

BOOK REVIEW

1812: THE NAVY'S WAR.

BY GEORGE C. DAUGHAN. (NEW YORK: BASIC BOOKS, 2011.)

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Reviewed by Jeff Hirschy

In *1812: The Navy's War*, historian George C. Daughan reexamines the naval history of the War of 1812. The conflict between the United States and the United Kingdom, at the height of the Napoleonic Wars, was viewed as a second war of independence in the United States and as somewhat of a nuisance in the United Kingdom. During America's post-Revolutionary War period, Americans continued to suffer what they considered to be injustices at the hands of Britain's Royal Navy. In reaction, the United States finally decided it could stand no more and declared war on the United Kingdom in 1812. It quickly became evident that the war's primary battlefield would be on the high seas. Daughan attempts to prove that the Navy saved the United States and its war effort in the War of 1812, preserving American independence and establishing respect among the Royal Navy, the United Kingdom, and other nations in Europe. *1812: The Navy's War* demonstrates how the officers and men of America's relatively small navy managed to fight and win battles against the colossal Royal Navy, while maintaining American independence and gaining esteem on the high seas.

When the War of 1812 began, the situation looked grim for the United States on both the high seas and on land. The American Navy contained only around twenty ships while the British Royal Navy possessed over one thousand. Drawing on reports, journals, and letters from both sides, Daughan describes how America's makeshift navy managed to hold its own against the might of the Royal Navy from the eastern Pacific Ocean to the Great Lakes of North America. American ships were able to emerge victorious from battles with the Royal Navy by a combination of sheer bravado, keen nautical ability, and a series of heroic captains. The captains mentioned—Oliver Hazard Perry, Stephen Decatur, John Rogers, and Isaac Hull—bravely and heroically led their ships and men into battle, often against overwhelming odds. From Brazil to the Mediterranean, American naval leaders held their own against the might of the Royal Navy. By 1815, when the United States' land campaigns had failed to impress, Americans could hang their hats on the fact that their navy had fought well against the Royal Navy.

After the conflict ended, Americans realized that the Navy (and privateers) had held enough ground for America to come out of the conflict victorious. The Army's record was full of defeats, with only a few victories sprinkled into the mix; but the Navy could boast a record the exact opposite of the Army. The fleet came out of the war with a series of sparkling victories and only a few defeats.

George Daughan's work, with its clear writing style and well-researched chapters, ably explains how the U.S. Navy saved the day during the War of 1812. In the dark days of the Fall of 1814, when it appeared that America was going to lose the conflict, the triumphs of the Navy kept the hope of victory alive for the average American. In 1815, peace would be declared, but not before pirates, privateers, and sailors from the Navy worked in conjunction with General Andrew Jackson to win the great American victory at New Orleans. Daughan demonstrates that the United States won the war and gained the admiration of not only the Royal Navy and the United Kingdom, but other European nations as well. The United States joined the family of nations on the back of its navy. *1812: The Navy's War* can serve both the average reader, looking to learn more about the U.S. Navy's role in the conflict, and the historian, seeking an interesting new survey of the naval aspect of the war.

1812: The Navy's War is a fascinating look at the War of 1812's naval campaigns. One will be able to see that while the Army's campaigns for the most part bogged down and failed, the Navy was able to achieve several victories over the Royal Navy on the high seas. These victories established the respect that was lacking between the American and British Navies and merchant fleets. While the Americans did not win any new territories or new powers they did finally achieve a certain level of recognition from their former colonial masters. The United States and the United Kingdom came close to war several more times during the nineteenth century but never actually went to war again.