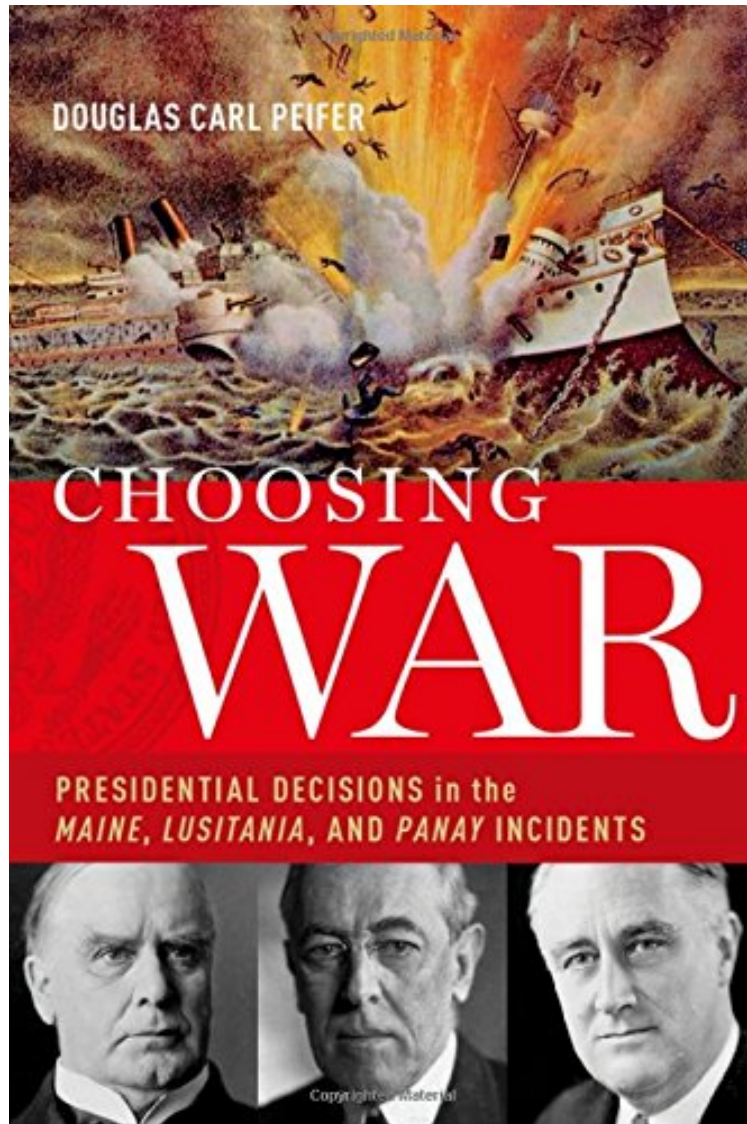


(Free pdf) Choosing War: Presidential Decisions in the Maine, Lusitania, and Panay Incidents

# Choosing War: Presidential Decisions in the Maine, Lusitania, and Panay Incidents

*Douglas Carl Peifer*

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**Douglas Carl Peifer : Choosing War: Presidential Decisions in the Maine, Lusitania, and Panay Incidents**

before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Choosing War: Presidential Decisions in the Maine, Lusitania, and Panay Incidents:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good Analysis of Three Naval IncidentsBy Dr. W. Terry LindleyDouglas Carl Peifer, professor at the US Air War College, laments that “academic historians have by and large

conceded the field of security studies to political scientists, international relations specialists, and other social scientists.” (1) In this well-written and thoroughly researched book that examines the sinkings of the American battleship Maine, the British passenger Lusitania, and the U.S. naval gunboat Panay, he discredits efforts to characterize naval incidents by whether the situation leads to war or by what issues or rights are at stake. A close examination of each encounter, he asserts, demonstrates its uniqueness “in terms of causes, issues, and resolutions.” (245) Peifer concludes that “rather than using history to provide direct analogies and ‘lessons learned,’ students of foreign affairs should employ history to gain strategic depth, study interconnections, examine what sort of options past presidents considered, and think about why they acted as they did.” (248) Each of the three main sections of the book follow a similar pattern: “The Incident,” “Context,” “The Immediate Reaction,” response, and “Aftermath, Consequences, and Reflections.” A superficial analysis of these three incidents might lead one to conclude that the destruction of each ship led to war. The blowing up of the Maine caused the United States and Spain to go to war in 1898, the torpedoing of the Lusitania led to hostilities between America and Germany in 1917, and the bombing of the Panay was a catalyst for armed conflict with Japan in 1941. As the author clearly shows, such a conclusion would be a misreading of history. The cause of the destruction of each ship differs. The Maine was blown up in Havana Harbor on 25 January 1898. The nature of the explosion has never been conclusively proven; three out of the four investigations pointed to an outside explosion, which seemed to indicate a Spanish mine, although Spain never acknowledged this. The other investigation, conducted under the guidance of Admiral Hiram Rickover in 1975, placed the blame for the explosion on an internal source—an exploding coal bunker. There is no doubt that the Lusitania was sunk by a German torpedo, though the impact of a secondary explosion is debated. The latter probably resulted from cold seawater hitting hot boilers. Peifer believes that the torpedo was the sole cause of the sinking, hitting the ship in the perfect spot to quickly bring it down. The Panay was sunk by a combined attack of Japanese high-level and dive bombers, coupled with strafing by fighters. The reaction to each crisis also varies. The American public, press, and Congress were in a war fever and demanded action with the Maine incident. McKinley waited for the report from the official inquiry before he made any decision. War with Spain was not a direct result of the sinking of the U.S. ship, but more important, the author points out, was the de Lome letter and the report of Senator Redfield Proctor on his observations from his recent trip to Cuba. Wilson was given freedom of action, since the American public wanted done short of war. His threats secured an apology and reparations from the Germans for the Lusitania tragedy and eventually an end to unrestricted submarine warfare. However, the president’s line in the sand was crossed with the renewal of unrestricted U-boat warfare in early 1917, and this led to war with Germany in April. Before the facts were in regarding the Panay, Japanese officials were hurrying to apologize to the American ambassador in Tokyo, the American commander of the Yangtze Patrol Squadron in Shanghai, and the State Department in Washington. The Japanese government also agreed to pay damages and reparations and provide assurances that this would not happen again. However, to this day, the cause of the deliberate attack on the Panay remains a mystery. Only one member of the attacking planes survived the war, and he swears that it was an accident, which seems unlikely given the clear markings on the American vessel. President Roosevelt’s hands were tied in that the American people opposed any action that might lead to war with Japan. Ultimately, this incident did not trigger war with Japan in 1941. This work should appeal to a wide audience which includes those interested in diplomatic, military, and presidential history as well as political scientists specializing in presidential politics and students of international relations. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Interesting insight into the decision-making process of three very different ...By JR Interesting insight into the decision-making process of three very different presidents, and into the influence outside factors played, especially politics and public opinion.

