

Topic Page: [Decatur, Stephen \(1779 – 1820\)](#)

Definition: **Decatur, Stephen** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

American naval officer. He commanded five different privateer vessels during the American Revolution and became a captain in the US Navy in 1798. He commanded the USS *Delaware* during the undeclared war with France.

He was born in Newport, Rhode Island and was the father of Stephen Decatur (1779–1820).

Summary Article: **Decatur, Stephen**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(dĕkā'tĕr), 1779–1820, American naval officer, b. Sinepuxent, near Berlin, Md.; son of a naval officer, Stephen Decatur. After joining the U.S. navy in 1798, he rose to fame in the Tripolitan War. In 1804 he and his men stole into Tripoli harbor and destroyed the captured U.S. frigate *Philadelphia*. This daring exploit won Decatur promotion to captain. He helped in the bombardment of Tripoli and, after peace was concluded (1805), negotiated successfully with the bey of Tunis. In 1808 he was one of the judges at the court-martial of James Barron; thereafter the two men were enemies. In the War of 1812 Decatur commanded three vessels, with the *United States* as his flagship. On Oct. 25, 1812, the *United States* met and captured the British frigate *Macedonian*. Afterward the British blockade held him powerless until Jan., 1815. Then (unaware that the war had ended) he put to sea in the *President*, outran three enemy ships and defeated the fourth, the *Endymion*, but the battle delayed him and he was forced to surrender to the other pursuers. In the so-called Algerine War in 1815 he used his squadron with vigor to force the dey of Algiers to sign the treaty that ended American tribute to Algeria. As one of the three navy commissioners (1815–20), he was powerful in naval affairs. His opposition to reinstating the unfortunate and disgraced James Barron led to bitter words. Barron challenged him, and in the ensuing duel Decatur was mortally wounded at Bladensburg, Md., on Mar. 22, 1820. Known for his reckless bravery and stubborn patriotism, he is also remembered for the toast, "Our country! In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be in the right; but our country, right or wrong!"

See biographies by C. T. Brady (1900), C. L. Lewis (1937, repr. 1971) and H. Nicolay (1942).

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