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THE USES OF MARITIME HISTORY IN AND FOR THE NAVY

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The knowledge of the past, the record of truths revealed by experience, is eminently practical, is an instrument of action, and a power that goes to the making of the future.

LORD ACTON (1832–1902)

There is an ever-present human tendency to think that all that went before is irrelevant and useless, especially in an era of transformation and change. Navies are particularly susceptible to this tendency since, in contrast to officers in other branches of service, naval officers, by and large, have tended to ignore the value of and advantages to be found in historical insight.

This negative attitude toward history within the Navy has its roots in the prevailing naval culture; it is shared widely among navies that have developed within the Anglo-American tradition. A dispassionate look at the patterns and process of innovation in the past, however, reminds us that such tendencies are to be determinedly guarded against. Maritime history is a central part of an understanding of the heritage and tradition of navies, but its value lies in more than heritage alone. Knowing what actually happened in the past is central to understanding the nature and character of naval power. It assists in knowing the limits to the usefulness of naval power as well as in understanding where we are today in the development and progression of the art of naval warfare. As every navigator understands, it is critical to know where we are and what external forces affected us on the way there if we are to lay the best course toward where we want to be. [\[2\]](#)

These judgments have once again been reaffirmed in the most recent study of the uses of history by, for, and in the American navy. In 2000 on the recommendation of the Secretary of the Navy's Advisory Subcommittee on Naval History, Secretary Richard Danzig commissioned an independent evaluation of the Navy's historical programs. This report, completed in October 2000, concluded that the U.S. Navy "has failed to use the rich historical information available to it in order to manage or apply effectively those resources for internal or external purposes."²[\[3\]](#) Moreover, "while history survives in isolated pockets the use of naval heritage history is disjointed, sporadic, inconsistent, and occasionally contradictory. Without a clear service-wide mission, history in the Navy has itself become an artifact, delivering traditional products for use in a Navy seeking other types of information." Subsequent meetings in 2000 and 2002—where representatives of

the perceived stakeholders of naval history throughout the Navy and supporters of naval history outside the service joined in the discussions—reviewed early drafts for a proposed strategy and a five-year plan for implementing it.

Nonetheless, despite these initiatives, at the beginning of 2003 the Navy still lacks an integrated policy for employing naval history. The recommendations and requests of Dr. David A. Rosenberg, the chairman of the Secretary of the Navy's Advisory Subcommittee on Naval History, for a strong and detailed policy statement, establishment of requirements, and the directives necessary to reverse the current trend have not yet been answered.^[4]

If this situation is to be rectified, the U.S. Navy's senior leadership needs to establish clear policy guidance. The establishment at Newport of the Maritime History Department this year is but one of the first steps to be taken throughout the Navy if we are to reap the rewards from the integration of history, its lessons and its cautions, into all aspects of contemporary naval thinking, doctrine, planning, and education.

THE PRESENT CONDITION

The stakeholders and supporters of naval history within the U.S. Navy are few. It has been left largely to civilian specialists at the Naval Historical Center at the Washington Navy Yard and the handful of academics and administrators in the Navy's twelve museums, at the Naval Academy, and the Naval War College. Naval history finds much more support outside the service, as can easily be seen in the keen interest in popular novels, films, and television programs with historical themes. A number of private organizations in the United States promote naval history and heritage, including the Naval Historical Foundation and the U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation in Washington, the Naval Order of the United States, the Historic Naval Ships Association, and the Center for Naval Analyses. Perhaps the most active publisher of work on U.S. naval history outside of the Navy is another private organization, the U.S. Naval Institute, which issues not only its monthly *Proceedings* but also, since 1986, the quarterly *Naval History*. Since the 1960s, the Naval Institute Press has published an increasing number of prize-winning books on maritime history. The institute has also established an important photographic archive, available to the public. Since 1969 it has been the leader in the field in oral history, producing more than two hundred bound volumes on recent naval leaders.

For those in, or who work for, the Navy, history is not some amorphous, abstract, and intellectual creation; it happens around them all the time. What naval professionals do every day is part of our nation's history, as is the work of their predecessors. Ships and shore stations are historic sites, as well as places where important tasks are carried out today and are prepared for tomorrow. Many naval buildings and reservations are historic and even contain archaeological sites of great cultural importance. Many offices and naval stations contain valuable objects, historic documents, artwork, and books, or

official records destined for permanent retention in the National Archives. The Navy and Marine Corps represent a broad cross section of American history; the safekeeping of national heritage, as reflected in its material culture, has been left to those who manage the Navy's assets. In the National Historic Preservation Act, Congress made the Navy Department responsible to the nation for the preservation of the cultural resources that it owns. It is an awesome responsibility but one easily forgotten by people struggling with immediate problems. The Navy needs to balance its management of these important cultural assets with its responsibilities for national defense, and it must do so, as the act requires, "in a spirit of stewardship for the inspiration and benefit of present and future generations."⁴⁵¹

