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Craig L. Symonds. *Lincoln and His Admirals: Abraham Lincoln, the U.S. Navy, and the Civil War*. Oxford University Press, 2008. 366 pp. Notes, bibliography, index, maps, appendices.

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Noted Civil War historian and Naval Academy Professor Emeritus Craig L. Symonds has taken on a daunting task—to examine Abraham Lincoln as a the commander in chief of the United States Navy along the lines made famous by the great T. Harry Williams in his classic *Lincoln and his Generals*. The result is extremely beneficial for the broad audience that seems to be eagerly gobbling up everything written about Abraham Lincoln these days. Symonds approaches his topic with an objective sensitivity to Lincoln’s subordinates that rival that of his predecessor, Williams. However, lest anyone think this an operational history of the war from a naval perspective, it is in Symonds words “...a book about the emergence of Abraham Lincoln as a wartime commander in chief” (ix).

The Civil War was not two distinct wars, one naval and one on land. Because of the geography of the United States, naval and land operations routinely overlapped and intersected. Symonds does yeoman work in showing this relationship at the strategic level across the hazy lines of command authority. *IJNH* readers will find the book extremely beneficial because it covers a clear gap in the literature about Lincoln’s command relationships with “that other service” while at the same time highlighting the intersection of Army and Navy strategy at the highest levels within Lincoln’s cabinet. Symonds does not slight land power and is realistic about just what the Navy managed to do, or not do. Also, readers will find a fascinating set of relationships between the Treasury, War, and even State Departments that influenced the interaction between the Army and the Navy. Symonds rarely strays to the tactical level in this book and that is a good thing since it keeps his main theme in focus and the narrative and analysis flow as a result.

Symonds centers much of his discussion on the issue of unity of command for the Army and the Navy. While problematic within the services, unity of command was completely dysfunctional at the highest level as a result of the Constitution and often found resolution only through personal action by Lincoln. Accordingly, Symonds spends a good deal time addressing Army-Navy relations at the cabinet and subcabinet level showing how they impacted at the strategic and operational levels, especially with “combined” operations (joint in our terminology). Personal cooperation between generals

and admirals was the often the only means of resolving command disputes between the services. More than a few operations foundered on a lack of cooperation and personality conflicts, but when cooperation occurred, as at Vicksburg and Fort Fisher, the Army-Navy teamwork was often crowned with success.

This reviewer appreciated Symonds' objective and fair approach. No one is whitewashed or unfairly treated. Especially useful, and here Symonds' command of the various memoirs and private correspondences is evident, were the discussions of the shifting political alliances in the cabinet and the relationships—often by marriage—of key Navy senior officers with political families like the Blairs.

The Civil War found the Navy Department in a state of disrepair as to its command structure as much as the inadequacy of its fleet. Lincoln's evolving insight and judgment of character in selecting his generals—a highlight of Williams' book—is also on display here for his naval component. From the beginning Lincoln and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles formed a sort of good cop/bad cop team in their approach to smoothing the ruffled feathers of bruised Nineteenth Century navy officer egos. The key innovation of creating the Assistant Secretary of the Navy position for the talented Gustavus Fox, who acted as a sort of civilian Chief of Naval Operations, is ascribed to a suggestion by his brother-in-law Frank Blair. However, it was Lincoln's high esteem for Fox that sealed his fortuitous assignment to the Navy Department. As for the admirals—Foote, Farragut, Du Pont, Porter, Wilkes, Dahlgren, et al.—Symonds gives them all their due, but they play second fiddle to the main character of the President.

This book is a must for the student of the strategic level of the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln as a strategist. As noted, Symonds' command of the primary and secondary sources is superb and his use of them in this book effective. *Lincoln and His Admirals* is a worthy companion piece to Williams' classic and Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals* and has my highest recommendation for as broad an audience as possible.



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