



2013-084

Jonathan R. Dull, *American Naval History, 1607-1865: Overcoming the Colonial Legacy*. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2012. Pp. ix, 194. ISBN 978-0-8032-4052-0.

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How did the United States go from colonial backwater to modern naval power? Eminent naval and diplomatic historian Jonathan Dull¹ poses this central question in a history that reaches from the colonial period through the American Civil War. The book is a companion to his earlier *The Age of the Ship of the Line*, and its seven chapters of economical but lucid prose will appeal to both professional scholars and most undergraduates. Broadly, the work's three major sections examine the period of European hegemony in American waters up to about 1815, an era of true American independence in 1815-61, and the rise of the United States to regional naval preeminence during and after the Civil War. Throughout, Dull maintains that world-class navies are built on national-level economies of scale, backed by centralized government bureaucracies, and sustained by consistent political support.

Dull opens with an overview of the American colonial period, when the colonies were, above all, suppliers of naval stores for Great Britain, not shipbuilders in their own right (7-10).² He reveals a great deal of colonial disunity despite an efficient mail system, highlighted by competition between Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Connecticut over frontier regions of the Ohio Country.³ Anglo-Americans had grown self-reliant in wars with Native Americans and usually held their own, with a little help from home, against European imperial rivals in New Netherlands (New York), French Acadia (Nova Scotia), and Spanish Florida. Though they played a role in building and repairing merchant ships—even sending out privateers—they made only a tiny contribution to Britain's overall naval strength; moreover, in terms of personnel, “only three of the American navy's original twenty-six captains had any prior experience in the British navy” (9)

Writing of the Revolutionary era, Dull contrasts the colonies' privateering legacy with the capabilities of Britain's fully developed navy. One difference appears in the exploits of some converted merchant schooners under former slave-ship captain Ezek Hopkins: “He sailed on 17 February 1776, but instead of [facing British warships in] the Chesapeake he went to the Bahamas, where he captured Nassau, seizing a substantial haul of munitions, including about 100 cannon” (21). Smaller fragments of the emerging American navy claimed similar successes: Washington's six-gun schooner, the *Lee*, for example, captured the British supply ship *Nancy* on 29 November 1775, seizing munitions critical for the ongoing siege of Boston (22). Fleet actions were entirely another matter:

American-built frigates were built for pursuit of prizes and escape from warships rather than for combat. No more than three ever served together. The only major operations in which they served were disastrous. An unsuccessful 1779 attack on a British post in the Penobscot River cost not only the *Warren* but also a Continental navy sloop of war, three Massachusetts navy warships, and more than thirty privateers and transports. The fol-

1. His previous work includes *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War* (Lincoln: U Nebraska Pr, 2005), *The French Navy and American Independence: A Study of Arms and Diplomacy, 1774-1787* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 1975), and *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 1985), a valuable successor to Samuel Flagg Bemis's classic *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (1935; rpt. Westport, CT: Greenwood Pr, 1983). In terms of maritime history, Dull first explored the themes of centralization, sustained political and industrial will, and long-term economies of scale in *The Age of the Ship of the Line: The British and French Navies, 1650-1815* (Lincoln: U Nebraska Pr, 2009).

2. A valuable primary source relevant to the restriction of American contributions to British naval shipbuilding is Board of Trade to Parliament, “Representation of the Board of Trade Relating to the State of the British Islands in America ...,” 14 Jan 1734/5, Viscounts Melville Papers, vol. 1, item 4, pp. 33-40, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

3. Cf. W. Neil Franklin, “Pennsylvania-Virginia Rivalry for the Indian Trade of the Ohio Valley,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 20 (1934) 463-80, and William Byrd, *History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina* (1728; rpt. NY: Dover, 1987).

lowing year the *Boston*, *Providence*, *Queen of France*, and the sloop of war *Ranger*, 18, were lost in the unsuccessful defense of Charleston, South Carolina. (24)

Another task of the early American navy was ferrying army units across rivers and lakes, for example, in the Lake Champlain campaigns of 1775–76 and the operations around Philadelphia in 1776–77.

