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Shield of the Republic, 1945-1962

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achieve all that its proponents claimed—until the destructiveness of atomic weapons was demonstrated. Without the atomic bomb, amphibious invasion seemed the only sure way to end a conflict characterized by suicidal Japanese defenses.

On the surface, the debate concerning President Truman's decision should have ended years ago. Ninety-nine percent of the key decision makers—both American and Japanese—agreed that it took the shock of the “absolute weapon” to cause Japan's surrender. Most official assessments credit the bomb with being a critical (if not the *most* critical) factor in convincing Emperor Hirohito to sue for peace. The testimonial evidence is overwhelming. Japan knew that the war was lost yet planned to fight on until it achieved a more favorable treaty than unconditional surrender. In fact, many Japanese military leaders were determined to fight to the death in the “decisive battle” that would fix their immortality as true samurai.

Most confusing are the parochial claims of airpower and seapower advocates that the war could have ended without bomb or invasion. These revisionist scholars, determined to prove the evils of atomic weapons, capitalism, or American foreign policy in general, have seized upon the few contradictory sources to “prove” that the atomic bombing was immoral. Allen and Polmar cut through this confusion in a nonpolemic fashion, by simply laying out the American plans for invasion and estimates of its cost, the Japanese military commitment to a “decisive battle,” and the face-saving excuse which atomic destruction provided to the

Emperor of Japan. They also detail the attempted military coup that nearly prevented the surrender.

In a final assessment, the authors recount the words of a billboard outside the atomic components factory at Oak Ridge, Tennessee: “Whose son will die in the last minutes of the war?” Many died in World War II, but the final invasion and occupation of Japan (Operation *DOWNFALL*) began with the stroke of a pen and not the crash of a kamikaze. If you still need convincing, reading *Code-Name Downfall* should prove decisive. And if you are already convinced but want a clearer picture of the decision-making process of Allied and Japanese leaders, this is the best single-volume source currently in print.

SAM J. TANGREDI
Commander, U.S. Navy

Ilsenberg, Michael T. *Shield of the Republic, 1945–1962*. Vol. 1. New York: St. Martin's, 1993. 948pp. \$35
Shield of the Republic is an epic account of the U.S. Navy during the stormy years following the end of the Second World War. Its comprehensive sweep ranges from highbrow issues of national security strategy to the relentless technological advances that drove institutional change, down to detailed portrayals of the lives and problems of sailors during the postwar period. Along the way, the author intersperses numerous vignettes and character sketches, which keep the narrative moving smartly.

The scene opens in Tokyo Bay on the morning of the Japanese surrender,

with a detailed description of a Navy that had just won one of the most overwhelming maritime victories in history, leaving no conceivable future foe in the field. And therein lay the problem. With no Mahanian enemy, a powerful new service rival claiming the atomic mantle for itself, and few apparent missions, the Navy struggled to justify its existence. "In the new, uncertain world taking shape in the terrible shadow of atomic energy, what purposes the awesome collection of naval power within and beyond Tokyo Bay might serve remained to be seen."

The author traces the Navy's often demoralizing fight in the late 1940s for a significant place in national military strategy. He then describes the sudden reversal in fortunes when events in Korea demonstrated in no uncertain terms that the Navy was still powerful and useful to have around. American political leaders came to find the naval forces indispensable in a host of situations when the use or threat of force could usefully underpin diplomacy, from Matsu and Quemoy, to Lebanon in 1958, to the Cuban Missile Crisis. By 1962, far from the demoralized postwar service, "the incomparably powerful instrument that was the Cold War Navy steamed on, at its triumphant peak."

Rampantly advancing technology also drove change. Isenberg skillfully weaves into the narrative accounts of technical advances like the development of the large carrier, nuclear-powered submarines and their marriage to the ballistic missile, fleet missile defense, and the electronics revolution. Underlying all these developments was the Navy's extraordinary involvement

in basic scientific research of all kinds, whether through the Office of Naval Research and its associated laboratories or by sponsoring work in the civilian world.

People and personalities are not neglected either. The author traces the rise of the aviators to dominance, followed later by the growing influence of the submariners. He dedicates separate chapters to discussions on senior leadership, the "wardroom," and the enlisted community, from multiple perspectives ranging from personnel training and management problems to sociological considerations.

In short, there is much to like about this book. However, it has some significant weaknesses. There are numerous typographical errors as well as distracting errors of fact that good editing should have caught. More seriously, the narrative is frequently tainted by "political correctness." For example, "To the service's discredit, however, the Navy . . . remained a rock-solid pillar of male supremacy, hypermasculine attitudes, and male-oriented sexual discrimination—against both women and homosexuals." The problem is not the author's particular views, but rather the sneeringly contemptuous attitude he takes toward those who have qualms, for serious reasons, about the desirability of open homosexuals in the military or of women in combat roles.

Similarly, the author is contemptuous of certain other "types." Throughout the book he looks dismissively on those who believed the Soviet Union was a malignant force, accusing the senior leaders of "what Cold Warriors euphemistically called the Free World"

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of "almost unthinking opposition to communism." Admirals were another unenlightened class, "archaic as well as conservative," leaders of a "Navy . . . usually top-heavy with traditionalism and inertia." There are even "two-fers" —"Admirals were almost to a man knee-jerk anti-Communists." Such ad hominem comments detract from an otherwise excellent narrative.

Still, there are lighter moments. For example, after forty-five years, even naval officers can laugh at the Air Force's claim, following USS *Missouri's* hard grounding in 1950, that "the battleship is here to stay!" And the author's reference to the "delights of Rotterdam" is wonderfully oxymoronic, at least to an ex-resident.

Michael Isenberg is an associate professor at the U.S. Naval Academy. He is the author of numerous books, including *Puzzles of the Past: An Introduction to Thinking about History*. A retired Naval Reserve captain, Isenberg is a veteran with eleven years active duty as a surface line officer.

Shield of the Republic is entertaining history, but more importantly, it is also a useful book for those struggling to determine the direction in which the Navy should go. The circumstances we presently live under bear striking resemblance to the period following the Second World War. As was the case then, recent combat experience suggests that the conduct of warfare might be changing in major, though as yet unforeseen, ways. Just as in the 1950s, we are experiencing rapid advances in a variety of technologies that have military relevance. And, following the collapse of our major foe after pro-

longed national exertion, we too are in a new world situation, and it is not clear who our future foes will be or what the nature of the conflict may be. *Shield of the Republic* is an instructive account of how our predecessors dealt with the uncertainties they faced fifty years ago.

JAN VAN TOL
Commander, U.S. Navy

Maloney, Sean M. ed. *Securing Command of the Sea: NATO Naval Planning 1948-1954*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995. 292pp. \$38.95

Sean Maloney is a Canadian military historian with a special interest in the Cold War. His latest offering depicts how Nato maritime commands evolved from historical precedents and trial by fire in the World War II experience. The evolution of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization command structure unfolds like a mystery thriller, highlighting the difficulties encountered by the victors of the war—the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. Only these three countries had significant military forces available to resist the Soviet Union.

Beginning with the chain of command used during the war, and giving prominence to the difficulties experienced, Maloney clearly describes the founding of Nato against the backdrop of such grim events as the 1947 coup in Hungary, the 1948 coup in Czechoslovakia, and the Berlin blockade. It was apparent that the Marshall Plan would not be enough to stop Soviet aggression.