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"Admiral Halsey's Story," and "A Sailor's Admiral: A Biography of William F. Halsey"

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Whatever its shortcomings as military history, this book has much merit as political history, for it manages to do something that is treacherously difficult. It manages to portray the Revolutionary movement with all its blemishes, and the American heroes with all their warts, yet does so without demeaning them. In other words it avoids both Panglossian patriotism and muckraking sensationalism. The Revolution's leaders come off these pages as fallible human beings who had to work with fallible, weak, and sometimes corrupt "helpers," and in that regard their achievement seems all the more worthy of our respect.

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Halsey, William F. and Bryan, J., III. *Admiral Halsey's Story*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1976. 310pp. Merrill, James M. *A Sailor's Admiral: A Biography of William F. Halsey*. New York: Crowell, 1976. 271pp.

Admiral Halsey's Story, as some of us aging sailors will recall, was first published in 1947. The present volume, coming out nearly 30 years later, is an unabridged republication of the first edition and represents a contribution of the Da Capo Press to the reprint series entitled: *The Politics and Strategy of World War II*.

Looking back over the years, one is tempted to ask if the book might have taken on a different emphasis had Admiral Halsey waited, let us say, another 5 years before writing his story; whether or not he might have become more analytical about that long, grueling naval war in the Pacific of which he shouldered so much of the prodigious burden of combat. If we should succumb to the temptation of asking such a question in the first place, we would no doubt quickly recognize its futility. Any delay in the writing of the book, for the purpose of refining judgments or

clarifying perspectives, might very well have deprived the narrative of its spontaneous realism and, most important of all, the Halseyan charisma that flows, often boisterously, from the admiral's personal thrust and sense of immediacy. What we did not get was a strategic study in wartime naval operations. Instead, we got a rich portrait of a tough man of the sea. The book is pure Halsey—the personal yarn of a seagoing, fighting admiral who was forthright, honest, often brilliant, sometimes rash, but who possessed above all else, a natural modesty that enhanced his uncommon valor.

It would not be entirely fair to give "Bull" Halsey (as the wartime press loved to call him) all the credit for the quality of the chronicle he left to naval history. He was fortunate in choosing as his collaborator Lt. Comdr. J. Bryan III, USNR, an established writer as well as a naval officer who had flown combat missions from carriers and shore bases, and who was highly qualified to assist "the old man" in playing the unfamiliar role of autobiographer. It is to Bryan's lasting credit that he not only kept himself entirely out of the text, except for a few brief editorial comments, but that he was able to immerse himself so well in the admiral's idiom that the reader can feel Halsey's presence on every page. Bryan's Introduction, the only place in the book where we are conscious of him, is a delightful but all too short characterization of the admiral, with well-chosen anecdotes that deftly extol Halsey's heroic stature and human warmth.

On the very first page of *Admiral Halsey's Story* we are reminded that the book is not an autobiography, but a report. "Reports," says the admiral, "are the only things I know how to write, since half my time in the Navy has gone to preparing them." Yet, as much as Halsey may have wished to confine himself to "official form," he continuously creates for the reader that

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wartime atmosphere of the 1940's in which command decisions were made and decisive operations carried out. There is more spindrift here than strategy and that makes the narrative come alive.

Roughly the first quarter of the book is taken up with Halsey's life from his birth in his grandfather's house in Elizabeth, New Jersey in 1882 to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. It is a capsulized autobiography, unpretentious and anecdotal, which carries us apace through his years at the Naval Academy; destroyer command during World War I; and flight training at Pensacola at the age of 51. The remainder of the volume is devoted to Halsey's activities at sea and ashore from Guadalcanal to Tokyo Bay. He divides his narrative of the war years into three phases: (1) from the time he commanded a carrier task force that was at sea, west of Pearl Harbor, when the Japanese struck, to 28 May 1942; (2) from 18 October 1942 until 15 June 1944, when he was Commander of the South Pacific Area and its Forces; and (3) from June 1944, until August 1945, when he commanded the Third Fleet, a duty assignment climaxed by the surrender of Japan aboard the battleship *Missouri*.

