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## Rickover-Controversy and GeniusA Biography

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Polmar, Norman & Allen, Thomas B. *Rickover—Controversy and Genius—A Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982. 725pp. \$20.75

"Some day I hope the Navy will have officers who will understand odd officers with odd talents." So said Ruth Masters Rickover in 1958 on one of the rare occasions she allowed herself to be interviewed by the press. Polmar and Allen in their rather lengthy and detailed biography describe Admiral Rickover's oddities of character and actions as well as his peculiar talents to get things done. As noted in the subtitle, it deals with a very controversial man with an undeniable genius.

Admiral Rickover, born in Poland, served almost 60 years on active duty after his commissioning in 1922. Until 1937, he served as a line officer in four-piper destroyers, battleships, and submarines. He was XO of the *S-48* for two years and had a brief stint of 2½ months in command of a minesweep in the Asiatic Fleet. After his initial tour as an EDO at the Cavite Navy Yard, Rickover served almost his entire ED career at the seat of government, Washington, D.C., in the Navy Department and, since 1949, concurrently in the AEC (Department of Energy). He served actively fifteen years as a line officer and almost 45 years as an EDO.

For professional Navy people age 45 and beyond—active and retired—there is little in this book about Rickover that has not been recorded before. This is not surprising, given Rickover's recognition as a most skillful public relations practitioner and his outstanding political acumen. Admiral Rickover has written 6 books, made more than 65 major speeches on various subjects since 1955, and has more than 1 million words of official testimony recorded in the Congress of the United States. The authors, however, have made a solid contribution to Rickover lore. They have done a thorough job of research in the printed medium in oral history in

extensive interviews or correspondence with more than 200 persons in the Navy, the Navy Reactor Branch, DOE, and the civilian power and shipbuilding industries on the subject of Admiral Rickover and nuclear power. The chapter notes, bibliography, acknowledgements, and index should be most useful to others interested in the Rickover phenomenon.

Under Rickover—the zealous, tyrannical, autocratic driver of both Navy and industry and godchild of solons on the Hill—*Nautilus*, the world's first nuclear-powered ship, was completed and operating in 1954. By 1960, fifteen nuclear submarines were in commission; by 1967, the Polaris program's 41 SSBNs were completed; and by 1981, a total of 128 nuclear powered combat ships was operating. Over a quarter of the ships of the Navy are nuclear powered. Rickover's influence on today's Navy has been monumental—both materially and psychologically.

Admiral Rickover's material accomplishments have been widely acclaimed over the past quarter century—he is named in the dictionaries as being responsible for the development of the atomic submarine. Even so, there are those who have vociferously challenged his methods, if not his technical leadership—e.g., Rear Adms. J. James, A. Mumma, R. Moore; former chiefs/deputy chiefs, Bureau of Ships. Referring to Rickover, Capt. Dick Lanning (first CO of *Seawolf* SSN) has suggested that "When a revolutionary succeeds, he should be given five years then shot, or otherwise removed." Rickover's personal control of all government or industry-sponsored R&D in nuclear power was virtually unlimited—any such research that had been initiated but not sponsored by Rickover was stopped, abruptly.

The psychological impact of Rickover on the Navy is probably more profound but not so readily apparent. The authors suggest that we have two Navies—one,

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the traditional Navy; and two, the nuclear, or Rickover Navy. And it appears that the nuclear Navy is very much in the ascendancy, both materially and personnel-wise. The authors say that Rickover hated the Navy, its institutions, its traditions. About 1951, he set about changing the system, and he succeeded. The Navy saw the reactor as a mechanism in the evolution from sail to improved propulsion; what counted was the warship, not the machinery that moved it. Rickover saw his machinery as the centerpiece of the ship, if not the whole Navy. In the nuclear Navy, weapons and the many associated equipments needed to fight a ship are definitely secondary to the propulsion plant.

The book is the story of a very controversial, a very self-serving, a brilliant manipulator of people, a zealous visionary, a bitter man—truly, an odd officer with odd talents whose impact on the Navy for over a quarter century has been uncanny. Rickover's ultimate effect on the Navy lies in the future. The Nucs of the Navy have no fear but many old-timers, in and out of the Navy, are deeply concerned about the fighting capabilities that a latter-day Machiavelli has wrought.

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Livezey, William E. *Mahan on Sea Power*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982. 427pp. \$15.95

The revision of William Livezey's excellent work, first published in 1947, is timely and worthy of consideration by all students of the use and influence of sea power. His intent was to meet a definite need "for appraisal of Mahan's ideas, a correlation of them with the climate in which they took shape and an estimate of their influence upon the course of events." The original work did

fulfill this purpose and was well received by historians and navalists. Neither an unabashed hymnal for Mahan, as the Puleston biography, nor abrasively critical as Seager, Professor Livezey of the University of Oklahoma provides a scholarly, readable interpretation of the "influence of Alfred Thayer Mahan on American Sea Power." His thesis was that Mahan's primary value and role was as an advocate and annunciator of America's place in the world, a world of competition and force provided by a mighty fleet of capital ships, remains unchanged in this revised edition.

Livezey examines Mahan, the period in which he wrote, and his influence on the men and nation-states of his era. The industrial revolution, creation of world markets, colonialism, and expansion were all forces that required a framework for nation-states use. Mahan's conversion to imperialism and the need for "colonies, commerce and bases" were the trinity of necessary factors in his argument for the United States to become a great power. History "proved" that nations possessing sea power would be the great powers. The biology theories of Darwin were transferred to the arena of society where competition for a "disproportionate" amount of the world's resources was the "natural" order. Men and nations were destined to compete, competition fostered conflict, and conflict which was "justified" would resolve in the favor of those nations that were sea powers.

The somewhat circular argument of commerce, a merchant marine, and the resultant requirement for a large navy of capital ships to defend them, was the central theme espoused and defended by Mahan in his thirty-year writing career. Livezey's treatment of Mahan's theory of naval warfare is particularly sound, bringing an order to the rules and principles which are scattered, randomly, throughout Mahan's voluminous writings. The final chapter, Chapter 15, is new and looks at the concepts of