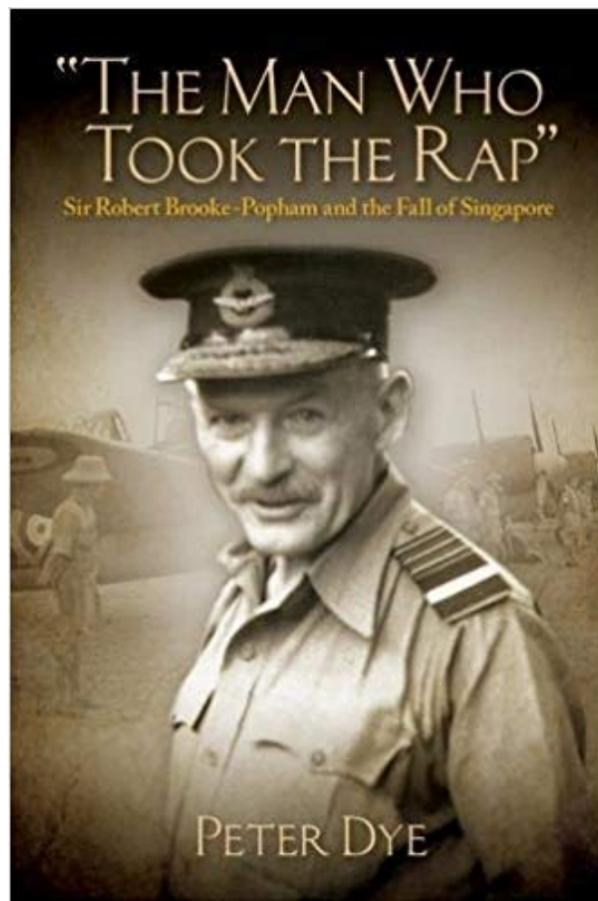




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**USNI Press Book
Reviews**



February 4, 2019

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Uncommon Valor: The Stories Never Meant To Be Told

01/18/2019

By Chloe Laird

We are all enthralled reading a Tom Clancy novel or watching the latest Mission Impossible.

Tales of going up against the enemy engross us.

In this book, the author provides such tales, but these are not fiction.

In *Uncommon Valor: Stories of American Heroism, — The Recon Company That Earned Five Medals of Honor and Included America's Most Decorated Green Beret*, the author tells the story of the formation and operations of an advanced Special Forces reconnaissance company during the Vietnam War.

Moore does an exceptional job of making every anecdote come alive and relaying the stories of the 100+ veterans he researched in a way that brings new meaning to “humanity behind the hardware.”

He reminds his readers that war is so much more than black and white and invites us into the daily life of what it was like to be selected for this elite Kontum based recon company.

Codenamed *Studies and Observation Group*(SOG), men were told from the get-go how dangerous the missions they would be undertaking were.

“Take a look to your left and then take a look to your right.

“One of those two men beside you will be dead at this time next year.”¹

After a quick smoke break, most men decided to take the leap and accept the year-long mission that would be conducted “across the fence” – deep into enemy lines.

Each recon unit, otherwise known as a “spike team” (ST) consisted of 2-3 Special Forces Green Berets and a small number of local tribesmen (initially Chinese Nungs).

Within the first twenty pages, Moore hooks you into FOB-2’s (Forward Operating Base 2 at Kontum, otherwise known as SOG’s home) three initial spike teams- Teams Dakota, Iowa and Ohio.

All three teams had seen combat prior and went straight to it while five other teams were to complete their training.

Each unit was headed by an experienced master sergeant and each team came to represent heroism in their own way.

Team Ohio, looked over by Master Sergeant Meadows, had a high success rate with their missions “centered around their boldness, their training, and the proficiency of each man on the team.”²

Each team was different with the ways in which they trained, ran missions and lived their experiences out.

They were different even down to the way they prepped new team members.

