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Grave of a Dozen Schemes: British Naval Planning and the War against Japan, 1943-1945

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recognition of their skill and bravery. The 46th Taman alone produced twenty-three Heroes of the Soviet Union, their nation's highest combat award, and the 586th produced three "aces."

The author, herself a Woman Air Force Service Pilot during World War II, conducted more than seventy interviews. The stories are compelling and are supported by photographs of the women, as young combat pilots in the 1940s and as grandmothers in the 1990s.

To see the photographs of these women flyers as they look today, wearing their wings, decorations, and medals on dresses very much like my grandmother would wear, may conjure up uneasy feelings for some. Yet, however uncomfortable it may be, they proved that women can perform courageously and still maintain their femininity. In her interview, Major Mariya Smirnova, Hero of the Soviet Union, says, "There is an opinion about women in combat that a woman stops being a woman after bombing, destroying, and killing; that she becomes crude and tough. This is not true; we all remained kind, compassionate, and loving. We became even more womanly, more caring of our children, our parents, and the land that has nourished us."

A Dance with Death is not the complete story of all Soviet women in combat, but it relays firsthand knowledge of combat pilots flying daring missions during a pivotal point in their country's history. It is not unlike other oral histories of aviators flying into combat. These pilots with the "right stuff" just happen to be women.

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Willmott, H.P. *Grave of a Dozen Schemes: British Naval Planning and the War against Japan, 1943-1945*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1996. 342pp. \$36.92

In *Grave of a Dozen Schemes*, H.P. Willmott, author of many excellent books on war, and especially on the Second World War, has assumed the difficult task of making clear what the British political and military chieftains wished to do when they were able (or so they imagined) to assume a substantial part in the war against Japan; what their options really were; what they found themselves actually doing; and in the end, how much it mattered.

The principal actors in Willmott's account are the prime minister, Winston Churchill, and the professional heads of Britain's armed forces: Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal. Others, such as Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia (whose title suggests more than reality allowed), play bit parts. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff do not appear, but offstage they rumble ominously. The Japanese army and navy, nominally the objects of everyone's attention, are merely the subjects of occasional allusion.

The central difficulty, Willmott makes plain, was that while the places where the British could fight the Japanese were far away from home, the more pressing war against Germany was being fought right at hand, and even when, at long last, victory over the Germans seemed nigh, the Germans refused to be defeated on the schedule the Allies had set for them.

Moreover, Britain's power was exhausted, and that of Australia, upon which Britain's leaders had assumed they could draw, was waning swiftly. Another supposed pillar, India, had revealed itself not as a source of strength but as a giant swamp into which power, once committed, sank with hardly a trace.

Early in 1942 the Japanese had beaten the British in Malaya and Burma, the Dutch in the Netherlands East Indies, and the Americans in the Philippines; also, they had already taken a large part of China. The Americans deluded themselves with the notion that if they could only supply the Chinese government in Chungking with enough modern arms, its army would drive the Japanese out of China. Thereafter the Americans could pound Japan into submission by means of bombers based on Chinese fields. The only way to get American arms to China was to sail them to Rangoon and from there move them first up a small railway and then over a primitive mountain route grandly called the "Burma Road." But when the Japanese took Burma, with it they took Rangoon, the railway, and the road. The Americans wanted the British to get them back, but the British, neither sharing the Americans' illusion about China nor interested in fighting in the jungle (a form of warfare in which they had already demonstrated striking ineptitude), had other ideas. However, they depended on the Americans for much, and the Americans in turn would supply none of Britain's needs for war in Southeast Asia unless the British focused on recovering those logistical objects upon which the British placed no value.

What did the prime minister, in particular, wish to do? He wished to recover

Singapore, that seaport where the southern tip of Malaya meets the Strait of Malacca, from which passage between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea could be commanded. Potentially it was a powerful place, and Britain had lost it shamefully. However, to recover Singapore the British had first to eject the Japanese from both Malaya and the former Dutch island of Sumatra, between which flows the Strait. To do this the British fleet would have to land a large army on each shore and, because of the great distances from friendly land, would also have to provide all the air support until the invaders could build fields ashore. Although in 1943 and 1944 Britain had armies in India, they were untrained in amphibious warfare. In any event, the Eastern Fleet had no seagoing amphibious ships, and for that matter hardly any aircraft carriers. It did have a lot of ships with which to fight submarines, but by the time most of them arrived, almost all the enemy's submarines had left the area. Willmott describes the resulting situation at sea succinctly: "The Eastern Fleet's record of underachievement belied a recent supremacy . . . which could not be applied to any real effect."

These frustrating conditions led to violent battles between the prime minister and his service chiefs. Churchill was determined to begin the recovery of Singapore, while the others were equally determined not to start something that could not succeed. No one wanted to send an army into Burma's jungles. Not many, least of all the prime minister, wanted to send a British fleet to the Central Pacific, where not only would it be dwarfed by the U.S. Pacific Fleet but it would be unavoidably dependent on

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an American welfare program, in the form of logistical support.

Round and round they went, the prime minister furious and relentless, the chiefs vigorous and unflinching. At one point the chiefs agreed that if Churchill persisted in his "false statements, false documentation, and defective strategic thinking," they would resign. None did. The author suspects that during this period the chiefs' staff developed into an independent player, though so discreetly that the others failed to notice.

As the war neared its end in both Europe and Asia, Britain did not what it wished to do but what it *could* do. To its own surprise, Indian and British troops, under a splendid commander, carried out an excellent overland campaign in the Burmese jungle, regaining both Rangoon and the route to China. But by that time China had lost its allure for the Americans. The latter, disillusioned about attacking Japan by air from Chinese bases, were doing so from bases they had seized themselves from the Japanese in the Pacific. Simultaneously, depending on a few weak bases in eastern Australia and on a wholly unsatisfactory fleet train at sea, all six of Britain's fast carriers (never more than five at a time) shared in the American struggle for Okinawa and later in the attacks on Japan's home islands. But its carrier aviation, lacking aircraft equal in number and quality to the Americans' and with naval aviators whose skill did not equal their courage, suffered losses (23.4 percent per month) even worse than the appalling American rate. Given the shortcomings of both its resources for underway replenishment and its aviation logistics, the British Pacific Fleet was fortunate that the war ended when it did.

Willmott leaves the reader in no doubt that the British achieved a great success in Burma, but one without strategic meaning; in the Pacific they made themselves useful auxiliaries to the Americans, but at a price beyond their ability to keep paying.

This master of the English language has written another in his series of clear, insightful books. One hopes he will be writing military and naval history and analysis for a long time to come.

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Hammond, William C. *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1968-1973*. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1996. 659pp. \$43

This latest book from the Army's Center of Military History completes William Hammond's two-volume effort on the media and the Vietnam War. The first volume was published in 1988 and covered the war from 1962 to 1968. In this volume the author continues where he left off telling the story of the media, the military, and the U.S. administrations from the post-Tet 1968 period through January 1973, when the peace agreement went into effect.

In the prologue Hammond recapitulates his earlier volume. Recall that Vietnam had run its American course for more than a decade, allowing journalists covering it a relative independence rare in military history. Reporters had never before enjoyed such freedom of movement and observation in time of conflict; furthermore, the ubiquity of the chopper