With the exception of an unwanted spell on the Binnacle List in 1942, Halsey was either commanding at sea, or was ashore planning future campaigns. He directed the campaigns in the Solomons and the attacks on the Carolines and New Britain. And when the South Pacific was made secure, he moved into the Central and Western Pacific. It was here where the Navy's 500 warships were used to deceive the Japanese by designating them the "Third Fleet" when commanded by Halsey and the "Fifth Fleet" when they steamed under Admiral Spruance of Midway fame.

The history of the Pacific War, with its own genus of agony and ecstasy, has

been so much enlivened by Halsey's engaging "report." Beneath his charging spirit there was an essential warmth and candor that made him beloved by his subordinates and respected by his superiors. He was capable, as all great leaders must be, of self-criticism. He admitted that he had been "guilty of an injustice" in relieving the skipper of the *Helena* for abandoning the torpedoed *Juneau*, an injustice which he did his utmost to rectify. At the same time, he was outspoken over our failure to coordinate naval power in the Pacific under a single authority. Such divided command, he pointed out, "was an invitation which disaster nearly accepted."

Perhaps the most controversial of Halsey's decisions was his turn northward, toward the Japanese lure, during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. He stresses the three options open to him at that time, and he argues that "given the same circumstances and same information," he would again have made the same command decision. His strategic judgment was, unfortunately, corrupted by pilots' exaggerated reports assessing the damage inflicted upon enemy ships near the San Bernadino Straits. Time has not exonerated the admiral, to be sure; nor has it condemned him irrevocably for an error of judgment. Those who find fault with his questionable decision at Leyte, or with the orders he issued or failed to issue during the two devastating typhoons that claimed men and ships, should remind themselves that hindsight is not wisdom, and that Halsey's greatness lies not so much in the many honors he received but in the simple fact that he deserved them. Heroes, after all, are mortal.

Admiral Halsey's Story flows at a steady pace and the narrative runs straight and true. The imagery is aided, although not greatly so, by a modest assortment of photographs. The several charts included in the text are instructive, but they are too few in number to

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assist very much in clarifying operations for the uninitiated reader. The Index, on the other hand, gets much higher marks. All in all, *Admiral Halsey's Story* managed to survive very well indeed its 29 years of literary hibernation.

The author of *A Sailor's Admiral* is a professor of history and marine studies at the University of Delaware and was in the naval service during World War II as navigator of a seaplane tender in the Pacific. He is also the author of several military volumes, including one on the Halsey-Doolittle raid. These facts would seem to qualify him for the task of writing a biography of the irrepressible Halsey. Unfortunately, Merrill's "biographical" material on the admiral prior to 1941 fills a mere ten pages, while his Epilogue, which carries the story from 1945 to Halsey's death in 1959, is shorter yet. Since the admiral's personal letters to his family were not available, as the author explains in his Preface, the book's subtitle would have been more accurate had it read: *The War Years of William F. Halsey*.

It is clear, almost from the start, that Merrill may be guilty of hero worship. And why not? Halsey was heroic. It is also clear that the author would have to lead us over the same track lines and get us involved in the same battles that Halsey had already told us about in his own narrative. One might suppose that it was just rotten luck for Merrill that his volume came out almost simultaneously with the Halsey reprint, for it is not easy to follow a revival of the admiral's act. Yet, even though there is much repetition of events (what else could there be?), Merrill carries his version off quite well. His pedestrian style lacks the flamboyance found in the Halsey volume, but Merrill's hand is sure and steady, nonetheless, and he succeeds in illuminating some neglected facets of the admiral's image.

For one thing, he gives us a lucid account of Halsey's impromptu ex-

was the admiral's way of "countering the myth of Japanese martial superiority." We are informed, too, that Halsey took a lot of flak from the Methodist Board of Temperance for stowing gallons of bourbon on board his carriers for the tranquility of his hard-fighting pilots.

