

Book Reviews

Utmost Gallantry: The U.S. and Royal Navies at Sea in the War of 1812

Kevin D. McCranie. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011. 365 pp. Illus. Maps. Notes. Bibliog. Index. \$39.95.

Reviewed by David Curtis Skaggs

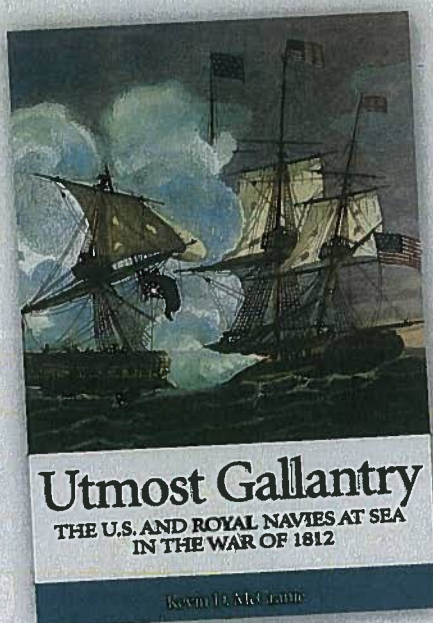
Among the plethora of bicentennial books describing the War of 1812 at sea, Professor Kevin McCranie of the Naval War College sets an unequaled standard for depth of research and analysis. In *Utmost Gallantry*, he seeks "a balanced appraisal of the war based on British and American archival sources" and "to place engagements in a broader operational and strategic context" than do previous studies. Within the operational limits he establishes for this volume, he succeeds admirably.

Most American studies emphasize the ship-to-ship duels of the war's first six months and ignore the ever-increasing effectiveness of the British blockade of the East Coast of the United States. McCranie stresses the latter and declares the war's turning point to be the inglorious 1 June 1813, when British sailors bottled up Stephen Decatur's squadron of the USS *United States*, *Macedonian*, and *Hornet* at New London, Connecticut, and when HMS *Shannon* defeated the *Chesapeake* off Cape Ann, Massachusetts. McCranie rightfully concludes: "When adding the combat loss of the *Chesapeake* to the operational loss of Decatur's squadron . . . the Royal Navy had rendered ineffective in a single day four U.S. warships, or slightly less than half of the total operational strength of America's oceanic navy." At the same time the *Constellation* lay blockaded at Norfolk, from which she never sailed.

For the remainder of the volume, McCranie traces cruises of ships from both sides, recounting their many failures and occasional successes in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans. It is here that the author's indefatigable research skills bear their ripest fruit. One cannot help but admire his use of American and British ship logs, and of inquiries into such little-used archives as the Suffolk Record Office in Ipswich, England, where the papers of Captain (later Rear Admiral Sir) Philip Broke

reside along with the *Chesapeake's* log and the *Shannon's* journal. McCranie and the Naval Institute Press deserve high accolades for the superb maps and engagement diagrams depicted throughout the book.

Unlike most scholars of the naval war, this author is not an unabashed admirer of Secretary of the Navy William Jones. Because McCranie concentrated on warship combat, he belittles Jones' emphasis on using the Navy as commerce raiders. Nor does he see privateering as an adjunct to naval policy, as did Jones.



However, too often blame for mission failure is placed on Jones' shoulders rather than those of his self-serving, honor-hungry captains.

The one problem with *Utmost Gallantry* is the book's narrow focus. McCranie confines it to the oceanic war, omitting the conflict on the North American lakes and Royal Navy raids on the American coast from Maine to Louisiana. There is an interrelation between these aspects of the naval conflict that can only be seen through a detailed analysis of their interconnections.

For instance, the lakes effort not only took manpower from the oceanic war, it also diverted money, matériel, and shipwrights from the coastal ports. But

the lakes were the one place where the United States could match the Royal Navy, and where two decisive battles and one indecisive campaign affected the war's outcome more than oceanic operations.

