The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History

Volume I
1812
Part 1 of 7

Naval Historical Center
Department of the Navy
Washington, 1985

Electronically published by
American Naval Records Society
Bolton Landing, New York
2011

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THE NAVAL WAR OF 1812
A Documentary History

Volume I
1812

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With a Foreword by
REAR ADMIRAL JOHN D. H. KANE, JR., USN (RET.)
Director of the Naval Historical Center

NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER
DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON: 1985
CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

DEDICATION

This book is the first of a three-volume series of naval documents from the War of 1812. The purpose of this series is to publish rare, inaccessible and deteriorating documents for the enlightenment of all who wish to study the origins of American sea power.

The importance of the War of 1812 extends to our time. The image of a diminutive United States Navy confronting the British maritime giant is one that has passed from generation to generation. The fact is that the British Navy, while very large, had world-wide responsibilities. During the first year of the war, which this volume presents, the number and size of British warships on the North American Station did not overpower vastly the force available to the U.S. Navy. The frigates CONSTITUTION and UNITED STATES defeated HMS GUERRIERE, JAVA and MACEDONIAN in three separate actions in the Atlantic, fortifying the national will with the example of a Navy ready to fight and prepared to win.

As the war continued into 1813 and 1814, Great Britain was able to bring more naval forces to bear, restricting the pugnacious Americans to occasional sorties from fogbound ports. Perhaps the U.S. Navy's greatest contribution to the war was made on Lakes Erie, Ontario and Champlain, where joint operations were essential to thwarting British invasion plans and to protecting any American thrust into Canadian territory.

As our nation nears the 175th anniversary of the War of 1812, these published documents restore freshness to that conflict. Many sacrifices were made by sailors and marines, fighting for a cause whose outcome was often in doubt. The results were worthy of the effort. The United States emerged from the war with a renewed sense of sovereignty and self-confidence. There is no doubt the U.S. Navy contributed mightily to this outcome.

It is a pleasure to see the appearance of the Naval Historical Center's The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History. These volumes bring to the reader the immediacy of the moment in the words of the participants and commentators of the time. One man's tireless efforts established this approach to naval history. With this in mind, I wish to dedicate this work to Commodore Dudley W. Knox, U.S. Navy (1877–1960), who headed the Office of Naval Records and Library for 25 years and was editor of the Navy's first documentary series. I am sure he would be pleased with the continuation of his efforts.

JAMES D. WATKINS
Admiral, U.S. Navy
Foreword

In 1938, the Office of Naval Records and Library published the first volume of a series of naval documents covering the wars of the United States with the Barbary states. President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote in a foreword to that initial volume: “It is my earnest hope that the printing of naval manuscripts relating to the War of 1812 and other naval phases of our national life may follow.”

Commodore Dudley W. Knox, director of the Office of Naval Records and Library, edited the Barbary Wars series, as well as seven earlier volumes on the Quasi-War with France. The final volume of the Barbary Wars series appeared in 1944. Twenty years later, treatment of another naval phase of “our national life” got under way with the publication of the first volume of Naval Documents of the American Revolution. At this writing, eight volumes of this undertaking have appeared. While the need for documentary coverage of the navy in the War of 1812 was evident, as President Roosevelt had recognized, demands on a small professional staff and economic considerations made it impossible to initiate an endeavor for a number of years. In 1978, however, it seemed feasible for a new staff member, Dr. William S. Dudley, to devote a portion of his time to planning a War of 1812 project. I outlined the concept to the Secretary of the Navy’s Advisory Committee on Naval History, which enthusiastically endorsed it.

From the beginning, we recognized that the Center’s manpower resources could not sustain two projects on the magnitude of the American Revolution documentary series. The limits of our coverage for the War of 1812 had to be much narrower. From an abundance of pertinent documents, only a modest number of those judged to be the most representative and significant have been selected for inclusion in this three-volume work.

