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Professional Reading

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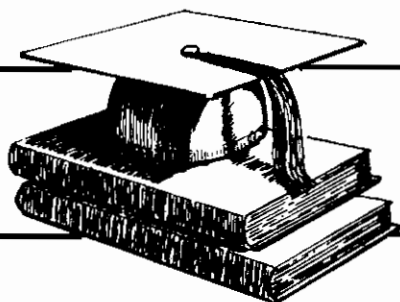
Thomas B. Buell

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PROFESSIONAL READING

Buell, Thomas B. *The Quiet Warrior: a Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1974. Page count unknown.

Comdr. Thomas B. Buell, U.S. Navy, has written a first-rate biography of one of the Navy's greatest World War II admirals, Raymond Ames Spruance. The study is full-length, but as it should, it stresses Spruance's great service as Commander 5th Fleet during most of the Pacific War. While needing no apology for the extent and quality of his research, Buell does explain that he is describing Spruance as seen at close quarters by those about him. Thus he focuses on this fascinating naval officer as he works his way up the ranks from Naval Academy graduation in September 1906 till retirement on 1 July 1948. The view is quite personal as Buell takes the reader to the stateroom, the mess, the quarterdeck, the bridge, and the flag bridge where Spruance passed his years. He deliberately does not give us the panoramic vistas from Admiral Nimitz' CINCPAC headquarters at Pearl Harbor or Guam. While enough is said about the grand strategy of the Pacific War to keep the reader oriented, the author prefers to examine the battle strategies developed by Admiral Spruance to meet the Japanese at Midway and in the Philippine Sea and his invasion strategies for the campaigns against the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, the Marianas, Iwo Jima, and finally Okinawa. The final product is intimate

enough to have been written by the admiral himself.

Though not trained as a historian, Commander Buell is thorough in his research and modern in his methodology. He examined carefully the manuscript records of the Navy Department and other branches of the Government in the National Archives, Office of Naval History, and the Naval War College. These official materials and the Spruance papers at the Naval War College, plus those of many naval officers close to the admiral, formed the documentary base for the biography. For color and, much more importantly, the answers to hundreds of minor questions that could not be divined from the records, Buell turned to oral interviews and personal correspondence with individuals who served with the admiral. Here the oral history collections of Columbia University and the United States Naval Institute proved invaluable. Through this type of research, pioneered by Samuel Eliot Morison and Walter Lord, Buell gives the reader an insider's view of how decisions were made in the offices ashore or in flag country on board *Enterprise*, *Indianapolis*, and *New Mexico*.

This is not the first biography of Admiral Spruance, but it is the most complete to date. In this study the author pays sufficient attention to Spruance's boyhood to provide some insights into the factors that shaped his personality. He traces out the early duty assignments that came to Spruance

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which helped develop his skills at command. Drawing on his previously published articles, Buell examines carefully Spruance's Naval War College tours. There he learned systematic planning and later returned twice before World War II to instruct others. As with several other officers, most importantly Admirals Nimitz and Kelly Turner, Buell believes the Naval War College duty provided Spruance with the firm foundation necessary for planning operations to prosecute war in the Pacific against Japan.

During his research the author was assisted mightily and then warned by Rear Adm. Richard J. (Carl) Moore not to put Admiral Spruance "on a pedestal." Heeding this advice, a fairly warm and believable picture of the admiral emerges from the study. While not diminishing his stature among those admitted by Professor Morison to the pantheon of World War II naval heroes, Buell found that the admiral was quite human. He could be outraged, carry a grudge, become excited, lose his bearings in "the fog of war," and even sulk—but not very often in any case. On the other hand, he was modest, almost despairingly so in the eyes of Nimitz' public relations people, and he was generous, trusting, forgiving of errors in his subordinates, loyal to those with whom he worked, decisive, courageous, and willing to live with decisions once made. He chose his staffs well and let them work unfettered. This released him from the clutter and burdensome details that swamped too many flag officers. Thus freed, he could think, plan, supervise, and at the end of a planning period he could enter a campaign at peace with himself. Spruance's incredible calmness during times of heaviest pressure under fire undoubtedly came from the confidence that his planning was sound. Buell suggests, by way of contrast, that Admiral Halsey's planning was haphazard at best and that the problems of the 3d Fleet's

operations are traceable to this weakness.

