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Live Oaking: Southern Timber for Tall Ships

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foreign-flag ships by the United States. In its only test since World War II, in 1973, it failed. He points out that the relationships of Panama and Liberia with the United States have changed drastically. Our shipowners and our government have assumed all along that sovereignty was for sale for the price of a registration fee. This book concludes that ships under other flags may be profitable, but, in a crisis, will not be dependable.

ALLAN A. ARNOLD
US Merchant Marine Academy

Wood, Virginia Steele. *Live Oaking: Southern Timber for Tall Ships*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1981. 224pp. \$21.95

It was not until after the American Civil War that the steel warship became the normal fighting instrument of navies. Until that time the ordinary warship was a creation of wood, or woods, with different kinds of timber used for different parts of the ship. For the frames the very best timber available in the western world was live oak. Live oak is durable, extremely hard, and scarce. It is found mainly on the coastal islands and low-lying shores of the Southeastern United States and the Gulf of Mexico, parts of the country drenched in heat and humidity, and home for snakes, alligators, mosquitoes, and, in the 18th and 19th centuries, debilitating diseases.

The people who went into that difficult environment to get the materials with which to build ships were the shipbuilders themselves, men from New England and other Northeastern shipyards. It was in the winter, when it was too cold at home, that they did most of their work in the South. They were assisted by slaves rented out by their local owners. How different it is today

when our shipbuilders in the North as well as in the South work in the yard year-round, and depend on strangers to provide them with the steel, aluminum, and electronic parts which they shape and assemble into ships.

During the early part of our country's independence, we resembled in some ways what we now call "Third World" countries. The major powers looked upon us as, among other things, a source of raw materials for their ships, though it was a long time before European admiralities recognized the value of live oak. But getting the wood out of forests the US Navy had reserved for its own use was not something a foreign government was likely to do overtly. Records are scarce, and the author barely hints at the likelihood of foreign covert activity on our shores. There was no question, though, as to the activities of our own citizens who, as it suited them—and it often did—took what they wanted from the unguarded naval reservations.

The Civil War demanded that the United States build hundreds of warships, nearly all of which were made chiefly of wood. But, while most of the shipyards were safely in the North, the most prized shipbuilding material of all, the live oak, was in what suddenly had become an enemy country. What the US Navy did was what we might expect to happen again if an important resource suddenly were denied it: it did without. (So, apparently, did the Confederate Navy, which made little or no use of the resource it now possessed.)

Most of the US Navy's new ships weren't particularly good, but they were good enough. They lasted long enough to fight the war, and then they quickly rotted away. But, of course, the job for which they had been built was finished and there was no more need for them. In any future war we will probably have to

design the majority of the ships we build, and perhaps the aircraft, weapons, and sensors as well, to similar criteria.

Live Oaking is a well written, interesting examination of an odd corner of American naval and maritime history. It is also an extremely attractive book. Altogether it is worth the attention of those who like ships, who like naval history, and who like good books.

FRANK UHLIG, JR.
Naval War College Review

Allison, David Kite. *New Eye for the Navy: The Origin of Radar at the Naval Research Laboratory*. Washington: Naval Research Laboratory, 1981. 228pp. \$13

D.K. Allison states that the goal of his book on the origins of radar at the Naval Research Laboratory is not to study the "things" invented through research but the "people" who did the inventing. He treats that somewhat archaic goal flexibly, however, arguing that in the history of contemporary technology the focus must be on institutions rather than individual tinkerers or isolated geniuses. Thus, the book is more the biography of a research laboratory than a study of the men who staffed it.

To be sure, Allison gives us sketches of the principal actors, but the sketches never provide real characterizations of the personalities involved or meaningful insights into their motivations. The civilian scientists and engineers are mostly midwestern farm boys devoted to public service and adept at resolving technical puzzles. The naval officers are graduates of Annapolis, dedicated to national defense and determined to maintain the perquisites of whatever office they happen to be holding at the moment. Perhaps that is a realistic picture, but if we are to discuss the "people" rather than the "things" some

effort to make the various figures distinguishable from one another would be appropriate.

The NRL itself, however, is treated with all the affectionate care that could be expected of a first-rate administrative historian. Its lineage is traced back into the nineteenth century through one of the best brief analyses of the impact of scientific technology on American industry available. The Laboratory's parentage in the creation of a scientific navy with its improved educational facilities and increased awareness of the need to modernize the fleet is carefully detailed. Thomas Edison's role as midwife to the NRL's birth after the labor pains of World War I is fully described. But Allison's real interest is one the adolescent experiences that transformed the infant Laboratory into a mature and significant member of the Navy family.

Allison's decision to concentrate on radar was a shrewd choice. Narrating its invention allows him to introduce all the popular themes expected in a history of science. It was, for instance, "accident" that led A. Hoyt Taylor and Leo C. Young, in 1924, to discover that radio beams could locate distant ships. Ironically, they almost immediately abandoned this line of research. When they returned to it, in 1934, they misdirected their search by using continuous waves. Serendipity came to the rescue, however, when research in "key clicks" and sonar led to the choice of pulse waves. Allison also discusses the problem of simultaneous discovery, which he treats in a discussion of work done by the British, RCA, and others. Finally, Allison opens a healthy historiographical dispute with earlier historians, for Allison denies the generally accepted influence of ionospheric studies on the NRL's invention of radar. These are classic themes in the history of science,