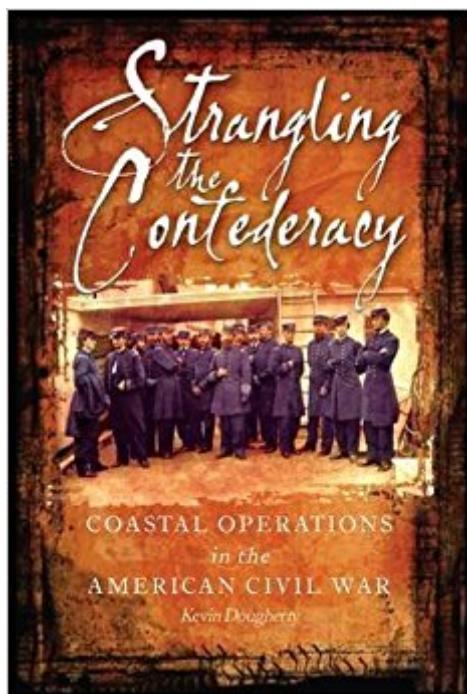


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Strangling The Confederacy: Coastal Operations In The American Civil War



Synopsis

A selection of the Military Book Club While the Civil War is mainly remembered for its epic battles between the Northern and Southern armies, the Union was simultaneously waging another campaign—dubbed “Anaconda”—that was gradually depriving the South of industry and commerce, thus rendering the exploits of its field armies moot. When an independent Dixie finally met the dustbin of history, it was the North’s coastal campaign, as much as the achievements of its main forces, that was primarily responsible. Strangling the Confederacy examines the various naval actions and land incursions the Union waged from Virginia down the Atlantic Coast and through the Gulf of Mexico to methodically close down every Confederate port that could bring in weapons or supplies. The Rebels responded with fast ships—blockade runners—that tried to evade the Yankee fleets, while at the same time constructing formidable fortifications that could protect the ports themselves. While Union troopships floated offshore, able to strike anywhere, mobile Confederate forces were kept at hand near crucial points, albeit in smaller numbers, to resist Federal irruptions into their homeland. In the final analysis, the Union’s Navy Board, a unique institution at the time, undertook the correct strategy. Its original decision to focus on ten seaports that had rail or water connections with the Confederate interior—from Norfolk to Charleston to Mobile to New Orleans—shows that the Navy Board understood the concept of decisive points. In a number of battles the Federals were able to leverage their superior technology, including steam power and rifled artillery, in a way that made the Confederate coastal defenses highly vulnerable, if not obsolete. On the other hand, when the Federals encountered Confederate resistance at close-quarters they often experienced difficulties, as in the failures at Fort Fisher, the debacle at Battery Wagner, the Battle of Olustee, and in other clashes. What makes this book particularly unique is its use of modern military doctrine to assess and analyze the campaigns. Kevin Dougherty, an accomplished historian and former career Army officer, concludes that, without knowing it, the Navy Board did an excellent job at following modern strategic doctrine. While the multitude of small battles that flared along the Rebel coast throughout the Civil War have heretofore not been as well known as the more titanic inland battles, in a cumulative sense, Anaconda—the most prolonged of the Union campaigns—spelled doom for the Confederacy.

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Customer Reviews

This book by author Kevin Dougherty works as a broad overview of coastal operations conducted by the Union Navy/Army during the American Civil War. I myself am not that familiar with these operations and came away with a good understanding of the decision making and planning by both governments (most of the time not so good by the Confederacy), the leadership by the commanders of both sides (again, a lot of times not that great for the South), the forces involved (unfortunately the book has no detailed Orders of Battle), and the sequence of events. The book is divided into seven parts: 1. Short bios on Union and Confederate participants in the coastal operations, and the formation, membership and planning of the Union Navy Board in 1861. 2. The Atlantic Campaign 1861-1862 - Hatteras Inlet, North Carolina - Port Royal Sound, South Carolina - Fernandina and Jacksonville, Florida - Fort Pulaski, Georgia. 3. The Burnside Expedition, North Carolina, 1862 - Roanoke Island - New Bern - Fort Macon. 4. The Peninsula Campaign, Virginia, 1862 (shows how the lack of cooperation between the Army and Navy contributed to the Union failure). 5. The Gulf Campaign 1861-1863 - Ship Island, Mississippi - New Orleans, Louisiana - Pensacola, Florida - Galveston, Texas. 6. Tougher Challenges 1863-1865 - Charleston, South Carolina - Mobile Bay, Alabama - Fort Fisher, North Carolina. 7. The Coastal War and the Elements of Operational Design (compares the Union's conduct of the Coastal War with the modern U.S. militaries procedures and