Throughout US history, presidents have had vastly different reactions to naval incidents. Though some incidents have been resolved diplomatically, others have escalated to outright war. What factors influence the outcome of a naval incident, especially when calls for retribution mingle with recommendations for restraint? Given the rise of long range anti-ship and anti-air missile systems, coupled with tensions in East Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the Black and Baltic Seas, the question is more relevant than ever for US naval diplomacy. In *Choosing War*, Douglas Carl Peifer compares the ways in which different presidential administrations have responded when American lives were lost at sea. He examines in depth three cases: the Maine incident (1898), which led to war in the short term; the Lusitania crisis (1915), which set the trajectory for intervention; and the Panay incident (1937), which was settled diplomatically. While evaluating Presidents William McKinley, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's responses to these incidents, Peifer lucidly reflects on the options they had available and the policies they ultimately selected. The case studies illuminate how leadership, memory, and shifting domestic policy shape presidential decisions, providing significant insights into the connections between naval incidents, war, and their historical contexts. Rich in dramatic narrative and historical perspective, *Choosing War* offers an essential tool for confronting future naval crises.

"*Choosing War* is an excellent dissection of the decisions made by American presidents in the wake of the Maine, Lusitania, and Panay incidents. *Choosing War*, in great detail, shows that naval incidents are very often a precursor to

greater conflicts on land, on sea, and in the air....It is a unique book that is written clearly enough to serve as popular history, yet *Choosing War* will also serve as a great reference to American military figures, geopolitical strategists, and their publicly elected leaders."--Larry Provost, *MCU Journal*"Well-reasoned and convincing, *Choosing War* makes an important contribution to the fields of presidential studies and decision making. It also provides excellent examinations of three naval events and their link to foreign relations. Thus it will be of interest and value to both diplomatic and naval historians. There exists no similar study."--James C. Bradford, Texas AM University, editor of *America, Sea Power, and the World* "Americans can choose their wars, or blunder into them. Douglas Peifer's insights into three moments of crisis and decision from the high seas--the *Maine*, the *Lusitania*, and the *Panay*--eloquently explain the difference. A must-read for anyone interested in naval history, or in how the most difficult decisions that cross a president's desk often come from unexpected times and places."--Jeffrey A. Engel, Director, Center for Presidential History, Southern Methodist University"Presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to poor Barack Obama today have luxuriated in the certainty that we could project American force anywhere to solve any conflict that collided with our national interests. Mr. Peifer argues naval and air power no longer are adequate shortcuts to diplomacy."--*Washington Times* "A compelling illustration of the sort of insights that political scientists and practitioners routinely miss...Peifer's wonderfully clear prose makes the volume a page-turner."--H-Net, H-Diplo "[An] exemplary feat of historical interpretation."--Naval Historical Foundation"This is a valuable work...[*Choosing War*] is worth a place on the reader's list and is highly recommended."--*Northern Mariner*"In *Choosing War*, historian Douglas Carl Peifer has written a book that can help tomorrow's policymakers anticipate the kinds of predicaments that may confront them...Anyone interested in improving critical thinking during future maritime emergencies will find *Choosing War* to be provocative [and] rewarding."--*Michigan War Studies* "Articulate, well organized, and highly readable... Peifer makes a unique contribution to our understanding of how an American administration makes that most important of decisions-whether or not to go to war... *Choosing War* hits the mark."--H-Net, H-War"*Choosing War*, in great detail, shows that naval incidents are very often a precursor to greater conflicts on land, on sea, and in the air. Douglas Carl Peifer also reaffirms a need for the historical perspective, short and long term, in regard to contemporary matters. These contemporary matters are often thought to be the exclusive domain of political scientists and policy analysts, but *Choosing War* shows that historians can add just as much, if not more, to current policy debates."--*Marine Corps University Journal*

About the Author Douglas Carl Peifer is a Professor of History and Strategy at the US Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama.