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The Naval War of 1812: The History of the United States Navy during the Last War with Great Britain

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the excursion to another era. Reading it, however, we cannot help but wonder how different, and how much more difficult, may be the challenges our navy faces today.

MICHAEL VLAHOS
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Roosevelt, Theodore. *The Naval War of 1812: The History of the United States Navy during the Last War with Great Britain*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1989. 476pp. \$24.95

Originally published in 1882, seventy years after the beginning of the War of 1812, this operational history was one of the first to attempt an honest, factual, and unbiased account of the naval actions of that conflict.

The heart of the book lies in the author's effort to understand the battles and their outcome. Mr. Roosevelt's balanced presentation and extensive analysis holds the attention.

Roosevelt begins with a description of the residual effects of the Revolutionary War: the trade restrictions imposed by Britain because of our informal alliances with France; the impressment of American-born sailors at sea; Britain's continuing war with France, and so on.

He describes with vigor the great battles fought by the *Constitution*, *Wasp*, *President*, *Hornet*, *Enterprise*, and *Essex*. The *Shannon's* capture of the *Chesapeake* is thoroughly discussed, with the sensible conclusion that the *Chesapeake* was just plain outfought.

The difficulties facing both sides on the Lakes are brought out forcefully. The battles there, involving small fleets of modest-sized vessels, were well fought, but the outcomes were determined not only by firepower but were heavily influenced by the personal characteristics of the commanders. Perry's victory at Lake Erie preserved the Northwest Territories for the United States, and Macdonough's victory at Lake Champlain prevented the British from advancing down the Hudson valley and splitting the country in two. Roosevelt gives both men the recognition they deserve.

Roosevelt also tells about the many cutting-out operations, assaults against vessels in harbor, amphibious landings, and raids. Usually led by junior officers, these required superb seamanship and courage.

All this concentration on operational matters leaves little room for the affairs of the shore establishment and the navy offices, but clearly Roosevelt did not want to write about those things. These topics have been covered in several recent works and so are not really missed.

This book is one of the early efforts to apply comparisons of combat power, the effects of the environment, and operational factors to the analysis of naval warfare. Such details as the weights of American and British cannon shot are compared. Roosevelt tells us that because of porosity and poor casting techniques, American shot was about seven percent lighter than British shot of the same nominal size. He includes the effects of sea

state, weather, sun, rain, and suchlike in his discussion whenever they affected the results of the battle; he also examines the quality of the seamen, the training and morale of the crews, the condition of the vessels, the leadership qualities of the captains, and the influence of the impressed or deserted seamen. This analysis gives a wealth of material for the modeler of historical naval battles or for the wargamer.

This work is a part of the "Classics of Naval Literature" series published by the Naval Institute Press. The volumes have been carefully selected and are beautifully printed and bound. An introduction by Edward K. Eckert reviews Roosevelt's life and his contribution to the study of American naval history. This introduction is well worth the time to read.

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King, Irving H. *The Coast Guard under Sail: The U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, 1789-1865*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1989. 233pp. \$29.95

Writing the early history of the United States Revenue Cutter Service is a difficult undertaking for a variety of reasons; the most important is that it was hardly a true service during the period discussed in this book. Rather, it was more nearly a number of small vessels dispersed among the Atlantic and Gulf coast ports, without central administration or control for much of the time. Toward the end of this period several

revenue cutters were stationed on the Pacific coast as well; like their sisters on the eastern seaboard, they were under the control of collectors of customs, whose attitude toward the cutters and their personnel varied considerably.

The absence of a central administration resulted in a dearth of records, requiring the historian to use considerable ingenuity in seeking sources. This is reflected in the counting of, and descriptions of, the cutters. On occasion, several were built to the same design; precise identification of some remains doubtful.

Irving H. King, professor of history and head of the Department of Humanities at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, has been grappling with this problem for years.

He described the origins of the Revenue Cutter Service in *George Washington's Coast Guard*, published in 1978 by the Naval Institute Press. The book discussed the service through the Quasi-War with France, and is summarized in the first two chapters of *The Coast Guard under Sail*.

As in his other work, King discusses the military contributions of the Revenue Cutter Service, emphasizing its role as a precedent-setter for the U.S. Navy: testing sailcloth; having its cutters built in various areas of the country, under the supervision of their prospective commanding officers; and providing advice on ship design and navy yard locations. Consideration of the revenue cutters' service in the nation's various wars is made more difficult because some of the vessels were transferred directly to the navy and