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## Robert Blake, General-at-Sea

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seapower, the development of airpower, and a form of offensive mobility, all of which undercut the need for a continental commitment. Limited liability was based on the assumption that Britain would have strong continental allies who would fight.

Vansittart pointed out that this assumption was essentially invalid. Britain's allies would not consider sea and air participation sufficient. International politics required a sizable British land contribution, if only because the French Army would have to bear the brunt of any German westward move. Furthermore, the Little Entente would resist German pressure to the extent that French guarantees were backed by British military power.

Nevertheless, by the end of 1937 Chamberlain had committed Britain to limited liability, even though military and diplomatic advisers had warned of its potential effects. Nineteen hundred and thirty eight saw not only Hitler's annexation of Austria, but also the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia at Munich. Mr. Dennis succinctly comments, "The power of persuasion rested ultimately on the ability to threaten: that the British utterly lacked." After Munich, the French looked to the British to make up for the loss of some 35 Czech divisions.

By this time it was abundantly clear that some sort of British continental commitment was necessary. Unfortunately, the current state of Britain's Armed Forces precluded one. Peacetime conscription was the only answer. From January 1939 the Government took halting steps, in Mr. Dennis' words, to prepare the nation for war, not as part of any coherent plan, but as an attempt to pacify public opinion. Hitler's annexation of the non-German people of Slovakia in March 1939 led directly to the adoption of peacetime conscription by the end of April.

Mr. Dennis has written a thorough and factual account which is an ex-

cellent study in how not to relate defense policy to national interests.

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Powell, J.R. *Robert Blake, General-at-Sea*. New York: Crane, Russak & Company, 1972. 352p.

At first glance, there seems to be an air of distant unreality about the naval wars of the 17th century. The yellowed paintings of the time depict long-beaked ships encrusted with gilded carvings and ornamented with gaudy banners. Lace collars, ruffled sleeves, and flowing, shoulder-length hair seem to contrast starkly with burnished armor and the glint of sword blades in the portraits of great leaders. How could ships such as these sail the Atlantic; how could such men be sailors?

It was an age of contrast. This was the era that saw the early colonies in North America struggling for survival, yet, it was also the sophisticated age of Spinoza, Grotius, Rembrandt, Dryden, Andrew Marvell, and John Milton. It saw the flourishing of the Dutch maritime empire and the triumph of absolutism in France under Richelieu and Louis XIV. In England, Oliver Cromwell, with a Puritan minority, had beheaded the King and established a dictatorship in the name of constitutional and parliamentary government. While Cromwell ruled uneasily at home, his foreign policy was more successful. Ireland was subjugated; a successful attack was launched on Dutch maritime ascendancy; and war with Spain brought the prize of Jamaica, the star of English possessions in the Caribbean. To accomplish this, Cromwell spurred the greatest flurry of naval activity in England since the days of Henry VIII.

Amidst this setting, Robert Blake stands as the most important figure in 17th century British naval history. J.R. Powell's portrait of Blake is not painted on so broad a canvas, but it is important for a newcomer to the 17th century to

realize at the outset that he is not only dealing with a man who was significant in his own time, but also one of the three or four most important men in all of British naval history.

Born in England's West Country, the birthplace of many other great seamen, Blake received a liberal university education and went on to become a member of the Short Parliament. Later he achieved national renown during the English Civil War in the Parliamentary Army. His successful defense of Lyme and Taunton against the Royalist Army helped to turn the tide in favor of Cromwell's forces.

When Cromwell came to power, he and his government discovered that the English Navy had been left totally demoralized, disorganized, undisciplined, and leaderless. Hoping to return efficiency and loyalty to the navy, Cromwell selected Blake to handle the administrative organization of a rejuvenated navy. With two others, Richard Deane and Alexander Popham, Blake was given the title "general-at-sea" and given joint command of the fleet. He proved to be not only an efficient and effective administrator, but a remarkable leader who quickly earned the respect and trust of the sailors in the fleet. For the first time English seamen found themselves well treated, properly clothed, fed, and even paid. Although this achievement seriously strained the financial resources of the Government, Blake was largely responsible for developing an efficient, centrally controlled organization which, when combined with skilled leadership and high morale, would soon enable the English Fleet to defeat the greatest and most successful navy of the age.