Despite widespread interest and generous outside support, the uniformed Navy has yet to make full and effective use of maritime history as a resource. The practical challenge of implementing a Navywide policy for the support and practical use of maritime history in and for the Navy is a complex one. It involves promoting a range of interrelated but distinct levels of historical understanding as well as organizing and supporting a variety of responsibilities, tasks, and functions across the Navy. If such a program is to succeed, maritime history in the Navy will have to have the direct attention and the solid and continuing support of the flag officers who lead the service.

THE HISTORY OF HISTORY IN THE U.S. NAVY AND THE SEA SERVICES

MARITIME AND NAVAL HISTORY DEFINED

To begin a vibrant historical program within the Navy, one needs first to understand what one means by "maritime" and "naval" history, respectively. There has long been confusion about the two terms, but in the past decade a consensus in usage has formed that clarifies the matter. Maritime history embraces naval history; it is the overarching subject that deals with the full range of mankind's relationships to the seas and oceans of the world. It is a broad theme that cuts across academic boundaries and builds linkages between disciplines to form a humanistic understanding of the many dimensions involved. Maritime history involves in particular the histories of science, technology, cartography, industry, economics, trade, politics, international affairs, imperial growth and rivalry, institutional and organizational development, communications, migration, law, social affairs, leadership, ethics, art, and literature. The range is immense, and the possible vantage points and topics are many. Yet the focus is clearly defined—ships and the sailors who operate them, with specific sets of scientific understanding and technological devices, in their hostile sea environment, which covers the greater part of the globe.

Within the broad field of maritime history, there are a number of recognized major subspecialties. Among them are the history of navigational and maritime sciences; the histories of ships and their construction, the aircraft that fly over the seas, and the submarines that pass under their surface; maritime economic history; the histories of

merchant shipping, fishing, and whaling; the histories of yachting and other leisure activities at sea and on the seaside; the histories of geographical exploration and cartography; social and labor history, the health of seamen; maritime law, maritime art, maritime literature; and naval history. These subspecialties are interrelated within the framework of maritime history to varying degrees, but each is tied as well to historical subject areas outside the maritime field. Characteristically, a maritime subspecialty's relationship outside the field defines its perspective on, and approach to, maritime history.

War at sea and the development of its political, technological, institutional, and financial elements is, thus, the focus of the naval history subspecialty. Within the structure of maritime history, naval history relates to the other maritime subspecialties as a special case, a particular application of the histories of ships and shipbuilding, geographical exploration, cartography, social and labor issues, health, law, art, literature, and so on. It also connects to the study of agencies and sea services that cooperate or share responsibilities with navies, such as (in the United States) the Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Revenue Service, and Coast Survey. The last three have fulfilled under a variety of organizational names critical maritime functions as hydrography, policing and safety of navigation, piloting, and the licensing of mariners. Outside the maritime sphere, naval history is closely associated with, and has adopted the broad approaches of, such fields as military studies, international affairs, politics, government, and the history of technology.

Naval history specifically involves the study and analysis of the ways in which governments have organized and employed force at sea to achieve national ends. It ranges across all periods of world history and involves a wide variety of national histories, languages, and archival sources. (Most prominent among the latter are governmental archives, supplemented by the private papers of individuals who served in or with navies.) The study of naval history involves analysis of the ways in which decisions were reached and carried out, as well as of the design, procurement, manufacture, and employment of vessels, aircraft, and weapons to achieve the ends in view. As Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond succinctly put it, naval history

includes the “whys” of strategy in all its phases, from the political sphere to that of minor strategy and tactics of fleets and squadrons: it includes the “hows” of actual performances: and, not less important, the “whys” of success and failure. It embraces all those elements of foreign diplomatic relations, of economics and commerce, of international law and neutrality, of positions, of the principles of war, of administration, of the nature of the weapon, and of personality.^[6]

Naval history in the machine age faces the need to explain these matters comprehensively, placing individual decisions and the collective interactions of leaders within a wide context of technological, financial, and operational issues.^[7]

A traditional work in the field of naval history traces the ways in which national leaders dealt with international situations and decided upon courses of action that involved employment of ships and weapons at sea, and the reasons why. It then follows the results of those decisions and examines the actual uses of naval force at sea and its consequences, often in terms of the biographies of particular admirals, specific battles, campaigns, or accounts of the actions of fleets, squadrons, and even individual ships and aircraft.

