

1999

## America and the Sea: A Maritime History,

Craig L. Symonds

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Symonds, Craig L. (1999) "America and the Sea: A Maritime History," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 52 : No. 3 , Article 18.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol52/iss3/18>

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).

## 162 Naval War College Review

shipbuilding and aircraft construction capability, Australia depended at first on Britain and then on the United States for its ships and aircraft. Even overhaul and repairs were points of political pressure; there was no natural constituency to benefit from increased appropriations. These problems, along with their solutions, are explored in a fashion that will keep the serious student of naval aviation attentive.

The two light carriers Australia once possessed had their share of problems. HMAS *Sydney* was already old at the time of its acquisition, and its glory days were short. During Vietnam it was brought out of retirement to serve as a troop transport—dubbed the “Vung Tau ferry.” However, the story of HMAS *Melbourne* was different: it would be a mainstay for close to forty years. It lent its name to two major collisions with plane-guard destroyers—HMAS *Voyager* and later the USS *Frank E. Evans*.

An aside, but an important one in the story of naval aviation “down under,” was suppressing illegal activities along the very long and sparsely populated Australian coastline. Indonesian fishermen, as well as others (like the Japanese pearl-ers prior to World War II), have preyed on the coastline with an eye toward scarce wildlife resources. Originally, several S2F Trackers were assigned to remote settlements, and they played a major role in interdicting and deterring incursions. Today that same service, now called Coastwatch, is contracted out, with Australian Customs being the lead agency. The Navy still assigns *Fremantle* class vessels at Darwin to Coastwatch.

*Flying Stations* is an excellent combination of serious study and a “looking

back” by personnel who served. The unknown author(s) did an excellent job of combining the two. This book should interest the scholar, veterans of Australia’s Naval Air Service, and the general reader.

PETER CHARLES UNSINGER  
San Jose State University

Labaree, Benjamin W., et al. *America and the Sea: A Maritime History*. Mystic, Conn.: Mystic Seaport, 1998. 686pp. \$49.95

This is a gorgeous book—big, colorful, user friendly, and authoritative. The first thing you notice is its size: the 686 glossy pages are laid out in double or even triple-column format, so the book is packed with information. Indeed, one of the few disappointing things about this volume is that it is so big (and heavy) that it is difficult to read lying down or even while sitting in a chair; this book requires a table—though not necessarily a *coffee* table! Second, it is a colorful book. There is full color on virtually every page, with hundreds of museum-quality reproductions of contemporary paintings and photographs to illustrate the text. Even the subheadings and captions are rendered in color. Third, in addition to the rich narrative, which is a chronological narrative of America’s maritime history from the colonial era to the present, there are scores of stand-alone essays and sidebars on specific topics, which allow the reader to dip into the book like a Christmas pudding. Fourth, it is authoritative. The six

principal authors are all respected scholars, and the editing has been accomplished with such skill that the text has a single "voice." Finally, when compared to similar books of this quality, the retail price is a bargain.

Though *America and the Sea* is a cohesive narrative, not a collection of essays, one of its most attractive and valuable features is the sprinkling of short pieces on specific aspects of America's maritime heritage throughout the text. These run the gamut from "The Slave Trade" to "John Paul Jones," from "Seaman's Morals" to "The Great White Fleet," and from "Navigational Instruments" to "The Boat People of Cuba and Haiti." There are even sections on "Recreational Boating and Racing in the Interwar Years," on "Hollywood and the Sea," and a discussion of how America's maritime heritage has been portrayed on the silver screen, from *Moby Dick* (1955) to *The Hunt for Red October* (1990). Each of these essays is between two and five pages long (triple column), and though each essay supports and complements the main narrative, they may also be read independently.

Not a few of the inserts offer contemporary views of America's maritime heritage. Many are literary; there are excerpts from the likes of Richard Henry Dana (*Two Years before the Mast*), Mark Twain (*Life on the Mississippi*), and Herman Melville (*Redburn*). Others are firsthand accounts culled from the letters and diaries of historical figures. Margaret Perkins Forbes, wife of the captain of the fishing schooner *Midas*, recalls a harrowing ocean crossing in 1811; Charles A. Post, a seaman on the blockading vessel

USS *Florida*, recounts the tedium of blockade service in the Civil War; and Newell B. Jordan, captain of down-easter *R. D. Rice*, writes to the ship's owner in 1889 that his return trip will be delayed because he simply cannot get enough sailors to man the ship.

Easily the most arresting aspect of the book is the presence of several hundred full-color illustrations, the captions of which are little essays in themselves. Some are a full page in length. It is possible (and rewarding) to page through the book reading from caption to caption. It is, in short, the kind of book that can be (and most likely will be) sampled in small pieces over a long period.

There are a few disappointments, such as the absence of any reference notes (mostly overcome by a useful suggested reading list). In addition, there are no graphs or diagrams to illustrate, for example, the rising and falling fortunes of America's maritime industry or naval expenditures. Then, too, the maps are too few, and generally too small and nonspecific, to be of much help. But these few shortfalls should not detract from a splendid accomplishment.

CRAIG L. SYMONDS  
U.S. Naval Academy

---

Wildenberg, Thomas. *Destined for Glory: Dive Bombing, Midway, and the Evolution of Carrier Airpower*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998. 258pp. \$34.95

As discussions of a potential revolution in military affairs (RMA) percolated in recent years, the Department of Defense sponsored a number