

Search



The Navy Museum Online Store

International Journal of Naval History

Naval Documents of the American Revolution

Contact Us



Who We Are ▾

Support the Foundation ▾

Programs ▾

Events ▾

Newsletters ▾

Our Partners

HOME / BOOK REVIEWS • BOOKS / THE WAR OF JENKINS EAR: THE FO ...

THE WAR OF JENKINS EAR: THE FORGOTTEN STRUGGLE FOR NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA, 1739-1742

THE WAR OF JENKINS EAR: THE FORGOTTEN STRUGGLE FOR NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA, 1739-1742

🕒 November 25, 2021 📁 Book Reviews, Books

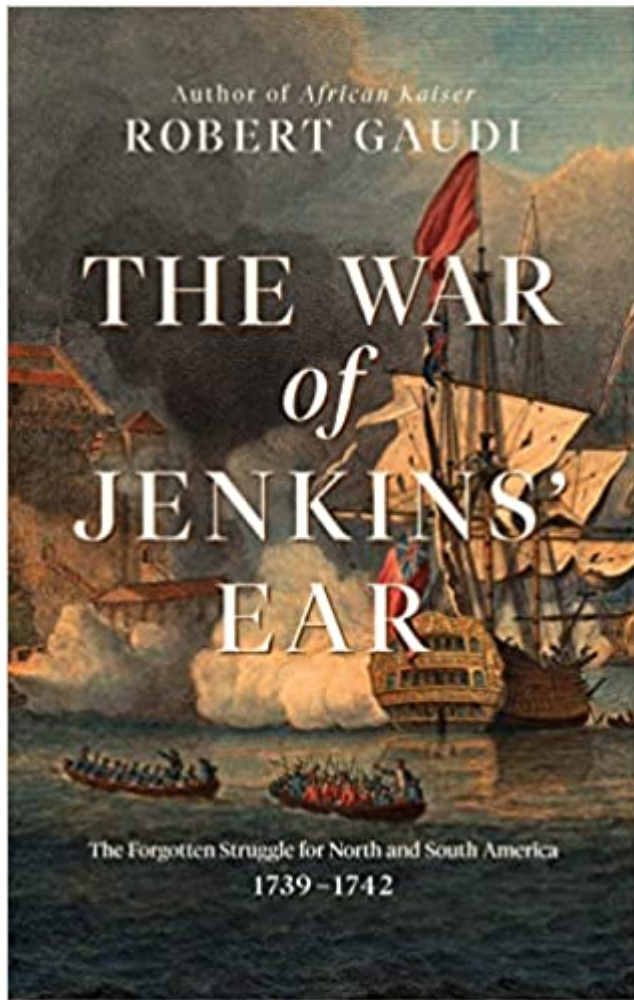
🔖 age of sail, British Royal Navy, Colonial Wars, diplomacy, Robert Gaudi, Spanish Navy, The War of Jenkins' Ear, Tyler Robinson

Reviewed by Tyler Robinson

The War of Jenkins' Ear is Robert Gaudi's second book in the genre of military history. At a glance it seems quite different from its predecessor, *African Kaiser*, which focuses on German military operations in Africa in the First World War. However, the two works have certain themes in common. Both focus on conflicts between European powers over distant colonial interests, prosecuted by unprecedentedly diverse units. Moreover, both feature extraordinary feats of navigation and recognize the unglamorous role of sanitation and disease prevention in averting military casualties.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS:





A quote from J.H. Powell lamenting his inability to write history as vividly as fiction is featured in the epigraph to *The War of Jenkins' Ear*, but this book proves as engaging as any novel. The author's language is eloquent yet economical, enabling him to present a wealth of information in a readily digestible medium accessible to those with little prior knowledge of the subject matter.



VIEW OUR PULL TOGETHER NEWSLETTERS



The War of Jenkins' Ear emerged from grievances on both sides, namely the rampant smuggling performed by the British "South Sea Company" in Spanish waters and the piratical behavior of the Spanish colonial *guarda costa* toward British shipping. The competing interests at play in this larger conflict were encapsulated by the eponymous mutilation of the Welsh merchant Robert Jenkins by a Spanish coast guardsman in 1731, a full eight years before the beginning of the conflict itself.

