

Bravest of the Brave: The Adventures of Captain David Porter

H. Alden Fletcher

(October 2008)

Softcover \$15.95 (454pp)

978-1-4343-9159-9

For historians finding an old diary is akin to discovering gold. Even the shortest entry written by the most ordinary person is likely to provide a valuable snapshot of their daily life for posterity.

For H. Alden Fletcher the author of *Sails of Glory* the journals of Captain David Porter must have seemed like the map to El Dorado. Not only are they an interesting early history of our country's navy they contain an exciting adventure that became the foundation for Fletcher's second historical novel *Bravest of the Brave*.

As a sixteen-year-old on board his father's ship David Porter first sees a skirmish between American and British warships off the coast of Hispaniola. The event makes such an impression on the young man that he decides to record his adventures in a journal while he is at sea. But this initial skirmish is just the beginning. Porter becomes a midshipman in the US navy and sails the waters off of Tripoli and later New Orleans battling pirates and French ships. When the War of 1812 breaks out Porter becomes the captain of the Essex the first American warship to sail around the Cape of Horn into the Pacific Ocean.

Bravest of the Brave combines adventure on the high seas with one man's quest to balance duty and honor to one's country. "I have always endeavored to do good solely for the sake of good" Porter writes in a letter. But his commitment comes with a heavy price as Porter learns when one of his decisions causes him disgrace.

Fletcher tells Porter's life in a mix of fictional scenes peppered with excerpts from Porter's real-life journal or log entries. In the fictional scenes it's clear that Fletcher has carefully researched his subject. Sea battles come to life with detailed descriptions of the warring frigates. Porter's visits to ports in Chile and Peru depict a colorful but potentially dangerous New World.

But this careful dedication to fact sometimes hampers the story. As Fletcher is working from Porter's own words obviously written after important events in his life some fictional scenes unfold without a sense of the unknown; characters don't seem to question their decisions and this makes the scenes feel too pat.

Nonetheless *Bravest of the Brave* is a book that is sure to interest readers who enjoy historical fiction as well as anyone looking for a good adventure tale.

(August 21, 2009)

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