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## Small Boats and Daring Men: Maritime Raiding, Irregular Warfare, and the Early American Navy

K. L. Delamer

Benjamin Armstrong

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### LEADING, BUT WHITHER?

*Small Boats and Daring Men: Maritime Raiding, Irregular Warfare, and the Early American Navy*, by Benjamin Armstrong. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2019. 280 pages. \$34.95.

Naval warfare long has been classified into two broad schools. One approach, resting largely on the works of Alfred Thayer Mahan, has been classified as the “blue water,” or *guerre d’escadre*, school, and focuses on open-ocean battle-fleet operations. The competing theory emphasizes *guerre de course*, or attacks on enemy commerce, and the use of what today would be termed *asymmetric warfare* at sea. Both terms were a product of the Jeune École, a group of French writers in the late nineteenth century who applied land-warfare theories to operations at sea. These theorists concluded that technological advances had made fleet engagements less relevant. Commander Benjamin Armstrong, a permanent military professor at the U.S. Naval Academy, has offered a new approach to examining naval warfare by exploring an older and often-neglected aspect of maritime conflict, *guerre de razzia*, or war by raiding.

Armstrong draws the idea of *guerre de razzia* from a 2003 essay by noted naval historian James Bradford. The term *guerre de razzia* is French and derives from the “colonial school” of

land warfare advocated by Marshals Bugeaud, Gallieni, and Lyautey. Bradford laid the groundwork for navalizing this concept by examining the impact of operations conducted by John Paul Jones during the American War of Independence. Armstrong has expanded both the breadth of historical examples supporting the idea and the scope of what might constitute *guerre de razzia*.

*Small Boats and Daring Men* proceeds from the original premise of the Bradford essay, that naval warfare encompasses more than the dichotomy of the fleet action versus *guerre de course* orthodoxy. Whereas Bradford confined his definition to the temporary landing of forces on enemy shores, Armstrong adds an array of activities, each explored through a separate case study. A different conflict or unique theater of specific conflicts serves as the vehicle to explore each aspect of this new school of naval strategy. The common thread running through these cases is the emphasis on what would be termed today *irregular warfare*.

Armstrong addresses a range of naval missions that were common during

the age of sail. Descents on enemy coasts were common practice in the era. “Cutting out” expeditions designed to capture, or in some cases recapture, vessels in enemy hands also were typical. Armstrong adds some unique wrinkles to these regular features of warfare in the age of sail. In particular, one chapter deals not with the projection of power from naval vessels against objectives ashore or close inshore, but rather the reverse. He focuses on methods using innovative technology against a superior blockading force to allow a weaker maritime power to deter invaders. This chapter strikes a somewhat dissonant note, but the broader themes resonate in it as well. It also focuses attention on a significant subtheme—specifically, the role of equipment and technological innovation.

Armstrong weaves two additional themes throughout his work: the focus on unique skill sets in addition to specialized equipment, and the importance of upper-level leadership. Many senior leaders saw these operations, to use modern terminology, as *lesser included operations* that were inherent in the normal conduct of naval warfare; such opinions were not well-founded. Further, Armstrong emphasizes intersectional leadership, both at the senior level, where empowering junior officers was essential, and at the junior-officer level, where the mission-critical decisions were made. These operations served as a nursery for future successful leaders of the U.S. Navy.

If there is a weakness in this volume, it is the absence of maps. The book provides only a single, global chart with general locations corresponding to the various chapters. As most of the narrative is tactical, more and detailed maps depicting

the individual operations would have been useful for readers unfamiliar with the geography of these events.

Perhaps the strongest part of the book is the conclusion, which serves to acknowledge that this work is a brief survey of an understudied aspect of America’s naval heritage. While Geoffrey Till described naval irregular warfare as “postmodern,” Armstrong raises the idea that ideas perceived as new and innovative often are reinventions of ideas from the past. As Harry Truman was reported to have said, “The only thing new in this world is the history you don’t know.” Professor Armstrong offers a unique view of the early American navy. For the casual reader, it is an engaging series of stories. While histories generally are filled with the great battles, the actions covered in this book represent smaller, more frequent applications of naval power. For specialists, this is a framework and an important call to study events that do not fit neatly into the acknowledged schools of naval strategy.

K. J. DELAMER



*Our Man: Richard Holbrooke and the End of the American Century*, by George Packer. New York: Knopf, 2019. 608 pages. \$30.

The field of diplomatic history lends itself to biographies of diplomats such as Secretaries of State or other high-level officials as a means of understanding policies and the policy makers. Going through the shelves of our university library, one can chart the history of American twentieth-century foreign policy through the biographies on the shelves. These books, along with works such as *The Best and the Brightest*, tell