

1972

Book Review

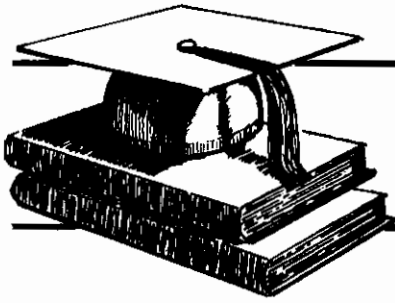
The U.S, Naval War College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

War College, The U.S, Naval (1972) "Book Review," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 25 : No. 7 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol25/iss7/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.



PROFESSIONAL READING

Karsten, Peter. *The Naval Aristocracy: the Golden Age of Annapolis and the Emergence of Modern Navalism* New York: Free Press, 1972. 461p.

Professor Karsten, a young historian and former naval officer, has undertaken a historical and sociological study of the professional naval officer from 1845, the date of the founding of the Naval Academy, to 1925, the year that the permanent Naval Reserve was established. During this period the naval officer corps was, as Professor Karsten suggests, a remarkably homogeneous socioprofessional group knit together by close ties of family, religion, social class, and professional identity. The author explores nearly every aspect of their life and thought, from marriage and family to political and social ideas. Their 19th century roles as diplomats, lobbyists, explorers, publicists, and inventors all come under close scrutiny. Few naval officers will be flattered by the results. The author finds "racism, authoritarianism and warmongering" to be rather widespread among these 19th century leaders of the U.S. Navy.

The officer corps was wealthy, old-stock American, and lily white, with few Baptists or Methodists and fewer Jews. Blacks were employed mainly as stewards and body servants. The American officers aped and admired the British, held other races and peoples in contempt, and believed unswervingly in the "survival of the fittest" among nations. At the Naval Academy the young midshipmen were taught a thorough identification with the service,

its reputation, and its interests.

Much, if not all, of the activities of these 19th century officers, Karsten suggests, can be understood as an effort to advance the interests of the Navy and of their own careers in the Navy. On the domestic scene they ceaselessly wrote and lobbied for a larger Navy, while internationally they "earnestly sought an opportunity to demonstrate [their] valor and abilities in combat; an aim which appears to have led [them] to offer force in dubious situations." The naval officers despised the American merchants and missionaries whom, in their role as "policeman of the seas," they were obliged to protect. Nevertheless, they assiduously guarded and promoted American business interests overseas, conceiving them to be identical to "the national interest."

Professor Karsten's thoroughgoing reassessment of Mahan and his role will probably be of great interest to historians. The author points out that concepts such as "seapower" and "control of the sea" were hardly original with Mahan. Neither did his books serve to convert large numbers of people to navalism and expansionism; most of them were already converted. The author strips away the layers of esoteric scholastic commentary, with which scholars have surrounded the admiral's work, to reveal what should have been evident all along: that the *Seapower* books were, first and foremost, an instrument for obtaining a big Navy. "Expansionist ideology was quite agreeable to Mahan . . . But it was the Navy's

growth and prosperity that was the first mover. It was the Navy for which he fought and the Navy, for Mahan, needed no justification." (p. 339)

Although it is an impressive performance, *The Naval Aristocracy* is not without some shortcomings, the most serious being that Professor Karsten, as he frankly admits, simply does not like the officers he is writing about. The result is that, in a few places, the book reads more like an indictment than a social history. In almost every instance, doubtful or ambiguous evidence is resolved in favor of the prosecution. Thus Capt. Percival Drayton's remark that "a little despotism in government is a good thing," is taken as typical of the views of his naval colleagues, while this same officer's very liberal (for the time) views on race relations are presented as quite untypical. Authoritarian, militaristic, or racist remarks by naval officers are presented in the text as typical; more moderate or contradictory remarks by other naval officers are presented in the footnotes as "exceptions." Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to dismiss this book as merely an antimilitary polemic. Professor Karsten is a serious scholar who appears to have waded through every collection of personal papers, every memoir, and every biography pertaining to his "naval aristocracy." On many important points his documentation and the weight of statistical evidence he brings to bear are impressive and quite persuasive. The book will probably stand for a long time as the definitive study of the naval officer corps.

The Naval Aristocracy may be taken as indicative of a new trend in military history away from the narrow accounts of battles and the laudatory biographies of great captains. The time has passed when the military profession and its members can expect historians to accept, at face value, their beliefs about the nature and function of their profession. Naval readers who are disturbed by

some of Professor Karsten's findings may derive some comfort from the fact that historians are also beginning to examine the lawyers, the Army, the Foreign Service, and the medical profession in the same critical spirit. The indications are that the results will be no more flattering than *The Naval Aristocracy*.

