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The Naval Strategy of the World War

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between success or failure of the sequential.”

Military Strategy runs to only ninety-four pages of text. Even with a twenty page postscript, forty-five pages of the author's reprinted articles, a very useful and informative thirty-five page introduction provided by Professor John B. Hattendorf (senior editor of the Classics of Sea Power series) it is but one long afternoon's read. Well, perhaps two afternoons, because Admiral Wylie will force you to stop and think for a while.

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Wegener, Wolfgang. *The Naval Strategy of the World War*. Translated by Holger H. Herwig. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1989. 231pp. \$29.95

The 1890s saw the rise of the big battleship school in naval war thinking. Its protagonists believed that do-or-die encounters in the home waters, between concentrated fleets rather than cruiser raids on distant shores, would be the warfare of the future. Nowhere was this kind of thinking more dominant than in Wilhelmine Germany, where it was vigorously promoted by Admiral Alfred Tirpitz and his followers.

When in 1897, Tirpitz became the kaiser's naval minister, he immediately began to plan a battle fleet of 60 big ships to be constructed in carefully projected stages over a

period of 20 years. At the end of this period, this fleet was to be capable of defeating the then most powerful navy in the world, the Royal Navy, should the British ever decide to strike. However, if the “decisive battle” in the North Sea was not initiated by England, Tirpitz hoped to use the 60-battleship German fleet as a power-political lever to bully other European nations into providing the kaiser with a large overseas empire. But Tirpitz's grand design failed. He lost the subsequent arms race against Britain well before 1914, and he suffered a strategic defeat when his concept was put to the test at Jutland in 1916.

Opposition to Tirpitz's ambitious plan arose well before the outbreak of the First World War. Among his critics were a number of young naval officers who rejected the Tirpitz school on the grounds of erroneous strategic thinking rather than on political grounds. But Wolfgang Wegener, the author of this volume, was the most precise and hard-hitting among them. Against the tide, he argued that sea power depended on the combination of available hardware and *geography*. He showed that in contrast to all of Tirpitz's expectations, the Royal Navy never sought the much-vaunted “decisive battle,” because there was no reason for Britain to attack the German fleet. By adopting the strategic defensive, Wegener argued, the British gained all the advantages they were looking for. At the same time Tirpitz's fleet was too weak to leave its own defensive

posture. True to its original design, it remained bottled up in the southern North Sea without ever threatening British control of the Atlantic sea-lanes. What was lacking, Wegener concluded, was not just a strong battlefleet, but access to the Atlantic that could only be provided by "geography," i.e. by the possession of Denmark and Norway. Only then, would the German navy pose a serious strategic threat to the British.

Wegener experienced bitter hostility to his ideas on the part of Tirpitz and his coterie. As Tirpitz continued to dominate the German navy, even after defeat, this hostility ultimately put an end to the critic's naval career. Wegener was unceremoniously forced into early retirement. In the end, it was not Admiral Raeder, but a civilian who began to show an interest in Wegener's ideas: Adolf Hitler.

It was Hitler who, in 1940, ordered the occupation of Denmark and Norway in an attempt to conquer "geography" and to gain access to the open Atlantic. But for reasons that will no doubt be studied in strategy courses at naval colleges around the world, Hitler did not win either.

Of course, since Wegener's critique of Tirpitz was formulated, many other factors have, in various ways, further modified modern strategic thinking. Nevertheless, this volume will prove invaluable to all students of naval history and strategy. It contains a careful translation of Wegener's once famous book,

first published in 1929. There are also three shorter essays produced as internal memoranda in 1915, in which the author first developed his ideas.

Dr. Holger Herwig is well qualified, through his own work at the University of Calgary, to edit and supervise this translation. Through a long, well researched essay, Dr. Herwig introduces the reader to the contemporary political context. The introduction highlights the feuds within the naval officer corps that were rooted in the differences of opinion over strategic matters. It alone, make this volume a worthwhile and rewarding read.

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Reynolds, Clark G., ed. *Global Crossroads and the American Seas*. Missoula, Montana: Pictorial Histories Pub., Co., 1988. 220pp.
Reynolds, Clark G. *History and the Sea: Essays on Maritime Strategies*. Charleston, South Carolina: Univ. of South Carolina, 1989. 232pp. \$24.95

Both books are by Clark G. Reynolds, the well-known naval historian who is presently chairman of the history department at the College of Charleston. *Global Crossroads*, is the proceedings of the 1987 conference which the International Commission for Maritime History (ICMH) held at Charleston. It reveals Reynolds' work as both program chairman for the confer-