



Perilous Fight

Stephen Budiansky

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In *Perilous Fight*, Stephen Budiansky tells the rousing story of the underdog coterie of American seamen and their visionary secretary of the navy, who combined bravery and strategic innovation to hold off the legendary Royal Navy.

Budiansky vividly demonstrates that far from an indecisive and unnecessary conflict—as historians have long dismissed the War of 1812—this “forgotten war” had profound consequences that would change the course of naval warfare, America’s place in the world, and the rules of international conflict forever. Never again would the great powers challenge the young republic’s sovereignty in the aftermath of the stunning performance of America’s navy and privateersmen in sea battles that ranged across half the globe. Their brilliant hit-and-run tactics against a far mightier foe would pioneer concepts of “asymmetric warfare” that would characterize the insurgency warfare of later centuries.

Above all, the War of 1812 would be the making of the United States Navy. Even as the war began, the nation was bitterly divided over whether it should have a navy at all: Jeffersonian Republicans denounced the idea as a dangerous expansion of government power, while Federalists insisted that America could never protect its burgeoning seagoing commerce or command respect without a strong naval force. After the war, Americans would never again doubt that their might, respect, and very survival depended upon a permanent and professional navy.

Drawing extensively on diaries, letters, and personal accounts from both sides, Budiansky re-creates the riveting encounters at sea in bloody clashes of cannonfire and swordplay; the intimate hopes and fears of vainglorious captains and young seamen in search of adventure; and the behind-the-scenes political intrigue and maneuvering in Washington and London. Throughout, *Perilous Fight* proves itself a gripping and essential work of American naval history.

From the Hardcover edition.



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