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Bradley Peniston, **No Higher Honor: Saving the USS Samuel B. Roberts in the Persian Gulf**, Annapolis MD : Naval Institute Press, 2006. 275 pp., photographs, figures, notes, bibliography and sources, index.

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Bradley Peniston's, *No Higher Honor: Saving the USS Samuel B. Roberts in the Persian Gulf*, is a gripping tale of leadership, teamwork and survival by the captain and crew onboard the *Samuel B. Roberts* during the height of the Iran-Iraq conflict in the spring of 1988. The guided missile frigate was ordered to escort tankers in the Persian Gulf during Operation Earnest Will, the largest convoy operation since WWII. During a routine assignment on 14 April, the *Samuel B. Roberts* was hit by an Iranian mine. Peniston draws on hundreds of documents and interviews to report on the first warship since the Korean War to come alarmingly close to sinking in hostile action.

Main's Bath Iron Works (BIW) launched the third *Samuel B. Roberts* (FFG 58) on 8 December 1984. The ship's namesake was a WWII hero, Coxswain Samuel Booker Roberts Jr. who perished from a fatal wound to the back of the neck while diverting Japanese attention from his fellow Americans. The title of Peniston's book, *No Higher Honor* was coined by Lt. Cdr. Robert Copeland, the commanding officer of the first *Samuel B. Roberts* in 1944. In Copeland's report from the battle off Samar during WWII, "... the men zealously manned their stations wherever they might be, and found and worked with such calmness, courage, and efficiency that no higher honor could be conceived than to command such a group of men" (17). It was a legacy that Naval Officer Paul Rinn would emulate and carry on. A South Carolina man, Rinn was

stationed on Bailey Island, Maine to oversee the construction of the *Samuel B. Roberts* and to hand pick her crew. His textbook leadership skills would be the saving grace for the crew of the *Samuel B. Roberts*, along with head of damage control, Lt. Eric Sorensen. A forward by Rinn in Sorensen's 86 page DC handbook stated, "learn damage control procedures as if your life depended on them-it very well may" (39). He could not have been more right.

The captain and crew of the *Samuel B. Roberts* were second to none. In April 1985, a Pre-Commissioned Detachment of 150 members gathered at Norfolk Naval Station, V.A. Each sailor spent hundreds of thousands of classroom hours on Damage Control (DC), learning how to fight fires and control flooding. Forty sailors from the *Samuel B. Roberts* completed The Point Loma course at the combat information center (CIC) in San Diego, finishing 82 different courses that totalled over 3,000 classroom days, including promotions and 14 personal awards. Over all, the *Samuel B. Roberts* team had earned the highest grades ever received by a frigate crew. During an end of the year evaluation in 1986, the *Samuel B. Roberts* was named the best *Perry*-class ship to date. After intense training at Guantanamo Bay in July of the same year, the crew received an 'outstanding' in navigation, anchoring, transferring items at sea, and gathering intelligence. The crew of the *Samuel B. Roberts* were the first to endure a new training regime on how to fight chemical fires, trainers deeming it the 'most impressive operation of its type held to date' (63). The senior tester declared the exercise as the best mass conflagration drill he had ever witnessed (65). The crew of the *Samuel B. Roberts* also won Mission E's during the battle efficiency cycle of Oct. 1986-March 1988.

The journey to the Persian Gulf began when 215 souls onboard the *Samuel B. Roberts* were deployed on 11 January 1988. The *Samuel B. Roberts* was one of 4 ships assembled in Destroyer Squadron 22 (DesRon 22) led by commodore Capt. Donald A. Dyer. As the situation in the Gulf deteriorated, on 11 February 1988 DesRon 22 was forced to anchor off Fujairah, a United Arab Emirates port on the Gulf of Oman. Two days later, the *Samuel B. Roberts* assembled in the Earnest Will convoy area in the Gulf of Oman. However, the schedule to Kuwait was changed and the *Samuel B. Roberts* was

ordered to meet with the USS *Coronado*, the command ship dispatched from San Diego for duty as the Middle East flagship. The *Samuel B. Roberts* duty was to protect American ships and enforce their right of free passage in international waters.

