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From the Rivers to the Sea: The U.S. Navy in Vietnam

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views Johnson's decision not to mobilize the reserves as a crucial step that evolved by 1968 into a Vietnam-only force that consisted of an entirely new army of draftees, one-term volunteers, "instant" non-commissioned officers, and recent graduates of the Reserve Office Training Corps and Officer Candidate School. This army was hardly a cross-section of American youth, and was, in Spector's words, "especially sensitive to the social and political controversies and changes in the society it served." The chapters on the "disintegration" of the American army in the latter stages of the war are particularly frightening.

Like Macdonald, Moore, and Galoway, Spector is critical of the manner in which the Johnson administration and senior military commanders fought the war. Too little attention was paid to the war in the countryside; Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) focused almost exclusively on the "big-unit" war with the NVA, relegating the pacification role to the government of South Vietnam. The American failure, states Spector, was a failure of understanding and imagination. American leaders simply did not see that what was for them a limited war for limited ends, was for the Vietnamese, both North and South, an unlimited war for national survival.

Even more disheartening is the allegation that senior commanders, supposedly schooled in Clausewitzian theory, virtually ignored the Prussian's basic dictum that "no one starts a war—or rather, no one in his senses ought to

do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by the war and how he intends to conduct it." Whereas American commanders used military forces to achieve tactical victories, the North Vietnamese employed their forces to achieve political objectives. In short, American leaders neither understood the true nature of the war nor developed a military and political strategy to achieve their war aims. Therein lay the true tragedy of Vietnam.

COLE C. KINGSEED
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Schreadley, R.L. *From the Rivers to the Sea: The U.S. Navy in Vietnam*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1992. 418pp. (No price given)

It is no secret that journalists are frequently better at recounting history than historians are at understanding it. Such is the case with Commander R.L. Schreadley's engaging chronology of the brown-water navy's successes, disappointments, and frustrations in the Vietnam War. One of the best books in a growing library of accounts of U.S. naval operations in that ill-fated conflict, it places the brown-water sailors in chronological context without exhaustively analysing the war's origins. Happily, the book concentrates on the years between 1968 and 1971, neatly bracketing the most intense phase of riverine operations. It was during this period that Schreadley served with COMNAVFORV as director of the Navy's special history project.

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The breadth and variety of subjects interviewed and the perceptiveness of the author's personal notes are both evocative and informative, particularly for those who served with Task Force 116 or 117. That the book is encyclopedic and episodic rather than primarily analytic in nature is a particular strength. Few soldiers involved in the gritty details of day-to-day operations have time to seek out, much less understand, the larger context of what they are doing. Understanding often comes only after years have dimmed the details of personal endeavors. During my own rotation "in-country," a period that corresponded roughly to Schreadley's, I frequently visited Breezy Cove and Song Ong Doc as the Navy's primary Registered Publications System custodian in the delta. Despite my geographic familiarity with the base and also its manifest vulnerabilities, I understood the larger context of its *raison d'être* only after closing Schreadley's book. Indeed, whether talking about the congenial atmosphere of An Thio or describing the Byzantine nature of Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), *From the Rivers to the Sea* produces a flood of memories and reflection.

It would be a historical injustice, however, to view Schreadley's effort as merely one of sentimentality for graying veterans of Vietnam. It is a fine source of primary information for any student—and there are many—seeking to understand fully the Navy's inshore role, particularly in relation to the post-Tet process of "Vietnamization."

Schreadley paints a clear picture of U.S. commanders appalled by the political decisions forcing them to turn over an incomplete mission to a corrupt, incompetent, and unsustainable South Vietnamese regime. More importantly, he tracks the sense of futility down the chain of command from General Creighton Abrams and Admiral Elmo Zumwalt to unit commanders such as Cyrus Christensen, who were desperately trying to breathe life into a moribund, often deadly, policy. There is a sense of frustration throughout the book that Schreadley shares rather than creates.

Schreadley does not attempt to conceal his opinions about why the crusade in Vietnam was a failure. At the outset he declares the military advice to have been sound but U.S. political will weak. The media, State Department, and, in fairness, incompetent leadership in the field are all presented as components in the debacle. But here his analysis ends. He is quite content to leave larger questions about the efficacy of U.S. policy in the first place, or the likely results of a militarily directed war, to historians such as George Herring and James Gibson. Schreadley's purpose is to tell the reader about the accomplishments of the black berets, and this he does with pride.

The author does not preach, he engages. I have referred a number of my students wishing to do projects on the economics of the Vietnam War to Schreadley's account of the military currency fiasco, and they have returned incredulous at the economic lunacy he

wryly describes. More importantly, the humor and wisdom of this chapter has lured them deeper into the book, and I have had some difficulty retrieving it from them. That Schreadley can command the attention of students who balk at attempts to read Lynn White or even Garrett Mattingly underscores the readability of *From the Rivers to the Sea*.

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Melvin, Michael J. *Minesweeper: The Role of the Motor Minesweeper in World War II*. Worcester, England: Square One, 1992. 174pp. \$20

Mine warfare had a significant if unheralded impact on naval operations in World War II. Germany's minelaying efforts were especially effective, given that the Allies in general, and the Royal Navy in particular, were not prepared to conduct a major mine countermeasures campaign. That the Royal Navy defeated the Axis mine threat is a testament to the courage and determination of its minesweeping crews, who were predominantly civilian trawlers mobilized along with their trawlers to fight the war in the United Kingdom's territorial waters. The shift from a defensive war at home to power projection operations throughout the world forced the Royal Navy to expand this force dramatically. *Minesweeper* is the story of the Motor Minesweeper Units, or the coastal waters mine countermeasures force, which grew from less than eighteen part-time reserve units in 1939 to over nine

hundred boats, built in yards located all over the world, by 1945.

Written by a veteran of the motor minesweepers, Michael Melvin, the book traces the history of the force from its start in the pre-war period, to the design debates in the war's early days over the new motor minesweepers, the construction and employment of the force as it grew, the Allies' dependence upon the mine countermeasures effort, and finally its dissolution in 1946.

This work is an interesting record of the achievements, sacrifice, and courage of a little-known group of men, whose fight began the first day of the war and did not end until the last known minefield was swept—over one year after the official end of World War II.

CARLO O. SCHUSTER
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Drea, Edward J. *MacArthur's ULTRA: Codebreaking and the War against Japan, 1942-1945*. Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1992. 296pp. (No price given)

Much has been published regarding the exploits of Allied codebreakers in the European and Pacific theaters of World War II, and also about the operational uses of cryptologically derived information, which became known as "ULTRA" in both theaters of war—at sea in the Battle of the Atlantic and in the Central Pacific, as well as in the ground wars in Africa and also western and southern Europe. However, little has appeared on the handling and use of ULTRA in the Pacific ground war, especially in the forgotten campaign