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The French Navy

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This is an excellent volume, especially suited to the curricula of the War College's first few months.

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Le Masson, Henri. *The French Navy*. New York: Doubleday, 1969. 2 v.

The French Navy was handicapped in many ways during the Second World War. Within a year all of the Atlantic and Channel ports were occupied by German forces, while French African possessions were threatened by De Gaulle's Free French movement. The action at Oran and the seizure by the British of all French vessels in ports under their control deprived the French Fleet of much of its fighting power, and the scuttling of the vessels in Toulon in 1942 further reduced its resources.

Henri le Masson has collected in two volumes a valuable historical reference work for the French Navy during World War II and during the interwar period. The average reader will be interested mainly in volume I, which describes the warships of the French Navy. Volume II deals with sloops, minesweepers, and other small auxiliary vessels.

In addition to the reference sections, the author begins his first volume with a brief commentary which sheds valuable light on French naval planning during the interwar years. In it he expresses criticism of the Popular Front government of Leon Blum and the social laws which that government enacted, claiming that they slowed down the rearmament efforts of the Third Republic.

In dealing with the 1940 defeat, the author defends the loyalty which the major units of the navy gave to the Vichy regime. He is critical of the British operation at Oran, pointing out that orders had already been given Admiral Darlan not to surrender the fleet—orders which were obeyed at Toulon 2 years later. As he was himself a naval liaison officer in London at the

time, his opinion on this matter is relevant.

While the primary benefit of this effort is its research effort, compiled from official sources, the author does neglect to discuss certain important facts about the French Navy. During these years, ship designs were very general in nature, and the details were usually supplied by engineers in the naval yards. This improvisation resulted in great variations in layout and performance.

A second factor the author fails to consider is the wisdom of allocating large resources to the French Navy at a time when the obvious enemy would be invading by land. Masson notes that the navy absorbed 21 percent of the French military budget until 1938, but he does not address himself to the question of whether such an expenditure was justified in the light of France's strategic situation. The French were naturally unwilling to rely on the British for the protection of their colonies, but could they, in fact, maintain simultaneously an army strong enough to contain Germany and a navy strong enough to play an independent role? The author apparently thinks this was possible, but the verdict of history leaves the question open to doubt.

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Marmion, Harry A. *Selective Service: Conflict and Compromise*. New York: Wiley, 1968. v.p.

This book is a short, but informative, effort to analyze the Selective Service System. The author's intent is to demonstrate the shortcomings of the present "draft" and to point up the need for reforms in the law beyond those incorporated in the 30 June 1967 Act (Public Law 90-40) which amended the existing Universal Military Training and Service Act. The volume contains a valuable brief history of the Selective Service