

Naval War College Review

Volume 22
Number 5 May

Article 7

1969

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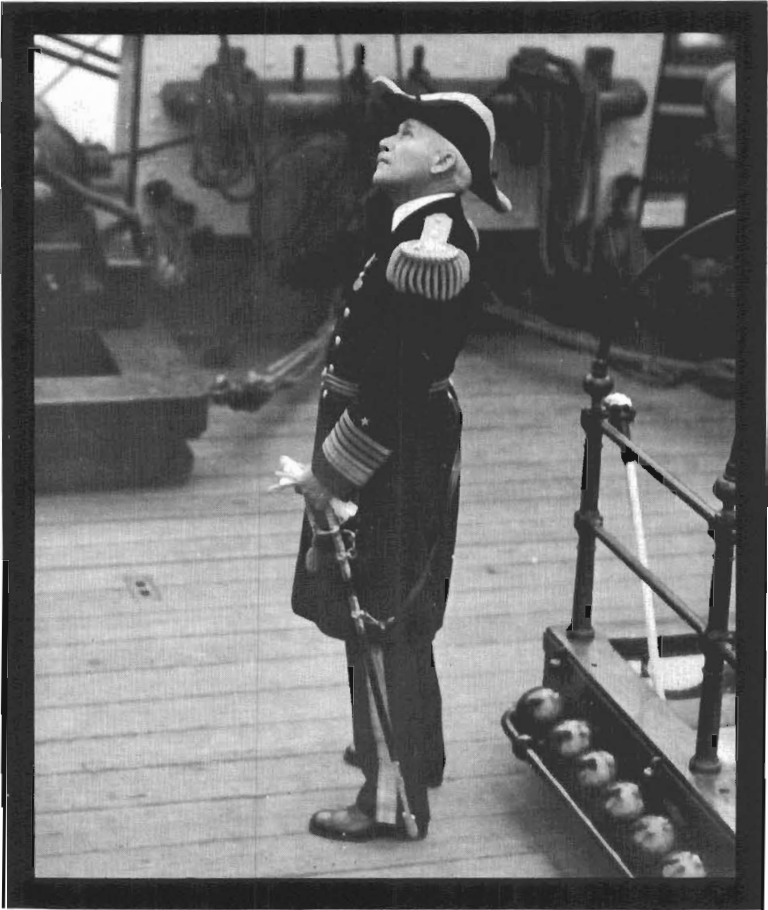
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Recommended Citation

Wheeler, Gerald E. (1969) "William Veazie Pratt, U.S. Navy: A Silhouette of an Admiral," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 22 : No. 5 , Article 7.

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On Board *Constitution*

As Chief of Naval Operations in the spring of 1932, Admiral William V. Pratt visited *Constitution*, then berthed in Newport. The Admiral's first cruise was under sail as a midshipman and his first duty was in *Atlanta* which carried a suit of sails to augment its steam plant. In his professional career, Pratt was to serve his early years in vessels that showed the transitional nature of the times. He was also to serve under the command of officers who showed too often that they had been trained to command an earlier breed of men.

WILLIAM VEAZIE PRATT, U. S. NAVY:

A SILHOUETTE OF AN ADMIRAL

by

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Within the past year, articles have appeared in the *Naval War College Review* and the Naval Institute's *Proceedings* that have examined the qualities of leadership possessed by a number of the Navy's most famous wartime leaders.* These admirals have been immortalized in naval literature; their pictures and sculpted busts adorn the passageways and rooms of the Navy's schools; and most have been honored by having academic halls and destroyer-type vessels named for them. Besides their various leadership traits, they all share the common background of having achieved greatness in wartime. Most of those officers discussed by Professor O'Connor and Potter had served in World War I, a few with distinction; but all are remembered for their World War II accomplishments. Yet the fleets they commanded, particularly in 1941 and 1942, had been built and trained by a generation of naval

officers, the survivors of which cheered from the beaches as their successors faced the Axis fleets at sea. In this retired generation was one of the most illustrious admirals to roam flag country in this century--William Veazie Pratt. Were it not for the *William Veazie Pratt* (DLG-13), few today would have heard of him. Yet, during his 12 years of active service in flag grade, Admiral Pratt held every top sea command, served as President of the Naval War College, and retired after 3 years as Chief of Naval Operations. Had Admiral King not preempted it as a subtitle for his memoirs, Admiral Pratt's own biography might well be called "A Naval Record"!

William Veazie Pratt came from "down-Easter" stock, born in Belfast, Me., on 28 February 1869. Both his mother and father came from New England merchant marine families. Pratt's father had been an Acting Master, serving at sea in the South and North Atlantic Blockade Squadrons during the Civil War. Before his son's birth, Nichols Pratt entered the service of the Shanghai Steam Navigation Company and remained on the China

*Raymond G. O'Connor, "Reflections on the Characteristics of a Commander," *Naval War College Review*, October 1968, p. 37-43; E.B. Potter, "The Command Personality," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, January 1969, p. 19-25.

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coast until retirement in 1906. Young Pratt was taken to Shanghai by his mother in 1871 and lived in China until it was time to begin school. Upon return to Belfast in 1877, he was cared for by his maternal grandmother. After schooling in Belfast and Farmington, Me., Pratt entered the U.S. Naval Academy in the spring of 1885.

Graduating number six of 35 in the class of 1889, Passed Midshipman Pratt began the long climb to flag rank. His "middle cruise" was served in *Atlanta*, one of the original modern naval vessels that constituted the "White Squadron" of the 1890's. Commissioned an ensign in 1891, Pratt was ordered to the China station for duty in *Petrel*, commanded by rugged Capt. Morris MacKenzie. In his manuscript "Autobiography,"[†] Pratt recalled having served under a series of difficult commanding officers:

While on the subject I might add that in my earlier Naval career, I sailed with almost every hardboiled senior in the service, save one, and I mean hardboiled, stern, able, just, efficient, with little tolerance for laziness or inefficiency. They were not the good fellows in the service; the ones easy to get along with; the kind most officers wanted to sail with. I thought at the time I was unlucky, but have come to realize that it was the best of fortune that my early training was under this type of men, and I was well trained. Deliver me from the skipper who tries to be the good fellow, when it isn't natural, just to gain popularity. He will be the first to fail you in trouble.

While *Petrel* wintered in Newchwang, protected from the frozen waters by a mud drydock, Ensign Pratt observed the defeat of Chinese troops in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895. From these observations he gained a lifelong respect for the Japanese and an equally deep abhorrence of military slaughter.

[†]Admiral Pratt's "Autobiography" was completed in 1939 but was never published. This manuscript and his official papers and correspondence are on deposit at the Office of Naval History, Washington, D.C.

From the China Station, Ensign Pratt was ordered in 1895 to the Naval Academy for 2 years of instructor duty in the Mathematics Department. At the Academy Pratt began to develop the amenities that later endeared him to his juniors. He enjoyed sports and practical jokes; he played poker well; and he lived the full life of the bachelor in elkh quarters on Stribling Walk. From teaching "wooden" sections in mathematics, this young ensign developed an empathy for the underdog that he never lost. In time he recognized that good leaders were not uncommon among those who stood toward the bottom of the Academy classes.

After completing 2 years in Annapolis, Pratt was ordered to sea in *Annapolis* the Navy's apprentice training ship; but with the outbreak of the Spanish-American War he was transferred to *Mayflower*, again under MacKenzie. Despite a myriad of attempts by her commanding officer to get *Mayflower* into action, Pratt was destined to spend his time at the dull routine of blockade. At war's end, and now a lieutenant (junior grade), he was shifted to *Newark* for duty in the Philippines. Under Capt. Bowman McCalla, *Newark* saw a great deal of action in the waters around Luzon during the Philippine Insurrection. In shore operations at Aparri and Vigan, Pratt came under fire and hauled himself creditably. Duty in wartime resulted in rapid promotion; and after 9 years as passed midshipman and ensign, Pratt moved to lieutenant after a mere 3 months in grade as a lieutenant (junior grade).

Following another 2 years on the *Severn* 1900-1902, Lieutenant Pratt was ordered to *Kearsarge*, flagship of Rear Adm. Albert Barker's North Atlantic Fleet. For its time, *Kearsarge* was the most modern of the Navy's battleships. Because of a series of transfers and a suicide, Pratt took over as navigator despite his relatively short time in rank as a lieutenant. Three years as navigator,

with a cranky admiral looking over his shoulder, gave him the careful schooling in shiphandling that established his service reputation as a blue-water sailor. He summed up his own views on navigating:

I learned from him (Rear Admiral Francis J. Higginson) to value the lead and compass, to an extent that we always navigated as if we were in thick or foggy weather. The result was that when fog suddenly struck us we were not nonplussed. Sights of course, plenty of them were taken, but lead and compass were the real reliance. As a matter of fact, they are today (1939), even as they were hundreds of years ago, the sailors' truest friends. You can't get aground if you keep deep water under the keel.

