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In My View

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In My View

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Ian Oliver

IN MY VIEW . . .

Vietnam and the Absence of Strategy

Sir:

While I greatly respect Rear Admiral Henry E. Eccles, U.S. Navy (Ret.), I am not surprised that in "Vietnam and the Absence of Strategy" in your March/April, 1982 issue ("In My View"), he accuses the military leaders of having a growing contempt for the study of military theory, particularly logistics, since he has written books on the subject. Nevertheless, I must challenge his suggestion that there was no strategy advanced by the military command, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for operations in Vietnam. The facts are that the files are packed with recommendations by the JCS which recommended military actions which, if they had been accepted, would have brought the Vietnam conflict quickly to a close. Having been a member of the JCS for seven years, four years as Chairman, I deny that I was preoccupied with struggles over service unification, creation of the Department of Defense, the B-36 bomber (which was at that time extinct), or nuclear weapons. Being a star graduate of the Naval War College where I listened to Rear Admiral Eccles speak, I have never in any sense of the word had contempt for the study of military theory.

If there was emphasis on technical, managerial, and bureaucratic concerns, such emphasis was generated by the civilian analysts brought into the Pentagon by Secretary McNamara. There was certainly no confusion of objectives in the minds of the members of the JCS. As Rear Admiral Eccles must know, the President of the United States is the Commander in Chief and consequently there were three Presidents involved in setting objectives. The guidelines were succinctly put forward by President Johnson and were as follows:

- (1) We will not invade North Vietnam
- (2) We will not overthrow Ho Chi Minh
- (3) We seek no wider war

As one can clearly see, with such objectives military success is impossible. In short, I agree fully with the statement that the Vietnam War drew down upon the United States disaster and humiliation. I do not agree that the military intellectual leadership was surrendering to civilian scholars and systems analysts. No military man in his right mind agreed with the directions received. However, we are constitutionalists and we obey the orders of the elected officials of our country. What does Rear Admiral Eccles recommend under such circumstances—that the JCS order the 82nd Airborne to Washington and take over the country?

I consider the statement by Rear Admiral Eccles that those of us on active duty at the time permitted our intellectual honesty to be smothered and that we ignored the basics of successful warfare to be an insult at worst and unfair at best. It is too bad he did not have an opportunity to serve on active duty in the painful environment which prevailed during the Vietnam War.

Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

ASW: Where is the Inner Screen?

Sir:

In his article, "ASW: Where is the Inner Screen?", published in the Jan-Feb 1982 issue of *NWC Review*, Commander R. W. Atkins succinctly described the difficulty commanders encounter in protecting main body ships from missiles and torpedo firing submarines. His recommended solutions are reasonable if perhaps necessarily constrained in one instance by FFG availability.

What struck me about the article was that the author did not recognize the carrier based SH-3H ASW helicopters as a potent force in the inner zone ASW problem. With its high mobility, reasonably powerful active sonar, and deadly kill capability in the hover/snake mode, it is considered by many navy planners and operators to be one of the most lethal inner zone weapon systems in the ASW inventory (particularly by its most frequent adversaries in the U.S. Navy submarine community, of which I am a member).

The one flaw I have found in the employment of the SH-3H is that there are not enough of them based on board the CV's to provide adequate coverage in ASW, SAR and logistics. However, when these units are dedicated to the pure close-in ASW problem, they are definitely a *strong* member of the team.

Rear Admiral F. W. Kelley, U.S. Navy
Director, Undersea and Strategic Warfare
and Nuclear Energy Development Division

A Question of Survivability

Sir:

The sinking of the HMS *Sheffield* by an air-launched missile during recent hostilities in the South Atlantic has renewed the controversy surrounding the wartime survivability of surface combatants.

Opponents of naval forces have seized on the sinking of this modern destroyer to support their argument that surface combatants are a major investment of wealth, technology, and manpower which can be beaten by relatively cheap antiship missiles.

This line of reasoning leads to the conclusion that surface combatants have little usefulness in modern warfare and, because of their vulnerabilities to missile attack, are not a prudent investment.

Supporters of surface ships counter that the battle group of which the *Sheffield* was a part was not balanced in terms of force composition. Weak British air defenses, consisting mainly of Sea Harrier jets, could not provide the long-range air defense essential to defense against antiship missile attack. Proponents of US naval force planning note additionally that the F-14/E-2C combination greatly improves US carrier battle groups' air defense capabilities. Had the British battle group possessed such a defense, the successful attack against the *Sheffield* and other surface combatants would have been much less likely.

