

exploration of polar regions and also to everyone with an interest in the history of science around 1900. Maritime historians will appreciate the coexistence and relative value of modern and traditional maritime craft in remote locations like Greenland.

While this book is definitely not recommended to a very broad readership, its value as a source of historical analysis would make it a welcome addition on the bookshelves of the small target audience. For anybody else, it might be an enjoyable, even casual, read given the entertaining qualities of de Quervain's original report that has lost nothing in translation. An armchair traveler might enjoy going back a century or so to a place where only very few will have the chance to actually visit. Despite the dramatic changes going on with the polar ice-cap at large as a consequence of global climate change, the surface of the Greenlandic ice-cap itself has not changed that much since the Swiss expedition of 1912. In fact, this book might even increase our understanding of these global changes by offering modern-day readers a firsthand account of one of the places most affected by climate change.

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James Delgado. *The Curse of the Somers. The Secret History behind the U.S. Navy's Most Infamous Mutiny.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, www.oup.com, 2022. 178 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography. US \$24.95, cloth; ISBN 978-0-19-757522-2. (E-book available.)

One sentence in James Delgado's fresh telling of the 1842 mutiny on the brig *Somers* sets this gripping tragedy in perspective. "History would have been very different had [Matthew Calbraith] Perry transferred [Philip] Spencer to *Grampus*." Perry, in the family line of early American naval heroes, could have dispatched Midshipman Spencer, the always-difficult son of John Tyler's Secretary of War and later Treasury, to another ship.

Instead, Perry, commander of the New York Navy Yard, assigned young Spencer, whose head swam with fantasies of pirates that he was only too willing to share with one and all, to *Somers* on what was to be its first operational cruise – to the Africa Station.

To say the moving of Spencer was "political" would be understating the matter. Aboard *North Carolina*, Spencer, already showing open contempt for orders and rank, attacked a ranking officer in a drunken fury. But for his family's influence in Washington and inside the sea service, he could have been cashiered and should have been, rather than shuffled off to another assignment.

Somers also was different from other ships in the fleet. It was to be a "school ship," where the most junior acting midshipman would literally "learn

the ropes” on their way to a naval commission. Spencer was never a model for them to follow on any ship.

Perry and his in-law, Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, a noted travel writer and author of several biographies of naval heroes, were strong proponents of formalizing midshipmen’s education. They held steady to rigorously training the mids in the ways of the sea and the Navy. The helter-skelter manner of hit-and-miss education for the teen-aged mids aboard warships at sea had proved a disgrace that should have ended decades before, but it hadn’t.

Educating and training would-be officers was near the top of the priority list for naval reformers, like Perry and Mackenzie, from the 1830s on. But exactly how that was to be accomplished remained the huge question, debated over and over again and not answered until years after the “curse of the *Somers*” was laid upon the Navy, the executive branch, and the Congress.

Delgado, author of more than 20 books and an acclaimed maritime archaeologist, establishes the range of conflict that played out on that “unlucky ship” with sharply drawn portraits of the leading protagonists, Spencer and Mackenzie.

Coming on stage in this tragedy is Mackenzie’s character, diametrically different from Spencer’s. In the author’s telling, Mackenzie’s intense religiosity, his spirited defense of the Perry family for its role in the War of 1812 and ensuing literary feud with historian and novelist James Fenimore Cooper, were contributing factors in what happened aboard the brig. They certainly were also factors in the public clamor that erupted after the “drumhead” proceeding at sea that condemned Spencer and led to him and two others being hanged for mutiny from the brig’s yardarm.

Despite his years of naval service and the slow movement of promotion in a small US Navy, *Somers* was Mackenzie’s first command at sea. Succinctly put, “*Somers* was essentially supposed to be a school ship, but it was also a functioning warship. Mackenzie would by necessity run *Somers* as a warship than as a floating school,” Delgado writes. To show where education ranked before it sailed, *Somers* did not even carry a schoolmaster aboard, a common enough practice in the navy then for its warships.

Chapter 4, packed with testimony from the official court of inquiry and Mackenzie’s later court-martial, highlights Mackenzie’s command in disturbing detail. All too often, he and his senior officers had overlooked the disciplinary problems that swirled around Spencer’s interactions with crew and the acting midshipmen. Then came the crackdown, floggings, and locking in irons.

The reason: “the discovered list,” carried by Spencer in a razor case, with the names of the “mutineers,” some certain, others leaning, and some not involved. But were those men on Spencer’s list actually plotting to murder

Mackenzie and others who stood in their way of seizing the ship? Would they go to their assigned posts to carry out the mutiny? Was the brig to be a piratical cruiser?

Delgado describes the onboard tension this way in Chapter 5: “*Somers* was now a ship in the full grip of fear by the officers of the men and boys, fear of the officers by the crew, and no one sure of exactly what would happen next.” Nathaniel Currier’s “floating gallows” lithograph of two bodies hanging from *Somers*’ yardarm below an unfurled American flag best illustrates what happened next.

The iconic image of the hangings only opened the door for more anger and controversy from a fistfight in Tyler’s cabinet between Spencer’s father and Navy Secretary, Abel Parker Upshur, through the Navy with courts of this and that reviewing and judging, and writers like Cooper and a press eager to feed an audience on details that “proved” Mackenzie was correct or Spencer a “martyr.”

Delgado leads readers into that vortex of nineteenth-century recrimination that continues to this day. He has skillfully put the facts on the table in *The Curse of the Somers*. Like the author, I now believe “all parties are to blame,” a major change from my first introduction to *Somers* through Cooper’s 1844 pamphlet on Mackenzie’s “despotism” and “unmanly conduct” on the cruise. Spencer was at the centre of the vortex that cursed *Somers*.

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John J. Domagalski. *Escape from Java: The Extraordinary World War II Story of the USS Marblehead*. Barnsley, S. Yorks; Pen & Sword, www.pen-and-sword.com, 2022, ix+310 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. US \$34.95, UK £25.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-52678-441-4.

The prime objective of Imperial Japan’s attacks on American, British, and Dutch possessions in December 1941, was to secure the natural resources of Malaya (now Malaysia) and the Dutch East Indies (DEI – now Indonesia). Those areas were rich in rubber and tin as well as other resources, all of which Japan lacked. Starting in 1940, military officials from Great Britain, the USA, the DEI, Australia, and New Zealand began developing contingency plans to meet the Japanese military threat. For America, the US Navy’s (USN) Asiatic Fleet was based in Manila, in the then-American colony of the Philippines. Part of the Asiatic Fleet was a by-then elderly light cruiser named USS *Marblehead*. John J. Domagalski’s *Escape from Java: The Extraordinary World War II Story of the USS Marblehead* tells the story of this tough ship and its courageous crew in the early days of the Pacific War.