The same can be said for the British decision to engage in littoral raids. Designed to encourage opposition to the James Madison administration and to detract American Army regulars from the Canadian campaign, they did exactly the opposite. By diverting soldiers and sailors from the Canadian operations, London strategists may well have contributed to British failures on Lake Champlain and the Niagara frontier in 1814. For these interconnections, readers should consult George Daughan's less-well-researched and error-prone *1812: The Navy's War*.

It is to be hoped that Professor McCranie will follow up this volume with a second one dealing with those aspects of the naval conflict omitted in *Utmost Gallantry*. His talents in research diligence and analytical insight are too well demonstrated to leave us without a complete history of the naval aspects of the War of 1812.

Dr. Skaggs is a professor emeritus of history at Bowling Green State University, and the author of three books dealing with the War of 1812 on the northern lakes. He is the 2012 recipient of the USS *Constitution* Museum's Samuel Eliot Morison Award for his "research and award-winning scholarship about the United States Navy's role in the War of 1812."

De Ruyter: Dutch Admiral

Jaap R. Bruijn, Ronald Prud'homme van Reine, and Rolof van Hövell tot Westerflier, eds. Rotterdam: Karwansaray Publishers, 2011. 279 pp. Illus. Maps. Notes. Bibliog. Index. \$93.19.

Reviewed by Virginia W. Lunsford

This inaugural offering of Karwansaray Publishers' series Protagonists of History in International Perspective is a valuable contribution to early modern maritime studies. Edited by three Dutch scholars, the handsome compendium of essays surveys the life, achievements, and contributions of Michiel de Ruyter, the great 17th-century admiral from the Dutch Republic. Several pieces also investigate his impact beyond the borders of the Netherlands by exploring

the greater world in which de Ruyter lived and worked in an environment characterized by European expansion, the birth of the global economy, significant developments in naval tactics, technology and professionalization, and important geopolitical changes. The contributors themselves are an admirably diverse lot.

Naval historians and specialists in Dutch history will find the essays about specific aspects of de Ruyter's life and career fresh and illuminating. Jaap R. Bruijn writes about the relationship between de Ruyter and his fellow flag officers in the Dutch Navy. Michel Vergé-Franceschi analyzes the naval rivalry (and respect) between the admiral and his formidable French counterpart, the Marquis Abraham Duquesne. Henk de Heijer explores de Ruyter's 1664-65 expedition to West Africa and America, while J. D. Davies considers British perceptions of him during the Anglo-Dutch Wars. Niels M. Probst assesses his role in the conflicts between Denmark and Sweden in the 1650s from a Danish point of view. Finally, Ronald Prud'homme van Reine, in two different pieces, considers de Ruyter's place in 17th-century Dutch arts and letters.

Other chapters use the admiral's influence and achievements as a means to discuss broader topics in early modern history. Among these are Karim Bejjit's look at the relationship between Dutch and North African states, Jan Glete's exploration of the political and military context, and John Hattendorf's discussion of the century's European navies, naval strategy, and naval tactics.

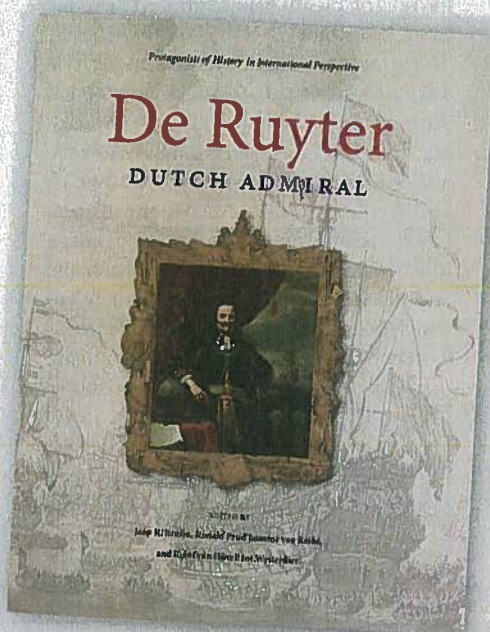
Visually, *De Ruyter, Dutch Admiral* is a beautiful volume of very high print quality and striking appearance. Especially impressive are the numerous maps and images. The former are large, clear, attractive, to the point, and organized in such a fashion as to be easily consulted. The images are stunning. The book is replete with large, richly colored reproductions of 17th-century Dutch paintings, maps, drawings, and engravings. Indeed, probing essays aside, the illustrations alone are reason enough to peruse this work.

