

Naval War College Review

Volume 25
Number 6 June

Article 13

1972

The Naval Side of King William's War

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Recommended Citation

Symonds, Craig L. (1972) "The Naval Side of King William's War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 25 : No. 6 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol25/iss6/13>

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ception, until mid-1965 the United States employed means which were "consciously limited and purposefully indirect." Examination of *The Pentagon Papers* reveals little appraisal of expectations, beyond pious hopes that whatever course of action adopted, it would succeed and more force would not be required.

At the Naval War College students are taught to evaluate proposed military actions by the classic tests:

- *Suitability*—Will the action accomplish what is desired?

- *Feasibility*—Are the means available sufficient to accomplish what is desired?

- *Acceptability*—Is the accomplishment of the action worth the price that will probably have to be paid?

The military professional has the rare opportunity to use *The Pentagon Papers* as valuable source material to apply these criteria to the major U.S. military actions in Vietnam.

Leslie Gelb, Director of the Study Task Force that produced *The Pentagon Papers*, noted in his letter of transmittal to Secretary of Defense McNamara that writing history where it blends into current events is treacherous. Writing about Vietnam at this time is even more treacherous, because of the passions that disagreement, disappointment, and frustration have released. Military professionals can avoid compounding these errors by studying and analyzing what data are available. By utilizing the tools provided by a sound grasp of military theory, the military professional can make a positive contribution to American scholarship and to his profession.

(*Editor's Note*: Lieutenant Commander Simpson, of the College of Naval Command and Staff faculty, used *The Pentagon Papers* as textual material for his seminar "Conflict, Strategy and Politics.")

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Powley, Edward B. *The Naval Side of King William's War*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1972. 361p.

Marcus, G.J. *The Age of Nelson*. New York: Viking Press, 1971. 504p.

While there are few men who would dispute the claim that the physical and technological demands of modern naval warfare exceed any challenge faced by earlier generations of seagoing fighting men, it is difficult to read about the days of "wooden ships and iron men" without at least one small pang of regret. In our current state of rapidly advancing technology, it is occasionally satisfying to reflect on the age of sail and its more personalized confrontation with the elements.

Both of these new books recall that lost era, and it is appropriate that they be reviewed together for they represent the genesis and conclusion of the most protracted naval conflict in history. With only brief interludes of peace—often characterized by a feverish rebuilding of battered warships—England and France fought each other on the seas for over a century, from 1688 to 1815. In these two books we catch a glimpse of the personalities and weaponry, the tactics and strategies of naval warfare at the beginning and at the end of that struggle.

Both volumes are labors of love, and within their covers one can rejoice with the authors in the elemental challenge of the sea, and in the pleasure of a tale well told. But if attention to detail and exhaustive research are any measure, Mr. Powley hath the greater love.

His book is one of those rarely found and even more rarely appreciated volumes of historical purity. His sources are voluminous and unimpeachable, and he seldom allows himself to editorialize or glamorize historical events. The story of King William's War unfolds slowly and almost ponderously. Much of the work is, in the author's own words, "a factual journal to illustrate the course

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and routine of naval business." (p. 71) Not that the story is not a good one, for it is.

The antagonist is the deposed Catholic King of England, the self-styled James II. The protagonist is the Protestant Prince of Orange, proclaimed by Parliament to be William II, the rightful King of England, France, and Ireland. Fleeing from the nation he once ruled, James turned to the Catholic King of France, Louis XIV, for protection. Louis, however, was not disposed to boarding houseguests unless they could prove to be useful. He therefore arranged for James to be sent to Ireland to lead a rebellion of the discontented Irish-Catholic majority against their British rulers.

This was the origin of the Naval War of 1688-89, and perhaps more significantly in our own view, it was also the origin of the bitter Catholic-Protestant antagonisms that scourge Northern Ireland today. It was a fierce struggle characterized by determined and courageous fighting on both sides. The siege of Protestant-held Londonderry by the Irish Army of James II rivals the heroic resistance of Leningrad in our own century. The story ends abruptly on the eve of the crucial Battle of Beachy Head in 1689 for the authors unfortunate death cut short the peroration to his work. But in any case, Beachy Head was not the end of the Anglo-French naval wars; the end came in 1805 with Admiral Nelson's victory at Trafalgar.

In *The Age of Nelson*, Mr. Marcus, like Mr. Powley, tells a good story, but, quite frankly, a story that has been told before. The author's assertion that "... the naval side of the War of 1793-1815 has never been fully and comprehensively treated," is simply not valid. (p. 11) Literally scores of works have been published during the past century dealing with the naval aspects of the Napoleonic Wars, of which A.T. Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and*

Empire (1892) is the most conspicuous.

This latest work is for the most part well written, but offers little new material. The main contribution of the book is the narration it provides of the years of "lame duck" warfare which followed Trafalgar. During this period, the French Fleet remained continuously in port while the battleships of the Royal Navy beat back and forth across the harbor entrances in tedious blockade duty.

Both books were written primarily for history buffs, but *Nelson* will doubtless have some general readership because of the nature of the subject. They are, however, worthwhile reading, and in their pages the origins of our naval heritage can be rediscovered.

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Sellers, Robert C., ed., *Armed Forces of the World, a Reference Handbook*, 3d ed. New York: Praeger, 1971. 296p.

This reference handbook provides a summary of the armed forces of the world in terms of size, composition, major weapons systems and items of equipment, defense budgets, defense spending as a percent of gross national product, and other information of use in estimating the nature of the defense activities of a given country. The handbook provides no qualitative judgments as to the effectiveness or utility of these forces. A reader knowledgeable in current weapons systems and major items of equipment will find enough information to make some generalizations as to the modernity of the forces under consideration. There are a number of useful appendices dealing with key defense agreements and treaties, munition production capabilities, nuclear weapons potential (and interestingly here the editor includes Israel with the present five nuclear powers as having an immediate nuclear capability), capability