

exception. The Republic started to disintegrate in winter, 1939. The remaining units of the Republican Navy sailed for neutral ports in French North Africa and were interned. In Spain itself, the Republican forces fought with each other. Republican leadership hoped, perhaps, to prolong the Civil War long enough for a broader European war to break out (which occurred when Germany invaded Poland 1 September 1939). A wider war would cause Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union to cease their respective involvements in Spain, leaving room for Republicans and Insurgents to come to some sort of settlement. That hope was dashed when Insurgent troops entered the Spanish capital of Madrid on 28 March 1939, ending the war.

Alpert's book illuminates the least-known aspect of the Spanish Civil War. It is a good read, a valuable reference, and is recommended.

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Thomas Barthel. *Opening the East River: John Newton and the Blasting of Hell Gate*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, www.mcfarlandbooks.com, 2021. 226 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. US \$39.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-4766-8298-3. (E-book available.)

In the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War, the maritime commercial interests of New York City, which were vitally important to the well-being of the nation as a whole, were faced with a daunting navigational dilemma. The East River, along with the Hudson River, was a major waterway into New York Harbour, yet its waters were anything but ideal for the movement of ships, particularly as they grew in size and value with increasing commercial trade. Beset with numerous hindrances, particularly rocks and reefs, whirlpools driven by the turbulent currents, and vigorous tides, the river was a genuine ship breaker. Seeking to significantly curtail, if not entirely prevent future merchant marine deaths, as well as cargo and ship losses, General John Newton of the Army Corps of Engineers, was tasked with clearing the river. Over the next 19 years, Newton would tenaciously tackle this task, relying on a mixture of sheer manpower, developing technology, and his engineering prowess. This process would be finalized in 1885 when the massive nine-acre Flood Rock was demolished in front of tens of thousands of onlookers through the use of 282,730 pounds of high explosives.

While it was John Newton who was tasked with finally fully opening the East River to maritime trade and who was praised by the National Academy of Sciences for his work, the task was truly too large for any singular person. In recognition of this, this book is not a biography. Rather, Barthel uses Newton

as the nucleus around which the larger story takes shape. To begin, Newton was not the first man to whom the task of clearing the East River had been given – its dangerous nature having long vexed the merchant interests of New York. Between 1851 and 1853, Benjamin Maillefert (an underwater blasting specialist) was contracted to begin clearing the river through the use of explosives, a task which produced significant smoke, but little in actual results. In defense of Maillefert, however, Newton's eventual success, while buoyed by his engineering prowess, was heavily predicated on technology that did not come into its own until he had taken over the project. Of particular importance were the advances in steam technology, underwater drilling and tunneling, and Newton's use of nitroglycerin, which by 1867 had been stabilized in the form of dynamite. Of particular note, technologically, was the steam drilling scow which Newton had designed for underwater work in the harsh conditions of the East River's currents. Capable of drilling multiple boreholes at once, this ship allowed for a steady pace when it came to removing underwater obstructions, with the debris from each detonation being removed by rock scows working in rotation.

While the General may have had the vision for how to attack the problem head-on, it was his numerous supervisors, miners, and divers who were immediately responsible for the day-to-day drilling, blasting, and hauling. Without the strength of their backs and their expertise, even the finest engineering schematics were worthless, and Barthel makes it very clear that Newton was well aware of this. Throughout the text, Newton is shown both directing and listening to those whom he employed, trusting them to aid him in achieving their common goal. Further, Newton was ever cautious to ensure the ongoing safety of his workers, constructing specialized sheds for the storage of explosives and consistently checking safety measures on both his diving and mining sites. While the book concludes the main narrative with a chapter titled "Newton's violent triumph," as is often the case, the great individual stands highest, but only through the health and society of others.

This text serves to shine a light on an interesting point in the history of the United States. The nation, still recovering from a terrible civil war, was growing both internally and internationally, and required modernized infrastructure to ensure that it could maintain such growth. To build this infrastructure, daring minds and bodies combined with the latest industrial technology toiled for years, often unseen, the results of their labours celebrated in their time but frequently forgotten as the years progressed. In a not insubstantial way, this book serves to memorialize the men who made the East River a little safer, and who helped to ensure the continued financial well-being of a growing nation. Further, it helps to provide an easily digestible story of the technological evolutions which were occurring in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Of particular interest, and hopefully, of use to some readers, will be the appendix which lists the obstructions on the East River, allowing for a better understanding of exactly how unsafe the river was, and how monumental a task opening it truly was. A handy overview for a complex internal improvement project, this book will sit comfortably on most any bookshelf.

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Claude Berube. *On Wide Seas: The US Navy in the Jacksonian Era*. Tuscaloosa, AB: (University of Alabama Press, www.uapress.ua.edu, 2021. xiii+248 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. US \$54.95, cloth; ISBN 978-0-8173-2107-9. (E-book available.)

Few historians consider President Andrew Jackson a navalist. Claude Berube's *On Wide Seas* advances the argument that Jackson was indeed a navalist and his executive stewardship of the United States Navy during his administration led to significant naval growth and professionalization. Berube's critical work fills a gap in naval historiography and is the first book to solely examine the development and employment of the Navy from 1829-1837 under Jackson's aegis from 1829-1837.

The central premise of *On Wide Seas* is that the US Navy developed into a premier instrument of national power throughout the 1830s as a consequence of a burgeoning naval culture. Not only did it promote America's intellectual and social growth, it also manifested it through the creation of new policies and strategic and operational employment of the sea service. Despite Jackson's background in the army, Berube argues that Jackson keenly understood executive power and the navy's capability to promote national maritime growth globally.

Organized into six chapters, the first chapter explores the transformation of the navy during the Jacksonian era as an intellectual renaissance, enhanced by increasing literacy rates and proliferation of print media. This allowed new ideas to reach vast audiences transmitting the navy's new scientific discoveries while symbiotically influencing fiction writing and literary boosterism via works by Edgar Allen Poe, James Fenimore Cooper, and Washington Irving. A robust print discourse in military-specific journals allowed naval officers to promote new ideas and challenge staid and entrenched orthodoxy that professionalized the naval officer corps. Organizations such as the Naval Lyceum and their *Naval Magazine*, along with half a dozen others, formed new strategic thinkers and enabled communication within the service and beyond with legislators, writers, and civilians. This Jacksonian democracy in