

Inside the US Navy of 1812–1815

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research is thorough, the engagements are somewhat hard to follow, and the adjacent maps of Iraqi air bases do not provide much clarity. Dedicated diagrams would have been invaluable. While Cooper does an admirable job of comparing differing accounts of complicated engagements and suggesting the most likely sequence of events, his reliance on oral history colors his overall assessments of the performance of the Tomcat and its aircrews. It is unclear whether Cooper believes the performance of the Tomcat is underappreciated or that it is appreciated correctly and he merely wants to provide context. His three “contradictions” never are dealt with explicitly, but the evidence suggests that they—especially the latter two: that the Tomcat lacked the proper equipment and that Iraqi pilots knew to avoid its powerful radar—are accurate. Cooper goes out of his way to commend the performance of Tomcat aircrews, attributing their lack of air-to-air victories to their strict adherence to the rules of engagement and tactics; however, two of the incidents described feature some obvious mistakes regarding both. Finally, there are minor editorial quibbles involving the aforementioned “First” and “Second” Persian Gulf Wars, the occasional improper use of military acronyms, and his use of Soviet instead of the more familiar NATO designations for some weapon systems (e.g., referring to the R-40D instead of the AA-6 Acrid), but this may be an idiosyncrasy of the military aviation enthusiast community. Despite having heard these same stories for years—some of them from the same people Cooper interviewed—I definitely learned something new from *In the Claws of the Tomcat*. Cooper describes

the Iranian and Iraqi pilots that the U.S. Navy faced from 1987 to 2000 as experienced combat veterans, and his book rightly credits their performance. Naval aviation sometimes overestimates its future performance and underestimates that of its future opponents, but it does so (and did so) at its own peril.

JOSHUA HAMMOND



Inside the US Navy of 1812–1815, by William S. Dudley. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2021. 368 pages. \$54.95.

In the first chapter of *America, Sea Power, and the World*, James Bradford’s edited textbook on the history of the American navy, the author explains to students and readers what he considers to be the three elements of a modern Navy: purpose-built warships, a professional force—in particular, a professional officer corps—and a shore establishment of supporting structures and bureaucracies. In large measure, naval history across the past several generations has tended to focus on the first two elements, the warships and the sailors. William S. Dudley’s new book, *Inside the US Navy of 1812–1815*, is a masterwork of depth and research that returns the third element, the shore establishment and bureaucracy, to the center of the history of early American naval power. In doing so, Dudley offers not only a great service to our understanding of the U.S. Navy’s past but also key reminders of the breadth of naval topics that require our attention in the present and the future. In June 1812, when the United States declared war on Great Britain, the U.S. Navy was not ready. Americans were taking on the most powerful maritime

force in the world, yet while Congress began raising armies and activating militia units it did very little to prepare the nation's maritime defenses and its navy. Despite the fact that the British had been engulfed in a long conflict with France, the Royal Navy in North American waters still outnumbered and outgunned the U.S. Navy when the war began. Yet while America was lacking in number of ships, the quality and professionalism of its officers offered some high points. The talents of commanders such as Isaac Hull, Stephen Decatur, and John Rodgers would result in surprising single-ship victories and other successes early in the conflict.

Over the last decade, as Americans commemorated the bicentennial of the War of 1812—while the British largely ignored it—there has been a refreshing resurgence in scholarship on the conflict. However, the glory of the early frigate duels, the small-squadron combats on the lakes, and the operational and strategic execution of the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy have tended to remain at the center of this new scholarship. Much of the narrative of the war overlooks the key foundation on which the U.S. Navy—as is any navy, quite frankly—was built: the administrative and bureaucratic functions run by the Secretary of the Navy to design and build the ships, recruit and promote the officers and men, supply the combat units with everything they needed to fight and survive, and provide the infrastructure to maintain and repair the ships. Dudley's book corrects this oversight with the depth that historians of all kinds aspire to achieve in their work.