The "adequate air defense rationale" is a sound approach to justify programs to maintain and build on the carrier battle group as the centerpiece of US seapower. The need for high performance aircraft, and their superiority over the relatively low performance Sea Harrier, can be reaffirmed. Followed to its conclusion, this line of reasoning says in essence, "we recognize the threat posed by antiship missiles to surface combatants and have taken reasonable measures to provide for their defense." A tidy ending—but for the future of our naval strength, one last aspect of the *Sheffield*'s loss should be examined for possible parallels within our own navy.

It is an inevitable consequence of war that men and ships are lost. Experiences in the Pacific during World War II provide that, despite extremely heavy losses, a determined air attack can penetrate even the best of defenses to reach the target. The Japanese kamikazes were a prototype for what has become a worldwide inventory of antiship missiles. World War II battle reports show that warships survived hits from weapons possessing greater explosive force than that contained in the missile used to sink the *Sheffield*. Several questions demand answers. Why was the *Sheffield* destroyed by a single missile? Are US surface combatants equally vulnerable to destruction when hit? If the answer to the second question is yes, what can we do to improve our ships' survivability and combat effectiveness once they have been hit?

A reasonable starting point would be a look at naval ship construction. A growing trend has been to concentrate resources on improved weapons systems and shipboard habitability. New weapon systems, while necessary to maintain pace with the technological advancements of potential enemies, add enormously to the cost of new ships. Faced with a need to obtain the greatest number of ships within a given budget, hull design, compartmentation, armor protection of vital areas, and system redundancy are no longer of primary concern to the designer. The result is ships that are little more than weapon platforms. They carry the finest weapons technology can produce, but cannot take a punch once their defenses are breached.

The efforts to provide the best possible shipboard living conditions have had equally adverse effects on surface combatant survivability. Extensive hull compartmentation is not only expensive, but is a barrier to shipboard living conditions. Watertight doors, hatches, scuttles, deck drains, and ventilation closures are difficult shipmates to live with. All require attention, impede movement through the ship, and detract from comfortable living. Yet, each contributes to the capability of a ship to survive battle damage.

The army would reject a proposal to purchase tanks, designed on the premise that their superior firepower, electronic warfare systems, and protective air cover would

both eliminate the need for armor protection and result in lower procurement costs.

Why do we seem to accept the above premise when procuring surface combatants? The added costs of building tough ships of high grade steel, with armor protection of vital areas and internal compartmentation designed to minimize blast damage is significant, but appears justifiable to improve survivability of ships and their high cost weapons and electronic systems.

The loss of the *Sheffield* has given us an ideal opportunity to reexamine the way we procure and build surface combatants. How the US Navy responds may well determine survivability of our surface combatants in any future war at sea.

Commander R.W. Atkins, US Navy

Theater Nuclear Warfare and the US Navy

Lt. Cdr. T. Wood Parker argues with skill the twin points that the use of nuclear weapons at sea differs in important ways from the use of similar weapons on land and that, in consequence, a nuclear war might remain limited to the oceans and not spread to the land. It is clear that nuclear arms used only against naval forces at sea will cause few prompt civilian casualties, and so induce less political pressure for escalation. A deep sub-surface nuclear burst, used against a submarine in very deep waters, should be entirely confined and cause no prompt casualties, except, of course, aboard the submarine. One may accept very nearly all of Lt. Cdr. Parker's points, and his recommendations that the US Navy must procure adequate nuclear arms, and be prepared to fight a nuclear war at sea, without endorsing his conclusion that the use of tactical nuclear weapons at sea differs greatly in probability from the use of similar weapons on the battlefield.

To begin with, the smaller nuclear weapons are simply not very effective against surface ships. To quote Lt. Cdr. Parker ". . . a 125 kiloton weapon exploded as much as 1000 yards away would sink most of the ships in the US Navy today." This is unarguable, except that dispersed to meet an attack Naval vessels are rarely as closely spaced as 1000 yards. A single 125 kiloton warhead would in reality probably disable only a small number of combatants—two or perhaps four, while temporarily disabling perhaps the same number.

The destruction of HMS *Sheffield* in May, 1982 showed, however, that few modern ships can accept even one hit by an intelligent cruise missile and still continue to be effective fighting vessels. The US Navy has had extensive combat experience against the prototypical cruise missile; the *Kamikaze* viewed correctly was a cruise missile utilizing a man as a guidance system. Even granting the ability of the Close in Weapon System (CIWS) to deal with individual missiles, it requires only a small number of missiles to saturate the defenses of a ship equipped with only two or three CIWS installations. A few percent leakage rate through the defenses must be considered likely in view of the fact that the *Kamikazes* achieved penetration rates

many times greater. With such potent conventional weapons available, an enemy may well forgo the use of less cost-effective and more politically inflammatory nuclear weapons.

