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Robert J. Schneller, Jr. *Farragut: America's First Admiral*. Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, Inc. 2002. 128 pp. Maps, illustrations, bibliographic note, index.

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(Note: The views expressed in this review are those of its author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force Academy, the Air Force, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.)

Robert J. Schneller Jr.'s concise biography of Admiral David Glasgow Farragut provides a clear account of the commander who gained laurels for his inspirational leadership in the two most important naval engagements of the Civil War. As one in the series of Brassey's (now Potomac Books) military profiles, Schneller's book is tightly focused on the most significant events in Farragut's service to the Union. Indeed, this slight volume is limited by design to afford few details beyond those describing what made Farragut a legend in his own time.

With less than 100 pages of text, *Farragut: America's First Admiral* is not in any sense a comprehensive biography. In his preface Schneller states that his intent is to discuss what made Farragut great and the times "when his greatness came to the fore." (p.xii) This is a highly sympathetic treatment of Farragut and those looking for a critique of his leadership or personality should look elsewhere. However, if one is seeking a pair of case studies justifying the selection of Farragut as the first full admiral in United States history, then this book should suffice.

The book is divided into six chapters tracing Farragut's rise from motherless ward of David Porter Jr. to national icon. The first three chapters span a mere 26 pages and are

just enough to cover the people, places, and events that helped shape the bearing of the future admiral. As Schneller cautions readers in his preface, there is not much space provided to illuminate Farragut's personal development or how he approached relationships in and out of naval service. The meat of this book is found in the succeeding three chapters dealing with the Battle of New Orleans, the Battle of Mobile Bay, and the more than two years between those actions. The events in these three chapters are described with admirable clarity and provide easily digestible discussions of the preparations and deeds that reflected so much credit on Farragut. The final chapter is little more than a brief note on how Farragut lived out his years as America's most respected naval officer.

While the treatment of Farragut's early life and career is less than ideal, Schneller is at his best when describing his subject in command. Seizing upon courage as the attribute that best served the admiral, the author strives to make his subject's bravery obvious. Beyond showing Farragut's boldness in planning, Schneller portrays him as a man prone to Nelsonian heroics. At both New Orleans and Mobile Bay, Farragut demonstrated his physical courage by not only seeking vantage points aloft that left him in plain sight of his subordinates, but also exposed to enemy fire. While Schneller ably describes Farragut's personal displays of heroic leadership, he does not have the space to demonstrate how much influence these acts had on those he led, beyond making those in close proximity stare at him in wonder. (p. 44) How his actions stood in comparison to his contemporaries in a war replete with numerous displays of bravery by officers on both sides is one more issue that evades discussion. Nonetheless, what emerges in a very short span of pages is a portrait of a man who was cool under pressure and decisive when it mattered most.



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