As explained in the editor’s preface, the documents are presented chronologically by topic or theater of operations. Explanatory text introduces individual documents or groups of documents, providing a
context for the events described. The present volume begins with an introduction which briefly summarizes the fortunes of the American navy from 1775 to 1805. The first chapter prepares the reader for the "second war of independence with Great Britain." Included are introductory essays and documents concerning naval preparedness, Jefferson's gunboats and embargo, impressment of seamen, and the dramatic Chesapeake-Leopard and President-Little Belt affairs. These matters portray the deterioration of Anglo-American relations and the United States' declaration of war against Great Britain. The next four chapters present documents on the Atlantic theater through August 1812, the northern lakes, the Gulf Coast, and then return to the Atlantic theater through December 1812. The volume closes with Commodore William Bainbridge's victory in U.S. frigate Constitution over H.M. frigate Java, a battle which symbolized American prowess at sea during a troubled first year of war with a more powerful enemy.

During the War of 1812, the United States Navy came of age. Fleet actions on the lakes and single-ship engagements at sea showed that American warships could more than match Royal Navy ships of similar force. The war also demonstrated, however, that with far fewer ships than the enemy had, the United States could neither lift strangling naval blockades nor prevent harassment along the coast and the burning of Washington. Lessons with broad implications, even for the present time, can be drawn from this experience. Even so, the War of 1812 deserves more attention from historians than it has received. Certainly, Alfred Thayer Mahan and Theodore Roosevelt addressed biographers, and Oliver H. Perry, Stephen Decatur, and Isaac Hull have had their biographers, but the bibliography is modest when compared with that of the American Revolution, the Civil War, or World War II.

We hope that this study will attract a wide and varied audience. The entire spectrum from casual reader to serious researcher can use the book with interest and profit. We hope, as well, that the selected documents presented here will act as a lure to further scholarly investigation and further publication so that the War of 1812 can assume its rightful place in the literature of this nation's naval heritage.

JOHN D. H. KANE, JR.

Preface

This volume is presented as the first of a three-volume documentary history of the United States Navy in the War of 1812. As such, it contains selected documents which display the flavor and substance of maritime warfare between the United States and Great Britain during the period 1812-1815. We have drawn heavily on naval records held by the National Archives and Records Service. To these we have added others reflecting a variety of viewpoints: the plans and reports of British naval officers who engaged our forces, newspaper columns of the day, statements of civilian officials who were charged with direction of the war, and the papers of private citizens who chose to go to war for personal profit though at great risk. To guide readers in their use of these documents and as a unifying medium, brief essays and headnotes are provided.

The method of organizing the historical materials contained in this work is basically chronological by theaters of operation. After a presentation of documents related to the maritime causes of the war, each of three theaters, Atlantic, Northern Lakes, and Gulf Coast, will be treated in separate chapters. Occasionally, there will be exceptions to strict chronological order within these theaters, when topical treatment of documents provides a more meaningful context. The events contained in this volume will cover the period from 1809, the year that marked the end of the Tripolitan War, until the end of December 1812. This dividing line, although arbitrarily chosen, is nonetheless appropriate because it marks the end of the first year of a war that lasted for nearly three years. The two succeeding volumes will deal with the events of 1813 and 1814-1815, respectively.

This documentary history is more than a recounting of naval battles from eyewitness reports. There are many works which have treated the naval engagements of the War of 1812. The objective of this work is to display the underpinnings of the U.S. Navy during the era of the War of 1812, and in this way to help explain both its successes and failures
at a formative time in its institutional history. The substance of this book is the life of the navy. It includes documents on such diverse subjects as the causes of the war from a maritime perspective, the navy's preparedness for operations, the recruitment of seamen and marines, the construction and fitting out of ships, the treatment of sick and wounded men, questions of insubordination, incompetence, and jealousy among officers and men, matters relating to the supply of food, drink, clothing, armaments, and spars for navy crews and ships, the operations of privateers, as well as navy warships, and the plight of men held as prisoners of war. In the American navy as a human institution, with all the nobility and frailty that phrase implies. It is hoped that the documents in this volume will provide glimpses of the U.S. Navy long forgotten or perhaps as yet unknown to a majority of readers. Specialists will be familiar with much of the material but its variety should stimulate research in new directions. If this work sparks such a process, then it can be said to have been a worthwhile effort.

