

identifies works in English with an asterisk. Among the pleasing features of the book is widespread reference and use of non-English source materials, whose authors are occasionally quoted directly in the text and text boxes. *Fortress Europe* by Joseph and Hanna Kaufmann is recommended for general readers interested in European military history and specialists on military fortifications and coastal defences.

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**Jack Kelly. *Valcour. The 1776 Campaign that Saved the Cause of Liberty*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, [www.stmartins.com](http://www.stmartins.com), 2021. xv+285 pp., illustrations, maps, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. US \$28.99, CDN \$38.50, cloth; ISBN 987-1-250-24711-7.**

*Valcour* is a masterfully written history of a military campaign by opposing naval forces engaging in combat on a long narrow lake during the early stages of the American Revolution. Its unforeseen, consequential aftermath likely changed the outcome of the entire war. Kelly's narrative is a mosaic of interlocking and yet similar clashing tales of American and British politics, military ambitions, imaginative tactics, resourcefulness, and the vital role of logistics in war. In addition, there are thought-provoking insights into the character and leadership qualities of the officers on both sides of the conflict.

The British military plan was to cut the rebel colonies in two, especially the rowdy New Englanders, by capturing a swath of territory from the US-Canadian border, down Lake Champlain, across Lake George, through Saratoga and ultimately connect to the Hudson River and New York City. Lake Champlain contains many islands, shoals, steep rocky cliffs, and heavily forested shore. It gently flows south to north for roughly 120 miles with a width of twelve miles at one point and an average depth of about 60 feet. Situated between the Green Mountains to the east and the Adirondacks to the west, lake winds (critical for naval warfare) generally run northerly or southerly in this geologic corridor.

The leaders of the American forces for this "terraqueous war" were Generals Philip Schuyler, Horatio Gates, plus Benedict Arnold, Commodore of the Continental Navy's lake forces, and some soon to become prominent, such as John Sullivan. The British commanders were Generals Guy Carleton and John Burgoyne, and the later-renowned, Edward Pellew. All were King's Army veterans, but were now opponents. In addition, the British had made alliances with many of the native American tribes in the area.

The adversaries had the same requirements to wage the impending battle. These included reconnoitering the lake's nearby territory, taking soundings

of shoals, and building and arming vessels in the wilderness. Another critical challenge was providing timely logistical supplies like powder, canvas, and cordage for their forces. The British had a large number of disciplined soldiers and sailors as well as shipwrights, most of whom had recovered from smallpox and therefore not susceptible to reinfections. In addition, they had ample rigging equipment, naval stores, cannon, and powder. The Americans essentially had resourceful and clever although not well-trained men who were dedicated to the idea of gaining political and personal liberty. They were much fewer in number and their arms, effective if employed judiciously, were limited by comparison.

Then there was the matter of battle advantages, disadvantages, and tactics. The British had roughly thirty sophisticated armed bateaux vessels along with two schooners, a large radeau (raft) called *Thunderer*, and the big, square-sail frigate *Inflexible*, built on Lake Champlain's shores. The Americans knew the idiosyncrasies of the lake's bottom and their fleet of sixteen crudely-built schooners, sloops, gondolas, and row galleys. The crews were militia from several colonies, civilians engaged in learning the complex art of fighting battles upon water. US forces also controlled the relatively rundown, southern lake choke-point of Forts Ticonderoga and Mount Independence. The battle plan was to array the American fleet in a tight, south-facing anchorage arc below the northern shallows off Valcour Island's western shore. Once the British invaders discovered the hideaway of their quarry, the Yankees could concentrate their fire power on a relatively small but massed target. As the British struggled to bring their guns to bear, the Americans fired into them. Slowly, the more powerful force gained a favourable position. The result was devastating as British guns shattered the greenwood sides of the hastily built Yankee craft with heavy shot. The Americans suffered many losses during the exchange as the stronger British forces prevailed.

At dusk, the British anchored their fleet in a tight, defensive configuration to prevent the Americans from escaping. The intent was to force their surrender after the next day's dawn. That night in the fog, Arnold cleverly skirted the British trap, escaping to the south to engage them one last time. This led to the inevitable Yankee defeat, but also forced a strategic delay.

Although it was only shortly after 11 October 1776, the weather turned cold, producing some icy patches on the lake's few placid places. With complete victory within his grasp, General Carlton opted to encamp on the shores and transport his large army later on other craft, thus anticipating gaining control the entire lake in the spring. This allowed Arnold and most of his men to either shelter at Ticonderoga or escape to the south. Not long after, Gates and Arnold met Burgoyne at Saratoga and decisively defeated the British, a victory that convinced the French to enter the war as American allies. Therefore, the battle

off Valcour Island helped turn the overall tide of the Revolutionary War. One cannot read this book without thinking that Benedict Arnold's later acts of treason were a tragic ending for a man who, otherwise, would have been an American military hero.

Historian Kelly is a master storyteller, incorporating beguiling details and background information to bring to life the events and historic characters along with the bit-players who did all the fighting and bleeding. While retaining a scholarly thrust, the author occasionally uses textured prose to create remarkable and compelling word-images. For example: "The sun reached its zenith in the cobalt sky. While cumulus clouds, excited by the drama below went flying by. The guns gushed tumbling white clouds themselves, the sulfurous smoke billowing in the wind" (169).

Two more multifaceted gems are, "That night they got a taste of the adversity that always threaten sailors. The clouds first masked, then devoured the newly full moon. The air became restless. Drops of rain splattered on the canopies rigged over the gondolas' decks. The drumroll increased to a fierce tattoo. The wind veered around the north. It whipped the rain under the awnings, giving the men on the decks a cold drenching. The pitching and heaving of the boats under their anchor cables had many of them vomiting over the gunwales. The night went on and on" (98). "And if the days were hard, what are the nights? The moon, which had passed full a few days after they arrived at Valcour, had given relief from the profound darkness. But even bathed in that ghostly light, the nearby forests and hills suggested the darkness of the spirit. The men had to fight against gloom and discouragement. Now that the moon was coming toward new, the darkness deepened, feeding the men's worst imaginings" (128-129).

I highly recommend *Valcour* to historians and lay readers alike, a gem of maritime history chronicling a brief but pivotal event. In closing, Kelly perceptively summarizes his work's overall message as follows: "Generals and politicians have basked in renown. Ordinary fighting men and innocent civilians have carried the burden. The idea of war can inspire glory – its reality is anguish, hardship, and loss" (250).

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**Alston Kennerley. *Bullen's Voyages. The Life of Frank T Bullen: Sailor, Whaler, Author.* Barnsley, S. Yorks: Seaforth Publications, [www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk), 2022. 256 pp., illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. UK £25.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-39907-427-8.**