

Naval War College Review

Volume 70
Number 3 *Summer*

Article 21

2017

The Role of the Royal Navy in South America, 1920–1970, by Jon Wise

Angus Ross

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

Recommended Citation

Ross, Angus (2017) "The Role of the Royal Navy in South America, 1920–1970, by Jon Wise," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 70 : No. 3, Article 21.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol70/iss3/21>

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.

certainly lack the high-intensity combat usually considered “worthy” of retelling. Although Wood’s research is voluminous, it relies heavily on published materials. Archival records and Vietnamese-language sources would strengthen an already insightful analysis of American veteran narratives and their imprint on popular perception of the war. Moreover, Wood’s reliance on previous scholars’ works undercuts his oft-repeated claim that the book offers an overdue corrective to existing scholarship. Indeed, this slender volume is directed not only to the casual reader but to the professional historian. According to Wood, Vietnam veteran memoirs have received “inadequate treatment” by literary scholars and historians, who generally consider only a small sample of texts and fail to distinguish fiction from nonfiction narratives. He further charges that few military historians scrutinize veteran-authored texts. Yet Wood’s fundamental premise that this book “is a work of history, but it does not treat veteran memoirs as sources that can be straightforwardly mined for information” belies a naive understanding of professional historical practice (p. 5). Any responsible scholar approaches her sources—archival and secondary—with a professionally critical eye.

Even so, this book would be an excellent addition to an undergraduate military history curriculum. Wood’s clear and impressive synthesis of historical and literary scholarship provides a useful introduction to the critical study of Vietnam veteran memoirs. Interested readers will want to supplement Wood’s book with fine-grain examinations such as David Kieran’s *Forever Vietnam: How*

a Divisive War Changed American Public Memory, Thomas Myers’s *Walking Point: American Narratives of Vietnam*, and Jerry Lembcke’s *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*.

BREANNE ROBERTSON



The Role of the Royal Navy in South America, 1920–1970, by Jon Wise. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. 288 pages. \$122.

Although arguably not a very enticing title for American naval professionals, this small, hardback book is nonetheless well worth their time. The author’s aim is to illustrate the contribution that the maritime service can make to a nation’s foreign policy in peacetime, and in particular to the health of its shipbuilding and defense exports. While the book obviously showcases the fortunes of twentieth-century Great Britain, the points it makes are broadly transferable and increasingly relevant in this era of growing emphasis on seamless inter-governmental cooperation. Besides, the subject matter is refreshing: How often among naval monographs do you find a top-notch scholarly investigation into that most mundane and yet ubiquitous naval mission of “presence” or “showing the flag”? Naval officers are quick to extol the virtues of these activities in conversation, but few actually can substantiate their claims. This book goes some way toward filling that gap.

The book has its origins in a PhD dissertation on the history of the relationship between the Royal Navy and its Chilean counterpart. As such it limits the focus to a manageable analysis of the presence

mission in a particular theater at a given time, while at the same time allowing a useful extension into the broader topic of naval diplomacy throughout the Americas as a backdrop. The work begins with a survey of the extant scholarship on *showing the flag*—a term that the author explains is really too broad to be useful—before moving chronologically through the decades of the last century. By and large the chapters flow logically into one another, although the comparative chapter on U.S. postwar defense plans (chapter 6) seems something of an outlier, particularly in view of the title. The research is excellent and uses a wide variety of contemporary official sources and established scholarly works. The author is an academic researcher and does not appear to have had any naval experience, although he has done his homework in gathering the appropriate naval opinions. The work forms a concise and usable package. (However, from a publishing point of view, the physical ink used in the printing leaves a lot to be desired. In the reviewer's copy, even the action of fingering a page lifted the print right off the paper!)

The book's overall message is that, while the Royal Navy was suffering through a stretch of undeniable decline throughout the period, even in its heyday the service never really enjoyed a position of complete, influential dominance on the South American continent. Furthermore, by being proactive and focusing its efforts on areas where success was more likely, it managed to maintain a surprising level of influence for far longer than one might have imagined in what was, after all, very much a secondary theater for the United Kingdom. To this end, the book

showcases the importance of the attaché in linking naval and diplomatic efforts, as well as the enormous value of offering educational experiences and exchanges to foreign officers, thereby sowing the seed corn for future cooperation.

Interestingly, it also demonstrates that even in the absence of such schemes, the Royal Navy leadership could and did lead the impetus for change, with surprising success—as evidenced by the impact of the 1970s “Group Operating” concept, which enhanced the prestige value of the navy's visits ashore while at the same time sustaining its skills and capabilities at sea. The navy benefited in that its “blue-water” skills were preserved far longer than would have been possible otherwise, and defense sales benefited from the showcasing of those skills. It truly was a “win-win” development. In conclusion, this is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in the broad topic of naval diplomacy overseas or defense sales in particular.

ANGUS ROSS



The Warrior, Military Ethics and Contemporary Warfare: Achilles Goes Asymmetrical, by Pauline M. Kaurin. Surrey, U.K.: Ashgate, 2014. 154 pages. \$149.95.

Pauline Kaurin is associate professor of philosophy at Pacific Lutheran University, specializing in the just war tradition and military ethics. For this volume, Kaurin developed her research during time at the U.S. Naval Academy and U.S. Military Academy and in dialogue with academic colleagues in the International Society for Military Ethics. This volume examines the ethical