

2015

At War in Distant Waters: British Colonial Defense in the Great War, by Phillip G. Pattee

Richard J. Norton

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Norton, Richard J. (2015) "At War in Distant Waters: British Colonial Defense in the Great War, by Phillip G. Pattee," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 68 : No. 3 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol68/iss3/15>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

and dishonest grounds and not worth the cost, Biggar once again provides a clearly argued case that the cost was justified. Whether readers come away persuaded or not, Biggar's argument will sharpen their thinking.

Biggar's is very much a theological book, and therefore mostly of interest to readers interested in a strong normative Christian argument. In that context, whether one is persuaded on every detail or not, it is a welcome tonic among the often shallow and sloppy thinking about war and the international system from some Christian circles. Yet there is value in the book even for readers who may not share the full theological view. It certainly brings a historical depth to the discussion that much contemporary philosophical just war thinking does not, detached as it is from the long historical tradition in the West Biggar represents, and attempting to grapple with the ethical problem of war with a comparatively small tool kit.

MARTIN L. COOK



Pattee, Phillip G. *At War in Distant Waters: British Colonial Defense in the Great War*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2013. 274pp. \$59.95

Phillip Pattee, a retired naval officer and professor at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, examines British efforts before the First World War to craft a global maritime strategy to deal with threats that were expected to arise during a war with Germany. In doing so, he makes a compelling case that British naval thinkers were not completely fixated on the German High Seas Fleet, nor were they unconscious of the critical need to keep the sea-lanes

of commerce and communication open for their merchant navy and England's national economy. Threats included the inevitability of impossibly high insurance rates during times of war, the combat capability of the overseas German East Asia squadron, and the possibility of persistent predations by German raiders. British leaders also understood that, despite the size of the Royal Navy, British assets would initially be stretched thin, as most British capital ships would be kept in home waters to respond to potential action by their German counterparts.

Pattee discusses British efforts to overcome these threats. His review of British involvement in insurance programs designed to keep merchant vessels in trade is fascinating and illuminates what must be one of the least known programs of the First World War. Strategies to deal with the German East Asia squadron, raiders, and shore-based supporting communication systems are better known, but Pattee still does them justice. Taken all together, *At War in Distant Waters* is a useful addition to a complete account of the First World War.

However, this book could have been much more. For starters, the title is misleading. Although the book chronicles actions taken in colonial waters, the depicted purpose is much more aimed at defending Britain, not its colonies. Nor does Pattee convincingly prove that Great Britain conquered German colonies to provide maritime security. Although some actions, such as the seizing or destruction of German high-frequency radio installations, were designed for this purpose, others, such as the conquest of German Southwest Africa, were not. Britain could have easily conducted limited operations and

denied naval basing and support from the German colonies. A major second African front, although sensible for other reasons, was not needed to protect seaborne trade. Additionally, the book is surprisingly dry, when it definitely did not need to be so. The eradication of German raiders from the world's oceans is a remarkable story, complete with drama, excitement, and extraordinary personalities. Spee's one-sided German victory at Coronel and his subsequent defeat at the Falklands were two of the major naval battles of the war, yet are given short shrift by Pattee. The tale of Count Felix von Luckner and his raider *Seeadler*, although occurring after the raider threat was greatly diminished, would provide a compelling illustration of the challenges in hunting down a gifted and tenacious raider captain. Pattee does relate the story of SMS *Königsberg*, but in such a brief manner as not to do justice to the very real concerns the cruiser created for the Admiralty, or the sheer magnitude of effort it took to destroy the warship. To compound matters, Pattee claims the destruction of *Königsberg* was carried out by two mortar-equipped barges. This is an error. To put *Königsberg* out of commission, the Admiralty dispatched the monitors HMS *Mersey* and HMS *Severn* on a long and hazardous journey to the Rufiji delta, where *Königsberg* was hiding, to sink it. For a book of this nature, this error is surprising.

While Pattee does include a description and evaluation of British operations in Mesopotamia—and ties these actions to the strategic importance of oil—the book is strangely silent on the Dardanelles campaign and the U-boat war. Perhaps this is because Pattee does not see the Mediterranean or Atlantic as “colonial” waters, or because neither Gallipoli

nor submarines figured sufficiently in prewar planning. Still, each of these challenges either demanded or resulted from evolving British strategies and both would seem worthy of inclusion.

Still, when all is said and done, Pattee has contributed to a deeper understanding of British—and German—maritime strategy in the First World War. By shifting focus away from the North Sea and the clashes between the Grand and High Seas Fleets, he has reminded the reader that British maritime leaders understood global vulnerabilities and planned to deal with them long before the guns of August opened fire.

RICHARD J. NORTON



Appelbaum, Peter C. *Loyal Sons: Jews in the German Army in the Great War*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2014. 347pp. \$79.95

Centennial commemoration and observance of the First World War have generated many books studying major and minor aspects of what was hoped would be the “war to end all wars,” or as H. G. Wells titled a 1914 book, *The War That Will End War*. It wasn't; instead, it was the first act of a century-long tragedy. The present volume provides a significant study of the more than 100,000 German-Jewish and 320,000 Austro-Hungarian Jewish soldiers serving during the war. One in eight was killed. First World War historian Jay Winter is correct when he writes in the volume's foreword, “we owe a debt to Peter Appelbaum for bringing to light the Jewish element in this tragic story.” The volume is groundbreaking in its scope and depth.

The volume consists of eight chapters and four appendixes. The first chapter