In describing Spruance's preparations and command of the operations from Midway through Okinawa, Commander Buell does the job economically and with a tight focus on the admiral and his staff. Here and there he adds interesting new information, but the main themes and interpretations remain as previous naval writers had left them. Because he did interview many from Spruance's staffs, he disagrees with what might be called "standard assessments" of several individuals with whom Spruance worked. Halsey's staff, which Admiral Spruance used at Midway, comes off badly tarnished, and the reader might easily wonder how the magnificent achievements of 4 June were ever accomplished amid such bungling. Reflecting his own Naval War College training, Commander Buell dismisses as being uninformed the criticisms of Spruance's cautious actions during the Battle of the Philippine Sea (17-20 June 1944). He believes that, as at Midway, the admiral interpreted his orders properly and used his fleet to accomplish the primary mission—maintaining the security of the invasion force attacking Saipan. Yet the author is willing to recognize that there were reasonable alternatives available to the admiral that might have permitted the fleet engagement that Admirals Marc Mitscher and Willis Lee believed could have been won. While he makes no judgments, Buell does acknowledge that Spruance did not really appreciate the striking power of the fast carrier groups and that he continued too long to use them as adjuncts to surface and amphibious operations. On this point the reader can find the aviator's views best spelled out in Clark Reynolds' *The Fast Carriers*.

With war's end, Admiral Spruance came quietly ashore to a fourth tour at the Naval War College, this time as President. Here he and the institution

gradually worked their way into the routines of postwar life. The admiral was tired and in this last duty he left no important and lasting impression on the functioning of the War College, though he did the next generation of naval officers a great favor by scrapping Admiral Kalbfus' manual, *Sound Military Decision*. With retirement on 1 July 1948, Admiral Spruance sought respite from the cares of a career of steadily increasing responsibilities. Four years later his gardening on the Monterey Peninsula was interrupted by appointment as U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of the Philippines. Buell provides a good deal of information about the admiral's activities in the Philippines that has not been published previously. Filipino nationalists will not appreciate the clear confirmation of what they had suspected all along. The United States, through Spruance's embassy, did work covertly to see that Ramon Magsaysay won the presidential election of 1953. While not approving of the admiral's mission and the deceit he had to practice to accomplish it, Buell accepts Spruance's activities in the spirit of "the end justified the means." Upon return to America in April 1955, Admiral Spruance then remained fully retired until his death on 13 December 1969.

Commander Buell deserves the thanks of the Navy, those who served with Admiral Spruance's forces during World War II, and the reading public in general for this excellent biography. His industry and honesty are evident from beginning to end. While he did not exactly adhere to Admiral Moore's prescription, he did leave us with a readable and believable biography of a truly superb naval officer. It has the quality that the "Quiet Warrior" would have appreciated.

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Hyatt, A.M.J., ed. *Dreadnought to Polar: Maritime Strategy Since Mahan*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1973. 125p.

Discussions of naval strategy frequently fall into one of two categories: the highly speculative or the greatly detailed. Happily, this modest volume avoids both categories. Instead, it is a thoughtful and reflective collection of essays originally presented as papers at a conference at the University of Western Ontario in 1972. The contributors include distinguished and well-known historians, such as Theodore Ropp and Arthur Marder, as well as several lesser known men. All the papers are of a uniformly high scholarly and literary quality.

In discussing Sir Julian Corbett's work, D.M. Schurman emphasizes Corbett's insistence that national policy and need should govern naval policy. Lest this point appear simplistic, Theodore Ropp points out in "German Seapower: a Study in Failure" that prior to World War I, Germany failed to reexamine the strategic implications of the political decisions to build the High Seas Fleet. This failure, he maintains, was as much individual as it was institutional.

Following World War I, the United States seized the initiative and proposed a specific formula for naval arms limitation at the Washington Conference. A particularly good essay examines the objections raised by Adm. Sir Herbert Richmond to the Washington formula. Richmond's objections merit considerable study and reflection, because his proposal called for smaller navies and hence less expensive ones than those authorized. According to his analysis, these navies would be more effective because they would be more closely tied to the needs of national policies.

Current problems and concerns are also reflected in informative and enlightening essays on the problems of arms control and the high seas in the