

Book Reviews

Richard Barbuto. *New York's War of 1812. Politics, Society and Combat*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, www.uopress.com, 2021. 364 pp., illustrations, maps, table, notes, bibliography, index. US \$39.95, cloth; ISBN 978-0-8061-6833-3. (E-book available.)

At different points in time, the War of 1812 theatre spanned the East and Gulf coasts of America, the West Indies, and stretched out into the Atlantic to the British Isles and into the Pacific. The one constant area of contact between the antagonists, from start to finish, was the northern boundary between the United States and the British area of Upper Canada. It was here that the United States hoped to gain a foothold for use as a bargaining chip to leverage their demands at the negotiation table. In that fight along the borderland, the state of New York figured most prominently. Richard Barbuto has written a book which details New York State's contribution to the war. It is a detailed account of the politics, mobilization efforts, and the battles in which the state participated and a welcome addition to the University of Oklahoma Press' "Campaigns and Commanders Series."

The overarching hero of Barbuto's book is New York Governor Daniel D. Tompkins, who leads in all areas (except on the field of battle), from pre-war preparations, to raising additional militia and regular army troops as needed,

to the construction of defences for the preservation of New York City from British attack, and through the celebration of the victorious heroes. Governor Tompkins rallied the war effort in the face of Federalist party resistance and his leadership played a significant part in whatever positive outcome arose from the conflict, at least for New York State.

From the outset of the war in June 1812, things did not go well for the Americans. Poor military leadership in the field, untrained or inexperienced troops (or both, especially among the militia) and little coherent strategy, left the war that was to be won simply by marching, carrying on for another two years. Within this story appear Solomon Van Rensselaer and Henry Dearborn who seem to fail at their tasks right on cue. Winfield Scott and Alexander Macomb make an early career appearance and show their promise. It is Peter Porter and Jacob Brown that are the shining lights in New York State during the war. They proved to be strong leaders, presenting far better trained troops to face the enemy in 1814 than the British confronted earlier in the war.

Barbuto's detailed analysis of the politics and the mobilization of forces stands out in this text. He describes in rich detail the governor's efforts to raise troops, to prepare the state for the war he backed, and his push past early defeats and setbacks. The author uses first-hand accounts of victory celebra-

tions and evacuation in defeat to describe the impact of war on the local inhabitants. Barbuto discusses America's Indigenous allies, discussing their relationship with the local American settlers, the negotiations to have them enter the war, and their eventual partial withdrawal from the fighting.

This book is really a micro-history of one state's response to the national call to arms and the execution of the war against the declared enemy. It focuses almost exclusively on New York State decisions, decision makers, local activity, involvement in battles, and the local actors recording the action. The author delineates the war at the state level for the reader, in compelling detail.

Unfortunately, this singular focus leaves the other important aspects of the war to a single line or two, sometimes a footnote, which tends to reduce significant shifts in the struggle to a marginal position. One example is the 1813 defeat of the British squadron on Lake Erie, which had powerful ramifications for the Niagara Peninsula, but receives five lines in the book, three of which repeat that Oliver Hazard Perry won the battle. Another is the American failure to press home the advantage of their 1813 victory on Lake Erie and the subsequent loss of four vessels on the upper lakes in 1814 (only two of four were mentioned). Indeed, the naval side of the war is reduced in the text. There is a description of Melancthon Woolsey and his early war efforts against the British. American Commodore Isaac Chauncey appears and is involved in the narrative throughout, primarily in his evolving relationship with the army during the war. But the naval aspect is less than might be expected, especially compared to the discussion of the militia and regular troop recruitment, deployment, training, and battle experience. Of course, the Governor of

New York had a hand in these areas and worked with the federal government to advance their development. The navy, on the other hand, was controlled by the federal government's Secretary of the Navy and, therefore, at arm's length from the state government. Thus, in this study of New York's response to war, the navy takes a backseat. Barbuto also briefly mentions privateering, describing the risk of such ventures and the rich rewards. Yet, America's privateers did not destroy, or even really make a dent in British trade, though their attacks did raise insurance costs.

New York's British opponents receive scant attention and the various British responses to American efforts are limited to the basics. This is most clearly apparent in Barbuto's description of the Battle of Plattsburgh and its simultaneous naval engagement (the Battle of Lake Champlain). He details the American army preparations and response but gives the British side no more than a once-over. The overall result is that the other side in this book takes on a ghost-like or shadowy quality.

Peter Rindlisbacher's sterling representation of the opening salvos of the Battle of Lake Champlain graces the book's cover and is one of ten images within. The book depicts only the American participants in events, mainly New Yorkers, while representing none of the British opposition, or even their Indigenous allies. The six maps are clear, instructive, and well-placed. The single table on the comparative losses at the Battle of Lundy's Lane seems somewhat unnecessary, as the information could be easily contained within the text, as it is with similar comparisons elsewhere in the book. The bibliography is extensive and, coupled with the endnotes, would allow any researcher to locate the exact sources that support

this solid work.

Keeping in mind that Barbuto set out to have a razor-sharp focus on New York State's role in the War of 1812, this is a book that readers interested in the War of 1812, the raising of militia, the early development of the American army, and state involvement in the making of war should find well worth reading.

Thomas Malcomson
Toronto, Ontario

Quintin Barry. *Crisis at the Chesapeake: The Royal Navy and the Struggle for America 1775-1783*. Warwick, UK: Helion Books, www.helion.co.uk, 2021. 264 pp., illustrations, maps, ship list, bibliography, index. UK £25.00, US \$45.38, paper; ISBN 978-1-91333-653-0.

“There was in the end no way in which the Americans could have ultimately been denied their independence; but the war that was fought to achieve it was substantially a naval war, and it was at sea that it would be decided.” That statement in the introduction sets the theme for this work. What follows broadens most people's visions of the American Revolution by placing it in the context of a world war. It achieves this by illustrating the role of navies in the war and how combat in other theatres affected the Revolution and was affected by it.

The tale begins with a recognition that Britain's Royal Navy, which had been shaped by two centuries of successful European war – largely against the Spanish, Dutch and French – in home waters, was ill-suited for its role in the American Revolution. Its fleet of mostly ships of the line were ill suited to transporting men and supplies across the Atlantic and intercepting small enemy smugglers, but the Royal Navy's

tasks were broader than that. With the entry of France and Spain into the war, Britain was challenged in four theatres: home waters; North America; the West Indies; and Gibraltar. Competing demands on resources would play roles in the course of battle and its outcome.

This work brings the glorious victories of Minutemen, John Paul Jones (who is not even mentioned in this tome), and George Washington down a notch or two. Speaking of 1778, the author opines, “In many ways the West Indies now ranked as the most important overseas theatre. It was widely believed that they were crucial to the British economy and commerce, while the French islands represented a target of considerable importance. Their loss would be a damaging blow to France, and the King was willing, in order to avenge ‘the faithless and insolent conduct of France’ to come to terms with the colonists if it enabled the conquest of the French islands” (49). Jumping ahead to the end, the terms on which peace was agreed were broad indeed. The United States received independence, true, along with the chance to come crawling back to Mother England, but other territorial interests were also resolved. Spain relinquished its claim to Gibraltar, retained Minorca and West Florida (which it had captured from the British), and gained East Florida, while returning the Bahamas to Britain. The Dutch regained Ceylon and kept the Cape of Good Hope, but lost Negapatam (southern India) to the British and conceded them trading rights with the Spice Islands. France weakened Britain through the loss of her American colonies, as well as recovering St. Lucia, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon (and extended their fishing rights there), and possessions in India, along with retaining Tobago that it had taken during the war.

After an overview of the American