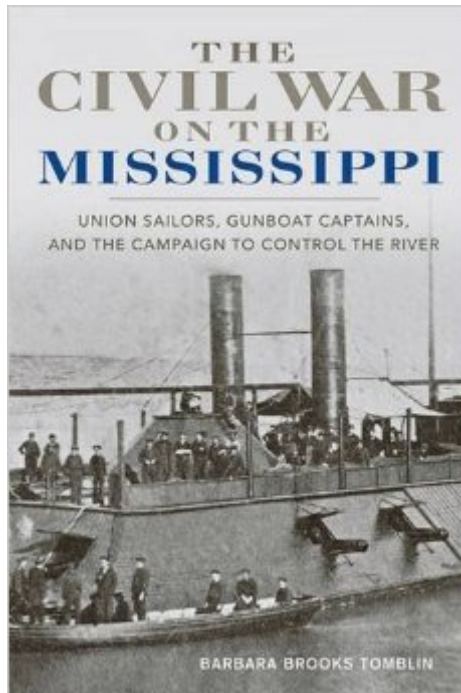


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The Civil War On The Mississippi: Union Sailors, Gunboat Captains, And The Campaign To Control The River



Synopsis

Flowing from its source in northern Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi River borders or passes through ten different states and serves as one of the most important transportation systems in the United States. During the Civil War, both sides believed that whoever controlled the river would ultimately be victorious. Cotton exports generated much-needed revenue for the Confederacy, and the Mississippi was also the main conduit for the delivery of materials and food. Similarly, the Union sought to maintain safe passage from St. Louis, Missouri, to Cairo, Illinois, but also worked to bisect the South by seizing the river as part of the Anaconda Plan. Drawing heavily on the diaries and letters of officers and common sailors, Barbara Brooks Tomblin explores the years during which the Union navy fought to win control of the Mississippi. Her approach provides fresh insight into major battles such as Memphis and Vicksburg, but also offers fascinating perspectives on lesser-known aspects of the conflict from ordinary sailors engaged in brown-water warfare. These men speak of going ashore in foraging parties, assisting the surgeon in the amputation of a fellow crewman's arm, and liberating supplies of whiskey from captured enemy vessels. They also offer candid assessments of their commanding officers, observations of the local people living along the river, and their views on the war. The Civil War on the Mississippi not only provides readers with a comprehensive and vivid account of the action on the western rivers; it also offers an incredible synthesis of first-person accounts from the front lines.

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Customer Reviews

This is an excellent book--but be aware that it is not a military history or an account of naval actions.

The title includes sailors and gunboat captains, and that's much of the book. It's based on diaries, letters and memoirs of just that, officers and sailors, and uses these to paint a vivid picture of the Mississippi squadron (originally under Army command, it became part of the Navy in 1862). The book covers actions up to the Vicksburg campaign when the river was finally opened for Union navigation all the way to the Gulf. It gives a vivid sense of dueling with Confederate batteries, which were formidable. There's also an undercurrent of "contrabands," that is escaping slaves who often escaped to naval vessels. The book doesn't explore this systematically but does give a sense of the importance of African Americans--labor and a good deal of help on ship. There's one useful map, but more maps would make this a better book. The illustrations are helpful. What would also have been helpful would be a chapter early on giving more detail about what life was like on board--surely those details could be patched together from the same sources used in the book. Were the watches the same as on the oceanic navy? How big was a gun crew and how did they lift some of that very heavy ammunition for the big guns. And what is a Parrot or a Dahlgren artillery piece? What did they eat, and did they sleep in hammocks, naval-style? The book may get the reader curious about these details. And perhaps a diagram of one or more of the ship classes. The river gunboats were more or less armored steamboats, and yet once armored were able to absorb a good deal of punishment--despite those paddlewheels which would seem to be delicate and vulnerable. Overall though, it's a good read.

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