

Laura Rowe. *Morale and Discipline in the Royal Navy during the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. 266.

Often characterised as the first total war, it has become increasingly difficult to detach the history of the First World War with the experience of the millions of men and women mobilised to fight it. From the memoirs of famous participants like Ernst Jünger, Vera Brittain, and Siegfried Sassoon to the growing social historiography examining trench culture, soldier experience, minority representation, and the psychological impact of the conflict; the Great War has become the quintessential soldier's war. In no country is this truer than the United Kingdom, where the symbol of the khaki-clad Tommy Atkins not only epitomises the British experience of the war but has engrained itself within British national identity. But there is a fundamental misconception behind this fixation on the British foot soldier, as it ignores the experience of the hundreds of thousands of Britons who did not serve on the Western Front but on the high seas. Many histories have examined the warships of the Royal Navy, but few works have paid heed to the experience and culture of the sailors who manned them. Tommy has received his due, but Jack Tar has yet to be given proper attention.

It is this deficiency that Laura Rowe addresses in her new monograph *Morale and Discipline in the Royal Navy during the First World War*. Drawing upon an impressive breadth of archival materials ranging from Admiralty memorandum, fleet newspapers, and personal memoirs, and with requisite evidential skepticism, Rowe argues that the culture of the Royal Navy is best defined by the relationship between the competing discourses of paternalism and democratism. Using this discursive framework, Rowe concludes that the First World War brought on a weakening of barriers between the Senior Service and civil society, but that morale and discipline was predominantly maintained due to “a subtle web of loyalties, history, ethos, traditions and customs, rooted in older notions of service” (p. 7).

Rowe's chief difficulty in this project was how to examine morale within the navy which differs so greatly in structure, culture, and combat from the army. Addressing much of the historiography on First World War morale, including Gary Sheffield, Alexander Watson, and Jonathan Fennell, Rowe argues that the best way to assess naval morale is to look “through the lens of discipline” and the relationship

between officers and sailors (p. 63). In this regard, Rowe applies the discourses of paternalism and democratism. Paternalism is defined as the attempt by the Admiralty and upper ranks to maintain strict hierarchy and discipline by extolling the traditions of the Royal Navy and stressing the national importance of naval service. In comparison, democratism came from below in an attempt to combat the infantilization forced upon sailors by paternalism. It expressed itself through lower deck societies which lobbied for sailors to receive greater rights as professionals matching their technical expertise. Two chapters are dedicated to dissecting how these discourses became engrained within the social structures of the Royal Navy through training, officer-sailor relationships, and the jurisprudence of naval law.

Having established how paternalism and democratism were ingrained in the Royal Navy, Rowe transitions to examining how the First World War impacted the two discourses, principally within the battleships of the Grand Fleet. Two primary wartime issues, each receiving one chapter, are considered: pay and conditions, and lower deck representation. Each issue was pre-existing before the war but was aggravated as sailors began to protest that their wages or rights were not improving as rapidly compared to civilian professions. While paternalism and democratism appear as intrinsically opposed, Rowe demonstrates that they were not wholly incompatible. Both discourses fundamentally agreed that an inter-service solution was preferable to external actors becoming involved in naval matters. Each was willing to make minor concessions to the other. For example, Rowe argues that although the lower decks adopted trade union rhetoric during the war, this adoption was subconscious and direct cooperation with civilians was frowned upon. Despite this insular nature, with increasing links between sailors and civilians, Rowe concludes that the First World War saw the final breakdown of the myth that the Royal Navy existed in isolation from civil society

A final chapter presents a statistical analysis of the Admiralty's archival records of court martials, disciplinary courts, and recorded mutinies. Rowe's evidential skepticism of these records is impressive as she ponders the significance, or insignificance, of the numbers. Particularly scintillating is the examination of the three minor mutinies during the war. While Rowe identifies that each mutiny was largely sparked by circumstances unique to each ship, most commonly the actions of specific officers, an underlying pattern of grievance was shared between the three and perhaps with other ships in the Royal

Navy. Rowe argues that this could indicate that while the mutinies were statistically inconsequential, they may have had a much greater impact to the fleets that is hidden from the historical record.

*Morale and Discipline in the Royal Navy* is an impressive, and in many ways, a seminal work. However, this book is much more an examination of the wartime disciplinary systems and of the relationship between officers and sailors than it is a thorough examination of morale. Rowe makes a compelling case that discipline is the finest measure for morale and that issues of pay and conditions were the most pertinent problems, but the war itself is often missing. Beyond brief explanations to the brutality of naval warfare, references to combat and the politics of the war are few and far between. A scant argument is made that “the Royal Navy’s sailors remained convinced that they were successfully performing the job for which they had been trained” (p. 236). This is a surprising and unsubstantiated claim. There are references to frustration amongst sailors over the war, particularly in 1917, but further research could be conducted on how naval scandals impacted morale in the Royal Navy. More issues remained unexplored, including how sailors reacted to the devastating loss of the Battle of Coronel, the public recriminations over failure to prevent the naval bombardment of Scarborough, Hartlepool, and Whitby, or the losses sustained during the Gallipoli Campaign. What the Royal Navy thought of their foes across the North Sea is another noticeable element of morale that is lacking. Finally, the brief description of wartime fleet culture, ranging from church service to leisure activities, included within the conclusion, warrants further exploration. These are interesting points of inquiry for future researchers, in what will hopefully be a growing historiography.

*Morale and Discipline in the Royal Navy* is a thoroughly well researched and argued social history that presents a fresh view on the First World War and a new framework for examining concepts of morale. Although its highly academic vernacular and at times disjointed organisation may dissuade casual readers of naval history, Rowe has set a strong foundation for further study of the Royal Navy and other similar institutions.