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## American Merchant Ships on the Yangtze, 1920-1941

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understand the RAN would be well advised to read this work carefully.

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Yerxa, Donald A. *Admirals and Empire: The United States Navy and the Caribbean, 1898-1945*. Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1991. 202pp. \$34.95

A century ago, Alfred T. Mahan repeatedly reminded Americans that the Caribbean was a vital area for the United States. He envisioned it as an "American Lake." While not rejecting Mahan's view overtly, Donald Yerxa uses another maritime concept as the basis for his investigation. Interpreting American interests in the region as imperial ones, he focuses on two of them: protection of the area from external threats, and the removal of threats within the area to imperial stability.

Yerxa has dug deeply into archival sources to describe fifty years of U.S. naval activity that ranges from gunboat diplomacy and support of armed intervention to goodwill visits and wartime operations against German threats in the region during 1917-1918 and 1941-1945. His conceptual structure provides a strong focus and an explicit argument around which he skillfully organizes his narrative. In doing this, he has written a valuable narrative that will be useful for all who work in the history of American naval strategy. Nevertheless, Yerxa does not answer every question regarding the U.S. Navy's activities in the region. Because of the structure of

his thesis, the author was forced to omit a range of naval activities in the Caribbean that do not fall into his dual categories. Notwithstanding, and although the volume makes no pretense of being definitive, it is the closest yet to such a work. With that in mind, and with no other sources to which one can readily turn, it would have been convenient to have had a list of the various commanders of the naval forces in that region along with their dates of command, as well as lists or graphs showing the forces' changing strengths and character. A deeper understanding of the administrative structures of the naval commands is needed.

Readers of the *Naval War College Review* will readily recognize one of the chapters of this book, which appeared earlier as an article in these pages (Autumn 1986, pp. 60-72).

This is an important book. Although not a full history of the U.S. Navy's activities in the Caribbean, it is a strong work in its focus at the level of broad grand strategy and foreign policy.

JOHN B. HATTENDORF  
Naval War College

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Grover, David H. *American Merchant Ships on the Yangtze, 1920-1941*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992. 234pp. \$47.95

This book focuses on American mariners in China between the two world wars. It illuminates the lives of individual crew members, the organizations of which they were a part, and the turbulent environment in which they

worked. Its author, David Grover, was a career merchant mariner and naval officer before becoming a dean at the California Maritime Academy. He has written four other books, two about the American frontier and two that deal with American vessels in World War II. In this volume he tries to marry those two interests to describe the American merchant fleet on the Yangtze and chronicle the adventures of those who sailed it.

The American merchant fleet was as much a product of government policy as of private initiative. Without the tax incentives provided by the 1922 China Trade Act, American firms would not have acquired ships built in Shanghai that were especially designed to ply the Yangtze's often dangerous waters. These long (up to 210 feet), shallow-draft vessels were underpowered, but they had hulls compartmentalized to resist flooding, armor-plated bridges, and officers quarters arranged to provide defense against pirates, marauding soldiers, and attacking mobs. These ships operated with credentials provided by the Department of State and were entitled to protection by Navy gunboats and U.S. Marines. Their presence on the Yangtze proved less a source of private profit than a source of public policy dilemmas; they deepened American involvement in China at a time when political turmoil suggested that withdrawal from the river trade was the wiser course of action.

Grover presents detailed and colorful descriptions of the three principal American firms' operations. Standard Oil (later Standard Vacuum) was the first U.S. company to appear on the

river. It had the largest fleet, stayed longest, and derived the biggest profits from carrying oil and its byproducts on the Yangtze and its tributaries. The Dollar Line ships were originally sent to provide reliable and comfortable passenger service on the river. They never made money, however, and their eccentric owner quickly lost interest. Those who ran the Yangtze Rapid Steamship Company resembled business buccaneers. They ran opium and guns for Chinese customers, borrowing so much money that they went bankrupt in 1935; they generally embarrassed the more staid diplomats, naval officers, and missionaries by their conduct.

Two aspects of Grover's story will draw the particular attention of those interested in national security matters. One is the demonstration of how and why a gap developed between declared policy and actual practice. There was friction between merchant captains and senior naval officers that grew out of different mind-sets, the lack of clear guidance from Washington, rapid turnover of naval commanders, and excessive concern for "not losing face" before the Chinese. Grover suggests that this tension, far more than a paucity of naval resources, made naval protection for American Yangtze mariners a sometime thing and, more importantly, rendered the often stated naval mission of "protecting American lives and property" in China a platitude rather than an "operative policy" on the Yangtze.

The second important aspect is the book's unorthodox treatment of the *Panay* incident of December 1937.

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Grover argues that the Japanese bombing of the American gunboat, often termed a "prelude to war," was the consequence of error, just as Tokyo claimed then and after the Pacific War. The mistake was not misidentification of *Panay* but rather the presumption that the Standard Vacuum merchant vessels it was convoying were carrying Chinese troops. It was the merchant fleet, not its American naval protector, that was precisely the sort of target on which highly motivated Japanese naval aviators hoped to hone their bombing and strafing skills.

That argument, like several others which Grover advances, struck this reviewer as suggestive but incomplete. Despite his extensive archival research and interviews, he marshalls few details on civil-naval frictions or Japanese actions to support it. Strikingly little is said about the nature of the revolution and the subsequent Nationalist-Communist struggles in China that made the Yangtze so dangerous a place for both merchant mariners and the U.S. Navy.

Grover serves up a rich diet of anecdotes rather than a careful analysis of what was going on. One can savor his "sea stories" and usefully digest the snippets of data he offers about ships, captains, and companies. But serious readers will leave this book hungry for a fuller portrait of American lives on the Yangtze and a more thorough analysis of the policies that put them there.

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Sligh, Robert B. *The National Guard and National Defense: The Mobilization of the Guard in World War II*. New York: Praeger, 1992. 208pp. \$45

Robert Sligh is a historian at the headquarters of the Twelfth Air Force at Bergstrom Air Force Base, Texas. This book is the culmination of a manuscript prepared during his advanced academic program at Texas A & M University. Although he is not an established historian, Sligh's use of sources lends credibility to this work. It is a well documented study and easy to read.

As a means of eliminating the requirement to raise, arm, and pay large standing armies, governments have utilized the citizen-soldier concept. The strengths and weaknesses of such a system are well known. In this excellent historical study of America's National Guard, Robert Sligh has provided an in-depth look at the development and transition of the Guard prior to America's participation in the Second World War.

Sligh briefly describes the Guard's transition from the militia of the founding fathers, its virtual collapse after the Civil War, and the development in 1879 of the National Guard Association (NGA). Not satisfied with its constabulary role, the NGA fought to establish the Guard in the national defense structure and secured congressional appropriations to help prepare it to assume this role. However, this increase in responsibility and funding did not mean that the Guard wanted more supervision or for control to be passed on to Congress or the War Department. The dilemma between the states'