

**Caiella, James M. *American Naval History in 50 Ships*
McFarland & Company, 2025**

317 pp., ship designators and abbreviations, illustrations, notes, bibliography, ship name index, general index

ISBN 9781476697482 (softcover) US\$49.95; 9781476656113 (e-book)

James Caiella's *American Naval History in 50 Ships* is an unusual non-traditional, very well-illustrated American naval historiography in that it shifts one's attention away from the handful of iconic vessels that dominate public memory. Caiella, a highly regarded photographer, editor, and historian, has constructed a compelling narrative around 50 lesser-known ships and some quasi-vessels (or crafts) that nonetheless played meaningful roles in shaping the nation's maritime trajectory. Spanning from the Continental Navy to the dawn of the supercarrier era, Caiella's selections underscore how innovation, miscalculation, and human agency collectively influenced naval development.

One of the book's strengths lies in its breadth. The book is organized into five chronological sections – Age of Sail, Steam and Civil War, Age of Steel, World War II, and Cold War – allowing readers to trace the progression of naval thought, growth, and capabilities across roughly two-and-a-half centuries. Caiella does not simply catalogue obscure vessels; he places each within a broader historical moment, demonstrating how even marginal or ill-fated designs can illuminate larger patterns of technological experimentation and institutional change. Some stories highlight genuine breakthroughs, while others are cautionary tales. Some vessels proved to be genuine innovators, while others reflected conceptual misjudgments or flawed execution. The book includes an array of trifling information, from the fact that there were 12 privateers and warships named *Saratoga* from 1780 to 1994, to President Theodore Roosevelt's brief turn at the helm of the very early submarine *Plunger*. On a smaller but vital scale were two heroic tugboat operations. There are also two vessels that were never meant to float: the full-sized battleship constructed of brick and mortar and wood called the *Illinois* that was the US Navy's exhibit in the White City of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, and the never-put-to-sea downtown Manhattan wooden naval enrolling quasi-battleship *Recruit*, built in 1917. Each account marked a waypoint in the evolving maritime identity of the United States, mostly for the better but occasionally for the worse. Yet each ship – whether successful, ill-fated, or somewhere in between – contributed to the evolving trajectory of America's naval and maritime tradition, offering insight into the processes that shaped the nation's seafaring identity.

The author's attention to human experience is particularly noteworthy. He

consistently focuses on the commanders and crews whose labor, ingenuity, and occasional misjudgments placed these vessels in their historical context. Among the more striking episodes is the account of a Civil War captain who attempted to sell his own warship, a reminder that naval history is as much about personalities and pressures as it is about hardware.

Caiella's book contains many memorable photographs and the author's narrative style, although sometimes tedious, is easily accessible. It is also replete with an extensive bibliography thus making the book valuable to both specialists and general readers who seek a deeper understanding of some of the more unusual vessels and events in America's naval and coast guard histories. It also discusses how the navy transferred many ships to perform service in the navies of our allies in their times of war such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Norway, and the Soviet Union.

Ultimately, *American Naval History in 50 Ships* succeeds in broadening the lens through which naval history is viewed. By illuminating the stories of ships that rarely receive attention, Caiella enriches our understanding of the United States' naval and seafaring heritage while offering a nuanced perspective on the forces – technological, strategic, and human – that shaped it. Therefore, this book is a thoughtful, well-researched contribution to the field, but also provides a reader with an advantage in a game of “naval vessel trivial pursuit.” In summary, this unique work, the author of which has recently passed, is a welcome reminder that history often resides in the overlooked and the unexpected.

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Chapman, Craig S. *The Resurrected Pirate: The Life, Death, and Subsequent Career of the Notorious George Lowther*

Schiffer Military History, 2025

256 pp., photographs, maps

ISBN 9780764369070 (hardcover), US\$29.99

In *The Resurrected Pirate*, Craig Chapman sheds light on the remarkable story of George Lowther, an infamous ex-pirate captain who became a respectable lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Chapman's title hints at a common misconception about Lowther and his fate that contemporaneous pirate sources like Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Pyrates* (1724) falsely record. Despite what these texts claim, Chapman asserts that in 1723, Lowther did not end his life by gunshot while marooned on an island in the Caribbean but escaped