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A Naval History of World War I

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In the aftermath of the demise of the Soviet Union, a scholarly work on Stalin's control and manipulation of the American and European "peace movements" in the decades prior to World War II may seem of interest only to historians of the period. After all, active subversion of Western intellectual circles by foreign intelligence services might be considered anachronistic and irrelevant in today's open society.

This is not the case, however; foreign governments will continue to seek to manipulate the support and influence of respected intellectual leaders for their policies. Koch's well researched study demonstrates how this can be done; there are important lessons to be learned here.

Tracing the covert career of Willi Munzenberg, a founding member of the Communist International (Comintern), Koch demonstrates how such respected writers as André Gide, John dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, and other Western intellectuals were purposefully led in the 1930s to support Stalin's intricate and self-serving prewar policies. Using information that has recently become available from the archives of the former Soviet Union, Koch pieces together a credible tale of global and long-term deceit and perfidy. From Paris, to Cambridge, to Hollywood, Koch has traced the close connections between Soviet agents of influence and espionage, shedding new light along the way on the activities of such spies as Klaus Fuchs, Alger Hiss, and Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.

This work is a valuable addition to the literature on the activities of

foreign intelligence services, and it is particularly relevant to understanding the ways and means by which intellectuals can be used to generate public support for certain policies. It is also a useful reminder of the perfidy and cynicism of totalitarian regimes in using individuals to further their own ends. While modern circumstances likely make the total control of a Stalin unrepeatably, there can be little doubt that such efforts to gain the support of influential individuals continue today.

In the end, as Koch concludes from his analysis, Willi Munzenberg and most of his Comintern compatriots were themselves sacrificed on the altar of Stalin's paranoia, despite, or possibly because of, their many successes.

This is an interesting book that provides some unique insights into the grey area between perception management and active espionage. It should be required reading both for students of intelligence operations and for anyone seeking to understand the international politics of the period.

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Halpern, Paul G. *A Naval History of World War I*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1994. 591pp. \$55
Before World War I began in July 1914, most of those who thought about war at sea were certain they knew how the next struggle would begin—and that as a consequence of that beginning it would end shortly thereafter. They

believed that within the first few days of the war's opening shots, the two greatest fleets in the world, those of Britain and Germany, would meet somewhere in the North Sea. One would vanquish the other, and with the world's oceans thus firmly under the control of the victor, the other side would have no choice but to seek the best peace terms possible.

Indeed, the war's first shots were fired by warships, in the early morning dark of 29 July 1914. But those warships were not British or German, or dreadnought battleships, or in the North Sea. They were a trio of Austro-Hungarian river monitors, opening an attack on the Serbian defenses of Belgrade from the Save River, a tributary of the Danube.

In the North Sea, Britain's Grand Fleet was based at Scapa Flow in the bleak Orkney Islands, north of Scotland. The smaller High Seas Fleet lay five hundred miles southeastward, mainly at Wilhelmshaven, on Germany's short, shallow North Sea coast.

Because of its smaller size (Halpern tells us that when the war began Britain had twenty-one dreadnoughts and Germany thirteen), the German fleet seldom sailed far enough into the North Sea for the British, even with their excellent communications intelligence, to force them to battle. In their turn the British dared not approach the German bases, for fear of minefields and submarines. Hence it was nearly two years before the expected battle came, on 31 May 1916, off Denmark's Jutland Peninsula. Each fleet hit the other hard. When it was over, the Germans had proved themselves

superior in important ways, but they knew they were lucky to have survived and did not want another such experience. In fact, there was to be none. Halpern aptly quotes a journalist who commented that the German fleet had assaulted its jailer and was back in jail.

Though the author does not say so explicitly, it was the submarine that effectively put the big fighting ship—and, indeed, the fleet as a tactical unit—out of business. Invisible or nearly so, comparatively long-ranged, economical to build and operate, and armed with the most deadly of weapons, the torpedo and the mine, the submarine had no need to fear any big ship: rather, the big ship had to fear the submarine. Fleets gave up sailing those waters where enemy mines might lurk, and without the escort of destroyers to protect them from submarines they were not likely to sail anywhere. A contemporary development, the airplane, was eventually to rescue both big ships and the fleet, but at a high price for both, and not until twenty years later.

Halpern has organized his history well, and he covers both accurately and in detail the nearly forgotten naval operations on the Danube and Tigris rivers, the Mediterranean, the Adriatic, the Black Sea, and the Baltic. He covers not only the well known allied amphibious failure at Gallipoli but also the poorly known German amphibious success in the approaches to the Gulf of Riga, and also the forgotten Russian amphibious successes in the Black Sea against Turkey. He reports not only about the Russian Black Sea

Fleet's blockade of the short sea route from the Zonguldak coal mines to the mouth of the Bosphorus—which nearly closed down Turkey's primitive industry and threatened to immobilize the German battle cruiser *Goeben*, masquerading as a Turkish ship under the name *Jawus Sultan Selim*—but also about the Imperial Russian Navy's successful task forces built around makeshift seaplane carriers.

German U-boats drove the Grand Fleet to the edge of impotence, not so much by direct attack but by sinking the merchant ships the fleet was supposed to protect. It was upon those ships that not only Britain (including its fleet) but the whole alliance depended. Halpern tells us the familiar story of how, even though the U-boats were winning, the Royal Navy recoiled (because it was a "defensive" scheme) from the only solution in sight, the convoy. Finally, in the spring of 1917, just as the U.S. Navy's destroyers came on the scene, the Royal Navy tried that repulsive tactic. At one stroke this simple, old method of sea warfare reduced the number of targets that the submarines could find, from many individual ships to only a few groups of them, and those in fairly compact formations. If a U-boat were to locate such a convoy, she would find it screened by destroyers or other small warships, each eager to sink the raider. The number of U-boats sunk went up, the number of merchant ships lost went down, and the threat of allied defeat in the Atlantic faded in time for a new, American army to cross that ocean. In turn, the new army helped defeat the Germans in France. It was the German failures, first at sea, and then on

the Western Front, that brought the war to an end—or, at least, that is how this reviewer understands it.

The United States fought during the last third of the war. Halpern's assessment of the U.S. Navy's contribution to the victory seems fair and well balanced, though one wishes he had said a bit more on the subject.

One wishes also that Halpern had shown more clearly the effect of action afloat upon the course of events ashore. How important to the development of the war and its outcome were the battles and campaigns in the wide ocean and the narrow seas? Most narrators of the war seem to have trouble with that issue. Halpern, like them, has left readers to figure it out for themselves. Alas!

Still, perfect books do not exist. Paul Halpern's is a very good one. Let us hope he writes more.

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Messimer, Dwight. *Escape*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1994. 288pp. \$29.95

Escape is high adventure. It is a chronicle of the wartime experiences of Medal of Honor recipient Edouard Isaacs, the only U.S. Navy line officer captured by the Germans during the First World War. It is a delight to read.

The author, Dwight Messimer, is a history professor at San Jose State University and a specialist in American and German naval history. Although his authoritative account is extensively researched from Isaacs's family