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From Hot War to Cold: The U.S. Navy and National Security Affairs, 1945–1955

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Yet Graham also well portrays Rumsfeld as a complex man who got things accomplished. A tenacious collegiate wrestler at Princeton and a Navy pilot, Rumsfeld was elected to Congress at age thirty. He served four terms before President Richard Nixon appointed him as head of the Office of Economic Opportunity and then as ambassador to NATO. Under President Gerald Ford, Rumsfeld would serve as White House chief of staff and as the youngest-ever secretary of defense. In Rumsfeld’s business career, he was a CEO responsible for the successful turnaround of several major corporations. With his appointment in 2001, he would also become the oldest to serve as secretary of defense. In all of his many appointments and responsibilities, Rumsfeld comes across as an intense, capable, and ambitious operator with a “deep moral streak.”

Graham’s well written and comprehensive narrative implies an answer to the question of why an administrator known for his diligent and rational approach to resolving complex issues ultimately presided over a deeply dysfunctional policy-making process. In Rumsfeld, overconfidence eventually converted a healthy skepticism about thorough organizational procedures into near contempt for them. Transforming the military, like countering an insurgency, proved to be more about changing minds than about building new weapons or using old ones. Graham concludes that Rumsfeld’s “biggest failings were personal—the result of the man himself, not simply of the circumstances he confronted.”

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deployment patterns were established that would last for half a century. This book not only speaks knowledgeably about technical, organizational, and doctrinal shifts over a tumultuous decade but gives full attention to the personalities of the day. From the president on down, Barlow examines the debates, discourse, plots, and planning, as well as the passion and emotion that went into these decisions. There are giants in these pages, including Ernest J. King, Forrest Sherman, James Forrestal, Harry Truman, and Dwight D. Eisenhower. There is also a myriad of other officers and leaders whose names should be more familiar, such as Admirals Richard Conolly and Edward C. Ewen. Barlow has captured the flavor of political infighting at its best and worst. Among the more dramatic accounts is the tale of how Secretary of the Navy Charles Thomas fired Admiral Robert B. Carney, who, as Chief of Naval Operations, had tangled with the secretary of state, infuriated President Eisenhower, and refused to exchange message traffic with Thomas.

If there is a flaw with Barlow’s book, it is the flaw to which every writer aspires—to instill in the reader a feeling of regret when the last page is turned and the book is finished. It is profoundly to be hoped that this volume will be followed by a second and a third.

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