The Naval War of 1812:
A Documentary History

Volume I
1812
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The Naval War of 1812

A Documentary History

Volume II

Edited by William S. Dudley
THE NAVAL WAR OF 1812

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1813

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On the Gulf Coast, an area given little thought by Madisonian strategists, naval and military commanders struggled to prepare for whatever the war might bring. The Creek War smoldered and flared up in Alabama; American military forces under Major General James Wilkinson captured Mobile from the Spanish; and Captain John Shaw, commanding the New Orleans Station, repeatedly warned Washington of the vulnerability of the Mississippi delta. Just as frequently, the navy secretary scolded Shaw for spending too much money on defensive measures. Shaw’s nightmares came to life only one year later, as the British targeted New Orleans for a major amphibious assault.

On the Chesapeake Bay, another segment of the American population learned only too well what war could bring. British amphibious attacks laid waste the coastal areas of the Chesapeake in Virginia and Maryland. Regular American army forces were virtually nonexistent, naval forces were too slender to oppose their ably led enemy, and the Virginia and Maryland militias had limited effectiveness. Under Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren and Rear Admiral George Cockburn, the British had their way in the Chesapeake during the spring and summer of 1813. The events of 1813, if read correctly, foretold of more and worse to come in the next campaign season.

The second year of the war brought a great challenge to the United States. The nation that declared war in 1812 began to taste its bitter fruit in 1813. The United States Navy learned more about its strengths and weaknesses in this more difficult phase. The strengthening enemy blockade, the lack of American ships of the line, the drain of warfare on at least two fronts, and inadequate preparations for war by the Jefferson and Madison administrations limited the U.S. Navy’s capabilities in the face of superior force. It is difficult to build a navy during a war. But it may be built beforehand, thus delaying or even deterring armed conflict. Perhaps the most important lesson drawn from the second year of the war was the need for preparedness—in order for the United States to conduct a war at sea successfully, its navy must have adequate manpower, training, equipment, and ships.

As in our first volume, we particularly hope that this work will attract a wide and varied audience. The general reader, the earnest student, the professional scholar, and the serving officer can all use this book with interest and profit. We hope, as well, that the documents presented in this series will stimulate a better understanding of the historical lessons of sea power for the United States.

I wish to express gratitude to Dr. William S. Dudley, senior historian and previously head of the Early History Branch, for the dedicated leadership and professional skill that he has devoted to the War of 1812 series since 1978. The present volume’s preface identifies many additional historians, editors, librarians, archivists, and officials who supported and shaped this work. Among them I especially thank Rear Admiral John D. H. Kane, Jr., the former director of naval history, who initiated the project thirteen years ago; and Christine F. Hughes, Carolyn M. Stallings, and Charles E. Brodine, Jr., the able editorial staff of this volume. It is obvious that The Naval War of 1812 results from the combined talents and interests of many people. It also reflects the longstanding faith of the United States Navy in the value of historical understanding for the well-being of the American naval service and for the nation as a whole.

DEAN C. ALLARD
Director of Naval History

Preface

This is the second volume of three in a documentary series on the history of the United States Navy in the War of 1812. It contains documents that reflect the substance of maritime warfare between the United States and Great Britain from 1812 to 1815. We have drawn heavily on naval records held by the National Archives and Records Administration. To these we have added others reflecting a variety of viewpoints: the plans and reports of British naval and army 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 the reader in the use of these documents and as a unifying medium, brief essays and headnotes are provided.

The historical materials are arranged chronologically by topics within theaters of operations. Each chapter is preceded by an introductory essay that provides a context for the documents that follow. We have expanded the number of theaters treated in the first volume. To the Atlantic, Northern Lakes, and Gulf Coast theaters, we have added ones for the Chesapeake Bay and the Pacific, reflecting the drift and expansion of war as determined by the main participants. The documents contained in this volume will cover the period from January through December 1813. This arrangement is logical because it best illustrates the tempo of warfare during a time when the change of seasons and sudden changes of weather persuaded combatants to slow or halt operations to avoid the increased risks of catastrophe that frequent storms, freezing temperatures, and excessively muddy roads would bring. The final volume of this series will deal with the events of 1814-15.

