

2011

Captains Contentious: The Dysfunctional Sons of the Brine,

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Recommended Citation

Crawford, Michael J. (2011) "Captains Contentious: The Dysfunctional Sons of the Brine,," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 64 : No. 1 , Article 19.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol64/iss1/19>

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A comprehensive bibliography curiously omits any reference to the British Library in London, which holds the second-largest collection of manuscript sea charts in the world.

The Sea Chart's appeal is to a wider readership than just mariners, leisured or professional. It is a must for all whose interest is in grasping how Earth's continents and oceans were charted and our world was shaped.

LAWRENCE PHILLIPS

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Norton, Louis Arthur. *Captains Contentious: The Dysfunctional Sons of the Brine*. Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2009. 185pp. \$29.95

“Honor,” as Douglass Adair explains in *Fame and Founding Fathers* (1974), “is an ethic of competition, of struggle for eminence and distinction.” “In a particular culture,” he writes, “a sense of honor—a sense of due self-esteem, of proper pride, of dignity appropriate to his station—acts like conscience for a practicing Christian.” Adair argues that “the lust for the psychic reward of fame, honor, and glory, after 1776 becomes a key ingredient in the behavior of Washington and his greatest contemporaries.” Gregory D. Massey observes in *John Laurens and the American Revolutions* (2000), “Like his fellow officers, [Continental Army colonel John] Laurens valued his honor or reputation above all else. Honor, more than anything, defined a man.” What Christopher McKee says about the U.S. Navy officer corps of 1794–1815 in *A Gentlemanly and Honorable Profession: The Creations of the U.S. Naval Officer*

Corps, 1794–1815 (1991) applies equally well to naval officers of the Revolution: “Unless this search for fame . . . is recognized as a primary element in the ethical air breathed by the naval officers . . . , a true understanding of that corps is . . . impossible.”

Lacking this essential understanding of the place of honor in the value system of the late eighteenth century, Louis Arthur Norton, professor emeritus at the University of Connecticut and author of several works on nautical themes, has built a wrongheaded argument about the character of the Continental navy officer corps.

Norton's title encapsulates his thesis—that captains of the fledgling American navy were excessively concerned with their honor, making them unusually contentious, which in turn impeded their effectiveness and harmed the Continental navy. Norton believes these captains' preoccupation with personal honor and rank was indicative of dysfunctional personalities dominated by narcissism, ambition, obsession with order, and aggression, rather than indicative of the shared values of their time, the same values that motivated Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Madison.

The heart of *Captains Contentious* comprises five chapters, devoted respectively to the Continental navy careers of John Manley, Silas Talbot, Dudley Saltonstall, Joshua Barney, and John Paul Jones. The choice of these five is somewhat arbitrary, for one—Talbot never even held a Continental navy command. None of these biographies makes a convincing case that these men were more contentious or touchy about rank than their contemporaries in other armed services. Anyone familiar with

interpersonal conflicts within the Royal Navy of the era must dismiss Norton's assertion that the British naval officers were less contentious than their American counterparts. Nor does Norton demonstrate that the strong personalities of the officers he studies harmed the effectiveness of the naval service. This book has an extensive bibliography, but a single example will illustrate the sloppy use of those sources. Norton states on page 2 that common sailors who continued seagoing into middle

age often retired ashore as broken men, whereas the source he cites in fact refutes that notion.

Captains Contentious is not what it purports to be—a useful study of the connections between leadership and personality. Instead, setting aside its wrongheaded thesis, it is a collection of five unconnected brief biographies in the tradition of “lives of distinguished naval officers.”

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