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Quintin Barry. *Disputed Victory: Schley, Sampson and the Spanish-American War of 1898.* Solihull, UK: Helion and Company, 2018. 280 pp. $49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-912174-91-1.

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By its overwhelming victories in the Spanish-American War, the United States Navy helped to transform its country into a world power. However, particularly in the Caribbean theater of operations, all was not smooth sailing. Command of the North Atlantic Squadron fell to two officers of very different personalities on the eve of hostilities: the scholarly and methodical Rear Admiral William Thomas Sampson became the overall commander, and the outgoing (some would say impulsive) Rear Admiral Winfield Scott Schley oversaw its most important division, nicknamed the "Flying Squadron." The course of the war strained their relationship to the breaking point, with Sampson eventually impugning his subordinate's capabilities. To make matters worse, opposing factions within naval ranks (and, indeed, within the public at large) credited either one man or the other with the destruction of the Spanish fleet at the battle of Santiago on July 3, 1898. This dispute culminated in a Court of Inquiry convened by the Navy Department in 1901 that sought to investigate the allegations against Schley's wartime conduct. Military historian Quintin Barry, who also continues a distinguished legal career as a chief executive of an international consortium of law firms, delves into the causes, course, and consequences of this controversy.

Barry begins with brief biographical sketches of the key characters and a comparison of the American and Spanish navies as war clouds loomed in early 1898. The chapters focusing on the early and intertwined careers of George Dewey, Alfred Thayer Mahan, Sampson, and Schley trace the origins of the personal alliances that shaped the eventual turmoil. For example, in 1861-62, Schley and Sampson were both junior officers on the frigate USS ***Potomac***, which patrolled the waters off Mobile Bay, Alabama, early in the Civil War. Having graduated from the United States Naval Academy a year before Sampson, Schley slightly outranked him at this time. Their relationship was then apparently amicable, although "in terms of personality, they could hardly have been less alike" (p. 35). Years later, between 1879 and 1883, Schley served as a member of the Lighthouse Board, which was at the time headed by Dewey, who eventually presided over the Court of Inquiry; Barry characterizes the future hero of Manila Bay as a "good friend" of Schley (pp. 38-41). In contrast, naval theorist and historian Mahan, of a more intellectual bent akin to Sampson, clashed with Schley in the late 1880s over the Navy Department's jurisdiction over the Naval War College, creating a rancor that later intensified as Mahan advised and critiqued wartime strategy and actions.

Personal differences notwithstanding, these individuals had been united in their efforts to revive their navy from its years of decline after the Civil War. Initially, they met with only periodic success, in the face of various secretaries of the Navy of differing levels of competence and commitment, and also of a financially recalcitrant Congress. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, their endeavors had come to fruition, in terms of modern steel warships and modern education and training for naval personnel. Sampson in particular was instrumental in modernizing the campus and curriculum of the Naval Academy, ensuring better-quality steel for hull armor construction, and attempting (albeit "not altogether successfully") to design electrically-powered turning mechanisms for gun turrets (pp. 48-49). As war clouds loomed in the late 1890s, a "vigorous recruitment" swelled the ranks of the American navy to the point where effective strength exceeded nominal strength (p. 90). Further, in 1896-97, the Naval War College, in collaboration with the Navy Department, developed several strategic plans in the event of war, with the encouragement of the energetic assistant secretary of the navy, Theodore Roosevelt.

In contrast, by 1898, Spain's navy was woefully ill-prepared for combat. Several ships, including the lone battleship of the fleet, the ***Pelayo***, had yet to be adequately armed and armored. Others were obsolete and "in varying degrees of decrepitude and of little or no fighting value" (p. 89). Moreover, insufficient manpower severely crippled several vessels. Finally, poor intelligence regarding American strength led to unrealistic battle plans. Barry sympathetically depicts the plight of the Spanish admiral Pascual Cervera y Topete, a commander only too aware of his force's shortcomings, and assigned the impossible task of defending Spain's Caribbean possessions against a much stronger foe. His repeated prewar advisories and warnings to the minister of marine in Madrid fell on deaf ears.

After briefly recounting the events that precipitated war in 1898, Barry then focuses on the Caribbean operations of the North Atlantic Squadron, especially those of the "Flying Squadron" under Schley's leadership; prosecution and defense at the Court of Inquiry would later scrutinize these actions. At the outset of hostilities, the "Flying Squadron" was detached from the rest of the fleet and stationed at Hampton Roads, due to uncertainty about Cervera's destination and intentions once the Spanish fleet embarked on its transatlantic voyage on April 29. (Schley's contingent's nickname reflected the expectation that it would rush to the defense of any vulnerable part of the eastern seaboard of the United States.) As Barry points out, both Sampson and Schley were uncertain of Cervera's whereabouts for an extended period of time. Suspecting that the Spanish fleet had taken refuge in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Sampson advanced on that harbor on May 12; not finding his opponent there, he ordered his ships to bombard the harbor fortifications before withdrawing. Several days later, after Cervera had sheltered his ships in the harbor of Santiago on the southeastern coast of Cuba on May 19, Schley stayed positioned outside the harbor of Cienfuegos, significantly further to the west. Even after he moved his blockade to Santiago a few days later, intelligence on the Spanish position was still sketchy, leading Schley to decide that a return to Key West for re-coaling his vessels was militarily feasible. Although Schley soon changed his mind and returned to Santiago, secretary of the navy John Long, himself no friend of Schley, decried this as "the darkest day of the war" (p.150).

