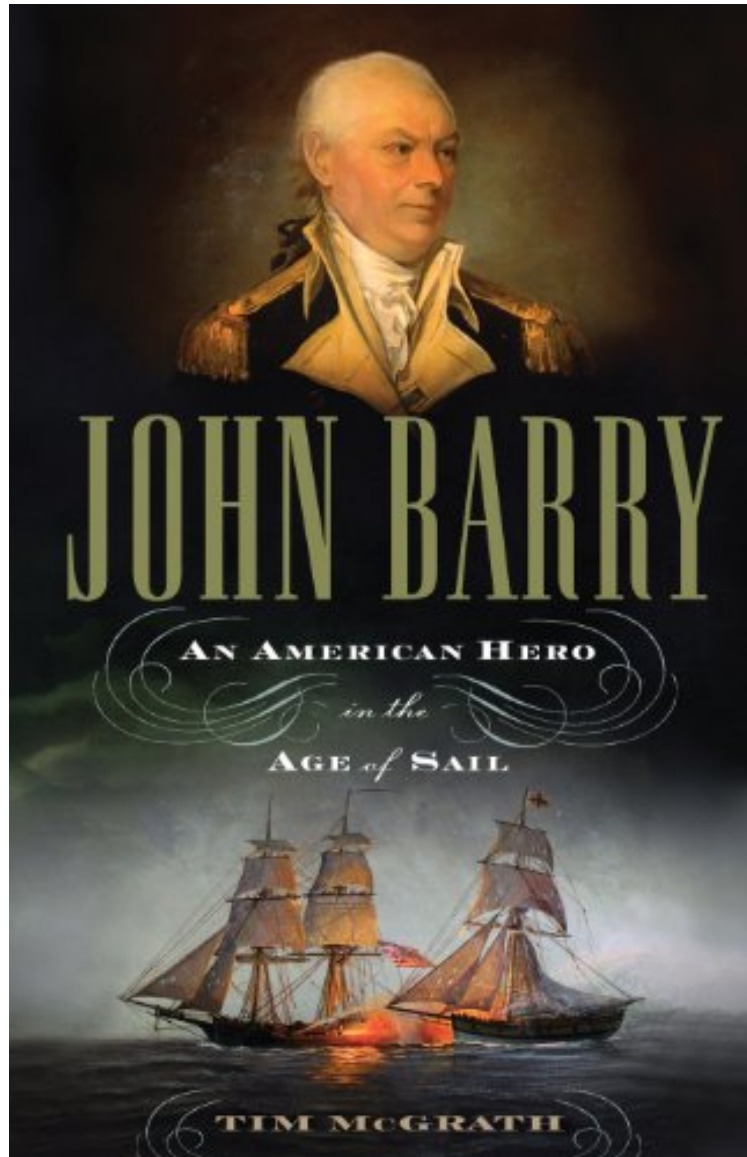


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John Barry: An American Hero in the Age of Sail

Tim McGrath

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Tim McGrath : John Barry: An American Hero in the Age of Sail before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised John Barry: An American Hero in the Age of Sail:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A real iron man commanding America's first wooden ships By Phred Ahead of this review are 10 solid five-star votes. Each review presents a more or less solid case for marking this as an "I love it" book. I share their enthusiasm and only demur my fifth star because biography does not succeed as an