Halsey's controversial turn northward during the Leyte campaign is discussed candidly in Chapter X. Especially revealing is the admiral's reactions, described impartially by Merrill, to the criticism his seemingly quixotic gambit at Leyte elicited from Admiral King, Bernard Brodie, C. Bann Woodward and Samuel Eliot Morison. Merrill succeeds well in achieving a fair balance of judgment in the conclusion of his chapter by contrasting the views of Clark Reynolds, who was also strongly critical of Halsey, to those of Stanley L. Falk, who favored Halsey's decision to turn north after Japanese Admiral Ozawa.

Merrill's narrative is equally balanced when it deals with the disastrous typhoon of June 1945, which caused major damage to units of Halsey's fleet and prompted Admiral Nimitz to order a Court of Inquiry. The author notes that the court was "extremely critical of Halsey," but that neither King nor Nimitz was able to recommend disciplinary measures because of Halsey's service to his country and his combat record. Merrill gives the last word to the admiral, who argues that "in both the December 1944 and June 1945 typhoons the weather warning service did not provide the accurate and timely information necessary to enable me to take timely evasive action."

A Sailor's Admiral is short on strategic insight, and we get a grasp of Halsey's ebullient character through inference rather than delineation. But, then, Merrill did not promise anything more than a book for the "popular market." There are some well-selected photographs, the most memorable and

characteristic of which is the one of Halsey eating Thanksgiving dinner with the crew of the *New Jersey* in 1944. The charts although absurdly few in number, are precise and easy for the layman to follow. Numerous key operational dispatches are quoted in full in large type, and Merrill has provided full command titles to explain some of the otherwise cryptic acronyms in general military use.

Unfortunately, both books fail to meet the need for a serious full-length biography of Halsey. The admiral was too emotionally involved with events to be wholly objective in his account of himself, although his salty observation of the war from his pinnacle of command is quite indispensable for a deeper study of the man. Merrill's well-written and engaging book is simply too limited in scope to pass as a biography, although it might very well become a congenial companion to *Admiral Halsey's Story*.

Fleet Adm. William F. Halsey, Jr., USN, was indeed a favorite of the wartime American public. He was at that time, and probably will remain, a controversial personality, but none will deny that he was a great naval leader, whose strongest asset was his audacity in battle. The books reviewed here, one old and one new, revive for us the memory of a great admiral whose time, like the ships he commanded, belongs to the pages of history.

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Kennedy, Gavin. *The Economics of Defence*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975. 251pp.

The literature on defense economics, broadly construed, is voluminous, but there are few good "introductions" to the subject. The continued popularity of Hitch and McKean's *The Economics of Defense in the Nuclear Age* (now in its ninth paperback printing), written

almost 20 years ago attests to that fact, although there have been a few more recent general introductory works—for example, Murrery Wiedenbaum's *The Economics of Peacetime Defense*. At least part of the reason that there are few introductions to defense economics is that the array of topics which can be included under that general heading is truly vast, ranging from the practical application of microeconomic tools in a systems analysis framework, to the theoretical abstraction of the economic theory of conflict, to the Marxist proposition that defense spending is a necessary prop to capitalist nations. The British economist Gavin Kennedy has written, in nine short chapters, a good, textbook introduction to an extremely wide range of defense economics topics. The book is an outgrowth of his lectures and seminars at two universities and at the National Defence College in Great Britain in the early 1970's.

The book begins with an interesting chapter on the history of economic thought with respect to defense from Adam Smith to Lord Keynes, followed by a chapter discussing the economic theory of public goods. Defense is the classic example of a "pure public good" in the theory of public finance. Kennedy develops the theoretical models in some detail, including an extensive discussion of the economic theory of military alliances. These two chapters are the most interesting in the book. The subjects, which are treated with clarity, are not covered by other introductory books of which I am aware. Chapter 3 presents worldwide comparisons of defense budgets, and comparisons of the national burden of defense expenditures as measured by the ratio of defense spending to GNP. The methodological problems in such comparisons are carefully discussed, particularly in the context of a U.S.-Soviet comparison. Kennedy concludes that international comparisons are crude and uncertain, but that they have some