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Professional Reading

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PROFESSIONAL READING

Love, Robert William, Jr., ed. *The Chiefs of Naval Operations*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1980. 448pp. \$28.95

Professor Robert W. Love, Jr., of the US Naval Academy's history faculty, has created an interesting and useful book for those interested in the modern history of the Navy. The book's limitations, and there are a few, are traceable to it being a collaborative effort. On the whole, Professor Love recruited an interesting mix of writers—some "name" historians, several neophytes, a few specialists in strategy, and one well-informed professional naval officer who also wears the academician's robes.

Where the editor has fallen short is in his control over the general content of the individual essays. The roots of this problem may lie in his lack of a clear decision on what the book is designed to present. Is it to be brief biographies, an administrative history of each CNO's term, an operational history of the Navy under each Chief, or perhaps a combination of all of these? From the structure of the essays, it appears that each author set his own rules. This approach does permit a writer to play to his own strength, but it also creates a bit of unevenness among the essays.

As might be expected, the Chiefs are presented chronologically, from Admiral William S. Benson (May 1915-September 1919) through Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. (July 1970-July 1974). In

general, essay length appears to match the importance of the Chief or the importance of the period in which he served. Occasionally my judgment differed with the assigned pages of text. For instance, David L. McDonald, Thomas H. Moorer, and Elmo R. Zumwalt served between August 1963 and July 1974, directed the Navy's effort in Vietnam for eleven years, survived the interminable assaults of the defense intellectuals and amongst all three have only 42 pages for their efforts.

In contrast, Admiral Forrest P. Sherman flashed brilliantly for 20 months, according to Dr. Clark Reynolds, and received 23 pages for his record. Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King (March 1942-December 1945) was accorded 42 pages, an understandable sum, given the period in which he served. Admiral Arleigh A. Burke's six years as Chief set a record, and certainly were of major importance; but, should Mr. David Rosenberg have been allowed to sprawl across 56 pages of peacetime history? Yet, having listed these inequities, I must note that Rosenberg's essay is a splendid history of the Navy's entry into the age of nuclear vessels and thermonuclear weaponry.

Professor Love introduces the nineteen essays on the Chiefs with a short background history of the office of the Chief of Naval Operations. He presents quite clearly the changing relationships

between the CNOs and the bureau chiefs, and also describes the gradual reduction after World War II in CNO's authority to control naval operations. He offers a few sentences about the position of the CNO vis-à-vis the SecNavs and SecDefs, but one wishes he had written more, since the individual authors rarely handle this subject very well. Though the practice isn't too popular among writers and editors, the Naval Institute Press could have served us all a little better had the essays in the second volume of its *American Secretaries of the Navy* been made available to Professor Love's authors.

While it would be inappropriate to review each essay in Love's work, a few generalizations and some specifics might prove useful. The selection of Dr. David F. Trask to write the study of the first CNO was an excellent one. His previous publications provided Trask with a firm foundation for focusing on Admiral Benson. His research is thorough and his writing a model of clarity. His subject emerges as an undistinguished captain who rose to the challenge of developing a new position of leadership for the Navy. Highly nationalistic, but no risk-taker, Benson did the best he could under the tight reign of Secretary Josephus Daniels. We don't learn much about how he selected his subordinates, or of his relations with the lordly bureau chiefs, but we do get a good picture of how he controlled the Navy during the first world war.

While Dr. Trask's essay on the first CNO is a bit skimpy biographically, Professor Lawrence Douglas' study of Admiral Robert E. Coontz (November 1919-July 1923) is rich in this respect. The second CNO provided some memoirs after he retired. Douglas makes good use of this source, and a lot of archival research, to describe carefully

how Coontz established the operational structure of the postwar fleets. While the names changed over the years, the Atlantic, Pacific, and Asiatic Fleets continued in existence, as did the Train and Control (Submarine) Force. Like his predecessor, Coontz had little experience with major fleet commands before he took office, but this did not intimidate him. If there is a point of interest that Dr. Douglas somewhat overlooks, it would be the political skills that Coontz demonstrated. He showed several future CNOs that one can survive in Washington.