Both during and after the war for independence, Dull writes, European navies were dominant, while American merchant ships were newly vulnerable to attacks by the Barbary pirates. Though much of chapters 3 and 4 cover the gradual emergence of both the new nation and an American navy that could operate free from foreign entanglements, Dull stresses the helpful role of an indulgent Britain. Soon after the Treaty of Paris (1783), British merchants returning to American ports met little resistance—and sometimes enthusiastic welcomes—from their former enemies (34); charitable attitudes in London may have informed both a generous application of the Jay Treaty of 1794 (40–41) and naval assistance during the Quasi-War with France in 1798–1800 (45). In short, while the United States may have grown more able to determine its own fate, it still remained subject to the vicissitudes of European diplomatic alignments.⁴

Dull shows especially well that American diplomatic prowess—or blind luck—was a stronger protection for the new republic than its minuscule sea power. During the War of the First Coalition (1798–1802), the United States risked and narrowly avoided war with both France and Spain, while Britain's indulgence was again evident in the transaction of the Louisiana Purchase through a London bank. Over the next decade, the United States continued to straddle the Anglo-French divide, though Britain's impressment of American sailors and strict enforcement of its own interpretation of maritime law damaged Anglo-American relations. A modest naval expansion and costly economic measures were on the point of a breakthrough in June 1812, when President James Madison declared war (52–54).

As in his discussions of the Revolution and the Barbary wars, Dull offers an impressive list of ships and naval actions for the War of 1812, demonstrating once more that, while US ships performed well in single combat and small-unit actions, they were still outclassed by European navies. On the American side of the Atlantic, one effect of the war was an ambitious naval building program, which led in time to separate US and British initiatives to curb new European colonization after Spain's American empire collapsed in the 1820s (65–69). In the post-1815 period, Dull also treats Europe's more general withdrawal from American affairs (69) and the US Navy's expanding role in commerce protection (71–73). European withdrawal allowed the technologically backward American navy to languish in some disorder for much of the period before 1846, while their commerce protection operations gained US warships some exposure across the Atlantic world.

War with Mexico (1846–48) during a delicate stage in Anglo-American relations ushered in the next generation of growth for the Navy. Intricate negotiations with Britain finally secured the US-Canadian border all the way to the Pacific and gave the Polk administration a free hand to fight Mexico (75–78). In 1841–43, Abel P. Upshur, Secretary of the Navy in the Tyler administration, had overseen an upgrade in naval technology and fleet organization, thanks to which the Mexican War was the first time the Navy properly operated with steam ships and several fleets at sea. Though naval actions were limited, the blockade of Mexico was a success, as were sea-land operations at Veracruz. By 1854, having resumed its commerce-protection role, the Navy also played a key part in opening trade relations with Japan (81).

In much his longest chapter (forty pages)—on the Civil War—Dull displays the US Navy truly coming into its own against a hapless, overstretched, and disorganized Confederacy (esp. 113–18). He even assigns the Union navy a prominent place in winning the war, unlike most conventional histories, which emphasize heroics on land. Highlighted are the Union's greater centralization and industrial capacity, the impact of its blockade on the Confederate economy, its rapid development of a strong riverine navy especially for operations in the Mississippi waterway, the consequent seizure of such key Confederate ports as New Orleans

4. See, esp., William R. Casto, *Foreign Affairs and the Constitution in the Age of Fighting Sail* (Columbia: U South Carolina Pr, 2006).

(97–101, 104), and the technical superiority of Monitor class and other iron-clad steamships to anything the Confederacy could put to sea.

In sum, Jonathan Dull offers a good, compact naval history of the British colonies and early republic up through Civil War era. He remarks with some justice in his last chapter that, although the Navy shrank after 1865, its exertions in the Civil War laid foundations for a US overseas empire near the turn of the twentieth century. Detailed reckoning of building projects, ship launches, and major naval actions reinforce the larger narrative of the maturing of the US Navy over the course of roughly a century, as it overcame colonial-era legacies of provincialism, poor administration, and subordination to the vagaries of European politics.

Throughout, Dull only hints at the critical links between the Navy and US foreign relations, though he might have drawn more freely on his background as a diplomatic historian in handling this topic. Although peace with the major European powers was certainly precarious, even almost fictional, Dull should have credited American diplomats rather than the fledgling Navy for securing such breathing space as the early republic enjoyed between 1783 and 1812. Conversely, while he briefly commends the Navy for helping to open trade relations with Japan, he overlooks its cooperation with Britain and France in eastern Asia and the punitive expedition to Korea in 1871.⁵ Dull did not set out to write a diplomatic history, however, and his well conceived, well written volume amply achieves its stated aims.

5. For the US Navy perspective, see Carolyn A. Tyson, *Marine Amphibious Landing in Korea, 1871* (Washington: Naval Hist Foundation, n.d.) – www.miwsr.com/rd/1329.htm.