In the battles of the first Anglo-Dutch War, Blake and his fellow generals-at-sea introduced the tactical concept of the line ahead, the basic pattern for tactical maneuvers which would last for nearly three centuries. In spite of the fact that the enemy had a long

tradition of naval victory and sea experience, Blake, the soldier-seaman who had not even gone to sea until he was 49 years old, defeated the greatest admirals of his time: Tromp, De Ruyter, and De With. Following the defeat of the Dutch, England emerged as the supreme naval power in Europe. Among the generals-at-sea, it was Blake who was recognized as the great leader.

After the war Blake and his victorious fleet were sent east of Gibraltar to restore England's prestige in southern Europe and northern Africa. This precursor of the British Mediterranean Fleet won success against the Spanish, the French, and the Moors, demonstrating, for the first time, the importance of Gibraltar in controlling the naval power of France and Spain.

Blake's last victory was his most famous. He crowned his career by destroying the Spanish treasure fleet at Teneriffe.

Blake's achievements have been known, but for centuries the man called Robert Blake has remained a shadowy figure in history. An eminent scholar of 17th century naval history, J.R. Powell has devoted half a lifetime to studying Blake. His edition of the *Letters of Robert Blake* was published by the Navy Records Society in 1937 and has since been followed by *Documents Relating to the Civil War* (1963) and *The Rupert and Monck Letter Book, 1666* (1969) and a full-scale study, *The Navy in the English Civil War* (1962). Powell's study of Robert Blake surpasses all previous studies of this important, but little known figure. His thorough scholarship and wide-ranging research are the basis for a study that reevaluates the pioneering work of Hannay, J.K. Laugh-ton, Julian Corbett, and other naval historians of this era. By careful scholarship, Powell explodes the legend of the "Protestant" wind that supposedly allowed Blake's fleet to escape from Teneriffe. In a similar investigation, he shows that no evidence can be found to

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prove that Tromp raised a broom to the masthead of his flagship signifying that he had victoriously swept Blake from the seas after the battle off Dungeness. While Powell does not see Blake in the broadest terms of 17th century history, he does broadly sketch a background that includes the important international events and naval problems. Most importantly, Powell has discovered something of the man amidst the events. The scarcity of sources and Blake's own personality have ensured that he will always remain a vaguely defined figure in history, but Powell has captured for us as much of Blake's character and personality as we are ever likely to recover. Unlike Nelson, Blake was not a dramatic, flamboyant character. He opposed unnecessary casualties in battle and had the kind of common sense that could lead to admonish a glory-seeking officer, "I do not love a fool-hardy captain, therefore temper your courage with discretion . . ." (p. 251). He was an educated, thinking man who could see clearly beyond the gunwales of his own ship. Powell has successfully taken us deeper than the ruffled collars and burnished armor. This portrait of one of England's most consistently successful officers deals with the beginning of the English Navy as a profession, the development of naval administration, the origins of naval tactics, and the crucial role of personality and leadership in naval affairs. Every serious student of such matters should find this scholarly and detailed biography worthwhile.

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Schoenfeld, Maxwell P. *The War Ministry of Winston Churchill*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1972. 283p.

Mr. Schoenfeld has undertaken a most ambitious project. To write what is essentially a wartime biography of Winston Spencer Churchill requires that

one explore the personality of a most complex individual, examine the organizations—both formal and informal—of the British Ministries of War and the Foreign Office, develop the chronology of the war itself, and, most ambitious of all, discuss inter-Allied relationships and Churchill's role in the formation of Allied strategy and policy. That he has essentially succeeded is a tribute to his style and ability as well as his courage.

Churchill, of course, wore two hats in the British Government during the Second World War. He was both Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. It was impossible, in his eyes, to separate the two offices because of the simple fact that waging war was the sole policy of the British Government from 1939 to 1945. Just so, it is impossible to separate those roles in analyzing him today. This book, then, is not only a study of the British War Ministry, but of Churchill himself.

The first half of the book examines Churchill, the man, in his various aspects (The Politician, The Administrator, The Warrior), while the second half traces the events of the war years from the formation of the Grand Alliance to Potsdam and the abrupt termination of the Churchill ministry. The unfortunate result is that Churchill is somehow artificially divorced from the events that surrounded him in real life. In a brief 256 pages, therefore, we read what amounts to two books: one on Churchill, one on World War II diplomacy.

The story of World War II diplomacy has been told before, and it should not be expected that in this slim volume Mr. Schoenfeld could surpass the efforts of either W.H. McNeill or Herbert Feis; by far the greatest contribution of this book is the portrait we are given of Churchill.

The "popular" image of Churchill, particularly in the United States, is that of a sturdy and determined man with a bulldog's chin and a stirring voice who personified British resistance to Nazi