

1972

British Battleship 1860-1850

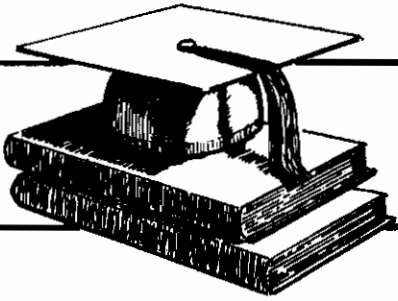
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PROFESSIONAL READING

Parkes, Oscar, *British Battleships 1860-1950*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1972. 701p., Rev. Ed.

Naval history texts normally concentrate on officers' wartime decisions on how to use the ships available to them, yet years before the war other officers participated in equally fateful decisions on what types of ships would be available. These actions are usually not studied, but in a peacetime navy, no officers make more important decisions than those about the selection of new ship designs. To Englishmen in the last half of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century, the most important of that kind of decision dealt with battleships, the keystone of England's naval power. This book covers a period from broadside-mounted guns in full rigged iron ships to radar controlled 15 inch guns, yet the questions facing the men charged with determining the type of battleships to be built were always of a similar nature. If it is technically possible to build a larger gun, should we put it on our new ships even if that means a larger, more expensive ship? Should we sacrifice armor for speed or speed for armor or try for both at the price of fewer ships for the same money? Should we keep our reliable propelling machinery or try a new invention (compound engines, turbines, small tube boilers or oil fuel) which would improve the ship if it succeeded but render the ship worthless if it failed? Is the new weapon (ram, mine, torpedo boat, submarine, or airplane) as powerful as its supporters claim, and

how much of the ship should we allocate to weapons and armor to resist this menace? What is a possible opponent's answer to the other questions, and what type of ship will they build? Can England afford to build such ships? Can England afford not to build such ships? Obviously such questions are still with us, and even though they worried about shell against armor instead of missile versus ECM, the English experience with battleship design is of interest.

The book explores what factors went into the answering of the questions and thus the selection of armament, size, and power of England's battleships. The tactical and technical factors are covered by small sections on the challenge presented by the ships other nations built during the same period. The state of the art in armament, armour, and antibattleship weapons like torpedo boats is discussed for each era. The author introduces short biographies of Directors of Naval Construction and Sea Lords to inform the reader of the caliber and personalities of the men involved in the decisions; professional rivalries could influence a design as well as military requirements. The political and budgetary forces which affected the designs are mentioned, and the distorting effects of peacetime scrimping followed by panic rearmament are well covered. Alternate designs that were considered and rejected are explored in some detail. The most interesting of these paper ships are the alternate *Dreadnought* designs and the canceled post-World War I battle cruisers.

The end products of the decision process were the ships that were actually constructed, and the book has a great deal of data on these vessels. Evaluations of seaworthiness, habitability, and usefulness by men who served on the ships are reported. The author gives his own interesting criticism on the armaments, armor, and purposes of each class of ships and has included many miscellaneous tidbits of information such as costs, comfort, and other items; modifications and modernizations; short summaries of the battles the heavy ships participated in and what lessons were learned from the ship's war service; and a brief listing of service life and final disposition is included for each ship.

Dr. Parkes spent 30 years in the making of this authoritative book on British heavy ships, with most of his data being drawn from Admiralty sources. The book is well written and is illustrated with over 450 rare photographs and plans. One regrets that this new edition's reproductions of photographs suffer slightly in comparison to the original English edition of 15 years ago due to being printed on flat instead of glossy paper, but this is probably necessary to control the cost of the book. The author's many sketches and plans are well drawn and informative. Individuals with an interest in naval history and what factors go into the evolution of ships would find this book well worth reading.

PHILIP J. SIMS

The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam. Senator Gravel ed., Boston: Beacon Press, 1971. Four vols. 2899p.

The publication of *The Pentagon Papers* by *The New York Times* on Sunday, 13 June 1971, was one of the most sensational events in the history of American journalism. Hitherto highly

classified documents relating to national decisionmaking on Vietnam at top governmental levels were widely published. Their publication raised profound constitutional questions regarding necessary confidentiality of the U.S. Government balanced against the first amendment right of freedom of the press. This is an interesting issue, but it is a collateral issue as far as the professional military officer is concerned.

The Pentagon Papers are now a part of the public record. The study was commissioned by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara for use within the Department of Defense. It provides a rich documentary source, including papers that many officers would never see in the course of their careers. It also contains short analytical summaries of the various major subsections, and these summaries are followed by extensive, but succinct, chronologies which help keep the important events straight.

This is not comprehensive history, because only documents in the possession of the Department of Defense were used. The anonymous authors of these volumes did not have access to State Department and White House files, and this limitation is a flaw in *The Pentagon Papers*. Still, *The Pentagon Papers* are an important source of primary material for the professional military officer.

In his emotional foreword to the four-volume edition published by the Beacon Press of Boston, Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska says the American people have been misled, misunderstood, and ingored in the pursuit of a "reckless foreign policy which the people never sanctioned." He concludes that if the facts had been known, the war would have ended sooner. This is a highly questionable and certainly unprovable thesis, which nevertheless, enjoys a degree of popularity in some circles. The Senator goes on to say that *The Pentagon Papers* do not reveal any military secrets, only "an appalling litany of faulty premises and ques-