The tone of the book lightens mid way through as the author moves away from the 'man as machine' approach and focuses on the more humane and personal aspects of life on board the *Samuel B. Roberts*. An example of this is the monthly 'steel beach picnics' hosted by the sailors; this comprised a BBQ on the flight deck where the crew ate, relaxed and listened to music. One junior sailor, Mike Tilly, even took full advantage of a 'no uniform zone' and showed up without a stitch of clothing; he escaped without any repercussions! During a personal interview with Paul Rinn, he recollects a time during the Ides of March in 1988 when an entire wardroom dressed in full length Togas, complete with wreaths around their heads, shouting 'hail Caesar'. To the great relief of the crew, Rinn took one look and started laughing so hard that he fell over one of the chairs and onto the floor (107). It is stories such as these that make *No Higher Honor* so accessible for the reader.

During a routine convoy mission in the late afternoon of 14 April 1988, Seaman Bobby F. Gibson (19) of Walkertown, N.C. identified a mine sitting off the ship's starboard bow. After alarming the captain, the only option faced by Rinn was to reverse the *Samuel B. Roberts*; not an easy task for a single-rudder frigate. Rinn ordered the bridge helmsman to put the rudder hard left and ordered engines back one third. He ordered power to the APU's (auxiliary propulsion units) and the ship began to move backwards. Unfortunately, this attempt failed to avoid the mine that hit the *Samuel B. Roberts* and at 4:50pm on 14 April 1988, 253 pounds of TNT struck the ship lifting her clear out of the water. In an instant, the aluminium decks of the *Samuel B. Roberts* cracked in three places, 6ft of hanger came loose from the main deck and the keel failed all together. Almost immediately, fire ravaged the main engine room and destroyed millions of dollars of equipment. The room became open to the sea, causing the ship's largest space to be flooded. Quite literally adding fuel to the fire, containers of diesel and other petrol burst into flames. Fire spread to the rest of the ship through the air ducts.

The author dedicates chapters 9-13 to the crew's remarkable action in a crisis. The spirit of Lt. Cdr. Robert Copeland remained alive on the decks of the *Samuel B. Roberts* thanks to the leadership and courage of her crew. These actions are portrayed by the author in interviews from first hand accounts that are packed with emotion, camaraderie and gripping tales of heroism.

In response, the ship's Seahawk set flight at 6:15pm after minimal repairs were made. The helicopter headed towards the amphib *Trenton*, carrying hospitalman 1st class James Lambert and GSM Larry Welch who had burns over 40% of his body. The helicopter, a twin-roto helo CH-46 Sea Knight, flying from the *San Jose*, was boarded by a further 8 patients after 7pm. The Sea Knight returned to the *Samuel B. Roberts* in less than an hour, bringing essential provisions such as hoses, DC gear, English muffin sandwiches, Snicker Bars, and grape and orange soda. The last of the fires onboard the *Samuel B. Roberts* were put out at 9:05 pm with no fatalities.

On 15 April, the tug *Hunter* arrived to take the wounded frigate to the Dubai dry-docks. The *Samuel B. Roberts* was down three feet at the stern and had a truck size hole in her hull. The White House ordered Operation Praying Mantis in retaliation for the damage inflicted to the *Samuel B. Roberts*. Two Iranian oil platforms were to be destroyed along with one man of war. At the end of the day on 16 April, the U.S. sunk one frigate, one patrol boat, 3 Boghammars, eliminated 2 oil platforms and put another frigate out of action. No fleet had lost such a large fraction of its fighting force in a single battle since Leyte Gulf in 1944 (187).

On a national radio address for Armed Forces day, President Reagan praised the heroic crew of the *Samuel B. Roberts*. For the first time in twenty years, every sailor aboard the *Samuel B. Roberts* received the Combat Action ribbon, recognizing satisfactory performance while under enemy fire. The crew was also awarded the Navy Unit Commendation, thirty others received medals. The *Samuel B. Roberts* was repaired for sail back to Newport but permanent alterations were to be made at BIW. The *Mighty Servant 2* semi submersible heavy lift ship brought the *Samuel B. Roberts* 8,100 miles

back to Newport and onto Maine . After an \$89.5 million overhaul, the *Samuel B. Roberts* was deployed in Operation Desert Shield.

Bradley Peniston's extensive experience on warships is illustrated throughout this enjoyable and well-researched book. The author's detailed descriptions allow the reader to portray a vivid mental image of life onboard the USS *Samuel B. Roberts*. Combined with a number of highly entertaining anecdotes, *No Higher Honor* represents an accessible and pleasurable read for all.



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