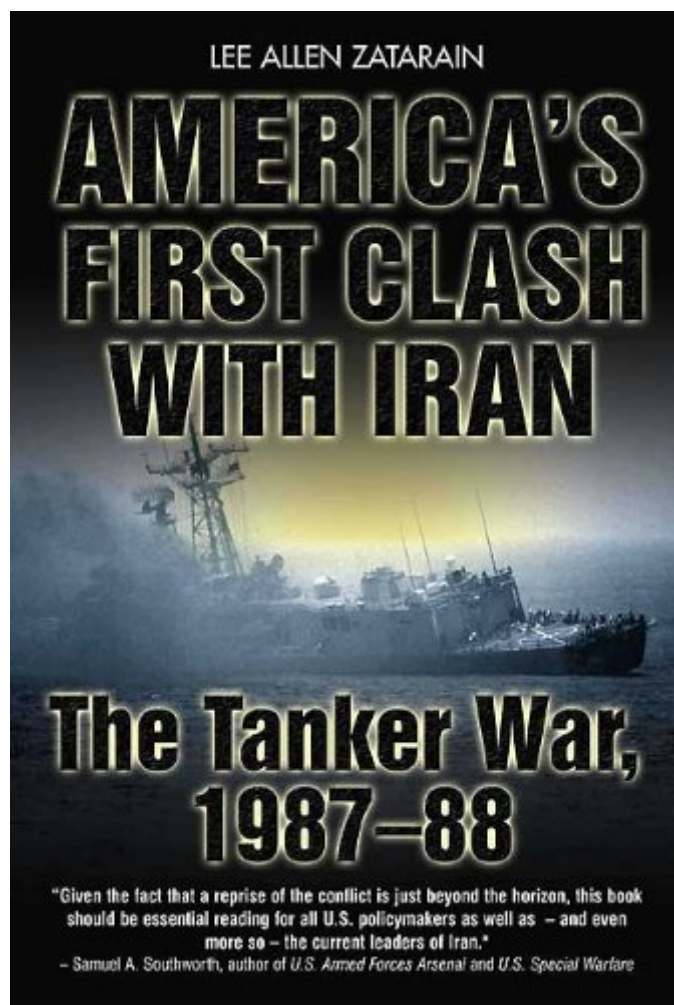


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# America's First Clash With Iran: The Tanker War, 1987-88



## Synopsis

“A fine job of recounting a 20-year-old fight that was no doubt just another round in a continuing struggle.” •US Naval Institute Proceedings

In May 1987 the US frigate Stark, calmly sailing the waters of the Persian Gulf, was suddenly blown apart by an Exocet missile fired from an Iraqi jet fighter. A fifth of the ship’s crew was killed and many others horribly burned or wounded. This event jumpstarted one of the most mysterious conflicts in American history: “The Tanker War,” waged against Iran for control of the Persian Gulf. This quasi-war took place at the climax of the mammoth Iran-Iraq War during the Reagan administration. Losing on the battlefield, Ayatollah Khomeini’s Iran had decided to close the Persian Gulf against shipping from Iraq’s oil-rich backers, the emirate of Kuwait. The Kuwaitis appealed for help and America sent a fleet to the Gulf, raising the Stars and Stripes over Kuwait’s commercial tankers. The result was a free-for-all, as the Iranians laid mines throughout the narrow passage and launched attack boats against both tankers and US warships. The sixth largest ship in the world, the tanker Bridgeton, hit an Iranian mine and flooded. The US Navy fought its largest surface battle since World War II against the Ayatollah’s assault boats. Meanwhile, US Navy Seals arrived in the Gulf, setting up shop aboard two mobile platforms. As Saddam Hussein, who had instigated the conflict, looked on, Iranian gunners fired shore-based Silkworm missiles against US forces, actions which, if made known at the time, would have required the US Congress to declare war against Iran. In July 1988, nervous sailors aboard the cruiser USS Vincennes shot an Iranian airliner out of the sky, killing 300 civilians. This event came one month before the end of the war, and may have been the final straw that influenced the Ayatollah to finally drink from his “poisoned chalice.”