This documents project has been in progress since 1978 and has involved the efforts of many dedicated individuals, working within and outside of the Naval Historical Center. Rear Admiral John D. H. Kane, Jr., the Director of Naval History, urged the Historical Research Branch to take up the project and has been an enthusiastic advocate ever since. Of prime importance to this undertaking was the constant support and wisdom of Dr. William J. Morgan, former Head of the Historical Research Branch and now Senior Historian Emeritus of the Naval Historical Center. He encouraged this work despite his knowledge that assigning staff to a War of 1812 project would reduce the number of people available to work on his prestigious Naval Documents of the American Revolution series. To assist in multiple editing chores Ensign Meredith Leach was assigned as a principal assistant for research. She participated in the exacting tasks of document search, preliminary selection, and transcription. She made a strong contribution by surveying a vast number of microfilm collections in the National Archives and in helping to select representative documents. Ensign Leach's relief in 1981, Lieutenant Donna Nelson Geiger, continued all of these tasks and, developing valuable expertise in the subject matter, extended coverage into new areas. She ably helped edit galleys. Joye Leonhart contributed her skills as an illustrations researcher and printing specialist, working with the Naval Publications and Printing Service to ensure that this new publication proceeded properly through its many printing phases. Tamara Moser Melia, Dr. Michael A. Palmer, and Lieutenant MaryCarol Hennessy rendered great assistance in editing galleys and page proofs and in preparing the index. As no publication project can succeed without a fine typist, we were particularly fortunate in having Jane Huie's expert typing skills and unfailing good humor on hand for the completion of the more than 1,000 pages of typescript that were sent to the printer. Darnese Ferguson arrived in early 1983 to succeed Mrs. Huie, competently typed the index and assisted in many other ways.

As usual in publishing a book such as this, many Naval Historical Center employees were called upon for assistance. To Stanley Kalkus, the Director of the Navy Department Library, to his assistant, John Vajda, and to Barbara Lynch, an expert reference librarian, we are indebted for efficient service and willing cooperation with the many requests made for obscure works, difficult citations, and liaison with the Library of Congress. Charles Haberlein and Agnes Hoover of the Curator Branch Photographic Section provided advice and information regarding the many possibilities for illustrating the volume. The personnel of Dr. Dean Allard's Operational Archives Branch were always willing to search for biographical data in their Early Naval Records Section.

Many archival institutions and libraries provided us with information and copies of documents and illustrations from their repositories. Most notably included in this category are the Navy and Old Army Branch of the National Archives and Records Service, the Library of Congress, the Public Archives of Canada, the National Maritime Museum of Greenwich, England, and the Public Record Office in London. Unpublished Crown copyright material in the Public Record Office is reproduced by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Other helpful institutions included: the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, the Chicago Historical Society, the William L. Clements Library at Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Essex Institute and Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, the Maryland Historical Society, the New-York Historical Society, and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The United States Naval Academy Museum provided us with considerable assistance and access to their collection as did the Special Collections Division of the Nimitz Library at the Naval Academy.

Foremost among those groups and individuals who have provided us with support and encouragement are the Secretary of the Navy's Advi
sory Committee on Naval History, presided over by Dr. Richard W. Leopold. The advice and counsel offered by the committee have been of great value. Two independent authorities on United States naval history were asked to read and comment on the prepared typescript. Professor K. Jack Bauer of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Professor Christopher McKee of Grinnell College reviewed the work and made several excellent suggestions, despite many other demands on their time. Commander Alexander Douglas, Director of the Canadian Defense History Directorate, has shown a friendly and stimulating interest in this project from the beginning and has encouraged further research in British records regarding the naval war on the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain. To these individuals and all others connected with this project, we are indebted and truly grateful.

