

2000

## Great American Naval Battles

Bryan Lucas

Jack Sweetman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Lucas, Bryan and Sweetman, Jack (2000) "Great American Naval Battles," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 53 : No. 4 , Article 28.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol53/iss4/28>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

high-risk design was viewed with some reservation by the Navy Department leadership. Therefore, for security, the U.S. Navy contracted for a third design, which became the USS *New Ironsides*.

An armored frigate, it was the first American seagoing ironclad. Many innovations in the areas of gunnery, protection (armor), and seaworthiness made this ship far ahead of any ship of its time. Although USS *New Ironsides* was unique and capable, it was the only one of its class; in contrast, "monitor mania" resulted in fifty ships. The author does a nice job explaining the reasons and choices in the shipbuilding process.

*New Ironsides's* operational exploits were as unique as the ship itself. It took more hits from enemy guns than any other Federal ship but did not lose a single man to them. Its endurance was unmatched; it maintained uninterrupted blockade duty for sixteen months during the siege of Charleston, South Carolina. The account by William Roberts, a retired U.S. Navy surface warfare officer, of the first torpedo attack delivered by a semi-submersible, the CSS *David*, against the *New Ironsides* is excellent in its detail. The section on the contribution of *New Ironsides* during the capture of Fort Fisher is an early vision into the "looking glass" of future warfare and joint operations.

Even knowledgeable Civil War enthusiasts will be surprised to discover that the naval action in the Civil War was so broad, varied, and intriguing. These two books bring these adventures to life. Both books are enjoyable and informative, and they offer an enhanced appreciation of the growth of naval technology that has shaped the Navy of today.

WAYNE J. ROWE  
Naval War College



Sweetman, Jack, ed. *Great American Naval Battles*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1999. 456pp. \$39.95

Jack Sweetman's *Great American Naval Battles* is an enjoyable series of essays from a distinguished team of naval historians that includes such well known authors as Edward L. Beach and E. B. Potter. Sweetman, himself a renowned naval historian, writes a comprehensive introduction that lays out the framework for the essays and provides the rationale for his selection of what he argues are the nineteen most significant naval battles in American history. Almost half (eight) come from the Second World War, seven of these from the Pacific theater. The selection is largely predictable but allows detailed looks into America's great naval leaders and the birthplaces of modern naval tradition. Included are John Paul Jones at the battle off Flamborough Head, Oliver Hazard Perry at Lake Erie, David Farragut at Mobile Bay, George Dewey at Manila Bay, and Raymond Spruance at Midway. These essays are well crafted and offer fresh insights into the events of these otherwise well known battles.

Even more interesting are descriptions and arguments for naval battles that are less well known and yet, according to the authors, have had significant strategic impact in American history. These are essays like James Martin's "Battle of Valcour Island," which argues that Benedict Arnold's naval defense of Lake Champlain in the fall of 1776 was crucial to the defeat of Burgoyne a year later at Saratoga. Equally interesting, although by no means new, is Edward L. Beach's detailed description of the failure of senior leadership in Washington during the critical days and hours before the

Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. It does not completely exonerate Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, but it does bring out critical failures in the timely distribution of intelligence. Moreover, it makes the case that the poor material readiness of the Pacific Fleet on 7 December 1941 had more to do with inadequate congressional funding than with negligent naval leadership.

While all of the essays do admirable jobs of conveying the critical details of engagement, some provide greater insight into strategic settings and effects than others. John Hattendorf's essay on the battle of Manila Bay does a particularly good job of setting the strategic stage and drawing out the strategic consequences. On the other hand, a few essays go so deep into tactical maneuver that readers sometimes struggle to keep their focus on the big picture. I am thinking here of Mark L. Hayes and his account of the Civil War battle of New Orleans. While this piece is clear, I found myself getting lost in the overabundance of detail. This brings to mind my only serious reservation with this book: essays of such detail and depth warrant greater support by illustrations and maps. While some excellent choices have been made in this area, I think the reader could have been better served with even greater use of charts and pictures, especially in essays like Hayes's, where so much "fine grain" is provided.

Other naval battle essays included in this anthology are Hampton Roads, Santiago, the Coral Sea, Guadalcanal, the Philippine Sea, Leyte Gulf, and Okinawa. The book concludes with the only essay that deals with a naval battle after the Second World War; it is about Operation PRAYING MANTIS, which took place in 1988, during the tanker war in the Persian Gulf. That essay looks to the future

of naval battles, noting both the increased capabilities of naval forces and the persistent influence of political authority on the waging of limited conflict.

Like any good anthology, this book provides a solid collection of sophisticated, well researched, and well written essays that encourage the reader to wander through its contents to focus on new thoughts and insights in areas of greatest interest. After reading each essay, I had a strong inclination to read just one more before putting the book down. It would be perfect for the new student of naval history, after core texts by the likes of E. B. Potter, S. E. Morison, or Sweetman himself. For the more widely read naval historian, it is like a bottle of fine brandy that can be sipped and enjoyed in small doses but provides lasting pleasure.

BRYAN LUCAS  
Naval War College



Gutmann, Stephanie. *The Kinder, Gentler Military: Can America's Gender-Neutral Fighting Force Still Win Wars?* New York: Scribner, 2000. 300pp. \$25

This new book, which could aptly be called the latest salvo in the culture war to shape the future of the U.S. military, holds no surprises. As might be inferred from the title, the author believes that the armed forces have made far too many concessions to political correctness in order to attract and retain women in uniform. In her view, the concessions have resulted in lowered standards that have inevitably reduced the combat effectiveness of the military.

Readers who agree will find the book well written, easy to read, and full of numerous examples illustrating the degree to which political correctness has been