

1991

The Beatty Papers: Selections from the Private and Official Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty, Vol. I: 1902-1918

John B. Hattendorf

Brian Ranft

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

Recommended Citation

Hattendorf, John B. and Ranft, Brian (1991) "The Beatty Papers: Selections from the Private and Official Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty, Vol. I: 1902-1918," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 44 : No. 4 , Article 22.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol44/iss4/22>

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.

Ridgway, who had led the 82nd Airborne Division and later the XVIII Airborne Corps in World War II, succeeded Walker as commander of the Eighth Army. Wearing his trademark grenade and first-aid kit on his paratrooper's harness, he landed at Seoul on 27 December 1950. Although the army was in full retreat southward, Ridgway told his chief of staff that they would be soon going the other way. Ridgway did turn the army around, and with it, the United Nations' fortunes in the war.

Appleman's thesis is that Matthew Ridgway's command of the Eighth Army merits recognition equal to that of the "Great Captains" such as Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Napoleon Bonaparte, Frederick the Great, and Julius Caesar—because he turned the Eighth Army around!

Other officers have inherited their predecessor's mistakes and found armies in disarray, with morale low and performance poor, but have not been ranked among the immortals. I do not argue that Matthew Bunker Ridgway was an extraordinary officer; but the comparison, albeit dramatic and justifiable as literary license, falls short in credibility. Appleman fails to support his thesis in this competent but too dry technical history.

To his credit, Appleman has patiently and comprehensively amassed his primary sources; his prose, however, merely paraphrases the language of the original after-action reports. He employs far too much the passive voice and highly colloquial syntax; the book is also flawed by the

lack of an editor's aggressive blue pencil.

Though Appleman provides a solid account of the battle action, his commentaries are frequently gratuitous. For example, "[General Edward] Almond earned laurels and should have the gratitude of all patriotic Americans." Well past mid-book, Appleman rhetorically asks, "does an individual sometimes make a difference in battle?" (Thankfully he answers yes.) Notwithstanding the informal tone of the book, individual combat anecdotes are few and far between. Appleman's emphasis is on command decisions, dispositions, and large unit movements, but in short, this book seriously lacks color and sufficient human dimension.

DOUGLAS KINNARD
National Defense University

Ranft, Brian, ed. *The Beatty Papers: Selections from the Private and Official Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty, Volume 1: 1902-1918*. London: Scholar Press, and Brookfield, Vt.: Gower Publishing, 1988. 600pp. \$69.95

This volume is the first of a set compiled from the personal papers of Admiral Beatty (1871-1936) which were donated by the Beatty family to the National Maritime Museum in 1981. It was edited by Professor Brian Ranft, the well-known naval historian, formerly of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich. This Navy Records

Society volume is a selection of documents that have not previously been published or fully used.

Beatty joined the navy as a cadet in 1884 and after a dashing and adventurous career as a junior officer was promoted to captain in 1900 at the age of twenty-nine—far below the normal age of forty-two. Because of a wound from action in the Boxer Rebellion, he was unable to take up his duties as a captain until 1902. While convalescing, he married the only daughter of Marshall Field, the Chicago businessman. Thus, 1902 marks a new stage in his career as well as the beginning of his correspondence reflecting his thoughts on naval policy and strategy. At the same time, Britain's position in world politics and naval affairs began to change as she faced the ever more serious challenge from Germany.

Though much material about Beatty has been published in W.S. Chalmers, *Life and Letters of David Earl Beatty* (1951), Arthur Marder, *From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* (five volumes, 1961-78) and Stephen Roskill's 1981 biography, this new volume parallels the documents in A. Temple Patterson's Navy Records Society edition of *The Jellicoe Papers* (1966-68). With so many other books in print, Ranft has chosen to concentrate his selection in two ways. First, he has eliminated documents which have been fully exploited by historians such as Marder and Roskill, and secondly, he has chosen his material largely from the collection at Greenwich.

Ranft has divided the volume of correspondence into six sections. The first two deal with his prewar career and promotion to flag rank, while the remainder chronicle his wartime experience and command: Heligoland Bight and the Scarborough Raid in 1914-15; the Dogger Bank in 1915; Jutland in 1916; and as commander in chief of the Grand Fleet in 1916-18.

In the early phase, one can see how Beatty's professional arrogance overshadowed his talents. This roadblock to further advancement was broken in 1912 when Winston Churchill selected Beatty as naval secretary to the First Lord, and this in turn led to Beatty's appointment as commander of the battle cruiser squadron. This was a position fitted for a man with Beatty's prewar view of aggressive naval operations. His first experiences of the war in this position, however, brought with them some signs that neither would the war be short nor the sea action readily decisive.

The documents on the Dogger Bank operation and its aftermath highlight tactical errors and difficulties with communications and gunnery. This experience is clearly reflected in Beatty's revision to the Battle Cruiser Fleet Orders.

Beatty's first reaction to Jutland focussed on the deficiencies in ship construction and gunnery performance, not the more general observations on leadership and strategy which dominated the postwar debate. Many valuable documents, including Beatty's correspondence with Jellicoe, are available in *The Jellicoe Papers*.

However, Ranft has added some new insight on Jutland by printing Beatty's original dispatch, informal notes and reports, additions to the Battle Cruiser Orders containing the lessons learned, and reminiscences from a Royal Marine private and a petty officer.

Beatty's appointment to succeed Jellicoe as commander in chief Grand Fleet led to the most frustrating and stressful period of his career. Nearly a third of the volume documents this phase of his life. It shows Beatty's distress over what he saw as the navy's lack of achievement in contrast to the army's battles ashore and his frustration with the long struggle against German submarines. Ranft also reproduces a full fifty pages of selections from Beatty's Grand Fleet Battle Instruction of 1918. This document in particular shows Beatty's approach to fleet command. One may well call it the apogee of British fleet tactical development in the First World War. In addition, Beatty's close and informative correspondence in 1917-18 with the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, gives clear insight into the differing perspectives between London and the fleet command.

Overall, Professor Ranft has made a major contribution by rendering these sources readily available to scholars and to serving officers. One must emphasize that it is a contribution both to the scholarly study of naval history as well as to professional naval thought. One can find in these pages both the personal and professional side of naval high command.

Throughout the volume, Beatty's correspondence with his wife gives great insight into his career and character. His squadron and fleet orders give insight into tactics and leadership. For all these reasons, any modern naval officer can benefit from reading this volume.

JOHN B. HATTENDORF
 Naval War College

Thomas, Charles S. *The German Navy in the Nazi Era*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1990. 284pp. \$34.95

The German navy has never had a very good press, and its officer corps deservedly has had an even poorer one. "Arrogant snobs" is one of the kinder things said about them. But now Charles Thomas has put into perspective their often baffling behavior in the twelve years of the Nazis. He draws copiously and skillfully upon the Federal military archives at Freiburg to show that the top officers of the navy, in particular the commander in chief, Fleet Admiral Erich Raeder, were determined that there be no repetition in World War II of the World War I revolt of the High Seas Fleet. To this end Raeder and most of his top aides continually assured Hitler and the Nazi party apparatus of the navy's loyalty. That this was galling to many is obvious, but equally obvious is the unhappy fact that the navy could not distance itself completely from the sordid madness of the party and its leaders. What Mr. Thomas calls a