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Icebound: The Jeanette Expedition's Quest for the North Pole

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Samuel Francis DuPont, David Glasgow Farragut, David Dixon Porter, John Rodgers, Robert W. Shufeldt and Benjamin Franklin Isherwood. In addition to the old standbys, Bradford also includes a couple of surprises—two Confederate officers, Franklin Buchanan and Raphael Semmes. Fortunately, none of the authors lapse into hagiography, and while some may be more critical of their subject than others, for the most part we are presented with sound scholarship and judicious appraisals.

At least three themes emerge: the importance of family, the importance of technology, and the unimportance of the Navy.

No one who is acquainted with the history of the American Navy in the 19th century will be at all surprised at the number of inter-family connections amongst these officers. Since the service was so small, in matters of personal relationships it often more closely resembled a gossipy village than a professional seagoing force. Advancement, thanks to family and friends, was common.

Nearly all of these officers were affected by technology, and none resisted it. To be sure, some were more open and prescient than others, but contrary to conventional wisdom, these aged, whiskered officers were not obstacles to technological advancement.

Just how important was the Navy to 19th century America? Not very. Charting the seas and avenging piratical attacks make for good reading, but they hardly changed the

destiny of the Nation. This is not to say these events ought not to be recorded and celebrated. Indeed, they demonstrate the personal virtue of courage and help us to better understand what good leadership is really about. Nevertheless, in the broad realm of antebellum American history, our Navy did not play a key role.

In the case of the Civil War, of course, the Navy did emerge as an important player, but even here caution is advised. Despite the great claims made for the blockade, recent scholarship suggests that it was hardly decisive. It was on the rivers that the Navy played out its part. It may well turn out that the brown-water navy was more important to the Union victory than its blue-water counterpart.

A third volume in this series is apparently in the works—*Admirals of the Steel Navy, 1880-1930*. Once completed, this naval triptych will provide a ready and welcome addition to the literature of American naval history.

WILLIAM M. FOWLER, JR.
Boston, Massachusetts

Guttridge, Leonard F. *Icebound: The Jeanette Expedition's Quest for the North Pole*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1986. 357pp. \$23.95

Icebound is a long overdue and thoroughly competent presentation of the events surrounding the destruction of the U.S.S. *Jeanette* on 12 June 1881 in the Arctic Ocean north of

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Siberia, while under the command of Lieutenant George W. De Long, U.S. Navy.

Guttridge's research is first class as he examines both the public record and the available private files of the crew members who either perished or survived this disaster which attracted such great public interest. He has located and used just the right photographs and illustrations as he narrates the chronology of events in this, the first U.S. Government authorized, but privately sponsored, attempt to reach the North Pole by ship via the Bering Strait. However, the reader will need a magnifying glass for the chartlets.

Discrepancies between the private utterances and public testimony of the survivors, and the written records of those who perished, form the basis of a naval mystery heretofore largely unresolved. It is generally accepted that then Navy Secretary William E. Chandler and the expedition's sponsor, publisher James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald*, allied themselves with Lieutenant De Long's widow Emma to prevent a full public disclosure of the tragedy, each for his or her own reasons—all of which the author discloses. Even the subsequent Congressional investigation by the Naval Affairs Committee seemed to be limited to a predetermined finding. In 1882, apparently, politics in the Navy were considerably less subtle than now!

The concealed physical affliction of the expedition's navigator, Master John W. Danenhower, U.S. Navy, is dealt with in a frank manner, and the

author is not maudlin in his treatment of the navigator's suicide after his rescue. Those who know of Rear Admiral George W. Melville's appointment, over some 40 senior officers, to the post of Chief of the Bureau of Steam Engineering (later BuShips) and of his leadership during the Navy's transition from sail (then preferred) to steam (then detested), and before Dewey's Great White Fleet, will find revealed facets of Melville's character not readily apparent in environments less harsh than the Arctic.

Guttridge's use of a dramatic style of narration, almost as though he were actually aboard the *Jeanette* or present at the hearings, is skillful and does not lessen the appeal of his tale. Today's officers will gain an insight into aspects of basic leadership in situations of stress that are still valid but less evident in today's technocratic Navy.

Icebound is an enthralling "detective" story. How odd that the author, an Englishman and a civilian, is able to "solve" the mystery when so many Americans, both naval and civilian, have fallen short in their efforts to bring together all the complex elements of the *Jeanette* expedition. In August 1883, George Melville wrote to Emma De Long that, "There is a great deal we both might say that has not been said. . . . I know the true history of the Expedition will never be written." Leonard Guttridge's efforts come close!

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