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Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era

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quickly by an overwhelming majority. Moïse then covers the “DeSoto” patrols, in which *Maddox* participated. These patrols took place off the coast of North Vietnam, monitoring electronic activity to aid the coastal raids that were part of OPLAN 34A. Moïse shows that these raids took place in the Tonkin Gulf on the night of 30–31 July, just before *Maddox* entered the area. The attack by the North Vietnamese against *Maddox* on 2 August took place in this context. There was no American response, save a warning and more OPLAN 34A operations on 3–4 August, along with the movement of *C. Turner Joy* to join *Maddox* on patrol. Moïse details the events of 2 August and the resumption of the DeSoto patrols, emphasizing how members of the Johnson administration misled Congress about these events.

The most engrossing part of this book recounts the events of 4 August with painstaking detail, piecing together documents and interviews to reconstruct what did, and what did not, happen. Here the book has a tendency to bog down a bit, as Moïse takes care to sort out details of everything, including time zones and tracking charts. He concludes that it was a combination of bizarre weather conditions, a dark night, and overzealous radarmen that led to the inaccurate conclusion that *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* were under attack. His final chapters discuss U.S. retaliation for the incident, including how the Johnson administration used the information to sway the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and escalate the war—even though many in the

Joint Staff, “even the Navy people,” had concluded that probably no attack had occurred.

In retrospect, does it matter if the 4 August attack took place? Moïse recalls that in 1965 McGeorge Bundy referred to events in Vietnam as streetcars: if you don’t hop on one, you can hop on another. Perhaps this was the case, Moïse argues, although it is hard to imagine the same flow of events happening in Vietnam *without* the Tonkin Gulf incident. This streetcar, states the author, came about by accident, but once the United States jumped on, there was no going back; the streetcar metaphor implies too much linearity. The very fact that the Tonkin Gulf streetcar was a phantom makes its place in our policy history worthy of study.

This is an excellent book, chosen as a selection in the History Book Club. While it is slow reading at certain points, it is thorough and provocative throughout. The subject is an important one, because the issues of war, advice, presidential power, and truth are always with us. It is essential reading for the national security community and those interested in U.S. policy in Vietnam or the U.S. presidency.

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Buzzanco, Robert. *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996. 386pp. \$29.95

144 Naval War College Review

Masters of War is a version of the author's 1993 doctoral dissertation at Ohio State. He is presently an assistant professor of history at the University of Houston. The subject, as its subtitle implies, is the interplay and conflict between U.S. military and civilian leadership during the Vietnam War. While the author does not confine himself strictly to the area of civil-military relations, that is his principal focus.

The historical laboratory that Buzzanco employs is the period from the beginning of the John F. Kennedy administration in 1961 through the immediate aftermath of the Tet Offensive in 1968, where the book cuts off. He breaks down his examination into seven time periods, beginning with the early Kennedy miscues in foreign and strategic policy.

Throughout his analysis the author employs four themes: military perceptions of the risky basis of the war, civilian responsibility for commitment to the war, antagonisms between civilians and the military, and rivalry between services regarding strategy and resource allocation.

Buzzanco provides the usual parade of documents for this period, interspersed with occasional value judgments and also summary assessments of each section. However, the judgments appear to be preconceived, since they are not based on any analysis of the documentary evidence. Also, in certain of the summary evaluations the author is on questionable ground. He states, for example, that "in the early 1950s, despite the military's bold stand against intervention, [President Dwight D.] Eisenhower and [Secretary of State John

Foster] Dulles continued to seek ways to get American troops involved in Indochina." To begin with, Eisenhower and Dulles were not of the same mind on this subject, and Ike ran the show. Recall, for example, Eisenhower's disapproval of Secretary Dulles's and Admiral Arthur Radford's plans for U.S. intervention at the time of Dien Bien Phu. While he was president, Eisenhower had no intention of getting U.S. troops involved in Vietnam beyond the level of advisors, who numbered well under one thousand while he was in office.

In part, Buzzanco's problem seems to be the magnitude of his initial goals without any overarching central question or hypothesis. In certain of his conclusions it is not clear what he had in mind. For instance, he writes, "During the Johnson years, as combat troops entered the battlefield and took over the war . . . politics increasingly determined the U.S. approach to Vietnam." What else, one wonders, could have? As Karl von Clausewitz stated long ago, "War has its own language but not its own logic." The subordination of the military to the political point of view is the only thing possible under our form of government. If, however, what he meant was that the senior military should have been more forthright with the president in disagreeing with certain decisions, he is correct. The acceptance in July 1965 by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Earle G. Wheeler of President Johnson's decision not to call up the reserves is a prime example.

The subject of this book is an important one, and Buzzanco writes well. I hope in the future he will pursue the

matter more analytically and expand the historical period of his study. In the context in which he is writing, one cannot end an examination of the matter at Tet 1968 but must continue on through the U.S. withdrawal, or at least until 1973. He also, I submit, should answer for himself that most difficult of all issues—What is the question? Nevertheless, I recommend this book to those who are interested in studying America's major foreign and strategic policy failure of the twentieth century—the Vietnam War. This book is provocative, interesting, and worth the time of student and policy maker alike.

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Dawes, Robert A., Jr. *The Dragon's Breath: Hurricane At Sea*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1996. 248pp. \$29.95

The defining features of Commander Dawes's account of a ship's disastrous end are as intertwined and interdependent as the strands of a nautical cable. He combines the theory and analysis of failure with the fatal links in the chain of real events in 1944 that led the "broken decker" USS *Warrington* (DD 383) to its grave fourteen thousand feet below the surface of the Atlantic. To these Dawes tightly weaves a critical review of the court of inquiry's findings and the voices of actual survivors.

The result is no mere tale of wind and water. The story unfolds in scenes with pace and panic well matched to any movie thriller, but also with the

attention to detail found in training manuals and exercises aimed at preserving ships and lives at sea. The ill-fated vessel encounters a hurricane, capsizes, and sinks. Two hundred forty-seven perish, and sixty-eight survive. Dawes's research, interviews, and personal familiarity with ship and crew allow the narrative to proceed as if it were his own diary, overlaid upon the log itself. The reader can hear the howl of the 140-mile-per-hour winds, see the monstrous waves nearly seventy feet high, and taste the brine itself as officers and crew fight for the ship and their own lives.

Those who have served at sea will find themselves swept up in the flow of fact and testimony, just as *Warrington* was carried to oblivion as it attempted to turn 180 degrees and run before the wind. It was doomed by a combination of flaws in the hull design, seam and structural separations that allowed massive surges to flood the vital spaces below. In this sense, the term "broken deck" applied to the ship in eerily prophetic ways. A sailing bow in crosswind conditions coupled with a series of deferred repairs made steering in the following seas an almost impossible task. Torn and fractured in the final hours, *Warrington* was at last unable to right itself.

The author relinquished command of the ship just fourteen days before its loss in September 1944. Prior to the turnover he had taken *Warrington* in harm's way, into action in the Pacific. He came to know the ship intimately, along with its increasingly overworked but effective crew. Dawes consistently brought attention to the urgency of the