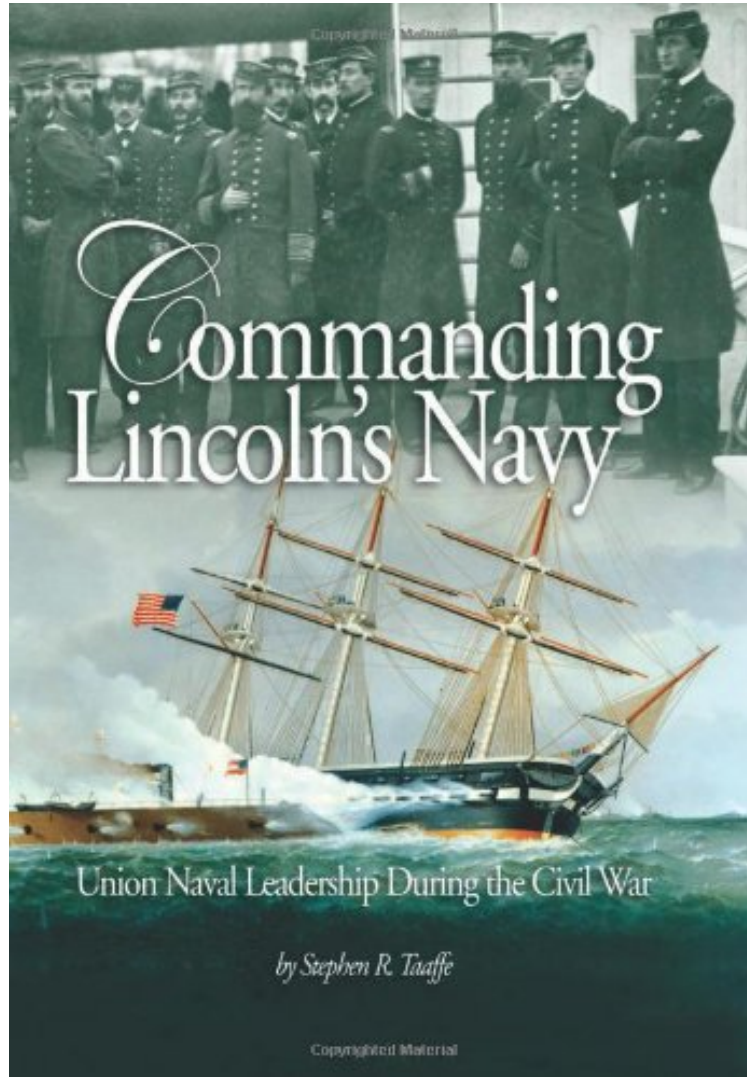


Commanding Lincoln's Navy: Union Naval Leadership During the Civil War

Stephen R. Taaffe

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Bought the digital version. If you are an avid ...By Bernard LavalleeBought the digital version. If you are an avid reader of Civil War history, be warned that much of this book you probably read a dozen times in other volumes. It's unfortunate that so much current literature on the Civil War is

poorly written or simply regurgitates much talked about information.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent analysisBy Eric SternerTaaffe reviews naval leadership through the prism of Navy Secretary Gideon Welles and the officers he chose to command naval squadrons during the Civil War. In general, he credits Welles (and his alter ego Gustavus Vasa Fox) with overcoming entrenched bureaucracy and constant politicking to make excellent personnel decisions that resulted in winning commanders. Excellent when read with Craig Symonds' Lincoln and His Admirals.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An excellent short historyBy James W. DurneyThe author brings his considerable talents to the US Navy during the Civil War, their mission and their management. As with "Commanding the Army of the Potomac", we look less at battles than management. This produces a non-standard history that can be a challenge to read. The author understands we do not know the Admirals as well we know the Generals. He takes the time and writes a series of mini biographies of the main characters by way of an introduction.In doing so, he shows us the difference between the pre-war Navy and Army, underscoring how these differences affect the war. One major difference is no VIP tries to get command of a ship. Another is the Navy Department is under stable political control throughout the war. While strengths, these two items created their own set of problems. Seniority was everything in the Navy. Until death or retirement, no one moved up. Since there was no real retirement officers served well past their physical abilities and often the intellectual abilities as well.This is not a tale of Washington politics and influence peddling, although there is a good deal of that. This is a story of building a Navy, selecting men for major commands and their actions. Battles and blockades command much of the narration. While there are few naval battles, attacks on forts and the problems of the blockade take center stage. While not always a "page turner", this is a book of solid information on an ignored subject. This is either an excellent introduction to or a short history of the Navy's activities in the Civil War. Either way, it is well worth reading and a book that should be in your Civil War library.

The Union Navy played a vital role in winning the Civil War by blockading Confederate ports, cooperating with the Union Army in amphibious assaults, and operating on the Mississippi River and its tributaries. To wage this multifaceted war, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles divided the Union Navy into six squadrons. The book examines who Welles assigned to squadron command and why he appointed these officers. Taaffe argues that President Abraham Lincoln gave Welles considerable latitude in picking squadron commanders. Lincoln not only trusted Welles's judgment, but he also understood that the Navy was not as important to the Union war effort militarily and politically as the Army, so there was less of a need for him to oversee closely its operations. Welles used this authority to make appointments to squadron command based on several criteria. Welles factored into his mental calculations seniority, availability, and political connections, but he was most interested in an officer's record, character, and abilities. Although some of Welles's earliest selections left something to be desired, his insight improved markedly as the war continued and he gained a greater understanding of the Navy and its officer corps. Indeed, by the end of the conflict, Welles had become quite ruthless in his search for effective squadron commanders capable of filling the Navy's increasingly difficult missions. In doing so, he contributed greatly to Union victory in the Civil War. The book covers some of the Civil War's most important campaigns and battles, such as the Union assaults on New Orleans, Charleston, Mobile Bay, and Fort Fisher, and the fighting on the Mississippi River.

About the AuthorStephen R. Taaffe is Professor of History at Stephen F. Austin State University, teaching American military and diplomatic history. Born and raised in Youngstown, Ohio, he attended Grove City College in Pennsylvania for his undergraduate degrees, and Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, for his MA and Phd. He resides with his wife and three children in Nacogdoches, Texas. He is the author of MacArthur's Jungle War: The 1944 New Guinea Campaign, The Philadelphia Campaign, and Commanding the Army of the Potomac.