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Master of Seapower: A Biography of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King

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Lawrence of Arabia but no less daring, resourceful or romantic. Bryson delights in the exploits of Decatur against the Barbary Pirates, particularly the torching of *Philadelphia* when that ship was captured and lay at anchor in the harbor at Tripoli. In another exploit, reminiscent of Lawrence himself, he tells of William Eaton, formerly a Captain in the U.S. Army, sometime consul to Tunis, Naval Agent (perhaps agent provocateur) to the Barbary States, and a man with a definite vision, who, in 1804, gathered a motley crew of 400 sailors, marines, a few Arabs and Greeks, and marched 600 miles across the North African desert in attempt to restore pasha Hamet Karamanli to the Tripolitan throne. Undaunted by shortages of food, water and by mutiny, not to mention travel by foot and camel, Eaton's force attacked the fortress at Derne by land while Navy ships *Hornet* and *Nautilus* bombarded from the harbor. The result was victory and peace in America's little known but first declared war.

With respect to the final level of this book, wherein Professor Bryson attempts to convince us that we ought not only to remain in the Mediterranean, but that we should also establish a 5th Fleet in the Indian Ocean, he is perhaps guilty of preaching to the choir. Not many would argue with his contention that our national interests dictate a continuing need for a strong naval commitment in that part of the world. Whether as part of the defense of the southern flank of NATO, or as part of a continuing commitment to Israel, or, not the least, as part of our growing interests in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, the U.S. Navy's tasks will obviously continue. Even a thumbnail sketch of just some of the crises in that part of the world in the 1970s alone will convince a skeptic of the need for a strong Navy presence there.

Professor Bryson's review of our

historical naval commitment is both timely and germane.

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Buell, Thomas B. *Master of Seapower: A Biography of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1980. 609pp.

If any single theme characterized the career of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, it was his deep-seated and openly expressed ambition to reach the pinnacle of his profession, Chief of Naval Operations. When in 1939 the position fell vacant—quite possibly for the last time during King's active duty—the appointment as Chief of Naval Operations went not to King but to Adm. Harold Stark. King was named instead to the General Board, often the last duty for officers nearing retirement.

Had King's career ended with his service on the General Board, it would still have been an exemplary one, but hardly one that would have attracted a skilled biographer like Thomas B. Buell, author of *The Quiet Warrior: A Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance* (1974). Born in Lorain, Ohio, in 1878, King graduated from Annapolis as a passed midshipman with the class of 1901 and for almost four decades saw unusually varied and interesting service. Choosing carefully the officers under whom he would serve—and many asked for the able King—he saw staff duty with some of the most influential officers of the early 1900s: Hugo Osterhaus, William Sims, and Henry Mayo.

Until the 1920s King's sea duty was entirely in surface ships, but thereafter he became involved with submarines as a division commander and then as commander of the submarine base at New London, Connecticut, from 1923 to 1926. Nearing the close of his tour at New London, he enhanced his already high reputation through his supervision

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of the efforts to salvage S-51 that had sunk off Block Island. With the completion of the salvage job in 1926 King transferred to naval aviation. The Bureau of Aeronautics was trying to recruit qualified line captains to act as spokesmen for naval aviation and to take command of the Navy's growing number of carriers. Before making the transfer King was careful to ascertain whether it would enhance his career prospects. Although he was not a natural pilot, he did take flight training at Pensacola and in the ensuing years held virtually all of naval aviation's most prestigious assignments: command of the carrier *Lexington* ("King's final test for future flag rank"); Commander, Aircraft, Scouting Force; Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics; and Commander, Aircraft, Battle Force, the so-called carrier command of the U.S. Fleet. Extremely competitive, he was determined to win the annual Fleet Problems in which his forces engaged and succeeded in extending the capabilities of naval aviation both in performance and in doctrine. As early as 1938, for instance, he argued for the separation of the fast carriers and their escorts from the slow battleships of the day, a concept that anticipated the fast carrier task forces of World War II.

Upon leaving the carrier billet in 1939, King was posted to the General Board. But with tensions growing between the United States and Germany, King, on Stark's recommendation, was sent back to sea in December 1940 to take command of the main U.S. naval forces in the Atlantic, the so-called Patrol Force. In early 1941 his command was upgraded in status and renamed the Atlantic Fleet. Shortly after Pearl Harbor King was summoned to Washington to become Commander in Chief of the U.S. Fleet. He also replaced Stark as CNO in February 1942, ending the war in command of the mightiest array of naval forces the world had ever seen.

