

1980

A History of Naval Tactical Thought

John B. Hattendorf

Giuseppe Fioravanzo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Hattendorf, John B. and Fioravanzo, Giuseppe (1980) "A History of Naval Tactical Thought," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 33 : No. 4 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol33/iss4/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

114 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

prevalent conflict model. While it may spark some controversy among Soviet specialists in the West, this original and incisive analysis deserves serious and thoughtful consideration in reaching a better comprehension of the present and future trends in Soviet military affairs.

JOSEPH E. THACH, JR.
OASD(PA)

Elliot, Peter. *Allied Minesweeping in World War II*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1979. 201pp.

It was a personal delight to read this book about minesweeping, the poor cousin of the naval service, seldom recognized for the vital, tough, and dangerous job performed. It was doubly interesting for me because photographs of my own ship, U.S.S. *Chief* (AM 315) appear not only in the text but on the cover.

The book emphasizes the great problems faced by the Royal Navy during their ordeal of cut and try methods of sweeping the ingenious influence mines devised by the Germans. In the earlier days of the war, before effective countermeasures for magnetic and acoustic mines had been devised, the Royal Navy experienced heavy losses to mines to both mine-sweeping craft and coastal convoys. Reading this book brings home the degree of debt owed to the Royal Navy mine countermeasures establishment by our own. In return for their knowhow bought at such a bloody price, some 50 Fleet Minesweepers and countless YMSs (perhaps the most effective magnetic sweeper built) were turned over to the U.K.

The author has provided a thorough and excellent explanation of the techniques of minesweeping and of the ships and equipment involved. The glossary of terms is complete and there are many helpful photographs and diagrams. There are some few errors

worth of this book or to prevent its recommendation to those who are or have been associated with minesweeping nor to those who may just want to learn what it's all about.

ARTHUR WINSLOW II
Captain, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

Fioravanzo, Giuseppe. *A History of Naval Tactical Thought*, translated by Arthur W. Holst. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1979. 246pp.

In 1942, the Naval Institute published Admiral S.S. Robinson's *A History of Naval Tactics from 1530-1930: The Evolution of Tactical Maxims*. That study has long remained the standard, one-volume treatment of the subject in English. Like so many other works in the field, however, it is a descriptive volume that provides a mass of detail without a careful focus. Admiral of the Fleet Fioravanzo has taken a different approach in his small volume. He has sought to develop general concepts focused on the development of tactics, rather than on descriptions of specific tactical actions and battle orders. It is a worthwhile approach to a complex subject that has often lacked stringent analysis.

Written in 1956, Fioravanzo's book was not published until 1973, and it appears now in English for the first time. The volume is very much a personal contribution to the study of naval tactics, and it clearly reflects Fioravanzo's many published writings. As such, it is not the result of specialized, academic research into the subject, but rather the fruit of an active life in naval affairs.

This volume is a valuable contribution for the English-speaking world because it demonstrates the insight of an officer from a quite different naval heritage. There is much of interest in these pages that reflects Italian naval thinking in the first half of the 20th century. In particular, Fioravanzo has

PROFESSIONAL READING 115

based much of this volume on the studies of naval tactics by Gavotti and Bernotti as well as on two of his own earlier works: *La guerra sul mare e la guerra integrale* (1930-31) and *Cinematica aeronavale e fondamenti di tattica* (1920). Throughout the book, he quotes at length from a number of his own articles that were published between 1919 and 1956. In short, this book is a distillation of a prolific writer's professional thinking on the topic of naval tactics.

Fioravanzo has divided the history of naval tactics into four broad periods: the Age of Oared Ships, the Age of Sail, the Age of the Screw Propeller and the Age of Naval Aviation. He differentiates between these categories by noting a basic change in the spatial dimensions in which naval tactics were employed, and he ties this change to developments in propulsion. "Rowing tactics," he says "were the tactics of dimensionless space: The point of ramming (a point as we know, has no dimension)." Sailing tactics, based on a column parallel to the enemy, were one-dimensional. Screw propeller tactics, based on a circle determined by the range of weapons, were two-dimensional. Lastly, the use of the submarine and the airplane in the Age of Naval Aviation were the tactics of three-dimensional space. In each of these four categories, Fioravanzo has discussed ship characteristics, tactics and illustrative battles. He began his study with the assertion that "Battles are the most important acts of war and, under certain circumstances, the deciding ones." In the end, however, he concludes that "The era of glorious battles as fought in the past, seems to be over. Even if an important naval engagement should take place, it would be a long range struggle between two elusive naval formations." In conclusion he predicts that aviation, missiles and nuclear weapons have obliterated the division between maritime and land warfare for the future.