For example, Meadows “schooled his team around a sand table mock-up of their area” and each member “had to be able to point out LZ sites and alternates where they would meet if the team had to split in the field”, while other teams such as the one ran by Gerry Wareing would “just grab his team, tell them they were going to go out and that was it.”

His success with his team members was not as high– “he got a new team every time he went out” because “they wouldn’t go with Wareing again.”³

The missions were completed, all the same.

Reading through this book is like being allowed to sit in on the interviews themselves: there are no filters and no barriers between you and the warriors.

What you see is what they got.

Being able to have such an inside look on such a top-secret organization is something of a rarity.

Moore’s insurmountable efforts to thoroughly investigate the eight year existence of SOG and keep track of the 7,800 men that took part and “received more than two thousand individual awards for heroism” (335) makes this book unforgettable.

The success rate of the Green Berets, the loss being 150 to 1 (ratio of NVA soldiers to Berets), is only the cherry on top of a cake filled with “a collection of heroes.”

As a member of a generation much younger than that of the Vietnam generation, this book allows me to better understand the challenges facing my father’s generation in combat.

Footnotes

1. Stephen L. Moore, *Uncommon Valor* (Naval Institute Press, 2018), p. 4.
2. Stephen L. Moore, *Uncommon Valor* (Naval Institute Press, 2018), p. 21
3. Stephen L. Moore, *Uncommon Valor* (Naval Institute Press, 2018), p. 43

Red Star Over the Pacific: China’s Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy, Second Edition

01/03/2019

By Robbin Laird

This book provides good insights into the Chinese regime and its approach to seapower as well as providing some solid thinking about how best to respond over the period ahead to this challenge.

The book also provides a very useful perspective with regard to how the Chinese approach seapower in a comprehensive way and provide an understanding of how the Chinese are leveraging several elements of seapower to augment their global position, rather than just focusing on the capital ships which China has built and is building.

The book by Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes is not an easy book to read, in part because, it leverages original Chinese source material and using such material means that not only does one need to translate from a different language but from a different culture to explain how the Chinese are shaping their approach to seapower.

I did this with regard to the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s and there was always a challenge of going beyond the words to better understand the underlying concepts and approaches taken by the Soviet leadership and policy elite. The authors of this book face a similar challenge as well.

The core points can be put simply – China is no longer simply a continental land power but with the emergence of a significant engagement in the global economy, anchored by three key port zones, seapower is important.

But they also drive home the point that it is important to understand the evolving Chinese approach, rather than mirror imaging the US maritime strategy projected into Chinese technologies.

*Beijing, in short, will compile its own script as it develops doctrine, tactics, and capabilities to meet its needs and conditions. The ensuing chapters examine in greater depth the sources, future direction, and strategic implications of the logic and grammar of Chinese sea power.*¹

At the heart of the Chinese transition with regard to seapower is the shift from benefiting from and leveraging the global liberal system which has been underwritten by the US Navy to shaping their own capabilities to defend their interests, operate globally and to provide extended defense of their crucial port regions, where significant population and economic capabilities are located.

The authors provide a good look at the core importance of the three port areas or systems in China which provide the core areas for the transit of goods into and out from China.

These port systems provide the core area which China wishes to defend and is doing so by building out from the mainland into the South China Sea.

The geography of Chinese production, distribution, and consumption has imposed new strategic demands on Beijing. China's most important economic centers are now located along the northern, eastern, and southern shores.

*The well-being of these megalopolises and the overall health of the Chinese economy depend on easy access to the maritime common that connects China to global markets.*²

And as they are doing so they are using all of their maritime assets to do so, notably the Chinese Coast Guard, commercial shipping, fishing trawlers and other assets.

The authors highlight what one Chinese analyst has called the “cabbage strategy.”

Zhang Zhaozhong—a retired rear admiral, NDU professor, well-known television personality, and prolific author of nationalistic navalist books for popular consumption—explain(s) how a cabbage strategy works. The strategy, Zhang says, can be encapsulated in “just one word, which is squeezing.”

