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One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890-1990,

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BOOK REVIEWS

A book reviewer occupies a position of special responsibility and trust. He is to summarize, set in context, describe strengths, and point out weaknesses. As a surrogate for us all, he assumes a heavy obligation which it is his duty to discharge with reason and consistency.

Admiral H.G. Rickover

"The U.S. Navy: An Instrument of National Policy"

Baer, George W. *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890-1990.*
Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994. 553pp. \$49.50

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS there have been several good books about the U.S. Navy, but surely one of the best that this reviewer has read is by the chairman of the Naval War College's Department of Strategy and Policy, George Baer. It is an excellent, balanced study, containing analyses of the interactions between strategy, doctrine, tactics, technology, personnel, and history—how the Navy really works. Baer does not treat the Navy as an isolated unit but as an "instrument of national policy."

The book is divided into two parts: "On the Sea," which constitutes about 60 percent of the book, covers from 1890 to World War II; part two, "From the Sea," discusses the post-World War II era. The author offers several chapters on the postwar and interwar years (areas which have been sadly neglected in other works on navies) that are relevant to the present problems facing the national security community.

Beginning with the year that Alfred Thayer Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* was published, Baer notes that "before 1890 the Navy was a force of cruisers that operated in detached squadrons throughout the world and monitors that were confined to harbor defense at home. That kind of navy, said Mahan, was no longer adequate." Also, 1890 was approximately the time when the modern warships we know today were finally taking shape from the various types of steamships and ironclads. In that same year, Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Tracy published an annual report calling for an offensive battle fleet. As a result, Congress passed a Naval Act that authorized three first-line battleships. Thus, in 1890 the modern American navy was born.

The introductory chapter sets the tone of these interweaving bureaucratic, internal relationships—Mahan's strategy, the internal and external politics of the Secretary's report, followed by Congress' response, resulting in the technology of the three first-line battleships. These are followed by an analysis of how the ships were used, with critical comments by Julian Corbett about the Navy's Mahanian strategy for the Spanish-American War. This skillful, analytical mix is carried nicely throughout the book.

The two chapters on World War I are excellent, noting that it was the destroyer, not the battleship, that proved vital, although the battleship played an important part in assuring America's strategic independence in the postwar era. There follow four chapters covering the interwar period, detailing everything from "The Treaty Navy," to "Are We Ready? 1938–1940." These chapters include interesting descriptions of personalities and war plans. Baer's three chapters on World War II are more analytical than descriptive, and some conclusions may prove controversial. For example, Baer defends Spruance's controversial decision to guard the amphibious forces rather than seek a "Pacific Trafalgar" in the battle of the Philippine Sea.

Part Two, on the postwar Navy, begins with the chapter, "Why Do We Need a Navy?" In it is interesting coverage of the argument between the Navy and the Air Force, some of which may sound familiar due to the post-Cold War "roles and missions" debate. Also of great interest are the chapters "The McNamara Years, 1961–1970" and "Disarray, 1970–1980," which cover periods of our nation that are invariably glossed over in many other books but have great lessons for the present. Also, it was nice to see Admiral Thomas Hayward, the father of the Navy's offensive strategy, get his due in "The Pacific Model," first as Commander Seventh Fleet, then Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, and finally as Chief of Naval Operations. Admiral Hayward (in an era of so-called "hollow forces" and a shrinking fleet—sound familiar?) showed what could be done with some imagination and leadership. The book ends with a discussion of the strategy of the Navy's publication of ". . . From the Sea." According to Baer, this new policy means that "the U.S. Navy, after one hundred years, closed its book on sea power and doctrine in the image of Mahan."

Readers of such journals as the *Naval War College Review*, and certainly anyone involved with decision making, will, or at least should, find George Baer's book "must" reading.

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