

Naval War College Review

Volume 43
Number 4 *Autumn*

Article 26

1990

Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet

William R. Braisted

James R. Reckner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Braisted, William R. and Reckner, James R. (1990) "Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 43 : No. 4 , Article 26.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol43/iss4/26>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

nese would probably not have undertaken the Southward Advance. Instead, they would have attacked the Soviets. In the words of Colonel William V. Kennedy (*Naval War College Review*, Winter 1989), "More than any other single strategic decision, Japan's attack on the United States rather than the Soviet Union, determined the outcome of World War II. The Soviets could not have survived such an attack. Consider what it would have taken to defeat a Nazi Germany and an Imperial Japan that had established a combined hegemony over Eurasia."

On the basis of the numerous Japanese sources to which he gained access, the author clearly establishes the desire of the leaders of that country to avoid war with the United States. Similarly, the United States had no real wish to go to war with Japan. However, inadequate knowledge of not just the intentions and thinking of one side by the other, but also of the opponent's culture, led to inevitable clashes. Barnhart chronicles those clashes exhaustively, analyzing each from the standpoint of the objectives each party and the misunderstandings which arose. His book is an excellent primer on the ways in which two nations can drift into war without any desire on either side. For that reason, it is a very important contribution to the literature of serious "peace studies." My only criticism of the work is that following its enormous detail becomes tedious. If the reader is willing to

accept that limitation, he will be well rewarded.

ROBERT C. WHITTEN
Commander, U.S. Naval Reserve (Ret.)
Cupertino, California

Reckner, James R. *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988. 221pp. \$26.95

The Great White Fleet made its spectacular cruise around the world between 1907 and 1909. James Reckner believes that the voyage by the sixteen battleships of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet has too often been portrayed as an episode in diplomatic history (more especially in troubled American Japanese relations), without adequate appreciation of its real significance to the U.S. Navy. This perception led Reckner to reexamine the cruise within the context of American naval development during Theodore Roosevelt's second term in the White House. Reckner by no means ignores the international aspects of the cruise. Indeed, in surprisingly short space, he narrates in compelling detail the fleet's reception in every port of call and establishes the naval scene in which the cruise took place.

By 1907, Reckner argues, the fleet had finally reached a size that made it natural, if not inevitable, that a long cruise ensue to test and perfect its capabilities. The State Department, he points out, was not involved in the initial decision by Roosevelt to send the fleet to the Pacific. Prepa-

rations for the cruise were essentially naval, not diplomatic. The fleet's greatest triumph was the fact that, far from breaking down, it ended its 45,000 miles of steaming in better trim than when it began. Its major vulnerability proved to be its dependence on foreign colliers that nearly brought the fleet to a halt when three of these vessels failed to appear on schedule in Australia. For that fleet, war in the western Pacific would have been a logistic nightmare.

Though the cruise may have been conceived as a fleet exercise, one cannot ignore the international, even diplomatic ramifications of such a major naval demonstration. When Roosevelt rejoiced that the cruise had been a "knock-out for mischief-makers" in both the Atlantic and the Pacific, he obviously had in mind the evolving informal system of naval power in which the British Navy concentrated against the German fleet in the North Sea while the United States built naval power sufficient to restrain Britain's Pacific ally, Japan.

Reckner is undoubtedly correct in concluding that the Americans and Japanese would probably have worked out accommodations on immigration, China, and Pacific security even had there been no world cruise. On the other hand, the friendly outpouring by the Japanese to welcome the fleet to Japan notwithstanding, we may never know how significant the cruise may have been in strengthening the conviction among Japanese naval

men that Japan needed a navy 70 percent the strength of the American navy to assure the island empire security in the western Pacific.

Papers of Rear Admiral Charles M. Thomas, Midshipman (later admiral) H. Kent Hewitt, Midshipman Louis Maxfield and others provide fresh insights into the actual conditions in the fleet during the cruise. Reckner's thoughtful, carefully prepared monograph is a valuable addition to the surprisingly slim literature on Theodore Roosevelt's navy.

WILLIAM R. BRAISTED
The University of Texas at Austin

Hagerman, Edward. *The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare*. Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1988. 366pp. \$37.50

In a classic formulation in the history of ideas, Isaiah Berlin contrasted the "fox," who knows many things, with the "hedgehog," who knows one. Edward Hagerman, of Canada's York University, brings a hedgehog's perspective to his analysis of the Civil War. That conflict has been described as ushering in the era of modern war in so many ways that its key, according to Hagerman, has been overlooked. He argues that the essential problem of mid-nineteenth century warfare was the threat of stagnation created by firepower—specifically, the rifled musket. Its introduction created an interrelated, comprehensive network of tactical, operational, and