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John H. Schroeder, **Commodore John Rodgers: Paragon of the Early American Navy**, University Press of Florida , 2006. 255 pp., Series: New Perspectives on Maritime History and Nautical Archaeology.

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This is the thirteenth book in the *New Perspectives on Maritime History and Nautical Archaeology* series published for the University Press of Florida. John H. Schroeder, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin , Milwaukee , writes an analytical biography of the life of Commodore John Rodgers, an influential Naval figure from 1798 – 1835.

Commodore John Rodgers' long and honoured career as a naval commander and diplomat made him a significant figure in nineteenth century America ; however, until now there has never been a comprehensive biography written about him. This fascinating and thoroughly researched book fills large gaps in American naval history as it examines the life of Commodore Rodgers from his early days as a merchant captain to his service as a senior naval officer.

Well-known as a stern and patriotic person, *Commodore John Rodgers* describes an intensely passionate man whose brave leadership and personal commitment to the United States Navy brought about some hugely important operational successes and eventually a comprehensive revision of the naval service during the 1800's.

His Naval career began in 1794 after the humiliating loss of the *Hope* to the French precipitating in the Quasi War and then onto 1798 in the Caribbean when as first Lieutenant on board the *Constellation* under the command and tutelage of Captain Thomas Thruxton, Rodgers helped bring about the capture of the French frigate

L'Insurgente. An important role came during the Barbary Wars of 1802-06 whilst as Captain of the *John Adams* when he became honorary Commodore of the Mediterranean fleet. It is at this point Rodger's overwhelming thirst for glory is manifested in his desires to "draw the sword of the Nation" whilst dealing with the Barbary States within the Mediterranean . Rodgers relatively swift ascension through the ranks is then sealed.

At sea during the War of 1812 Rodgers excellent naval skills saw Britain 's monopoly of the seas and dominance of world foreign policy permanently usurped. Upon cession of the war Rodgers accepted a position as President of the newly created Board of Navy Commissioners whereabouts he helped bring about massive administrative change in the structuring and character of the American Navy during what was one of the most tumultuous periods of technological change ever experienced by the Navy.

Throughout the book Schroeder describes Rodgers as an often maligned and bad-tempered man. However his rigid ethics and disciplinarian approach to command help portray him as an appealing representation of the broader themes that affected American society at this time. Moreover, Schroeder's effective use of Rodgers' correspondence with his wife Minerva helps to bestow a warming and personal posture upon the private life of a naval leader. In particular Rodgers admits to his own division of character and promises upon his return home to more 'tranquil times' he will redress his countenance to one that more befits the character of a peacefully minded soul.

In a time where some historians now consider the biography an outdated format Schroeder not only indulges the reader into the aspects of Rodgers own life but also provides an engrossing perspective into American history by seamlessly encompassing the era's political and diplomatic history. The author's extensive use of primary source documents such as manuscript resources from the Rodger's own family papers and archival sources is in particular a strong point of the book.

Mr. Schroeder goes far to identify Commodore John Rodgers as an important figure in the foundations of the early American Navy and thus allows him some of the

attention for which he has been duly overlooked as an important member of the Naval caste. If it were not for singularly well researched works such as this we may never have been allowed to reassess Rodgers' categorisation as an essential part of American Naval History.



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