

2020

Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It

Kevin J. Delamer

Larry D. Ferreiro

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

Recommended Citation

Delamer, Kevin J. and Ferreiro, Larry D. (2020) "Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It," *Naval War College Review*. Vol. 73 : No. 1 , Article 14.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol73/iss1/14>

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.

of crediting Air Marshal Asghar Khan of the Pakistani air force as responsible for significant improvements in his service.

The role of paramilitary mujahideen is discussed in detail, Subramaniam arguing that these forces were largely ineffective in sparking popular uprisings. He also looks at the opposing navies, and attributes lack of any real Indian naval campaigns to the unavailability of INS *Vikrant*, India's sole aircraft carrier, during the period of hostilities.

Subramaniam provides clear descriptions of combat actions, supported by adequate maps and occasional pocket biographies of key personalities. He candidly admits to failures of Indian intelligence, and notes that Pakistani forces experienced similar problems. Indian mistakes and losses are cataloged carefully, as are those of Pakistan. He draws extensively from personal interviews, unit war diaries, and secondary sources.

The book concludes with the liberation of Bangladesh. Although Pakistan is identified as responsible for widespread human rights abuses in what was then East Pakistan, Subramaniam recognizes that Indian leaders from Indira Gandhi on down recognized the greatly improved strategic situation India would face if Pakistani forces were removed from a shared eastern border. The war's depiction follows Subramaniam's pattern of explanatory description, buttressed by maps. He examines the rapid collapse of Pakistani forces in Bangladesh and military operations along the West Pakistan-Indian border. Subramaniam provides a careful examination of the naval war and mentions the roles of militia forces, intelligence, and covert operations.

Regrettably, Subramaniam stopped his examination of India's military at 1971. His excellent ability to analyze

and explain would have been welcome in looking at the role of the Indian military during the national emergency of 1975 to 1977. An examination of the impact of India's nuclear capabilities on doctrine, strategy, tactics, and forces also would be a notable addition to this work.

Taken in its entirety, the picture *India's Wars* paints of the evolving Indian military is a flattering one. Modern military prowess rides comfortably on proud traditions and achievements of the past. If a reader detects a certain satisfaction on the part of the author, it is as well deserved as it is understandable.

RICHARD J. NORTON



Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It, by Larrie D. Ferreiro. New York: Random House, 2016. 464 pages. \$18.

In the past, Larrie Ferreiro has combined his expertise in military history with his extensive knowledge of naval architecture to produce unique interpretations of eighteenth-century events that shaped our world. Building on the impressive scholarship in works such as his *Ships and Science* and *The Measure of the Earth*, *Brothers at Arms* combines familiar accounts of French officers who served with the Continental Army with descriptions of the contributions of other French and of Spanish officials without whose assistance the newly created United States likely would not have survived.

The book begins with the interesting assertion that the courts of Europe, particularly the Bourbon monarchies of France and Spain, were the principal audience for the Declaration of

Independence. It is this assertion that frames the balance of the work. The chapters then explore how different segments of French and Spanish society aided the American cause. Beginning logically, it describes the contributions of the merchants who provided the covert shipments of arms that sustained the Continental Army through the early years of the conflict. Ferreiro then moves through the ministers who directed events, the soldiers whose expertise leavened the new American army, and the sailors whose exploits secured the final victory.

The thread that runs through the entire book is the international dimension of the struggle for American independence. The various strands are tied together in the concluding chapters. In turn, Ferreiro explores the closing phases of the war in North America, the global struggle that eventually transcended the American war, and finally the international legacy of the conflict. Ferreiro's writing is crisp and his style accessible to the general reader, while the scholarship remains first-rate and valuable to the specialist. While the notes are presented in a style more typical of popular history, the combination of primary sources, archival material, and scholarly works cited is a testament to the depth of research supporting this volume.

The only minor weakness in the work is that it includes only three, small-scale maps, each covering an enormous theater. For a reader unfamiliar with the geography involved, larger-scale maps within the text might be more useful. This is, however, a minor issue in an otherwise masterful treatment.

