

International Journal of Naval History

Volume 2 Number 2 August 2003

Robert J. Schneller, Jr., **Farragut: America's First Admiral** (Washington, DC: Brassey's Inc., 2002). Chronology. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliographic note. Index. Pp. xvi + 116. ISBN 1-57488-398-4. \$19.95 (cloth).

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Of the many players comprising the rich naval history of the American Civil War, perhaps no name looms larger than David Glasgow Farragut. As the flag officer of the Federal West Gulf Blockading Squadron, the Tennessee-born Farragut gained crucial, stirring, and much-publicized victories at New Orleans and Mobile Bay, virtually closing these capital Confederate ports to world commerce. He too played a principal (if at times underemphasized) role in the Mississippi River campaigns culminating in the fall of Rebel fortresses at Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Port Hudson, Louisiana. Crowned the nation's foremost naval hero both during and after hostilities, he who uttered the epochal words "Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!" at Mobile Bay was rewarded for his brilliant work with the first commission to admiral in U.S. history. The subject of three full-length biographies and a number of smaller-scale works over the last 130 years, Farragut falls again under analysis in Robert J. Schneller's cogent monograph *Farragut: America's First Admiral*, the inaugural volume in the "Brassey's Military Profiles" series.

Schneller, currently on staff at the Contemporary History Branch of the U.S. Naval Historical Center (and author of an award-winning biography of Farragut comrade—and sometimes professional antagonist—John A. Dahlgren), makes no pretense in this work at creating a complete, critical biography. This is rather an emphasis upon Farragut the combat leader over Farragut the man, a study centering "on the qualities of leadership that made him great as well as on the moments in his life when his greatness came to the

fore” (xii). After transitory glances at Farragut’s formative and early professional years, the author recounts the admiral’s Civil War exploits along the Gulf Coast and the Mississippi. Nothing new here—the battles of New Orleans and Mobile Bay, not to mention the running of the Confederate batteries at Vicksburg, have been chronicled in scrupulous detail over the last century—yet the chief virtue of Schneller’s approach is a fast adherence to his stated theme. Indeed, the author demonstrates repeatedly throughout the narrative that Farragut exemplified the *beau ideal* military leader, possessing “all the attributes of [an illustrious] commander: intelligence, confidence, determination, and boldness. He remained aware of the overall tactical situation even as the battle raged . . . and his ability to divine the decisive moment for action was almost uncanny.” (99–100).

The author consults a limited number of essential published works and manuscript materials in fashioning a tight history. For the scholar, the bibliographic note and endnotes prove to be especially helpful, steering those interested in a more detailed look at the admiral’s career toward preferred sources. Schneller too recognizes—though the restricted, monographic format of *Farragut* prevents him from examining—limitations in the existing literature; one such area is Farragut’s ambivalent attitude with regards to race. Recognizing that the admiral’s “opinions about slavery and African Americans remain a mystery” (104), the author points out that Farragut befriended a number of individual blacks while favoring at the same time President Andrew Johnson’s restrictive postbellum reconstruction program. In the end, Schneller calls for future Farragut biographers to investigate this important aspect of the admiral’s personality. It is a plea that should not go unheeded.

Stylistically, Schneller is at his best when describing the maelstrom of battle; his prose detailing the actions at New Orleans and Mobile Bay is always engaging, well paced, and lucid. Yet his approach seems at times too colloquial. Numerous contractions appear throughout the book; moreover, references to the Hollywood creation “Indiana Jones” (17) and the assertion that Farragut “was [in 1864] partying a little too much for a man of his age” (81) might offer some literary flair, but are of dubious use in an academic medium. Still, the above are rather trifling criticisms. Robert Schneller has fashioned a solid introductory volume of one of America’s unrivaled maritime heroes. *Farrugut*:

America's First Admiral can not only stand on its own as part of any student's reference library, it would make a fine component part for survey-level courses in Civil War and American military history.



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