doctrine for planning and conducting similar operations) As can be seen, this volume pretty much covers all Coastal Operations in the American Civil War. The book is well written and concise (197 pages of text/233 pages total). But I have two major complaints about this work. First, it does not have enough maps (9 maps total) and those that are included are not detailed enough (as an example the first map, a Theater of Operations map titled "The Coastal War" does not include the Texas coast and "Galveston" is printed in the Gulf of Mexico with an arrow pointing west). There is no map for Hatteras Inlet (though there is a good Area of Operations map for the North Carolina coast), the map for Port Royal is ok, there is no map for operations in northeast Florida/southeast Georgia, etc. (there are no maps for a few coastal operations covered in the text, no maps for any Confederate fortifications, no maps for any related land battles [Roanoke Island, New Bern, Secessionville, etc.], and the map of Charleston's defenses does not even show Fort Sumter). My second complaint about this book is that after examining the Bibliography I see that this book is a combination of secondary sources only, and does not even list "The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies" (O.R.), but even more shocking to me for a book about Civil War coastal operations conducted predominately by the Union Navy, it also does not include "Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion" (O.R.N) as a source!!! The book has 20 photos of participants and locations relevant to the text, the Notes section only list sources, and there are no appendixes. This title will give the reader an introduction to Coastal Operations during the American Civil War and the final chapter of the book is interesting and informative (turns out the Union Navy Board did a pretty good job using operational design like our modern military would today). Unfortunately, the lack of maps and primary research make this more of a book for the casual reader or someone just learning about these operations, but even they will probably want something more detailed. (I havent read that much on this subject but for further reading I recommend "The Battle of Port Royal" by Michael D. Coker, and "Civil War on Pensacola Bay, 1861-1862" by John K. Driscoll)

I picked this one up for \$5. It's worth that. But I have mixed feelings overall. It's a fairly brief (less than 200 pages of text) but still manages to give a decent, introductory level overview of the Navy Board, and the coastal operations undertaken by the Union. Very few primary sources are used, but the bibliography of secondary sources seems pretty good. Dougherty does a nice job of tying these operations together, and showing how successful the Union over the period Sept 1861-May 1862. Of the 10 Major CS ports, they were down to 3 (Mobile, Charleston and Wilmington) early in 1862. The Union made little additional progress against CS ports until 1864. The blockade was made as

successful as it was by combined operations against ports and port defenses in a brief period time early in the war. And then little was done for over 2 years. The book suffers from some organizational problems and repetition, particularly in the introduction and concluding chapter, but the meat of the book is organized and concise.

I bought this book on the assumption (yeah I know) that when the subtitle said coastal operations that it would go into detail about it. That assumption was wrong as what this book does is give a quick rundown on the MAJOR naval ops against Confederate ports plus a bit about the Peninsula Campaign and absolutely nothing outside of that. Nothing is mentioned of the hundreds of small raids, convoy duties, intelligence missions, counter guerrilla opns, refugee pickups etc that the Navy did throughout the War often causing the Confederacy untold grief while doing so. For anyone with little to no idea of what the Union Navy brought to the fight or it's importance, this book does do a fair job of highlighting the major opns. It also discusses in some detail the personnel of the Navy Board in deciding both strategy and division of resources which IS something not touched on in many references. This was a first in US military history and may be understood as something akin to the Admiralty of the Royal Navy. This was a highly successful planning group and one the Army could have benefited from greatly, by emulating. Until something better comes along then for a more detailed history of the Navy during the Civil War, I'll have to stick to Admiral David D Porter's huge "Naval History of the Civil War". Written from the winning side of the War, it lacks the balance of details from the Confederate side and sometimes overblows successes while minimizing failures but it's still the most encompassing of naval histories of the War.

This is a slim little volume that gives a fairly broad overview of Union efforts on the Confederate littoral. After a brief setting of the stage which describes the broad situation, the major players on both sides and introduces the US Navy Board, the book is arranged chronologically. Each major operation gets, essentially a chapter. Finally the book sums up the Union strategy, how well the strategy was implemented and, interestingly compares the Union planning and strategy with the current US planning and doctrine for littoral warfare. The book is well written and basically succeeds at its mission which is providing a broad overview of coastal operations. All the key information is here. Although I would have preferred more detailed information on the operations themselves (there is nothing like a comprehensive Order of Battle for any of the operations) and I am really interested in the strategic effects of these operations on the Confederate's military position, criticizing this book for not including these things seems a bit unfair. I'm reviewing the book the

author wrote, not the one I wished he had written. That being said the book could use a few more maps. Highly recommended, but it will probably just make you want to know more, which ain't necessarily a bad thing.

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