

## John Rodgers (1773 – 1 Aug 1838)

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**Rodgers, John.** Died Senior Officer of United States Navy after 41 years of brilliant and important service. Born Maryland, fought in the naval war with France as first lieutenant of the *Constellation*; promoted captain 1799; fought against Barbary pirates (1802-1806) and in the War of 1812. President of Board of Navy Commissioners.



*The National Intelligencer, August 4, 1838*

### **General Naval Order**

As a mark of respect to the memory of Commodore John Rodgers, late senior officer of the Navy of the United States, who died in Philadelphia on the 1st inst., the flags of the Navy Yards, stations, and vessels of the United States Navy are to be hoisted half-mast, and thirteen minute guns fired at noon on the day after the receipt of this order.

Officers of the Navy and Marine Corps are to wear crape for thirty days.

J.K. Paulding

Navy Department, August 3, 1838

*The National Intelligencer, Monday, August 6, 1838*

### **The Late Commodore Rodgers**

The remains of this distinguished veteran officer of the Navy were not brought to this city for interment, as had been expected by his friends here, but were committed to the tomb in Christ Church burying-ground, Philadelphia.

The funeral took place on Friday afternoon from the residence of Commodore Biddle. It was attended by many officers, naval, military and civil, and was escorted in procession by a detachment of Marines, and a number of the uniformed companies of the city, ordered out on the occasion by General Prevost. The pall was borne by officers, chiefly of the Navy, among whom were Commodores Stewart and Biddle. The funeral service was performed by the Rev. Dr. Tyno. During the movement of the procession, minute guns were fired at the Navy Yard; and after the interment a volley was fired over the grave by the Marines.

Having thus followed the mortal remains of this brave officer to the bourn appointed for all the living, the occasion seems fit to recite the leading incidents of his active public life, which is attempted in the following hasty sketch:

Commodore John Rodgers entered the Navy as a lieutenant in the year 179. He was 1st lieutenant of the *Constellation* in the action with the *Insurgent* which resulted in her capture. His zeal in performing his duty on the occasion, and complying strictly with the orders of his commander, (Commodore Truxton) was, in Commodore T.'s language, "not to be surpassed." After the action the command of the *Insurgent* was conferred upon him.

With Midshipman D. Porter (the present commodore) and 11 men, he took possession of the prize, and commenced removing her crew to the *Constellation*; but, before this could be done the ships were

separated in a heavy gale of wind, and 173 prisoners were left on board to be guarded by Lieutenant Rodgers and his handful of men, whose situation was rendered peculiarly perilous by the circumstance of there being no handcuffs or shackles on board to secure the prisoners, who manifested a disposition to retake the prize. The energy of Lieut. Rodgers, assisted by the gallant Midshipman Porter, conducted the prize safely into St. Kitts.

Returning to the United States, Lieut. Rodgers was commissioned a Captain in the Navy, in consideration of highly meritorious conduct and known qualifications. He was appointed to command the Sloop of War Maryland, in which vessel he cruised in the West Indies for many months, rendering important services. In 1801, he sailed in the Maryland for France, with Mr. Dawson, sent as a diplomatic messenger to that Court.

In 1802, he was appointed to the command of the John Adams – attached to the Mediterranean squadron – destroyed the Meshouda of 22 guns, “the largest cruiser belonging to Tripoli,” and performed other valuable services.

In 1804, he was appointed to the Frigate Congress, and proceeded to the Mediterranean as part of a squadron of vessels, under the command of Commodore Samuel Barron, sent thither against Tripoli.

From Comm. Barron’s extreme ill health, he resigned the command of the squadron in May, 1805, to Comm. Rodgers, whose decisive conduct soon disposed the Bashaw of Tripoli to make peace with us, and in less than two months after the command devolved upon him a treaty of peace was concluded with that Power, on terms dictated by him and Colonel Lear.

In 1812, the command of a squadron was given to him. He dashed into the European seas, made a number of captures, most of which he from necessity destroyed, returning triumphant after an absence of more than three months. At the time he sailed, a number of the enemy’s vessels were on our coast, greatly exceeding the Commodore’s squadron in force. These he successfully evaded, and, by drawing them off in pursuit of him, enabled a great number of our merchant vessels, with valuable cargoes, to return in safety to our ports. One of the effects of this cruise was to save millions to our merchants and to our Government.

When the British army marched upon Baltimore, Commodore Rodgers acted a distinguished part in the defense of that city. Many believe that Baltimore would have been surrendered but for the seasonable aid of the force under his command.

After the war, he was appointed Commissioner of the Navy, and presided over that Board for several years. He was mainly instrumental in making regulations which have conduced to the economy of the naval service. He was offered the appointment of Secretary of the Navy, but declined it. Having acted as President of the Board of Navy Commissioners about ten years ago, the President invited him to take command of the Mediterranean squadron, mentioning considerations, inducing him to do so, highly honorable to the Commodore. He accepted, and his flag was hoisted on board the North Carolina ship of the line of which D.T. Patterson, Esq. Was appointed Captain.

He cruised in the Mediterranean seas nearly three years. He had much intercourse with the commanders of other naval Powers, and was held by them in high estimation. The ship was particularly distinguished for her fine condition at all times, and the high state of discipline maintained on board. The Commodore, his accomplished Captain, and this noble specimen of American naval architecture, were objects of universal admiration. Returning to the United States, he was again appointed President of the Board of Navy Commissioners, and continued to discharge with great fidelity and zeal the arduous duties of that station, till his constitution was literally worn out, and his mind exhausted, in the service. He then retired—made a trip to England in the hope of recovering his health, and was there received with those kind affections which were gratefully remembered till his last moments.

