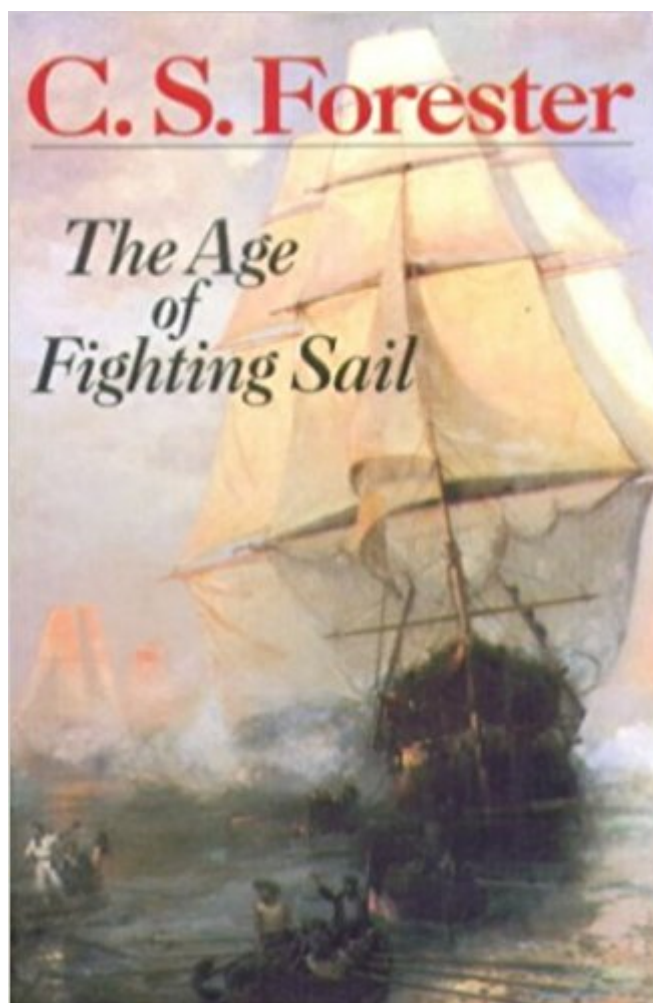


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The Age Of Fighting Sail: The Story Of The Naval War Of 1812



Synopsis

No one has been so well equipped as C. S. Forester to dramatize the sea battles of the War of 1812, to characterize the heroes more skillfully, or to comprehend more shrewdly the world unrest that made it possible for an infant republic to embarrass a great nation rich in one hundred years of sea triumphs.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Forester covers the War of 1812 from the perspective of naval battles in this 1956 volume. He outlines how the inexperienced U.S. navy managed to more than hold its own against that of the British, which was a scourge of the seas for many years. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

1. Short review: :-D (rating: 5 out of 5 stars -- I love it.)
2. Long review:
2.1. What I liked: The fact that the narrative was easily readable vice the impenetrable prose of the academics who write on the subject. The surprising favorable view of the young American Navy from an Englishman.
2.2. What I did not like: Does not apply.
2.3. Who I think is the audience: American naval history buffs.
2.4. Is the book appropriate for children to read? Yes. No worries.
2.5. On the basis of reading this book, will I buy the author's next book? Yes.
2.6. Summary: It is odd, but the title of the book is incorrect. If it were correct, it would be 'A History of the Naval War of 1812.' The age of fighting sail would cover the period from 1588 to 1865. Once you get past that bit of bait-and-switch, you have a readable account of acts and actions of the American captains and naval ships in the War of 1812. I have

read the history of the early US Navy for more years than I care to count. I am always delighted when I discover something I have not read before. Forester delighted me more times than any writer I recall, excepting Toll whose book I read after this one. For example, John Rodgers commanded an American squadron at anchor off New York City. When he received news that the US had declared war against the UK, he took his squadron to sea without waiting for orders. His cruise yielded no actions against the Royal Navy and little in the way of prizes, but Rodgers's cruise tied the Royal Navy in knots. Vice-Admiral Herbert Sawyer, commanding His Majesty's ships in Halifax, Bermuda, and soon in the Bahamas and across the Caribbean, found his numerically superior fleet tasked to 1) convoy British merchantmen to the UK, 2) engage and destroy the American navy, 3) destroy American privateers, 4) blockade American ports, and 5) carry the war to the American homeland. His forces were sufficient for any one of these tasks, but they were woefully inadequate to accomplish them all. By the time Sawyer learned that Rodgers had put to sea, it was apparent that the American squadron could be anywhere in the Atlantic. It could fall on almost any point with superior force. Sawyer faced the impossible tasks of protecting British merchant shipping against this threat while he sought for Rodgers's squadron to bring it to battle. These tasks occupied the whole of his naval assets. He had no ships left to blockade American ports. The entire American navy and hundreds of privateers were able to put to sea to multiply Sawyer's problems. And they did. I finally got a timeline for the American naval victories at sea: 1812 and 1815. None in 1813 and 1814. In those years, the US Navy got whipped or found its ships blockaded. When John Warren replaced Sawyer, the Royal Navy got serious about blockading American ports. He sent a sizable squadron to blockade Chesapeake Bay and Delaware Bay. This blockade effectively cut off Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania from the sea. American maritime commerce from these states ceased. And after Napoleon surrendered the first time (in 1814) a brigade of Wellington's troops joined the Royal Marines and raided cities in Virginia and Maryland and burned Washington, DC. (Jefferson's beloved militia ran at the sight of the British. (Many historians consider Jefferson to be the smartest man to ever hold the office of President of the United States. In my opinion, Jefferson was an idiot, because he valued his theories more than the experience of better men.) The only force to acquit itself honorably in battle against the British was an artillery battery manned by sailors and supported by a Marine company and commanded by Joshua Barney, an American hero who is too little known and too little celebrated. This force fought until the men were physically captured after hand-to-hand fighting. Congress voted Barney a sword for his valor. (FYI the Wikipedia piece on Barney does not do justice to the man. It is hard to find his history, but it is worth every minute of the time it takes. The man was phenomenal.)) The British wanted to keep the