After a short tour in *Newark*, during 1906, Lieutenant Commander Pratt was again ordered to the Naval Academy, this time in the Navigation Department with collateral duty among the "wooden" plebes of the Mathematics Department. From there, in 1908, he was detailed to *St. Louis*, lying in reserve in Bremerton, as executive officer. His commanding Officer, Capt. Albert Gleaves, he described as "an extremely able and smart officer, but a bit of a martinet." Because of an innate untidiness, a failing that Pratt recognized but never attempted to remedy, he had his problems with Gleaves. After a year in *St. Louis* and promotion to commander 1 July 1910, Pratt was ordered to the armored cruiser *California*, again as executive officer, Capt. Henry T. Mayo commanding. In preparation for a trip to Valparaiso, Pratt displayed another talent developed from several European cruises. He had a good palate for wines, and Rear Adm. Giles B. Harber, flying his flag in *California*, ordered him to select a cargo of California wines to be used for official entertainment. The ship's paymaster joined him in the selections; the rest is history. "After the test was over, the paymaster was incommunicado for another twenty-four

hours. I had lost all zest for my meals, and it was some time before I could look a bottle of wine squarely in the face."

With 3 years of sea duty completed in 1911, Commander Pratt received orders to the Naval War College to serve as an instructor in the Tactics Department. The President, Rear Adm. Raymond P. Rodgers, had been one of Pratt's commanding officers in *Kearsarge* and one he deeply admired. In his "Autohography," he admitted that

... as I look back and try to recall some outstanding incident... there seems nothing but a blank wall to face me and all that remains is the great and enduring influence of the War College, which hereafter throughout my naval career, yes, even after, was to influence and direct my life and its actions.

On the lighter side, Pratt and his wife Louise partied much, learned the most recent dances, and enjoyed horseback riding, including the hunt. Professionally, he felt that Capt. W. McCarty Little, then retired but head of the Tactics Department, educated him well in the field he was teaching. Pratt admitted that he was impatient with precision movements, the results of such maneuvers concerned him more. He felt this was another evidence of his sloppiness and disinterest in detail, yet he never really tried to correct this flaw. He justified his unconcern for details by concluding that leadership was the most important factor in military accomplishment.

Strange perhaps it may seem, the deeper I became involved in complicated mass movements, the less their inherent value appealed to me, but more and more there appeared as a dominating factor, not the things which an enemy might handle, but the inherent characteristics of the leader who used the material things which he held power over. And it was in this aspect that I saw Nelson: not the things which he did, but the man himself with all his strength and weakness.

To develop leadership, Pratt felt very strongly that younger men had to be delegated authority to act and to be held responsible.

Probably the most important assignment in Pratt's career came with his detachment from the War College in the spring of 1913. He was ordered to the Torpedo Flotilla of the Atlantic Fleet where he served as Chief of Staff to Capt. William S. Sims, one of the Navy's most inspiring leaders. The captain had been instructed by Pratt at the Naval War College and had been impressed. When putting his staff together, Sims requested that Commander Pratt be included. When Pratt reported to the Torpedo Flotilla, Sims was flying his broad pennant in *Dixie*, a destroyer tender; but he was soon given the light cruiser *Birmingham*. Pratt was not only Chief of Staff, he also commanded the flagship. In this "two-hatted" position he exercised his first command in his usual seamanlike manner. Ironically, he was blessed with a navigator who had little feel for his work.

As Chief of Staff to Sims, Pratt learned a great deal about leadership and educating junior officers to flotilla work. According to his biographer, Elting Morison, Sims had the "Nelsonian touch." He created his own "hand of brothers" and welded a flotilla of individual ships into a potent offensive unit. Within the flotilla, tactics was discussed by the conference method, a technique Sims and Pratt had learned at the War College. The flotilla commander messed with his staff and thus built up those personal bonds lacking in most naval staffs of the day. Sims recognized the pressing need for a flotilla doctrine; and through conferences with his destroyer captains, trial and error operations, and the creative ingenuity of his staff one was prepared. In later years Pratt was to emulate Sims in an amazing number of ways: conferences, messing, development of initiative in his juniors, loyalty to his subordinates, aggressive-

ness in destroyer tactics, and attention to the development or improvement of doctrine wherever he commanded. While with the flotilla, Pratt was selected for captain in June 1915 and reported to his next duty in his new rank.

Between November 1915 and January 1919 Captain Pratt was ashore. These were highly important years in the nation's history, and with war in April 1917 they became critical years in the life of any naval officer who hoped to move up in rank. The "Navy List" of 1915 contained the names of many officers who moved ahead of their Academy classmates because of meritorious achievement in the Spanish-American War. A distinguished record in a sea command, perhaps in combat with the enemy, was a traditional way for a captain to achieve flag rank. For a captain to man a desk throughout a war or to be relegated to a backwater command was almost sure preparation for terminating a career with four stripes. Pratt knew the "rules of the game" as played by the selection boards, and for that reason these years take on extra interest in analyzing his career.

After completing his examinations for captain in November 1915, Pratt was ordered to the Canal Zone to become the naval member of the Panama Canal Defense Committee. He was attached to the staff of Maj. Gen. Clarence Edwards, U.S. Army, wore a khaki uniform, and was normally addressed as "colonel." He enjoyed the year in Panama and concluded that the most valuable experience for him came from learning to work with Army types and to like them. In later years this capacity to deal well with the other services was to pay dividends for the country.

Pratt got a second exposure to the Army's way of doing things when he reported to the Army War College, as a student, at the end of September 1916.

Unfortunately for him, he was unable to enjoy the routine of the regular student. Because of the college's location in what is today, Fort McNair, the captain was within phone call or messenger despatch from the Navy Department. As relations with Germany deteriorated, particularly following the severance of relations in February 1917, Pratt began to spend little time at the college and most of his time at the War Plans Division of the Office of Naval Operations. By May, with the Nation at war, Secretary of War Newton Baker notified Pratt that the course was to be shortened, and he was to be detached on 19 May. If the captain had any dreams of going to sea, he was quickly disabused of them. Adm. W.S. Benson, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), assigned him as senior member of a "board on devices and plans connected with submarine warfare."

The next 18 months were frantic ones for the Navy, the Office of Naval Operations, and for Captain Pratt particularly. Without the title (until 18 August 1918), Pratt served as Assistant CNO. He handled the enormous routine of Admiral Benson's office and organized it to fight a war. He also worried about antisubmarine warfare, established a convoy control and routing system, kept an eye on the developments in mine warfare, and helped prepare policy papers. A measure of his value can be read in the seven despatches that Vice Admiral Sims sent from London pleading for the use of Pratt as his own Chief of Staff. Despite Sims' importuning and the captain's occasional hint that he would like a fighting command, Admiral Benson held Pratt in Washington. Recognizing that he might be irreparably damaging his assistant's career, Admiral Benson wrote the following for insertion into Pratt's promotion file:

Captain Pratt is my senior assistant and is charged with preparation of papers on policy and other matters of such an

important character that I have felt that the best interests of the Service would not allow me to consider his detachment. I have, therefore, refused to consider the question and I feel that, although it inflicts a personal hardship on Captain Pratt, the best interest of the Country and of the Service demand his retention on shore duty.

Another task that Pratt handled with magnificent finesse involved the ever testy Commander-in-Chief of Naval Forces in European Waters--Vice Admiral Sims. Like every theater commander, past and present, Sims believed that his command was the most important in the Navy. He pressed constantly for more staff, more ships, more munitions, more freedom to operate, and more control over other naval forces operating in European waters. He came to believe that Admiral Benson, out of stupidity and incompetence, was deliberately sabotaging his attempts to win the war. Pratt was truly trapped trying to sail between Scylla and Charybdis. He was a close and true friend of Sims, and he was a loyal subordinate of Admiral Benson. Through the years Pratt had developed an intense attachment to the administrative principle that loyalty had to move both ways. Ironically, Sims had driven this home to him again and again in the flotilla years. Now, on almost a weekly basis, he received long personal letters from Sims exchanging information and ideas and normally firing at least one salvo at the CNO. From time to time he would request Pratt to show these letters to Benson in order to cut bureaucratic corners. He normally enclosed carbons of his correspondence with Benson and occasionally sent Benson's letters on to Pratt. On the other hand, Benson usually showed Pratt his correspondence from Sims and asked his assistant to draft replies. In time, Benson found it difficult to read Sims' correspondence and at one point asked Pratt not to show him any more letters from Sims

because they upset him so badly. Fortunately, the war ended before the CNO collapsed or took action against his European theater commander. Despite this breakdown in interpersonal relations, Sims could still end his correspondence throughout this period with his famous leitmotiv—"cheer up". As one would guess, it was Pratt who collapsed. In the fall of 1918 he was forced to take leave to his home in Belfast due to total physical and mental exhaustion. He was apparently quite close to a disability retirement.

The World War might have ended on November 1918, but Captain Pratt was called upon twice more to fight administrative battles. In late November he took a quick trip to Paris to assist Admiral Benson who was fully engaged in what Harold and Margaret Sprout called "The Naval Battle of Paris." At question was the disposition of the German High Seas Fleet. A secondary question, but even more vital to Benson and the Navy's admirals, was whether the United States would build out of its 1916 and 1918 naval construction authorizations and thus surpass the Royal Navy in size and fighting power. While solving few problems, Pratt did learn, at first hand, how touchy the British were on the subject of American Naval strength. The visiting he did in England deepened his basic admiration for the English as a people. The second "battle" Pratt became engaged in again involved Admirals Benson and Sims. This occurred in the spring of 1920 and will be discussed later.

