratical actions against US merchant ships off the West African coast.

During the fall and winter of 1843, Commodore Perry, accompanied by detachments of Marines, made several landings on the West African coast, including at the growing colony of Liberia. During these landings, Perry met with local tribal kings and the President of Liberia, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, in order to ascertain which tribes were responsible for the murder of two American crewmen aboard the US ship *Edward Burley* and of the entire crew of the *Mary Carver*. Upon hearing accusations that the village of Little Berebee was responsible, Perry met with the village's leader Ben Krako on December 13, 1843. Considered violent and dangerous by other local chiefs, Perry's challenge to Krako received general support amongst the region's local leaders. When Krako claimed that the captain of the *Mary Carver* had provoked retribution, Perry declared the explanation outrageous. During the confrontation, a shot rang out, leading to a general altercation between Marines and tribesmen. Perry captured Krako, who was mortally wounded in the exchange. In a punitive action, Marines burned down Little Berebee.

Perry proceeded to burn down additional villages as a punitive demonstration against future acts of piracy. Men were ordered to destroy property but to spare lives. Perry also formulated a series of treaties with coastal tribes that successfully ended the threat to US merchants in the region. The Navy-Marine African landings in 1843 maximized American visibility and protected American commercial interests in the region. The expedition also removed one of the chief organizers of piracy on the West African coast.

Nicholas J. Schlosser, USMC HD