Dr. Ronald Spector
Historian, Current History Branch
Office of the Chief of Military History

Taylor, Maxwell D. *Swords and Plowshares*. New York: Norton, 1972. 434p.

There are two diametrically opposed schools of thought on military professionalism. One school maintains that the job of a military man is not to reason why in matters of foreign policy but to win wars by military means and leave all other considerations to civilians. The other school argues, however, that the military does have responsibilities in the field of foreign policy and should make recommendations on the question of whether or not to use military force.

In a 1969 speech at West Point, Gen. Maxwell Taylor attempted to reconcile these contrasting views. But in his autobiographical *Swords and Plowshares* General Taylor leaves little doubt about which position he espoused in his distinguished post-World War II career as Commander of the 8th Army in Korea, Army Chief of Staff, Military Representative to the President, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Ambassador to South Vietnam, and White House Consultant. Never does the erudite general, publicly or privately, in or out of uniform, express any misgivings about the basic premises of the post-World War II containment policy. Instead, Taylor hails the Truman decision to intervene in Korea as courageous; he studies the Bay of Pigs disaster without even addressing the question of whether the United States should be invading Cuba in the first place; and he makes

96 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

numerous trips to Vietnam and serves as Ambassador in that unhappy country without ever once challenging the rightness of our involvement.

Taylor's position on the role of military leaders is very much in the tradition of his predecessors as Army leaders, i.e., Bradley and Ridgway. However, the fact that Taylor emerges in this mold is surprising, and indeed disappointing, because Taylor was supposed to be different than other military men. Indeed, this is precisely why he was brought back into government by the Kennedy administration.

In addition to tracing his career from West Point to Saigon, Taylor also summarizes the lessons of his experience in two concluding chapters entitled "Lessons from Vietnam," and "Adjustments to Declining Power." Those who were disappointed by Taylor's position in the first part of the book will be greatly troubled by his conclusions. The general condemns the policy of gradualism in Vietnam as immoral; advocates that future presidents use military force swiftly and decisively, regardless of the international consequences; laments the fact that negotiation has become the controlling objective of our policy in Vietnam; and lays the majority of the blame for the divisions in our society and the defamation of our institutions on the media.

Nonetheless, the book is valuable for those interested in the attitudes and perceptions of military leaders. Like Lyndon Johnson's *Vantage Point*, Taylor's memoirs are poor history, (e.g., his account of the involvement of the Kennedy administration in the overthrow of Diem), but rich in character insights that make it easier to understand how the United States became immersed in Vietnam.

Lawrence J. Korb
Associate Professor Political Science
U.S. Coast Guard Academy

Tolley, Kemp. *Yangtze Patrol: the U.S. Navy in China*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1971. 292p.

At a time when the reader is sated with books of China, it hardly seems profitable to recommend yet another. Yet, *Yangtze Patrol* will be of great interest to all naval officers and especially to those who served with the modern-day version of the river patrol in the Mekong Delta. To one unschooled in the annals of naval history, this writer believed the Mekong patrols to be innovative and representative of the modern and flexible Navy, only to find precedent along the Yangtze and in "Mr. Lincoln's Brown Water Navy."

In *Yangtze Patrol*, Rear Admiral Tolley traces the history of the Navy's river gunboats from the inception of the Yangtze Patrol to its enforced demise at the onset of World War II. The gunboats sailed the inland waters of a foreign land to protect the lives of the many American citizens in China, to protect U.S. commercial interests, and to insure that other foreign nationals gained no advantage over our traders. Even when their useful function ceased in China at the time of the Japanese conquest there, the sailors and gunboats of the river patrol continued to serve in admirable fashion, as a few of their number survived to aid the defense of Corregidor in Manila Bay. Although the Yangtze gunboats may have found themselves aground many times on the mudflats of the Yangtze, they hardly anticipated that their final grounding would be at Corregidor, with the last of their crews manning the defenses of that stronghold.

The author draws from his own experience as a former river rat to enliven the accounts of his predecessors. He relies mainly on the prolific writings of the gunboats themselves to enrich and color the account, presenting a bizarre, exciting, and highly readable account of the early American experience in China.

The expansive television coverage of

President Nixon's recent trip to China provided the American viewers with their first public view of China in 20 years, and in the course of the extravaganza there was revealed a new, modern, and efficient China. Admiral Tolley's book describes an entirely different face of the Middle Kingdom. As well as recounting the lives and work of American navy men in China, *Yangtze Patrol* presents an interesting study of the struggle for control of China, particularly between the first revolution in 1911 and the outbreak of World War II. Within this time period China was the scene of almost ceaseless warfare; between the warlords, between the warlords and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and between Chiang and the Communists. How did the nation survive?

