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Gordon S. Brown. *The Captain Who Burned His Ships: Captain Thomas Tingey, USN, 1750-1829.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011. Illustrations. x + 201 pp. $28.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-61251-044-6.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey

Gordon S. Brown's express purpose with this book is to provide a biography of Captain Thomas Tingey, the commandant of the Washington navy yard from 1800 until his death in 1829. In this the author has admirably succeeded. Indeed, given the rich primary sources that have been drawn on for the eponymous captain's years at the yard, it is surprising this should be the first such study. Brown's explanation is that "Tingey himself was neither a heroic nor a flamboyant figure" (p. vii). The point is an important one because potential readers should not expect stories of naval derring-do. As commandant, Tingey was essentially the manager of an industrial operation. Nevertheless, in this prosaic role he played a crucial part in the yard's establishment and development. In turn, the yard was important to the fledgling U.S. Navy, initially as a provider of supplies and ship repair facilities, and more latterly for its specialist craft skills quite apart from the construction of seven warships.

Brown sensibly adopts a chronological structure to tell the story, beginning with Tingey's birth in London in 1750. The three opening chapters, approximately a quarter of the work, take matters down to 1800 when Tingey was appointed to Washington. In contrast to what follows, the materials documenting these fifty years are sometimes sparse, but Brown does well to construct a flowing narrative spanning Tingey's time as a young man in the Royal Navy, then as a successful merchantman trading as far afield as India, and finally on active service in the U.S. Navy during the Quasi-War with France. These were important years for what was to follow, providing Tingey with invaluable experience of commerce and man management. Considerable reference is rightly made both here and throughout the book to Tingey's extensive family. His relations were of central importance and a desire to help them prosper sometimes drew the captain into questionable business arrangements. Brown goes so far as to suggest that "the creation of a large and loving family" was an achievement as important to Tingey as his naval successes (p. 173). It would therefore have been helpful if a family were included to assist in keeping track of precisely who was who given the extensive cast list. This minor criticism apart, it must be said that the text benefits throughout from well-chosen black-and-white illustrations.

The majority of the work (eight of eleven chapters) details Tingey's service at the navy yard, a facility conceived only shortly before his appointment. Brown charts as sure a course as his subject through the next three decades, adeptly explaining the personal and professional challenges faced by the commandant set against the backdrop of the wider political and military scene. One prominent theme is the often uncertain future of the yard through changing times and political fashions. Emphasizing the yard's modest and precarious beginnings at a time of retrenchment, Tingey's initial engagement was to superintend the building of a 74-gun ship of the line; only in 1804 was the post of commandant officially established by which time no work had started on this commission, the yard's work having been confined to the refitting of warships.

Although with Federalist leanings, but working almost exclusively under Republican administrations, Tingey's longevity at the yard testifies to his ability to work with a variety of people. His eschewal of the political machinations that characterized early nineteenth-century Washington is surely another reason for his historical neglect in favor of more controversial figures (he worked under no less than seven secretaries of the navy). However, while recognizing Tingey's skills as an administrator, Brown is not blind to the captain's shortcomings. These included controversies over contractual dealings, a certain "timidity when dealing with political authority," and a self-righteous pride when honor or integrity were questioned (p. 67).

With the bicentenary of the War of 1812 upon us, chapter 9 is particularly topical and tells of Tingey's greatest test when, in August 1814, Washington was

briefly occupied by British forces. The war down to that date had highlighted the yard's poor location in terms of access to the open sea and some resources had consequently been shifted elsewhere (conversely, the reason for the yard's original establishment at Washington where it could be kept under close political supervision is underlined). The defense of Washington had been neglected on the assumption that the city had no strategic significance, but as Brown points out, the yard was still a prime industrial site and the custodian of valuable supplies; it "was still a key military target" (p. 125). This had been overlooked or ignored until the British were virtually at the gates. Brown skillfully and atmospherically conveys the various dilemmas and uncertainties that the commandant faced before deciding to evacuate and destroy the work of more than a decade. Several ships in dock were deliberately burned during the withdrawal to prevent them falling into enemy hands, an act that gives the book its rather insipid title. With the facility in ruins, there were thoughts of closure, but again political factors held sway given the yard's "usefulness for the administration and congressional relations" (p. 137). Tingey, although some of his powers were curtailed by new bureaucratic procedures, played a central role in the yard's reconstruction.

One topic that could usefully have received more attention is the yard's contribution to Washington's growth as a city both in economic and social terms. This would have dovetailed neatly with the narration of Tingey's domestic situation. Instead, the author is largely content to suggest that this as an area for future study. Even so, a map of the city would not have gone amiss (there is an inadequate thumbnail illustration on page 43). A clear plan of the yard itself is provided, but not until page 140, a fact signposted neither in the earlier text nor by an introductory list of illustrations (this last itself a curious omission).

This work will be of particular appeal to scholars of U.S. naval history at the beginning of the nineteenth century and provides an individual case study of political-military relations in the early American Republic. However, as a biography with an emphasis on Tingey the family man, the book not only is concerned with matters of state, but also will have a wider interest for social historians of the period.

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