

## Book Reviews

**Quintin Barry. *Disputed Victory: Schley, Sampson and The Spanish-American War of 1898*. Solihull, UK: Helion & Company Limited, [www.helion.co.uk](http://www.helion.co.uk), 2018. 253 pages, illustrations maps, notes, bibliography. UK £35.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-91217-491-1.**

More so than most American wars, the Spanish-American War of 1898 was fought by naval forces. *Disputed Victory: Schley, Sampson and The Spanish-American War of 1898* is the story of the naval aspects of that war and the quarrels over the glory that followed.

The book begins with a background of the US Navy of the late nineteenth century and its battleships. It was a period of change as navies of the world transitioned from wood and sail to metal and steam, armaments improved, and naval theory advanced. For the United States, insulated by oceans and lacking overseas empires to protect, it presented a tug-of-war between those seeking to make do with the relics that survived the post-Civil War downsizing and those striving to keep pace with European navies whose threat might never approach American shores, or at least until the next generation of ships was launched. It also became a contest between those clinging to the tactics of the past and the visionaries studying new horizons at a new Naval War College.

The book next focusses on the main characters involved: Winfield Scott Schley, commander of the Flying Squadron that fought the Spanish fleet off Santiago de Cuba; William Thomas Sampson, Commander of the North Atlantic Squadron, of which the Flying Squadron was a part; George Dewey, Commander of the Asiatic Squadron and hero of Manila Bay; Theodore Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy who put many of the pieces into place until organizing the Rough Riders and going to Cuba with an Army command. Other major characters are Alfred Thayer Mahan, a driving intellect in the molding of the then-modern navy and Pascal Cervera, the Spanish naval commander.

The narrative then explores the relationships between the United States and Spain and American preparations for conflict. Having laid out the background, the author turns his attention to the actual naval encounters.

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Although generally working chronologically, Barry devotes a chapter to Admiral Dewey's Battle of Manila Bay on 1 May 1898, which he posits Dewey almost could not have lost. That set up the next nearly fifty years of American occupation of the Philippines.

Then Barry takes the reader to the main theatre of operations, the Caribbean. Those who know even a moderate amount about the Spanish-American War may be aware of the battle off Santiago de Cuba on 3 July 1898, but this saga begins weeks before. Cervera's departure from Spain, in an era before satellite surveillance, placed a strain on the navy that was charged with protection of the whole eastern seaboard. That duty had to be balanced against offensive operations, first a blockade of Havana followed by the abortive 12 May attack on San Juan, Puerto Rico. When Cervera's fleet was located within Santiago Harbour, all American ships assembled offshore.

Prior to the climatic naval battle of the war were American probes of the harbour, coordination with Army units ashore, and manoeuvres in preparation for Cervera's exit from the harbour. Under pressure from Madrid, Cervera sailed out on 3 July at 9:30 a.m. and into the complete destruction of the Spanish fleet. Destroyers *Furor* and *Pluton* were out of action within four miles of port, armoured cruisers *Infanta Maria Teresa*, *Oquendo*, and *Vizcaya* were forced ashore, burned, and blown up within twenty miles of Santiago, and *Cristobal Colon* completed the capitulation by surrendering fifty miles west of where it emerged. Though suffering some hits, all American ships remained in action throughout. Spanish casualties were reported as 323 killed and 151 severely wounded. American casualties were minimal.

It would seem that a one-sided victory such as this would contain sufficient glory for all victors, but not so. Sampson filed a report critical of his subordinate, Schley. Newspapers, congressmen, and commentators, most prominently Albert Thayer Mahan, debated the relative heroism and cowardice, competency and ineptness, and triumph and tragedy of the two commanders. Navy Secretary, John D. Long, ordered a Board of Inquiry to investigate and report on the matter. I will not spoil your read by revealing the outcome, but the controversy made for a messy denouement to a spectacular victory.

Author Quintin Barry has assembled a detailed account of the naval aspects of the Spanish-American war in general and the Battle of Santiago and its subsequent controversy in particular. Drawing on a multitude of accounts and the transcript from the board hearing, he has directed attention to a consequence of the battle that was new to me, at least. The bibliography is a valuable guide to further reading. The footnotes provide citations but little additional information. The division of the index into four indices for people, places, ships, and general terms, aids the reader in locating information more expeditiously than a single index. Photos of individuals and ships, including

action shots, assist the mind's eye in creating scenes while the maps place the combat in geographic context. I recommend *Disputed Victory* for those seeking a deeper understanding of the US Navy's role during the Spanish-American War.

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**Vyvyen Brendon. *Children at Sea: Lives Shaped by the Waves*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen & Sword History, [www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk), 2020. 256 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. UK £15.99, US \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-52677-242-8.**

“What cheer, mate?” Who can forget the “half-grown boy in sea clothes” of Robert Louis Stevenson’s classic novel *Kidnapped* (1886)? Alas, there was little cheer for him or his real-life counterparts in the age of sail. More often than not, as movingly demonstrated by Vyvyen Brendon in this well-researched study, the story of children afloat is generally one of backbreaking work, peril, abuse, suffering, and neglect.

In her introduction, Brendon explains that she “was drawn to this subject by a strong affinity for the sea” (1). Her forbears grew up in Britain’s remote Isles of Scilly, and several, as teenagers, took to the waves, where they lived, worked, and died hard. During the Second World War, when Brendon herself was yet a child, her father served on the dangerous Murmansk Run. While too young to fathom what he was facing, she easily recalls her mother’s “anxiety” (1). Brendon studied history at St. Anne’s College, Oxford, and went on to a teaching career. After retirement, she devoted her energies to research and writing, producing two previous works, *Children of the Raj* (2005) and *Prep School Children* (2009).

Brendon is clearly qualified to explore her latest topic. As with her previous books, her scope is limited to the experience of children who were born “in Victorian and Georgian times, when the sea was still the key element of Britain’s national existence” (5). This presents certain challenges to reconstructing their stories. To begin with, these children lived in an age when they were “supposed to be seen and not heard” (4). Many of them were “waifs and strays” (5) for whom the only records are from hostile or indifferent institutions like the police or law courts. Evidence for what these children themselves thought or felt is limited. If a child was lost or buried at sea, there was often no documentation, and those who survived frequently disappeared and are difficult or impossible to trace in their destination countries.

Undaunted, Brendon persevered and, thanks to creative sleuthing, manages to highlight some remarkable stories. She focuses on eight children, including