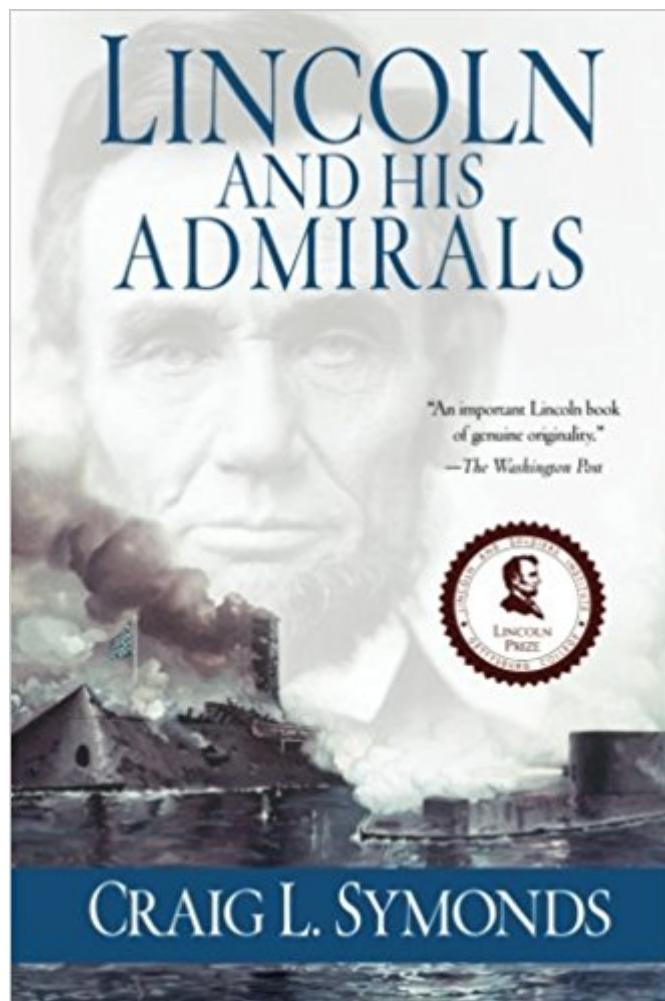


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# Lincoln And His Admirals



## Synopsis

Abraham Lincoln began his presidency admitting that he knew "but little of ships," but he quickly came to preside over the largest national armada to that time, not eclipsed until World War I. Written by naval historian Craig L. Symonds, *Lincoln and His Admirals* unveils an aspect of Lincoln's presidency unexamined by historians until now, revealing how he managed the men who ran the naval side of the Civil War, and how the activities of the Union Navy ultimately affected the course of history. Beginning with a gripping account of the attempt to re-supply Fort Sumter--a comedy of errors that shows all too clearly the fledgling president's inexperience--Symonds traces Lincoln's steady growth as a wartime commander-in-chief. Absent a Secretary of Defense, he would eventually become de facto commander of joint operations along the coast and on the rivers. That involved dealing with the men who ran the Navy: the loyal but often cranky Navy Secretary Gideon Welles, the quiet and reliable David G. Farragut, the flamboyant and unpredictable Charles Wilkes, the ambitious ordnance expert John Dahlgren, the well-connected Samuel Phillips Lee, and the self-promoting and gregarious David Dixon Porter. Lincoln was remarkably patient; he often postponed critical decisions until the momentum of events made the consequences of those decisions evident. But Symonds also shows that Lincoln could act decisively. Disappointed by the lethargy of his senior naval officers on the scene, he stepped in and personally directed an amphibious assault on the Virginia coast, a successful operation that led to the capture of Norfolk. The man who knew "but little of ships" had transformed himself into one of the greatest naval strategists of his age. Co-winner of the 2009 Lincoln PrizeWinner of the 2009 Barondess/Lincoln Prize by the Civil War Round Table of New YorkJohn Lyman Award of the North American Society for Oceanic HistoryDaniel and Marilyn Laney Prize by the Austin Civil War Round TableNevins-Freeman Prize of the Civil War Round Table of Chicago

## Book Information

Paperback: 448 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; Reprint edition (October 15, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0199751579

ISBN-13: 978-0199751570

Product Dimensions: 9.3 x 1.2 x 6.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 43 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #966,544 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #66 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Naval Operations #1230 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > United States > Civil War #1260 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Campaigns & Battlefields