Indeed, the start and end dates for the conflict contained in the subtitle of Gaudi's work do not represent the full scope of the history covered in this text. Gaudi devotes substantial attention to the personal and family histories of key figures, the breakdown of diplomacy between Spain and England in the leadup to the conflict, past acts of conquistadores and pirates that still loomed large in the popular imagination, and the more recent War of the Spanish Succession, which laid a geopolitical groundwork unsuited to lasting peace. A particularly memorable figure from this prior conflict is the Machiavellian diplomat, cardinal, and chef,

Giulio Alberoni, who acted as a Richelieu-esque figure in the Spanish court of Phillip V.

Though readers looking for nothing more or less than a concise blow by blow account of the War of Jenkins Ear itself may disapprove of such inclusions, this wealth of detail serves to efficiently contextualizes an understudied conflict and makes this book a delight for anyone with a passion for the baroque period or naval history more broadly. The extra granularity provided by these anecdotes elevates Gaudi's narrative to an immersive experience with cinematic appeal.

The War of Jenkins' Ear may be distinguished from the larger War of the Austrian Succession in much the same way as the Pacific War may be distinguished from the Second World War. The focus of this book is therefore primarily restricted to conflict in the New World, from Caribbean islands to South American strongholds and the "Debatable Land" between the colonies of Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida. However, as the primary participants in this conflict were European powers, some discussion of their turbulent histories is well warranted. The final chapter of the book also extends the geographic scope to include Spanish colonial holdings in the Pacific, as Commodore George Anson, a Royal Naval Officer and South Carolina landowner, managed to lead an ill-equipped squadron crewed by elderly and disabled veterans, untrained recruits, and cabin boys to circumnavigate the globe and interdict a fortune in treasure bound for Spain.

Both logistics and leadership play central roles in accounting for military successes and failures in *The War of Jenkins' Ear*. A pre-industrial Spanish empire corrupted by the resource curse of vast natural wealth often failed to maintain and supply its overseas installations, and the competency of local colonial governors proved at least as decisive as the scheming of British officers. Simultaneously, failure to engage in swift and decisive action doomed English forces unable to contend with the tropical illnesses that proliferated in any protracted conflict. Admiral Edward Vernon is credited with recognizing this fact, in addition to acknowledging that the treacherous nature of conditions at sea demanded his captains be granted the autonomy to adapt when necessary. However, much like the Japanese military of the Second World War, the British sea and land forces of the 18th century exhibited a stubborn inability to take

risks at the behest of one another, grievously undermining their joint attempts to conquer the Spanish strongholds of St. Augustine and Catagena.

As Gaudi notes, the failed campaign against Catagena was notable not just as a devastating defeat for the Royal Navy, but also as the first instance of American marines engaging in a conflict on foreign shores. They were recruited based on the assumption that living in the New World had granted them some immunity to the aforementioned tropical diseases, and were surprisingly representative of the population of America, including Black and Native soldiers serving alongside White Protestants and Catholics. Among the American officers leading these integrated forces was a young Lawrence Washington—the elder brother of George Washington—who served aboard the flagship of Admiral Vernon and would go on to name his family home of Mount Vernon after the officer whose rigid attention to health and sanitation enabled him to survive this grueling and ultimately doomed campaign.

Tyler Robinson graduated with an MLitt in International Security Studies from the University of St Andrews in 2018. He has also contributed reports on emerging technologies and geopolitical threats for OODA LLC.

The War of Jenkins Ear: The Forgotten Struggle for North and South America, 1739-1742 (Robert Gaudi, Pegasus Books, New York, NY, 2021).

Spread the word. Share this post!



[< Previous](#)

[Next >](#)

LEAVE COMMENT

Your Message

Your Name (Required)

Your Email (Required)

Your Website

☐ Save my name, email, and website in this browser for the next time I comment.

Submit Now

RECENT POSTS:

A History of the Naval Historical Foundation

December 8, 2022

War Alert in the Tropical Dawn at Pearl

December 7, 2022

Two Observations on Devotion

November 30, 2022



CONTACT US:

Naval Historical Foundation
1306 Dahlgren Avenue, SE
Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374
1-202-678-4333
info@navyhistory.org

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 15304
Washington, DC 20003

Copyright © 2011-2022 Naval Historical Foundation. All rights reserved.

Follow Us [f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [You Tube](#)