Battles took place in China only when the contending forces were of equal or nearly equal strength. When one side outnumbered the other, it was customary for the smaller force to surrender or to join the larger. Foreigners found this philosophy to be very comic, whereas it was in fact proof of the profoundly pragmatic nature of ancient Chinese civilization. Had the ground rules not been such, the loss of life during the generally senseless civil wars from 1911 to 1926 would have been frightful. (p. 128)

The author also describes the confrontation between the Communists and the Nationalists, but the book is not entirely of war. *Yangtze Patrol* is essentially a story of the men and ships of the Chinese river patrols, with all the humor and horror that was the lot of the gunboat crews and their officers.

There is even something in the book for the Marines, with brief descriptions of the actions of the Fourth Marines. Yet, perhaps more interesting is the account of the time that "Brute" Krukak made a slight "miscalculation"; how-

ever, he managed to recover with the aplomb for which he was famous.

Yangtze Patrol is an excellent history of an era of naval warfare that is most often the subject of sea stories. The book contains a wealth of material that reads like a novel, yet is fact. It is the type of light history that is easily read and highly interesting.

R.D. AMMON
Major, U.S. Marine Corps

Worcester, George R.G. *The Junks and Sampons of the Yangtze*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1971. 626p.

Americans generally tend to consider China as a great landmass probably because their impressions of that country are gained from small-scale maps in geography textbooks. Rather, it is a region of great rivers that open this heart of Asia to the sea. These rivers and a long coastline are what make this vast land area a maritime country.

The Jesuit missionary Gabriel Maillaing, in 1688, reported that there were more vessels in China than in the rest of the world together. This is probably still the case. Passenger traffic and the movement of freight is still mainly by junk which, except for the Arab dhow, is the world's only remaining commercial sailing vessel. The dhow is usually an open deck craft with a single lateen sail and is incapable of complex navigation and piloting. The junk, on the other hand, is a sophisticated, unique vessel with battened lug rigged sails, watertight compartmented hull, and, in many cases, balanced rudder. It is a universal type that has been adapted to almost every transport function on sea and river from railroad ferry to live fish carriers; flower boats and the fufu junks were essential and kept a malodorous balance between city sanitation and rural agriculture in a country that cannot afford domestic animals. Oddly, "junk" is not a Chinese term but a Portuguese adoption of the

98 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

Javanese word for ship, "djong." The Chinese term is "ch'uan." The Chinese small boat, "sampan," also has many distinctive functional types. Flat-bottomed, with very shallow draft, about 14 feet long and 4 feet wide, it is propelled by a single scull over the stern or by poles.

Junks and Sampans of the Yangtze has over 900 illustrations, most of them drawings to scale of these craft performing their many functions. There are also charming sketches like that of the five-masted Pechili trader (page 167) and several of the crooked stern junks of the Upper Yangtze. All were drawn by the author himself during his years of field research. Informative footnotes are tastefully placed at the side of the page together with many small photographs and model drawings of seagoing tools and parts. All contribute to making a beautiful book.

This large, folio-sized volume, however, is far more than a definitive work on these unusual sailing vessels. It is also a study of Chinese philosophy in which one gets a sense of this timeless land "just before time there ceased to stand still." It is also a detailed geographical presentation of the world's fifth largest and one of its foremost rivers, the major lifestream of a great continental country. One can follow the river from its estuary near fabled Shanghai to Ping-

shan, 1,700 miles from the sea, where the Min River joins after its 12,000 feet descent from the plateau of Tibet. A colorful discussion is devoted to the 200 miles from Ichang to Wansien, and the passage of the famous gorges that divide the Upper River from the rest of the Yangtze. The Chinese proverb warns: "It is more difficult to ascend to Szechwan than to ascend to heaven."

George Raleigh Gray Worcester left the British Navy in 1919 at the age of 29 to become River Inspector in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service. For 30 years he surveyed the Chinese coast and rivers and assisted in opening the Yangtze to steam navigation. He was released from other duties during the last 8 years to devote his time to Chinese nautical research, the result of which is this book, revised from five earlier works of limited circulation. His research was done during one of the most critical periods in China's tumultuous history, and he and his wife spent 3 years in a Japanese prison camp. After World War II he returned to England and served for 7 years as editor of the famed scholarly nautical publication, *The Mariner's Mirror*. He died in 1969, happy in the knowledge that his work would appear in its present form.

JOHN D. HAYES
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.)



There is only one way to read a book, to give yourself up to it, alone, without instruction as to what you should be finding in it, without the necessity of making it into a series of points, but enjoying it, coming to know in personal terms what is in the mind of the writer.

*Harold Taylor, "The Private World of the Man
with a Book," Saturday Review, 7 January 1961*