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Waiting for Dead Men's Shoes: Origins and Development of the U.S. Navy's Officer Personnel System, 1793–1941

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insufficient research and a tendency to conflate fleet exercises with strategic planning.

Nonetheless, and while the background material that makes up a significant portion of this study is not always reliable, the book is of value to the specialist for the fresh perspective it offers on the Royal Navy's response to the operational challenges of the interwar period.

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Chisholm, Donald. *Waiting for Dead Men's Shoes: Origins and Development of the U.S. Navy's Officer Personnel System, 1793–1941*. Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001. 883pp. \$125

Donald Chisholm has provided us with an important book. It is the first comprehensive history of the development of the U.S. Navy's officer personnel system. Others have provided portions of the picture; Christopher McKee's *A Gentlemanly and Honorable Profession: The Creation of the U.S. Naval Officer Corps, 1794–1815* is an excellent treatment of the early years. But the Royal Navy, from which many American practices derive, is more thoroughly covered. Extensive coverage of the Royal Navy is to be found in Michael Lewis's *British Ships and British Seamen* (1940); *The Navy of Britain: A Historical Portrait* (1948); *A Social History of the Navy, 1793–1815* (1960); and *The Navy in Transition, 1814–1864: A Social History* (1965). William Laird Clowe's magisterial seven-volume *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present* (1897), although dated, remains impressive. Yet no one has provided for the U.S. Navy books of such depth and coverage

until now, with Chisholm's impressive work.

Chisholm's intent goes well beyond a historical recounting of events. His stated aim is "to explore how institutions are created and elaborated, to assess the usefulness of the problem-solving conception of decision for so doing, and to relate the previously untold story of the origins and development of the U.S. Navy's officer personnel system." Chisholm believes that the problems faced by the Navy's officer personnel system parallel in many ways those faced by other large-scale organizations. He is at least as interested in process as he is in outcome, and he draws with impressive scholarship upon multiple disciplines, including not only history but political science, sociology, strategic management, foreign policy, and public administration. Although Chisholm's vehicle is the detailed study of naval officer personnel management, he uses that as a means of studying organizational management in a broader context. In this he is successful. Extensively researched in primary sources and thoroughly documented, his book is a major contribution to organizational theory.

The author's intended audience is the community of naval officers—past, present, and future—congressional scholars, and students of American political development. However, an even wider audience will appreciate this study for its insights into institutional problem solving, modification, and growth. However, even a comprehensive study such as this must set its limits. To make things manageable, Chisholm chose to omit the staff corps and Marine Corps, the development of the reserves, the creation and modifications of the Naval Academy curriculum, and the enlisted personnel system.

It took almost 150 years to construct the naval personnel system that existed at the beginning of World War II. Chisholm makes clear that this system did not come about because of any grand design but as the result of an infinite series of incremental decisions made to solve problems as they arose. The three main motivations behind these decisions were, Chisholm argues, efficiency, equity, and economy. "Efficiency" in this sense refers to the most economical use of resources, more closely resembling what might be called "effectiveness." "Equity" is concerned with protecting the rights of officers. "Economy" ensures the least possible cost at all times. First one, then another of these goals prevailed as the Navy interacted with the administration and Congress during its periodic expansions and contractions. The interaction between the Navy and Congress in addressing naval personnel problems represents a major portion of the historical action recounted here. Of particular value is the report on congressional naval debates, offering not only the bills that passed but the full flavor of the debates, including the attempts (both successful and not) to amend them and the arguments presented. This gives us an idea of not only what happened but also of what might have been.

The title of the book is taken from the memoirs of Rear Admiral Yates Stirling, Jr.: "With all its faults, and there are many, the Navy has accepted selection because it brings officers to high ranks young enough to be at their best. Promotion by seniority, waiting for dead men's shoes, is a sad blow to efficiency, for it stifles initiative and offers no incentive." Yet for well over a century, promotion by seniority prevailed. It took until what later came to be called the Line Personnel

Act of 1916 for the Navy to adopt "selection up" as the means for determining who was to be promoted. Chisholm characterizes this decision as "*the* pivotal point in the navy's history." The commanders and captains selected in the twenty years following the passage of the act were to become the flag officers who led the Navy in its greatest test, and finest hours, during World War II.

