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Prelude to Disaster: The American Role in Vietnam, 1940-1963

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the effect of, and adaptation to, social change in the case of senior petty officers, a problem and a group of major importance.

A simple count of Baynham's interviewees shows that the traditional (seaman, stoker, Royal marine) branches of the service produced few who rose above petty officer while the new specialist branches produced few who failed to reach above that rank. This apparent career disappointment accompanied by loss of status cannot but have had an effect on discipline, especially a discipline made less rigorous by the introduction of the new specialists. Baynham discusses the problems of discipline but does not look for general causation. We are told of the 1906 near mutiny of the stokers at Portsmouth but not whether it was unique, nor are we informed of nonproximate causes of the incident. Thus the student concerned with understanding recent problems such as those on *Constellation* is left curious but unsatisfied. Symptoms of stress in the social system of the Royal Navy are described to us, but with no attempt to link them into a coherent diagnosis. Although he points to increasing democratization of avenues of promotion, Baynham is satisfied with childhood socialization as an explanation for the differences in promotion between boy entrants who became a chief yeoman of signals and a leading stoker. The Royal Navy as a socializing agency and the effects of branch on career are both ignored.

The writing of history can never be absolute; it is colored by the perspective of subsequent events. Who, now, is concerned with Mussolini's achievement in draining the Pontine Marshes? Baynham attempts to avoid perspective and in doing so considerably decreases the value of his book. We have a collection of chapters rather than a development of a thesis. Nevertheless it is valuable as an introduction to a largely neglected area of study. Baynham's tapes are

presumably available and, together with interviews with others who served in the same period (on actuarial grounds there should be more than 55) and searches of the relevant documents, the data for the execution of some well-planned research is available. The core of my problem with the book lies in the fact that research cannot succeed without a well-defined objective. Baynham has performed a service in opening up an important data source. However, in that his work lacks a clear focus (and indeed in a critical sense—he spends pages on stories I have heard on several continents with different protagonists), he does not significantly add to our knowledge, although expanding our store of information.

What then has Baynham accomplished? He has produced a readable view of naval life in the period. My first reading of the book was accomplished in a single sitting. While reading I was engrossed, but on closing the book my questions started and were not answered by detailed searches. So far Baynham has no competitors but the importance of his subject demands more heavy-weight efforts. Until research (which depends on research funding) extends in this direction, *Men from the Dreadnoughts* cannot be overlooked.

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Brown, Weldon A. *Prelude to Disaster: The American Role in Vietnam, 1940-1963*. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975. 278pp.

The experience of reading this book parallels, in an odd way, some of the events it describes: One has the definite sensation, the further one progresses, of sinking slowly into a quagmire. Admittedly this imparts vividness to the account, but it is not, one suspects, the impression Professor Brown sought to produce in his history of the American role in Vietnam from 1940 to 1963.

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(A sequel, *The Last Chopper*, covering 1963 to 1973, was published in 1976.)

Brown's theme is the "betrayal," by Ho Chi Minh, Ngo Dinh Diem, and their respective external patrons, of the Vietnamese people's burning desire for "freedom." But Brown offers no precise definition of this term: While he admits at one point that "freedom meant one thing to Europeans and Americans, something quite different to the majority of Asians," the general thrust of his argument is that the Vietnam conflict "was a war to contain communism, to establish freedom, as justified as had been the war in Europe and Asia from 1939 to 1945, and the Korean War from 1950 to 1953." This tendency to impose Western political concepts on Asian cultures prevails throughout the book to its considerable detriment.

Brown's account also suffers from his inability to disengage his passions from his subject, a step which would appear to be a necessary prerequisite to the kind of "objective evaluation" he promises us. To describe President Eisenhower as "one of the architects of the policy that enslaved millions" is not to enhance the dispassionate nature of the analysis, nor does it help for Brown to conclude his discussion of the 1954 Geneva Conference with the outburst: "Pontius Pilates—all of us!" Brown then compounds the confusion by endorsing, in his final chapter, all of the Johnson administration's arguments in defense of its Vietnam policy, down to the point of invoking Munich, SEATO, the pledges of three previous presidents, and the Gulf of Tonkin resolution.

The book contains one other distinction: Although published 4 years after their release, the book does not contain, in the course of some 248 pages of text, a single reference to *The Pentagon Papers*. Since Brown cites these documents in his bibliography one can only conclude that the omission was by design, as with other aspects of this

puzzling book, though, one cannot help but wonder what the design was.

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Fay, Peter Ward. *The Opium War, 1840-1842*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1975. 406pp.

This masterfully written book deals with a far broader area than its title might indicate. The author, Professor of History at the California Institute of Technology, discusses the entire range of contacts between China and the West in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. He also demonstrates a direct connection between these and current events: The attitudes and policies of the Chinese People's Republic's leaders in 1976 show a definite historical linkage to the events of 1840 to 1842.

The reader is struck not only with the prominence in this book of "Commissioner Lin"—the mandarin who seized and destroyed 170 tons of opium, and who still is a hero to the Chinese—but also by the similarity in the language of the Manchu court in the 1840's and that of the Maoist Communist Party of today. For instance, in acknowledging Britain's military superiority in 1842, the royal emissary cautioned that the emperor "would, if pushed too far, call upon his people to rise, men, women, and children—every bush will be a soldier."

Fay credits the British penetration of China to the twin influences of "Christ and opium." The former was proselytized by an interdenominational horde of missionaries from many countries. Represented, for example, was the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the English Church Missionary Society, Spanish Dominicans, Portuguese and French Lazarists (Vincentians), and Jesuits from many nations. The efforts that representatives of these organizations were willing to