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In Jeopardy: The Royal Navy and British Far Eastern Defence Policy, 1945-1951

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This tale is difficult to categorize but wonderful to read. It is a biography, history, commentary, and Greek tragedy of the five major players in the Iran-Contra affair. John McCain, the son and grandson of admirals, is a former naval aviator who was shot down over North Vietnam, imprisoned, and tortured. He returned to the U.S. to become a senator from Arizona. Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, U.S. Marine Corps, who was the pivotal figure in Iran-Contra, demonstrated throughout his flamboyant career the essence of the Naval Academy mantra, "a message to Garcia," accomplishing his assigned missions with determination and flair. Vice Admiral John Poindexter, a quiet, brilliant man who finished first in his Annapolis class and served there as Brigade Commander, emerges as the gifted national security advisor. Bud McFarlane, the introverted foreign policy expert, was Poindexter's predecessor. James Webb, the most decorated combat Marine of his class, served as Secretary of the Navy during a portion of the scandal.

However, this book is no more about Iran-Contra than *Moby Dick* is about whaling. The real themes of this morality tale are the twin towers of ambition and Vietnam and their impact on a generation of Americans. There is also a superbly realized portrait of the Naval Academy of the 1950s and 1960s.

Robert Timberg is a graduate of the Naval Academy, a Marine veteran, and renowned journalist. In summarizing these men, he writes: "Each in his own way stands as a flesh-and-blood repository of [his] generation's anguish and sense of betrayal. Whatever they later

became—hero, hot dog, hustler or zealot—they were for a time among the best and brightest this nation had to offer. And in their formative years—at Annapolis and during the Vietnam era—they shared a seemingly unassailable certainty. They believed in America."

Who is the nightingale in the title? Ronald Reagan himself. The story goes that a young nightingale cannot sing until it hears the sweet song of another nightingale. In isolation, the bird would never sing. But when the young bird first hears another, a genetic code is unlocked and it bursts forth in full-throated song. Tinberg's conceit is that Reagan provided the first trilling notes and that when the others (especially Oliver North) heard the song, they too began to sing.

This is a big, thoughtful, readable book with much to say about national security.

JAMES STAVRIDIS
Commander, U.S. Navy

Murfett, Malcolm H. *In Jeopardy: The Royal Navy and British Far Eastern Defence Policy, 1945–1951*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995. 192pp. \$38

In the 1945 general election, Clement Attlee led the Labour Party to parliamentary victory with a mission of radically transforming British society through expensive and comprehensive domestic reform. The necessary funding for these programs, coupled with the severely weakened post-World War II economy, mandated a drastic reduction in military and naval force

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levels and expenditures, resulting in a "major revision" of British Far East defense policy.

Malcolm H. Murfett, Senior Lecturer of History at the National University of Singapore and author of several monographs on British naval policy in the Far East, analyzes the decisions of the Attlee government and the service chiefs during this period of wrenching disarmament, made more intense by the slow pace of economic recovery and chronic monetary crises. He uses authoritative secondary sources, as well as notes and minutes of numerous Cabinet, working group, service, Ministry of Defence, and parliamentary-committee meetings to build his case. An acknowledged weakness in primary sources is the continued classification of papers under the Public Records Act of 1958, particularly those of the British Defence Co-ordination Committee (Far East) and the Singapore-based Regional Commanders in Chief Committee. What this study illustrates is the potential for conflict and threat to security and economic stability when "a punishing course of disarmament" is undertaken to pay for a "highly expensive domestic reform programme"—a fundamental lesson for post-Cold War governments struggling with domestic versus security spending priorities.

The author characterizes Attlee as a "pragmatic realist" who, with Minister of Defence Albert V. Alexander, essentially espoused a "conservative foreign and defence policy" after 1950. He did so under the pressure of communist insurgency in Malaya and Indochina, the rise of the Peoples' Republic of China (and the attendant threat to Hong

Kong and Commonwealth political and economic regional interests), the North Korean invasion of the South, and the advent of the Cold War. Despite the dramatic rise in military expenditures after 1950, with increased funding, pay, and the extension of compulsory National Service to two years, the damage of the preceding four years remained. Murfett describes the pre-1950 British security policy as "in a state of flux." Decisions about the role of Commonwealth forces in regional security, the extent to which British influence in the Far East should be sacrificed (particularly to the United States), the ultimate level of funding, overall fleet strength, and the numbers to be deployed to the Indian Ocean or Pacific, agonized service and political decision makers.

For example, the recommendation of the Harwood Working Party (June 1949) to reduce the Royal Navy to essentially a home defense force and the strident reaction of pro-naval agencies "[illustrate] the enduring problem of matching military needs and economic resources." Base location proved especially thorny, with Singapore ultimately chosen as the central fleet site over Hong Kong or Australia despite senior officer opposition. The reduction of fleet assets by 1950 to roughly 40 percent of late 1945 demonstrates the British dilemma, which was characterized by Alexander as "virtually abandoning our position in the Pacific, seriously weakening our strength in the Mediterranean and Germany, and providing no margin to meet unforeseen circumstances."

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