In contrast, modern naval historians have come to understand that navies and those who serve in uniform do not exist separately from other parts of society. In addition to seeing their actions in terms of leadership, tactics, and strategy, scholars must also understand them in terms of the external environment, domestic politics, bureaucratic politics, the state of technological development and capabilities, procurement issues, organizational culture, and the capacity of naval men and women (in a profession marked by rigid hierarchical structures) for innovation, change, and alternative approaches.^[8] Modern naval history looks at navies not only within their national contexts or as instruments of particular national states but also from wider international and comparative perspectives, in terms either of the chronological development of specific events or of the broad, long-term development of navies around the world.^[9] Clearly the actions of one navy cannot be considered in isolation from foreign influences, whether enemies, allies, or world developments.

Naval historians, as practitioners of the wider field of maritime history, are bound by the same general requirements and standards as apply to scholars who work, research, or write in any other historical area. Any historical project requires a wide understanding of the context in which the events under study took place, a deep appreciation of the historical literature addressing the subject and its broad field, and a thorough examination of the original documents and other primary source materials that establish authoritatively what occurred, how, and why.

THE AUDIENCES FOR MARITIME HISTORY

For the historical program to be successful, the Navy and its historians must be more strategic in their approaches, recognizing that they must appeal to a number of different audiences at once. Maritime history in the United States has four distinct audiences, each of which requires different approaches, levels of understanding, and vantage points: Congress and other government leaders, including uniformed members of the nonnaval services; the men and women of the U.S. Navy; academics; and the general public.

The first two audiences—Congress, government leaders, and uniformed men and women in all the armed services—look to a historical understanding that provides considerations and insight useful for the current and future development of the Navy. Their collective interest and approach may be described as applied history.^[10] The last two audiences, the general public and academe, form a related pair; they look toward broad understanding

and evaluation of maritime and naval events as fundamental and as essential for understanding world history and national life. Their interests may be described as those of basic history.

The Decision Makers: A Focused Audience

The general public's understanding of maritime and naval affairs—developed, corrected, and expanded by the academic community—provides the foundation for at least the initial understandings of the people in charge of leading, building, funding, and developing the Navy. These decision makers, leaders of government, are those who make up an important audience for applied history. However, their needs in maritime and naval history are more detailed, specific, and technical than those of the public and academe, address professional interests beyond the scope of popular and academic interests, and typically need to be formulated and presented in different ways.

Congress and Government Leaders

Members of Congress, congressional staff members, and the uniformed men and women of services other than the Navy form a distinct audience for certain aspects of maritime history. This audience is widely varied but may include representatives from areas that have long-standing interests in maritime affairs, such as coastal states, states with traditional Navy ties, vocal groups of naval retirees or veterans, or states where assets for the Navy are produced or its bases are located. This part of the audience will have special interests in specific aspects of naval history that relate to their own state and its history, politics, or interests but may need specific information that builds on their traditional ties or broadens their regional outlook into a national perspective. Congress and government leaders also include those who do not have such built-in interests but need understandings of how and why the Navy has developed, if they are to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

A component of this audience of specific interest to the Navy comprises the Navy Department's senior civilian appointees, such as the Secretary of the Navy, the Assistant Secretaries of the Navy, and the noncareer deputy assistant secretaries. Most typically have short tenures with the Navy Department in the course of careers that take them to a variety of executive branch positions. Like many members of Congress and leaders in other services, they do not necessarily have previous exposure to naval matters. These leaders with important present responsibilities have a direct, practical need to know about the roles and functions of the Navy and when, why, and how it has been used, misused, or neglected in the past. As Sir Basil Liddell Hart once wrote, "History is a catalogue of mistakes. It is our duty to profit by them."¹¹¹

Those who make decisions on present and future naval issues need to profit from past errors and problems. They always need a sense of the backgrounds of the difficult issues they are struggling to solve. The Navy's historians should provide historical understanding in ways that are accessible to busy leaders, who need specific information and interpretation focused on particular elements of maritime history in ways that provide insight into current debates over funding, policy making, and joint-service operational and technical planning. This type of information is likely to be precise and detailed, even quantified, pointing to specific incidents in American historical experience or drawing broad parallels to situations in American or world history.