His explanation is worth quoting at length: “For every measure there is a countermeasure. ...If you send fishing vessels to resupply, then we will use fishing vessels to keep them out; if your coast guard sends supplies, then we will send marine surveillance to keep them out. If your Philippine Navy ships hurry over, we will use naval vessels to keep them out. There is nothing to be afraid of, and we must stick it out to the end. The cabbage strategy of which I have spoken many times is to surround them layer by layer, and make them unable to enter [Second Thomas Shoal].48 (Our emphasis).”³

A key disconnect between Western navies and the Chinese over the past few years has been a clear focus by Western navies on maritime missions to support the global trade order whereas the Chinese have been focused on conflict at sea as well as global trade order missions.

China's approach poses problems from a cultural standpoint as well. In the sense that "Mahanian" connotes girding for fleet battles and "post-Mahanian" means policing the sea or projecting power ashore, China is comfortable using post-Mahanian means for Mahanian ends.

A fishing trawler or coast guard cutter represents an implement of power politics as surely as a warplane or a hulking destroyer.

For their part, U.S. naval officers find it hard to deal with white-hulled China Coast Guard cutters or maritime enforcement vessels trying to cement command of Chinese-claimed waters. Countermeasures for maritime militia embedded within the fishing fleet and working in conjunction with law enforcement ships are still harder to come by.⁴

The authors note that this is changing as the US Navy begins to refocus on conflict at sea as a core mission and is modifying its combat assets to be more capable of so doing.

The authors conclude their book by looking at ways the US might more effectively counter the Chinese approach and to enhance core combat capabilities.

And it is China's mounting resistance to the U.S.-led system of trade and commerce, which has nourished the regional order for more than seven decades, that makes the rise of Chinese sea power so worrisome.

Policy makers, then, must resist the temptation to focus narrowly on the material or operational dimensions of Chinese anti-access.

These are important beyond a doubt. But statesmen must recognize that China's ascent and its accompanying dream pose an all-encompassing challenge to the United States and the long peace over which it has presided in Asia.⁵

I would add that a major aspect of working mid-term and long-term responses to the Chinese and to shape ways to constrain them is clearly how the US works with core Asian allies.

The military-technical aspects of so doing are important but so are the political-military as well as diplomatic.

But bluntly, how Japan, Australia, the South Koreans and others work together with the US in shaping the next phase of the liberal order is a crucial concomitant of the refocus on what the authors refer to as the "Mahanian" focus which connotes girding for fleet battles and "post-Mahanian or policing the sea or projecting power ashore.

The authors deal with the allied dimension in the context of how the Chinese see the general challenge facing them with regard to their core security challenges.

Geography colors how Chinese strategists appraise threats. The Korean half-island and the Japanese archipelago converge on key bodies of water while forming straits near China's political and economic centers.

Whether the U.S.–Japan–South Korea alignment can ever become a coherent strategic unit is dubious at best in light of the two Asian allies' turbulent past.

Nevertheless, Chinese observers find it unsettling that two U.S. allies boasting advanced economies and modern armed forces stand athwart sealanes essential to China's security and economic health.

Sowing disunion among the allies would partly ameliorate this dilemma—and thus represents a strategic imperative for Beijing.⁶

Indeed, from my perspective working the technology and working the US and allied concepts of operations along with reshaping how the alliance will work in the presence of persistent Chinese efforts to change that Alliance is at the heart of the challenge.

For US policy makers, rebuilding the US Navy is a necessary but not sufficient condition; working more effective allied relationships to constrain and channel the Chinese is crucial as well.

Footnotes

1. Yoshihara, Toshi. Red Star over the Pacific, Revised Edition (p. 47). Naval Institute Press. Kindle Edition.
2. Yoshihara, Toshi. Red Star over the Pacific, Revised Edition (p. 65). Naval Institute Press. Kindle Edition.
3. Yoshihara, Toshi. Red Star over the Pacific, Revised Edition (pp. 176-177). Naval Institute Press. Kindle Edition.
4. Yoshihara, Toshi. Red Star over the Pacific, Revised Edition (pp. 142). Naval Institute Press. Kindle Edition.
5. Yoshihara, Toshi. Red Star over the Pacific, Revised Edition (pp. 295-296). Naval Institute Press. Kindle Edition.
6. Yoshihara, Toshi. Red Star over the Pacific, Revised Edition (p. 92). Naval Institute Press. Kindle Edition.

