**War of 1812**

**Book Discussion Points**

*Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy,* by Ian W. Toll (2006)

1. What do you think of the level of responsibility among Sailors at the time of this book? How is it different from today?
2. A lot of the details of the early naval engagements were documented in the log books of naval assets engaged in them. These logs inform us today of the tension and choreography among the French, British, and American fleets as well as friendly forces movements. What does a deck log have to do with warfighting? How can a logbook influence the future?
3. The U.S. Navy ships operated with a higher level of independency of command during this time than is practiced today. Why do you think that was so? Do you think junior officers and senior enlisted personnel exercise their authority to a lesser extent now? What options are there or changes can be made—at your level, unit level, and up the chain—to give greater individual authority?
4. Technological advances contributed to fledgling America’s successful build-up of the fleet of six frigates. How does the technology that your unit has contribute to the Navy’s warfighting effort?
5. The overt rationale in 1794 to establish a navy was to protect sea lanes. Has the primary mission of the U.S. Navy changed? (p. 42 para 5)
6. Why was the establishment of the Navy so contentious? How does the tension among the “doves,” the “hawks,” and special-interest groups and well as the Republican and Democratic National Parties impact the military? How does political activity directly or indirectly influence warfighting?
7. How did the expectation of battle drive the design of the first of America’s ships? Is this still how ships and other weaponry are developed today? (p. 50 para 3)
8. What lessons can be learned from the life of U.S. naval leader Commodore Thomas Truxton—good and bad? (p. 92 para 4)
9. Service in the original U.S. Navy was voluntary, as it has been in our military since 1973. How are the motivations for enlisting the same now as then? How does the reason for joining—and whether or not it’s a volunteer or draft crew—affect a unit’s ability to train and fight? (p. 94)
10. What recruitment problems did USS *Constitution* face that have also challenged our all-volunteer Navy? (p. 98)
11. Were Thomas Jefferson’s three conditions for the need for an American Navy—that its purpose be defensive, that it not be exploited as a source of patronage and corruption, and that it be affordable—realistic in his time, and for today? (p. 164 para 2)
12. How did the United States’ use of tributes to the Algiers and other countries relate to our practice of international relations today?
13. How does improper government spending impact military warfighting ability, short- and long-term? (p. 127 para 5)
14. Why was the build-up of a naval force as opposed to a land force viewed as at cross-purposes in the early years of our government? (p. 124 para 4) Is there still interservice rivalry? Does it serve to strengthen or detract from our military?
15. Why would President Quincy Adams repeat as a mantra: “The trident of Neptune is the scepter of the world”? (p. 143 para 4) How does this concept pertain to our traditional world view as Americans, before 9/11?
16. How would Thomas Jefferson’s idea of fighting piracy apply to today’s international climate? (p. 262)
17. The weather continues to vex warfighters, regardless of sophisticated construction or weaponry. Other natural factors such as geography, time, sea currents, are also beyond a sailor’s control. Select one of the sea battles described in *Six Frigates* and discuss the turn of events with these natural factors in mind. Discuss a current example of how these have affected your warfighting experience. (p. 232)
18. “By 1800, The United States was the largest neutral maritime power in the world, and by a considerable margin.” (p. 271 para 2) In what way does—or does not—this statement from *Six Frigates* still ring true today? How does it influence our warfighting capability?
19. Thomas Jefferson argued for a fleet of small gunboats in the defense of our inland waters and harbor defense (pp. 284–285). Riverine warfare was employed during the War of 1812 as well as later conflicts. How does this heritage unite our Sailors?
20. Commodore Edward Preble was lauded as a national hero, in part for carrying “the fight to the enemy” for the first time. (p 257 para 2) How does “carrying the fight to the enemy” define our role as warfighters?
21. What do you think of the espionage or intelligence gathering techniques described in *Six Frigates*? (p. 343)
22. What aspects of the sailor’s life as depicted in *Six Frigates* resonate with you?
23. How does the battle rhythm described in the bookcompare to yours?
24. How does shipboard life described in *Six Frigates* compare to yours?
25. A submarine and “floating mines” were some of the new components of warfighting in 1813. (pp. 422–423) How does technology challenge us as Sailors? Are we more separated from warfighting having such a high level of sophisticated weaponry?
26. Comment on the fog of war as described in *Six Frigates.* (p. 415 para 2)
27. How does the public support or disdain of a military action or war effort impact your sense of mission? (p. 419)
28. The author of *Six Frigates* concludes that“no other foreign war has ever divided the American people so bitterly. . . .” (p. 458 para 1) What do you think?