This documentary history is more than a recounting of battles from eyewitness reports. Many documentary works have dealt with the War of 1812, but none is currently in print and very few have focused solely on naval affairs as this series does. The objective of this work is to display the underpinnings of the U.S. Navy during the war. In this way, we hope to explain its successes and failures at a formative period in its institutional history. While battles are the stuff of war and cannot be ignored, this volume also attempts to explain through documents the concerns of policy makers as well as commanding officers, of ordinary sailors and marines, and of common citizens who had opinions about the course of the war. It is hoped that the documents in this volume will provide glimpses of the U.S. Navy long forgotten or perhaps unknown to a majority of its readers. Specialists will be familiar with much of the material, but its variety should stimulate research in new directions.

This documentary project has been underway since 1978 and has involved the efforts of many dedicated individuals working within and outside of the Naval Historical Center. A former director of naval history, Rear Admiral John D. H. Kane, Jr., made the decision for the Historical Research Branch to commence the project in keeping with the wishes of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who had urged an earlier director, Captain Dudley W. Knox, to print the naval manuscripts of the War of 1812. The first volume of these documents was
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in distribution when Dr. Ronald Spector became director of naval history. His support of the project was constant and appreciative. Dr. Dean C. Allard, the present director, has enthusiastically urged completion of these and other documentary projects. Dr. William J. Morgan, senior historian at the Naval Historical Center, has lent his wisdom and experience from years as editor of *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* in offering welcome advice to a younger project.

Since the publication of Volume I, several staff members who gave invaluable assistance toward the editing of Volume II have transferred to other branches of the Naval Historical Center or have gone on to other walks of life. Nonetheless, they helped assemble our documentary base extending into 1815, established the professional editorial practices that the Early History staff follows today, and set our standards through publication of the first volume of this series. These include Dr. Tamara Moser Melia, the first associate editor of Volume II, and assistant editors Lieutenant Donna Geiger Nelson, Dr. Michael A. Palmer, Lieutenant MaryCarol Hennessy, and Joyce Leonhart Durant. Of the present Early History Branch staff, I am most indebted to our superb War of 1812 editorial team, led by associate editor Christine F. Hughes, and aided by assistant editors Carolyn M. Stallings and Charles E. Brodine, Jr. These are the individuals whom I guided in the selection, transcription, annotation, and writing of headnotes for the documents printed in this volume. They also shared the arduous task of copy editing before final submission to the printer, correcting galleys and page proofs, selecting illustrations, and indexing the volume. Dr. Michael J. Crawford, head of the Early History Branch, and staff historian E. Gordon Bowen-Hassell contributed their expert knowledge of early American naval history and offered the advice whenever it was needed. Charlotte Marie Knowles, our chief secretary, quietly and patiently took care of many details essential to the smooth running of the office during this demanding period. As usual in publishing a book such as this, many Naval Historical Center employees were called upon for assistance. To Stanley Kalkus, librarian of the navy, John Vajda, director of the Navy Department Library, and others on the library staff, 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, Agnes Hoover, and Edwin C. Finney, Jr., of the Curator Branch’s Photographic Section provided advice and information concerning the many possibilities for illustrating the volume. The staff members of Bernard Caval­cante’s Operational Archives Branch assisted by making available the biographical data in their Early Naval Records Collection (“ZB” Files).