Germany's Last Mission: The Failed Voyage of U-234 to Japan

12/22/2018

By Robbin Laird

This book by Joseph Mark Scalia and published in 2000 by Naval Institute Press provides a comprehensive look at one of the most neglected stories of World War II, namely, the mission of U-234 to Japan.

The submarine turned out to be the last gift of Nazi Germany to Japan and was designed to deliver both advanced war materiel as well as technicians to aid the Empire of Japan in its fight to the death with the Americans.

The submarine itself was a very large World War II submarine built to carry cargo and crafted around the frame of a submarine built for mine laying. The submarine was jam packed with various key wartime materials including parts of the new German jet fighter.

While at sea, the Reich surrendered but the Captain at first ignored the orders to surrender but later sorted out how to avoid surrendering to the Brits via Canada and came to America. Then at Portsmouth, the US Navy then sorted out what to do with the prize.

Given that the war with Japan was still unfinished, the key focus for US intelligence was to sort out what the Germans had actually transferred to Japan and how much advancement the Japanese had made in terms of new technologies. The information gained was invaluable in providing a more accurate assessment of what the US would face in the Japanese invasion.

The book provides a first-rate assessment – leveraging the mission of the U-234 – of the German and Japanese military technological relationship. Prior to the German invasion of Russia, the Russians allowed the use of the trans-Siberian route between Japan and Germany to provide a direct link.

After that only the sea route was available and after the US and the allies gradually gained mastery of the seas, the two sides used submarines to transfer war material, a complicated, difficult and slow process.

A key conclusion was that there was basic distrust between the two authoritarian regimes which limited the full extent of cooperation possible. Also, the significant disconnect between the two regimes with regard to science, technology and military production limited the ability of the Japanese to incorporate German scientific and technological advances.

The Japanese demonstrated without doubt that the ability to transfer science and technological advances TO production was the key; not just knowing about S and T advances.

“By December 1944 Japan’s hopes for remaining competitive in the air rested primarily on the availability of German aid.

“However, German observers in Japan were frustrated by what they perceived as an ignorance of efficient construction methods, as well as by the lack of standardization, technical personnel and machine tools.

“Japanese officials sought to address these deficiencies by buttressing their own antiquate manufacturing processes through the acquisition of modern German equipment, securing the production rights to German innovations, facilitating the training of Japanese engineers in Germany and obtaining the services of German technical and manufacturing personnel.”¹

This is an historical observation but we are facing a similar collaboration between two authoritarian regimes today also designed to make the world safe for their approach as opposed to that of the democratic world.

I have studied the Russian-Chinese relationship since graduate school and it is clearly entering a new phase of collaboration, but clearly shaped by how authoritarian regimes work with one another. But clearly, Sino-Russian collaboration is a major factor shaping the decade ahead in terms of forging the next phase of global development.

And speaking of contemporary relevance, there is this priceless observation about collaboration between the US Army Air Force and the US Navy over sharing the goodies onboard the U-234. As the US Navy got custody of the U-234, it parceled out only what it thought relevant to anyone else.

“Having been unpacked and inventoried, the bulk of U-234’s aviation cargo was eventually sent to the U.S. Army Air Forces testing facility at Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio.”

However, let us not get over generous!

“Although naval officials immediately sent the ME 262 and 165 to the AAF, they balked at surrendering the remainder of their war prizes to a rival service and withheld the remaining accessories until naval air authorities could exploit them.”²

Thank God that would not happen today!

There was a key material onboard the U-234 which is part of another story as well. Onboard the U-234, there was a considerable amount of German produced uranium oxide. Could the cargo have been used by the Japanese to execute a mission to deliver a dirty bomb?