Victory, of course, enshrined King as a great naval leader, and in many ways he was—he had the ability to fix upon the objective, he was well read in military history and had made every effort to prepare himself for high command, and he had a sound understanding of strategy. Although the two were frequent antagonists at meetings of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Great Britain's Field Marshal Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, believed that King was America's ablest strategist. Despite the accolades King received at war's end, the author, a retired naval officer himself, does not hesitate to attack the myth of infallibility that victory retrospectively cast upon King. He considers King a poor logistician, questions his judgment in initiating the famous Tokyo Raid of 1942 and the Guadalcanal campaign (luck saved both the campaign and King's reputation, Buell argues), and reveals King's cavalier attitude toward the work of planners. King, for instance, wanted the Marianas taken in 1944 despite the fact the Joint War Plans Committee had not recommended seizing them. Neither had the Commander of the Pacific Fleet, Adm. Chester Nimitz. But, as Buell reveals, King did not entirely trust Nimitz' judgment—he believed Nimitz was too much of a compromiser—and King wanted the Marianas taken. They were.

Despite his single-mindedness on many issues, King remains a difficult man to understand. Although he accumulated more papers than many of his contemporaries, his correspondence is not abundant. Rumors about him abound: that he drank excessively, that he chased other men's wives, that he had a nasty and petulant disposition. Buell has confronted these and other stories about King and addressed the questions that should be asked about King's behavior and his naval leadership both during and before World War

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II. In dealing with King Buell has made use of King's papers, dozens of interviews and oral history memoirs, and pertinent files at the Navy's Operational Archives and at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

Buell's study thus gives the appearance of careful research. This, however, is not entirely the case. His book ignores, for example, such relevant sources as the files of Commander, Aircraft, Battle Force, available with other flag files of the 1930s at the National Archives. This reviewer in the course of working on his own planned biography of King has consulted this file and has found it of value for the study of aviation doctrine and King's role in it. Buell also neglected to consult such important sources as the papers of Adm. Charles M. Cooke (King's top planner and one of the two men closest to him throughout World War II) and the large holdings of the British Public Record Office. They are of value for a fuller understanding of some of the legendary disagreements King had with the British. The British, for instance, were so leery about dealing with King that the Admiralty, much to Prime Minister Churchill's annoyance, felt obligated to keep a four-star admiral in Washington to head the British Naval Mission lest King ignore the opinion of a lesser man. This is not to argue that an entirely different picture of King would have emerged had Buell made use of these records, but it is certainly not complete as it is.

More serious is the failure of Buell and his publisher to provide documentation. Although he frequently makes clear his source in his narrative and provides a useful bibliographic essay, he asserts far too much. For instance, of King's drinking Buell says "Whether he had been an alcoholic [prior to 1941] depends upon one's definition." Had King been an alcoholic in the clinical sense—the only sense in which this term should be used—rather than a man

who sometimes drank too much on shore and made a spectacle of himself, would he have been able, by act of will alone, to limit himself to an occasional beer or glass of wine for the duration of World War II? Buell's casual handling of the definition of alcoholism and his failure to provide satisfactory documentation for the weak case he does make about the extent of King's drinking needlessly raise doubts about the reliability of his portrayal of King. Furthermore, while his quotations seem generally accurate—and, I might add, quite effective—there is still reason to believe that the author has allowed minor inaccuracies to creep into them.

For those, however, who have no particular reason to be concerned with the apparatus of scholarship *Master of Sea Power* will make first-rate reading. It is praiseworthy in many ways. It is well written, contains forthright and challenging judgments that virtually demand a reassessment of much conventional wisdom about the Second World War, and brings its subject to life in a way that was missing from *Fleet Admiral King*, the memoir that King and Walter Muir Whitehill collaborated on after World War II. While Buell has not done all the research one could wish for, he has succeeded in producing an informative biography that will have to be consulted by anyone who wishes to understand Ernest J. King and American naval leadership in the first half of this century.

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Korb, Lawrence J. *The Fall and Rise of the Pentagon: American Defense Policies in the 1970s*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979. 192pp.

The post-Vietnam war years have seen a decline in America's military strength, both in manpower and