

questions one is asked as a supposed naval historian: “Which was the carrier involved in the Taranto raid?”; “Which destroyers accompanied Warspite on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Narvik battle?” and such.

A sour comment made on naval preparation for “the next war” is that their ships are largely designed and acquired in preparation for a war like the last one, rather than the new one. Also many historians have noted that the RN and others presumed, and built up their navies, to counter future major battles of the Jutland and Falklands type for what developed as the Second World War. Only the Americans, in their huge Pacific anti-Japanese battles, fought such battleship-to-battleship conflicts, and even they – and the Japanese – had to hurriedly adapt to aircraft carrier battles as their new format. This was much more a convoy war.

Marriott’s *Naval Battles of the Second World War* includes several that were hardly “naval battles” in the normal sense: the loss of HMS *Glorious*, the convoy battles for Malta, and the destruction of the 1941 Duisberg, a Malta-bound convoy. Each selected battle sets the strategic tone under “Background,” denoting the participants on both sides with their ships or Air Groups in a paragraph or so, without anything significant in the way of assessment in the wider context. This is followed by a page or two of “The Action,” followed by ship and the occasional action photograph. Only “The Battle of the Atlantic” chapter includes seven sections, such as “The Opening Rounds” and “The Importance of Ultra,” each of these one- or two-paragraph descriptions the subject of multiple books by various authors!

These pages will be handy as refreshers, reminding any who need a memory-jogging for who was involved, what actual ships were lost on either side, the moment-to-moment action and the local outcome of an interesting selection of mostly British-based Second War at-sea events, such as “The Channel Dash,” the two Narvik Battles, PQ-17, the December 1942 Barents Sea battle, Taranto, Oran, Matapan, Operations Harpoon, Vigorous and Pedestal for Malta, and Operation Torch. It is a reference, not an assessment of history or naval competence, and as such, a tool, not an education.

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**Christian McBurney.** *Dark Voyage: An American Privateer’s War on Britain’s African Trade.* Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, [www.westholmepublishing.com](http://www.westholmepublishing.com), 2022. xiv+360 pp., maps, illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. US \$35.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-59416-382-1.

This book focuses upon a unique use of privateering employed during the American Revolution, specifically the role of the American privateer

*Marlborough* that attacked British slave trade interests from August 1776 to August 1778. The ship's remarkable voyage from Rhode Island to Africa involves the entrepreneur John Brown, of Providence, Rhode Island, and the captain of Brown's ship, George White Babcock of Exeter, RI. Expressly built for its privateer mission, the two-deck brig *Marlborough* was crewed by Rhode Island and Massachusetts men who had not been involved in the slave trade in West Africa. Much of the book is a detailed account of that operation which demonstrated audacity and patriotism, along with troubling moral inconsistencies. This important work covers a largely undocumented chapter in the maritime history of the American Revolution.

The first two chapters introduce the reader to John Brown, a cast of Rhode Island "characters," a description of the international business of the slave trade and the lucrative privateering operations at that time. These are followed by John Brown's unique Revolutionary War privateering quest, his 250-ton brig *Marlborough* that mounted 20 carriage guns manned by a crew of 125, and its breakout to sea through a British naval blockade of Narragansett Bay to sail to the west coast of Africa. The author then graphically describes the horrors of the traffic from the capture of slaves in the jungles of Africa, their transportation to trading compounds and ultimately vessels, the many "middlemen", and sundry health dangers involved in the despicable enterprise. The centrepiece of the book is a detailed description of the privateer battles and apprehensions of the *Marlborough* and the disturbing fact that with its captures it entered the slave trade by default, but likely not the New Englander's intent. When British slave ships filled with enslaved Africans were captured, the privateers in effect became slave traders. Compassion for the hundreds of captives that were packed onboard the British slave ships or sympathy for the trauma these captives had already suffered was a minor concern. Instead, the Americans treated the captives like any non-human cargo seized on board an enemy ship, anticipating the sale of their 'prizes' in a slave market. At the time, such behaviour was not seen as offensive by many Americans. The author then describes the harrowing voyage of the return to the United States in detail.

Captain George Babcock and his crew undertook a then-unique American privateer attack on Britain's slave trade by capturing British slavers off the African coast rather than the usual privateer interceptions in the Caribbean. It was reminiscent of the bold, demoralizing Continental Navy raids of John Paul Jones, Gustavus Conyngham and Lambert Wickes along the British and Irish coasts; both were remarkable considering that the rebellious United Colonies were facing the most powerful navy in the world. These privateer attacks led British slave merchants in Liverpool, Bristol, and London to question whether to continue investing in the slave trade business. The Revolutionary War also had an impact on the British slave trade to the Caribbean because American privateers not only attacked and captured British slave ships, but also their

merchant ships returning home from British Caribbean islands carrying sugar (the third leg of the so-called triangular trade). As well, they seized British vessels filled with provisions intended to feed both the white and slave Caribbean Island populations.

