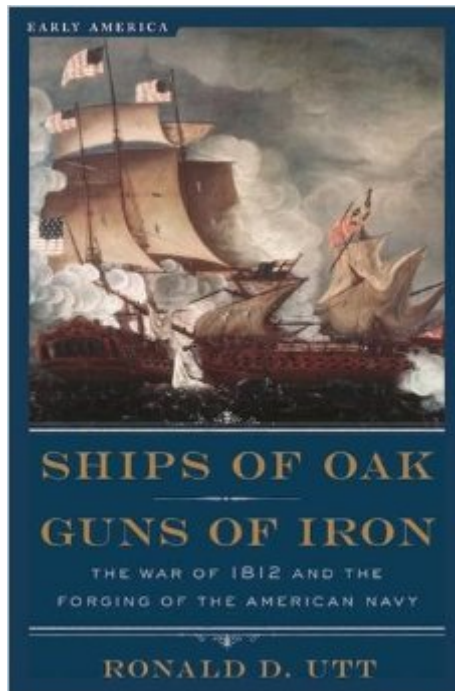


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Ships Of Oak, Guns Of Iron: The War Of 1812 And The Forging Of The American Navy



Synopsis

The War of 1812 is typically noted for a handful of events: the burning of the White House, the rise of the Star Spangled Banner, and the battle of New Orleans. But in fact the greatest consequence of that distant conflict was the birth of the U.S. Navy. During the War of 1812, America's tiny fleet took on the mightiest naval power on earth, besting the British in a string of victories that stunned both nations. In his new book, *Ships of Oak, Guns of Iron: The War of 1812 and the Birth of the American Navy*, author Dr. Ronald Utt not only sheds new light on the naval battles of the War of 1812 and how they gave birth to our nation's great navy, but tells the story of the War of 1812 through the portraits of famous American war heroes. From the cunning Stephen Decatur to the fierce David Porter, *Ships of Oak, Guns of Iron* relates how thousands of American men and boys gave better than they got against the British Navy. The great age of fighting sail is as rich in heroic drama as any epoch. Dr. Utt's *Ships of Oak, Guns of Iron* retrieves the American chapter of that epoch from unjustified obscurity, and offers readers an intriguing chronicle of the War of 1812 as well as a unique perspective on the birth of the U.S. Navy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I knew I was going to have problems with this book when I found George Washington, who died in 1799, on a list of participants in the War of 1812. Moreover, the title and the jacket blurb are misleading. They indicate that the book is a naval history of the war. It isn't - it covers the land campaigns as well. However, while there are maps of some of the naval actions, there are none of the land battles, which need them more than the ship-to-ship actions. Unfortunately, those are the

least of this book's problems. One of the endorsements on the back of the jacket says that the author "draws on previously overlooked material" about the War of 1812. Not so. The book is based mostly on secondary sources, with only a scattering of published primary sources such as memoirs and diaries. There is absolutely no original research. Consequently, the author has nothing new to say about the war which has not previously been said by other historians whose works he has drawn on. Some of the secondary sources are general surveys, like Samuel Eliot Morison's "Oxford History of the American People" and Thomas A. Bailey's "A Diplomatic History of the American People," which is basically a text book. Other secondary sources on which Utt relies heavily date back to the 19th century, including books by James Fenimore Cooper, Henry Adams, and Theodore Roosevelt. In fact, there are so many direct quotes from Roosevelt that I was tempted to give up on Utt and read Roosevelt's book on the naval war of 1812. At least Roosevelt did some serious research. The same endorsement congratulates Utt on providing an account of African Americans who served in the war, as if nobody had ever noticed this before. Actually, Gene Allen Smith has written an entire book on black participation in the War of 1812.

As a history junkie who's reviewed dozens of books on the subject, I was wondering (I do this a lot!) "Where are the books on a war that has been called 'the second American Revolution' on the bicentennial of its commencement?" I'm referring, of course, to The War of 1812 between the fledgling U.S. and the British Empire, by far the largest naval power on earth. It officially began with Congress declaring war on Britain on June 18, 1812, but it began long before with the impressment of American sailors by the British, writes Ronald D. Utt in his comprehensive and very readable "Ships of Oak, Guns of Iron: The War of 1812 and the Forging of the American Navy". Utt's telling of the war minces no words about who was responsible for the war: It was the Royal Navy and its policy of kidnapping, abducting -- whatever you want to call it -- of Americans to serve on their ships. In Chapter One he recounts the case of one of these victims: "in his memoirs of his time as a sailor aboard the American frigates Constitution and John Adams during the War of 1812, Moses Smith recounts a tragic story about an American seaman's attempt to escape British impressment--a form of abduction and involuntary naval service practiced by recruiters for the Royal Navy in the early nineteenth century: 'About this time the John Adams arrived at Annapolis from a foreign cruise, and from her men we learned of a striking case of heroism, which is worthy to be told. A coloured seaman belonging to New York had been pressed into English service, and when the Adams was lying off their coast, he got an opportunity to come on board of her as one of a boat's crew, sent with an officer upon some errand. Thinking now his time had come to escape from the British, he

determined if possible not to return.

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