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Fire When Ready, Gridley! Great Naval Stories from Manila Bay to Vietnam

John B. Hattendorf

William H. Honan

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is G.J.A. O'Toole's *The Spanish War: An American Epic* (1984).

DAVID F. TRASK
Washington, D.C.

Honan, William H., ed. *Fire When Ready, Gridley! Great Naval Stories from Manila Bay to Vietnam*. New York: St. Martin's, 1993. 364pp. \$27.95

The chief cultural correspondent of *The New York Times*, William Honan writes frequently about the navy and naval affairs. In his latest book, he has used his keen eye for a well written story to select the very best descriptions of naval battles. In this nicely printed and well designed volume, Honan has assembled twenty-six stories. All of them are designed to illustrate the unique quality of heroism that one finds in battles at sea—qualities that appear in the arduous conditions beyond the frame of ordinary experience.

Honan's choice is superb. Some of the chapters are well known, including Sir Roger Keyes's reminiscences of the attack on Zeebrugge in 1918, Samuel Eliot Morison's dramatic account of the attack on Pearl Harbor, C.S. Forester's vivid description of the sinking of the battleship *Bismarck*, Winston Churchill's speech explaining why the Royal Navy sank the French fleet at Oran in 1940, and Admiral Sandy Woodward's recently published account of the sinking of *Sheffield*. Others are forgotten descriptions, but written by well known

authors such as Hector Bywater and Rudyard Kipling.

The collection includes some first-hand accounts that are important documents for historians. Among them are Semenoff's account of Tsushima and Georg van Hase's description of the sinking of HMS *Queen Mary*. American naval history is documented by Marine Corps aviator Tom Moore in his account of dive-bombing a Japanese carrier at the battle of the Coral Sea, and by Marilyn Elkin's account of the search for her husband who was missing in action in Vietnam.

As one would expect, newspaper journalists are not forgotten. Joseph Stickney's account of Manila Bay, Hanson Baldwin's portrayal of Leyte Gulf, and Stanley Johnson's *Chicago Tribune* article that recounts the battle of the Coral Sea represent the very best in naval journalism. Equal to them are Honan's own historical account of the Japanese attack on Port Arthur in the Russo-Japanese War and his 1970 first-hand report for *The New York Times* on U.S.-Soviet naval operations in the Mediterranean.

Honan's collection is a tribute to the Navy. Each contribution, in its own way, adds to our understanding of naval battle. Taken together, they lead us to reflect and to ask deeper questions about human character, the nature of battle, the role of naval power, and the usefulness of naval history. Such philosophizing lies beyond the scope of the book, as Honan is quick to point out: "This book is not about

soft-handed policymakers and politicians; it deals with men of action and gritty courage. . . .”

Those of us who labor daily in the mire of defense jargon can find relief here; good writing and clear understanding go together. Honan gives us a selection of the best in descriptive naval writing. We can learn much from it.

JOHN B. HATTENDORF
Naval War College

Sheehy, Edward J. *The U.S. Navy, the Mediterranean, and the Cold War, 1945–1947* (Contributions in Military Studies, No. 126). Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992. 191pp. \$45

Edward J. Sheehy has provided a history of American naval operations in the Mediterranean from the end of the war in the European theater in 1945 until the eve of the establishment of the Sixth Task Fleet in 1948. Sheehy, an assistant professor of history at La Salle University, in Philadelphia, has produced a detailed study that is well written and well researched. The sixty-five pages of notes and sources constitute 33 percent of the entire book.

Sheehy begins his study with a brief but useful review of what has been a long American connection with the Mediterranean, beginning with the corsairs of North Africa’s Barbary coast in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Throughout American history, the United States

has normally deployed naval forces in the Mediterranean, by my reckoning for about 150 of the last 200 years. Nevertheless, American policymakers did not plan to retain a naval presence in the Mediterranean after the end of the Second World War. Britain’s Royal Navy would suffice to police the Middle Sea in an era of peace orchestrated by a still-functioning Grand Alliance. Unfortunately, as the war ended the alliance collapsed, and the hoped-for harmony gave way to confrontation, especially in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Sheehy’s study well illustrates the difficult and confused transition in American foreign and naval policies that occurred as a result. Well into 1946, the U.S. Navy continued to demobilize, withdraw its forces from the Mediterranean, and close down its overseas shore bases. Only belatedly, as the Soviets pressured Iran and Turkey and generally threatened the peace of Europe, did the United States begin to strengthen its naval operating forces in the Mediterranean, often without a corresponding amplification of instructions regarding just how on-scene commanders were supposed to use such additional forces. Uncertainty on the part of American naval commanders in Europe led not only to confusion and the end of several promising careers but also to potential danger, given a delicate diplomatic situation in which the United States hoped to deter a possible Communist advance without provoking the very war that all hoped to avoid.