W. S. DUDLEY

Editorial Method

Selection

There are thousands of naval documents available in the National Archives, Library of Congress, and other repositories, from which we have selected a few hundred as being representative of the War of 1812. Our intention has been to choose documents evocative of topics and persons of that period. With citations and references provided, the interested reader should be able to locate similar classes of documents of the particular period and theater of war in question. The majority of documents selected for publication are of an official nature, addressed to the secretary of the navy by officers in command of ships or naval stations. Added to these are orders from the secretary to his commanders, excerpts from logs and journals, and letters to the Navy Department from private citizens. As privateers were very active during the war, papers representing their activities are also included, but the privateering record is very incomplete. When appropriate, we have selected documentation from British sources to balance the perspective presented by American sources.

In most cases, the version printed is the original letter or recipient’s copy; it frequently happened, however, that the original never reached its destination. Authors of letters customarily took the precaution of sending at least one and sometimes two copies to ensure arrival of their communication. Where a copy is printed, it will be so designated in the source note. The word “copy” will only appear in the text if it is actually a part of the original manuscript itself. The list of abbreviations on page xv identifies other types of documents printed.

The secretary of the navy carried on a vast correspondence with all ranks of officers, for he was the operational chief of the navy as well as its principal administrator. The most complete record of the secretary’s outgoing correspondence is contained in letterbooks into which departmental clerks copied each letter, but not its enclosures. The original letters were drafted by the clerks and then signed by the
On rare occasions, when the secretary was indisposed or out of the city of Washington, the chief clerk, Charles Goldsborough, and later Benjamin Homans, would sign for the secretary. The original letters are not extant in most cases. Consequently, the secretary of the navy letters that we have printed have been obtained from departmental letterbooks. When an original secretary letter has been found, it will be so indicated in the source footnote. When unofficial correspondence is printed, customary source information will be provided.

Transcription

In transcribing documents, we have adhered as closely as possible to the original in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and abbreviation. When proper names are misspelled in the text, the transcription retains that misspelling, but if the word is so unclear as to be misleading, the correct spelling is placed in bracketed italics. Original capitalization, or lack of it, is followed, even at the beginning of sentences. The punctuation used is that of the original document, with one exception. In the early 19th century, dashes were often used in place of periods, commas, semi-colons, and question marks; most of these dashes will be replaced by appropriate modern punctuation. Abbreviations and contractions used in the original have been retained, including ampersands and ditto marks; however, superscripts commonly used with abbreviations of the time have been used only on signature lines of autograph letters.

Missing, Incorrect, and Indecipherable Words

Where a manuscript has been damaged or contains indecipherable words, we silently supply the missing letters, if there were no more than four. If more than four letters, or entire words are missing, we supply them in roman type enclosed in brackets, adding a question mark within brackets if the conjecture is doubtful. On the other hand, if there is an opportunity to add a word or phrase to clarify meaning, the added material will be printed in roman within brackets immediately after the affected word. But, if the original author has erred, we will provide the correction in bracketed italics. For the reader’s convenience, here are some examples of our procedures:

1. Rank and last name of an officer are contained in the text, but his first name is missing. Editor provides the missing information: Lieutenant [William] Bush.

2. Rank and last name are provided in the text, but the first name is stated incorrectly. Editor provides the correct first name: Lieutenant Robert [William] Bush.

3. Rank and last name appear but not first name. After research, editor is not certain but has reasonable idea of officer’s identity: Lieutenant [William?] Bush.

Annotations

The first note following the documentary text is unnumbered and gives a description and the source of the document. Numbered footnotes will provide only essential clarification, explanation, or information about persons, places, or subjects mentioned in the text. Rather than burden the reader with lengthy footnotes, we prefer to cite relevant scholarship or reference material, trusting that the reader’s curiosity will lead to a consultation of informed sources. Letters cited by date in the text of a document will be provided a full citation if considered relevant to the subject under discussion. Enclosures will generally be included immediately following the text of the original letter. If the enclosure is too lengthy or is not deemed of sufficient importance to be printed, a footnote commentary will usually be provided.