The main features of naval personnel organization emerged slowly and incrementally. Initially the Navy had only two ranks, lieutenant and captain; flag ranks were not established until the Civil War. For many years naval officers' pay lagged well behind that of Army officers. Advancement by seniority resulted in painfully slow promotion, which resulted in officers overage in grade. For half the period covered in this book the Navy had no means to retire officers. The principle of selection up was adopted only after trying a series of other ways to select for promotion. These included the use of professional examinations as a screening device and the establishment of "plucking boards" to accomplish "selection out." None, however, proved satisfactory. Even after accepting selection up, the Navy still had to figure out how the selection board would work, what criteria would be used, and the details of fitness reports. So simple a matter as determining the number of officers needed in the various grades took years to organize.

One of the great virtues of Chisholm's study is his detailed presentation of how every problem was addressed, describing the invariable false starts and unintended consequences that led serendipitously to a stronger institution. Chisholm argues that organizations cannot rely upon a succession of brilliant leaders: "It is that their rules and procedures—not least

those that govern the procurement, education and training, advancement, and placement of their personnel—permit them to operate effectively with normal human beings, and to withstand the occasional individual who proves less than completely competent.”

Gratitude is due to Stanford University Press for publishing this valuable work, which even at its steep price is unlikely to return its costs. For a book that will probably be consulted a great deal, however, it is too bad that a sturdier binding was not used. My copy is already beginning to fall apart.

Chisholm has achieved what he set out to do in fine style. He has provided a comprehensive history of naval officer personnel management and at the same time has shed light on the creation, structure, and problem solving that resulted in the organization we see today. From now on it will be impossible to write usefully about the history of personnel management without reference to this book. It promises to be a standard authority.

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Lehman, John. *On Seas of Glory: Heroic Men, Great Ships, and Epic Battles of the American Navy*. New York: Free Press, 2001. 436pp. \$35

John Lehman, former secretary of the Navy and author of *Command of the Seas* (1988), has with this book produced a masterful outline of “the grandeur of the American naval tradition.” The truest examples of this “grandeur” are “best found in its people, fighting sailors, technical innovators and inspiring leaders.” From John Paul Jones and the Revolu-

tionary War to the six-hundred-ship fleet of the Cold War, John Lehman brings us a wonderful episodic view of the U.S. Navy’s people and ships, and their collective contribution to the strength and character of the nation they have served.

Using both primary and secondary sources in the United States and England, Lehman offers an exciting and message-laden portrait of the American naval tradition, a portrait that is “deliberately selective and subjective.” In short, this book is not a typical chronological narrative history of the U.S. Navy but a stimulating history of a highly adaptive institution.

One of the most intriguing sections is the story of Joshua Humphreys, the “premier ship-builder” and “the most innovative and revolutionary designer of the age of sail.” Humphreys would design several warships for the young republic, all of them larger, faster, and more heavily armed than similar vessels in England or France. Collectively known today as the “super frigates,” this group included such storied vessels as *Constitution*, *United States*, and *President*. Even Admiral Horatio Nelson, the preeminent naval leader of his day, is quoted by Lehman as foreseeing “trouble for Britain in those big frigates across the sea”; the trouble of which Nelson warned came during the War of 1812. Throughout, Lehman contends that, contrary to the views of many historians, privateering had a significant impact on the outcome of both the American Revolution and the War of 1812. He argues that “the battles of the American Revolution were fought on land, and independence was won at sea.” This work does much to reinforce such a view.

From the end of the Civil War to the beginning of the Spanish-American War, a great deal of technological and strategic