

Book Reviews

A Blue Water Navy: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1943-1945, Volume II, Part 2, by W.A.B. Douglas, Roger Sarty and Michael Whitby; with Robert H. Caldwell, William Johnston and William G.P. Rawling, St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing, 2007, 650 pages, photographs, colour plates, maps, tables, diagrams, bibliography, index, CDN \$60, ISBN 1-55125-069-1.

Reviewed by Ken Hansen

After more than half a century's wait, *A Blue Water Navy* completes the official history of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) in the Second World War. Following *No Higher Purpose* (Vanwell, 2002), a team of historians has used the same chronological style to address the final two war years. The only exception to the timeline is the inclusion of *Operation Jubilee*, the raid at Dieppe in 1942, in a chapter that begins the subject of combined operations in European waters. The book ends with the return of HMC Ships *Uganda* and *Prince Robert* to Esquimalt in the late summer and fall of 1945.

The subtitle of *A Blue Water Navy* is a misnomer – this book, like *No Higher Purpose*, is not concerned with naval operational concepts or doctrine. Rather, it is primarily a history of the 'operating' forces of the RCN. The focus, therefore, is on recording the activities of tactical forces and providing insights into the challenges they faced and successes they achieved. As is the case in other official histories, the activities of Canadians seconded to other allied naval forces are not covered.

The chief problem with *A Blue Water Navy* is that the general plan of the book does not stick to its purpose. A reasonably detailed tactical history could have been accomplished within the length provided, but too often the narrative strays off into issues of politics and strategy. These diversions, without proper exploration of the interconnecting issues of operational organization and campaign design, leave the text disjointed. While the descriptions of tactical activity are uniformly well written and enjoyable to read, particularly those parts that deal with naval engagements, the remaining parts are far less edifying.

The overall degree of tactical information provided does not compare well with the standards set out in either the American (Samuel Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, published between 1947 and 1962 in 15 volumes) or British (Stephen Roskill, *The War*

at Sea, 1939-1945, published between 1956 and 1951 in three volumes) official histories. The American and British versions provide excellent descriptions of the command relationships, task organizations, operational plans and tasks assigned to naval forces for all major operations. Maps, tables and supplementary annexes provide the detail needed for academic study and analysis. These, although present occasionally and of good quality when used, are not included systematically in *A Blue Water Navy*. Advanced students of history and operations planning will not find the degree of detail needed for their analytical purposes.

It seems that the writing team has attempted to 'hit the highlights' rather than provide comprehensive detail. The composition of tactical formations and changes to them are not recorded. When reading either volume, readers will want to have a number of standard references at hand, such as: Marc Milner, *The North Atlantic Run* and *The U-boat Hunters*; Ken Macpherson and John Burgess, *The Ships of Canada's Naval Forces, 1910-1981*; Arnold Hague, *The Allied Convoy System, 1939-1945*; Gilbert Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*; or Paul Kemp, *U-boats Destroyed*.

In addition to its shortcomings based on a comparison with other countries' naval histories, *A Blue Water Navy* does not compare well against the official histories of the Canadian Army and Air Force. Thus this volume must be compared to C.P. Stacey and G.W.L. Nicholson, *Six Years of War*, published between 1955 and 1960 in three volumes, or the 1096-page third volume of the history of the RCAF by Brereton Greenhous et al., *The Crucible of War, 1939-1945*, published in 1994. It is evident that the team writing approach has resulted in a competition between perspectives for space and a rush to complete within the length allowed. Strangely, the Atlantic and the Pacific sections both end anticlimactically, without the benefit of a proper summation. Readers are left to tabulate for themselves the total contributions, subtract the losses, and come to some conclusion about the worth of either enterprise.