Professors Richard Turk and William Braisted deal with CNOs about whom little previously has been written. Probably Admiral Edward W. Eberle (July 1923-November 1927) is the least known of the CNOs. He was the first Chief to arrive at his post from a major fleet command and thus set an important precedent. Though his tenure coincided with the fiscally austere years of the Coolidge presidency, he did see several important construction bills through Congress. He left office about as quietly as he entered. Dr. Braisted's essay on Admiral Charles F. Hughes (November 1927-September 1930) is a model of diligence in research and documentation. His footnotes provide an Ariadne's thread for future naval historians who need guidance through the manuscript materials of the 1920s Navy. He describes a bluff and honest seaman who eventually was overwhelmed by the problems surrounding President Hoover's drive for naval disarmament and severe budget reductions. Though lacking the high drama of a full political confrontation, Hughes' slightly early departure from office was taken by the service to be a personal protest in the name of the Navy. He became one of the few to send such a signal to the Commander in Chief.

The CNOs of the 1930s, Admirals

104 Naval War College Review

William V. Pratt, William H. Standley, William D. Leahy, and Harold R. Stark served within a much more complex political environment than had their predecessors of the 1920s. They had to manage naval reduction in the early 30s, then, after 1934, rearmament. International crises which could have brought war in 1931-33, 1937, and after the summer of 1940, presented threats that the Navy might be at war before it was ready. And then there was the ever present challenge of maintaining control of the Navy despite a President who believed he should do more than figuratively steer the Ship of State.

The essays on Admirals Pratt and Standley are excellent. Both present a good deal of solid information on how the CNOs managed the Navy Department, its leaders, and its political supporters. Professor Major's description of Admiral Leahy's stewardship is less successful. The CNO and the Navy tend to disappear in an essay focused heavily on international relations. Given Leahy's reputation as a seaman, skilled administrator, "Gun-Clubber," Bureau of Navigation "operator," and confidant of FDR, much more could have been written about him as CNO.

Dr. B. Mitchell Simpson, a former career naval officer, presents an interpretation of Admiral Harold R. Stark's tour (August 1939-March 1942) that should raise a few hackles. While not agreeing with the harshest conclusions about Admiral Kimmel's responsibility for the success of the Japanese at Pearl Harbor, he does work assiduously to relieve Admiral Stark of any serious culpability. He likewise makes a convincing argument that the CNO was not "fired" by FDR in March 1942, but sought to make the management of the naval war more efficient by resigning in favor of the CominCh, Admiral Ernest J. King. As

with the essay on Leahy, the role of Stark in actually managing the Navy is submerged in discussions of naval construction bills and war planning.

Professor Love's essay on Admiral Ernest J. King (March 1942-December 1945) is important as a transition point in the volume. The CNOs between Benson and King prepared the Navy for combat, and King led it for almost four years of magnificent effort. Drawing heavily on most of the published writing about the admiral, plus using his own extensive manuscript research, Love provides a "mini-biography" of his subject.

If there is a central flaw, it would be the heavy emphasis on the Navy's operations during World War II. Historians and biographers, such as S.E. Morison, E.B. Potter, T.B. Buell, Vice Admiral G.C. Dyer, and Fleet Admiral King himself, in his memoirs, have supplied enough operational history and strategic analysis for those who want the full story.

What might have been provided in this essay is how King selected and managed his subordinates. Did the bureau chiefs emerge from the war with enhanced or diminished authority in dealing with the CNO? How well did the admiral relate to SecNav Frank Knox? And why did King dislike working with James Forrestal? Yet, having raised these questions, the reader is advised that Dr. Love's essay is a good short history of the naval war as seen from a Washington focus.

In the decade between King's departure in December 1945 and Burke's arrival in August 1955, the Navy stood down from wartime strength, battled and lost temporarily an engagement with the new Air Force over a supercarrier and a nuclear warfare mission for naval aviation, fought a "limited war" in Korea, and then began a long vigil

around the world trying to stretch limited resources to cover cold war exigencies in both hemispheres.

The CNOs served two-year terms in these years and most could be described as "caretakers." Almost all of these Chiefs had trouble adjusting themselves, and the Navy, to their diminished status within the new Department of Defense. The essays on Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz (December 1945-December 1947) and Admiral William M. Fechteler (August 1951-August 1953) are disappointing, probably because their authors saw their subjects as transient caretakers. Dr. Coletta's handling of Admiral Louis E. Denfeld (December 1947-November 1949) is quite thorough on the B-36 imbroglio and the admiral's fall from grace. He also captures the flavor of the Navy's opening struggles with the imperious SecDefs.

But someone, either Dr. Ross in analyzing Nimitz, or Coletta in chronicling Denfeld's miseries, should have written about the structure of the Department, the organization of the fleets, planning, and relations with the bureaus. Dr. Reynolds' study of Admiral Forrest P. Sherman (November 1949-July 1951) is exceptionally complete. His research, like Coletta's, is as thorough as classification would allow. His description of Sherman's role in the start-up of Nato is particularly useful.