Fioravanzo's discussion of naval tactics is provocative, interesting and valuable. Yet, there are aspects of it that will not please all readers. The constant reference to and extensive quotation from the author's previously published works will be irritating to those who seek a more academic, impartial approach to the subject. The outlook of an Italian officer expresses an understandable interest in Mediterranean affairs, but there will be readers who will find this a restricted view. The very foundation of the study in Italian literature, with some French sources, may also create a similar reaction in the American reader. Yet, if looked upon from a different way, each of those things may also produce a corrective factor and a new dimension to writing in English, even if they do not incorporate entirely the thinking of the English-speaking world.

The conceptual basis of the work and the viewpoints expressed by Fioravanzo are both interesting and useful. However, specialists in the history of naval warfare will quibble over the factual accuracy of many of the historical details that are described. Because the work is not one of academic scholarship, it does not reflect recent research. Although our knowledge of events has been deepened in recent years by much new work in all areas, it may be unfair to expect a work such as this to have taken full account of studies in English. Yet the reader who sees this book in translation will most likely be well versed in the literature in English. Undoubtedly, he will note a number of factual errors relating to American and English history. An American, for example, will quite rightly object to the assertion that Admiral Spruance failed to pursue the retiring Japanese forces at Midway because "he did not want to risk being drawn into an area infested with submarines, which might be lying in wait." Others will wonder about the Union gunboats on the "St. Louis

116 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

River" in the War between the States. Specialists in galley warfare will argue that there was more to that business than merely ramming other galleys. There are a number of other examples in which our understanding of specific problems has been altered, but it would be of little value here to make such points when they do not alter the overall contribution that the book makes. It remains valuable as a summary of a 20th-century Italian admiral's understanding of his profession, and it makes a major contribution in attempting to provide a conceptual basis for the history of naval tactics. This beginning bears study as a basis upon which new work could possibly be built and upon which concepts can be further refined.

JOHN B. HATTENDORF
Naval War College

W.R. PETTYJOHN
Commander, U.S. Navy

Frere-Cook, Gervis and Macksey, Kenneth. *The History of Sea Warfare*. Enfield, Middlesex, England: Guinness Superlatives (distributed by Sterling Publishing, New York) 1975. 245pp.

Not a carefully documented research source (and not intended as one), *The History of Sea Warfare* is a well-organized, well-illustrated (photographs, paintings, plans of action) memory jog for students of the subject and delightful reading for anyone. Its seven sections include Oars and Spears, Cannons and Culverins, Wooden Walls, Ironclads and Explosives, The Decade of the Dreadnought, The Aircraft Carrier Era, and The Age of Nuclear Power. The two appendixes cover sea warfare of the future and combat elements in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The book is one of the Guinness Superlatives series and the reader may thus expect, and find, all the "first," "largest," "oldest," "most effective,"

"most useless," "strangest," "worst disaster," etc. of any such book of records. He may be surprised, however, as I was, to find these superlatives not just listed but woven very carefully into short but accurate (and sufficiently complete for the purpose) battle narratives, technical descriptions, and strategic and tactical analyses. These are set in chronological order beginning with the earliest records of maritime history (2900 B.C.) and closing with events of the mid-seventies when the book was first published in England.

Whether read from front to back, dipped into randomly as recreational reading, or referred to for quick access to names, dates, circumstances, battle outcomes, and the like, this volume will please a variety of casual readers.

Heinemann, Edward H. *Ed Heinemann: Combat Aircraft Designer*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1980. 277pp.

The successful and effective use of airpower depends largely on three vital factors: a well-designed weapon system, an ability to maintain the aircraft operationally ready, and a skillful employment of the aircraft in combat. Without any of these ingredients, the end result will be considerably less than desired, perhaps even failure. Having flown as an F-4 *Phantom* crewmember for 5 years, I found that this book brought to my attention once again the integral part played by those who design and build our aircraft.

This book is an autobiography of Heinemann, an aircraft designer for over 30 years with Douglas Aircraft Corporation. During that time, Heinemann was largely responsible for the design and construction of such noted combat aircraft as the SBD *Dauntless* dive bomber, the A-20/A₃