The main focus of this volume, as indicated by the title, is to explain the development of the "big ship-blue water navy" during the last years of the war. The sections on formulating Allied strategy, in which Canada played practically no part, are used to show how the post-war navy took shape. Neither aspect advances significantly the treatment provided by Tucker in *The Naval Service of Canada* published in 1952 which followed the preferable thematic approach for strategic and operational analysis. Unfortunately, in those few places where the text does attempt to employ operational terminology, it gets it

wrong. For example, it incorrectly describes the central Atlantic as “the centre of gravity” of the war against the U-boats (p. 39). In this case, the locale should be called the *area of operations*. The *tactical centre of gravity* was the endurance of the German U-boat forces that allowed them to reach and remain in their chosen area of operations for an effective period of time, while the *operational centre of gravity* was the Kriegsmarine’s ability to generate, sustain and direct those forces. As well, critically important operational subjects, such as force generation, mission development and task organization, sustainment and logistics, are very poorly covered.

As is usually the case, logistics fares the worst of all. Barely half a paragraph is dedicated to it where the book examines the RCN’s efforts to prepare itself for both leading and supporting roles in the invasion of Japan. Projecting power over oceanic distances is the ultimate test of a blue-water navy. Logistical inadequacy was the principal reason Admiral Ernest King was adamantly opposed to accepting the British Pacific Fleet into the central Pacific in the final stages of the war in the Pacific, fearing that it would require support from the US Navy. This proved exactly to be the case. The RCN was, if anything, worse prepared for the demands of operating at extreme ranges from Canada and from forward support bases established by the USN. Citing a secondary source for a report by the Royal Navy’s liaison officer to Admiral Nimitz’s staff, the text records: “Logistics is the most important aspect of the war at sea in the Pacific” (p. 538). Unfortunately, beyond a very few references to the RCN’s lack of minor equipment like water coolers and laundry machines, little evidence is presented that the Canadian naval leadership even vaguely understood how far short they were of achieving their blue-water aspirations. Because of its tactical focus on the operations of a single light cruiser and an armed auxiliary, the vitally important operational issues of reach, endurance, replenishment and forward sustainment remain unaddressed.

The lack of an operational history is a critical deficiency in the development of a national maritime doctrine. Without a complete understanding of the roles played by Canadian naval forces within a large maritime alliance, the conceptual and procedural lessons of this momentous period will continue to elude the government, the service and the public. In sum, *A Blue Water Navy* captures useful tactical history in its descriptive sections, but its strategic and operational insights are not up to the standards of the analysis provided in other official service histories from World War Two. 🍷

China’s Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing’s Maritime Policies, edited by Gabriel B. Collins, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein and William S. Murray, Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2008, 483 pages, references and index, ISBN 978-1-59114-330-7.

Reviewed by David N. Griffiths

Anyone who has spent time removing the “Made in China” labels from Canadian souvenirs will know how closely the economies of Canada and China are interconnected. Understanding the strategic implications of China’s renaissance as a confident world power, enmeshed in a global web of complex relationships, requires an understanding of the energy that drives it. This makes *China’s Energy Strategy* a particularly useful and timely book.

In its first two years, the China Maritime Studies Institute at the US Naval War College has produced some excellent analytical work that draws on extensive Chinese sources. *China’s Energy Strategy* is the second in its series on Chinese maritime development and its 24 contributors represent an impressive array of expertise that, predictably, generates both consensus and disagreement. This in itself makes the volume a useful read.

One of the analytical pitfalls identified by several contributors is the seduction of ‘mirror imaging’ – i.e., projecting one’s own assumptions, priorities and values on to the object of study. The United States, for example, is highly dependent on imported oil and gas, and therefore vulnerable to disruption of seaborne transport. In contrast, China, although it is importing increasing amounts of energy, meets 69% of its overall needs from domestic coal and another 15.8% from hydroelectricity. Chinese priorities and interests are, therefore, quite different. To the pessimist, China’s increasing dependence on foreign fossil fuels suggests a motive for naval expansion to defend its sea lines of communication (SLOC). A number of contributors argue, however, that by increasing its dependence on seaborne imports, China is striking a deliberate balance between the vulnerability of SLOCs and the resilience inherent in diversification. This, the optimists suggest, is an opportunity for cooperative engagement.