Although uranium oxide is characterized by a relatively low level of radioactivity, creating a bomb from the material would undoubtedly have some effect, and notably a psychological one.

The book concludes with a look at the uranium oxide cargo onboard the U-234 and suggests this still remains one of the mysteries of the U-234.

Others have suggested that the Japanese were intending to load this material onboard the Japanese submarines which had been built to launch airplanes and to deliver a strike on San Francisco in mid-August 1945.

Given that U-234 never made it to Japan, this is a case of a bit of history that did not happen.

Against the Tide: Rickover's Leadership Principles and the Rise of the Nuclear Navy

12/13/2018

By Robbin Laird

Growing up in Northern Ohio, one of my best friends from childhood eventually went to the Naval Academy with a clear desire to become an officer in the surface fleet. Then Admiral Rickover intervened and my friend became an officer in the nuclear submarine community.

He once described to me his meeting with Rickover and his interview. Which turned out to be mercifully brief as being a young man meeting a legend was certainly an intimidating moment. But Rickover did make it so, and so my friend began his journey into the silent service.

That was one aspect of Rickover's leadership – an ability to recognize talent, recruit it, and put talent into “his” service.

Rear Admiral (Retired) Oliver has written a book, which looks at Rickover's legacy from the standpoint of the kind of leadership, which he provided. Oliver himself a member of the silent service, describes throughout the book his own interactions with Rickover and shapes his observations on how Rickover led and how his leadership example might inform more generally about the nature of leadership of organizations, notably those undergoing fundamental change.

My own experience has been with the Aegis community within which significant top down leadership has shaped a globally unique capability as well.

Both the Aegis program and the building of the nuclear navy are certainly high points in US Navy leadership.

Oliver explains how the shift from the diesel submarine to the nuclear submarine community was clearly about disruptive change, in which not only did the technology change dramatically, but also the kind of combat leadership as well as the concepts of operations which needed to be followed by the new nuclear submarine community.

Oliver highlights how Rickover, not an imposing physical command presence, shaped such a significant transition, one crucial to the defense of the United States and the free world.

One of my favorite stories, which Oliver provides of Rickover, revolves around his practice of going on the test dives of a new nuclear submarine, certainly someone who might be risk adverse would not do. But Rickover was not; and believed that this was part of his leadership responsibility.

Oliver describes his personal experience onboard George Washington Carver in it initial trials with Rickover onboard.

“We had been at sea three days and were finally down at the deepest depth Carver was designed to go....One particular torpedo skid had apparently become pinched during the last two-hundred-foot descent. Suddenly, the upper-level engine room watch stander discovered a stream of water gushing from his escaped trunk drain. This was trouble.

Oliver went on to note that normally they would have surfaced to fix the problem, but this would clearly have delayed significantly the first deployment of the submarine and delay its mission of replacing another SSBN nearing the end of its scheduled deployment.

“We first became aware of an alternative solution when Rickover, who at that time was sixty-six years old, stepped through the hatch into the engine room, a hammer in his belt and wooden fid in his hand.

“Where is the engineer he asked?

Lt. Ken Folta poked his early balding head out of maneuvering: “Here Admiral.”

“Call the captain. Get permission to open the lower escape trunk hatch. You and I will lock ourselves inside and fix whatever is wrong.”

“The admiral pretended as if he didn’t notice Folta’s astonished look. “You there,” he said reading my name tag, “Oliver.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“You will be the telephone link to the commanding officer.

“You can be the first person to tell him if we die in there.”¹

That my friends, is leadership by example and taking responsibility.

And that is what the book is about.

In short, Oliver has written a book which provides insights into Admiral Rickover as a historical leader but at the same time looks at this particular history for lessons learned with regard to the leadership function in general.

Well worth reading.

Footnotes

1. Pages 37-38.

After Jutland: The Naval War in Northern European Waters, June 1916-November 1918

12/04/2018

By Robbin Laird

This book by James Goldrick, a retired rear admiral in the Royal Australian Navy, is a companion to his earlier book on *Before Jutland*.