in-depth critical analysis. It is said that most biographers tend to lose their objectivity towards their subject. It is possible that biographer Tim McGrath never intended for this to be a fully objective biography. In my case four stars also reflects the inability to give 4 stars. In 2012 we tend to prefer the antihero or to know that candidates for heroic standing always had clay feet. Mr. McGrath's John Barry, whatever his weaknesses may have been, they are not included in this story. What this book is about is a real-life rags to - if not riches than to prominence, by a great leader, warrior, American patriot and family man. John Barry would begin his life a younger son in an impoverished Irish family. He would be sent to the American colonies to join a successful seagoing relative. Through family influence he would gain a working berth aboard a merchantman and quickly established himself as a reliable sailor, leader, and ultimately merchant captain in demand. He would befriend the financier, future civilian leader of the colonial Navy and fellow Irishman, Robert Morris. As one of Morris's captains Barry would make several successful merchant cruises. When it became clear that the colonies would be fighting to gain their independence from England, Barry would be among the first to offer himself to command such ships as the colonial Navy could provide. Initially it would be his skills as an administrator that the Navy would tap. As such he would be instrumental in the fitting out and construction of some of America's first fighting ships. Ultimately he would be given command of his own ships and with them he would bring America some of their first naval victories. Also, much to Barry's frustration he would sail in support of American diplomatic efforts with France. McGrath makes a very strong case that Commodore Barry was also important in his ability to identify, train, and motivate America's next generation of naval leadership. During much of his service Barry depended on his continuing friendship with Robert Morris. As the so-called Agent of Marine Morris was vital in funding and administering what would become the U.S. Navy. However by the end of Barry's career Benjamin Stoddard would be his boss as Sec. of the Navy. The relationship between these two would never be as warm and indeed Sec. Stoddard would conclude prematurely if not ultimately correctly that Barry was passed his prime. Even so Sec. Stoddard would frequently appoint "Barry's boys" to important captaincies in the Navy that would fight the Barbary Pirates. John Barry would continue the family's tradition by providing money, a place to live and opportunities to work for not only members of his Irish family but for the children of his second wife's extended family. This aspect of John Barry the citizen is also important because some of his wife's family were notorious royalists, supporters of England against their native America. In *John Barry: an American in the Age of Sail*, Tim McGrath presents a very readable and very well documented biography. In doing so, he helps to remind us that we are a nation with heroes in our heritage. There was one area where John Barry was too much a man of his time, McGrath does not hide the fact that Barry was a slave owner would be to his death. In his will he would provide for the manumission of his two household slaves. There is no evidence that they were ever actually set free. This is the only blemish on John Barry's history reported in this biography. McGrath reminds us that there are several candidates for the title Father of the American Navy. We are reminded that whatever claim John Paul Jones has to that title, much of that claim is based on Jones's notorious self-promotion. Reading as something like an "in-your-face" burn McGrath points to John Paul Jones's permanent enshrinement at the United States Naval Academy and reminds you that John Paul Jones is forever alone. John Barry on the other hand lived out his life with the support of a loving family and is buried alongside them. In raising the issue of who is the father of the American Navy McGrath nominates John Barry but does not make a concluding argument. Because this is a well-documented biography it has a greater value than the expression casual biography would suggest. Alternately it lacks the critical analysis and thorough discussion of historical context that would lift it to a position with more serious, academic scholarship. My decision to stay with four stars and not to round up from 4 is because I believe Mr. McGrath wished to achieve a more scholarly and less "popular" type of history book. If the expression wooden ships and iron men stirs any part of the salt in your veins this book is for you. John Barry was one of the iron men commanding America's wooden ships. Tim McGrath has given us a biography worthy of this most worthy heroic American. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Well researched with many overlooked aspects of Barry and others of his time. By TomRI really enjoyed this book. I've read many books about both the British and United States during this period. There were several new aspects of history. Barry's struggle for recognition, and frankly, even to get paid was very interesting. The attitude of those in power towards the Navy was well laid out. I've visited John Paul Jones' tomb many times. I will surely go to Barry's as well. To me, one of the least known facts is how important and successful frigate Alliance was. Alliance gets a bad reputation because of its first commander, and most ignore it, or worse, because of that. One last note. USS Barry, the Forrest Sherman Class destroyer, has been removed from Washington Navy Yard and will likely be broken up. Very sad. As you can tell, I highly recommend this book. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. If you're interested in Commodore John Barry or the founding of the United States Navy, read this book. By J Hoare This is one of the most engaging biographies or histories that I've read in recent years. McGrath portrays the man, to the extent that we may know him at this remove, with the deft mastery of sources of a consummate historian and the skill of a master storyteller. One could not ask for better. Of the man John Barry many opinions have been offered but only one thing counts when all is said and done: he was true, to his adopted country, his family and his friends. Of the politics I will only say this: this account is a salutary warning of the vagaries of politics and influence, both of which should always be kept at least one remove distant from any professional military service if it is to serve its country well.

