

# Naval War College Review

---

Volume 25  
Number 7 September-October

Article 11

---

1972

## Swords and Plowshares

Lawrence J. Korb

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Korb, Lawrence J. (1972) "Swords and Plowshares," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 25 : No. 7 , Article 11.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol25/iss7/11>

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](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

growth and prosperity that was the first mover. It was the Navy for which he fought and the Navy, for Mahan, needed no justification." (p. 339)

Although it is an impressive performance, *The Naval Aristocracy* is not without some shortcomings, the most serious being that Professor Karsten, as he frankly admits, simply does not like the officers he is writing about. The result is that, in a few places, the book reads more like an indictment than a social history. In almost every instance, doubtful or ambiguous evidence is resolved in favor of the prosecution. Thus Capt. Percival Drayton's remark that "a little despotism in government is a good thing," is taken as typical of the views of his naval colleagues, while this same officer's very liberal (for the time) views on race relations are presented as quite untypical. Authoritarian, militaristic, or racist remarks by naval officers are presented in the text as typical; more moderate or contradictory remarks by other naval officers are presented in the footnotes as "exceptions." Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to dismiss this book as merely an antimilitary polemic. Professor Karsten is a serious scholar who appears to have waded through every collection of personal papers, every memoir, and every biography pertaining to his "naval aristocracy." On many important points his documentation and the weight of statistical evidence he brings to bear are impressive and quite persuasive. The book will probably stand for a long time as the definitive study of the naval officer corps.

*The Naval Aristocracy* may be taken as indicative of a new trend in military history away from the narrow accounts of battles and the laudatory biographies of great captains. The time has passed when the military profession and its members can expect historians to accept, at face value, their beliefs about the nature and function of their profession. Naval readers who are disturbed by

some of Professor Karsten's findings may derive some comfort from the fact that historians are also beginning to examine the lawyers, the Army, the Foreign Service, and the medical profession in the same critical spirit. The indications are that the results will be no more flattering than *The Naval Aristocracy*.

Dr. Ronald Spector  
Historian, Current History Branch  
Office of the Chief of Military History

Taylor, Maxwell D. *Swords and Plowshares*. New York: Norton, 1972. 434p.

There are two diametrically opposed schools of thought on military professionalism. One school maintains that the job of a military man is not to reason why in matters of foreign policy but to win wars by military means and leave all other considerations to civilians. The other school argues, however, that the military does have responsibilities in the field of foreign policy and should make recommendations on the question of whether or not to use military force.

In a 1969 speech at West Point, Gen. Maxwell Taylor attempted to reconcile these contrasting views. But in his autobiographical *Swords and Plowshares* General Taylor leaves little doubt about which position he espoused in his distinguished post-World War II career as Commander of the 8th Army in Korea, Army Chief of Staff, Military Representative to the President, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Ambassador to South Vietnam, and White House Consultant. Never does the erudite general, publicly or privately, in or out of uniform, express any misgivings about the basic premises of the post-World War II containment policy. Instead, Taylor hails the Truman decision to intervene in Korea as courageous; he studies the Bay of Pigs disaster without even addressing the question of whether the United States should be invading Cuba in the first place; and he makes

## 96 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

numerous trips to Vietnam and serves as Ambassador in that unhappy country without ever once challenging the rightness of our involvement.

Taylor's position on the role of military leaders is very much in the tradition of his predecessors as Army leaders, i.e., Bradley and Ridgway. However, the fact that Taylor emerges in this mold is surprising, and indeed disappointing, because Taylor was supposed to be different than other military men. Indeed, this is precisely why he was brought back into government by the Kennedy administration.

In addition to tracing his career from West Point to Saigon, Taylor also summarizes the lessons of his experience in two concluding chapters entitled "Lessons from Vietnam," and "Adjustments to Declining Power." Those who were disappointed by Taylor's position in the first part of the book will be greatly troubled by his conclusions. The general condemns the policy of gradualism in Vietnam as immoral; advocates that future presidents use military force swiftly and decisively, regardless of the international consequences; laments the fact that negotiation has become the controlling objective of our policy in Vietnam; and lays the majority of the blame for the divisions in our society and the defamation of our institutions on the media.

Nonetheless, the book is valuable for those interested in the attitudes and perceptions of military leaders. Like Lyndon Johnson's *Vantage Point*, Taylor's memoirs are poor history, (e.g., his account of the involvement of the Kennedy administration in the overthrow of Diem), but rich in character insights that make it easier to understand how the United States became immersed in Vietnam.

Lawrence J. Korb  
Associate Professor Political Science  
U.S. Coast Guard Academy

Tolley, Kemp. *Yangtze Patrol: the U.S. Navy in China*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1971. 292p.

At a time when the reader is sated with books of China, it hardly seems profitable to recommend yet another. Yet, *Yangtze Patrol* will be of great interest to all naval officers and especially to those who served with the modern-day version of the river patrol in the Mekong Delta. To one unschooled in the annals of naval history, this writer believed the Mekong patrols to be innovative and representative of the modern and flexible Navy, only to find precedent along the Yangtze and in "Mr. Lincoln's Brown Water Navy."

In *Yangtze Patrol*, Rear Admiral Tolley traces the history of the Navy's river gunboats from the inception of the Yangtze Patrol to its enforced demise at the onset of World War II. The gunboats sailed the inland waters of a foreign land to protect the lives of the many American citizens in China, to protect U.S. commercial interests, and to insure that other foreign nationals gained no advantage over our traders. Even when their useful function ceased in China at the time of the Japanese conquest there, the sailors and gunboats of the river patrol continued to serve in admirable fashion, as a few of their number survived to aid the defense of Corregidor in Manila Bay. Although the Yangtze gunboats may have found themselves aground many times on the mudflats of the Yangtze, they hardly anticipated that their final grounding would be at Corregidor, with the last of their crews manning the defenses of that stronghold.

The author draws from his own experience as a former river rat to enliven the accounts of his predecessors. He relies mainly on the prolific writings of the gunboats themselves to enrich and color the account, presenting a bizarre, exciting, and highly readable account of the early American experience in China.

The expansive television coverage of