blockade in place and wanted to continue to raid the American mainland. But Ross, their general, was killed by an American sniper on a raid, so the raiding stopped for lack of an energetic commanding officer. The blockade could not be kept because the strength of the fleet was wasting away. Sailors who had been impressed into service -- and that was most of 'em -- deserted, some when ashore to get water and victuals for their ships, others slipping over the sides in the night and swimming away. The Royal Navy suffered attrition during the blockade as if they were in combat. In the autumn of 1814, the Royal Navy quit Chesapeake Bay and Delaware Bay. The war ended with the Treaty of Ghent in which the US and the UK merely agreed to stop fighting. On its face, the American *causus belli* was the British impressment of American seamen. The British had stopped the practice by an Order in Council in 1812, but the news did not reach the US before the declaration of war. Impressment was not mentioned in the Treaty of Ghent, so the British retained the 'right' of impressment. However, orders went out to the British navy captains to leave the Americans alone. The British had got their fill of fighting Americans and did not want to repeat the experience. Jim Dunnigan once said that a nation wins a war only if its position after the war is better than its position before the war. In this light, the US won the War of 1812, but the UK did not lose because its position was not materially lessened. Forester applauds the American privateers for their depredations on British shipping and cites the increases in British shipping insurance and captures of merchant vessels as evidence of the privateers' effectiveness. I think it would be interesting to study American privateering against the British in the War of 1812 in some detail (I'm strange that way; different strokes), but I am not convinced that American privateers materially affected the outcome of the war. The British merchant marine had survived French privateers through four wars in the 18th century and finished each war with more sails and more shipping tonnage than at the beginning. A delightful fact that Forester brought up was that throughout the war American merchantmen supplied Wellington's army in Spain. Wellington himself said that his army lived on American grain. Wellington supplied all American merchantmen who brought him supplies written passes to excuse them from capture or impressment should they be boarded by His Majesty's Navy. All this is presented in an easy-to-read narrative. A most enjoyable book if you are interested in American naval history. YMMV.

I have to admit that the Kindle version is the third copy of AOFS that I own. I bought the hardcover when it first came out, because what kid on the northeast seaboard isn't interested in the naval war of 1812? I had read teddy Roosevelt's book and enjoyed it, but Forester, with no political axe to grind and being a Brit to boot, presented a slightly different vision which was supremely enjoyable

and more readable to the contemporary reader. I add to Kindle a lot of my old favorites to have them handy. BTW, Forester is peerless in Naval books! Your kid sails? Want him to love history? Give him Forester, not that fusty O'Brien.

This history's main virtues are that it is well written, truly a delightful narrative, and that it provides Forester's brutally objective perspective as an Englishman criticizing Britain for its superiority complex regarding naval warfare and the absolute shock that registered with the British when American ships started beating the Royal Navy in single-ship engagements. Forester skillfully weaves in the implications for British manning of her ships, gunnery training, and the harsh naval justice system and shows how later reforms owed their origins to the upstart Americans. The work's principal flaw has been noted by others and deals with things outside the narrative: the lack of diagrams of naval engagements and detailed maps. The current publisher, Chapman Billies, should have sprung for a decent graphic artist, which would have made visualizing the battles significantly easier. As it is, Forester's text assumes too much retained knowledge on the part of the reader. Overall, this is worth your time for those interested in this period and in 'fighting sail.'

Seemed a little disjointed. Jumps from sea to land to lake to political battles, but I learn a lot about the war of 1812. More than just the inspiration of our anthem and an awesome overture. Boston's USS Constitution's battle records were nice to see in print with Forester's style.

Forester was underrated as an historian. This is a very informative read. His novels skew toward young adult but this book is informative yet engrossing.

Everything you would expect from CS Forester. The title may be misleading because this not a review of the major navies with sailing ships in battle but instead a non-fiction history of the war of 1812 between England and the US.

If you want to get into the weeds about the naval War of 1812, this is the book. It's a nerd's compendium of detail, written in a journalistic, not prosaic style.

Give a good foundation to the study of US naval history in the war of 1812. Could have been longer with more coverage of the fighting in the inland waterways. The coverage of Lake Champlain campaign is generally briefly mentioned if not ignored so the section on this region of the war was

important to the story. Also a little better pre 1812 naval history would help explain some of the later narrative.

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