

Jampoler, Andrew C. A. *Hard Aground: The Wreck of the USS Tennessee and the Rise of the US Navy*

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When I began this read, I was expecting to find an exposition on how the grounding of the USS *Tennessee* was a turning point in the modernization of the US Navy (USN). I actually found that the theme of the book is the second clause of the subtitle – “*the Rise of the US Navy*” – of which the grounding of the *Tennessee* is merely one, though a recurring, story.

Tennessee's operational career as an armored cruiser spanned just over 11 years from 1906 to 1917. In 1916, it was renamed the *Memphis* to free the *Tennessee* name for a new battleship. During its career, it transported Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft to Panama for inspections of canal construction. In 1907 the cruiser participated in the naval review associated with the Jamestown Exposition, held from 7 to 11 June 1907 to commemorate the tricentennial of the founding of the first English settlement in America. The outbreak of World War I disrupted commercial sailings and financial transactions, leaving Americans scrambling for transportation home. On 6 August 1914 the *Tennessee* sailed out of anchorage at Tompkinsville, Staten Island, for Falmouth, England with only a navigation complement, barely enough crew to sail safely, but not a “fighting crew” (133). Its ammunition holds were loaded with three bags of \$50,000 each in double eagle gold pieces as part of a shipment of \$1.5 million in US government money and \$3 million in private money to satisfy expenses and secure transportation for expatriate Americans (131, 134). The *Tennessee* spent about a year in the eastern Mediterranean protecting American interests until the ship's return trip in August 1915, carrying “seven carloads of English gold” to safekeeping in the United States and Canada. By then renamed *Memphis*, the vessel was participating in American intervention in the Dominican Republic when it was wrecked by a hurricane that left the *Tennessee* aground and unsalvageable.

That is the story of *Tennessee*'s service and wreckage, but an even bigger part of the story is the second part of the subtitle, *The Rise of the US Navy*, beginning in 1881. The Civil War Navy was obsolete and retired. In the words of William Hunt, Navy Secretary: “The condition of the Navy imperatively demands the prompt and earnest attention of Congress. Unless some action be had ... it must soon dwindle into insignificance ... We have been unable to make such an appropriate display of our naval power abroad as will cause

us to be respected ... It is a source of mortification to our officers and fellow countrymen generally, that our vessels of war should stand in such mean contrast alongside those of other and inferior powers" (8).

The navy's rise began with the 1884 appropriation. *Dolphin*, *Atlanta*, *Boston* and *Chicago* introduced steel hulls to the fleet. By 1898, the rise was sufficient to decimate the Spanish fleets in Manila and of Santiago de Cuba during the Spanish-American War that put an end to the Spanish Empire. Lessons from the Spanish-American war that a heavily-armed cruiser like *Tennessee* could outrun anything it could not outfight lasted until the Royal Navy's *Dreadnought* made them obsolete in 1906. The acquisition of an American island empire gave rise to the Anti-Imperialist League whose leaders, including industrialist Andrew Carnegie, labour leader Samuel Gompers, Harvard professor William James, and Mark Twain became the conscience of America and questioned its need for a navy. President Theodore Roosevelt made a statement as he sent the Great White Fleet around the world in 1908.

The advent of U-boats during World War I changed naval warfare as they threatened to starve Britain into submission. The USN responded with a shift to wooden submarine chasers, harbor patrol boats, and destroyers. Naval preparation notwithstanding, American mothers "didn't raise my boy to be a soldier" (199). When war did come, six new *Tucker*-class destroyers were the first Americans over there. The USN suffered few combatant ship losses at sea and none in classical big-gun, ship-on-ship duels.

World War I did end, and Nashville became the home of the largest remaining portions of the *Tennessee/Memphis*. The narrative concludes with the successor *Tennessee* moored along Ford Island in Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, but that is another story.

Readers of *The Northern Mariner* will appreciate *Hard Aground* for its extensive chronicle of the evolution of the USN from the remnants of the Civil War fleet through two wars and to the cusp of another. The intermittent one-to-two-page snippets of artwork featured in *Puck* magazine or paintings of maritime themes situate naval history in the context of social milieu. Secondary sources are liberally quoted. The index is helpful in locating topics and the bibliography is a guide to further reading. Author Andrew C.A. Jampoler has crafted a tome broader than its title suggests. Begin reading this book with broad expectations and let the text narrow them, rather than expecting *Tennessee* to be the focus. If it has a weakness, it is in its meandering breadth in contrast to linear development found in many accounts. That recognized, it is a worthwhile read.

Jim Gallen
St. Louis, Missouri