It is the blending of the stories of familiar characters such as Lafayette and Rochambeau with the invaluable

contributions of other French and of Spanish officers and officials that proves most effective, particularly with regard to the efforts of the lesser-known characters. While the contributions of the prominent and well-known French officers are not neglected in this volume, it is the supporting members of the cast of characters who shape the narrative. While a recently published biography of Bernardo de Gálvez also has mined this rich vein of historical material, *Brothers at Arms* serves a different purpose. Ferreiro makes a compelling case for the often-neglected contributions of Spain to the American cause, but does so in the context of the complex and inter-related set of theaters. The operations of Gálvez against the British possessions in West Florida set the stage for French participation in the North American finale at Yorktown; a Spanish official in Havana provided the financial resources for the campaign as well. Ferreiro makes clear that each state acted out of self-interest rather than altruism.

Larrie Ferreiro has added depth and breadth to our understanding of the American War of Independence, particularly the global dimension of that struggle. He has placed the commonly understood struggle over control of the colonies within a broader international context. Where other works have considered the strategies that European powers employed during this fight, he has challenged us to assess the interactions among these various states and among the various theaters. In *Brothers at Arms* the war is presented as a global, integrated struggle. An informative book for the general reader, it also is a valuable and insightful volume for historians of the period. Ferreiro's book points the way to a more nuanced understanding of the American war and

should inspire more inquiries into the international dimension of the conflict. It challenges us to think first of Vergennes and Floridablanca, who thought in terms of grand strategy, rather than of soldiers and sailors with whom we are familiar.

KEVIN J. DELAMER



Plutarch's Politics: Between City and Empire, by Hugh Liebert. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2016. 264 pages. \$104.

Although the price of this volume may discourage individual ownership, unfortunately, do not let it deter you from seeking it out. The author, a professor of political science at West Point, has produced a tour de force of scholarship and analysis of an underrated, if not neglected, classical writer. Plutarch, a Greek of the first century AD, who thus lived under the Roman Empire, was one of the most consequential ancient authors in his impact on later European culture; not least, he is *the* authority for the history forming the backdrop of Shakespeare's Roman plays. His massive work *Parallel Lives* paired biographical accounts of one Greek and one Roman statesman or military commander from the period of the ascendancy of the independent state system of Greece and the Roman Republic. The focus therefore is on political-military leadership in the context of republican political orders. Representative pairings include Numa and Lycurgus, the founders of Rome and Sparta; Fabius and Pericles; Alcibiades and Coriolanus; Crassus and Nicias; and Demosthenes and Cicero.

Liebert's overriding intention is to disprove a widely held view that Plutarch's writing is superficial, merely a form of hero worship. The author shows

convincingly that neither Plutarch's choice nor his treatment of the men about whom he writes suggests a hagiographical purpose. Some of his statesmen are exemplars of severely flawed greatness. In all cases, he provides information supporting a negative as well as a positive interpretation of them. In an interesting and original discussion, Liebert suggests that the unusual format of the *Lives* is intended to set up an agonistic confrontation between the paired Greeks and Romans, one whose fundamental purpose is to make his readers reflect deeply on human personality and leadership styles. (Apparently, Augustus, the founder of the Roman Empire, used to enjoy watching boxing matches between a Greek and a Roman—perhaps the source of Plutarch's inspiration.)

The other central thrust of Liebert's argument is that Plutarch deserves to be regarded not just as a chronicler of political and military deeds but as a political philosopher, one intent on exploring and preserving an understanding of the workings of the political order of the classical polis, or city-state, prior to the advent of universal Roman rule at the beginning of the millennium. Plutarch was not in any sense a revolutionary. He was a prominent citizen in his hometown of Chaeronea in central Greece and well connected with the ruling Roman elites of the day. But he seems to have been concerned to nourish a recollection of the time of polis independence, as a way to encourage local patriotism and civic engagement in the circumstances facing him.

Liebert's book is far from a comprehensive study; rather, it focuses primarily on two of the lives, those of Numa and Lycurgus. This allows the author to develop a richly detailed portrait of the