

1997

## A History of the Irish Naval Service

J. J. Kavanagh

Aidan McIvor

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Kavanagh, J. J. and McIvor, Aidan (1997) "A History of the Irish Naval Service," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 50 : No. 4 , Article 30.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol50/iss4/30>

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](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

German navies, especially early in the war. Coletta's analysis, however, misses the point that virtually no naval officers before the outbreak of war, even those who had thought deeply on the subject, in their wildest imaginings conceived of an unrestricted campaign such as was launched in 1915. It is a serious fault to impose modern thinking on participants in events of earlier times.

In addition to its problems of content, this book suffers from severe editorial omissions. There is, in fact, no evidence whatsoever of an editorial hand. The prose is replete with malapropisms, grammatical and syntactical slips, proofreading omissions, and caption errors. It appears to be a first draft put into print as it stood. With editorial attention this study could have become a worthy contribution to the literature. As it stands, it is a disgrace to its publisher, especially at its asking price.

PAUL E. FONTENOY  
North Carolina Maritime Museum  
Beaufort, North Carolina

---

McIvor, Aidan. *A History of the Irish Naval Service*. Ballsbridge, Ireland, and Portland, Ore.: Irish Academic Press, 1994. 256pp. \$39.50

Aidan McIvor's book is the first history of the Irish Naval Service, published in time for the service's fiftieth anniversary in 1996. It is a scholarly work, concentrating on archival and published material.

McIvor does not have a seafaring background. He is a graduate of the University College of Wales and the

London School of Economics, and he obviously was more comfortable approaching this task from the standpoint of an academic than of a practitioner.

The book properly focuses on the modern-day Naval Service, which began its life in 1946, when the government decided not to disband the wartime Marine Service but to make it an element of the Permanent Defence Forces. However, the author did not completely ignore the great naval and maritime tradition of the Irish people: he devotes the first chapter to the Celtic missionary mariners, who may have reached North America, to the Irish in foreign navies, and to Irish maritime endeavour. Who remembers that the inventor of the first operational submarine, John Holland, was from County Clare? This chapter puts the Irish people in their proper context as an island nation.

The second and third chapters deal with failed attempts to form a navy after achieving independence, the use of sea-borne landings by government forces during the civil war, and the setting up of an emergency naval force at the outbreak of World War II. Even though almost a hundred pages have elapsed before one arrives at the point where today's service was formed, do not begrudge the use of those pages by the author; he uses them to paint the background for his work.

The author describes the beginnings of the Naval Service in 1946 as a time of demobilisation of manpower and disposal of ships of the wartime Marine Service. With the acquisition of three Flower-class corvettes in 1947 and the injection of new personnel, including a

## 158 Naval War College Review

retired Royal Navy officer as its first commanding officer, the future was looking bright for the new service. However, little more was done through the 1950s and 1960s, and the Naval Service entered the 1970s with only one commissioned ship. The early 1970s saw a revival, with the purchase of more ships and the commencement of a building programme for offshore patrol vessels (OPVs). The entry of Ireland into the European Economic Community brought about a renewed interest in fisheries and, more importantly for the Naval Service, fishery protection. The 1980s and 1990s saw the completion of the OPV programme, the construction of one helicopter-carrying OPV, and the purchase of two fast patrol boats from the Royal Navy. The profile of the service increased as more and more law enforcement tasks in the marine environment were added to its list of roles, particularly the task of interdicting illegal drug importations.

The book contains an interesting selection of illustrations, some of which are new to this reviewer, as well as important appendices containing ship lists and names of officers commanding the service. The book's strength is in the author's considerable amount of research. However, his lack of nautical background is apparent, especially when discussing incidents that depend on eyewitness verbal reports. The book's major weakness lies in its number of factual errors in the text and, particularly, in the appendices. For example, the hull of the *Deirdre* was not designed by the Netherlands Ship Design Organization, and the lists of officers commanding the Naval Service and

the officers commanding the Naval Base contain inaccuracies and one glaring omission. This is unfortunate in a book that, when it was published, was the only historical account of the Irish Naval Service.

The book's value is its collected archival and published material, which referred in passing to a quiet service, and brought it together in one publication. For this the Irish Naval Service owes McIvor a debt of gratitude.

J.J. KAVANAGH  
Commodore, NS  
Flag Officer  
Commanding Naval Service

---

Marvel, William. *The Alabama and the Kearsarge: The Sailor's Civil War*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1996. 610pp. \$34.95

In recent years a number of excellent histories have examined virtually every aspect of the American Civil War. Surprisingly, virtually none has addressed the lives of the Union and Confederate sailors, who contributed so much to their respective war efforts. In *The Alabama and the Kearsarge*, noted historian William Marvel corrects this obvious imbalance. In the process, he succeeds admirably in presenting the most comprehensive coverage of the hardships of the common sailor during this country's deadliest conflict.

Marvel is no stranger to readers and students of the Civil War. His *Andersonville: The Last Depot* and his biography of Ambrose Burnside received high acclaim throughout literary circles. In his latest effort, Marvel focuses on