



Our Country, Right or Wrong: The Life of Stephen Decatur, the U.S. Navy's Most Illustrious Commander

Leonard F. Guttridge

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Blazing sea fights and undercurrents of intrigue: these are among the compelling ingredients of a biography that brings to life the most illustrious and formidable figure of the United States Navy. His name is carried by more than two dozen towns and cities. Here at last is a full exploration of Stephen Decatur's complex character. Reckless in youth, cool yet audacious in combat, loved by those who sailed under his command yet plotted against by rivals in the race for glory, Decatur is brought to life in this enthralling sea story.

Decatur's heroism became widespread news in 1804 when, sent to reclaim a captured U.S. vessel from Tripoli in the Barbary Wars, he ordered his men to set fire to the captured vessel and proceed to attack the sailors of the Tripoli fleet in hand-to-hand combat. His brilliance continued through the War of 1812, after which he was promoted to the highest naval rank of Commodore.

Decatur not only proved dauntless on the quarterdeck but amazingly effective in Mediterranean diplomacy. His spectacular dealings with Islamic powers presaged America's twenty-first century involvement in the region.

Readers will also learn the identity of the woman he forsook for a sophisticated beauty pursued by suitors as varied as Napoleon Bonaparte's younger brother and Aaron Burr. Through freshly discovered documents, many official, some intensely personal, biographer Leonard Guttridge traces the elements that sped Decatur inexorably into the shadow of murder.

Here, at last, is the full story of the man who raised the most memorable toasts in the history of American celebrations, when he declared in 1816 "Our country! In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be in the right; but our country, right or wrong!"

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