2018


James P. McGrath III

Scott Mobley

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

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol71/iss4/13

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.
reader gains a nuanced mental picture of the moving parts on both sides of the conflict. Scholars and researchers who desire in-depth information will benefit from Giangreco's research, and the appendices and bibliography include numerous primary sources that have received little or no attention in past traditionalist-versus-revisionist debates. This work is a must-read for those interested in U.S. and Japanese military and political historiography and strategy in the final year of World War II and the critical factors contributing to war termination in the Pacific.

GINA GRANADOS PALMER


Judging Scott Mobley’s Progressives in Navy Blue by its cover, it might seem a bit esoteric. The parallels with the modern U.S. Navy, however, quickly become apparent in this well-written and -researched history of the transition of our Navy from sail to steam and from constabulary force to national fleet. This is Mobley’s first book, but in a thirty-year career as a nuclear-trained surface warfare officer, including command of two ships, he lived the same “warrior-engineer” dichotomy that was central to the late-nineteenth-century American naval culture around which this book revolves. The U.S. Navy between the Civil and Spanish-American Wars engenders limited historical discourse owing to the lack of naval combat, but Mobley asserts that the progressive currents that the naval officer corps debated during this period marked a pivotal shift in ideas on naval professionalism and strategic thinking.

The Gilded Age Navy, in relation to its time, was not an anachronistic organization wedded to outdated ideas, as it often is portrayed. Indeed, in many ways, the Navy of the 1870s and 1880s preceded the national Progressive movement. Even as the Navy addressed the massive challenges involved in incorporating emerging technology into an organization steeped in tradition, the service simultaneously had to deal with the emergence of national strategic thought. The idea that America should maintain a navy for war during peacetime ran counter to a century of tradition. Mobley asserts that this change in strategic focus drove the cultural shift in the Navy officer corps. In this he challenges previous scholars “who attribute the Navy’s revival to a mix of commercial expansionism, hegemonic aspirations, and imperial ambition” (p. 12). Progressives in Navy Blue adds to the scholarship by considering the “influence of strategic ideas, beliefs, values, and practices upon the Navy’s professional culture and identity” (p. 14).

With the marked exception of the Civil War, within the service’s first century “decades of overseas service, policing, and promoting America’s maritime empire fundamentally shaped the U.S. Navy as a constabulary force led by mariner-warriors” (p. 37). The post–Civil War American navy emphasized single-ship operations, with limited to no opportunity for multiship training. Naval officers and civilian leaders saw no need to dedicate resources to homeland defense, believing that the frigate-and-coastal-fort system in place...
since the Navy’s inception still sufficed. But by 1880 the focus had shifted from imperial constabulary duties to national defense as “the essential foundation of naval policy” (p. 143).

While most historians tie the renaissance of the U.S. Navy to the nation’s imperialist expansion around the turn of the twentieth century, Mobley asserts that the birth of the modern American navy predated this imperialist surge—perhaps even facilitating it. Navy progressives were divided in their approach to advancing the Navy. One branch focused on harnessing technology, while the other advocated the study of strategy. As an ardent voice for technology, Lieutenant Bradley A. Fiske advocated for developing ships with the latest technology, to stand up to the more advanced European navies. At the opposite end of the progressive movement, Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce founded the Naval War College in 1884 to ensure that the officer corps studied not only emerging technology but also the art and science of war. These two branches of progressivism “clashed between 1887 and 1897 in a series of bureaucratic and cultural struggles, with the Naval War College their primary battleground” (p. 207). Despite their differences, however, “the two cultures complemented each other in many ways. . . . Indeed, many officers readily embraced both perspectives” (p. 207).

Using Harold L. Wilensky’s professionalization model, Mobley tracks how the U.S. naval officer corps established its professional credentials. The final step involved the establishment of the U.S. Naval Institute and the Naval War College as forums for debating ideas. Prior to the 1873 founding of the Naval Institute, no forum existed for professional discussion within the naval service. The institute was open to all officers; the founders hoped that the inclusion of many voices would advance the profession as a whole. Mobley claims that—contrary to historiography regarding this era holding that naval education existed only at the intellectual fringes—“the early Naval War College mirrored the progressive trends shaping new graduate schools and social science disciplines in the United States during the Gilded Age” (pp. 182–83).

Many of the lessons Mobley identifies can inform today’s warrior-engineer debate. As the information age matures and the robotics age emerges, America’s navy faces new technological and strategic challenges. Those who trust technology to dominate future warfare and those who argue for the continued need to study the science of war continue to clash, just as they did over a century ago. Lieutenant William Bainbridge-Hoff’s observation rings as validly today as when he uttered it in 1886: “[W]ell-constructed strategy must consider technology, just as technology should be informed by strategy” (p. 207). For this reason, those desiring to advance the naval profession should read this book.

JAMES P. MCGRATH III


In Seablindness, Seth Cropsey delivers a comprehensive examination of sea power and makes a compelling argument for the modernization and recapitalization of the U.S. Navy. To do so he analyzes