Author Lee Allen Zatarain, employing recently released Pentagon documents, firsthand interviews, and a determination to get to the truth, has revealed a conflict that few recognized at the time, but which may have presaged further battles to come.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Well documented book with great detail. History brought alive for sure. Puts the lead up to Operation Desert Shield into some perspective as the book ends. Some great stories within the book on the mining incident with the USS Samuel B Roberts as well as the Iran Air shoot down by the USA Vincennes. If you are interested in this period of time in this region from a military perspective, you cannot go wrong with this selection.

The cover of the book is the USS Stark aflame. The contents exposes the underlying issues behind the tension in the gulf. At the time events were front page news; now a forgotten and under evaluated period of American commitment before Desert Storm. The reader is presented with facts. The facts in this case make for a great read. EM2 BHE-Division USS Enterprise 1986-1990

This was a great book. I had a decent idea on what the general events were, but found the detailed overview to be fascinating. I may not have always agreed with the authors conclusions, but I think he presented a very fair and balanced account. For example, with the tragedy involving the Vincennes. The author does try and give a picture of the gung-ho commander rushing off to an incident for "personal glory", but I think still does a nice job of explaining what was occurring around the time and allowing the reader to easily see why the incident occurred. I don't think anyone thinks the commander intentionally shot down a civilian airliner. But there is more to the story than the one tragic chapter and the author tells it in a very interesting style that keeps you turning the pages.

Very detailed and thoughtful description of a conflict most few Americans are informed about. I

sensed no preconceived agenda on the part of the author except to report accurately. I know someone personally who was actively involved, and knows a lot of details not covered in the book, but can't talk about it except in general terms. He says it has more right than wrong. It is interesting to note how and to what extent information was withheld or managed during and after the conflict.

The book is detail heavy, which is both good and bad. Good if you like the topic being discussed, but bad if the topic is not so interesting as it means a long, dragging read. I found myself "zoning-out" on some of the less interesting parts of the book, and I felt it could've done a bit more editing to make for a smoother and better reading experience. However, despite my misgivings, I think this is still one of the best books about modern naval warfare as when it is good, it is REALLY good. The sections related to the actual "Operation Praying Mantis" is awesome, and gives valuable new insight about the operation especially with regards to the Silkworm missile attacks on the US ships.

If you are a military history buff then this book is for you. Plenty of action for those looking for the war experience; but, it is also a detailed history of our Navy fighting a war that few knew about. For me the back ground issues, like how decisions were made, is the exciting part of this story. Well researched. Wanna know why gas is so expensive, read this book. It's a lot more complicated than you might think

This book is Lee Allen Zatarain's well-researched and detailed account of the United States' brief Persian Gulf conflict in the late eighties with Iran. It is a gritty, tactical, blow-by-blow account of the Marines, soldiers, and sailors involved in the conflict. While the book includes some details about the United States' regional strategy at the time, it focuses primarily on the men involved in fighting the conflict. It provides a unique window on the chaos inherent in any operational environment and the difficulties of making decisions under the "fog of war." While the book's style can be dry at times, for the most part, it provides a very straightforward account of a little known episode in American history. The book focuses on the tactical-level decision-making and actions of crews on individual ships. For instance, it effectively evokes the suspense of a naval captain confronting the prospect of incoming Silkworm anti-ship missiles sinking his ship. It also reiterates the superiority of military management techniques in chaotic environments. The book also provides a detailed account of the events that led to the tragic episode of the USS Vincennes and the accidental shoot-down of Iran Air Flight 655 resulting in two-hundred ninety civilian deaths. In doing so, it provides an intriguing

account of how the psychological effects of stress and aggression can cloud effective decision-making. "America's First Clash with Iran" seems to be one of the most comprehensive and well-researched accounts of this little known conflict. The book is an interesting read if you enjoy very detailed tactical accounts of what transpired in the Gulf. If you are more of a big-picture person, you should steer away from this book.

Have to like the book as I was there in person and proud crew member of the USS Simpson. Those were interesting days especially during Operation Praying Mantis. This book provides a lot of insight to what was happening in the Persian Gulf in those days.

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