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## The Gunroom

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Charles Morgan

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mended for the immense amount of primary-source research and careful documentation used in his work. The author's undertakings would be richly rewarded if members of the current Labour government in Wellington would carefully study his work so that they might finally appraise themselves of the havoc they have wrought on New Zealand's defense posture, which has been the result of their misguided conception of national security.

THOMAS-DURELL YOUNG  
U.S. Army War College

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Starr, Richard F., ed. *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs, 1988*. Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1988. 598pp. \$49.95

This definitive work is an annual compilation of the organization, strength, and activities of communist parties and revolutionary fronts. It provides worldwide coverage of communist parties, arranged alphabetically by country within six world regions, and includes an essay about each country's communist party organization. The essays include the number of individuals in each country's communist party, names of the party's officers, party legality, its publications, and a brief history of the party's interaction with the country's body politic. These overviews are exceptionally well done. Tables showing party congresses and a brief register of the

status of communism in each country are extremely useful.

Because of its simple arrangement and wealth of information concerning each country's communist party or revolutionary front, the volume is a worthwhile annual addition to defense institutional libraries. Although price may prohibit individual annual purchase, many professionals in the field would benefit from a onetime purchase.

MURRAY L. BRADLEY  
Naval War College

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Morgan, Charles. *The Gunroom*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1988. 242pp. \$3.95

"A young sailor," says the publisher's blurb on the cover of this short novel, "struggles to withstand the harsh mental and physical brutalities of service in the British Navy in the years before World War I." "Charles Morgan's first and most controversial novel," it continues, "appeared in 1919 only to disappear immediately. . . . Morgan and his publishers believe the British Admiralty to be responsible. . . ."

I was thus prepared for a fairly lurid exposé of the twilight world of the midshipman and of the gunroom in which he lived, of corporal punishment and the abuse of power, and of the captains who tolerated it because things had always been done that way. And indeed these themes are certainly present; the author himself describes the book as being "written in blood." But it commands

at least some of our attention, for Morgan experienced the world of the midshipman firsthand, and his book is to a large extent autobiographical. He joined the navy in 1907 and served in the gunrooms of HM ships *Good Hope* and *Monmouth*. Quickly convinced that the life was not for him, he resigned in 1913 to go on to Oxford and to a successful literary career. He returned to serve in the navy during both world wars.

The book thus has an authentic ring to it, and one is struck as much by what has survived from the Edwardian navy as by what has changed. There are some telling naval vignettes. We see the hero, John Lynwood, and a handful of his contemporaries waiting with tense foreboding in a rain-soaked seafront hotel for the boat that will take them to their first ship. For advice on the ship's program and on the personalities of the officers they turn to the obsequious naval tailor who is there to make final adjustments to their uniforms. His knowledge of the navy is encyclopedic. More important, he won't bite. And Morgan captures exactly what most of us have long forgotten, those first impressions on joining the training ship, the brusque impersonality, the sense of a system which tolerates no error but which has neither time nor patience to explain its arcane purposes.

The lot of the midshipmen in the *King Arthur* is certainly bleak. The boorish and arbitrary Kramer is "Sub" of the gunroom. He exerts his authority in the only way he knows how: the way he has been taught.

Outside the petty tyranny of the gunroom an unending routine of coaling ship, gun-drill, quarters, and fleet maneuvers are already (1911) signaling the inevitability of war, without recreating Nelson's band of brothers.

But Lynwood's disillusion has deeper origins than the casual brutalities of the *King Arthur*, an unhappy ship if ever there was one. Transfer to the *Pathshire*, commanded by a man of perception and humanity, and deployed to a station remote from rumors of war, brings, at best, momentary relief. The real problem lies deeper; it is the stifling effect of narrow professional focus and of an enclosed society impervious to external influence on the development of a reflective, creative, and idealistic, if over-sensitive young man. Lynwood is caught in a net, but it is a net wider than the navy itself. The net is a competitive social and international order of which the navy is the unthinking and unwitting instrument. "It can't go on like this," cries the heroine, Lynwood's only link with sanity, and herself the victim of the ensaring social order, "we must substitute the motive of Sharing for the motive of Gain. It's the only way out. It's the only way to stop the cruelty everywhere."

As a novel this work is uneven, as the author himself was the first to admit. The characters are weakly drawn, their relationships unconvincing. The thing breathes a youthful naiveté that many will find annoying. However, as a social history of the Edwardian navy it carries a ring of

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truth. It has something valid to say about enclosed societies, about "monks without the vows," about enforced conformity and the suppression of the individual.

The gunroom, with its potential for the abuse of power, is long gone. The enclosed society has been opened to general scrutiny. Earlier marriage, wider employment opportunity, and the forces of liberalism have broken the net. But the naval

reader will find in this book some fleeting echoes of his own past, long since forgotten or suppressed.

Did the Admiralty ban this book? I doubt it. Its naive idealism was ill-matched with the mood of 1919. Compared with the trenches of Flanders, life in the gunroom was, as they say, like a vicarage tea party.

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Commander, Royal Navy  
Dorchester, England

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**Request for Contributors to *Encyclopedia of American Wars* Series**

Benjamin R. Beede, a Rutgers University faculty member, seeks contributors to *The Spanish-American War and the Small Wars*, a volume in the forthcoming Garland Publishing series entitled *Garland Encyclopedia of American Wars*. The volume will include naval operations in the Spanish American War and marine operations ashore in the Caribbean and Central America, concluding with the termination of the occupation in Haiti in 1934. It will include some entries on American volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. Prospective contributors should contact Mr. Beede at 7 Thrush Mews, North Brunswick, New Jersey 08902.