## Customer Reviews

In the conversation below, two noted Lincoln historians, Craig L. Symonds and James M. McPherson (Pulitzer-Prize winning author of *Abraham Lincoln*) discuss the often-neglected role of the Union Navy in the Civil War. The discussion centers on the introduction of a new kind of warship with iron sides and revolving gun turrets called the U.S.S. Monitor, designed by engineer John Ericsson. Ironclads, or monitors as they were called, were used in the Union blockade of Southern ports. Though both Lincoln and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles embraced the new ships, Admiral Samuel Du Pont did not. DuPont's failed attack on Charleston not only brought an end to his career but also earned him derision for his failure to adapt to new technology. Both authors share the prestigious 2009 Lincoln Prize for the year's best books on Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. McPherson's ["Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief"](#) and Symonds's ["Lincoln and His Admirals"](#)

"*Lincoln and His Admirals* is that rare thing, an important Lincoln book of genuine originality."--Michael F. Bishop, *Washington Post Book World*"Splendid...By the end of the Civil War, Mr. Symonds shows us the Navy, both on the oceans and on the Western rivers, had played a major role in bringing about a Union victory, thanks in no small part to Lincoln's persistent naval leadership."--The *Wall Street Journal*"Outstanding...the wide-ranging naval war was fought on vast oceans and inland rivers, and Mr. Symonds restores Lincoln's passion for the Navy to its proper place."--James L. Swanson, *Washington Times*"Scores of books have detailed Lincoln's struggles with reluctant generals during the Civil War, but few have examined his relationship with naval leaders. Craig Symonds, professor emeritus of history at the Naval Academy, sets out to change that in '*Lincoln and his Admirals*'...Symonds delivers a fast-paced, crisply written account of the naval war and Lincoln's patient handling of Welles, Fox and the men who served them, including such famous admirals as David Glasgow Farragut, David Dixon Porter and John Dahlgren."--Seattle Times"We know a great deal about President Lincoln's relations with his generals but much less about his dealings with his admirals and his Navy Department. Craig L. Symonds, a professor emeritus at the U.S. Naval Academy, has filled this gap with a compelling tale about Lincoln's

dealings with the Navy and the prickly men who ran it...Mr Symonds has provided more than a splendid study of the Civil War at sea; he offers fresh insights into Lincoln as commander in chief."--John M. Taylor, *Washington Times*"Craig Symonds took the challenge, and the retired Naval Academy professor has produced a study as fascinating as it is revealing...Symonds has the rare ability to bring history alive through individuals who made it...Symonds has given us one of the year's best additions to Civil War history, whether or not you are a landlubber."--Roanoke Times"Readers already familiar with Lincoln's experiences with the army will find much to commend in Symonds' eye-opening *Lincoln and His Admirals*, as McPherson attests in a dust-jacket comment on the book. The book, he says, finally gives the Union navy and its commander in chief the credit they deserve for their important role in winning the Civil War."--St. Louis Post-Dispatch"Symonds, a prize-winning historian who taught at the U.S. Naval Academy, brings us yet another new way of looking at Lincoln - as a commander in chief who, by his own admission, knew "little about ships." Lincoln's relationship with his generals is one of the better-known side stories of the Civil War. Symonds reminds us that Lincoln had to keep his eye on the seas, rivers and admirals as well."--Newark Star Ledger"Solidly researched, well argued, and engagingly written. What really makes the book stand out, however, is the insight that Symonds provides into the minds and actions of the key players."--Civil War Book Review"The definitive work on the 16th president's leadership of the navy."--Publishers Weekly"The Civil War forced the 16th president to know a lot more, and Symonds expertly demonstrates how he learned about ships, strategy, new technologies and, above all, about dealing with the fractious personalities to whom he delegated naval operations... For scholars and the general reader alike, an insightful and highly readable treatment of a neglected dimension of Lincoln's wartime leadership."--Kirkus Reviews (starred review)"Superbly researched... Symonds has written an excellent work that describes both Lincoln's growing confidence and competence as a naval strategist as well as his relations with various naval commanders... This will be a fine addition to Civil War collections."--Booklist"Lincoln's role as commander-in-chief during the Civil War is most often assessed through his dealings with his Union generals; thus, Symonds's expert and accessible work on the naval side is a real boon. He gives us a meticulous and graceful interpretive narrative, rich with primary-source anecdote, of Lincoln's relationship with the U.S. Navy and his evolution as a naval strategist... Essential for all Lincoln collections."--Library Journal"We utter the names of Lincoln's admirals, such as Farragut and Porter, far less often than the names of his Generals, good or bad. And Craig L. Symonds' *Lincoln and His Admirals* is one of the relatively few books on the role of the maritime, studies focusing on Lincoln and his admirals being rarer still."--Baton Rouge Advocate"*Lincoln and His Admirals*' is an important book. It is easily the most

