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The Decline of British Seapower

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on a long column of battleships and battle cruisers, lay at anchor at opposite corners of the North Sea. Although there were a few small actions involving the heavy ships of either side, or both, there was only one day in all 1,500 days the war lasted that the opposing fleets actually saw each other and exchanged fire.

It surely is curious that in a war in which millions of Europe's young men perished on the eastern and western fronts, tens of thousands of such men in vast fleets of large, heavily armed ships should live so pacifically, so drearily, and, on the whole, so safely almost without break from the war's first day till its last. People still debate the degree of influence those men and their ships had, or might have had, on the outcome of the war.

What were the characteristics of ships which could so catch the imaginations of admirals, politicians, and taxpayers that some would demand and others would eagerly provide them by divisions and squadrons? What did they look like?

In this book one finds out what many of them looked like, for R.A. Burt and W.P. Trotter provide over 150 photographs, many of which are excellent, of the 50 British dreadnought battleships and battle cruisers which formed the core of the Grand Fleet from 1914 through 1918. Most of the views are single-ship portraits and all but a few show the ships in the very dark gray worn at that time by British warships in home waters. There was nothing attractive about most of the 50, though many of the later ones, the *Tiger*, and those of the *Iron Duke*, *Queen Elizabeth*, and *Renown* classes had the majestic good looks and presented a sense of power such as must have lifted the spirits of all, except their foes, who saw them at sea. Even though we can know them now only in the form of photographs, for long ago they

vanished from the face of the earth, we can be pleased by the appearance of such ships.

The authors provide the usual basic data on all these ships in tabular form, and caption their photographs knowledgeably and interestingly, while Mr. Burt provides the work with a short, roughly accurate essay on the dreadnoughts' origins, activities, and eventual passing.

One will not find in this book views of the great *Hood*, the last and largest of the World War One generation of British heavy ships, for she was not completed in time to serve with the Grand Fleet, or views of the dreadnoughts of any other nation, not even those American ships which served with that fleet in 1918. Neither will he find any pre-dreadnoughts, even though in the first part of the war a substantial number of those ships did serve in the Grand Fleet and all through the war they served in Britain's other fleets.

Still, for those who like big ships, and especially for those who like big ships with big guns, this is a book worth having.

FRANK UHLIG, JR.
Naval War College Review

Wettern, Desmond, *The Decline of British Seapower*. Boston, Mass.: Jane's, 1982. 400pp. \$29.95

Hill, J.R. *The Royal Navy, Today and Tomorrow*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982. 332pp. \$21.95

The Decline of British Seapower and *The Royal Navy, Today and Tomorrow*, are very different books, written for very different reasons. The first is a chronological account of the reduction in size and strength of the Navy which was second in size and power only to that of the United States in 1945. The second

book, heavily illustrated, is designed to "show off" the Royal Navy and its personnel to the British public. Strictly comparing the two would not be fair because they were written to achieve dissimilar goals. However, the merit of each makes clear the weakness of the other, and so it is not entirely inappropriate to discuss them in the same review.

Desmond Wettern has produced an extended "discussion" (I cannot say "history") of the fortunes of the Royal Navy since World War II. Sadly, however, his book lacks any organization other than a simple chronological one. Wettern, naval correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph*, has given us a year-by-year review of news stories on the Royal Navy. This is not to say that there is a dearth of interesting material in his book. It is to say what Wettern's editors should have said when they reviewed his manuscript—that such a book needs far tighter organization than any mere chronology can give it. Wettern marches his reader steadily from one year to the next from 1946 through 1970. The years 1971-82, in a chapter rather mysteriously entitled "Epilogue," are taken all at once, in one large gulp.

The same topics are covered again and again because the temporal sequence of the chapters does not allow the author to deal with all the material relevant to a particular topic (such as missile research and development) in one place. As a result, the whole book is confusing unless the reader outlines the continuing, pertinent issues which have affected the Royal Navy over the past 36 years.

And there has been no lack of issues: the proper role of fixed-wing aircraft at sea, the proper contribution of Nato defense, the decline of strength "East of Suez," and the proper balance to be struck between the costs of warships and

their numbers—all are covered. These issues, and others, have beset the Royal Navy for nearly two generations. Together, these challenges have frustrated both Conservative and Labour governments and successive Lords of the Admiralty, and they have played havoc with the professional aspirations of the men and women who have made the Royal Navy their career.

Unfortunately, Wettern begins his chronology of decline with an inadequate understanding of Britain's defense problems. After 1945, British seapower declined primarily not from neglect, but because Britain's economy could not sustain both it and a commitment to the ground defense of Nato. Wettern does not seem to understand that a decline was inevitable.

When, in 1952, the British government agreed to maintain an army in Germany, the implication for the future was clear—no longer would Britain be able to afford the size of navy she had once possessed for the protection of her trade and her colonies. Since 1962, with the launching of the first of its SSBNs, Britain's navy has had three uncomplementary missions—(1) keeping open the sea lanes to England in the event of a war between Nato and the Warsaw Pact, (2) protecting British possessions overseas, and (3) maintaining Great Britain's nuclear deterrent. The wonder is not that the conventional surface forces have gradually lost their ability to maintain sufficient British presence in areas distant from the Channel. The wonder is that the realization this would happen was so long in coming.