Besides the obvious political risks of crossing the nuclear fire-break, there are other risks as well. Electromagnetic pulse (EMP) and TREE effects are not merely inflicted on the victim. EMP spreads its destruction to antennas far beyond the target area. Electronic equipment many miles from surface zero may be damaged by the gas of neutrons produced by a nuclear burst. Everybody's radar and communications are blacked out, and the fallout from a nuclear burst near to a water surface may be much worse than from one over ground. A single sub-surface burst aimed at a submarine may disrupt sonar systems of all sorts nearly world wide for many hours.

Finally, the ship-damaging effects of large nuclear weapons exploded near or below the water's surface are unknown, and uncalculatable. It is not just that realistic testing has been prohibited since the ratification of the Limited Test Ban Treaty. Even more important is the fact that a nuclear weapon couples its blast effect vastly more strongly to water than to air; the blast transmitted through water reflects and refracts from the ocean bottom and the temperature layers in a way which is in practice unpredictable and which may lead to horrifying surprises. The results of the *Swordfish* test (the one shown on the cover of the *Naval War College Review* containing Parker's paper) for those readers with access to them, will stand as convincing testimony that this assertion is correct.

The US Navy must be prepared to fight in a nuclear conflict, to use nuclear weapons and to deter a nuclear attack by having a ready nuclear response. But this concentration on the nuclear scenario, as urged by Lt. Cdr. Parker, must not cause us to lose sight of the more realistic, and probably more deadly, threat posed by air, sea and submarine-launched anti-ship missiles.

Peter D. Zimmerman
Louisiana State University

An Irresistible Future

23 May 1982

Sir:

In my view, the article "An Irresistible Future," by Captain Smith has a high potential for harm because it is based on the experience of peace-time deployment and does not recognize the facts-of-life for submarine based weapon systems in combat.

Consider:

The water wastes are immense but in volume are less than one fifth the volume of the air ocean.

Submarines are without eyes and their ears are not effective against air threats.

Polaris, Poseidon, and now Trident submarines are the most nuclear weapon worthy targets the Soviets face—the exchange ratio would be worth a Soviet attack.

In order to launch missiles from submarines, the sub must be stopped or go very slowly to fire with accuracy.

Polaris, Poseidon and Trident subs must be shallow to launch missiles.

The deeper a sub dives the softer it is as a target.

In summary, all sub systems have the fatal flaws of being slow or stopped, shallow and blind when launching missiles. Why not consider a system that can launch while moving at high speed on the surface or in the air?

Captain Allen Jones, Jr., US Navy (Ret.)

The Trivia Quiz

24 May 1982

Sir:

I thoroughly enjoyed Captain Carson's, "The Old Destroyerman's Trivia Quiz" in the March-April issue of *Naval War College Review*; it brought back memories; perhaps too many.

Question 15 addressed the old PIANO or governing flags. In his answers, Captain Carson stated PETER, ITEM, ABLE, NAN and OBOE have been replaced with the three currently used pennants and two new phonetics for existing alphabet flags. When I took the quiz I remembered what the governing flags were but I called them out as PREP, INT, AFFIRM, NEGAT and OPTION—that's the way CTM A.J. Forrsell, USN, my boot camp company commander and SM2 G.S. Foster, USN, our signalling instructor taught us. A check in my 1946 edition of *The Bluejacket's Manual* confirmed my memory was correct.

Captain T. W. Glickman, US Navy

P.S. No bonus points please—I have checked and I am still alive.

Bring the Army Home? Cut Back the Fleet? (Chapter II)

Sir:

The headline you put over my commentary (Mar-Apr) on the Sept-Oct articles by Drs. Keith A. Dunn and William T. Tow precisely defines the issue that is being forced upon us: "Bring the Army Home? Cut Back the Fleet?"

Because the ultimate choice between those alternatives is so crucial to our future as a nation, and to the world as a whole, I think it is worthwhile to extend the discussion, at least to clarify points about which Doctor Dunn says he is "confused."

I proposed “withdrawing and deactivating” the five US Army division equivalents we now maintain in Europe. Doctor Dunn asks if I propose that these be shifted to support a new deterrent strategy in the Pacific and Asia. No. I used the word “deactivate” advisedly, supposing it to be widely understood in the military community. It means disestablish, close down, disband. The alternative strategy I support would rely primarily on a sea-based offensive capability built around the big carrier (with the four battleships “filling the gap” until more big carriers can be built) and the Marine Corps, backed by a smaller but more strategically mobile active Army reorganized around the AH-64 Advanced Attack Helicopter and the Air Cavalry Combat Brigade. The Army would gain sustainability from a more rationally structured and more rapidly mobilizable National Guard and Reserve. In short, a strategy more in keeping with our geographic position, worldwide interests and traditional military structure than what has become a national military establishment more European than American in character.

