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### The War for the Seas: A Maritime History of World War II

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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### “THE QUESTION IS . . . WHICH IS TO BE MASTER—THAT’S ALL.”

*The War for the Seas: A Maritime History of World War II*, by Evan Mawdsley. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2019. 600 pages. \$32.50.

It is a daunting task to attempt to write a single-volume history of World War II at sea from 1939 to 1945, covering all the participants in all the theaters of that global conflict. I am intimately aware of the many pitfalls that await the historian who has the hubris to try, since I too wrote a book on this topic, published two years ago (*World War II at Sea*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2018). I therefore applaud Evan Mawdsley of Glasgow University for taking up the challenge. It is a bit delicate for a reviewer to evaluate a book so similar to one that he himself has written, but since the works complement one another, I think it can be done fairly. Interestingly, both books divide the war into five parts of about five chapters each. The fact that the authors did this independently suggests that the war in fact can be differentiated into identifiable phases: the European war, Britain alone, the global war at sea, the growing Allied domination, and the final victory. Each of us also covered the Battle of the Atlantic, or the war on trade, in three chapters embedded in separate parts of the narrative; this too suggests that we are on to something.

The first decision the writer of any complex subject has to make is whether to approach it chronologically or topically. World War II was, after all, a huge, sprawling conflict, so telling its maritime story in sequence means bouncing around from theater to theater all over the globe. Mawdsley instead chooses the topical approach, offering separate chapters on naval aviation, intelligence, and amphibious warfare, for example. This allows him to develop themes and follow through with the consequences of one or another technology or decision. On the other hand, that approach compels him to insert periodic notes into the text indicating that issues raised while developing particular themes were “discussed previously,” “have already been described,” or are forthcoming, “as will be seen.” These create a kind of narrative speed bump, especially for those not grounded in the chronological structure of the war.

Another decision concerns coverage. Including every convoy, skirmish, and naval confrontation in the war would transform the book into a compendium or an encyclopedia rather than a history. And, of course, including more of the

smaller actions necessarily means devoting less space to the critically important ones. Coverage is always a delicate matter, for while leaving something out invites criticism that the book is incomplete, limiting coverage of the critical turning points invites criticism of another kind.

Mawdsley has chosen to be inclusive, and he covers a number of events that are overlooked in most general histories (including my own), such as the British raid on the Lofoten Islands off Norway (Operation CLAYMORE) in 1941 and the invasion of Madagascar (Operation IRONCLAD) in 1942, as well as extensive coverage of the Soviet navy in both the Baltic and Black Seas. All that comes with a cost, of course; running to six hundred pages, Mawdsley's book is not short, and yet it occasionally feels crowded as events pile up on one another—although no doubt that is how the war felt to those who fought it as well.

Mawdsley is not afraid to make judgments. He argues, for example, that the role of “special intelligence” (ULTRA) has been greatly exaggerated and that Hitler gave up on the invasion of England (Operation SEA LION) before the Battle of Britain even began. He defends Churchill's decision to attack the French fleet at Mers el-Kébir, asserting that it was “correct” (p. 71), and concedes that the Dieppe raid was “badly planned,” for which Mountbatten “deserves some blame” (p. 282). In the Pacific, Mawdsley concludes that Kimmel and Short were “rightly held responsible” for being unready on 7 December 1941 (p. 182) and that Nagumo was “surely right” not to approve a third aerial attack against Pearl Harbor (p. 181).

It would be inappropriate for me to recommend one of these books over the other. Therefore I merely will

suggest here that those interested in the naval war from 1939 to 1945 should read (and buy) both of them.

CRAIG L. SYMONDS



*Leading Change in Military Organizations: Primer for Senior Leaders*, by Thomas P. Galvin. Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2018. 120 pages. Available for download at [publications.armywarcollege.edu/](https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/). Free.

As Charles D. Allen states in the foreword, “70 to 80 percent of organizational change efforts fail” (p. vii). Numerous reasons exist why initiatives to improve an organization's performance, effectiveness, or morale do not succeed: incorrect problem diagnosis, poor planning or resourcing, strategy mismatch to culture, and resistance, among others. U.S. Army War College professor Thomas P. Galvin's well-researched primer effectively distills numerous organizational change philosophies and strategies into a practical and intuitive guidebook for military professionals at all levels.

A plethora of books on organizational change exists, with an Amazon.com search returning hundreds of results. Professor Galvin tailors his approach to the unique challenges of the military, which prepares for an uncertain future environment that before the crucible of operations and combat can only be simulated. He argues that most change efforts are too process oriented, at the expense of the often-overlooked context of the environment and the content of the change effort, which explain its purpose and the path to success. To this end, he develops a framework similar to the military's planning process that emphasizes context and content,