What he does with his two books is to put the Jutland battle in perspective as a juncture where the fleets prepared for a battle like Jutland and the evolved their fleets, tactics and capabilities beyond the battleships to new approaches in the wake of the stalemate which Jutland provided.

The battle of Jutland was a naval battle fought between Britain’s Royal Navy Grand Fleet and the Imperial German Navy’s High Seas Fleet in 1916.

This was a battle prepared for by both sides focusing on the centrality of their battleships as the key capital ship within both of their fleets.

What Goldrick’s book focuses upon is the significant operational innovations which both sides generated post-Jutland which would lay the foundation for the fleets which would then meet again in World War 2.

Both sides found ways to combine air, small ships, and mines and counter mines into various engagements in the North Sea and the waters around the UK as both sides sought to choke off each others supply lines.

It was a period in which mine warfare became a key element, and which Zeppelins and air planes made their clear entry into the naval warfare calculus.

Today's Western navies have tended to downplay the role of mine warfare but even in today's world mine warfare is a key element of any conflict which Europe would have with Russia and it is crucial to keep mine warfare skills fresh and almost certainly deserve much more attention from the US Navy and allied navies as part of naval warfare as a whole.

Our colleague Murielle Delaporte spent three weeks with NATO mine forces and during her time at sea, the force continued to find mines from World War II and perhaps as well World War I.

The book is largely one for specialists and those who study naval warfare in World War I, but it does have significant lessons to be learned with regard to the evolution of fleets and of naval warfare.

Most notably, it needs to be realized how important operations are in driving innovation, and with it the shaping of concepts of operations.

The author underscored that it is not just about technological innovation but shaping new ways to use technology and to drive concepts of operation.

The author has a great line in the book referring to the British learning that plans are not operations, and as they focused on operations and combat learning derived from operations, the Royal Navy progressed.

He concludes with an important observation with regard to World War I innovation on what would become the fleets engaged in conflict in World War II.

“What is clear is that the operations of the royal Navy in 1981 in particular were a remarkable advance on 1914....

“They foreshadowed the task forces of the next global conflict.

“The ‘Grand Fleet of Battles’ which had been emerging before the Great War, had been replaced by fighting groups that had the same ideas of combined arms and mutual support but operated on a smaller scale that made the necessary coordination practicable.”¹

Redefining the Modern Military: The Intersection of Profession and Ethics

11/30/2018

By Robbin Laird

This book addresses the evolution of military professionalism and the role of the military in the liberal democracies over the past two decades.

This means that the book really is addressing the question of what the demand side of the land wars in the Middle East and the global war on terrorism means from the standpoint of the judgement of what the military does and what being a competent professional means in this period of history.

As great power conflict returns, there is a major shift in what will be expected in order for the professional military needs to do to succeed in deterrence and in case of conflict how to prevail.

What indeed are the relationships between how the military profession has been reshaped to deal with counter-insurgency and the global war on terrorism and what the successful military officer in great power conflict needs to do to lead his or her forces to success in crises?

The book addresses the dynamics of change in military professionalism but there needs as well to be a significant look at how the civilian state of the relationship with the military can live up to its side of the bargain.

The complete inability to terminate conflicts in Afghanistan by any U.S. Administration speaks significantly of the complete inability of the civilian leadership to understand what military power can and can not do.

If we are to prepare to defend our interests against the authoritarian powers, it will be crucial to find ways to shape a new bargain between the military and its civilian leaders with regard to how to think about and conduct crisis management.

Unfortunately, the shift the military has undergone in the past twenty years is not an answer to what that bargain needs to become.

There are three key issues.

First, civilian leaders are less familiar with military issues as conscription has gone away and professionals are given the task to fight far away from the homeland.

Second, the nature of military technology as well as the nature of decisions to be taken on distant battlefields have pushed decisions down to much lower levels.

The strategic corporal of the former commandant of the USMC General Krulak in his envisaged three block war has become a reality not just for the land wars, but with the evolution of modern technology even more so in terms of the speed and significance of tactical engagements having strategic meaning.