The recent independent study commissioned by the Secretary of the Navy, *History and Heritage in the U. S. Navy*, found that the Navy does little to support decision makers by providing them with historical background to current issues. What is being done is scattered informally through a variety of activities, including the Center for Naval Analyses, the Naval Historical Center, the Navy Museum, the Naval War College, and several nongovernmental organizations and museums.^[12] Plainly the audience of congressional and other government leaders is a neglected audience, but one neglected at great cost. Whenever the country faces war, Congress, civilian leaders in the executive branch, the leaders of other services that cooperate with the Navy, and, above all, the nation's statesmen critically need to know and understand, in terms of actual practice and experience, the fundamental roles, limitations, and practicalities of the Navy's organization and its ability to provide mobility for military forces, project power overseas, control and protect sea and air routes, serve the objectives of foreign policy, and carry out its variety of other functions. They need to understand also the typical challenges that the Navy faces and the reasons why a number of roles that a statesman might be tempted to assign the Navy would be inadvisable, would distract it from its useful purposes. Leaders who have a broad understanding of and insight into maritime history and perceive the historical uses of and limitations upon fleets will be in a far better position to make proper decisions in regard to the present and future use of navies than those who have none.

Uniformed Men and Women in the Navy

The people who serve in uniform in the Navy provide a special audience with particular needs for history. For the uniformed Navy naval history is heritage, but at the same time professionals within the Navy need to analyze critically their profession's historical experience in ways that inform their thinking and decision making.

Understanding maritime history is part of naval professional identity. Understanding their own profession leads officers or enlisted personnel alike to feel a natural bond with other sailors, whatever their form of maritime endeavor or nationality. Today's sailors share a proud heritage that includes the world's great seamen and world explorers, such as Christopher Columbus, Ferdinand Magellan, and James Cook. Naval leaders, of course, are part of this professional maritime pantheon. Here we usually think of the great

fighting commanders in the context of battles and fleet operations: Drake, Tromp, Blake, de Ruyter, Nelson, Togo, Jellicoe, and Scheer, and within our own navy, Farragut, Dewey, Nimitz, Spruance, and Halsey. But a navy, of necessity, is made up of people of many kinds of abilities. Those who specialize in one form of warfare or spend their careers in science, technology, education, and logistics offer modern sailors models of inspiration and devotion to their profession no less valuable than those of fleet commanders.

Among such other models about whom our professionals need to learn, and toward whom they should look, are the scientist and oceanographer Matthew Maury, the inventor John Ericsson, the thinker and strategist J. C. Wylie, the mathematician C. H. Davis, the salvage expert Edward Ellsberg, the gun designer John Dahlgren, the logistician Henry Eccles, the educator Stephen B. Luce, the naval engineer B. F. Isherwood, the civil engineer Ben Moreell, the intelligence officer J. J. Rochefort, the aviator William Moffett, the naval diplomatist Matthew Perry, and the submariner Charles Lockwood; Joy Bright Hancock, a pioneering advocate for women in the U.S. Navy; Grace Murray Hopper, the brilliant developer of computer languages; Charles M. Cooke and Forrest Sherman, operational planners; H. Kent Hewitt, the amphibious innovator; Sumner Kimball, of the Life Saving and Revenue Cutter Services; Ellsworth Bertholf, of the Coast Guard; Spencer Baird, of the U.S. Fish Commission; Alexander Bache, of the Coast Survey; the many examples to be found in the history of the Marine Corps, including Holland Smith, Edson, and Puller; and a variety of people in the enlisted ranks, whose lives and services to the nation in a variety of ratings need to be discovered and made available to professionals. There are even heroes for naval historians: Sir John Knox Laughton, Sir Julian Corbett, Sir Herbert Richmond, and Captain Stephen Roskill of Britain, alongside the Americans Alfred Thayer Mahan, Robert G. Albion, and Samuel Eliot Morison.

The professional naval audience has a particular practical interest in maritime history in the context of recruiting: inculcating and maintaining service pride and tradition during the indoctrination and initial training and education of enlisted recruits, midshipmen, and officer candidates. This also plays a key role in the naming of buildings and ships, and the creation of memorials. Dr. William S. Dudley—Director of Naval History on the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations and director of the Naval Historical Center—has reminded those in uniform who lead our sailors, “‘Celebrate, commemorate, motivate,’ these words suggest what history and heritage can contribute to the Navy’s rich human potential.”⁴¹³¹ With this idea in mind, Dudley suggests that the first need is to give those who serve in the Navy a ready awareness of service history, a foundation upon which to develop deeper professional understanding.

The use of history for patriotic and motivational purposes is very important and powerful. It is also, however, an approach that can be, and has been, misused by totalitarian regimes. In a democratic state, great care is required, as is particular attention to the ideals of academic history—critical analysis of documents, factual accuracy, and commitment to the truth of what actually happened. One of the principal reasons for a lack of quality in the subspecialty of naval history is the lingering suspicion that its

practitioners somehow falsify it to achieve a government's political or institutional objectives.