comprehensive study to date on the development of Union naval strategy during the Civil War. Meticulously researched from primary sources, it concentrates on President Abraham Lincoln's role in the naval war...Much has been written on the relationship of Lincoln and his generals; now we have the same for Lincoln and his admirals. Anyone wishing to understand the naval Civil War and its relation to the fighting on land will want to read this book."--Journal of Military History"We know a great deal about Lincoln and his generals, but until now very little about Lincoln and his admirals. With a compelling portrait of personalities and a sharp analysis of strategy, Craig Symonds offers a gripping narrative that finally gives the Union navy--and its commander-in- chief--the credit they deserve for the important part they played in winning the Civil War." --James M. McPherson, author of *Battle Cry of Freedom*"Symonds is one of the finest American military historians in this generation."--Gabor Boritt, Fluhrer Professor of Civil War Studies and Director, Civil War Institute, Gettysburg College"This is an epic story--the quintessential, mal-de-mer-prone landlubber morphing into the admiral-in-chief of the mightiest armada on the planet. Spinning the yarn with resourceful scholarship and narrative verve, peerless naval historian Craig Symonds succeeds in creating an entirely new portrait of Lincoln: not only as healer of the land, but conqueror of the sea."--Harold Holzer, Co-Chairman, U.S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission"Craig L. Symonds has filled a gap by giving us a superb account of Abraham Lincoln's relationship with the navy and the people who ran it. Beautifully written, the narrative is also lively and informative. He eloquently describes how Lincoln's judicious temperament complemented his irascible 'Neptune,' Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles along with the calumny, envy, personal conflicts, and thirst for promotion that permeated the deep sea and riverine forces. This is the most complete and edifying story of Mr. Lincoln and his 'webbed-feet.'"--Frank Williams, Chief Justice, Rhode Island State Supreme Court and Lincoln Scholar"Lincoln and His Admirals is simply superb and Craig Symonds' analysis of US Navy leadership during the Civil War is magnificent! The Lincoln-esque gems placed throughout the book made reading it a delight. The chapters on the Fort Sumter crisis and the Trent affair are incisive and the best discussions of these dramas I have ever read. Symonds brought back to life our Civil War admirals and Navy Secretary Gideon Welles and shared their triumphs and their setbacks as they richly deserved."-- David Sutherland, President, Indianapolis Civil War Round Table (2001-02 and 2007-08)"Symonds's book is a necessary addition to the Civil War scholar's bookshelf. Casual readers will enjoy it for its wonderful prose and anecdotal style."--Centre Daily Times"Symonds is a talented author who keeps the reader engrossed from the first page. I particularly appreciated his ability to show Lincoln's strong interest in technology, ranging from ironclads to new weapons. The book is superbly researched with a portfolio of primary and

secondary sources. I recommend this book to all officers attending professional military institutions for the insights it offers to the Civil War period at sea and Lincoln as commander-in-chief."--Military Review"Symonds is tilling some important new ground in this pioneering study.... [It is] revelatory in its scope, vivid in its characterizations of the key figures, and thought-provoking in the way a fresh story emerges from an oft-covered subject.... a strong and original contribution."--Naval History

An excellent review of Lincoln's admirals, and his relationship with them, as well as including the relationships other people in Lincoln's govt. with these admirals. Really informative. Much info. I hadn't read before. (I'm an avid C.W. fan) So, you are not wasting your money. Only one complaint, and I don't know if it's really legitimate judging on this author's great presentation. I did feel like I wanted to know more of the personal lives of these admirals, and not just relationship with Lincoln. I must say the author does get into some of their personal lives quite well. I was looking for more.

