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Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century: An International Perspective

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defense policy, and especially readers interested in defense transformation.

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Bell, Christopher M., and Bruce A. Elleman, eds. *Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century: An International Perspective*. London: Frank Cass, 2003. 288pp. \$125

Throughout this excellent collection of essays on what might rightly be called the mystique of mutiny runs a significant thread—that from centuries of laws and regulations governing naval conduct and discipline there has emerged no precise or universally accepted definition of mutiny. Ambiguity has clouded every effort to create one. The only consistent element, despite the number of crewmen involved and the growth of simple disobedience into violence, is the necessary presence of usurpation and subversion of authority.

This is evident in what thirteen writers contribute here, in an authoritative and attractive style and tone. The mutinies they have selected for study are of a character so dramatic that no matter how scholarly the approach and painstaking the research, each tale is likely to intrigue the reader. Certain selections may be familiar: the Russian battleship *Potemkin*, the mass uprising that shook the German High Seas Fleet in 1918, Invergordon, and the Port Chicago mutiny. The authors—Robert Zebroski, Michael Epkenhans of Germany's Otto von Bismarck Foundation, Christopher M. Bell, and Regina T. Akers of the Naval Historical Center—tackle their subjects with fresh appraisal and zeal. The bloody *Potemkin* revolt led to the fall of

the Romanovs. The mutinous German seamen sabotaged their government's war effort. The Invergordon mutiny threw Great Britain off the gold standard. Thanks mostly to the NAACP's brilliant young lawyer, Thurgood Marshall, the Port Chicago episode not only struck a blow at racial discrimination but highlighted the endless debate of what constitutes a mutiny. Also, it should not be forgotten that President Clinton's pardon of Freddie Meeks in 1999 still leaves the names of forty-nine African-Americans on record as the only convicted mutineers in U.S. naval history.

The lesser known mutinies are dealt with by equally qualified experts with comparable skill and revelation. In 1910 the fury of Brazilian sailors against brutal employment of the lash reflected that country's discontent. After winning minor reforms from the ruling class, the men of the dreadnoughts *Minas Geraes* and *Sao Paulo* continued to show the Brazilian flag above subequatorial waters, maintaining their country's reputation as South America's leading naval power. The mutiny in the Adriatic Sea aboard the Austro-Hungarian armored cruisers *Sankt George* and *Kaiser Karl VI* in February 1918 is said to have helped bring down the Hapsburg monarchy. Yet as the author of "The Cattaro Mutiny, 1918," Paul G. Halpern of Florida State University, asserts, the revolt lasted only two days. Its causes were traceable to bad food, boredom, and plain war-weariness. Also mutinous, after four years of war with Germany, were French sailors when ordered into war against Russian Bolsheviks. While this event is the principal focus of the essay by French history professor Philippe Masson, notice

might have been taken of concurrent mutinous outbreaks prompted by the same disinclination to fight Russians, after fighting Germans, onboard British warships off Archangel and among American troops in the same region.

Homesickness and wartime restrictions were among the reasons why Australian tars defied their officers in 1919. The Chilean navy's revolt had its roots, as had that of the men of Invergordon, in the world economic depression, but the Chilean navy's revolt is notable as the first naval mutiny crushed by air bombardment. Indian sailors in the waning years of the British Raj staged lower-deck protests against their officers; the Canadian fleet developed "a tradition of mutiny" in the 1930s; and the Chongqing mutiny off Manchuria in 1949 "played a pivotal role in the . . . founding of the People's Republic of China."

Each story is briskly told, thoroughly detailed, and accompanied by comprehensive source data. Perhaps fortunately for riddle lovers, the question persists—what *is* a mutiny? Many of the Port Chicago fifty awaiting trial were bewildered, believing that a mutiny involved a crew overthrowing its officers and taking command of the ship. High-level brass can be just as confused. At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing following the Vietnam-era disturbances on the U.S. aircraft carriers *Constellation* and *Kitty Hawk*, the chairman asked Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, then Chief of Naval Operations, to define mutiny. Zumwalt passed that one on to his lawyer. The chairman wondered aloud if the *Caine* mutiny of Herman Wouk's novel, though fictional, was not the real thing; the CNO suggested that what happened on the *Bounty* was a genuine mutiny.

This book mentions these troubles on the American flattops only in passing. Were all the episodes it covers truly mutinies? Let the question rest. This is a fine book, eminently readable, and as definitive as any work can claim to be on the still mysterious matter of mutiny.

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Brown, Stephen R. *Scurvy: How a Surgeon, a Mariner, and a Gentleman Solved the Greatest Medical Mystery of the Age of Sail*. Markham, Ont.: Thomas Allen, 2003. 254pp. \$23.95

The conquest of scurvy played as great a role as any naval battle in the history of England's domination of the world during the Age of Sail. Today we understand that scurvy is a condition caused by dietary deficiency. The typical menu for a sailor in the eighteenth century consisted of biscuits, salt beef, salt pork, dried fish, butter, cheese, peas, and beer—hardly sources of vitamin C. According to the 1763 annual register tabulation of casualties among British sailors in the Seven Years' War with France, of 184,999 men, 133,708 died from disease, primarily scurvy, while only 1,512 were killed in action. Such numbers are hard to comprehend today.

Brown implies that America won its independence because the ravages of this disease prevented the British fleet from maintaining an effective blockade. Only a few years later, having conquered scurvy, the same navy thwarted Napoleon from mounting an invasion force and sustained a blockade preventing the French and Spanish from consolidating their ships into an effective fleet.