Upon return to the United States in late January 1919, Pratt relieved Capt. E.L. Beach and took command of *New York*. The captain was delighted to escape the desk and routine of administration in Washington. He was also thankful for the opportunity to command a modern battleship in the Atlantic Fleet. While Congress had modified the law requiring captains to serve 2 years at sea in order to qualify for

consideration by a rear admiral selection board, Pratt knew his chances would be diminished unless he met this requirement. Recognizing that they had endangered his career, Admiral Benson and Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels had certified officially that Pratt had been held ashore for the best interests of the Nation and the service. The two helped him further by the assignment to *New York* and in August 1920 by ordering him to relieve Rear Adm. Henry A. Wiley in command of Destroyer Forces, Pacific Fleet.

While commanding *New York*, flagship of Rear Adm. Hugh Rodman's Battleship Squadron Three, he was invited to mess with the admiral and his staff. Pratt accepted the invitation for he disliked the tradition of a ship captain dining alone. He deeply admired Rodman, particularly his seamanship, and apparently impressed the admiral through his own display of smart ship-handling. When the decision was made to establish a Pacific Fleet, consisting of the most powerful units in service, Rodman was selected to command it. He asked Pratt to join him as Chief of Staff, but the *New York's* captain preferred to stay in the battleline. Like many before him, he sincerely believed there was no finer duty than a battleship command. Duty in *New York* and association with Rodman's staff helped Pratt in another way; he began to evaluate men who would join his staffs through the years. The two officers who served him longest as aides or flag lieutenants, C.W.A. ("Jimmie") Campbell and Russell S. Berkey, were lieutenants in *New York* under his command.

While commanding *New York*, Captain Pratt was ordered to Washington in March 1920 for what must have been the most distasteful duty in his entire naval career. The Senate Naval Affairs Committee, chaired by Frederick Hale of Maine, had received permission to broaden an investigation of medals

awarded in the war into a full study of Rear Admiral Sims' charges that the Navy had been unprepared for war in 1917 and had prosecuted it badly once America entered the fighting. The admiral had laid out his charges in a letter to Secretary Daniels, dated 7 January 1920, and titled "Certain Naval Lessons of the Great War." Sims' intention in writing Daniels, and earlier in refusing to accept his Distinguished Service Medal, had been to get a public hearing and eventual reform and reorganization of the Navy. Though wishing to present his case professionally and impersonally, "Certain Naval Lessons" was a continuous enfilading broadside that took in Secretary Daniels, CNO Benson, and his close friend Captain Pratt. Secretary Daniels returned the fire in his traditional *ad hominem* manner—much to the delight of the press. Benson stuck to specifics and mostly proved that Sims was correct on the question of naval preparedness. His testimony, at times, had the flavor of Mark Anthony's declamation at Caesar's bier. Pratt managed to support both sides. There was unpreparedness in personnel and a balanced fleet; Sims was correct in calling for convoys; and Daniels and Benson had interpreted the situation properly by affording more protection to troopships than to merchant convoys. The captain, in his unpublished "Autobiography," said very little about the hearings. He summarized them in this paragraph:

When the congressional investigation took place, I was ordered from the Puget Sound Navy Yard . . . to attend all the sessions. There I sat with Sims; we were both sincere, but each held to his own opinions. We remained friends so much so that frequently I read over his evidence before it was presented. Once I found in it a statement I knew he would not like to make. Calling his attention to it, he thanked me and continued with his testimony. It turned out as I expected. Nobody was really to blame for our unpreparedness. It was rather inevitable—a state of

affairs bound to happen when we enter any war, rather more accentuated than would ever be the case again, but nobody culpably blameable.

Admiral Benson was succeeded as CNO by Robert E. Coontz, another admiral who knew Captain Pratt quite well and respected his abilities. In September 1920 he wrote informally to the *New York's* skipper and stated that Secretary Daniels "was inclined to do the best he can for you in regard to duty . . ." Pratt was offered his choice, the General Board or to relieve Rear Admiral Wiley in command of the Destroyer Force, Pacific Fleet. Though it meant additional sea duty, the captain opted to relieve the rear admiral. In either case, to use a current idea, it amounted to preselection for flag rank. On 1 November 1920 Pratt assumed his first flag command, though regulations required that he fly the broad pennant in the old cruiser *Birmingham* rather than breaking the two stars of a rear admiral.

Pratt's 6 months in command of the destroyer flotillas gave him an opportunity to prove that he was admiral caliber. It also gave him the chance to test what he had learned about leadership from "Billy" Sims and "Uncle Hughie" Rodman. In selecting a staff he looked for two qualifications in each man: ability and loyalty. Like Sims and Rodman, he drew them into a tightly knit body of friends and confidants. He eschewed the "yes man" and prized initiative. At mess with his staff, in conference with his destroyer captains, or on the bridge he wanted advice that was correct and not what his staff thought he desired to hear. The whole Pacific Fleet was a bit surprised at his selection of Capt. Frank Taylor Evans to be his Chief of Staff. Taylor Evans was blunt, opinionated, and reputedly difficult to work with; but he was a fine shiphandler and loyal to the core. For "flag" lieutenant he chose a lieutenant who had been an "E" turret officer in

New York. C.W.A. Campbell had "come up through the hawse pipe" and was to serve as Pratt's aide for 14 years--a naval record in itself. Two others need mention here. "Berk"--Lt. Russell S. Berkey--came from *New York* with Pratt and became "flag" secretary. With breaks for command or other sea duty, Berkey served almost 8 years with Pratt. Comdr. Hollis M. Cooley, the Force Engineering Officer, was to serve almost 8 years afloat and ashore with him. Years after retirement, Pratt summed up his philosophy of choosing subordinates:

In selecting the members of my staff, I never cared a snap of the fingers whether they were born in the cow yard or whether they first saw the light of day inside the walls of a palace. I never cared a straw, who their wives were, or what their wealth and social status might be, only as it affected their husband's manners, characters, and efficiency in attending to the business of the Navy. . . . I have had many staffs in the course of my naval career, many of the members following me from one appointment to the other. As I look back over the days past and gone, I can recall many a one, now a distinguished officer, who at one time or another served on my personal staff. I hope they liked the old man as well as he did them.

Pratt's destroyer force was long on ships and short on men, a condition that existed throughout the interwar years. He learned to "make do" with one-third of his force nested at a dock with a few maintenance crew aboard for all the ships. Another third operated under a limited condition with 50 percent crews. The other third was "fully manned," which meant 85 percent of war-time allowances. By rotating the vessels and moving crews liberally, a fair degree of material readiness resulted. Those destroyers that were fully operational were exercised liberally by Pacific Fleet Commander Rodman. He and Pratt were in perfect agreement that destroyers must operate aggressively and from doctrine. Smashups did occur, but

the admiral preferred to chance occasional damage to having his force become timid.

If Pratt had any doubts in the spring of 1921 that he would be selected for flag rank, he never revealed them in letters to his friends or family. When the flag selection ALNAV hit the fleet in early June, letters of congratulation cascaded in on him. Many have a common theme: he had done so much so well that selection had been absolutely mandatory. Typical was the "Dear Commodore: Congratulations will soon be in order for your 'two stars,' which after all is a rather amusing--if necessary promotion--considering the 'jobs' you've held, which very few rear admirals will ever be called upon to fill, or could fill." Soon after formal notice of selection, Pratt was detached from his command and ordered to the General Board. In September he was examined by the medical and professional boards and approved for the rank of rear admiral. When his vacancy occurred, he would date from 3 June 1921. It had been 32 very full years since he left the Naval Academy. His next 12 years in flag grade were to be even more tightly packed with events and great responsibility.

Under normal circumstances, Pratt's 2 years on the General Board would have represented a period of "marking time" while waiting for a sea command to become available and helping the Department with its long-range planning. In the years after the World War, the General Board was normally staffed by three fairly distinct groups of officers. The senior group consisted of some of the Navy's oldest admirals, now finishing up their time till mandatory retirement at age 64. Many had "flected up" to three and four star commands and were now again rear admirals. A second group was characterized by Pratt. These were "fresh caught" selectees or rear admirals who were getting accustomed to their new position in life.

Duty on the Board meant a lot of hard work, for they normally did the traveling and drafted the reports. On the other hand, it meant they were close to the seat of power and could do a little on-the-job career planning. The third group was made up of a few commanders or captains who might be on the rise or sitting out their 30 years and retirement. The latter group handled the secretariat functions of the Board. By executive order, the General Board concerned itself with war plans, naval policy, fleet organization and reorganization, naval construction planning, and ship design characteristics. Unfortunately for Captain Pratt (his number did not come up until 1 November), the United States was about to host the Washington Conference for the Limitation of Armament, and he would be called upon for unusually sensitive and possibly quite unrewarding work.