Where a navy's share of the national wealth actually declines, as it has in Britain, not only must numbers of ships decrease, but spending on research and development must also lag—with potentially hazardous consequences. As

Britain has learned, the danger of reducing the size and diversity of one's fleet can lead others to challenge it, as the Argentines did last spring in the Falklands. This cost/numbers squeeze is not peculiar to the Royal Navy, but its postwar history illustrates how difficult a dilemma it is to overcome. One solution is the reduction of overseas commitments and hence the need for naval presence; another is the abandonment of an all-purpose navy in favor of a force more specialized; yet another is the use of nonnaval forces (such as land-based aviation) for naval missions.

The Royal Navy has tried all of these approaches, but with only qualified success. Given its worldwide commitments, from Hong Kong to Guyana, the British government needs a navy with a long and flexible reach. But Britain cannot afford to keep an army in Germany (to say nothing of another in Northern Ireland), maintain an independent SSBN force, and have a navy able to deter or successfully resist actions such as that by Argentina against the Falklands. Something must give.

Wettern shows us what the Royal Navy has given up; what he does not seem to understand is that *something* had to give, and that the basic problem facing the government and the Admiralty has been and continues to be that of giving away the least military capability in exchange for the greatest financial gain. Even the US Navy now faces this dilemma, and there is a great deal to be learned by critically examining the Royal Navy's experience. It is unfortunate that Wettern's book is so poorly organized that such lessons do not stand out. Only the more stubborn readers will persist long enough to overcome the lack of a topical outline.

Wettern's interest in and familiarity with the Royal Navy is clear to the

reader from the author's tone and his comprehensive perspective. Little that happened in the Royal Navy in the years since 1945 is missed. Yet Wettern's book is not based on official documents other than the periodic White Papers presented to Parliament by successive governments. His is not an insider's or scholar's account of the attempts by the Royal Navy to carry out its duties in the face of multiple challenges—technological, financial and political. *The Decline of British Seapower* is also not Wettern's personal memoir of his experiences as a naval correspondent. One can only wish that it were.

Wettern has seen the Royal Navy in action over the course of a variety of campaigns and during scores of routine peacetime missions. Sadly, however, his personal impressions are submerged beneath what amounts to an extended, detailed report of the trials and tribulations of a navy forced to shift missions and shed its grand manner. As history, *The Decline of British Seapower* is poorly organized and incomplete. As journalism, the book fails because it tries too hard to be history.

The Royal Navy, Today and Tomorrow, is an attractive volume with many fine photographs and a short, well written text. Rear Adm. Hill has prepared what amounts to a public relations effort portraying in a positive way the capabilities and personnel of the Royal Navy. The heart of the book is its collection of photographs, many of which show officers and men engaged in the routine but demanding tasks which the peacetime navy of a maritime nation must perform—training, coastal patrol, survey work, lifesaving, maintenance, and housekeeping. The text endeavors to explain what the ships, aircraft, and bases are for, and what the missions of the Royal Navy are—or will be, in the

event of war. Some of the photographs are splendid.

The text, though short and perhaps—given the June 1981 White Paper on Britain's defense program—a bit too optimistic about the future of the surface forces, is nonetheless clear and informative. However, Admiral Hill does not deal candidly with the issues which force themselves on any reader who plows through *The Decline of British Seapower*. He can be forgiven for being over-optimistic. As Wettern's book shows, however, the issues which have dogged the Royal Navy since 1945 cannot be avoided or taken as "standard" ones for which a solution will inevitably be found.

THOMAS C. HONE
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Moore, Captain John, RN, ed. *Jane's Naval Review*. London: Janes' Publishing Company Limited, 1982. 160pp.

This set of essays is the second in what should be a long and useful series of annual publications. As stated in the publisher's note, "The first compilation in this series, published in October 1981, was issued under the title *Jane's Naval Annual 1981-82*." No reason for the change is offered.

Those familiar with Captain John Moore's unique perspective on world politics and naval hardware will find much to enjoy in this thin, glossy and photo-filled book. In the articles he wrote and, to a lesser extent, in the rest that he edited, one finds the expected supranational idealism. The cover, a photograph of one Royal Navy frigate burning in Falkland Sound, acts as a headline for three of these 22 collected essays which deal with the Royal Navy's and Royal Marines' demanding tasks in the summer of 1982. Regrettably, the articles are superficial, reflecting the urgency with which they must have been

rushed into print for this volume. Of most interest to readers who have studied the tactical interactions is an article entitled "Conflict and Commerce" by Andrew Ambrose. This lists the seventy-one merchant ships which took part in the Falklands campaign and describes some of the modifications made to major contributors.

There are three essays by US Navy authors, two of them previously published, one on "The Law of the Sea" by Secretary Lehman and the other "The Case for Big Carriers" by ex-CNO Admiral T.B. Hayward; the third is a thorough sitrep on the balance of power in the Mediterranean by Admiral W.J. Crowe, CinCSouth. Beyond these, the essays move about the world's oceans, examining navies by region. Others look at naval and possible future platforms in several warfare areas. The reader is given a pictorial and verbal survey of such topics as: "Coastguards of the World"; "Sea-Skimmer, Ship-Killer"; "Airships in the Naval Role"; "The Chinese Navy: The Race for Modernisation"; "Japan: A Naval Giant Stirs"; "French Naval Deployment in the 1980s"; "NATO's Destroyer and Frigate Programmes"; and so forth.

This is a glossy little sampler of material from volumes of Jane's publications and from other sources. There is not much original and little that is thought-provoking, but its convenient size, colorful cover, and editor's fame will probably make it an addition to many bookshelves or coffee tables this year.

D.G. CLARK
Captain, US Navy

Smith, Peter C. *The History of Dive Bombing*. Annapolis, Md.: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1982. 253pp. \$17.95

This is less a history of dive bombing