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The Price of Admiralty: The Evolution of Naval Warfare

Wayne Hughes Jr.
U.S. Navy (Ret.)

John Keegan

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The similarities are indeed striking, making it particularly worthwhile reading for modern naval strategists. Palmer ends his history on a note of sadness for "a strategy lost." Yet this is misleading. A strategy by definition is not something permanent. It should change as situations change and it should be lost when it no longer can achieve the desired goals with the means available. More interestingly, one might want to ask whether the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 will not be more important than the 1953 Act in its effect on separate service thinking about strategy. Its fundamental thrust seems to be to stop independent service thinking such as Sherman's and that done in the 1980s. If that is the case, it would be useful to examine positive historical examples of the navy's cooperative effort in joint planning, showing how each service's roles and missions can be effectively used jointly in a national strategy. It would be sad for the navy, if the situation has changed, merely to pine away in sorrow for a bye-gone method. There is more to be learned from a close examination of this example.

Captain Wayne Hughes, Jr., U.S. Navy (Retired)

Keegan, John. *The Price of Admiralty: The Evolution of Naval Warfare*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1989. 292pp. \$21.95

The *Price of Admiralty*, John Keegan's latest endeavor, is a maritime companion to his best-selling, *The Face of Battle*. Paralleling his earlier book, *The Price of Admiralty* fulfills the promise of the subtitle, *The Evolution of Naval Warfare*, with a series of four, chapter-long vignettes that promise the essence of naval combat: the evolution of tactics and technology; the strategic setting; the personalities of the commanders; and the naval societies of the fighting men they lead. This talented author has vividly depicted the battle scenes and has included a few charts and illustrations.

Keegan chose for his subjects, Trafalgar, Jutland, Midway, and the Battle of the Atlantic. The periods of action are the age of fighting sail, the age of the big gun, and two manifestations of sea war at this century's midpassage, the carrier battles and a submarine campaign. His narrative on World War II leads to some prognostication in the concluding chapter.

How well does Keegan fulfill his self-appointed purpose? He does not paint war at sea with the bold strokes we saw in *The Face of Battle*. This is because

Captain Hughes is professor of operations research at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California. He is also author of *Fleet Tactics, Theory and Practice*.

Keegan is basically a landlubber and not always comfortable with the language of the sailor. For instance, in the narration of the storm after the Battle of Trafalgar, three times in one paragraph we find ships that, rather than having run aground, "went ashore"; Jellicoe's warships at Jutland in 1916 are called "ironclads."

Keegan's failing (I do not mean to say failure) is partly a lack of confidence, in contrast to his evident self-assurance when dealing with ground warfare. But the failing is almost a virtue. An insecure author is a cautious author. It is as if that trait of stolid conservatism for which navy men are universally condemned has infected Keegan. Doubtless because of his prestige this book will sell and be widely read. If so, we, the navy family, may rest easy. He finds a few black sheep (speaking both of men and of their ideas and ideals), but by and large we are a noble breed. When Keegan scratches beneath the veneer, which is his intent, he finds many heroes and few villains.

And there are nice touches. Keegan has an acute sense of the importance of search, sighting and signalling. He also understands the first responsibility of a commander as one of keeping control: elegant tactics are simple tactics. Like Rear Admiral Bradley A. Fiske, he cites the similarity between a warship and a tank: "The British . . . perceived that the means of breaking the stalemate [in World War I] lay in the construction of a machine which would combine the qualities of manoeuvre and firepower within itself. They characterized this conception as a 'landship' and only later, when a prototype had actually been built, christened it a tank." And like Fiske, he contrasts the firepower of a fleet with that of an army in a neat paragraph that concludes, "in brief, six times as many guns, of much heavier calibre, could be transported daily by Nelson's fleet as by Napoleon's army, at one-fifth of the logistic cost and at five times the speed."

And this about Jutland: "The Grand Fleet may have appeared in the years between 1914 and 1916 to be the largest embodiment of naval strength, [but] it was a pyramid of naval power trembling on its apex." Or this about Midway: "At 1025 Nagumo stood poised on the brink of perhaps the greatest naval victory ever promised an admiral, certain to be spectacular in itself and destined to alter the balance of power between the Western and Asian world for decades to come. At 1030 he confronted not victory but disaster."

Keegan respects the great tactical skill of the Japanese Navy in World War II. He also helps along a reappraisal of the quality of Japanese warships and aircraft, to give them their due. Regarding the Atlantic convoy sea lanes, the ruthlessness of the German U-boat skippers, as opposed to their devotion to duty, is given more weight than seems fitting from an author who emphasizes the violence of war, but U-boat sailors justly receive his accolades for courage and endurance to the bitter end. Hatred and contempt for the enemy are not in Keegan's makeup.

This book is the result of cautious competence toward the great issues of naval history. *The Price of Admiralty* is conventional wisdom, well expressed. For my taste, Keegan's portraiture of battle, like Bruce Catton's, is rounded out with quotes from too many letters and diaries from just plain John Does. It smacks of TV interviews after the disaster. But his is the equal of the stuff I still enjoy in Fletcher Pratt's works, Ernest Hemingway's anthology, *Men At War*, and Hanson W. Baldwin's *Sea Fights and Shipwrecks*.

Former Secretary Lehman wrote a more laudatory review in the *Wall Street Journal* about a less well executed book, Barbara Tuchman's *The First Salute*. I think Mr. Lehman was kind because the thesis of Tuchman's book is that sea power matters and is too lightly regarded. Keegan has given lay readers a fair sense of sea war as at once majestic and miserable, and if I were reviewing for *The New York Times* instead of for the naval community my praise would be less stinting.

Here and there Keegan strays about twenty degrees off course, and I want to show why that is important. He closes the book with a forecast of the capital ship of the future. First he gives us a limited choice between carrier and submarine and then casts his lot with the submarine with the belief that nothing on the surface will survive missile and torpedo attacks in the future. Hence, the title of the last chapter, "The Empty Ocean." But the title identifies the flaw: an empty ocean is intolerable to the United States, Japan, Nato and to the oil rich states of Southwest Asia. Submarines can take away but cannot provide. Something must protect shipping and Marines. Keegan writes that submarines have communications problems, but he does not say that communications for mutual support and concerted action are woven into the very essence and character of both capital ships and the escorts of ships which must ply their trade. A naval policy that is only twenty degrees off course is dangerously off course. Sooner or later its ships will have "went ashore," like the *Exxon Valdez* did last year off Alaska, or the flush deckers that smashed into Point Arguello in 1923. Naval policy must be better than that.

Rabinovich, Abraham. *The Boats of Cherbourg*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988. 306pp. \$18.95
The Boats of Cherbourg is so well written that the reader easily becomes witness to events of spell-binding international intrigue. Traveling from Cherbourg and Europe,

via the Mediterranean Sea to Israel and the Middle East, one finds a route replete with captivating accounts of the activities surrounding the central issue of this book: The escape from France of the German-designed, French-built "Saar" missile boats that became capital ships of