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Oliver Hazard Perry: Honor, Courage, and Patriotism in the Early U.S. Navy (Library of Naval Biography)

David Curtis Skaggs

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Hailed for his decisive victory over a Royal Navy squadron on Lake Erie in September 1813 and best known for his after-action report proclamation We have met the enemy and they are ours, Oliver Hazard Perry was one the early U.S. Navy's most famous heroes. In this modern, scholarly reassessment of the man and his career, Professor David Skaggs emphasizes Perry's place in naval history as an embodiment of the code of honor, an exemplar of combat courage, and a symbol of patriotism to his fellow officers and the American public. It is the first biography of Perry to be published in more than a quarter of a century and the first to offer an even-handed analysis of his career. After completing a thorough examination of primary sources, Skaggs traces Perry's development from a midshipman to commodore where he personified the best in seamanship, calmness in times of stress, and diplomatic skills. But this work is not a hagiographic treatment, for it offers a candid analysis of Perry's character flaws, particularly his short temper and his sometimes ineffective command and control procedures during the battle of Lake Erie. Skaggs also explains how Perry's short but dramatic naval career epitomized the emerging naval professionalism of the young republic, and he demonstrates how the Hero of Lake Erie fits into the most recent scholarship concerning the role of post-revolutionary generation in the development of American national identity. Finally, Skaggs explores in greater detail than anyone before the controversy over the conduct of his Lake Erie second, Jesse Duncan Elliott, that raged on for over a quarter century after Perry's death in 1819.

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