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Salvage Man: Edward Ellsberg and the U.S. Navy

Frank C. Mahncke

John D. Alden

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mentions low morale in chapters 11 and 12, which would seem to undercut his remarks in the previous chapter.

Historians have long debated Hirohito's role in the Pacific War and the extent of his influence on Japanese decision making. Was he the mastermind of Japanese aggression or a constitutional monarch with pacifist leanings but no real influence over policy? Drea reasonably positions himself between these extremes. The emperor was briefed in detail on military affairs and could "influence the shape of the emerging consensus" by questioning his service chiefs. On the other hand, the military leaders often gave evasive answers or simply ignored their emperor's wishes. With elegant parsimony, Drea maintains that Hirohito's behavior throughout the Pacific War was driven by the desire to win a "decisive victory" that would enable Japan to conclude a negotiated peace and thereby preserve the imperial line. His argument is well supported with specific evidence, including passages from the recently rediscovered "Shōwa emperor's monologue," which Hirohito dictated to imperial household officials in 1946.

Drea's book should be read by anyone who wishes to understand why the Japanese armed forces and their leaders acted as they did during World War II.

DAVID A. GRAFF
Kansas State University

Alden, John D. *Salvage Man: Edward Ellsberg and the U.S. Navy*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998. 352pp. \$37.50

To this day, I keep and treasure battered copies of Commander Edward Ellsberg's books *On the Bottom*, *Men under the Sea*, and *Under the Red Sea Sun*—books I read and read again as a teenager. I devoured these stirring accounts of deep-sea salvage, reading by flashlight under the blanket after lights-out, an environment not unlike the tunneling under the sunken *S-51* so vividly described by Ellsberg. I often wondered who this "Commander Ellsberg of the Navy" was. Now, thanks to John Alden's sterling biography, I know.

Born in Colorado in 1891, Ellsberg graduated from Annapolis in 1914, at the head of his class academically but low in military efficiency. In his career he was a "can do" engineer, salvage master, inventor, writer, lecturer, and public figure both in the Navy and in civilian life.

Author of thirteen popular books on marine salvage and countless articles for the technical and popular press, Ellsberg became well known for his technical commentary on maritime and naval engineering matters. He left the Navy twice, frustrated by its bureaucratic ways and its displeasure with his public stature. Twice he returned when the Navy needed him.

The salvage and raising of the submarine *S-51* first brought national recognition. The *S-51* had been rammed off Block Island, Rhode Island, in September 1925, losing all but three hands. At the time, the Navy had no deep-water salvage capability and was dependent on maritime contractors. Ellsberg convinced the commandant of the Brooklyn Navy Yard that he could raise

the *S-51* with Navy divers and ships. The Navy would salvage its own.

Lying far over on its side in 132 feet of storm-tossed winter water, the *S-51* presented formidable salvage problems. Ellsberg, who had qualified as a diver, rounded up about all the divers the Navy had and set to work. First, they had to clear the tangled topside rigging from the submarine. To do this Ellsberg developed an underwater cutting torch, which he later patented and that became the standard for underwater work. Next, the divers bored tunnels under the boat, using high-pressure hoses to flush out the silt. Through these tunnels chains were passed and attached to flooded pontoons, which, when blown full of air, would lift the *S-51*.

All this sounds deceptively easy, but it was cruel, hard work. The weather was miserable, tunnels collapsed on the divers, the pontoons would lift unevenly, and the submarine would slip back to the bottom. Finally, in the summer of 1926, the *S-51* was brought to the surface and towed back to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where the bodies of its crew were recovered for burial. In 1929 Ellsberg wrote his first book, *On the Bottom*, about the salvage of *S-51*. It made him a public figure.

Ellsberg was not, however, a popular figure in the interwar U.S. Navy: he received too much public attention and was too outspoken. In 1926, denied a meritorious promotion and told that he would have to wait another eight years, he resigned and began a new career as a petroleum engineer and consultant. He returned to active duty briefly in December 1927, to assist with the salvage of the submarine *S-4*, which had been rammed and sunk off Cape Cod.

