

Naval War College Review

Volume 53
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 27

2000

Raiders & Blockaders: The American Civil War Afloat; USS New Ironsides in the Civil War

Wayne J. Rowe

William N. Still

John M. Taylor

Norman Delany

William H. Roberts

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

Recommended Citation

Rowe, Wayne J.; Still, William N.; Taylor, John M.; Delany, Norman; and Roberts, William H. (2000) "Raiders & Blockaders: The American Civil War Afloat; USS New Ironsides in the Civil War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 53 : No. 4 , Article 27.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol53/iss4/27>

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.

long, consisting of a table of known U-boat locations followed by textual commentary on their operations. *Trends* was a shorter, irregularly issued report covering changes in German U-boat employment and technology. Both were written by Rear Admiral J. W. Clayton and Commander Rodger Winn, heads of the Admiralty Operational Intelligence Centre and Submarine Tracking Room, respectively. They represent collectively one of the best sources of insight into what the Allies knew about the German U-boat campaign at any given moment.

Editor David Syrett, also the author of *The Defeat of the German U-Boats: The Battle of the Atlantic*, has compiled these reports, dating from late 1941 through the end of the war, into a useful and convenient volume. His introduction provides a clear, succinct overview of the kinds of intelligence that were incorporated into the reports, the American and British collection process, and a short selected bibliography. Unlike many document collections, this work includes a comprehensive and convenient subject index.

The reader familiar with naval intelligence reports will be impressed with the clear, candid style employed by Admiralty intelligence. For example, the 12 June 1944 *U-boat Situation* states that “the U-boat reaction to OVERLORD was prompt, energetic but remarkably confused.” The reports also provide insight into the ten months of 1942 when a change in the German code left the Allies unable to read U-boat message traffic. The Admiralty continued to estimate U-boat movements using other intelligence sources, but a comparison of intelligence reports from each period underscores the importance of ULTRA to Allied operations. In the words of one

report, without ULTRA “an accurate estimate of the number and disposition of U-boats operating in the Atlantic is not possible” (*Situation*, 23 February 1942).

What is lacking in this work, however, is a sense of how specific intelligence documents were used. It is clear that these reports circulated at the highest levels of the Admiralty, which included the First Sea Lord and certain other flag officers. Syrett comments on the difficulty of reconstructing exactly what intelligence was passed to senior naval leaders, but his decision not to reproduce even the limited routing information available for each document deprives the reader of useful insight. It is also not clear what reports, or parts of them, were shared with the American naval leadership.

According to his introduction, Syrett presumes that “his readers will be naval historians with a fairly high level of expert knowledge.” While not for casual reading, then, this well edited volume provides naval history students, as well as nonspecialist historians, convenient access to some of the key documents of World War II naval history.

DATE RITTAGI
Norfolk, Virginia



Still, William N., Jr., John M. Taylor, and Norman C. Delaney. *Raiders & Blockaders: The American Civil War Afloat*. New York: Brassey's, 1998. 263pp. \$16.95

Roberts, William H. *USS New Ironsides in the Civil War*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1999. 209pp. \$49.95

Mention of the American Civil War invokes images preserved for us by Matthew Brady—the encampments, the battlefields, and the aftereffects of the battle—in short, images of conflict on

land. Somewhere in our education we viewed the portraits of famous generals like Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant, who led Confederate and Union armies. We studied the major battles of Gettysburg and Antietam, and the surrender at Appomattox. We were made to understand the moral struggles confronted by President Abraham Lincoln and the reasons for his Emancipation Proclamation. The works of many fine authors have chronicled all these events. Yet rare is the mention of naval action. An avid reader of the war may be able to identify the four most famous naval battles (Mobile Bay, New Orleans, the battle between the ironclads USS *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia*, and the engagement between the USS *Kearsarge* and CSS *Alabama*), but little thereafter. Until recently there has been a lack of research on this topic, but within the last two years, new attention has been given to the U.S. Navy and the Civil War. *Raiders & Blockaders: The American Civil War Afloat* is an excellent primer of Civil War naval history. While its depth of material is good, it is its breadth that makes it stand out.