Ultimately, the professional relationship between Sampson and Schley became a casualty of the battle that destroyed Cervera's squadron on July 3. When the Spanish ships began their doomed dash out of Santiago harbor that morning, Sampson, aboard his flagship, USS ***New York***, was steaming eastward to attend a conference with General William Rufus Shafter, nominal

commander of the United States Army's expeditionary force in Cuba. As a result, Schley led the victorious attack; the *New York* only arrived in time to deliver the final blows to the already foundering destroyer *Furor*. The initial post-battle communication between the two American commanders boded ill for the future; Schley's ebullient signal "We have gained a great victory! This is a great day for our country!" elicited only an icy "Report your casualties" from Sampson. Schley later noted in his memoirs, "It is to be regretted that no word of congratulation, so much valued by men and officers on such occasions, issued from the flagship" (p. 192). There soon emerged a hotly contested debate over which commander deserved the credit for the success, which would be at the heart of the Court of Inquiry's investigation. Barry places part of the blame on the press. According to a contemporary article in the *Springfield Republican*, the dispute "arose largely from the determination of the slapdash writers to get a brilliant hero out of the Santiago battle at any cost. Sampson's careful, thorough, and comprehensive leadership would not do at all. The hero must be a dashing and devil-may-care officer, standing on the bridge, and fearlessly leading the line of battle against the enemy fleet" (p. 207).

Barry devotes his final two chapters to the escalating war of words between the two factions through the immediate postwar period, and then to the Court of Inquiry's hearings, which took place between September and November of 1901. (The Government Printing Office published the transcripts of the proceedings in two massive volumes the following year.) Attacks on Schley's wartime maneuvers came from several quarters. On July 10, 1898, Sampson wrote a secret letter to Long condemning Schley's decisions as "reprehensible" (p. 206). Mahan wrote articles characterizing Schley's performance with words such as "delay," "uncertainty," and "mistakes" (p. 210). Finally, in June 1901, naval historian Edgar Stanton Maclay published the third volume of his *History of the United States Navy from 1775 to 1901*; in it, he accused Schley of cowardice and indecisiveness. In Maclay's retelling of the events of 1898, Schley failed to "promptly ascertain whether or not Cervera's squadron was at Cienfuegos," and, once he learned that the Spanish ships were at Santiago instead, he "proceeded to drift leisurely" toward the latter harbor (quoted, pp. 214-15). Especially damning was the commander's abortive decision to return to Key West in order to obtain more coal. Finally, during the battle of Santiago, Schley's flagship, the USS *Brooklyn*, nearly collided with the battleship USS *Texas*. In response to Maclay's allegations, Schley requested the Court of Inquiry in an attempt to clear his name. Barry deftly summarizes the court's proceedings, quoting extensively from the transcripts. Ultimately, the court decided against Schley, though it dismissed the charges of cowardice. Dewey wrote an impassioned dissenting opinion, arguing that Schley had acted "with all possible dispatch," and that, as "absolute commander" of the attack on Cervera, he was "entitled to the credit due to such commanding officer for the glorious victory" (pp. 229-230). In early 1902, Schley appealed the verdict to Roosevelt, who was by then president of the United States. Though Roosevelt generally agreed with the court's findings, he nevertheless asserted that "if Admiral Schley's actions were censurable, he should not have been left as second-in-command under Admiral Sampson. His offenses were in effect condoned when he was not called to account for them" (p. 232). The opinions of most of the principal characters remained unchanged, though. Schley's "supporters were legion and were in no way shaken in their admiration of him; in contrast, when the magazine *The Independent* ran a pro-Schley article in December 1901, Mahan angrily cancelled his subscription (pp. 232-33).

In this compelling narrative, Barry has illuminated a forgotten aspect of a crucial chapter in the history of the United States Navy, and, indeed, of the history of the United States as a world power. For several years after the war, this controversy

severely divided the personnel of the navy, and threatened to "gravely damage its morale and confidence" (p. 210). Some good did come from the episode, though. Quoting historian David Trask, Barry points out that "it helped publicize the need for new and improved vessels, adequate communications by means of bases and naval stations, and improved operational performance, especially in gunnery" (p. 234). Though generally evenhanded, discussing the sound decisions as well as judgmental errors of both protagonists, Barry betrays a slight bias toward the more personable Schley. For example, it was Schley, not Sampson, who paid a sympathetic visit to Cervera after the battle and addressed him in fluent Castilian Spanish (p. 216). Further, quotes from both men's postwar writings are illustrative. The analytical Sampson offered a realistic, if rather cold, appraisal of the naval war of 1898: "If our easy victories over the fleets of a weak naval power fill our people with the belief that we now have a navy that is large enough for all our needs, then those victories will have done us more harm than good" (p. 213). For his part, Schley wrote immediately after the battle of Santiago, "I'm glad that I had an opportunity to contribute in the least to a victory that seems big enough for all of us!" (p. 236). It is with these words that Barry concludes his study.