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Royal Republicans: The French Naval Dynasties between the World Wars

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the passing of a wise and good man who gave to us brilliant insights on many of the significant issues of the times. But the death of Edward Crankshaw leaves a void, and the publication of this book in 1984 coincident with his passing, reminds us of what he gave to us, and what in turn we have lost because of his death.

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Hood, Ronald Chalmers III. *Royal Republicans: The French Naval Dynasties between the World Wars*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985. 221pp. \$25

When British naval guns under Vice Admiral Somerville's command roared out on the powerful French Fleet at Oran and Mers-el-Kebir in the early evening hours of 3 July 1940, an enigmatic chapter in the history of the French Navy neared its tragic close. In *Royal Republicans*, Ronald Hood seeks to illuminate the period between the two World Wars and to explain those factors which influenced the French Navy to play its curious role during those years.

The French Navy has not had a happy history. Even after its major triumph in helping to secure American independence off Yorktown, the French Fleet was destroyed within a few months. Neglect of the fleet and subordination to the army had been a constant in this history. In World War I, the navy was again relegated to a minor role of protecting the sea lanes and ensuring that the army received the necessary supplies and

reinforcements from abroad. To add to the navy's frustration, the navy's shipyards were handed over to the army for four years to manufacture army weapons. The armistice of 1918 left an embittered and resentful French Navy which was to grow in alienation from and suspicion of the republic it served.

Hood divides his analysis into three major areas: (1) the sociological underpinnings of the French Navy, especially the line officers (the *grand corps*); (2) the monastic education and inward orientation of the *grand corps* together with their intellectual leanings; and (3) the growing politicization of the navy, its sympathy for authoritarian rule including the fascism of Franco and Mussolini, and the preponderant role played by admirals in the Vichy government.

A picture is painted of the *grand corps* as the aristocracy of the navy, graduates of the *École navale*, frequently sons of naval officers, all from landed families, preponderantly from Brittany and the Midi, and bound together through the alumni association of the *École navale*. Drawing extensively from the records of the alumni association, the author presents statistical data on social and geographic origins, nobility in the *grand corps*, marriages and academic preparation. The French naval household consisted of the father at sea or in the colonies, generally resided in the port cities (or in Paris in later years) with the mother exercising the major influence on the young son. Much of this influence was dedicated to the proper

schooling and preparation for entry into the *École navale*.

At the *École navale*, the curriculum focused heavily on the humanities, with an accompanying lack of emphasis on science and engineering. Graduates were meant to know a great deal about the classics and history; technicians could handle the details of running a warship. Over all this intellectual preparation, the Catholic ethic loomed large. To the naval officer of this era, professional and devotional duties were considered inseparable. (Never mind that the deployed officers frequently took up with a mistress or a native girl—one must recognize the difference between planning and operations.)

The author emphasizes the prevailing mind-set of French naval officers of this period. Latins were good; Anglo-Saxons were bad; the monarchy had led France to greatness; the republicans were trying to destroy that greatness; communists were very, very bad; and fascism, on the Italian and Spanish models, had its good points.

According to Hood, Morris Janowitz's thesis that the career military officers are natural adversaries of the democratic societies that spawn them fits the French experience much better than the American one; there was no real counterpart in the United States for the widespread rejection of the French republic by an aristocratic officer corps. In the French Navy, the 1930s saw a shift from wardroom polemics against the republic and the parliament to political activism. Rallying to the

standard of Action Francaise, an extreme right-wing neomonarchist group, the *grand corps* participated actively in the Alliance de l'Action Francaise and supported the voice of the movement, the daily newspaper *Action Francaise*. The feeling grew that the only cure for the paralyzed and bumbling leadership of the Third Republic was authoritarian rule from above. Mussolini and Franco were admired as guardians of civilization.

The author devotes considerable space to the enigmatic figure of Admiral Darlan. Darlan was the consummate political opportunist, driven by an almost pathological hatred of the British and a hope, in 1940, that France would ultimately do better with a deal with the Germans than with the British. The fact that Darlan's greatgrandfather had been killed at Trafalgar may have had a bearing on his anglophobia, but the London Naval Conference of 1930 probably had the major influence on his thinking. Darlan and many other French naval officers felt strongly that Britain, through the conference, sought to ensure its dominance over all European navies.

Appointed as chief of naval staff in 1936 (curiously by the Popular Front government of Léon Blum), Darlan moved quickly to centralize his power. He brought his close friends into the top leadership, completely reshuffled the navy bureaucracy, and even proposed that he personally write the fitness reports on all captains. Walking both sides of the

political street, Darlan gained for the navy its largest budget to date from the detested Popular Front government, but he did little to tamp down the swelling sentiment within the navy against the Third Republic. In fact, Hood states that Darlan felt that the government was incapable of coping with the wartime crisis in 1939 and that a war cabinet with full powers should replace the parliament. With his anglophobia as a driving force, Darlan refused to throw in with the British at sea. Rather, when Marshal Petain formed the Vichy regime in 1940, Darlan was at his side as Minister of Marine. After the armistice, he told his admirals that the armistice benefited Frenchmen everywhere and assured them that "It is for us Frenchmen to profit from their [Germany's] hopes and, if we play the game with enough finesse, it is possible that we will come out of this adventure in good shape."

Darlan, of course, did not come out of the adventure in good shape, for he was assassinated in North Africa in 1942. Nor did his coterie of friends emerge from Vichy with laurels. The Vichy government, known as the "Society for the Protection of the Admirals," was indeed heavily laced with Darlan's followers. Ten admirals served at the cabinet or subcabinet level and later stood before the *Haute Cour de Justice* to receive their punishments as Nazi collaborators. Dreams, fostered by sincere convictions and bolstered by background, education, isolation, anglophobia and royalist hopes, turned into tragedy in the reality of the times. It is a sad and

instructive tale.

Hood has done a commendable job in presenting this analysis. His thorough research, including his interviews with former naval officers and their families, makes this a book of value to historians and sociologists who may wish to delve further into this unfortunate chapter in the history of the French Navy.

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Croizat, Victor. *The Brown Water Navy: The River and Coastal War in Indo-China and Vietnam, 1948-1972*. New York: Sterling Publishing, 1985. 160pp. \$17.95

The subtitle of Colonel Croizat's book is *The River and Coastal War in Indo-China and Vietnam, 1948-1972*. It is unfortunate that relatively little space in the book is devoted to telling the story of that war, and so much is taken up with dry, organizational matter that, quite frankly, reads as if it were lifted from poorly written command histories.

If anyone is equipped to tell the story of the Brown Water Navy in Southeast Asia, Colonel Croizat should be the one. He had a number of interesting assignments there during the period 1954-68. He participated in the evacuation of Haiphong after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. He served with the Franco-American Military Training Mission (TRIM), with the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in Bangkok, with the Fleet Marine Force Riverine Warfare Study (South