

Naval committee established by Congress, 1775

On October 30, 1775, the Continental Congress appoints seven members to serve on an administrative naval committee tasked with the acquisition, outfitting and manning of a naval fleet to be used in defense against the British. Almost two weeks earlier, on October 13, 1775, Congress had authorized the construction and arming of vessels for the country's first navy.

Members of the first naval committee included some of the most influential members of the Continental Congress and several "founding fathers," including John Adams, Joseph Hewes, John Langdon, Richard Henry Lee, Silas Deane and Stephen Hopkins, the committee's chairman.

On December 22, Esek Hopkins, Stephen's brother, was appointed the first commander in chief of the Continental Navy. Congress also named four captains to the new service: Dudley Saltonstall, Abraham Whipple, Nicholas Biddle and John Burrows Hopkins. Their respective vessels, the 24-gun frigates Alfred and Columbus, and the 14-gun brigs Andrew Doria and Cabot, as well as three schooners, the Hornet, the Wasp and the Fly, became the first ships of the Navy's fleet. Five first lieutenants, including future American hero John Paul Jones, five second lieutenants and three third lieutenants also received their commissions.

With help from the committee, America's first navy went from a fleet of two vessels on the day Congress established the naval committee to a fleet of more than 40 armed ships

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and vessels at the height of the War for Independence. The Continental Navy successfully preyed upon British merchant shipping and won several victories over British warships. This first naval force was disbanded after the war. What is now known as the United States Navy was formally established with the creation of the federal Department of the Navy in April 1798.