Historians employed by governmental agencies in a democratic country have a special obligation to the historical profession in this regard. They must always bear in mind that the government belongs to the people and is, in its actions, responsible to them and to public judgment. Congress, the executive branch, and the courts have established laws and regulations mandating the freedom of public information, limiting government control over it, and laying out the responsibilities of agencies, including the National Archives, for the permanent preservation and eventual release of records. Unless lost, deliberately destroyed, or weeded out by archivists, information in government files sooner or later becomes available for public scrutiny and critical analysis. This very process requires that the government's historians serve the public interest, not varying political or institutional interest. American naval history is so rich in experience and contains so many fine examples of bravery, courage, and professional excellence that there is no need to embellish the record. Quite the contrary—an accurate relation of the historical events and their context underscores the real achievements.

Entertaining and instructive stories that define ideals and motivate professionals to achieve them is neither all that naval professionals need to know about maritime history nor all that historians can offer the Navy. As naval officers gain professional maturity and become involved in broader issues, the historical lessons they need begin to overlap with the kinds of information that government leaders use. Still, there is a professional naval dimension that differentiates their historical study from that of other users of naval history—the need to think critically about the naval past in order to deal with the problems of the present and future. To a greater degree than history used for motivational and leadership purposes, professional historical knowledge involves clear, critical, rational analysis of success and failure, in considerably more detail than the information that is normally useful or relevant to non-specialist government leaders.

The present-mindedness of American naval culture typically leads serving professionals to consider as entirely new “bright ideas” that have in fact been tried before, in circumstances that may cast light on their applicability in a new and different context. History is particularly valuable for the insight it can bring to issues that recur only rarely, perhaps once in a generation: reorganization of the Navy Staff; the interrelationships of the offices of the secretaries of defense and the Navy, the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations; and the administration of the Navy's shore establishment by regions. Similarly, the Navy has long, useful experience in mine warfare countermeasures. Homeland harbor defense, a joint Army-Navy-Coast Guard concept that was applied in Vietnam and the Gulf Wars and is now arising again, was a “live” topic half a century ago but disappeared from view at the end of World War II.

Operational doctrine and the principles of war are attempts to distill such actual experience—historical experience, even if very recent—into “axioms” that can be readily applied to the present and future.^[14] There is no doubt wisdom in them, but the idea that human conduct can be effectively reduced to axioms is doubtful. Human actions and

reactions do not conform to the laws of physics, mechanics, or the natural sciences. In the nineteenth century, many thinkers thought they might, but later analysts discarded such ambitions, decades ago. Such formulations and professional axioms of the past are merely “rules of thumb”; they cannot be used blindly. They must be continually and critically tested against experiences in differing contexts. A study of the past shows what has worked and what has failed, but no two events are ever quite the same. Historical analogies do not create axioms but, more valuably, suggest the questions that need to be considered and the range of considerations that pertain.

American naval writers have been all too apt, in particular, to search the writings of Alfred Thayer Mahan for axioms of naval strategy, but he himself is a part of history, and his works need to be understood in terms of his intentions and of how they have since been used, misused, superseded, broadened, and modified.^[15] Historical study provides the practical basis of, and its approaches develop the intellectual tools for, an understanding of the nature of strategy and the process it involves.^[16] In this connection, historical understanding and knowledge of past events is not the object but rather one of several means to improve the ability of professionals to solve problems more wisely than arbitrary choice, pure chance, or blind intuition would allow.

The General Public

Far more than many academics are willing to grant, the general public’s interest in the field of maritime history is significant and continues to grow. There is a large market for popular works across a wide range of media: biographies, narrative books and articles, heavily illustrated books and magazines, historical novels, feature films, television series on the major networks as well as such outlets as Public Broadcasting Service, the History Channel, and the Discovery Channel. This wide public audience includes former and retired members of the sea services, but it is not limited to them. A large number of people with no prior connection to the services are fascinated by naval events, are intrigued by warships, aircraft, and naval equipment, and admire and take an interest in those who go to sea and have accomplished feats of navigation or geographical exploration. This is an audience with interests that are wide and general but at the same time often focused on individual events, specific seamen, or heroic actions, ships, or weapons. The Navy meets the interests of this audience by supplying historical information; making available historical photographs, films, and other images; maintaining museums, opening its libraries and archives to the public, and making available experts who can assist in the production or editorial review of popular works and advise on their historical accuracy. The Navy also posts a great deal of information on websites, where it is easily accessible to the public. Most notable among them is that maintained by the Naval Historical Center in Washington, D.C.;^[17] on it can be found a wide variety of historical information, bibliographies, a guide to manuscripts located in repositories in Washington and throughout the country, and a guide to organizations, programs, and resources relating to the U.S. Navy’s history. The website also includes links to numerous naval history-related sites outside the Navy.