In any case, the pessimists’ concerns may be a misleading mirror image of the SLOC fixation of the United States and Japan. China does not depend on imported oil to keep the lights on and the heat burning, but mainly as fuel for vehicles, ships and aircraft. Even then, it has alternative domestic and overland sources, is building up a significant

strategic reserve, and is aiming for energy efficiency (“love oil as if though it were blood and value oil as though it were gold” in the lyrical words of one article in a Chinese military journal).

Another analytical pitfall is seduction by ulterior motives, conscious or not. In the words of one contributor, raising the spectre of a ‘China threat’ may simply be yearning for a cure for a case of ‘post-Cold War enemy-deprivation syndrome.’ To advocates of threat-based force development, Chinese naval enhancement looks like a challenge to a naval arms race, and Chinese funding of strategically located ports like Gwadar in Pakistan looks like a first step toward overseas basing arrangements mirroring those like the US 5th Fleet in Bahrain. Yet, for the foreseeable future at least, China’s primary maritime focus remains on Taiwan, and its naval war-fighting capability is being optimized for securing and controlling its eastern maritime flank.

In that case, the maritime strategy supports a continental focus and China’s need to secure imported energy supplies is unlikely to translate into a national drive for an expensive globe-spanning, SLOC-defending fleet. Rather, it appears to be diversifying its energy sources, forging alliances with resource-rich suppliers, using its navy as a diplomatic instrument and establishing influence in strategically valuable places. This is one reason for its frequent evocation of the 15th century politico-diplomatic voyages of Zheng He’s fleets and their contrast with the cannon-toting entry of European vessels into the Indian Ocean some decades later.

China’s current leadership is nothing if not pragmatic and, as one contributor notes, lacks personal military experience. That leads Chinese foreign energy policies to diverge from those of the West, especially because China does not insist on the same moral or performance standards as its democratic counterparts. This opens doors to Chinese investment and influence that most liberal-democracies would prefer to keep shut. Chinese aid for Gwadar’s commercial port is a case in point. It is difficult to imagine a Canadian initiative that would accept the killing of some of its nationals or protection arrangements with local insurgents as a cost of doing business. Yet while China’s choice of partners may be a point of disagreement, it can also be a channel for cooperation, if China is willing to use its influence in the common good.

One of the contributors to this volume points out that most analysis is not so much of energy security as energy *insecurity*. The enormous maritime capability of the United States does not look as benign from Beijing as it does from Washington or Ottawa. US policies and forces represent a standing threat to Chinese interests, especially

in reserving the right to regain Taiwan by force if necessary. Chinese analysts look at US dominance in the Middle East and remember such incidents as the 1993 interception of the merchant vessel *Yin He* under the false assumption that it was carrying chemical weapons precursors and the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, accidental or not. Even humanitarian response can carry ominous messages to the sceptical. During the humanitarian response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, US carrier aircrew were required by regulation to continue readiness training. Innocent though these flights may have been, they also illustrated how easily the entrance to the Malacca Strait (through which 80% of China’s imported oil now passes) could be closed.

Those who view the recent Olympic extravaganza in Beijing as an echo of the Nazis’ 1936 spectacle in Berlin should pause for reflection. The spectacular opening ceremony made much of the ancient heritage of Confucius and Zheng He, but made not a peep about the founder of the Communist Party of China. A pragmatic leadership understands that cooperating to ensure a free flow of fuels and other seaborne trade within a stable global market system is far simpler, cheaper and more effective than military conquest. Pragmatism is serving the Chinese leadership well and, as the majority of the contributors to this book suggest, it will also serve our democracies well in engaging this awakening giant with its feet of clay but arms stretched toward the sea.

China’s Energy Strategy is a comprehensive study of a complex, multifaceted issue, written by specialists for a broad (and primarily American) audience. Although some chapters contain some mediocre maps, it is a pity that the editors did not provide one or two good overviews for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with China or its energy infrastructure. But that is a quibbling point. Overall, this is an invaluable book for anyone wanting to understand China’s economy in general and its maritime strategy in particular. 🍷

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