Third, the way the first trend has combined with the second trend has been for civilian leaders to craft tight rules of engagement which may make sense back in a capital like Washington but make little sense in a fluid tactical situation with strategic consequences in an extended and fluid battlespace.

To deal with this challenge, it is not just the military profession which need to be rethought but the civilian leadership which is losing any real understanding of what combat operations are and how technology evolves to enhance those capabilities, and not just provide options for some future world debated in so-called think tanks.

The book provides a good starting point for thinking through where we need to go in the decade ahead; it certainly is not where we have lived since 9/11. and the conduct of the endless war.

The editors make a crucial point at the end of their book:

“One clear result of this shift away from conscription to a technologically focused force is that fewer and fewer members of society — the very population with which the military must maintain trust — have an personal connection with the military or any exposure to conflict in a meaningful way.”¹

This is an explosive cocktail both for the civilians who are not really capable of understanding how to think about how to use military force in an effective manner or the evolution of the military to play the strategic partnership role with 21st century effective civilian leadership which great power conflict requires.

In a chapter on the evolution of the training of naval officers, William M. Beasley, Jr. underscores his concern with training become narrowly stove-piped and technical with the real inability to learn how to be strategic leaders.

From my point of view, given the shift back to great power conflict we clearly need change on both the civilian and military side to reshape strategic instincts, thinking and aptitudes.

“The Navy must do some serious soul-searching about its technical, platform-centric mind set.”²

But not just the Navy; the failed civilian class and its inability to terminate the endless war means we need to take a good look in the mirror and figure out how to master the use of military power for political objectives against the big boys, like chess-master Vladimir Putin.

Footnotes

1. Page 223.
2. Page 122.

“The Man Who Took the Rap”

11/23/2018

By Robbin Laird

The subtitle of the book is: “Sir Robert Brooke-Popham and the Fall of Singapore.”

This is a well researched and well written book on the life of the man who would be best known for a nation’s failure, the loss of Singapore in the face of a Japanese tidal wave, rather than in terms of his distinguished career in the RAF and in the British Armed Forces.

The author himself was a long serving officer in the Royal Air Force and was awarded the Order of the British Empire for his work in support of the Jaguar Force during the First Gulf War, retiring as an Air Vice-Marshal. His own background in the RAF and in the joint forces clearly inform the book throughout and provides more than a biography.

It provides a way to look at the evolution of the RAF through its formative years up to and through the initial phases of World War II.

The book is a first rate biography, but throughout the book there are lessons to be learned for today, notably with regard to the Pacific.

The Fall of Singapore is really about absence of the capability to execute an effective war plan against a determined adversary.

And as we face challenges in today’s Pacific, we need to be aware of the gap between aspirations and reality as well as never underestimating the capabilities of an adversary who does not think like us, but by following their own logic can achieve combat and diplomatic success.

The richness of the book can be suggested by a series of vignettes which I will highlight from the narrative of the book.

The first involves Brooke-Popham’s involvement in the formation of the RAF and its role in the First World War.

Here he was on the ground floor for the stand up of the RAF and its preparation for what would be known at the Great War.

In that war, he played a central role working the logistics of the RAF on the continent and working the relationship between the force and industry in building out the ongoing modernization and replacement of aircraft throughout the war.

In so doing, he established a staff with whom he could work effectively, and to reach back into communities driving modernization, build out and support of the combat force. In other words, he was at the vortex of the infrastructure which drove the availability of a combat force.

By the time he left France in February 1919, he had spent 53 months continuously on the Western Front.

For more than four years he had provided the RFC (and later the RAF) with an incisive and intuitive grasp of its needs.

His instinctive, intelligent, and seemingly instantaneous reactions in dealing with multitudinous problems and difficulties provided the essential foundation for air operations on the Western Front, creating the vital bridge between the nation's economy and airpower.”¹

A second vignette revolves around his time in Iraq from 1928-1930 in charge of the Iraq command.