Captain Paul Schratz' essay on Admiral Robert B. Carney (August 1953-August 1955) provides an insightful view of the admiral's squabbles with SecDef Charles E. Wilson. Using his research skills as a trained scholar, and combining them with his personal experiences and interviews, Schratz provides an excellent close-up of the Navy's first two years under President Eisenhower. Like many CNOs before and after him, Admiral Carney left office wondering if

the press in America was worthy of its First Amendment protection.

Admiral Arleigh A. Burke served three tension-filled terms as CNO (August 1955-August 1961) and left the office with his reputation and health intact, despite the fiasco at the Bay of Pigs. David A. Rosenberg's essay is complete, as noted above, but Admiral Burke's contributions were many. The author traces the admiral's interest in national strategy and his success in preparing the fleets for limited cold war operations such as occurred near Formosa and in Lebanon. Possessing a sound technical education, he saw the immense possibilities in mating the inter-continental ballistic missile to the nuclear-powered submarine. The Polaris program was driven to early completion because of his leadership. Though lengthy for an essay in this volume, Rosenberg's essay is clearly an excellent analysis of Admiral Burke's unique contributions as CNO.

While Rosenberg's study of Admiral Burke is heavily documented from a wide range of printed and manuscript sources, the essays that follow are not. Because of the classification limitations, the authors who dealt with Admirals George W. Anderson, Jr. (August 1961-August 1963), David L. McDonald (August 1963-August 1967), Thomas H. Moorer (August 1967-July 1970), and Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. (July 1970-July 1974) based their works on public documents, periodicals, newspapers, oral interviews, and correspondence. Though the authors of these last four sketches are fine analysts, one can expect their judgments to be modified as more is learned about classified operations in the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations.

Of the last four CNOs studied, only Admiral Anderson came into direct

106 Naval War College Review

conflict with his civilian superiors that he was not reappointed to a second tour. Because he disagreed with the acquisition of the F-111B from General Dynamics, he earned the enmity of SecDef McNamara's team. He crossed the Secretary personally over management of the Cuban blockade. By going somewhat quietly, to be Ambassador to Portugal, he forfeited the opportunity to take the Navy's grievances to Congress and its public.

Admiral Anderson's successor was another naval aviator, Admiral David L. McDonald. During his four years he pressed forward with the Navy's plans to add three more nuclear carriers to the fleet and did his best to maintain the strength of the operating forces while the war in Vietnam was prosecuted. Like Anderson before him, he was unable to stave off SecDef's moves to take control of naval operations, nor was he able to maintain CNO's traditional authority to assign flag officers. Still, he succeeded in bringing Admiral Thomas H. Moorer in as his successor, and thus the stress on the development of the carrier battle groups went forward.

As Professor McDonald notes, Admiral Moorer had two principal tasks to achieve, once he took office. He had to see that the Navy executed its assigned missions in Vietnamese waters, and he had to maintain enough naval capability to meet its other obligations throughout the rest of the world. Given the insistence of the Johnson administration on having both "guns and butter," Moorer fared no better than McDonald in increasing the Navy's strength. Admirals Burke, Anderson, McDonald, and Moorer strove constantly to awaken the nation to the increasing danger from Soviet naval growth, but none was particularly successful in this endeavor.

After Burke, all of the CNOs found their

authority limited by the centralization of power in the office of SecDef.

The volume ends with Norman Friedman's essay on Admiral Zumwalt. Given the controversial nature of his four years as CNO, and the recency of the period, Dr. Friedman did a good job of highlighting the goals and controversies of the admiral's tours. Like his predecessors, Zumwalt strove constantly to alert the administration, Congress, and the public to the Soviet naval threat. He fostered strategic planning and attempted to develop construction programs in support of the plans.

Conscious that morale had reached bottom, due to the lack of public support for the war in Vietnam, he initiated programs aimed at restoring pride in the service and thereby increasing reenlistment rates. Like his "high-low" approach to construction planning, the attempts to boost morale and enlistments proved highly controversial. It is fairly clear that both he and the Navy heaved sighs of relief when he went on the retired list. Dr. Friedman's essay is fair to the admiral, and the Navy, but many more years will have to pass before the impact of Elmo Zumwalt can be properly assessed.

On balance, this reviewer does not hesitate to recommend Professor Love's book to the armed services professional. There are occasional slips of the professional pen, such as describing Admiral Anderson as the first Catholic CNO (Admiral Benson was the first!), but these are few. More importantly, there is much of value to be learned from these essays and they deserve reading.

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The Committee for the Compilation of
Materials on Damage Caused by the
Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and