In a democratic state, ordinary citizens need to understand why such vast sums of taxpayers' money are spent on their navy and what it achieves. They do not need to know all the technical details, but surely they need a basic sense of the importance of naval supremacy in international relations, as well as of the roles and functions of the navy in both peace and war, if they are to have a complete appreciation of the history of the nation. The wider public in the United States needs to understand the role of the sea in American history and the essential roles that mariners played in its colonization, settlement, and early national development. Among a wide range of other things, the public needs to understand the essential contribution of the French navy to the military decision at Yorktown, which won American independence. It needs to understand that nearly the entire income of the federal government in the early decades of the republic derived from tariffs on maritime trade. American citizens need to know, as a matter of their national heritage, about the role and influence of maritime power on the coasts and on rivers during the Civil War; about the terrific struggles and dramatic victories at sea in the First and Second World Wars; more recently, about how the Soviet naval threat during the Cold War was met; and about the roles and accomplishments of the Navy in the post-Cold War era, in the Caribbean, the Adriatic and Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean.

Moreover, to stimulate and maintain this broad audience, war monuments and veterans memorials may be found in virtually every county, if not every town, in the country. Comparatively judged, there are a large number of maritime museums in the United States. The American Council of Maritime Museums currently has some forty-two institutional members, and twenty-one other museums are affiliate members. Its membership currently includes two of the twelve museums that the U.S. Navy operates (the Navy Museum in Washington and the Naval Academy Museum) and the Navy's Curator of Ship Models. Three of the Navy's twelve museums have been accredited by the American Association of Museums as having reached high professional standards: the Navy Museum in Washington, the National Museum of Naval Aviation in Pensacola, and the Naval Undersea Museum at Keyport, Washington.

In addition, there are more than a hundred historic ships, operated by some seventy organizations, open to the public in the United States. Moreover, a variety of other museums and libraries draw large audiences to view major permanent or temporary exhibitions in maritime and naval history.

Not everything of historical interest, of course, can or should be saved, but neither should they be inappropriately destroyed or left unmanaged. Some things are intrinsically valuable; some are useful only for the information they contain; some are both, some neither. The variety is immense. But every item worthy even of consideration for preservation has a life cycle, comprising identification, preservation, interpretation, use, and disposition—perhaps, transfer to appropriate repositories, or disposal. Every historical object needs to be taken up by an institutional infrastructure that can manage and preserve it and make it useful and accessible for professional use or public knowledge. Even tactical and administrative computer systems that process potentially historic information should be designed from the outset to preserve that information for

future use. To be a positive historical asset, an object must be placed in the context of a museum collection, an archive, a library, or some other specially formed collection with cataloging, identification, and retrieval systems.^[18] In order to do this in a way that meets modern professional demands, a major naval shore command may need a trained historical officer, who is educated in maritime history, serves as a resource, advises the commander, and coordinates with guidance from the Director of Naval History in Washington, the entire range of activities relating to maritime history that the particular command is likely to face—local history, archaeology, preservation of records, archives, rare books, charts and maps, art, historical commemorations, museums, and historical objects.

The Academic Audience

By contrast, the academic audience is small and generally limited to a relatively small number of students and faculty at colleges and universities, but it is an extremely important audience, far more so than its numbers suggest. Its importance lies in the fact that the independent thinking and scholarship of these researchers create the fundamental historical understanding of maritime and naval events that serves as the basis for those of all the other audiences. Other audiences may use the products of scholarly history in ways that academics might consider fragmentary or lacking in depth, but their understandings are ultimately based upon academic perceptions, debates, and prevailing interpretations.

The most important way in which the Navy interacts with the academic world is through direct discourse—its participation in academic research, writing, and professional evaluation of academic literature. This participation is undertaken largely by the research staff at the Naval Historical Center in Washington and through the research and publications of faculty members who specialize in naval history at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, the Naval War College in Newport, and the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

The ability of historians within the Navy to publish historical studies that meet high academic standards and become part of the academic historical discourse is essential to the Navy's ability to inform the public about its contributions to national life and its role in international affairs. Additionally, the Navy makes an essential contribution to the academic audience by allowing its own academic historians to act as advocates within the service. It contributes also by publishing (on the basis of the professional knowledge and judgment of its historians) official documents on naval history and by declassifying and otherwise making available for scholarly research archival material and historical collections owned by the Navy.^[19]