At the direction of Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., the General Board began preparing an American position for negotiations concerning naval disarmament. For a while Pratt was merely a regular working member of the Board who drafted his share of the many position papers dealing with both technical and international relations questions. In September and October 1921 the Board became quite specific in its recommendations concerning the size of the major navies after agreement was reached. Unfortunately for the Board and those who believed in a large Navy, the head of the U.S. delegation, Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, pressed for a lower total tonnage. After three reworkings still yielded a fleet in excess of 600,000 tons of capital ships, a smaller group went to work on the problem--Assistant Secretary Roosevelt, CNO Robert E. Coontz, and Captain Pratt. The latter was selected by Coontz because he knew him from wartime days in Washington and because the captain had a genuine mastery of the details

involved. Working from the principle that all nations should stop building capital ships at that moment and complete very few of the vessels on the ways, the three came up with the famous 5 - 5 - 3 ratios and a total capital ship tonnage not much in excess of 525,000 tons each for the United States, and Great Britain, and Japan. The "stop now" concept was Secretary Hughes', the details came from the Navy group, but for the rest of his career Pratt was to carry the onus of having scrapped over a million tons of old battleships, partially completed post-Jutland battleships and battle cruisers, and many drawers of blueprints for future construction.

Equally odious to those who disliked sinking *North Dakota* and the old *Iowa* and breaking up or destroying the new superdreadnoughts *Montana* and *Washington* was acceptance of article XIX in the Five Power Naval Treaty. This section called for maintaining fortifications in Guam, the Philippines, the Aleutians, and Samoa *in statu quo*. That article XIX was the key to bringing Japan's navy down to 60 percent of America's and was even more distressing to those who disliked the treaty. Ignored by most Navy critics was the fact that once Roosevelt, Coontz, and Pratt presented the details to meet Secretary Hughes' requirements, conference bargaining and the political sense of the civilian delegates took charge. No one in the U.S. delegation, outside the Navy technical staff, seriously believed the Nation would complete the 1916 and 1918 building programs then underway or that the Nation would build island operating bases west of Hawaii and fortify them.

Admiral Pratt's duty with the Washington Conference delegation added another area of expertise to his record--he was now a naval limitation specialist. Most officers anticipating further advancement would normally shun such an appellation; in current jargon it



Early Flag Commands

(LEFT) Rear Admiral Pratt's first sea command was Battleship Division 4 in the Battle Fleet from June 1923 till June 1925. From 1923, till Pratt's retirement in 1933, Lieutenant C.W.A. Campbell served as the Admiral's Flag Lieutenant. We see here Admiral Pratt and Lieutenant Campbell. (CENTER) From September 1925 until June 1927 Rear Admiral Pratt was President of the Naval War College. This portrait was taken in Newport. (RIGHT) After leaving the War College, Pratt assumed command of the Battleships, Battle Fleet and broke his Vice Admiral's flag. He was COMBATSHIPS from September 1927 till June 1928.

would hardly be "career-enhancing" and might appear positively "counterproductive." But Pratt was not an ordinary admiral. He proceeded to defend the treaty in several magazine articles and in public speeches. He had done no publishing before 1922; he now began to write regularly on the subject of naval limitation and international relations. The point he normally made was simple; he did not believe in disarmament or at least believed it so utopian that it would not occur in his lifetime, and therefore he believed in controlling international relations and international violence by limiting armament. He defended the ratios as a means of limitation and constantly stressed the need to build the U.S. Navy to full treaty strength. President Harding and Secretary Hughes deeply appreciated his professional support; on the other hand, he was suspected by several of his seniors of paving the way to advancement with battleship armorplates. Realistically speaking, it was probably lucky for Pratt that Admiral Coontz remained CNO into 1923 and then flew his four stars as Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet (CINCLANT) until the spring of 1925. On the political side, the Republicans remained in control during his 12 years in flag rank, and those who were in high office (Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover) knew his work and respected his integrity and fortitude.

Pratt's remaining 18 months on the General Board were less hectic. He participated in Admiral Rodman's study of the Navy's needs for naval bases, particularly on the West Coast, and drafted most of the final document. He can be credited with having sowed the seed that became Navy Day and for having recommended the day to be celebrated on 27 October--the birth date of President Theodore Roosevelt. In the spring of 1923 he observed the Fleet maneuvers in the Caribbean from *Henderson* in the company of Secretary of the Navy Denby, Admiral Coontz, and

most of the House and Senate Naval Affairs Committees members who were enjoying a business trip away from the less pleasant capital. He was sounded out on several sea command possibilities--the Special Service Squadron, the Scouting Force (vice admiral rank), or a battleship division in the Battle Fleet. He suspected, probably correctly, that the Special Service Squadron was a backwater command that would lead to even less impressive positions. The Scouting Force was more than likely beyond his reach; more importantly, it was in had condition. He confided to his wife: "The Scouting Force is all shot to pieces. Its morale is had. They can't shoot." At the end of the Caribbean trip, the Bureau of Navigation ordered Pratt to relieve Rear Adm. C.F. "Freddy" Hughes as Commander, Battleship Division Four, Battle Fleet. Elated at the news, the admiral wrote rather revealingly to Mrs. Pratt in April:

... it is the best sea duty assigned to any man in my class thus far. . . . I am immediately in the line of promotion and when the time comes I will go up with more actual experience in high command, probably than any officer on the list. They are not pushing me too fast. That would be bad, but I am distinctly being groomed. . . . Coontz tells me plainly that I am his choice to relieve McCully [Commander, Scouting Force] when his cruise is up. . . . Eberle [Admiral E.W.] the new CNO is a friend. Denby has nothing against me, and Roosevelt is for me. So all that is necessary is for me to make good.

When Rear Admiral Pratt broke his flag in *Pennsylvania* on 25 June 1923 and relieved Rear Admiral Hughes of command of Battleship Division Four (BATDIV 4), he was doing more than returning to sea. He was laying his reputation on the line and taking that first step up the line of sea command within the Battle Fleet. As we have seen, this was what he wanted. He would now be in direct competition with his contemporaries for higher com-

mands. He had succeeded as a battleship captain, now he had to convince Vice Adm. Henry A. Wiley (Commander, Battleship Divisions, Battle Fleet), Adm. S.S. Robison (Commander, Battle Fleet), Adm. R.E. Coontz (CINCUS), and Adm. E.W. Eherle (CNO) that he could handle the larger commands. It was almost traditional that the commander of the battleships, the Battle Fleet, or the U.S. Fleet had to have demonstrated his ability by commanding a battleship division at sea.

In taking over BATDIV 4, Pratt inherited a smoothly running division. Based on competition while in Hughes' hands, the division had been first in battle efficiency, engineering, athletics, and even rowing. He now had to continue to meet these standards. To help him handle his four battleships (*Pennsylvania* (flag), *Arizona*, *Mississippi*, *Idaho*), Pratt pulled together a small staff, the most important of whom had served in *New York* when he was captain and had moved with him to the Destroyer Force command. Lieutenants Berkeley and Campbell were there as flag secretary and flag lieutenant. Unlike most other rear admiral sea commands, a battleship division commander did not have a Chief of Staff. He was expected to exert his authority directly and to stand responsible for orders given. In this way his seniors would be able to compare Pratt directly with R.H. Jackson, L.M. Nulton, or H.J. Ziegmeier without wondering if a brilliant Chief of Staff had not really made success possible.

From the very beginning Pratt adopted his techniques of earlier years. He messed with his staff and encouraged these younger men to speak out. He conferred constantly with his battleship captains and made them feel a sense of "being on a team." At first he worked hard with his staff and captains to master the signals and tactical movements they ordered. Finally, he drilled them at sea as a single division and as

one of three divisions in the battleline. Whether when working out of San Pedro in the winter or north in Puget Sound during the summer, Pratt much preferred those periods of time when his division and a squadron of destroyers were working together alone. In his letters to his wife, haek in Belfast, he regularly complained about having "too many bosses" around. In tactics he was not timid in maneuvering his elephantine charges. Early in his command he wrote to Mrs. Pratt:

... naturally my experience at handling destroyers at high speeds gives me a certain amount of confidence in the ability of battleship captains to maneuver at a pretty lively rate. I daresay the most criticism of me will be along those lines. . . . Tommy rot. We are paid to fight and learn how to do it. Anyhow I know that the snappiest destroyer men have asked to be assigned to my division during the summer maneuvers.

At the conclusion of his summer of maneuvers and while the Battle Fleet was visiting San Francisco, Pratt was hurriedly summoned to Admiral Robison's flagship on 9 September. The night before a portion of Destroyer Squadron 11 had piled ashore north of the Point Arguello light at Point Peder-nales, known locally as Point Honda. The full scope of the catastrophe was not known, but the admiral was ordered to the scene and then on to San Diego to head a court of inquiry. Two days later the court was formally announced: Rear Admiral Pratt, President, Capts. G.C. Day and D.F. Sellers, Members, and Lt. Comdr. L.E. Bratton, Judge Advocate. Pratt's appointment had been recommended by Admiral Coontz and Assistant Secretary Roosevelt. Both felt that he would handle the assignment with the proper degree of sensitiveness to the Navy's and the public's interest. As in the case of the Washington Conference, Pratt was to find it very difficult to serve two masters--the Navy and the public.