Doctor Dunn doubts that we can realize a savings of \$30-40 billion by withdrawing and deactivating the Europe-based US divisions. Sen. Ted Stevens' and other Congressional staffs estimate that our present NATO deployment costs us about \$120 billion per year. Since the troop and related dependent and administrative components form the largest part of that deployment, \$30-40 billion seems a reasonably attainable savings, especially since turning over European defense largely to the Europeans would enable us to halt or drastically curtail production of the M-1 tank, the M-2 and M-3 Infantry and Cavalry fighting vehicles and several very expensive engineer and logistic supporting armored vehicles.

What is more important is that troop withdrawal could be accomplished over the next 3-4 years and be fully compensated in that time by activation of additional German units. Doctor Dunn's suggestion that instead of a troop withdrawal we look to arms negotiations with the Russians ignores the fact that the US budgetary crisis is here and now. We cannot permit the Russians to control our economy as well as our strategy by stringing out negotiations *ad infinitum*.

It is not easy to break away from the thought patterns of 35 years. To continue with a strategy, however, that was based on protecting a devastated and insolvent Europe of long ago invites economic and strategic disaster not only for ourselves but for the Europeans and all of our other allies as well.

Colonel William V. Kennedy, US Army Reserve (Ret.)

Gibraltar: A Stumbling Block or a Stepping Stone?

Sir,

Commander Kerr's solution to the Gibraltar “stumbling block”—“handing over by Britain of Gibraltar to NATO . . . would satisfy all aspects of the problem”—attractive to the military planning officer.

I would understand such a proposal by a US military officer who knows next to nothing about Gibraltar's history. Coming from a British officer, the proposal is **startling if not naive**.

Cdr. Kerr should know the Spaniards would never buy such a proposal. (Check with any Spanish officer attending the Command course.) The critical issue for Spain is not simply a border dispute with Britain nor an argument over a geographic anomaly. It is and has been for 277 years a question of sovereignty over "the Rock."

Salvador de Madariaga, an illustrious Spanish diplomat, historian, writer, professor at Oxford for many years, and Republican exile, stated the viewpoint of all Spaniards when asked his opinion about Gibraltar. In the London *Tablet*, 18 May 1968, he wrote: "Admiral Rooke stole it for London," he said. "I am sorry, no other word exists for it."

Any US planner, military or political, is making a crucial error if the problem is viewed without considering Spain's dignity, conscience, and sensibilities in the matter.

Today, for the British government, the paradox of the Gibraltar question may be stated: How to give Gibraltar back to Spain without betraying the people they imported and supported for almost three centuries. Gibraltans want to be British; lacking that, independence.

For the Spaniards, the question is purely and simply—sovereignty. Within the new post-Franco 1978 Constitution, the Spaniards believe the citizenship and special interests of the Gibraltans can be accommodated in the autonomous region concept—but sovereignty must be theirs.

Because of these Spanish sensibilities and the respect of other NATO countries for them, Gibraltar has never lived up to its potential geographic value. Without Spanish cooperation, Gibraltar was just another rock in the Mediterranean. With Spain in NATO, the Rock will acquire an overwhelming strategic significance.

However that significance is exploited in the future by NATO, it would be well for all involved never to forget that Spain's prime motivation concerning Gibraltar is to acquire its lost sovereignty.

Captain Edward Bouffard, US Navy (Ret.)

*See the *Naval War College Review*, Sept-Oct 1981, pp. 91-93.

Butcher and Bolt

Sir:

Mr. Barclay's interesting article, "Butcher and Bolt" (March/April 1982) throws valuable light on Roger Keyes and the early days of the commandos of World War 2, but more needs to be told to present a balanced picture of the subject and of the development of amphibious forces in Britain at that time, on which Mr. Barclay also touches.

The British had indeed neglected amphibious warfare before 1940. This becomes understandable when it is realised that with the world-wide empire of the 19th century available and later the Commonwealth, little need was foreseen to seize

naval bases on the outbreak of war or to disembark troops in hostile territory. The *entente cordiale* with France, coming in the early 20th century, while committing the Army to continental Europe, simultaneously provided for its disembarkation in friendly territory.

