

1973

Book Review

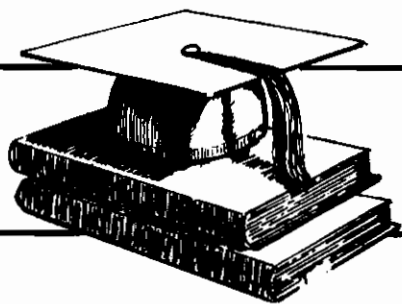
The U.S. Naval War College

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PROFESSIONAL READING

Corbett, Sir Julian S. *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1972. 310p.

Why study strategy? Students frequently ask this question at the Naval War College.

Corbett argues strongly for a study of strategy for descriptive purposes. That is to say, such study should be for the purpose of ordering data by providing a framework for reference. As an example he cites the study of meteorology and navigation. No one would suggest that a study of weather and currents would provide a prescription of how they will behave at a given time and place, but an understanding of how they generally behave is indispensable to a mariner. To Corbett this justification for a theoretical study of strategy is "not a substitute for judgement and experience, but as a means of fertilizing both." For this reason it can do no man harm.

Corbett points out that a study of strategy is not a "how to" activity directed toward learning how to conduct wars. In other words, the study of strategy should not be used for prescriptive purposes. The reason for this is that such prescriptions will inevitably lead to dogma. The unique characteristics of each war fought on the basis of dogma prescribed from the study of previous wars will result in much mischief by way of impractical or unrealistic war plans.

The payoff ultimately is to be found

in conceptual unity, first of all between a commander and his subordinates, so they can understand the objectives to be achieved, all the better to accomplish them. Secondly, conceptual unity is necessary between a commander and his civilian masters so that both will know what precisely is the desired result or strategic effect of military or naval operations.

The first part of the book is an excellent exposition of a theory of war, based to a large extent on the writings of Karl von Clausewitz, who saw "that real war was in fact an international relation which differed from other international relations only in the method we adopted to achieve the objective of our policy." This is rather an elegant way of restating Clausewitz' dictum that war is a continuation of policy by other means.

It follows that in considering any military or naval operation the first question to be determined is simply: what is the war about? When the object of the war is clear, the next question is: how much value do we and the enemy attach to it?

At this point Corbett makes a distinction between limited and unlimited wars. This distinction rests on "the intensity with which the spirit of the Nation" is absorbed in the attainment of the objective of the war. He also notes that wars may be limited by geographical factors, especially "the strategic isolation of the object." His

conclusion is that maritime powers are best suited to conduct limited wars, primarily because such wars tend to be located in remote or easily isolated areas. Corbett's conclusion logically follows, which is, simply, that military and naval operations are the means to achieve the goals of policy. He notes, "the means adopted must conflict as little as possible with the political conditions from which the war springs."

The second portion of the book is concerned with the theory of naval war. The object of naval warfare is command of the sea or, at least, the prevention of the enemy from securing it. Corbett is careful to point out that command of the sea means control of maritime communications and not the conquering or occupation of the seas, which is physically impossible. Corbett also points out that if one belligerent loses command of the sea, it does not automatically pass to the other belligerent.

Corbett expounds the concept of a "fleet in being." This is essentially a fleet which is ready to engage or, at the very least, to harass an enemy. Even a fleet inferior in size and in strength can be used defensively to prevent an enemy with superior force from exercising command of the sea. This is the reason that if one belligerent loses command of the sea, the other automatically does not gain it.

The third portion of the book discusses the conduct of naval war. In it Corbett analyzes the methods of securing command, the methods of disputing command, and the methods of exercising command. His analysis is based on an extensive and thorough knowledge of British maritime history from the English-Dutch wars of the mid-17th century through the English-French wars of the 18th century, including the extensive maritime and naval operations of the Napoleonic wars. Examples are also drawn from the Russo-Japanese and the Spanish-American wars.

Advances in naval technology from sail to steam to nuclear power have not rendered obsolete the fundamentals of war or of maritime strategy. Only the means have changed. The British triumph over Napoleon brought an era of extensive fleet operations to a close. With only a few exceptions, the next major fleet operations occurred during the Second World War. For this reason, a student of naval strategy must go back to the age of sail for a thorough understanding of the employment of naval forces.

Corbett is as relevant for the naval officer in the electronic age as he was for the officers in the Royal Naval College who attended his lectures in the early years of this century. The theoretical study of strategy is not only useful, but necessary, because it can determine the normal, to use Corbett's phrase, by collating past events to ascertain what lines of action tended to produce what effects. The idiosyncrasies of war militate against similar lines of action necessarily producing similar effects in subsequent situations. Ultimately, a commander must exercise his own judgment and rely on his own experience, however conditioned, to determine specific courses of action to follow in each situation as it arises.

Clausewitz pointed out that the study of strategy should educate the mind of the military commander, but it should not accompany him on to the battlefield. Corbett wholeheartedly agrees.

The Naval Institute Press has performed a great service to naval officers and students of strategy by publishing a 1972 edition of this 1911 classic. Unfortunately, the price of \$14 will inevitably discourage many otherwise interested readers. Regrettably, a less expensive paperback edition was not published.

B.M. SIMPSON, III
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McKee, Christopher. *Edward Preble: a Naval Biography, 1761-1807*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1972. 394p.

Writing to President John Adams in 1799, Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert remarked:

Our Navy at this time, when its character is to form, ought to be commanded by men who, not satisfied with escaping censure, will be unhappy if they do not receive and merit praise; by men who have talents and activity, as well as spirit, to assist a judicious arrangement for the employment of the force under their command or to cure the defects of a bad one.