The facts of the tragedy were not

difficult to establish: they stood almost completely revealed as the admiral looked down from the bluff above to the beach and rocks at Point Honda. Below lay seven four-piper destroyers being pounded to pieces: *Delphy*, *S.P. Lee*, *Young*, *Woodbury*, *Nicholas*, *Fuller*, and *Chauncey*. Later it was revealed that *Farragut* and *Somers* had grounded but had not suffered major damage. Twenty-three enlisted men (3 from *Delphy* and 20 from *Young*) had perished. The wrecks occurred a little after 2100 on 8 September 1923. While leading his ships in column at 20 knots on a 150 degree heading, Capt. E.H. Watson, squadron commander, signaled for the squadron to turn in *Delphy's* wake to 095 degrees. The turn was to take the squadron into the Santa Barbara channel between Point Conception and San Miguel Island; unfortunately DESRON 11 was 21 miles north of its estimated 2100 position. The court's job was to determine why such an enormous navigational error occurred, why the six other destroyers followed their leader to destruction, and should anyone be held responsible for the tragedy.

At the beginning of the court's hearings, Pratt tried to make it a closed affair because he distrusted newspaper reporting; but the public would not have it. After heavy complaints from the press, Secretary Denby and Admiral Coontz ordered open sessions. For Pratt it was a miserable position to be in. To his wife he commented after several weeks of hearings: "It is the worst job I ever had. Most of these men are my friends: I commanded the force, am looked upon as a destroyer man and a friend of the organization. Yet I have to give it the biggest knock it ever had... I have got to do this for the good of the Navy and because it is so." Conveying the truth to the public was particularly difficult for the court.

Before the hearings began, the newspapers had created a sympathetic atmo-

sphere for Captain Watson and his skipper. The catastrophe appeared to be the result of bad weather, perversely changing currents—perhaps due to the great Japanese earthquake the week before—and bad radio hearings from the Point Arguello radio station. More dramatically, the officers and men had acted efficiently and heroically once stranded. But as the hearings progressed, the destroyer captains, division leaders, and squadron commander gradually revealed that bad navigation techniques, dogmatic devotion to "follow the leader" doctrine, and abandonment by the destroyer commanders of individual responsibility for the safety of their ships had caused the disaster. By the close of the hearings the public and Secretary Denby wanted blood.

In its "findings" the court charged Captain Watson, Lt. Comdr. D.T. Hunter (CO of *Delphy*, squadron flagship), and Lt. I.L.F. Blodgett (navigator, *Delphy*) with "culpable inefficiency and negligence." Charges of negligence were lodged against Capt. Robert Morris (COMSESDIV 33), Comdr. W.S. Pye (COMDESDIV 31), Comdr. I.P. Davis (CO, *Woodbury*), Comdr. W.L. Calhoun (CO, *Young*), Comdr. W.S. Toaz (CO, *S.P. Lee*), Lt. Comdr. W.D. Seed (CO, *Fuller*), Lt. Comdr. H.O. Roesch (CO, *Nicholas*), and Lt. Comdr. R.H. Booth (CO, *Chauncey*). Court martial proceedings were ordered immediately for those charged, and in November Captain Watson, Lieutenant Commander Hunter and Lieutenant Commander Roesch were found guilty; Lieutenant Blodgett, the two division commanders, and the remaining five destroyer captains were acquitted.

Admiral Pratt had done as much as the public and the Navy expected. He had allowed the inquiry to speak for itself; nothing had been hidden. He personally wrote "the opinion of the court," and this controlled the recommendations. He had condemned bad navigation and insisted on the com-

manding officer's personal responsibility for his ship. Above all, he and the court deplored blind "follow the leader" doctrine; the report even invoked the independent spirit of Nelson at Cape St. Vincent and Copenhagen to show why orders cannot be blindly obeyed. Vice Adm. H.A. Wiley's court martial, in acquitting all but Watson, Hunter, and Roesch, placed the Navy's reputation in jeopardy again.

Pratt was pleased to close the court of inquiry and pick up his command again. He saw the division through the winter maneuvers in the Caribbean, the first of in which the U.S. Fleet exercised under a single commander in chief. The defenses of the Panama Canal were tested and found wanting; this finding became an annual occurrence. At the close of the concentration, the Battle Fleet stood north to visit New York and other major ports on the east coast, and Pratt finally managed to visit his family during a brief shore leave to Belfast. Later, in June 1924, tragedy struck his division when a flareback occurred in number two turret of *Mississippi*. There was little the admiral could do. A few days later he read the funeral service for the 47 dead from his division. A local minister in San Pedro rebuked him for assuming the clergy's role, but he believed his men would rather have the "old man" read the service than receive it from a stranger.

In early June 1925, while preparing for a Battle Fleet cruise to Australia, Pratt was detached from his command and ordered to the General Board for temporary duty. The Navy Department was planning to increase the defensive capabilities of the two aircraft carriers under construction, *Saratoga* and *Lexington*, but Secretary Curtis Wilbur (formerly a California judge) was undecided whether the proposed 3,000 tons added displacement for each carrier would contravene the Five Power Naval Treaty. Former Assistant Secretary Roosevelt was in the Himalayas and

Admiral Coontz was en route to Australia; besides, Pratt had worked so closely with the data and the technical committees that he was the logical person to consult. In his usual thorough manner, he prepared a 55-page disquisition on the treaty provisions. The answer, in short, was "yes." The carrier limit had been set at 33,000 tons, but this was done with the expectation that 3,000 tons more per carrier would be used for improved compartmentation. Pratt's own interpretation was supplemented by memoranda from former Secretary of State Hughes and international law specialist George Grafton Wilson of Harvard. This chore completed, and after a month of leave, the admiral proceeded to the Naval War College to relieve Rear Adm. Clarence S. Williams on 4 September 1925.

Pratt's 2 years in Newport are not noteworthy for any earth-shaking changes that he made at the War College; but he did leave his mark in a way traditional with him. Flag Lieutenant Campbell was again at his side; the rest of the staff was inherited from Williams. In keeping with the normal practice at the college, he spotted several bright students from the 1926 senior course and brought them aboard as staff members for his second year. Several outstanding students in the 1927 class he selected for his next seagoing staff. In this latter group was Capt. Royall E. Ingersoll, an officer he admired greatly and kept with him for his next 5 years. He and Ingersoll were to rewrite the "Fighting Instructions of the Battle Fleet," only to have them shelved by Admiral Wiley, the CINCUS. At the same time they also drafted a plan to reorganize the U.S. Fleet--this plan was rejected by CNO Hughes. Both documents were to become policy later--but we are getting ahead of the story.

Like every War College president before him, Pratt tinkered with the administrative and instructional organization of the institution. The staff was

divided into the functional divisions that a fleet staff might represent: war plans, policy and plans, logistics, personnel, material, supply, movement, communication, training, and information. The traditional departments of tactics, strategy, logistics, and law went into temporary eclipse; they were to return with the next president. Because of his longtime interest in international affairs, Pratt established close liaison with the State Department and began the custom of having Foreign Service Officers lecture to the students. He believed these gentlemen provided an interesting leavening for the college. To strengthen international relations further, Capt. Roy C. Smith, a retired officer, was asked to set up a continuing program in international law that would be oriented toward problem solving. While Pratt could not continue his custom of messing with his staff, he and Louise Pratt did bring them individually to the Admiral's House for a good meal and intellectual conversations late into the night. His correspondence of later years reveals that many of the more junior staff members valued these evenings highly.

In these years before World War II, the President of the Naval War College was an *ex officio* member of the General Board. Pratt took this collateral duty seriously and visited Washington regularly for the Board's meetings. It also gave him the opportunity to keep his name before the higher authorities in the Department. On the other hand, this was hardly necessary since he regularly advised Adm. E.W. Eberle (CNO) and Secretary Wilbur on naval limitation matters. Both in 1926 and again in 1927 he wrote lengthy memoranda analyzing the positions the Navy needed to take in future naval conferences. He stood unequivocally for equality with the Royal Navy, particularly in capital ships. As a token of the esteem he held for Pratt, Secretary Wilbur consulted with the Fleet's admirals and then sur-

prised the admiral by awarding him a Naval War College diploma at graduation in May 1927.

Pratt deeply disliked officers who engaged in special pleading for their own interests, but he was never hesitant to keep the Department informed of his preference for duty. He had requested a command in the Battle Fleet and was ordered to it by President Coolidge. His letter from the President designated him to relieve his classmate Louis R. DeSteiguer as Commander, Battleship Divisions (COMBATDIVS), Battle Fleet and to do so by 17 September 1927. In language Pratt was to see several more times, the President ordered: "In accordance with this designation you will assume the rank and hoist the flag of a vice admiral." The change of command ceremony was carried out aboard *West Virginia*, flagship of the battleship divisions and flagship of BATDIV 5, the division he was personally to command.