Dudley served most of his career as a historian at the Naval History and Heritage Command (or the Naval

Historical Center, as it was called during most of his career), holding the position of Director of Naval History from 1995 to 2004. During his time as an official historian of the U.S. Navy, he launched and led the editorial process that created the multiple volumes of *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History*, resulting in a deep understanding of the source material for any examination of the war. It is hard to imagine that there is another living historian with as thorough a knowledge of the sources as Dudley. That mastery shows throughout the book.

The work of Secretaries of the Navy Paul Hamilton and William Jones is at the core of the book. Modern readers looking back at the nineteenth century often forget, or are surprised to discover, that the Secretary of the Navy served as both the administrative and operational leader of the Navy and Marine Corps. The position of Chief of Naval Operations was not created until the threat of World War I presented itself, and Hamilton and Jones were left to shoulder the overwhelming responsibilities of both jobs, with only a marginal staff to support them. Dudley shows how these leaders balanced the competing needs and resources of the Navy—or, in some cases, failed to balance them. He demonstrates that the glorious victories, particularly of Perry and Macdonough on the Great Lakes but also of Hull and Decatur in the Atlantic, were built on the hard bureaucratic work that the naval administrators put into supplying, funding, and supporting the combat forces.

As the war develops through the book's chapters, readers are left time and again to realize that it is the often-overlooked and sometimes boring elements of the naval past that end up being decisive.

The chapters are conveniently broken up with subheadings that help the reader keep track of the many threads Dudley weaves throughout the book. However, with so much detail to relate, and given the complexity of the logistical challenges and administrative burdens the reader must understand, the author often employs flashbacks and jumps through the chronology of the war. For those who are not familiar with the general narrative of the conflict or the time line of events, this can induce confusion, whereas those who already have a clearer understanding of the conflict will benefit from Dudley's ability to focus on a specific challenge before jumping to another topic. A reader who is new to the naval war of 1812 should pair this book with another (such as George Daughan's *1812: The Navy's War*, or Andrew Lambert's *The Challenge: Britain against America in the Naval War of 1812* for a British viewpoint) to help alleviate any chronological confusion.

B. J. ARMSTRONG



Tower of Skulls: A History of the Asia-Pacific War, July 1937–May 1942, by Richard B. Frank. New York: W. W. Norton, 2020. 751 pages. \$40.

Historian and Vietnam veteran Richard Frank (*Downfall, Guadalcanal*) is on a mission. In *Tower of Skulls* he sets out to rebrand the Pacific theater of World War II as a grand “Asia-Pacific War” spanning from 1937 to 1945, from imperial Japan's invasion of China until Japan capitulated to Allied arms. His approach runs counter to the standard understanding of World War II as ranging from 1939 to 1945 (the dates

demarcating the European war against the Axis) or 1941 to 1945 (covering when America had joined the fight in Europe and the Pacific). Frank wants to give the war in China its due, showing that it was an integral part of a prolonged global maelstrom. In this he succeeds.

Tower of Skulls is the first in a trilogy that aspires to tell the full story of the world conflict. Yet if Frank's goal is to fold the Sino-Japanese War into a single Asia-Pacific War, why not turn back the clock all the way back to 1931, when Japan invaded Manchuria and reduced it to a vassal state? The author rejects (p. 32) “the beguiling interpretation styled ‘The Fifteen Years’ War,’ which argues that Japan followed a seamless path from Manchuria in 1931 to the USS *Missouri* in 1945.” Why? Because prominent backers of the Manchurian adventure in 1931 came to oppose fresh entanglements in China by 1937. Accordingly Tokyo, rather than initiating the new enterprise in an orderly manner, took “staggering, stumbling steps” into war in China.

This haphazardness, maintains the author, demonstrates that “contingency rather than inevitability produced the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945.” But indecision and acrimony commonly plague debates about whether to open a new theater—witness the caustic debate over invading Iraq in 2003. But a decision is a decision, no matter how decision makers arrive at it. Few would allege that the Iraq War stood apart from the global war on terror because of America's far-from-seamless path to Baghdad. In other words, Frank's premise is reasonable but far from incontestable.

But I quibble. Widening our memory of World War II to encompass what happened in China is a worthwhile enterprise, no matter whether you regard