On 8 December 1941 Ellsberg again rejoined the Navy and was sent to the Red Sea to clear the wrecked ships left by the Axis forces to block the port of Massawa, Ethiopia (now Eritrea). Clearing and opening the port involved hammering together a workforce of British, American, and Italian technicians, rebuilding the port's machine shops, and refloating a sunken drydock and several ships. Ellsberg raised the drydock in nine days and was promoted to captain—all this in fetid heat and in the face of obstinate British and American naval bureaucracies.

In November 1942 he was rewarded for his accomplishments at Massawa with a transfer to the North African coast, where he cleared the ports of Oran and Algiers for Operation TORCH. Here he conquered once again the problems of Massawa, with the Vichy French added for flavor.

From North Africa he was brought to England to advise on the PHOENIX Project, huge concrete caissons that were to be sunk off Normandy to form breakwaters for artificial harbors to be constructed immediately after D-Day. It appears that Ellsberg was less happy than in the Red Sea and North Africa, for he was not a man well suited to advising with tact and diplomacy other engineers who were about to get into serious trouble.

After the war, Ellsberg returned to private life as a consulting engineer, eventually retiring to Maine, where he continued to lecture, write, and stay in the public eye. He died in 1983 at ninety-one.

Ellsberg's biographer, John Alden, is a former submariner, naval engineer, and author of several previous books for

the Naval Institute Press. In 1984 he received a grant from the Office of Naval History to write *Salvage Man*.

Alden paints a portrait of an extraordinarily competent, capable, "hands on" officer who was tenacious, focused, and knew exactly what needed to be done and how to do it. Ellsberg was blunt and direct. He built organizations where none existed, often with little support or even against serious resistance from higher authorities. He was a "shade tree" mechanic and a robust field engineer who taught men how to do their jobs under difficult circumstances, leading by doing himself. At the age of fifty-one, he was diving on wrecked ships, placing pumps and explosives. In his own words, "It never pays to quit until you're dead."

FRANK C. MAHNCKE
Washington, D.C.

Ringle, Dennis J. *Life in Mr. Lincoln's Navy*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998. 202pp. \$32.95

McPherson, James M., and Patricia R. McPherson, eds. *Lamson of the Gettysburg: The Civil War Letters of Lieutenant Roswell H. Lamson, U.S. Navy*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997. 240pp. \$25

Following the Union victory at Vicksburg in the summer of 1863, President Abraham Lincoln wrote, "The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea," referring to the Mississippi River, now entirely under Union control. Yet in acknowledging the Union armies' victories in the West

as well as the East, he added, "Nor must Uncle Sam's Web feet be forgotten. They have been present, not only on the deep sea, the broad bay, and the rapid river, but also up the narrow muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp, they have been, and made their tracks." Lincoln's "Web feet" of course were the vessels and seamen of the United States Navy, which had contributed mightily to the Union effort.

Of the plethora of books and manuscripts on the American Civil War, surprisingly few address that contribution. Two recent studies help rectify this imbalance. Dennis J. Ringle's *Life in Mr. Lincoln's Navy* is the first study covering all aspects of the common sailor's life in the Union navy, including recruiting, clothing, training, daily shipboard routine, diet, wages, health, and combat experience. This thoroughly documented text provides more than a glimpse of nautical life in the fledgling world of steam engineering. It also offers a fresh look at the social history of the mid-nineteenth century.

Using ships' logs, published and unpublished letters, and diaries, Ringle examines the service lives of enlisted men assigned to naval vessels on the high seas and internal waterways. Contrasting the Union navy of 1865 to that of the antebellum period, he sees far more than a transition from a coastal force to a six-hundred-ship fleet manned by 51,500 sailors. Over the course of the war, the Navy successfully applied new technologies of steam and iron and altered naval warfare forever. In the process of contributing to the North's ultimate victory, it also participated in joint operations that forwarded