Because of substantial financial losses, British merchants deemed it prudent to hold off on making very large investments in long voyages until the risk of loss was reduced until the Royal Navy could assert its superiority on the high seas after the war ended. While never completely stopping the African slave trade into the nineteenth century, the significant captures of slave ships by American privateers reinforced the risk and the decision to reduce the trade, thus temporarily reducing the number of underwritten African slave ship voyages.

The result of John Brown's venture was summarized in an article in the Providence Gazette dated 13 June 1780. "The privateer ship Marlborough, Capt. Babcock [of Providence] arrived in port from a successful cruise having taken 28 prizes. She brought in with her ship laden with dry goods, wine, port, etc. and a brig with provisions. A large Guineaman, having on board 300 slaves was ordered to South Carolina the Marlborough has large quantities of effects on board taken from the enemy." (173) McBurney argues the newspaper article was not exactly accurate in detail, but it does convey the general success of the venture. Babcock had hoped to return a total of six prize vessels seized off the West African coast—the *Fancy*, *Pearl*, *Kitty*, and *Betsey*, plus two later ships—for prize money. He captured the ship *John* and the brig *Bridget* during his return voyage. Unfortunately, only the *John*, *Bridget* and *Betsey* were accounted for and sold as bounty to the privateer's syndicate.

McBurney's work includes 6 appendices. Appendix C, titled "British Slave Ships Captured by American Privateers with Enslaved Africans On Board," focuses on the period of the *Marlborough's* voyages detailing various vessels involved in the slave trade and specifics concerning their engagements. Of particular interest, Appendix D lists African captives carried by British and US slave ships to the Caribbean from 1752 through 1792. Just prior to the outbreak of the American Revolution, the number of slaves transported to North America reached 44,606. During the height of the Revolutionary War, that number was reduced to the high six thousands. Ironically, after the war ended, the total numbers of slaves imported to North America particularly the Caribbean increased to exceed 45,000 by 1792.

This is an unusual book in both its subject matter and the extraordinary depth of meticulous scholarship that the author has brought to his readers. The notes and bibliography plus the many appendices make this an extraordinary contribution to the maritime history literature. I highly recommend the well written *Dark Voyage* by Christian McBurney to maritime historians who are interested in privateering during the American Revolutionary War era, the

slave trade during these years, and its final demise at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

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**Michael McCarthy. *Ship's Fastenings: From Sewn Boat to Steamship*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, [www.tamu.press](http://www.tamu.press), 2023. (Second Edition). xii+239 pp., illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. US \$75.00, hardback; ISBN 978-1-64843-104-3.**

Except for the dugout, every watercraft throughout history required some type of fastenings to join its constructive elements. These fastenings might seem like a minor technical detail when looking at a ship at large, but they are of critical importance to the construction and determine and/or limit many parameters of the ultimately built ship, for example, size and seaworthiness. Imagine a major ocean liner with its steel plates sewn together like the hull of a birch bark canoe or Greenlandic kayak. Michael McCarthy needs to be lauded for bringing the history of this critical element of shipbuilding history into the limelight and providing a highly detailed and nuanced history of ship's fastenings.

The first edition of *Ship's Fastenings* was published in 2005 and fortunately, this edition (2022) is a real second edition and not just a reprint. With Michael McCarthy being a member of the Department of Maritime Archaeology at the Western Australian Maritime Museum who has led several excavation projects, it is no surprise that there is a certain emphasis on the early periods of maritime history, but the book covers the full timespan up into the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Second World War.

Focusing on a single technological detail of maritime design and construction instead of the whole ship allows the author to achieve a very high analytical depth and to illustrate how improvements within the technology of a single construction element shaped the whole industry as well as how the limitations of a certain technology for this single construction element prohibited other developments. Unfortunately, this analytical depth is not fully maintained for later historical periods and the chapters on fastening methods for iron and steel ships lack the level of detail to be found in the chapters on fastenings for wooden ships. This is not surprising, given Michael McCarthy's expertise, and maybe not so much a critique on the book but an encouragement for another author to continue McCarthy's work with a study of steel ship fastenings that will focus on the various riveting and welding techniques.

In addition to discussing the fastenings themselves, the author also discusses how the types of fasteners affected topics like insurance, etc. and