Because it transcends a narrow focus on just de Ruyter's career and also offers illuminating essays on broader historical topics as well as sumptuous reproductions of Golden Age Dutch art, the book's title is too limited. A more descriptive or inclusive title would enable potential readers to grasp the scope of what this

attractive and informative text actually covers.

One could object a bit, too, to the publisher's stated historiographical intent for the series (and, hence, for this book as its initial offering). The project's goal, Bruijn declares in his introduction, is to promote a "collective European historical consciousness," because "this continent is a collective of nations on its way to unity." This stated purpose sounds somewhat forced, almost recasting the work as a piece of polished propaganda rather than presenting it as the top-notch, early modern scholarship that it actually represents.

It is to this volume's credit that it offers views of the admiral from a variety of national perspectives, informs readers that he was well known throughout much of Europe, and that he made contributions beyond Dutch culture and naval history. However, his widespread influence does not necessarily fulfill the contemporary longing for a



historical "joint path." It is anachronistic, in fact, to insert this perspective into a century when European states were at war with one another almost continually. No doubt as the process of integration proceeds, a distinctive sense of European identity and collective consciousness will develop, but this will develop organically and over time.

This fairly superficial feature of the book does not permeate the essays per se, even though the editors' desire to promote a European ethos is the reason they engaged a diverse set of contributors in striving to reveal de Ruyter's transnational

impact. This is all for the good. The admiral was an especially influential and innovative figure in the most powerful navy and most economically dominant nation in the 17th-century world. Numerous accounts of his story exist in Dutch, but studies in English are far fewer. This beautiful work helps to redress the scarcity. In contextualizing de Ruyter, it provides insightful information on aspects of the broader early modern world. Michiel de Ruyter is worthy of such treatment, and the book is certainly deserving of readers' attention.

Dr. Lunsford is an associate professor of history at the U.S. Naval Academy, where she specializes in maritime and European history.

Reefs and Shoals: An Alan Lewrie Naval Adventure

Dewey Lambdin. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2011. 354 pp. Fiction. \$25.99.

Reviewed by Wade G. Dudley

It is January 1805, the birth of a new year in the continuing war against the Corsican Ogre and his allies. Dragged by duty from a warm bed (heated by the lovely but straitlaced Lydia Stangbourne) in Portsmouth, England, to battle the enemies of King George III in North American waters, Captain Alan Lewrie at last hoists the broad pendant of a commodore on HMS *Reliant*. The challenges before him are numerous, not least among them confronting his eldest son, Seawallis, for the first time since the lad secured a midshipman's berth for himself after forging his father's name to relevant documents (a chip off the old block).

The Admiralty has ordered Lewrie and the *Reliant* to his old stomping grounds of the West Indies and the American coast via Bermuda. Upon arrival, he is to capture or destroy French and Spanish privateers, show the flag in American ports, and investigate rumors of U.S. support of enemy privateers. Along the way he must commandeer ships for his squadron from an unsupportive admiral, worry about the persistent threat of yellow fever, be wary of a French fleet rumored to be heading his way from Toulon, try to avoid the bull-in-a-china-shop approach to diplomacy with easily offended Americans, and keep his pants buttoned (a mutual attachment is beginning to bloom with Lydia). Can he do it? Well, even at the age of 42, Lewrie is still quite the ram cat.