Headings

The title or rank, first name, middle initial, and last name of originators and recipients of documents will precede the documents when known. Document datelines will be provided as they appear in the original. If an address forms part of the salutation, it is retained, as are the complimentary close, signature, and postscripts. However, the complimentary close will be abbreviated unless it is of an unusual nature. Address and endorsements on the reverse side of a letter are omitted, but any meaningful information they contain will be discussed in footnotes. Internal notes added by the recipient will be included in footnotes. If a document is extracted from a longer document, this designation will appear in bracketed roman type at the left margin below the heading.

Headnotes

From the outset, it has been intended that this collection of printed documents should be taken as selections from a vast body of material. There will, consequently, be gaps in coverage of events. Documents do not always speak for themselves. With the passage of time, a document’s context and environment are blurred or forgotten. A docu-
mentary text has several meanings: a meaning in itself, a meaning in relationship to events that occurred immediately before, during, and after the document's creation, and a meaning from the perspective of hindsight. Each reader approaches a historical document with a different viewpoint, depending on the extent of his reading and understanding of history. In order to blend these meanings into a whole thought, introductory statements are provided for documents which stand either alone or in related groups. Frequently, the reader will find citations to scholarly material which will amplify the introductory matter. It is to be hoped that the headnotes provided will enlighten and not confuse the reader with more information than necessary. They are included to afford those interested a better perspective on events than what might be obtained only through the document itself.

List of Abbreviations

SYMBOLS USED TO DESCRIBE MANUSCRIPTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADS</td>
<td>Autograph Document Signed</td>
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<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Autograph Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALS</td>
<td>Autograph Letter Signed</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Document Signed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>Letter Signed</td>
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SHORT TITLES, ABBREVIATIONS, AND LOCATION SYMBOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adm.</td>
<td>Admiralty</td>
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<tr>
<td>AF</td>
<td>Area File</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>Letters from Officers of Rank Below that of Commanders Received by the Secretary of the Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGO</td>
<td>Directives (&quot;Circulars and General Orders&quot;), Navy Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL</td>
<td>Captains Letters to Secretary of the Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMC</td>
<td>Office of the Commandant, U.S. Marine Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNA</td>
<td>Letters Sent by Secretary of the Navy to Commandants and Navy Agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNA</td>
<td>National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>Masters Commandant Letters Received by Secretary of the Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLR</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Letters Received by Secretary of the Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLS</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Letters Sent by Secretary of the Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBuHi</td>
<td>Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, Buffalo, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RG</td>
<td>Record Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Records of the U.S. Senate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNL</td>
<td>Secretary of the Navy Letters to Officers, Ships of War</td>
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<td>UkLPR</td>
<td>Public Record Office, London</td>
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The American Navy: 1775–1805

Introduction

From the founding of the Continental Navy in October 1775 to the passage of the Naval Peace Establishment Act in April 1806, the United States Navy suffered difficulties no less severe than those of the fledgling nation it defended. To contend with the overwhelming naval superiority of Great Britain during the American Revolution, the Continental Congress established the apparatus to build a small navy which was essentially insufficient to deter the Royal Navy from its depredations upon American merchant shipping, and fishing vessels, and invasions of American coastal bays, harbors, rivers, and inland lakes. The precedent was set by Washington’s “fleet,” a handful of Marblehead privateers commissioned to interdict General Gage’s supply lines at Boston. Congress, during the years 1775–1783, authorized the purchase, construction, or hire of some forty vessels of all types—cutters, sloops, schooners, brigs, and frigates—to sail the high seas in defense of American liberties. These do not include the smaller vessels built for Benedict Arnold’s “fleet” on Lake Champlain or those constructed by individual states for their own navies, which were also encouraged by act of Congress.

The logistical problems encountered in building the Continental Navy, difficulties in manning and fitting out ships in competition with privateers, and the running of the British blockade in one way or another affected the histories of each of these ships. While they occasionally sailed in company, they were frequently picked off by the British as they operated independently or suffered mishaps usually risked by men under sail. Those that saw action generally fought hard and well before succumbing to superior force. Some took prizes, but most did not see the end of the war. The last frigate of the Continental Navy, Captain John Barry’s Alliance, was sold in 1785.