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## No Margin for Error

John E. Jackson

Dwight R. Messimer

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maintain essential equivalence at the strategic level.

Unfortunately the data for this study were all derived from secondary sources. No "insider interviews" which characterize many previous weapons program case studies were used. Consequently, the author's "distance" from the subject of study is apparent, and his analysis is often superficial and impressionistic. Still, *The Origin of the Strategic Cruise Missile* does provide some interesting glimpses of the U.S. cruise missile program.

STEVEN M. MEYER  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Messimer, Dwight R. *No Margin for Error*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1981. 167pp.

In an age when carrier-based aircraft form the backbone of the Navy's offensive and defensive punch, it is interesting to reflect back upon a time when the need for *any* Navy aircraft was seriously questioned. Such was the case in the United States in 1920. In order to demonstrate the versatility of naval aircraft, a flight was planned in which a team of Navy flying-boats would fly from California to Hawaii. In his delightful book *No Margin for Error*, author Dwight Messimer accurately and colorfully depicts the story of this record-breaking flight.

Operating aircraft over water, whether from shore bases or from carriers at sea, has long been known as an undertaking with "no margin for error." Messimer's choice of this phrase as the title of his book is particularly appropriate because this first "trans-Pacific" flight stretched the capabilities of the aircraft to the maximum—and perhaps slightly beyond. It was recognized from the start that a substantial "tail-wind" was a *necessity* to provide the range required to reach Hawaii. In the early planning stages:

The project planners counted on the trade winds to increase the planes' ground speed to around 80 knots. At that speed, the trip would be made in just over twenty-six hours, leaving about a two and one-half hour margin . . . their ability to reach Hawaii in still air was non-existent.

Two different aircraft were chosen for the attempt, the PN-9 manufactured by the naval aircraft factory and the PB-1 built by the fledgling Boeing Company. Neither plane, however, was really up to the challenge of 2,100 miles of open ocean. The question that must be asked is "Why did the U.S. Navy undertake an adventure with such slim odds of success?" The answer to this question is clearly spelled out by Messimer as he paints a vivid picture of the military/political climate of the day. Since 1919, U.S. Army Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell had fought for a consolidated "national air force" which would have been responsible for all military aviation. By 1924, his campaign was well underway and the infant naval aviation arm was clearly on the defensive.

Since 1923, Rear Admiral William E. Moffett, Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, had been looking for a way to stave off Mitchell's attack. Admiral Moffett had to convince the public that naval aviation had certain special requirements that could only be met if the aircraft and aircrews were an integral part of the fleet. What the Navy needed was a spectacular aviation accomplishment. In April 1924, following six months of in-house politicking, a plan to make a west coast-Hawaii flight was selected as being suitably spectacular.

Messimer covers the events leading up to the flight and then, with adventure-story excitement, details the crash at sea and subsequent events that have since become one of the great legends of naval aviation.

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The book is well illustrated, with numerous photographs, charts and graphs, and should be enjoyed by all Navy history buffs.

JOHN E. JACKSON

Lieutenant Commander, SC, U.S. Navy

Pearce, George F. *The U.S. Navy in Pensacola*. Pensacola, Fla.: A University of West Florida Book/University Presses of Florida, 1980. 209pp.

It might at first be tempting to categorize Professor Pearce's book as a local history of western Florida filled with stories of the interesting people and events which make up the history of the Florida Panhandle, of the various Navy facilities in Pensacola over the years, and of the early history of naval aviation. Thus in one sense, it is the story of the politics of western Florida and the South from British, French, Spanish, and American rule through colony, to territory, and finally to statehood. In addition, it is the story of U.S. Navy operations out of Pensacola throughout the Gulf of Mexico, which have dealt with threats ranging from pirates to dictators to U-boats. It is also the story of the cycle of birth-growth-demise and rebirth of both the naval facility at Pensacola and the civilian community around it. Finally, it is of course the story of the birth of naval aviation.

On the other hand, the history of Pensacola may also serve as an interesting model of typical American attitudes and action when it comes to national defense. If ever a naval facility suffered from the action-inaction and interest-disinterest of the exigencies of American public opinion and politics when it comes to defense spending, it has been Pensacola. Thus it is informative just to note a few of Professor Pearce's chapter titles which are at once both nautical, political and descriptive in themselves. After "Launching" in the early 19th century, based on the need for a facility in proximity to the Gulf of

Mexico and the Caribbean, came "Making Little Headway" after the pirate and slave trade had been suppressed by the Navy and the scourge of yellow fever in Pensacola found to be endemic. Then came "Under Full Steam" as Pensacola once again proved critical to U.S. efforts in the Mexican-American and Civil War, only to be followed by "Indecision in Washington" as the city and naval facility languished in the morass that was post-Civil War and Reconstruction politics. There was of course a "Rebirth" during the Spanish-American War and World War I followed by a "Demise" after the Great War when all things military throughout the country fell into decline. Finally, it was only with the birth of naval aviation and its rapid expansion in the 1920s that Pensacola could count itself really secure in its future.

Of all the pros and cons which were historically debated about Pensacola, one plus factor remains even today, the year-round moderate climate. Other factors, such as the presence of a natural harbor and its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, seem far less important. On the negative side the strongest fear, based on several actual major outbreaks, was of yellow fever, but this great concern has not been a factor since the turn of the century. What is most evident is that throughout the story, for both the Navy and the city, the ties to southern history and politics are apparent. Thus in the early days, Navy business, just like the business of the rest of the country, was tied to the major cities, and the influence and power of the east coast. More than one early editorial from the various Pensacola newspapers quoted by the author laments that Washington continually ignored its responsibilities to the South and Pensacola in particular. The Navy facility would languish or boom based upon the priorities set in Washington and the subsequent budgets allocated by Congress based upon national politics. It is perhaps not