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 Military Reference Branch of the National Archives whose naval specialists, Richard Von Doenhoff and Barry Zerby, were most helpful in the search for obscure documents and in expediting their availability for proofreading. The Library of Congress, the National Archives of Canada, the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, the National Library of Scotland, the Public Record Office in London, and the National Maritime Museum of Greenwich, England, are repositories of large collections of naval documents that we frequently consulted. Of special assistance to us was Mary Z. Pain of London, whose unparalleled knowledge of holdings and painstaking research provided documentation available nowhere else. As with all documents obtained from the Public Record Office, unpublished Crown Copyright materials are reproduced in this volume with the permission of Her Majesty’s Stationery Office. Other helpful institutions included: the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, the Chicago Historical Society, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan 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, the New York Public Library, the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and libraries at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of South Carolina. The United States Naval Academy Museum provided us with assistance and access to their collections, as did the Special Collections Division of the Nimitz Library at the Naval Academy. Other individuals who deserve mention here are William Clipson of Annapolis, Maryland, who provided us an excellent set of specially drawn maps for illustrations; Emily Cain of the *Hamilton-Scourge* Project in Hamilton, Ontario, for advice based on her research on the U.S. Navy schooners *Hamiton* and *Scourge*, and Dr. William M. P. Dunne of Hampton Bays, Long Island, New York, researcher and bibliophile extra­ordinary, for access to his collection of naval documents and books and for generously sharing his wide knowledge of naval history.

A most important group that has provided us with encouragement over the years are the members of the Secretary of the Navy’s Advisory Committee on Naval History who gave us sympathetic support and advice. I am also grateful to Dr. Harold D. Langley of the Smithsonian Institution and Professor Christopher McKee of Grinnell College; they have provided us with friendly advice and constructive criticism in reviewing documents in manuscript form. We value their sage advice on matters dealing with the American sailing navy. As editor, I accept full responsibility for any mistakes or errors of fact or misinterpretations found in essays, headnotes, or annotations. As in any selection of documents, others may differ with us about what was included or omitted. I believe that those we have selected fairly represent the concerns of the Navy Department in the second year of the War of 1812.

W. S. DUDLEY
Naval Historical Center
Washington Navy Yard
Washington, D.C.
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Commodore Isaac Chauncey to Lieutenant John Pettigrew, 9 January 1813

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Medal Commissioned by Congress Commemorating the Victory of U.S. Sloop of War Hornet over H.M. Brig Sloop Peacock. Published in Benson J. Lossing’s The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812, New York, 1869. (Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.)


Master Commandant James Lawrence. Portrait in oils by Gilbert Stuart, ca. 1812. (U.S. Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Maryland.)


"H.M.S. Shannon commencing the BATTLE with the AMERICAN FRIGATE Chesapeake on the 1st June 1813." Lithograph by Louis Haghe after painting by John C. Schetky. Published by Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1830. (Beverley R. Robinson Collection, U.S. Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Maryland.)

"H.M.S. Shannon leading her PRIZE the AMERICAN FRIGATE Chesapeake into HALIFAX HARBOUR on the 6th June 1813." Lithograph by Louis Haghe after painting by John C. Schetky. Published by Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1830. (Beverley R. Robinson Collection, U.S. Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Maryland.)


American Privateer Schooner Decatur Captures H.M. Sloop Dominica, 5 August 1813. Watercolor by Irwin J. Bevan, date unknown. (Mariners’ Museum, Newport News, Virginia.)


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Abbreviations Used to Describe Manuscripts

AD Autograph Document
ADS Autograph Document Signed
AL Autograph Letter
ALS Autograph Letter Signed
D Document
DS Document Signed
LB Letter Book
LS Letter Signed

Repository Symbols and Other Abbreviations

A&R Appointments and Resignations
Adm. Admiralty
AF Area File
BC Letters from Officers of Rank Below that of Commanders Received by the Secretary of the Navy
GaOOA National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario
CGO Circulars and General Orders, Navy Department
CL Captains' Letters to the Secretary of the Navy
CLS Confidential Letters Sent by the Secretary of the Navy
CM Records of General Courts-Martial and Courts of Inquiry of the Navy Department
CMC Office of the Commandant, U.S. Marine Corps
CNA Letters Sent by the Secretary of the Navy to Commandants of Navy Yards and Navy Agents
CShM Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.
CyM Yale Medical Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.
DLC Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
DNA National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
DNR Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.
InU Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind.
MC Masters Commandant Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy
MdAN U.S. Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, Md.
MdHi Maryland Historical Society Library, Manuscripts Division, Baltimore, Md.
MHi Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.
MiU-C William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich.
MLR Miscellaneous Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy
MLS Miscellaneous Letters Sent by the Secretary of the Navy

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Short Titles