Just reading through this chapter (Chapter 9) is a good reminder of those who do not study history are condemned to repeat it.

Here we learn that the Army lectured the Air Force on the impotence of airpower compared to the ability to control the ground.

We learn that the British were banking on the Iraqis taking charge of their own security and spent significant time training Iraqis to do that mission.

Unfortunately, reading through this chapter is as much about history repeated in our period as it is any recounting of Britain in Iraq.

It would be amusing to read the following paragraph if perhaps it was not so much about the distant 1920s.²

“The political and security situation in Iraq during the late 1920s was complex and uncertain.

“The policing of Iraq’s borders was a difficult task at the best of times, even with the RAF’s help.

“In the absence of natural features or habitation, it was possible to cross from one country to another without hindrance of the knowledge of the authorities.”

A third vignette involves his time reshaping the RAF prior to the establishment of Fighter Command. He was a key player in the reshaping of the RAF to work the air defense of Britain/

As head of Air Defence Great Britain (ADGB), he worked with his team on preparing the ground for what would become Fighter Command.

“He played a major role in the development of Britain’s air defenses for more than a decade.... As chairman of the ADGB Sub-Committee, he laid the foundation for a comprehensive and robust air defense network that would be validated under the most testing of conditions.....He was the first senior officer to appreciate the value of scientist when others were still refusing to admit them to their headquarters.”³

After his time with ADGB, he becomes Inspector General of the British Forces and in this capacity traveled throughout the Middle East and worked on the military side of the European situation. He was then sent to become Governor of Kenya in 1937 through 1939.

You might be asking yourself, OK why does he end up in the Far East after the knowledge and experience which he had gained with regard to the RAF, the joint force, the Middle East, Africa and Europe?

Well the simple answer is that you don’t appoint yourself to senior positions.

This takes folks wiser than we are — namely, politicians.

He was indeed very surprised to be appointed Commander in Chief Far East.

Here he was dealt a hand of trying to deter the Japanese with limited resources, working alliances among the powers in the region to curtail the Japanese, and to try to shape an air-maritime-ground capability which could defend Singapore.

The key was to have enough first line aircraft integrated with a maritime force (Force Z) to dissuade the Japanese from attacking Britain and its allied forces.

Unfortunately, the Germans had captured the secret documents generated by the British government describing in detail its strategy and force disposition.

It is a bit difficult to dance a Kabuki dance with your adversary when he already knows your moves and holds the script guiding your actions.

The final third of the book provides a detailed look at the Singapore and Pacific disaster and is worth the read all by itself.

And throughout the narrative are informed judgments about what happened, why and perhaps actions which might have been taken to deal with the coming Japanese attack.

Here is one example of the kind of insights one can find in this part of the book.⁴

“The Japanese attack on Malaya and at Pearl Harbor was not the first (not likely the last time) the American and British governments failed to anticipate the actions of a foreign power.

“There are many similarities with the Argentinian occupation of the Falklands in 1982 when ministers and the intelligence services, aware of increasing Argentinian frustration and nationalist fervor, simply did not believe that an invasion would take place.

The cognitive behavior that contributed to this strategic blindness included:

“Transferred Judgment”: the erroneous belief that others, even non-democratic states, will be deterred by the same factors that would make you hesitate.

“Mirror-imaging”: The assumption that others are likely to act as you would act under the same circumstances.

“Deception”: The aggressor’s actions to hide true intentions.

“Perseveration”: The psychological phenomenon whereby initial errors are very difficult to correct alter. Such anchoring errors can provide robust, even in the face of conflicting and contradictory information.”

In short, this is an important work.

Not just for what it tells us about an historical figure, but what it reminds us of what history can tell us if we pay attention to her and can actually learn.

My father used to tell me that it was not wrong to make mistakes; just making the same one repeatedly.

And by the way, he fought in the Pacific during World War II.

Footnotes

1. Pages 51-52.
2. Page 86.
3. Pages 119-120
4. Page 201.