

Naval War College Review

Volume 38
Number 3 *Summer*

Article 19

1985

The Penguin Atlas of Recent History: Europe Since 1815

James Stavridis

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

Recommended Citation

Stavridis, James (1985) "The Penguin Atlas of Recent History: Europe Since 1815," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 38 : No. 3 , Article 19.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol38/iss3/19>

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.

McEvedy, Colin. *The Penguin Atlas of Recent History: Europe Since 1815*. New York: Penguin Books, 1983. 95pp. \$5.95

Humble, Richard, ed. *Naval Warfare: An Illustrated History*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. 304pp. \$20.95

The Atlas of Recent History is the last in a series of four which detailed the gradual evolution of Europe from antiquity to the present. While the earlier volumes were larger in their geographical focus, including maps from around the world as well as the continent, *Europe Since 1815* is a purely European work. The *Atlas* includes nearly 50 maps which trace Europe from the end of the Napoleonic wars to the present. Professor McEvedy's lucid and witty commentary is included opposite each of the maps, and adds immeasurably to the volume's appeal.

McEvedy's commentaries are better than the maps they accompany. The latter are printed in only two colors (blue and grey); they are indifferently lettered and are poorly chosen to illustrate the more intricate twists and turns of European history. For example, the volume's first map is the continent in 1848, which seems an abrupt place to start an atlas that purports to cover events from 1815. The volume's basic concept is to show the same basic European map throughout, rather than using close-ups of particular areas of interest. While this does give a sense of continuity to the work, it makes it impossible to illustrate intelligently

such important occurrences as the unification of Italy, the emergence of Greece, the Crimean War, and so forth. Also, the total fixation on Europe does not allow for the inclusion of events in other areas—such as the scramble for colonies in Africa, the race to divide China in the Pacific, and so on.

The author does include some interesting maps that illustrate the population shifts across Europe during the period of study. Additionally, the text accompanying the maps is a superb short summary of the history of Europe during the 1815-1980 period. As a quick textual and geographical review of events during those turbulent years, the *Atlas* succeeds. Taken in combination with a more complete accounting of events (such as a solid history text), the volume is useful as a rapid reference. Overall, *The Penguin Atlas of Recent History* allows the interested reader to follow Napoleon's important and deceptively simple dictum—Know the map!

It is generally agreed that war at sea has influenced the outcome of events ashore in a very direct fashion. In *Naval Warfare: An Illustrated History*, Richard Humble has provided a guide to the sea battles and sailors that shaped history.

The volume, printed by the well known nautical publishing house of St. Martin's, is beautifully illustrated with line etchings, famous paintings, photographs, and deck plans. Roughly half of the illustrations are in color, and the work is printed on heavy bond, giving the book a solid presentation.

Humble has divided the book into six sections, each of which is devoted to a particular technological era of war at sea. The range of the work is impressive, covering the ancient world, the age of the galleon, the ship-of-the-line, the age of steam and shell, and the modern (WWII and later) era. It includes coverage of the Falkland Islands campaign in the final section.

Within the six sections, Humble's method is to write brief treatments of important battles (Salamis, Sluys, Lepanto, Trafalgar, Dogger Bank, Tsushima, Pearl Harbor, Leyte Gulf, etc.). He also includes sections on broader campaigns and wars (the Venetian-Genoese Wars, the Dutch Wars, the War of 1812, the Battle of the Atlantic, etc.). In a particularly useful series of articles, Humble also provides biographical sketches of the great sea warriors and admirals, including Francis Drake, Richard Howe, Horatio Nelson, John Paul Jones, John Jellicoe, David Beatty, Raymond Spruance, Chester Nimitz, and many others. The short, concise pieces are packed with information, anecdotes, and informative asides. It makes it possible to pick the book up over a series of months and read at leisure without losing any larger theme.

It should be understood that the book is not a grand work of strategy. The author does little to describe the larger themes of seapower and their impact on world events. This is not the writing of A. T. Mahan; Humble rather acts as an informed publicist and provides a series of insightful

vignettes on seapower and the men who shaped it.

While the volume lacks strategic content, it has readability, wit, and style. Unfortunately, it contains very few maps, and the bibliography and glossary are cursory at best. As a complement to other works of naval history (such as *Influence of Sea Power on History* and *Sea Power*), the book is a fine addition to any library.

JAMES STAVRIDIS
Lieutenant Commander, US Navy

Farwell, Byron. *The Gurkhas*. New York: Norton, 1984. 317pp. \$17.95

The tale of the British Gurkhas has been told many times, but perhaps never quite so well as by Byron Farwell. With this book, the author adds a fit companion to his earlier classics, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* and *Mr. Kipling's Army*.

Much of the appeal here lies in the paradoxes which the Gurkhas have always presented to Western minds. For example, how have the Gurkhas managed to acquire a reputation as peerless fighters while avoiding the brutish reputation associated with other mercenaries such as the French Foreign Legion? Then too, what is it that has enabled Gurkha regiments to maintain almost perfect discipline without resorting to punishments common among Western armies? Above all, how can one account for their loyalty and longstanding rapport with the British?

Farwell makes no claim to unraveling the paradoxes, but he does provide some significant clues. In the process he again demonstrates his skill at