Vice Admiral Pratt was commencing 3 years of command at sea that would see him "fleet up" to Commander, Battle Fleet (COMBATFLT), with the rank of admiral and then up to CINCUS. Each move upward was not guaranteed; performance would count as would luck, timing and the goodwill of those above. As he took over the battleships command, above him were COMBATFLT, Admiral DeSteiguer, CINCUS, Adm. H.A. Wiley, and the CNO, Adm. C.F. Hughes. These officers, plus Secretary Wilbur and the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, Rear Adm. R.H. Leigh, would recommend the "1928 slate" to the President when the time came. Fleet rumors had anticipated that Pratt would get the Battle Fleet command in 1927 instead of DeSteiguer, but the rumors were just that. In early 1928 Pratt knew he would get the Battle Fleet and his fourth star, but he was disappointed. He had "understood" from Secretary Wilbur that he was to be CINCUS and therefore formally requested of CNO Hughes that his



Four Stars

Between 26 June 1928 and 30 June 1933 Admiral Pratt moved progressively through the Navy's top commands. (LEFT) In 1928-29 he was Commander Battle Fleet and wore his flag in *California* (inset). This photo was taken at NAS San Diego as Pratt and Rear Admiral J.M. Reeves, COMAIRONs, BATFLT, inspected the station in December 1928. (CENTER) Change of command ceremony was normally full-dress formal in the Navy of the 1920's. Admiral Pratt, CINCUS (left) has just been relieved as COMBATFLT by Admiral L.M. Nulton (center), who had in turn just been relieved as COMBATSHIPS by Vice Admiral L.A. Bostwick (right). The date was 21 May 1929. (RIGHT) As CNO (1930-33), Admiral Pratt enjoyed leaving Washington and visiting in the Fleet. His old friend, Admiral F.M. Schofield, hosted him at the Naval War College in California and Texas while he served as COMBATFLT (1930-31) and CINCUS (1931-32). Though plagued by fragile health, Schofield's service reputation was that of an outstanding strategist and leader.

name he considered for command of the U.S. Fleet when Wiley stepped down in May 1929. In the fall of 1929, after CNO Hughes rejected his plan for reorganizing the U.S. Fleet, Pratt requested in a letter to Hughes that his name be considered for CNO when the appropriate time came "provided that I am considered qualified by service for the work, and my selection would not be subversive to naval interests."

Because of his heavier responsibilities, Pratt, as COMBATDIVS was allowed a large staff, and it grew progressively larger as he moved up. For chief of staff he inherited Rear Adm. A.J. Hepburn from DeSteiguer and felt extremely lucky to get this very capable officer. Hepburn would normally command BATDIV 5 in the name of Pratt. Campbell, of course, was there as flag lieutenant. Lt. Comdr. R.S. Berkey, "one of the most efficient officers I have ever known," reported aboard as flag secretary. His engineering officer, Comdr. H.M. Cooley, had served on his Destroyer Forces, Pacific Fleet staff and had just completed the senior course at the War College. The next year Captain Ingersoll left the War College staff and joined Pratt as assistant chief of staff. Of him, the admiral wrote: "A more highly trained, efficient officer I do not know. It was through his efforts solely that my nebulous, inchoate ideas of fleet operation were organized." In his "Antobiography" the admiral summed up his staffs: "If ever a man received loyal support from his staffs, from top to bottom, I am that lucky man. Without them I would have gone nowhere."

During the 3 years that Admiral Pratt exercised high command at sea, he strove constantly to improve the performance of the Battle Fleet. He was not satisfied with the way Fleet target practice was conducted; he felt Fleet tactical exercises could be improved; and he badly wanted to reorganize administratively the U.S. Fleet so that operations would be improved. What

bothered the admiral the most concerning target practice was the daily routine of steaming to sea from San Diego or San Pedro, trying to find an area free of merchant shipping and possessing the necessary 15 to 25 miles visibility, then firing and returning to port. He preferred to stay at sea for 5 days and then spend the weekend behind the breakwater. He believed that his routine developed more efficiency in shiphandling and better crew morale because of working more closely with their officers. He hoped that the idea, "that a ship is a home and not an office," would take hold. He recognized that this approach was not popular with Battle Fleet wives, but he pressed ahead with such scheduling. It should be noted that Louise Pratt remained in Belfast during most of Pratt's 2 years on the Pacific Coast with the Battle Fleet.

As we noted briefly before, the admiral did not have much luck with his attempts to change Battle Fleet tactical doctrine, but he did make significant contributions in his openminded approach to using aviation at sea. As commander of Black Forces in the Panama maneuvers of February 1929, he allowed Rear Adm. Joseph M. Reeves, Commander Aircraft Squadrons, Battle Fleet, to launch an attack by *Saratoga's* planes against the canal defenses. Setting up a small task group of *Saratoga* and *Omaha*, with a few destroyer plane guards, Reeves swept far south of the isthmus and then struck successfully at dawn from maximum distance. The next year carrier task groups became an established operating tactic. Admiral Reeves should be recognized as the "father" of the carrier task force system, but it took Pratt's midwifery to move from concept to operations.

Admirals Wiley and Pratt both disliked the administrative organization of the U.S. Fleet. Wiley proposed during 1928, while CINCUS, to reorganize the Fleet into "type forces." He would have

an admiral and vice admiral command the battleship force and a vice admiral and a rear admiral for each of the other types: carriers, cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and training squadrons. The whole Fleet, under CINCUS, would remain in one ocean—preferably the Pacific. Admiral Hughes, the CNO, would have none of it. Pratt, a few years later, renamed the fleets and almost accomplished what Wiley had in mind. Under CINCUS there was a Battle Force, Scouting Force, Submarine Force, and Fleet Base Force. A few more vice admirals were added, and the concept of CINCUS being an operational commander, as well as an administrative chief, became doctrine.

Yet there was only so much he could do; the “system” was stacked on the side of the *status quo*. Since 1919 the practice had evolved of allowing an admiral only 12 to 18 months (usually 12), with rare exceptions, in the top flag billets. Command of a battleship division usually lasted 2 years. The following chart shows how the game of “musical chairs” was played with the Navy’s flag commands, and it also shows the pattern of movement among Pratt and his contemporaries.

Because the CNO normally served 3 years or until his 64th birthday, appointment to this position required a fortuitous combination of circumstances. The most important factor seemed to be that a likely candidate had to be in an admiral’s billet and not have reached his 61st birthday when the incumbent CNO retired. Admirals Wiley and Leigh had “flected up” to the proper spot for becoming CNO in 1930 or 1934 but were too old at the critical point of selection. The decision on who should move from COMBATFLT to CINCUS was generally based on proven performance in the lower command. Again, as can be seen from the chart, appointment to COMBATDIVS was a type of “preselection” for command of the Battle Fleet. Occasionally there

would be a long jump from semiobscurity in the pack of rear admirals to a four star command, as in the case of Chase to CINCUS in 1930 or Schofield and Reeves to COMBATFLT in 1931 and 1934. These selections normally represented a recognition of long and effective service on a seagoing staff or the General Board. Admirals Reeves and Schofield, it must be admitted, did have the advantage of being close personal friends of Admiral Pratt.

The move upward for Vice Admiral Pratt from COMBATDIVS to COMBATFLT occurred on 26 June 1928. He relieved Admiral DeSteigner for the last time and broke his own four stars in *California*. He was reasonably sure that he would succeed Admiral Wiley as CINCUS when the proper time arrived, but there was always the possibility of a slip-up. His relations with Admiral Hughes had been cordial enough, but they were to become less so in the following 2 years. Both were sincere and honest men; but they disagreed on the need to reorganize the U.S. Fleet and, even more deeply, Hughes did not trust Pratt’s views on naval limitation. Probably, from Hughes’ outlook, Pratt seemed to have too much political influence. This had become evident when Pratt let the CNO know that he had expected to be CINCUS rather than COMBATFLT in June 1928.

On 21 May 1929 Pratt reached the pinnacle of success for the seagoing officer. In frock coats, cocked hats, swords, and medals and to the beat and sound of “ruffles and flourishes” and the roar of the *Texas*’ 17-gun salute, he relieved Adm. Henry A. Wiley as CINCUS. Already he was beginning to think of a last tour of duty ashore, preferably back to the War College, and then to his newly finished home in Belfast. But events once more overtook the admiral, and national policies and politicians forced a change in his plans.