For a long time, the academic standard of maritime history in the United States was not of the highest quality; only a few college or university history departments in the United States provided courses in any aspect of the subject. Nonetheless, over the past decade

there have been strong indications that this trend is being reversed.^[20] Mystic Seaport's general history *America and the Sea: A Maritime History* (1998) has apparently been adopted as a general textbook for this purpose on several campuses where the subject was not previously offered.^[21] It is certainly used at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut, where the Munson Institute of American Maritime History offers accredited, graduate-level summer courses in maritime history.^[22] Today a sizeable number of individual scholars, scattered across the country in various universities, colleges, and research institutions, pursue professional research and writing interests in naval history and within the broader scope of maritime history. It is these established scholars, along with a growing number of graduate students researching master's and doctoral theses within these areas, who constitute the main academic audience within the United States. They are joined by a similar set of scholars in other countries, most recently in Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, India, Norway, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, and Latin America, who share interests in this field and bring to it invaluable perspectives from the vantage points of other cultures, navies, and maritime environments.

The Navy's single most important interaction with the academic historical audience is the Naval History Symposium, sponsored by the U.S. Naval Academy at regular intervals since the first was held in Annapolis in May 1972. Originally conceived as an annual event, it has been held biennially since 1973. Since the third symposium, in 1980, a volume of selected conference papers has usually been published after each conference, reflecting the new interpretations and perspectives in naval history of this forum, attended regularly by several hundred historians and graduate students.^[23]

The Navy's historians, librarians, and archivists assist academic researchers in finding materials they need for research. In addition to archival guides and official naval records made available for research at the National Archives and Record Services, the Naval Historical Center continually updates on its website a guide to manuscripts available for research in libraries and archives across the country.^[24] Complementing this, the Naval War College, like other institutions, maintains on its own website a list of its manuscript and archival holdings (in its Naval Historical Collection) with a list of available research aids.^[25]

Two commands within the Navy and several civilian organizations have attempted to raise the standards of naval history and promote new academic work through the establishment of prizes. Among the civilian organizations, the New York Council of the Navy League of the United States, the Theodore Roosevelt Association, and the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute have joined forces to recognize annually the best book in U.S. naval history with the Theodore and Franklin Delano Roosevelt Prize in naval history. In 2002, this award was made a cash prize of five thousand dollars. In addition, the nation's professional organization for maritime historians, the North American Society of Oceanic Historians (NASOH), awards annually its prestigious John Lyman Book Prizes for a range of subjects in maritime history, including one in the category of U.S. naval history.

The Naval Historical Center promotes new academic work through the establishment of the Rear Admiral John D. Hayes Pre-doctoral Fellowship in U.S. Naval History for civilian graduate students; Vice Admiral Edwin B. Hooper research grants for postdoctoral scholars and accomplished authors; the Samuel Eliot Morison Naval History Scholarship for active-duty naval and Marine officers engaged in graduate studies; and the Ernest M. Eller Prize, awarded annually for the best article on American naval history published in a scholarly journal.

In addition to these prizes, the Naval War College Foundation awards annually the Edward S. Miller History Prize for the best article on naval history to appear in the *Naval War College Review*. It also funds the Edward S. Miller Fellowship in Naval History, a thousand-dollar grant to assist a scholar using the College's archives and historical collections. The work of naval historians is also considered for the Samuel Eliot Morison, Victor Gundos, Moncado, and Distinguished Book Prizes awarded annually by the Society for Military History in the broad field of military history. The U.S. Commission on Military History provides two \$2,500 grants to encourage and support American graduate students seeking to present the results of their research in U.S. naval history topics at the annual overseas congress of the International Commission on Military History.

MARITIME HISTORY AT THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

MARITIME HISTORY IN THE U.S. NAVY TODAY

A single broad historical theme might be presented to all four audiences, but it needs to be presented to each in a different way and by different means. Some audiences and groups may acquire their general knowledge through books and articles, but others are reached most effectively through images—films, videos, and dramatizations. An academic researcher may require original documents; a teenager, an interactive game; a member of Congress, a succinct tabulation of data; a career naval professional, a technical analysis. The detailed and technical information that makes maritime history useful for the professional audience makes it opaque and useless to the general public. Government leaders seeking critical analytical insight into current problems quickly dismiss elements of celebration and commemoration. Maritime historians and those who present their work must be aware of the differing needs of their audiences and the levels and approaches to history appropriate to each. There is no “off the rack” history. No one size and style fits all—but all styles are needed if history is to become more useful in and for the Navy than it is now.

