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Guardians of the Sea: History of the United States Coast Guard, 1915 to the Present. David

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A good example of the imbalanced views reflected by the speakers is the fact that there appears to be a common denominator among the majority of the contributors that arms control agreements "would discourage, not encourage, modernization and defense programs in the West: rather than leading to necessary improvements, they would more likely stifle them, thereby magnifying and making more dangerous the many other unbalances that favor the Soviet Union."

It is certainly in the interest of a more sober and strategically oriented view towards arms control to balance the present arms control fever and the public euphoria. It does not help, however, to define arms control as a process which leads to the "Destruction of the Alliance."

The present generation of American politicians have less experience and are less knowledgeable about European affairs, in particular about complex issues such as the "German question," which often results in superficial views and disturbing statements. Thus, the importance of a comprehensive and informative overview such as the ISC publication—a collection of facts and arguments which describes most accurately the state-of-the-art discussion about a political perspective for the divided Germany.

All in all, the study shows that NATO was founded under conditions different than those it currently faces and will face in the future. The German-American relationship has a

sound basis of shared values and interests: this relationship, however, needs an emotional and political boost in order to stay as healthy in the nineties as it has been in past decades.

ULRICH WEISSER
Captain, Federal German Navy

Johnson, Robert Erwin. *Guardians of the Sea: History of the United States Coast Guard, 1915 to the Present*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1987. 368pp. \$23.95

Coast Guardsmen, like all military folk, are fond of their traditions, and there are doubtless few in uniform or out who would not know that the service traces its lineage to the year 1790 when the 1st Congress authorized the construction of ten "cutters" to enforce the customs of the new republic. Probably fewer are aware of the significance of the year 1915, but it was then that the modern Coast Guard was created through a merger of two Treasury Department agencies: the Revenue-Cutter Service and the Life-Saving Service.

Ironically, the 1915 merger resulted from a report by a "President's Commission on Economy and Efficiency" which recommended that the Revenue Cutter-Service be abolished and its functions transferred to the Navy, and that the Life-Saving Service be transferred to the new Department of Commerce and Labor. There would be further mergers and transfers in the years to

follow: the Lighthouse Service would become part of the Coast Guard in 1939, followed by the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation in 1942, and in 1967 the entire service would move from Treasury to the newly formed Department of Transportation—not to mention wartime transfers to the Navy Department in 1917-1919 and 1941-1945.

One of the two main themes of this history is the organizational changes that came about as the service grew, adapted to new missions, and weathered social, political, economic, and technological changes—as well as subsequent attempts to reorganize it out of existence. Johnson, a historian at the University of Alabama and a World War II veteran of the Coast Guard, not only has carefully studied official Coast Guard records, but has delved into the letters and papers of key service leaders, Congressmen, and Cabinet members in order to put the changes into the political perspective of the times in which they occurred.

One of the enduring sources of tension within the Coast Guard, as well as the reason for such frequent legislative and executive scrutiny, has been the fact that it is a military service with predominantly civil missions. The military character of the service was established early in the history of the Revenue-Cutter Service, and it was that branch of the service (Johnson often refers to the “cutter branch”) that continued to dominate and provide the leadership as successive civil agencies were

absorbed. Johnson makes it clear that the Coast Guard is indebted to *that* leadership for, more often than not, it has been the service’s military character that has provided both the vision and the sense of tradition, enabling those leaders to cement its disparate elements into an effective and resilient organization.

The second theme of the book, carefully woven into the first, is an operational history. Here Johnson masterfully retells many stories of disaster, wartime action, and rescue at sea with the sure touch of an accomplished novelist. The incidents recounted, many of them well-known in Coast Guard folklore, and some more widely known, have been judiciously chosen to illustrate both the nature of Coast Guard duties at various times and the ways in which major events influenced the subsequent evolution of the service.

If there is a weakness in this book, it is the disappointingly brief treatment of the twenty years since the Coast Guard was transferred to the Department of Transportation. The author acknowledges this weakness, referring to his final chapter as “a hasty survey, a postscript of sorts,” and the characterization is accurate. It is a forgivable weakness; although the Coast Guard has undergone, and continues to undergo, dramatic changes since 1967, an adequately objective analysis of the trends and their significance clearly cannot be made at such close range—at least not from the historian’s perspective.

Overall, this is a fine book—one which will go far to help both Coast

Guardsmen and the general public understand how the Coast Guard came to be the unique institution that it is. Professor Johnson's objective, yet sympathetic, point of view and his clear and economical prose style make for fascinating and entertaining reading.

DAVID V.V. WOOD
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard

Beaver, Paul. *The British Aircraft Carrier*. Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, United Kingdom: Patrick Stephens, 3rd ed., 1987. 256pp. \$19.95

Paul Beaver has written a very readable account of British carrier aviation, providing many interesting insights into a navy that closed World War II with 52 aircraft carriers in service and 18 under construction. Beginning with H.M.S. *Argus* in World War I, Mr. Beaver traces the history of the aircraft carrier in the Royal Navy through the Falklands to the present day. He also presents the story of the many innovations that the British have pioneered—the angled flight deck, mirrored landing system, armored flight deck, and the steam catapult.

The British aircraft carrier's history is a rich one, and this book provides a full account, highlighted by numerous personal interviews and photographs. Besides covering theaters of operations familiar to

many, such as the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean, Mr. Beaver also details operations in the Indian Ocean and those in conjunction with the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Equally interesting are the postwar actions, including the Korean war and the Suez crisis.

The Royal Navy's carrier force, like the U.S. Navy's, frequently has been the subject of debates concerning its role and composition. Most significant for the American reader are the circumstances that prepared the way for the 1966 decision leading to the demise of the large deck carrier force and its conventional aircraft.

The principal change to this third edition is an additional chapter which discusses British carrier developments since the Falklands. Most of this information relates to equipment changes on ships and aircraft. A new table has been added to the appendices, and two line drawings also have been added—one is mislabeled, indentifying H.M.S. *Eagle* as H.M.S. *Invincible*. While the book is worthy of purchase, there is little cause for an owner of the second edition to upgrade to the third.

Though not a definitive history, *British Aircraft Carriers* accomplishes its purpose: to present an excellent overall account of a fascinating subject. For American readers, who would tend to be more knowledgeable of U.S. naval operations, this volume provides much interesting and valuable information on a force