For 6 months Pratt carried out the traditional duties of CINCUS. In *Texas*

	1 Jan 1927	1 Jan 1928	1 Jan 1929	1 Jan 1930	1 Jan 1931	1 Jan 1932	1 Jan 1933	1 Jan 1934
CNO	ADM Eberle	ADM Hughes	ADM Hughes	ADM Hughes	ADM Pratt	ADM Pratt	ADM Pratt	ADM Standley
CINCUS	ADM Hughes	ADM Wiley	ADM Wiley	ADM Pratt	ADM Chase	ADM Schofield	ADM Leigh	ADM Sellers
COMBATFLT	ADM Jackson	ADM DeSteiguer	ADM Pratt	ADM Nulton	ADM Schofield	ADM Leigh	ADM McNamee	ADM Reeves
COMBATDIVS	VADM DeSteiguer	VADM Pratt	VADM Nulton	VADM Bostwick	VADM Leigh	VADM McNamee	VADM Sellers	VADM Sexton
BATDIV 4/1	RADM Chase	RADM Chase	RADM Cole	RADM Schofield	RADM McNamee	RADM Sellers	RADM Brumby	RADM Kempff
CHBUNAV	RADM Shoemaker	RADM Leigh	RADM Leigh	RADM Leigh	RADM Upham	RADM Upham	RADM Upham	RADM Leahy

he "showed the flag" in east coast ports and even took a small group of ships to visit his hometown. He planned maneuvers, tightened administration, and wrote a few Fleet letters encouraging sobriety and patriotism in one case and operating economy in another. Though he disliked formal entertainment, he attended his share of state functions, charity balls, and stag dinners for departing or retiring flag officers. When appropriate, he did enjoy inviting his guests to dine in admiral's country in *Texas*. Most of his entertaining was done without his wife since she preferred to stay in Belfast when he was on sea duty, though she did meet him regularly in Newport or New York when his flagship was north.

In the fall of 1929 naval limitation talk was again in the air. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald of Great Britain had traveled to Washington to break an impasse in preliminary negotiations, and plans were laid for a naval conference to meet in London in January 1930. In November 1929 Admiral Pratt was called to Washington to discuss naval limitation with President Hoover and Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson. Satisfied with his views on the subject, the President asked him to head the delegation of naval advisers to the conference. The admiral accepted and set about assembling a body of officers to accompany him. The final delegation represented a good cross-section of the Navy's thinking on limitation and future ship construction. Diametrically opposed to Pratt on almost every issue considered was Rear Adm. Hilary P. Jones, then retired, a former CINCUS, member of the General Board, and Co-Delegate to the abortive Geneva Naval conference of 1927. He was suspicious of the British, was insistent on building only 8-inch gun cruisers, demanded tonnage parity with England in every category of naval vessels, and did not really trust limitation agreements or politicians who promised to build up to

treaty strength. Pratt, on the other hand, was a pragmatist. He trusted the English, probably because he was sure America would never fight them. He was convinced that Congress would never keep up with British building programs and therefore desired to set limits the Navy could attain and beyond which Britain could not build. As CINCUS he was more concerned with seeing a well-rounded treaty Navy described in an agreement, and then built, than in defending a particular type of vessel to the point of killing a conferee.

Between January and April 1930, the London Naval Treaty was written. It did represent many compromises--so many, in fact, that Admiral Jones returned home in February. Yet, from Pratt's viewpoint, it provided for a well-rounded Navy, and it did set a firm upper limit for most categories of naval vessels for the three signatories: the United States, Great Britain, and Japan. Offensive to the General Board and those hostile to naval limitation was American acceptance of a new class of cruiser, the 10,000 ton 6-inch gun type. To Pratt and part of the naval delegation, the "London Treaty Cruiser" was a well-protected and adequately gunned ship. To those opposed, the new cruiser epitomized unnecessary compromise with the British and the rejection of General Board advice.

Upon return to his command in May 1930, Pratt was called to Washington to defend the London Treaty before the Senate Naval Affairs and Foreign Relations Committees. He did so with his typical directness and honesty. He believed the Navy described in the treaty could meet America's defense needs; but he also stressed the obligation of Congress to build the vessels since the Navy was not at parity with Great Britain. The treaty, of course, was agreed to by the Senate. For his actions, particularly his stand against the General Board, Pratt lost the friendship of

CNO Hughes. Undoubtedly he also lost the confidence of many officers in the Fleet who simply had no faith in naval limitation agreements or the willingness of elected officials to provide the ships allowed by the treaty. They could not believe that Pratt was naive; they had to believe that he had sold his integrity to obtain the highest position in the Navy—Chief of Naval Operations. Yet had those same officers read the admiral's articles and printed speeches, published steadily from 1923 to 1929, they would have found that he had been absolutely consistent through the years. He believed in limitation because he knew Congress would never build "A Navy Second to None" in an unlimited situation. This had been the premise of the 1922 Washington Conference delegates, a very political group. The admiral knew that the delegates of 1930—Secretary Stimson, Secretary of the Navy C.F. Adams, Senators David Reed and Joseph T. Robinson, and Ambassador Dwight Morrow—were no less politically sensitive than their predecessors.

After the stormy spring hearings in Washington, Pratt was delighted to take his flagship south, through the canal, and to the west coast for inspections and maneuvers. From the west coast he accompanied the Battle Fleet to Hawaii for gunnery drills and tactical exercises. Upon return to California and while preparing to return to the east coast, he was summoned to the Navy Department with the warning, "Be prepared to stay in Washington."

As CINCUS, Pratt was quite aware of the Navy's fiscal problems. He recognized that President Hoover's interest in naval limitation was two-edged: he wanted to reduce international tension and perhaps reach that utopia where swords would be beaten into plowshares; and he wanted to reduce national spending to achieve a balanced budget. The London Treaty reduced competitive naval construction, but the U.S. Navy had fallen so far behind in

cruiser building that catching up with the British and modernizing the battle-ships at the same time seemed to the President to be the road to national bankruptcy. When Admiral Hughes was insistent on building cruisers, he was met with the Presidential order to reduce the Navy's budget for fiscal 1932 by another \$30 million. At that time the CNO chose to retire.

Pratt was scheduled to relieve Hughes in November 1930, instead he took over on 17 September. The ceremony at Main Navy was simple; it stood in stark contrast to the 17-gun spectacle the previous year. Admiral Hughes stated simply to the assembled well-wishers, "I just want to say good-bye and to thank you for your loyal and cordial assistance, and I trust it will continue." The new CNO was equally brief: "I have nothing to say except that I am sorry to see Freddy go." The *Army and Navy Journal* was also sorry to see Hughes retire and lauded him for standing by the Navy. Pratt was given no cordial "welcome aboard" by either the *Journal* or the *Army and Navy Register*.

Once installed, the new CNO established a Planning Section, headed by Rear Adm. M.M. Taylor, to handle routine and relieve Pratt of the administrative trivia he detested. Later Rear Adm. John Halligan joined his staff in the newly legislated billet of Assistant CNO, and Taylor moved over to the War Plans Division. Lieutenant Commander Berkeley came ashore with Pratt, at the admiral's insistence, and Lieutenant Campbell was also at hand as an aide. Scattered through the various divisions of Operations were most of his seagoing staff. Captain Ingersoll and Comdr. W.W. Wilson were in Fleet Training, Commander Cooley in Material, and Lt. Comdr. C.T. "Cal" Durgin was in Ship's Movements. In short, if the "old man" needed a familiar face or two around when things were difficult, he would always find them in the building.

Two Fleet reorganization measures

were quickly hammered out by Pratt and his staff. On 8 October 1930, in his own name, the CNO ordered 48 ships removed from the active list and a personnel reduction of 4,800 enlisted men. The admiral believed the Fleet was adequate for defense and would be tightly organized by the reductions. Almost all active vessels now operated with 80 to 90 percent complements. The administration was grateful on two counts: the reductions would save almost \$11 million over a 2 year period; and Pratt had ordered this in his name, thus sparing the President and Secretary Adams any public complaints. The second reorganization, mentioned earlier, was the establishment of the four U.S. Fleet forces. The organization chart was signed on 15 November 1930, to take effect the following 1 April.

As time wore on and the national depression deepened, the Navy's morale sagged badly, and Pratt spent much of his time trying to help where he could. Service pay needed adjustment, and considerable time was spent by the CNO and the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation (BuPers today) testifying to this need before Congress. Even more serious to the officers was a "hump" problem that was overtaking the Naval Academy classes of 1911, 1912, and 1913. Whereas promotion opportunity approached 80 percent for most ranks, these classes were facing a 20 percent opportunity unless more lieutenant commander and commander billets were opened. Though Army Chief of Staff MacArthur joined him in pressing for improved pay, Congress delayed any real action here. The "hump" was broken by new rank percentages and lower retirement requirements. At all times in his testimony and in dozens of public speeches, Pratt stressed the theme that the Navy's personnel were committed people who were sacrificing heavily because of their loyalty to the Nation and the Navy.

Of even greater importance to the

Nation's defense, the CNO struggled manfully to get the President and Congress committed to a reliable schedule of ship construction. In late 1930 the General Board brought in a 15-year building program designed to bring the Navy to treaty strength by the end of 1935 and to provide a schedule of replacements for the battleships as they became superannuated. To the President and Congress the program was impossibly expensive--Pratt knew this too. He pressed for a 10-year schedule of cruiser construction and battleship modernization that would bring the Navy to treaty strength and parity with Great Britain. The service periodicals and the General Board again felt that he had sold out. To the *Army and Navy Journal* this smacked of "disarmament by example," an approach that ignored the sad lessons of history. With another naval conference due to be held in 1935, the General Board wanted a full treaty Navy to give the United States a position of strength for bargaining purposes. Many in Congress, and the President as well, appeared to believe that the United States could bring the other nations down to its size. This had not worked in 1927, and it was to fail badly in the 1935-36 London Conference. But by entertaining these ideas, Congress was unwilling to go along even with Pratt's modest 10-year program.