Of his personal character, it may be added, that, though of quick temper, he was noble and generous in his disposition. He was a Patriot in reality. Though stern in his appearance, he was particularly distinguished for his humanity. The story of his noble and successful exertions to save two

young ladies from the massacre at Francois—his sublime efforts to rescue a poor old negro woman floating upon a cake of ice down the Susquehanna, which were also crowned with success, must be told as characteristic incidents of his life, when these brief outlines of his character shall be filled up by faithful History.

### *Who's Who In the Military*

Born near the present Havre de Grace, Maryland in 1773, Rodgers was the son of John Rodgers, a Scotsman who had emigrated to America about 1760 and who, after serving as a colonel of militia in the Revolution, founded one of the most celebrated naval families in U.S. history. After spending some 11 years in the merchant service the younger Rodgers entered the navy as second lieutenant aboard the *Constellation* in March 1798 and in June went to sea on her under the command of Capt. Thomas Truxton. He served as executive officer of the ship during her victorious engagement with the *Insurgente* on February 9, 1799. He was rewarded by being promoted the next month to captain, the first lieutenant to be raised to this rank in the newly reorganized United States navy. After a period of routine duty and a leave of absence he returned to active service in 1802, commanding the *John Adams* in the squadron sent out under Commodore Richard V. Morris to reinforce the blockade of Tripoli. In May 1803 he captured the *Mashuda* attempting to run the blockade. In June 1803 he was briefly acting commander of the squadron after the departure of Morris and before the arrival of Commodore Edward Preble. He returned home in December 1803 but rejoined the Tripolitan squadron in the summer of 1804 in command of the *Congress*. In May 1805 he succeeded Commodore James Barron in command of the squadron, and in June he completed a treaty with Tripoli abolishing the payment of tribute. In September Rodgers exacted a similar agreement from the bey of Tunis and then returned home. From July 1807 to February 1809 he commanded the gunboat flotilla and the naval station at New York, and he was then transferred to command of the Home Squadron. On May 16, 1811, while cruising off Cape Henry aboard the frigate "*President*," he engaged what proved after a 15-minute fight to be the smaller British sloop "*Little Belt*" and inflicted heavy damage and many casualties. The action, coming after the "*Chesapeake-Leopard*" affair, was commended by his superiors and made him a popular hero. During the War of 1812 he was the ranking active officer of the navy, and again he performed effectively, particularly against British merchant shipping. Aboard his flagship "*President*" he commanded squadron patrols sweeping the Atlantic from the Indies to the Cape Verdes, making four such cruises before the end of war. In 1815 he was chosen by President James Madison to head the newly established Board of Naval Commissioners (the other commissioners being Commodores Isaac Hull and David Porter). He retained the post until 1837, except for the period 1824-1827, when he was again on sea duty in command of the Mediterranean Squadron from aboard the "*North Carolina*." He was senior officer of the navy from 1821, and in 1823 he served for a short period as secretary of the navy. He resigned as a naval commissioner in May 1837 and died in Philadelphia on August 1, 1838. His younger brother, George Washington Rodgers (1787-1832), was also a naval officer.

*Will of John Rodgers, Capt. In the U.S. Navy of Washington, D.C. (dtd. Sept. 29, 1823, probated Aug. 14, 1838, Will Book 5)*

To wife, Mineva Rodgers, all property and debts; due the [Mr.] Duvall's at N.Y., about \$236; Mr. Burnett, of Georgetown, \$15; small sum to Mr. Bacon, grocer; small sum to Mr. Jones, grocer; small sum to Mr. Gunton, apothecary; small sum to Mr. Cana, grocer, small sum to Mr. Prout, storekeeper; Dr. Causin, a small sum.

Exrs.: Minerva Rodgers, wife

Wits.: Isaac Chauncey; Charles W. Goldsborough; C. Schwartz

*The National Intelligencer, April 12, 1848*

*To the Editors*

Gentlemen: The following extract from the Baltimore American is a very modest Obituary of a gallant young Officer, as much mourned by his companions in arms as any of our fallen heroes in this unhappy war. It is enclosed to you with the request that you will afford it a place in the National Intelligencer in honor of a brave youth who was the very idol of his corps. His friends have been greatly touched by Baltimore hospitality, which they met with in their melancholy journey; and certainly such sympathy does so much honor to human character that it should be held up as an example. S.

"The remains of Lieut. Alexander Perry Rodgers, of the 4th Infantry, son of the late Commodore John Rodgers, of the Navy, arrived yesterday morning from Norfolk, and were transferred, under a guard of honor, to the depot on Pratt street.

"Lieut. Rodgers was in his 21st year, and had just graduated at West Point when he was ordered to join Gen. Scott's column in Mexico. He was engaged at the siege of Vera Cruz, and in the battles of Cerro Gordo, Contreras, Molino del Rey, Churubusco, and Chapultepec. In the last of these engagements he commanded a company in the storming party, until he was killed by a ball through the forehead, when within ten feet of the batteries. He was the officer referred to with so much feeling in Mr. Kendall's account of this battle, as so 'beautiful in death,' with a smile of triumph on his face, and his sword so firmly clenched that it was difficult to remove it from his grasp. His remains were brought from Mexico by the United States ship Germantown, and they are under the charge of his brother, Lieut. C.R.P. Rodgers, of the Navy, to their final destination in the family vault at New London.

"The friends of the deceased beg leave to make their public acknowledgments to Mr. Jacob I. Cohen, Vice President of the Philadelphia Railroad Company at this point, and to Mr. Robert A. Taylor, and Mr. Falls, of the Baltimore Steampacket Company, for their courtesy and liberality in affording free transportation to the remains of a gallant officer. Their warm thanks are also tendered to Messrs. John Stewart & Son, who with great public spirit volunteered a hearse and their personal services on this occasion."