

1988

Confederate Navy Chief Stephen R. Mallory

Mary A. Decredico

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

Recommended Citation

Decredico, Mary A. (1988) "Confederate Navy Chief Stephen R. Mallory," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 41 : No. 3 , Article 16.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol41/iss3/16>

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.

alternatives. Every competent Athenian naval commander must have prepared for battle with the realization that, much like Jellicoe in a later war, he had the capability to lose the war in a single day.

The political disarray in Athens, resulting from the defeat in Sicily, combined with the revolt of the empire, is extensively analyzed. The circumstances surrounding the oligarchic coup and the subsequent restoration of the Athenian democracy serve to clarify many of the attendant problems Athens experienced in insuring that her military forces were properly led. In particular, Kagan goes to great lengths to analyze and trace the checkered career of Alcibiades.

Despite the disaster at Sicily and the rapidly deteriorating economic situation, Athens still managed significant naval victories over her Spartan foes. The extent of those defeats twice led Sparta to propose an end to hostilities. In spite of her serious condition, Athens twice refused to stop fighting. Kagan suggests that Athenian disappointment with the Spartan adherence to the ill-fated Peace of Nicias may have influenced the Athenians to reject the opportunity to end the war and thus retain what remained of the empire. The battle of Aegospotami resulted in a crushing Athenian defeat, one from which her depleted treasury permitted no recovery.

The Peloponnesian War was a classic battle between a land power and a sea power. Victory would eventually come to the power

retaining its acknowledged superiority while making inroads against its opponent's strength. Sicily provided the opportunity that Sparta required. How the Spartans accomplished their objective, in spite of themselves, has been superbly crafted in this work. It is eminently readable and a valuable addition to a more complete understanding of the course of this war.

BRANCE PARKER
Captain, U.S. Navy

Durkin, Joseph T. *Confederate Navy Chief: Stephen R. Mallory*. Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1987. 446pp. \$19.95

Still, William N., Jr. *Iron Afloat: The Story of Confederate Armorclads*. Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1987. 262pp. \$19.95

For all the thousands of volumes published on the military campaigns of the American Civil War, there are relatively few on the history of the naval war and even fewer about the Confederate Navy. It is therefore pleasant to welcome two major works about the Confederate Navy, both of them part of the "Classics of Maritime History" series reprinted by the University of South Carolina Press.

Joseph Durkin's biography of Stephen Mallory originally appeared in 1954. Long considered one of the Confederacy's ablest Cabinet officials, Mallory emerges in this account as a self-taught and highly

knowledgeable expert on naval affairs. Although Durkin concentrates on Mallory's tenure as Navy Secretary, he also provides comprehensive coverage of Mallory's early years, especially his term as U.S. Senator from Florida during the turbulent 1850s. Durkin effectively links Mallory's stint as chairman of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee to his later actions in the Confederacy. While chairman of that committee, Mallory labored diligently to professionalize and to instill discipline into the naval service. Moreover, he became a staunch advocate of constructing gunboats and improving naval ordnance. According to Durkin, Mallory's principal "axiom" that later became the "directing principle" of the Confederate Navy was: "'Naval strength (or weakness), from the character and design of the service is altogether relative, and must ever be measured by that of its adversaries.'"

Durkin's portrait of Mallory is sympathetic, indeed, almost laudatory. Yet, he never crosses the line to hagiography. He correctly credits Mallory with building a navy from scratch, and shows how innovative the Secretary could be in pushing for the construction of ironclads. Indeed, Durkin hints that Mallory may have been preoccupied with the ironclad program, and that preoccupation led to his failure to order the construction of other vessels designed primarily for harbor defense.

If there is a weakness in Durkin's biography it is the product of his

effort to illuminate the "inner man." Frequent shifts of focus to family problems and concerns do not quite succeed in developing a fully three-dimensional portrait.

The second volume in this series is William Still's *Iron Afloat*. Still notes in the preface that this second edition contains new illustrations, an addendum bibliography, and some other "minor corrections," though in general, it is little different from the 1971 edition published by Vanderbilt University Press.

The author chronicles the Confederate Navy's ironclad program in topical and chronological fashion, beginning with a discussion of Mallory's role in ironclad construction and provides a general overview of where the ironclads were built, their successes, and failures. He devotes individual chapters to the *Virginia* and the *Arkansas*—the two most successful and famous of the Confederacy's ironclads, and remaining chapters to military theaters of operation. While such organization is logical, it can also be confusing. For example, Still discusses ironclads and the defense of the West from 1861-1862, but unfortunately does not return to that theater for another one hundred pages.

In his assessment of the Confederate ironclad program, Still returns to one key theme: all the grand plans and all the efforts of able organizers and administrators could not compensate for the lack of skilled mechanics, raw materials, and facilities (especially rolling mills) needed

to convert what materials were available into iron and ordnance. Still also cites the "lack of cooperation" between the Army and Navy as a complementary problem. Although the Confederacy did manage some successes in its ironclad program, its fateful decision to concentrate solely on ironclads left harbors and rivers vulnerable, an oversight that supports Durkin's conclusions. In the end, however, Still does accord the ironclad program passing marks. He concludes that, "If time had allowed, the Confederate ironclads might have made a more significant contribution to the Southern war effort. As it was, they certainly achieved some success in the overall strategy of defense."

The most valuable contents of *Iron Afloat* deal with the building and design of ironclads. The author studied Confederate naval records, and his efforts are rewarded with a clear, detailed analysis of every aspect of ironclad production. The narrative is enhanced still further with excellent maps, diagrams, and pictures.

Still's volume on Confederate ironclads remains the seminal work on the subject. Combined with Durkin's biography of Mallory, the history of the Confederate Navy and its ironclads is cogently and effectively presented.

MARY A. DECREDICO
U.S. Naval Academy

Herwig, Holger H. *Germany's Vision of Empire in Venezuela, 1871-1914*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986. 285pp. \$38

Historians habitually begin books with questions. Here, Holger Herwig, professor of history at Vanderbilt University, asks: Why were the Germans involved in Venezuela, and what did their involvement mean? A careful examination of the German archives gave him the answer—German naval officers wanted to establish a strategic outpost for the world power competition between nations, and trade was sought by German entrepreneurs. But neither's position became an important feature of the government's fitful "world policy," nor of "imperialism" as understood for serious political support of economic expansion. There was less to German involvement than imagined by Marxist theorists or dreamed of by "fleet professors" whose pens outran the reality of an American "empire." Herwig's fine book is a valuable addition to the redefinition historians are making of overseas engagements in the 19th century and to his own highly respected studies of German naval and maritime strategy.

Herwig shows that existing German trade and cultural expansion in Venezuela were small and individual, not part of a broader political program. Berlin's support of naval enthusiasts was likewise limited. Navalists like Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz and officers in the