

Naval War College Review

Volume 71
Number 3 *Summer*

Article 18

2018

Navy Football: Return to Glory

Thomas J. Gibbons

T. C. Cameron

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

Recommended Citation

Gibbons, Thomas J. and Cameron, T. C. (2018) "Navy Football: Return to Glory," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 71 : No. 3 , Article 18.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol71/iss3/18>

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.

aviation, but in the end it falls short of delivering more-thorough reporting.

ROBERT C. RUBEL



Navy Football: Return to Glory, by T. C. Cameron. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2017. 189 pages. \$21.99.

As both a U.S. Military Academy (USMA) graduate and the father of a USMA graduate, I jumped at the chance to read a book about the success of the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA) football team. Let's face it: Navy has a winning program that has dominated Army football in recent years, even though both teams draw from the same pool of talented high school athletes. T. C. Cameron traces the history of USNA's football team, including its comeback, or "return to glory," over the past fifteen years.

Bill Belichick, the legendary coach of the New England Patriots, wrote the foreword, in which he pays tribute to the Navy coaches and midshipmen who taught him the game of football. "When I think of Navy football, my early role models were some of the biggest legends in the program's history" (p. 7). Belichick grew up in Annapolis and his father, Steve Belichick, was an assistant football coach at the Naval Academy for thirty-four years.

Cameron first traces the history of Navy football. He describes the period from 1950 to 1963 as its "Camelot" years. The Navy football team was successful under Coach Eddie Erdelatz and his assistant coach Wayne Hardin, who later succeeded him. During these years, Navy also built the Navy-Marine

Corps Memorial Stadium. The Navy football team was winning consistently, and legends such as Tom Lynch and Heisman Trophy winners Joe Bellino and Roger Staubach were winning the hearts and minds of football fans across the country. Even President John F. Kennedy, himself a Navy veteran, supported the Navy team. Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 was a tremendous blow to the team, and many wondered whether the Army-Navy game would even be played the week afterward. Ranked number two in the country, Navy won the game, then went on to lose to top-ranked Texas in the Cotton Bowl. After the following season, as Cameron puts it, "Camelot was over. Without knowing it, a long cold winter descended on the Navy program. It would last almost forty years" (p. 26).

Cameron characterizes the years between 1995 and 2001 as the "Big Tease." Under Coach Charlie Weatherbie, Navy football initially did well, experiencing winning seasons. However, as Cameron writes, "[h]is finish was a disaster, as Navy lost seventeen of the last eighteen" games he coached, "and twenty of twenty-one overall" (p. 51). Navy football's true renewed success began when Coach Paul Johnson, the offensive coordinator in 1995-96, returned, and Cameron portrays 2002-2007 under the heading "Johnson Returns." Johnson's record at Navy was 43-27, with five bowl appearances in six seasons. More importantly, Johnson's teams crushed both Army and Air Force, losing only once against another service academy. The football team has continued to have winning seasons under Coach Ken Niumatalolo from 2008 to the present, a period Cameron characterizes as a "Ball of Fire" because

of the coach's dynamic personality on the field. Cameron makes the point that "[i]f Ken Niumatalolo is your neighbor, you think he's a great guy. But if you play football for Navy, in an instant, he can be your worst nightmare" (p. 107).

Cameron does a superb job recounting the intense rivalries that Navy has with not only Army and Air Force but Notre Dame. He describes the 2007 win over Notre Dame—after forty-three consecutive losses—as follows: "The night 'the Streak' died—the longest streak in NCAA history—eighty thousand fans at Notre Dame Stadium watched in stunned silence as Navy let go of forty-three years of misery, embarrassment, and frustration" (p. 136). He details the joy—and other emotions—of football games with Army and Air Force, with the overall winner receiving the Commander in Chief's Trophy. Few other writers can match Cameron's insights into and appreciation of the distinctive qualities of the Army-Navy game. "The annual bit of military theater, greater than any other game, makes the Army-Navy legacy a little sweeter. The nation's game" (p. 106).

Nonetheless, I struggled somewhat with the book. I found it difficult that Cameron seems to be telling two stories, in that as he writes about the chronology of Navy football he intersperses the story of Navy's fierce rivalries with Army, Air Force, and Notre Dame. At times the story was challenging to follow because I was reading about things from two different perspectives: one that portrayed a chronology, and another that recounted memorable games with Navy's leading rivals.

The appendices highlighting Navy's unforgettable games, unforgettable seasons, GOATS (read the book), players, coaches, and a potpourri of other

topics all add value and make this book a must-read for football fans across the country. Cameron has shined a spotlight on Navy's football program through its highs and lows, with colorful commentary that makes it an enjoyable read.

THOMAS J. GIBBONS



The Battleship Holiday: The Naval Treaties and Capital Ship Design, by Robert C. Stern. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017. 272 pages. \$42.95.

Robert Stern, a writer of more than twenty books on naval matters over three decades, opens his latest effort by admitting that he is tackling a subject on which much has been written already. *The Battleship Holiday* explores the history and technical design of capital ships that the five signatories to the 1922 Five-Power Treaty—Great Britain, the United States, Japan, France, and Italy—plus Germany built during and after the "battleship holiday" that the treaty imposed. His fresh approach to analyzing capital ship design and construction during this period addresses the ships and their innovations chronologically rather than along national lines. Throughout this chronology, he explores three major threads: diplomacy, technology, and operational performance. Stern offers that, while other treatments address one or two of these threads, his assessment of all three provides "more complete insight into the interplay of factors that led different nations to build different ships" (p. 10) to achieve their respective national goals. Divided into two parts, the book first explores how capital ships evolved to the point at which the world's naval powers