

1988

A Survey of U.S. Naval Affairs, 1865-1917

James R. Reckner

Paolo Coletta

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

Recommended Citation

Reckner, James R. and Coletta, Paolo (1988) "A Survey of U.S. Naval Affairs, 1865-1917," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 41 : No. 4 , Article 26.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol41/iss4/26>

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.

them, and it is glad to tell people not only about those it has and hopes to have, but also about those it once had.

For a fairly long time, the U.S. Army has had ships and boats too. But the Army feels differently about them. To that service, they are merely "floating equipment." Now there are not a great many of them, perhaps 400 altogether, including eight small seagoing ships, a couple of hundred landing craft, and an assortment of self-propelled beach lighters, tugs, barges, and odds and ends.

But during World War II that service owned, operated, or at least controlled, nearly 3,000 seagoing ships and another 11,000 harbor craft. That was about as many as the Navy had at the time, though when barges and landing craft were added, the Army came out way ahead.

Then, and ever since, it has been difficult to find out about this Army "floating equipment" because there has never been a person or office responsible for keeping track of it all. As David H. Grover tells us in this illustrated catalog of the Army's huge wartime fleet, "Army vessel records are scattered throughout a military establishment that today has little awareness of and, indeed, little interest in, its maritime heritage."

Despite those obstacles, Grover has removed most of the difficulties. Among the ships the Army controlled during the war were three former U.S. destroyers, a former U.S. Navy brigantine, a former Coast Guard cutter, an assortment of schooners, scores of tankers,

hundreds of cargo ships, and some of the largest passenger liners ever to fly the flag of the United States. Grover not only names and describes them all, but, through generous use of photographs, he shows us what they looked like. He, the book's editor, and its designer all deserve that naval accolade, "Well done."

FRANK UHLIG, JR.
Naval War College

Coletta, Paolo. *A Survey of U.S. Naval Affairs, 1865-1917*. Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America, 1987. 265pp. \$15.75

In his latest work Professor Paolo Coletta of the Naval Academy offers an outline of "major developments in naval organization, administration, strategy, tactics, construction and personnel policies, operations, and sketches of leading political and naval leaders" from the end of the Civil War to the American entry into World War I. That is a tall order to fill in just 202 pages of generously illustrated text. Nevertheless, Coletta comes to grips with his topic with few wasted words.

The period of decline in the Navy following the Civil War; the Navy's renaissance; the war with Spain and American imperialism; Theodore Roosevelt's navy; "Dollar Diplomacy" and the Navy during the Taft administration; and the Navy during Woodrow Wilson's first administration: all these subjects are explained clearly and concisely in Coletta's skilled narrative and analy-

ses. Understandably, French H. Chadwick, Bradley A. Fiske, and Bowman H. McCalla, all of whom have been subjects of earlier Coletta books, play large roles in this account, but other naval officers rarely encountered outside specialized monographs, including A. Ludlow Case, Caspar F. Goodrich, and William F. Fullam, are introduced into the general scheme of things.

Coletta provides a thoughtful summary of the resolution of the fire control problem in the Navy, as well as a good treatment of the early years of submarine development and of naval aviation. The end notes and bibliography add significantly to the value of the work as a text for naval history courses, or for individuals seeking further knowledge of the period.

Given the book's broad scope, yet economical length, it is inevitable that something would have been left out. There is no mention, for example, of the *Baltimore* incident in Chile in 1891 and subsequent developments which brought the United States to the verge of war and "Fighting Bob" Evans to national prominence. Nor is there any mention, in the treatment of the Spanish-American War, of the record-breaking cruise of the U.S.S. *Oregon* and its implications, although it does receive brief attention in an unindexed passage in the book's concluding chapter. Also, exception might be taken with some of the author's assertions concerning the debate over battleship designs in 1908. But these are the hazards

inherent in writing a broad, descriptive survey of any topic.

The major criticism of this work lies not with Professor Coletta's scholarship, but with the sheer mechanics of publication. Typographical errors abound. A computer may do an excellent job of spell checking, but cares not one whit about the context in which the words appear. Although the reader may be amused to read that the secretaries of the Navy of the period were unable to give the Navy "military irections" (directions) (p. 11), and that the 26,000-ton dreadnoughts *Wyoming* and *Arkansas* had four crews (screws) (p. 169), other errors are more confusing and detract from the value of the book. One paragraph (correctly spelled) is repeated in full (p. 164), as is one appendix; and left to its own devices, the computer went berserk in some places when ordered to underline. Further, many index entries list incorrect page references for their subjects. In these respects, the book sadly lacks the human finishing touches which a reader might reasonably expect the publisher to provide.

Such criticisms notwithstanding, this book fills an important gap in existing naval literature and one can but hope that in subsequent editions—and it is a book worthy of subsequent editions—the mechanical errors noted above will be corrected.

JAMES R. RECKNER
Texas A&M University