Thus when in 1924 an Admiralty committee under Admiral Madden, Jellicoe's chief of staff in the Grand Fleet of World War 1, recommended that, following the example of the US Marine Corps, the Royal Marines should form a brigade for amphibious operations, it failed to convince the Treasury that the cost would be justified. In the 1930s a variation of the idea in the form of a joint services force was put forward by the staff colleges. Backed by the Admiralty and the Joint Planning Staff, it led in 1938 to the setting up of the Inter-Services Training and Development Centre under Captain Maund, RN. Although little more than a full-time committee, the Centre, in the short time left before the outbreak of war, made valuable studies of raiding and of medium-scale amphibious operations and persuaded the Admiralty to order the first batches of landing craft and to earmark four Glen-class liners for requisition as assault transports.

Shortly after the outbreak of war the Marines made a start on raising the brigade proposed by the Madden Committee, but, given priority below sea-service and a Mobile Naval Defence Organisation, it was not operational when in April 1940 the Germans invaded Norway. Early in May, however, one battalion was sent to secure Iceland, and thereafter the brigade was deployed for coastal defence until at the end of August it embarked for the abortive Dakar operation. Shortly afterwards it was decided to expand the brigade into a light amphibious division.

Meanwhile the War Office had raised ten Independent Companies largely from the Territorial Army to supplement the four brigades which had reached Norway. In May, after the loss of South and Central Norway, five of these were used in an attempt to halt the German advance northwards to link up with Narvik, but without air cover in the northern mountains, they proved ineffective against the German mountain troops. On return these and the other companies were used as the basis for the formation of seven commandos in the Special Service Brigade under Brigadier Haydon in the UK and three sent to the Mediterranean under Colonel Laycock.

The RM Division had not got very far when in May 1941, the four original battalions, two brigade headquarters and divisional headquarters were, with the Regular Army 29th Independent Brigade Group, the Special Service Brigade and other Army units, formed into a mixed force for the seizure of the Canary Islands should Franco throw in his lot with Hitler. Other Army brigades were added, and amphibious training and planning for other projected operations continued until in March 1942 Major General Robert Sturges, RM, with Headquarters RM Division, 29th Independent and 17th Infantry Brigade Groups and 5 Commando sailed at short notice for the seizure of Diego Suarez in Madagascar, an operation successfully completed in a 48-hour battle early in May at the cost of 115 killed and some naval losses.

To the Marines the exclusion of the four RM battalions from this force came as a bitter disappointment, but the division lingered on until, in April 1943, the Chiefs of Staff at last agreed to Mountbatten's earlier suggestion that the division and the two MNBDOs should be disbanded and used to provide additional commandos and landing craft crews for the return to Europe. In 1944-45 a total of seven Army and

nine RM commandos in four mixed brigades saw action, two brigades in NW Europe and one each in Italy and Burma.

In the early part of the war there were in fact more small commando and commando-type raids than Mr. Barclay mentions. Furthermore in December 1941 after Mountbatten had taken over from Keyes, 3 Commando with detachments from others made a successful medium-sized raid at Vaagso in West Norway; in March 1942, 9 Commando achieved a brilliant success in the St. Nazaire raid comparable except for its success to Zeebrugge; and in August 1942, 3 and 4 Army and 40 RM Commandos took part in the large-scale Dieppe raid, in which 4 Commando achieved the only real success. But inevitably as the great invasions began the commandos were increasingly used as amphibious light infantry, often being retained to take part in the land campaigns which followed.

"Unloading is the world-wide difficulty of amphibious operations," Marder quotes Rear Admiral Theodore Wilkinson, USN, as saying. Keyes, whose understanding of amphibious operations was superficial, on becoming Director of Combined Operations in 1940 seized upon the partly trained and rather chaotic commandos of that time as a private army and neglected the much more difficult problems of embarking and unloading a balanced military force of all arms. In doing so he interposed a period of friction, and for the Royal Marines frustration, between the far more productive regimes of Maund and Mountbatten.

It remains to correct Mr. Barclay on some details. Morford, the first commander of the RM Brigade, did not succeed Bourne in administrative command of the Royal Marines. Bourne had called up a retired officer to keep the place open and returned to it when Keyes replaced him as DCO. Morford, bitterly disappointed by the non-employment of his brigade, reverted to a training appointment in mid-1942 where he was subsequently killed in a training accident. Irwin, land commander for Dakar, was an Army major general, not a Marine. The christian name of Keyes' son in 8 Commando at the Litani River was Geoffrey, not George. In November 1942 as a lieutenant colonel he was killed and won a posthumous Victoria Cross leading a small raid on the North African coast at the time of a British desert offensive in an unsuccessful attempt to kill or capture Rommel.

Major General J.L. Moulton, Royal Marines (Ret.)

