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The Greek Genocide in American Naval War Diaries: Naval Commanders Report and Protest Death Marches and Massacres in Turkey's Pontus Region, 1921–1922

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a new, illuminating insight through this case study of a captain's career.

JOHN B. HATTENDORF



The Greek Genocide in American Naval War Diaries: Naval Commanders Report and Protest Death Marches and Massacres in Turkey's Pontus Region, 1921-1922, ed. Robert Shenk and Sam Koktzoglou. New Orleans: Univ. of New Orleans Press, 2020. 400 pages. \$24.95.

Living in an information-saturated world in which social media and ubiquitous cell phone use allow the worst atrocities of war to be livestreamed on a global scale in a matter of hours can make it hard for us to understand a time not so long ago when acts of senseless violence were obscured by long distances and the fog of war.

In the aftermath of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire disintegrated into a bloody intercommunal conflict between millennia-old Greek communities along the Black Sea and a new nationalist Turkish government. There to witness it was the U.S. Black Sea Fleet, which was tasked with maintaining the security of American interests, primarily relating to tobacco companies and U.S. relief workers, in the Turkish hinterland during the Greco-Turkish War. As neutral observers (the United States never declared war on the Ottoman Empire, despite its alliance with the Central Powers), the fleet used this network of contacts to report on allegations of ethnic cleansing and forced population removal. While the plight of the Ottoman Empire's Greek population on the Ionian coast during the great fire of Smyrna in 1922 is covered well in previous scholarship, editors Robert Shenk and Sam Koktzoglou shed additional light on the fate of the Pontic Greek

communities of the Black Sea coast, using the U.S. Navy as the narrator.

The bulk of *The Greek Genocide in American Naval War Diaries* uses condensed accounts from the war diaries deposited in the National Archives of American destroyers based on the Pontic coast to build a body of compelling evidence of wartime atrocities. Shenk, who previously has written more broadly on the region in *America's Black Sea Fleet*, and Koktzoglou highlight the challenges naval officers faced in discerning the ground truth in a wartime environment in which sea power stopped at the shoreline. The accounts capture the conflicting narratives heard, the incomplete information available, and the sense of impotence felt by U.S. naval officers with no sanction to intervene.

Using the naval war diaries as the backbone of the narrative and supplementing them with testimony from American businessmen and aid workers, Shenk and Koktzoglou make the case that elements of the Turkish government were involved in a direct effort to carry out what is defined in the modern era as *genocide* against the Greeks of the Pontus region. The war diaries detail a series of forced removals of the military-age males of the local Greek population conducted by Turkish forces, often resulting in reports of mass killings. Furthermore, the naval diaries present accounts brought by internally displaced persons and American aid workers from the interior of Anatolia detailing the wholesale destruction of Greek villages, ethnic cleansing, and mass rape. Coupled with these stories are discussions with Turkish government officials outlining their justifications for such extreme tactics, as well as the uncertainties USN officers

faced regarding the true extent of the killings and Turkish motivations. Some of the accounts from survivors of the mass killings and rapes are not for the faint of heart, and underscore the sense of powerlessness felt by the commanders of the Black Sea Fleet, who, despite their possession of state-of-the-art weapons of war, could do little to stop the chaos.

That is not to say that USN officers stood by and did nothing. The war diaries provide several portraits of heroism by officers attempting to avert further bloodshed and the great professional risks some destroyer captains incurred. One account in particular highlights the power one officer can have when compelled by humanitarian virtue. Captain Arthur L. Bristol Jr. of USS *Overton* risked his future career prospects by sending a well-timed letter to compel his commanding officer, Admiral Mark Bristol (no relation)—who had a well-known affinity for the nationalist government—to issue a formal complaint to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk over the planned forced removal of noncombatants. This likely spared the lives of twelve thousand Greek women and children. In multiple accounts, we see naval commanders struggling to define actions and concepts for which they had no words: *genocide*, *ethnic cleansing*, and a nascent sense of *the responsibility to protect*. We witness in these accounts the internal struggle of U.S. naval officers caught between the promise of America's new global role and the limits of that promise. *The Greek Genocide in American Naval War Diaries* is a compelling, primary-source resource for scholars seeking to understand the human face of sea power in the twentieth century.

MICHAEL IMBRENDA



“Vincere!”: The Italian Royal Army’s Counter-insurgency Operations in Africa, 1922–1940, by Federica Saini Fasanotti. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2020. 224 pages. \$44.

Most military historians are familiar with the colonial histories of Spain, France, Italy, and Great Britain on the North African littoral (along with Belgium in the Congo, as well as Germany and Portugal in southwest and southeast Africa). This recent work considers in detail the experience of one of these participants as it appears from eighty years of retrospection. With a title that can be read as *conquest* or *victory*, the book deals with the timely topic of low-intensity conflict in Africa in the first part of the twentieth century by a European power: Italy’s Royal Army in Libya and Ethiopia (or the Kingdom of Abyssinia). These were campaigns fought to pacify the coastal regions and interior. It is not a surprise—with success in the global war on terrorism and the “Long War”—that something is familiar in these colonial campaigns fought within the same locations, terrain, and populations as today’s. Yet while tactics, techniques, or procedures might be similar, the policy and strategic goals were very different, as were the actual results of the conflicts.

The study divides logically into two stand-alone parts, the 1922–31 campaign in Libya and the 1936–40 campaign in Ethiopia. Introductions and conclusions provide context for each campaign; sections on acronyms and personalities, as well as glossaries and notes, support the narrative. The well-written narrative also provides after-action lessons that are of interest to current efforts in the region. One theme