Professor Christopher McKee, librarian at Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa, uses this quotation as the theme of his scholarly biography of Capt. Edward Preble. Focusing on the detailed events of Preble's career from his youth in Maine, through service in the Massachusetts Navy during the Revolution and experience in the merchant marine, to his career in the U.S. Navy, McKee paints him as the personification of the American naval officer corps that came to leadership between 1801 and 1807. Although Preble was a stern captain who did not always command a happy ship, McKee sees that his success was based on the intellectual ability to understand the military, diplomatic, and commercial aspects of the naval profession and to harmonize, in his actions, the administration's policies with that understanding. In this way, McKee weaves the tactics of the squadron before Tripoli with Jeffersonian naval policy. Although not involved with the intellectual issues of strategic theory or the origins of policy, McKee rather successfully deals with Preble at the point where strategy, tactics, policy, and personality interact. This study is a useful contribution to an area of American naval history that has long been

ignored. It is thoroughly documented with primary source materials dispersed in depositories ranging from Paris and London to Portland, Maine; Washington, D.C.; and California.

McKee's careful scholarship adds insight into the history of the U.S. Navy's early period. While what he says is valuable, it is not the only approach that may be taken for a study of Preble. Seen in the broader perspective of American and modern European history, the student also needs to understand the reasons why Preble captured the popular imagination with his vigorous campaign in the Mediterranean and the effect that it had in broad national and international terms. McKee's work is generally confined to specific naval, maritime, and diplomatic events. He leaves for others to discuss the broad ramifications of these problems.

For instance, one might note that the Congressional gold medal inscribed to Preble, "*Vindici Commercii Americani Ante Tripoli*," reflected the sustained purpose behind the war and was an expression of the emerging American nationality and patriotism. At the same time, the comments of prominent men of the day brought recognition to a fledgling country. Horatio Nelson could say that the burning of the frigate *Philadelphia* was "The most bold and daring Act of the Age" and the Pope could declare that Preble "with a small force and in a short space of time, has done more for the cause of Christianity than the most powerful nations of Christendom have done for ages."

The detailed drawings of battle tactics and the extensive quotation from primary sources may make this volume less appealing to the general reader. However, it is a valuable contribution to the library of a specialist.

JOHN B. HATTENDORF
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Wenk, Edward, Jr. *The Politics of the Ocean*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972. 588p.

The Politics of the Ocean is an unusual book, unusual in that while it is written as a contemporary chronicle of recent developments, it remains one of the most valuable reference works in the field of oceanology today. In his first three chapters, the author describes the sequence of events which ultimately led to congressional passage of the Marine Resources and Engineering Development Act of 1966 and subsequent congressional efforts which created the National Council on Marine Resources and Engineering Development to implement this mandate. As Executive Secretary of the Marine Resources Council, Dr. Wenk is in a unique position to report on the council's continuing efforts.

Inasmuch as oceanology is a relatively new and expanding field and one which will grow in importance in the future, the remainder of the book concentrates on the formidable challenge it presents to those interested in the future well-being of this country. Five case studies are presented which illustrate the problems associated with trying to develop rational means of managing an area which amounts to 85 percent of the surface of this planet. Foremost amongst these are: the difficulties in developing an agreed upon concept of the coastal zone as an area of public trust; gaining greater knowledge and understanding of the oceans as a basis for new concepts of ocean law and international relations; Government and industry efforts to develop the resources of the oceans and the failure of these efforts to achieve the critical mass required for synergistic action; and the high hopes for a wet NASA as an institutional focal point for ocean-related projects and problems.

Progress today in each one of these areas has been unsatisfactory, largely because of the Government's failure to

effectively coordinate a national program focusing on the full range of ocean problems. Although the Congress gave the executive branch a clear mandate to initiate and implement a National Maritime Program in the Marine Resources Act of 1966 and supported the executive branch whenever it exercised its mandate, difficulties arose in the implementation of these new programs. There are over 35 Federal agencies or departments which have varying degrees of responsibility for implementing programs of maritime concern, not to mention the many states with coastal areas and rights. Given this fragmentation of authority, it is not surprising that the Government's overall program has only achieved limited success to date. The Marine Resources Council, with the Vice President of the United States as its chairman, did have sufficient power to accomplish some of its goals before it was disbanded. Dr. Wenk clearly shows that the proximity of the council to the White House was the source of its power and that without the support of the White House it became less effective. With the advent of the National Oceans and Atmosphere Agency (NOAA) and its advisory committee (NACOA), however, the Marine Resources Council disappeared from the scene.

The book is a powerful one. Dr. Wenk identifies the persons involved in most of the proceedings by name; gives the facts surrounding situations as he sees them; states his opinions forcefully on many subjects concerning the oceans; and while the book is not unbiased, the insights it provides are nonetheless important because of the key role its author played in the events described. No one is better qualified to express his opinions, for no one has had access to more facts or has been more involved with this attempt than Dr. Wenk.

The author very properly points out that the task of bringing rational man-

agement to our ocean resources has just begun. While we have just taken the first halting steps on a national scale, we must also acknowledge the need to concurrently develop international institutions designed to manage the world's oceans as a whole within the context of the United Nations Law of the Sea Conference. The book ends with a ringing call to seize the initiative in this area, imploring the reader to consider

the law of the sea as one of the possible alternatives in the development of our own national strategy.

In summary, *The Politics of the Oceans* is mandatory reading for anyone who understands that a nation's maritime policy must entail more than maintaining naval forces in readiness.

WAYNE J. SMITH
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy



If your book could persuade some of our new soldiers to read and mark and learn things outside drill manuals and tactical diagrams, it would do a good work.

T.E. Lawrence: Letter to Liddell Hart, 26 June 1933