

Book Reviews

Quintin Barry. *Suffern Versus Hughes: War in the Indian Ocean 1781-1783*. Series From Reason to Revolution 1721-1815 #125. Warwick, UK: Helion Books, www.helion.co.uk, 2024. 226 pp., illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. UK £ 25, paperback; ISBN 978-1-80451-339-2.

The American Revolution was a world-wide conflict. In addition to a set of recalcitrant colonists, the British were fighting Europe's major powers, which included Spain, the Netherlands, and, most important of all, France. By the period considered in this book, the conflict in North America was essentially over, but the war raged on in other areas of the globe as the British fought to maintain and even expand their empire. India was the prize.

Suffern Versus Hughes is Number 125 in publisher Helion & Company's "From Reason to Revolution 1721-1815," a series that focuses on military and naval history. Quintin Barry's third volume for the collection focuses on the personalities and battles that the two protagonists (Pierre André de Suffern and Sir Edward Hughes) engaged in for their respective kings and countries on the far side of the world. The contest between these two men, and their respective nations, is a welcome addition to the maritime literature of this period and expands it beyond the usual confines of the Atlantic.

Berry produces a concisely written, compact book full of information. It runs to just over 200 pages. The nineteen short and readable chapters are arranged in three general thematic groupings. The first five set the stage, introducing the reader to the two admirals, the theater of conflict, and the conditions on the ground prior to the arrival of Suffern and Hughes in India for their multiple duels. The next four chapters expose the machinations of war. There was a covert British proposal to attack Spanish positions in the New World, which evolved into an operation focused on the Asian subcontinent after Britain's declaration of war on the Dutch. Then there was a French

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counter to the not-so-secret operation. The initial Atlantic encounters between the British and the French in the race to the Dutch-controlled Cape of Good Hope may have foreshadowed events in the Indian Ocean. The wheels were set in motion for the two admirals to vie for supremacy in India. Thus are the vagaries of war.

Preliminaries settled, the meat of the book is contained in the remainder of the text. Battles for various ports and maneuvers at sea, politics on the subcontinent between the various Indian potentates and the European interlopers, as well as the five head-to-head confrontations between the two naval commanders are concisely presented. Here is where the reputations of these men were made. Barry, utilizing sources both complimentary and disparaging of the combatants, seeks a level of clarity in the fog of war. Was one commander bolder and more assertive while the other was more conservative and timid? Did available resources and considerations of outside factors – such as the English East India Company, French colonial governors, or other combatants – assist or hinder operations and affect potential courses of action? The author posits credible arguments for the actions taken by these men and their relative achievements in the rather unique and not always positive circumstances in which they found themselves.

The black and white illustrations and simple line maps are effective in their representation of the characters in the text, locating the areas in India referenced, or of following the line of battle. An appendix of the vessels available for each of the five battles allows the reader to gauge the resources available to each commander during their several clashes. The bibliography presents several sources that the reader may wish to examine if the topic is of a deeper interest than the limited amount of information that can be presented in the format of this text. A general index and an index of ships rounds out the back matter of the book.

For a relatively short monograph, Barry produces a readable and information-packed work. Although the American Revolution was basically over by the time that the struggles between Suffern and Hughes in the Indian Ocean took place, this treatment of these actions may be a welcome revelation for any enthusiast of that conflict. In addition, it will be of interest to those wishing to know more about the history of European activity in the Asian subcontinent or maritime and naval history in general. Although a specialist in late eighteenth-century French and British naval history might find the text basic, this reader believes that the book, like India was for the belligerent nations, is a prize worth keeping in one's collection.

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