Finalist for the Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison Award for Excellence in Naval Literature Ashore as well as at sea, Tim McGrath paints an informative, engaging and highly entertaining portrait of this worthy but neglected hero of American independence. The author shows us a man who was a magnificent embodiment of common sense and uncommon courage and dedication. That such a work is long overdue makes its achievement all the more pleasurable. Wall Street Journal Combining sophisticated use of sources with a pleasing writing style, McGrath masterfully rescues a father of the U.S. Navy from unmerited eclipse. Publishers Weekly A nearly indispensable addition to U.S. Navy collections. Booklist McGrath employs exemplary narrative style in this work. . . . In John Barry, the author adroitly juxtaposes maritime history, narratives of naval combat, and early U.S. social history. New England Quarterly McGrath is a compelling and lucid writer. He brings Barry to life, makes battles understandable, and provides the clearest description of Barry's 1778 capture of the British transport ships *Mermaid* and *Kitty* that this reviewer has seen. Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography A great read and an absorbing account of a drama-filled life. Naval History Well researched, well written, and a pleasure to read, this book restores John Barry to the important place he once held as one of our nation's great heroes. It is a tale of high adventure and personal courage and you will not want to put it down. JAMES L. NELSON, author of *George Washington's Secret Navy* Readers of this vivid biography will imagine they smell the ocean's salt air and the sulfurous fumes of gunpowder as they navigate these action-packed pages. Fans of Horatio Hornblower and Lucky Jack Aubrey will rejoice in discovering their real-life American counterpart. GREGORY J. URWIN, author of *Facing Fearful Odds: The Siege of Wake Island*

From Publishers Weekly This book establishes McGrath, an executive who has written for *Naval History* magazine, as an accomplished naval historian. Combining sophisticated use of sources with a pleasing writing style, he masterfully rescues a father of the U.S. Navy from unmerited eclipse. McGrath's own extensive recreational sailing experience adds an extra dimension by vividly conveying the physical facts of life at sea that structured the navy's military and economic aspects. An Irish Catholic, John Barry (1745-1803) went to sea as a boy, emigrated to Philadelphia, and became a successful merchant captain. In the fledgling Continental Navy of the American Revolution, he began by commanding a converted merchantman. He finished by fighting the war's last naval battle as a frigate captain. In between, he established a reputation as a skillful seaman, fighting captain, and successful taker of prizes. Returning to the merchant service, Barry made one of America's first trading voyages to China. In 1794 he was named the first commissioned officer in the new U.S. Navy and continued to offer valuable service through the quasi-war with France in 1798-1799, confirming his contemporary reputation as first of patriots, and best of men. 51 illus. (June) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist Along with John Paul Jones, John Barry was the most distinguished American naval officer of the Revolutionary War. Born in Ireland, he went to sea as a teenager and had a respected career in the merchant marine, including a record transatlantic passage. At the outbreak of war, Barry entered the Continental Navy and went on to further distinction in command of every type of American ship and in every type of operation they carried out, particularly harrying British commerce. After the war he enjoyed a successful career in the nascent (and perilous) China trade, before putting on a uniform again. This time he was the senior captain of the new U.S. Navy and showed skill in training the officers and men under him in the handling of the new big frigates. He might have been better known if he had not died in 1803; the last full-scale biography of him is nearly three generations old. The author deserves credit for a labor of love that is also a nearly indispensable addition to U.S. Navy collections. --Roland Green About the Author Tim McGrath is an executive who lives outside of Philadelphia. An avid sailor, he has been published in *Naval History* magazine