In the deluge of new books about the sixteenth president appearing in anticipation of the bicentennial of his birth, Lincoln and His Admirals stands apart. It begins to fill the void resulting from the frequent neglect of the naval aspects of the Civil War. For this reason alone, the book is worthwhile. The book, however, is more than merely worthwhile. It is a comprehensive account of the events and personalities involved in this crucial phase of the Civil War that is told in a fine narrative style. Symonds provides a compelling story of how Lincoln's initial reluctance to command was replaced by an increasing confidence that led to his personal role in many great and small details of naval administration. This "sea change" was the product of Lincoln's perceptive intelligence and his relentless determination to preserve the Union. Symonds includes informative portraits of many naval officers now almost lost to history and judiciously tallies their strengths and weakness. It did seem odd to me that he has comparatively little to say about Farragut or his torpedo-damning ascent of Mobile Bay. I was also surprised by the omission of the duel between Alabama and Kearsarge -- only the outcome is reported. Perhaps the author concluded that these events are already well-known. My only other criticism is that the first portion of the book would have been improved by relating the less familiar events afloat to those ashore that are much more widely known. At one point, I thought a timeline would have been helpful, but later, the author links the war at sea with the land war very well. Finally, I have to say that this very good book has a very good dust jacket. In the foreground is a vivid image of the encounter between Monitor and Merrimack (or Virginia), but looming above it is the ghostly face of Abraham Lincoln. It is a perceptive introduction to this highly recommended book.

This book provides a view of Abraham Lincoln's presidential leadership skills from the standpoint of Civil War naval affairs. It is not a history of the ships or average sailors of the period. Professor Symonds relates how President Lincoln grew as a military leader during the war while handling the diverse crew of naval leaders that had stayed with the Union when the South first bolted. The Cabinet infighting between Welles, Seward, Chase etc. is nicely drawn, as are descriptions of foreign relations frictions brought about by actions at sea. I liked that the author peppered his narrative with President Lincoln's small stories, often used by that great man to make serious points.

An interesting yet little known facet of the Civil War. Symonds tells the story in a narrative form keeping it interesting for the reader. Too often this type of book is very dry. It clearly illustrates the issues of government and politics in the time period have changed very little today.

Mismanagement, intra service rivalry and political intrigue are just some of the issues Lincoln had to deal with, Sound Familiar? The book increased my appreciation of Lincoln and reinforces the fact he was one of our greatest presidents. He realized that the war at sea was an important part of overall strategy and struggled with his generals, the congress and some of his cabinet to realize this. I strongly recommend the book to anyone with an interest in history, the Civil War and of course, Lincoln.

I attended a lecture presented by the author on the story of the Monitor and Virginia (I prefer Merrimac). Mr. Symonds is all Navy; he taught at the US Naval Academy. He knows his material thoroughly. He is witty and engaging. Those qualities prompted me to buy this book. It exceeded my expectations. The book is much more than a discourse on Lincoln and his admirals. It is a concise and precise compilation on the US Navy during the Civil War. It gives much attention to Lincoln's crucial interactions with the Secretary of the Navy and his assistant as well as the admirals and officers of the USN. The narrative also provides in-depth attention to other participants such as engineers and US Army generals. And, all of this information is supported with excellent descriptions of the tactics and equipment used during the conflict. Mr. Symonds' explanations of the invention and use of ironclads is especially interesting. The writing style and organization of the book is decidedly on the same level as works by other major authors such as Goodwin's Team of Rivals. The quality of the research and the synthesis of complex issues make this book a must-have for anyone interested in Lincoln and just about any aspect of the Civil War. In addition, it offers a wealth of new perspectives on the transition of African Americans from slavery to freedom--thanks in

substantial part to the efforts of the US Navy.

Good overview of Lincoln's relationship with the navy during the Civil War. High command during the Civil War was often fluid and uncertain, and the navy's experience was little different from the army's. This work is not meant to give the reader a rundown of naval tactics during the war, which can be found in other works. Considering how much the naval high command bickered over the effectiveness of the monitors, perhaps more discussion could have been directed towards their impact on naval tactics. The book does spend far too much time discussing Lincoln's policy on the fate of runaway slaves, and the chapter almost derails the focus of the overall work.

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