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Lewin of Greenwich: The Authorised Biography of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Lewin

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Hill, Richard. *Lewin of Greenwich: The Authorised Biography of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Lewin*. London: Cassell, 2000. 443pp. £25

Having served with Admiral of the Fleet Lord Lewin as a midshipman, Prince Philip, the duke of Edinburgh, notes in his foreword that in 1979 Lewin was the last Chief of Defence Staff in the United Kingdom to have served in the Second World War. It was serendipitous that this experience proved to be a force multiplier in his final challenge before retirement, as he masterminded the Falklands War alongside the prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. Conscious of the crucial importance of ensuring the coherence of what he called “politico-military issues,” or what we now call the maintenance of a policy-strategy match, Lewin knew that success depended upon being heard as the single military voice within the War Cabinet, and on his remaining at Thatcher’s side throughout.

Richard Hill’s carefully researched biography of Lewin paints the portrait of a man who, from a relatively humble background in the 1930s, achieved the highest military position in the British armed forces, beginning and ending his career with warfare, at different ends of the spectrum. Hill himself retired from the Royal Navy as a rear admiral, having worked for Lewin in a number of appointments. Near the end of Lewin’s life, Hill was asked by Lewin to write his biography. Consequently, Hill presents an extremely authoritative and sympathetic account of the great man’s life, spanning four decades of dramatic change in post-war history and relating Lewin’s part in the radical restructuring of the British armed forces, the legacy of which is very much in evidence today.

Predictably, Hill deals with Lewin’s appointments sequentially. In this way, the biography divides itself very clearly into two parts, reflecting the marked differences between service at the front line in an operational unit and the cut-and-thrust of the Ministry of Defence.

The first half moves swiftly through Lewin’s childhood before concentrating on his wartime experience, the highlight of which was his appointment in the Tribal-class destroyer HMS *Ashanti*, which played a crucial part in the North Russian convoys. *Ashanti* was then tasked to join Operation PEDESTAL in 1942, to convoy critical supplies to the besieged island of Malta; the advance of Erwin Rommel’s Afrika Korps on El Alamein had been largely a result of the Allies’ inability to use the forces based in Malta to cut German supply lines. The epic of PEDESTAL and the drama surrounding the torpedoed oil tanker *Ohio*, before it was towed into Valetta to the delight of the populace, is a tremendous story in itself. *Ashanti* rode shotgun on *Ohio* to Malta and then was dispatched to prepare for the next convoy to North Russia. As a sub-lieutenant, Lewin distinguished himself with great aplomb and finished the war having been mentioned in despatches three times and awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for “gallantry, skill and resolution . . . escorting an important convoy to North Russia in face of relentless attacks by enemy aircraft and submarines.” Postwar, his very swift promotion provided him with three commands, the last of which was the aircraft carrier HMS *Hermes*, aboard which he faced the challenges posed by the Aden crisis and the Six Day War of 1967.

In the second half of the biography, Hill’s emphasis moves from narrative to analysis. Lewin’s appointments in the Ministry

of Defence, dealing with issues at the strategic level, exposed him to the ill-defined world of negotiation and compromise and to the requirement to balance the myriad of interests between politics, the defence industry, the research lobby, academia, and the military itself. Here, Hill's greater depth and increased granularity of analysis provide a far better insight to the man, who wrestled with the introduction of Trident as Britain's strategic deterrent, and with the reorganization of the highest levels of defence to establish the primacy of the Chief of the Defence Staff over the service chiefs. Lewin's open mind, calm and modern style of leadership, and determination to deliver a viable and flexible defence for the United Kingdom of 2020 made him unique amongst his peers and still marks him out as an inspiration for all today. His vision of the establishment of a genuinely joint-service culture and of a balanced fleet that is fully interoperable with the Army and Royal Air Force and has a global reach, with a resulting capability to act as a force for good on the international stage, still exists today and continues to be refined in an uncertain world.

With the Quadrennial Defense Review in progress, the latter half of the biography will especially appeal to most of this journal's readership. It will be of real value to Naval War College students only a few years removed from their first assignment to the Department of Defense in Washington. Having gone myself straight from frigate command and the U.S. Naval War College to the Ministry of Defence for the first time—to face the Strategic Defence Review (our QDR)—I would have found Hill's insight into Lewin's match-winning formula an extremely useful preparation. Notwithstanding the time lapse and slight cultural

differences, the frenetic activity and the importance of networking skills and integrity are the same in the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Defense, and the wheels of progress still move quite slowly in both London and Washington.

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Sandars, C. T. *America's Overseas Garrisons: The Leasehold Empire*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000. 345pp. \$65

Christopher Sandars, a career civil servant at the British Ministry of Defence, has written a concise and judicious account, based on published sources, of the unique global security system developed by the United States in the years after World War II. Convinced that this American system was neither a traditional empire nor an attempt to gain worldwide hegemony, he describes it as a "leasehold empire," a novel security system necessitated by America's anticolonial tradition and by the surge of postwar nationalism, in which the United States negotiated a series of base agreements with largely sovereign states. His study traces the development of this system and the enormous variety within it, ranging from colonial relationships with Guam, Hawaii, Panama, and the Philippines to basing rights by virtue of conquest in Germany, Italy, Japan, and South Korea, to the revival of wartime arrangements in Great Britain, and to the acquisition of heavily circumscribed rights in some Middle Eastern nations.

In dealing with these categories, Sandars provides a brief history of America's