When the pressures of congressional hearings and concern about construction programs became unbearable, Pratt had an escape. He and Campbell would elude aboard a California-bound express and visit the Battle Force. The admiral enjoyed enormously the Fleet maneuvers each year. Pratt's brother Edgar lived in Los Angeles, and the two were quite compatible. Adm. Frank Schofield, as COMBATFOR and then CINCUS, was a dear friend and made him comfortable in *California* or *Texas*. And Adm. R.H. "Reddy" Leigh, who followed Schofield up the Fleet ladder, was equally ready to take the admiral

in. In his letters to his friends and wife, Pratt regularly mentioned the pleasures of clean, crisp, salt air and spray and enjoying the views from the admiral's bridge.

The elections of 1932 finished the job of turning out the Republican Party and brought an old friend of Pratt's to the Presidency. Yet the admiral had been a lifelong Republican, and he hated to see Hoover lose. He considered him one of the "ablest public servants" the Nation ever had. In a letter to Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., who was winding up his affairs as Governor General of the Philippines, he commented about the President: "Personally he must be very much relieved for he has had the most thankless job a man ever carried. I go out with the Administration as I am on March 1st an old crock of sixty-four and fit only for the scrap heap." In preparation for his retirement date, Pratt wrote a few notes of thanks to key congressional leaders and received a resolution of "thanks" and "well done" from the House Naval Affairs Committee. To his many service friends who wrote to wish him well after he "hailed down," he had a simple reply. "Of course it is not pleasant to have to give up after these many years of service, but it comes to us all and it is now my turn. So that's that."

But it wasn't quite "that." President-elect Roosevelt did not want Pratt to retire just then. He asked the admiral and Secretary Adams if something could not be done to keep Pratt in office. A ruling was sought from the Judge Advocate, Rear Adm. O.G. Murfin, and he decided that the 1929 statute governing retirement did not apply to the CNO. The age 64 retirement law specifically applied to those below the rank of vice admiral. Pratt was an admiral, therefore he could stay his customary 4 year term for CNO or until relieved by the President. So the admiral unpacked and went back to work. If he was embarrassed by the change, he never said anything

about it in his correspondence or public utterances.

President Roosevelt understood the Navy's need to build to treaty strength, but he was as short on public funds as Hoover had been. At first he tried economy measures, including a 10 percent cut in the salaries of all public employees. Pratt cooperated by suggesting savings through closing a half-dozen Navy yards. He also admitted that a third of the whole Fleet could be put in reserve and units rotated in and out of active status. But he recommended the rotation program only as a desperation measure. While cuts were made, by June the magic of deficit spending and pump-priming had been discovered. It was also finally recognized, after 30 years of naval speeches on the subject, that almost 90 percent of the cost of ship construction and materials was ultimately a labor charge. This led to a program of shipbuilding designed to cure national unemployment. The Navy, of course, was ready to do its part.

After almost 3 years of splendid misery as CNO, the skies appeared to be clearing for Pratt, but he was not destined to stay on. In April the White House announced that Vice Adm. William H. Standley, the Commander of the Scouting Force, would become the next CNO. He was not Pratt's first choice, that was reserved for his old Chief of Staff, A.J. Hepburn. But the admiral had to admit that Standley was the service's choice. He had not come up the Battle Fleet ladder, but he was competent and well liked. Pratt recognized the importance of having a following. He set his own retirement date for 30 June 1933.

Once again the letters poured in on Admiral Pratt. President Roosevelt wrote to "My dear Bill Pratt: I am really and honestly deeply sorry that you are retiring--sorry on my own account, sorry on account of the Navy and sorry on the part of the country." Congress-

man Carl Vinson of Georgia, Chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee, wrote:

Before your retirement from active duty in the Navy, I desire to express to you the thanks of the Naval Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives for the very great assistance which you have rendered in the formulation of legislation pertaining to the Navy Department. . . . The Committee feels a very real sense of loss in realizing that our official relations are so soon to be terminated.

And, finally, from a young Battle Force captain, almost unknown to Pratt, came a letter that summed up much of the younger Navy's feeling for him: "I do not want to appear to say too much, but the quiet efficiency of your leadership in the Navy has been a real inspiration to me. Your kindly interest in younger officers, I can indeed assure you, has meant much more to them than you can ever know."

Upon relief by Standley, Admiral Pratt reverted to his permanent rank of rear admiral and went on the retired list. The ceremonies completed, he took the afternoon train to New York.

Like Hughes, Eberle, Coontz, and Benson--his predecessors as CNO--Admiral Pratt walked out of Main Navy and into the shadowed land of the retired officer. In 1937 he was raised to full admiral on the retired list by virtue of new legislation governing such matters. In January 1941 he was recalled to active duty for 6 months to advise the Navy on antisubmarine warfare. He evaluated and endorsed the concept of the escort carrier that helped to win the Battle of the Atlantic in World War II. He wrote occasional articles on international relations and naval affairs until 1940, and in January of that year joined the staff of *Newsweek*. From January 1940 through 1946 he wrote a weekly column dealing with the war and then international affairs in the postwar period. His Navy Department sources were good, and these articles were

among the best writings available to those who wished to understand the shifting tides of the war at sea.

At war's end he again returned to Belfast to enjoy his wonderful rose garden and home on Primrose Hill. His eyesight was very poor, and his public appearances became less frequent. He still maintained a deep interest in international affairs and kept up a fairly vigorous correspondence. In 1957 his health began to fail, and in the summer of that year he entered the Naval Hospital at Chelsea. He died on 25 November 1957.

A career of this length and importance, for the times, is hard to summarize in a few words. Though Admiral Pratt never analyzed or spelled out the reasons for his remarkable success, perhaps we can deduce a few of them from this "silhouette" we have drawn.

1. Without detracting from Pratt's positive qualities, it should be recognized at the beginning that competition for high command was quite different from today's. Out of his Naval Academy class of 1889, 15 of the 35 graduates reached flag rank. Almost the same figures hold for the classes of 1888 (12 of 35) and 1890 (15 of 34). What is remarkable about Pratt is that he held every Battle Fleet command, CINCUS, and then became CNO.

2. A second factor which contributed to his continuing rise was the fact that the Republican administrations of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover felt a degree of gratitude toward Pratt for his work in the area of naval limitation. There were many other rear admirals who could have developed the technical expertise he displayed at the Washington Conference. By chance he was the junior rear admiral on the General Board, and to him fell the less interesting task of developing statistics for the studies. Once he was an "expert," his services could not be dispensed with. We saw that he was consulted in 1925, 1926, and 1927 and finally was called

upon again in 1929. The public defense he made of his advice and efforts was a reasonable activity for a man convinced of the soundness of his own judgments.

3. More basic to Pratt's rise was his willingness to work hard, with great personal deprivation, once he was assigned to a job. His activities as Benson's assistant demonstrated his enormous capacity for organizing and managing a stupefying workload under conditions of extreme pressure. In this position, and all fleet commands later, he put duty above family. His personal correspondence, within the family, displayed constantly the stresses that were generated. Fortunately for all, Louise Pratt was an independent spirit who could manage without her husband for long stretches of time.

4. In the Navy of Pratt's time, sound seamanship was indispensable for advancement. Like so many from Maine, he loved the sea and the shipboard life, yet he was respectful of the treachery ever present in that domain. His idols were smart shiphandlers like Morris MacKenzie, Raymond Rodgers, and Hugh Rodman. Though he normally found something good to say about any man, he was harshest in his judgments of those who conducted themselves badly at sea. The court of inquiry, following the Honda tragedy, spelled this out quite clearly.

5. It was quite obvious that Pratt had an open and innovative mind. He welcomed new doctrine, tactics, and new materiel. Because of this quality he was constantly tinkering with organization, always trying to make a unit operate more smoothly, be it a flotilla or a fleet. It was this interest in what was new that led him into the company of Joseph Mason Reeves and his gang of naval aviators. Perhaps it was this openness that allowed him to listen and learn from the younger officers of the Fleet. Throughout his correspondence there are numerous letters from officers quite

junior to him expressing their appreciation for his interest in their problems.

6. Finally, in his personal philosophy, Pratt was both a pragmatist and an optimist. He seldom believed that a struggle simply for the fight involved was worth the game. He worked constantly within the realm of the possible. If Congress would not build fortified naval bases in the Pacific, there was little reason to resist other agreements in the hope that Congress might change its mind. If the public did not want to increase the Navy, it was Pratt's view that this should be recognized as reality and plan soundly from there. And when the President called for economies and cuts in the Navy, Pratt did his best with what was left. He did not expect America to go to war in the 1930's, thus he felt that the Navy after economies was adequate for defense. The admiral was a deeply religious man, without a formal affiliation. Had it occurred to him, he would probably have felt quite comfortable with the motto of Admiral of the Fleet Lord John Fisher of Kilverstone--"Fear God and dread nought."

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



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