Most naval history studies have been devoted to what is called the blue water navy, focusing specifically on events on the open seas. In recent years, naval historiography has expanded to include events that were not just great battles among ships of the line or commerce raiding by privateers on the high seas but also other, lesser-known subjects. Benjamin Armstrong's book, *Small Boats and Daring Men*, shows the expansion of naval historiography by examining events involving great naval leaders and using unconventional methods to achieve naval missions. The predominant tool of this unconventional warfare was small naval vessels that could navigate rivers, bays, and other small channels that large wooden ships could not, similar to modern operations conducted by US Navy Seals through their use of clandestine operations to destroy or capture an enemy target.

Historian Nagao Yuichiro explains that conventional warfare is a battle between a state's regular armed forces. Thus, unconventional (or irregular) warfare is subversion, commerce raiding, terrorism, counterterrorism, and guerrilla tactics. [1] Conventional warfare between navies of the periods discussed by Armstrong was naval battles between arms ships trying to use their cannons and other types of weaponry to inflict damage on the enemy ship/combatants. Using privateers to inflict damage on enemies' trade and blockading ports were also common naval tactics. The irregular warfare discussed by Armstrong follows the idea of guerrilla tactics.

Many scholars have written about irregular warfare just not labeled it as such, using Yuichiro's definition. During the period when privateering was taking place, it was seen as a common act of warfare. While privateers were not regulars in the sense that they were not sailors in service to a nation's naval service, they provided a service to their country by causing disruptions to the enemy's economy and trade.

Armstrong divides his book into eight chapters, each highlighting a time in US naval history when men were quick to think outside the box and unconventionally hamper the enemy, from John Paul Jones's raid in 1772 to the return to Sumatra in 1838. In the first chapter, Armstrong covers the birth of irregular warfare for the fledgling American navy. He discusses how Jones used knowledge of Whitehaven, Jones's hometown, and Irish fishermen to guide his vessels through unknown waters and attack the coastal community. The use of gathered intelligence and Jones's knowledge allowed him to create chaos in England through fear. The chapter also highlights
how curation intelligence relationships in hostile nations were as meaningful back then as now.

The historiographical narrative surrounding each of the instances highlighted in the chapters can be found in other books related to the conflict they are associated with. For example, Armstrong uses two examples from the War of 1812 between the United States and England: raiding the Great Lakes (chapter 4) and using partisans, mechanical destruction, and the Torpedo Act (chapter 5). In Ships of Oak, Guns of Iron: The War of 1812 and the Forging of the American Navy (2012), Ronald Utt extensively covers the wartime conflicts that happened on the Great Lakes and in the Chesapeake Bay area but, in contrast to Armstrong, writes about these naval engagements as part of normal naval operations.

In summary, Armstrong evaluates history through a new lens and expands the current naval historiography to include abnormal naval operations for the given periods mentioned in the book. He points out that the leaders and the men who served with them were forward thinkers and understood that sometimes the way battles are fought needs to change to accomplish a mission's goals. All of these men were frowned upon by their enemies and not consistently successful, but they did secure their place in US Navy history. Armstrong does a great job relating past events and explaining them in a way that current irregular warfare is conducted. For example, Jones's use of locals to navigate the harbor of Whitehaven and find out about its defenses is similar to how counterterrorism operations are conducted in modern times. The US military uses human intelligence when forming plans to strike targets, whether people or a place.

Another aspect of the book that is done well is in the conclusion where Armstrong discusses how the ideals of Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan and Sir Julian Corbett have greatly influenced naval historiography. Both men's works have overshadowed earlier historians, like the nineteenth-century British naval officer P. H. Colomb, whose eight-volume Naval Warfare (1891) worked to expand the naval historiography beyond blue water naval tactics.

Note

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