Three dedicated Civil War naval historians have written nineteen essays for this collection. Thoroughly researched and well documented, these accounts take the reader from the lively action of major battles to the details of small engagements; from the vivid accounts of famous admirals to tales of the average sailor. Each is written and illustrated in a style that is easy and enjoyable to read. Fifteen essays have appeared elsewhere, in the *Naval War College Review*, *Civil War Times Illustrated*, and *America's Civil War*. While all the famous men and their engagements have been included, it is the mention of little-known facts, perhaps about the Confederate ironclad CSS

S Louisiana or the feisty Union admiral Louis Goldsborough, that sets this book apart from others.

Bernard Brodie, eminent scholar on world politics and military policy, and thought by many to be the founder of modern strategic theory, wrote this about the Civil War: "For the first time the achievements of the industrial and scientific revolution were used on a large scale in war." "Technology Afloat," by William N. Still, Jr., the fourth essay in *Raiders & Blockaders*, examines how new inventions and key technologies were incorporated into naval warfare in the 1860s. Among these were the adoption of steam propulsion on warships and the developments in naval ordnance, such as shell guns, improvements in interior ballistics, rifling, and the transition to breech loading. In addition, while mine warfare, undersea warfare, and ironclad warships were not new in the 1860s, the Civil War became a proving ground for these new ships and weapons. The origins of many of today's weapons, ship designs, and strategies can be directly traced back to the Civil War.

In 1861, the U.S. Navy had a three-point strategy to help win the Civil War. The first was to blockade the Confederate coastline, the second was to support the army in river operations, and the third was to counter Southern advances in technology, especially ironclad warships. The Union navy approached the new threat of ironclad warships by building vessels of three experimental classes. The first ship was the USS *Galena*. While representing an attempt at innovation, it was still a conservative design and proved to be not very successful. The second effort was the class that began with the USS *Monitor*. These ships were small, inexpensive, and quick to build. However, their

high-risk design was viewed with some reservation by the Navy Department leadership. Therefore, for security, the U.S. Navy contracted for a third design, which became the USS *New Ironsides*.

An armored frigate, it was the first American seagoing ironclad. Many innovations in the areas of gunnery, protection (armor), and seaworthiness made this ship far ahead of any ship of its time. Although USS *New Ironsides* was unique and capable, it was the only one of its class; in contrast, “monitor mania” resulted in fifty ships. The author does a nice job explaining the reasons and choices in the shipbuilding process.

New Ironsides's operational exploits were as unique as the ship itself. It took more hits from enemy guns than any other Federal ship but did not lose a single man to them. Its endurance was unmatched; it maintained uninterrupted blockade duty for sixteen months during the siege of Charleston, South Carolina. The account by William Roberts, a retired U.S. Navy surface warfare officer, of the first torpedo attack delivered by a semi-submersible, the CSS *David*, against the *New Ironsides* is excellent in its detail. The section on the contribution of *New Ironsides* during the capture of Fort Fisher is an early vision into the “looking glass” of future warfare and joint operations.

Even knowledgeable Civil War enthusiasts will be surprised to discover that the naval action in the Civil War was so broad, varied, and intriguing. These two books bring these adventures to life. Both books are enjoyable and informative, and they offer an enhanced appreciation of the growth of naval technology that has shaped the Navy of today.

WAYNE J. ROWE
Naval War College



Sweetman, Jack, ed. *Great American Naval Battles*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1999. 456pp. \$39.95

Jack Sweetman's *Great American Naval Battles* is an enjoyable series of essays from a distinguished team of naval historians that includes such well known authors as Edward L. Beach and E. B. Potter. Sweetman, himself a renowned naval historian, writes a comprehensive introduction that lays out the framework for the essays and provides the rationale for his selection of what he argues are the nineteen most significant naval battles in American history. Almost half (eight) come from the Second World War, seven of these from the Pacific theater. The selection is largely predictable but allows detailed looks into America's great naval leaders and the birthplaces of modern naval tradition. Included are John Paul Jones at the battle off Flamborough Head, Oliver Hazard Perry at Lake Erie, David Farragut at Mobile Bay, George Dewey at Manila Bay, and Raymond Spruance at Midway. These essays are well crafted and offer fresh insights into the events of these otherwise well known battles.

Even more interesting are descriptions and arguments for naval battles that are less well known and yet, according to the authors, have had significant strategic impact in American history. These are essays like James Martin's "Battle of Valcour Island," which argues that Benedict Arnold's naval defense of Lake Champlain in the fall of 1776 was crucial to the defeat of Burgoyne a year later at Saratoga. Equally interesting, although by no means new, is Edward L. Beach's detailed description of the failure of senior leadership in Washington during the critical days and hours before the