

Harding University

## Scholar Works at Harding

---

History & Political Science Department Faculty  
Research & Publications

College of Arts & Humanities

---

Winter 2015

### Review of Ray and Steven Hanley, Arky: The Saga of the USS Arkansas

Jared Dockery Ph.D.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/history-polsci-facpub>

 Part of the [Military History Commons](#)



**HARDING**  
UNIVERSITY



---

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Arky: The Saga of the USS Arkansas by Ray Hanley, Steven Hanley and Anthony A. Sirco

Review by: Jared Dockery

Source: *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (Winter 2015), pp. 398-399

Published by: Arkansas Historical Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26281836>

Accessed: 08-06-2021 16:23 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*Arkansas Historical Association* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*

## Book Reviews

*Arky: The Saga of the USS Arkansas.* By Ray Hanley and Steven Hanley. (Little Rock: Butler Center Books, 2015. Pp. 167. Foreword by Anthony A. Sirco, afterword, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95, paper.)

Between its commissioning in 1912 and its sinking as part of the infamous Bikini atomic tests of 1946, the battleship U.S.S. *Arkansas* participated in the occupation of Veracruz in 1914, patrolled the east coast during World War I, and provided gunfire support for amphibious landings on Normandy, southern France, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa during World War II. Ray Hanley and the late Steven Hanley, known for their extensive work in local Arkansas history, deliver an affectionate account of the career of the late dreadnought in this brief volume.

*Arky* provides even coverage of the major incidents in the *Arkansas*'s service record. In relating the events of World War II, the authors have relied extensively upon excerpts from journals kept by crewmen aboard the ship. The eighth chapter, "Sacrificed to the Dawn of the Atomic Age," which deals with the ship's demise during the Bikini tests, is the most poignant and disturbing chapter of the book. The *Arkansas* was part of a sacrificial fleet subjected by the U.S. Navy to two separate atomic explosions in July 1946. The *Arkansas* survived the first bomb, which detonated about five hundred feet in the air, though the ship suffered fire and other damage. The second blast, which exploded underwater, occurred several days later and sent the *Arkansas* to the bottom of the lagoon.

The story of the atomic tests at Bikini is a melancholy one and not only—or even mainly—because of the destruction of the *Arkansas*. The authors are rightly critical of the U.S. government's removal of the island's people to locations that were scarcely habitable. Moreover, the Navy opted to return crewmen to the ships that survived the first attack in order to clean up and make repairs. Unfortunately, it did not provide the men with protective suits to shield them from the radiation that permeated the vessels. While the Hanleys concede that "the world had scant experience at that point with the aftermath of an atomic bomb," they nevertheless observe: "In a retrospective reading decades later, it challenges logic that in a ship just damaged by an atomic bomb, the engineers were to 'Make the machinery operable, with priority to lights and ventilation' among other assignments—all this so that the surviving and somewhat restored ships could then be likely finished off by the planned second atomic bomb" (p. 139).

After the second blast, the Navy again sent unprotected sailors onto irradiated ships. Years later, hundreds of these sailors claimed to have suffered illnesses, including cancer, because of their exposure to radiation during these tests.

The authors also relate the claim of one *Arkansas* crew member, James Elliott, who said that, after reboarding the ship between explosions, he had seen the corpse of a fellow crewman left behind during the first test, even though all ships were supposed to be evacuated during the detonations. "We were sworn to never tell what we found not even in fifty years," Elliott claimed (p. 141). If his story is true, it would contradict the Navy's official account that there were no fatalities or even injuries during the tests. However, the Hanleys admit they were unable to find any corroborating evidence to support Elliott's charge.

The book is not long; its 167 pages include endnotes, a bibliography, an index, and black-and-white photographs. Indeed, these fascinating photos—drawn from the Navy as well as private collections—are the highlight of the book. The authors write in the genre of popular, rather than scholarly, history. Their utilization of about.com for background information on the occupation of Veracruz, rather than Robert Quirk's classic and still-in-print *An Affair of Honor: Woodrow Wilson and the Occupation of Veracruz* (1967), is unfortunate. But their writing style is clear and eminently readable. Scholars who specialize in the Cold War's atomic arms race may be interested in Elliott's uncorroborated claim that there was a fatality onboard the *Arkansas* during the Bikini tests. Otherwise, this book is recommended to Navy buffs and, especially, to anyone who had a relative serve aboard the *Arkansas*.

JARED DOCKERY  
HARDING UNIVERSITY

\*\*\*

*Natchez Country: Indians, Colonists, and the Landscapes of Race in French Louisiana.* By George Edward Milne. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015. Pp. xiv, 293. Acknowledgments, figures, notes, bibliography, index. \$84.95, cloth; \$26.95, paper.)

On November 29, 1729, the Natchez Indians raided Fort Rosalie at the site of present-day Natchez, Mississippi. They destroyed the settlement, killed most of the Frenchmen there, including government officers, and captured most of the French women and African slaves. Only a few