The issue, however, is more than just a question of the audiences that will benefit from historical insight, and the differing styles they need. It is far more basic than that, and the situation is much more critical. In June 1999, the chairman of the Secretary of the Navy's

Advisory Subcommittee on Naval History formally reported to Secretary Danzig that the U.S. Navy as an institution needed to put a much higher priority on preserving and using history—“The Navy places a far lower priority on history than the other services measured in competitive dollars and manpower.”⁴²⁶¹ What money the Navy does receive for its current historical programs at the Naval Historical Center in Washington, it “stretches . . . very thin.” The Navy employs fewer professional historians, archivists, or museum specialists than the other services and has nothing comparable to the separately funded U.S. Military History Research Institute (at the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks) or the separately funded Air Force’s Historical Research Agency at the Air University, which complement the work of their Washington-based service historical offices. For the Navy, the Naval Historical Center in Washington has had the major burden, researching and writing history while also running the service’s operational archive, the Navy Museum, an Underwater Archaeology branch that monitors naval ship and aircraft wrecks around the world, and the Navy’s art collection. The other services have dispersed networks of historical offices to ensure that headquarters and operational history are preserved and recorded; the U.S. Navy has no similar system outside of Washington. There are no naval historians permanently attached to operational commands. The Naval Historical Center has only one naval reserve unit and a small naval reserve volunteer training unit to handle the job of gathering historical materials from deployed units to form the basis for the permanent historical record of the Navy’s current operations. In the Navy today, operational history from deployed units is preserved only in summary form, through the annual ship, squadron, and unit command histories. These reports are often delegated to junior officers, who have little appreciation of the fact that they are preparing the permanent official records of their commands’ activities. They sometimes treat the assignment as a public affairs exercise rather than a serious permanent record that documents commands’ activities for the history of the Navy as well as for professional information and use in future decades. Unlike during World War II or the Korean and Vietnam Wars, ships and major operational commands no longer submit action reports or keep war diaries; the annual command history was designed to replace these older methods of reporting, but operational commanders often overlook this responsibility.

Today, the Navy’s key operational units are the numbered fleets, with their important battle fleet experiments, carrier battle groups, and amphibious ready groups, but few, if any, of these have ever produced command histories as permanent records of their operations. These operational commanders, of course, have wars to fight and win; nonetheless, the result of neglecting their historical obligation is that the nation has no permanent record of their operations for the benefit of professionals today or of future generations. Congress, government leaders, the general public, and uniformed and civilian professionals working within the Navy will entirely lack authoritative records of the contemporary history of our times, unless some action is taken to rectify the situation.

In some cases where recent records have been created, they have been put into a microcopy or electronic formats that are not useable on a permanent basis; the information that these systems were supposed to have saved is entirely lost. Information and raw data that could be used for future historical research and retrieval appears in e-

mails and the electronic formats that the Navy uses every day, yet neither operational naval commands nor shore establishments have effective systems by which electronic archives can be routinely saved and delivered to safe and permanent archival storage, and the electronic data systems themselves saved for future use and reference. The paper copies of documents that naval commands have traditionally transferred to archival storage declined by 75 percent between 1981 and 1990, and the volume of archival acquisitions declined a further 50 percent in the following decade.^[27] No effective electronic or automated means of permanent record keeping has yet been created to fill this void.

In December 2001, the chairman of the Secretary of the Navy's Advisory Subcommittee on Naval History reiterated these issues to Secretary of the Navy Gordon England and noted that for too long the Navy as a whole has viewed history as "someone else's problem." As a result, much of our historical record over the last fifty years has been destroyed, and few of our Sailors know or appreciate our history. This mindset needs to be challenged. Every unit of the Navy shares responsibility for preserving records, understanding naval history and traditions, and drawing inspiration and wisdom from past accomplishments.^[28]

As a result of these repeated reports to the Secretary of the Navy, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William J. Fallon, issued an instruction in August 2002 to all ships and stations to establish a policy for the development and use of historical lessons learned and of historical resources to support and inform naval operations, plans, and programs.^[29] Despite this clear and positive step, much remains to be done to implement a more effective and service-wide historical program for the U.S. Navy.

The Historical Center in Washington has a nine-million-dollar budget, which includes funding for USS *Constitution* but not the support of the museums outside of Washington and educational activities at the Naval War College and the Naval Academy. The Navy has not *completely* neglected maritime history, and budgets for the Naval Historical Center have not been cut to the extent that the budgets for other naval commands have been cut in recent years. At the same time, millions of dollars in the Navy's funding have gone into the review and declassification of archival records of many Navy commands. All this gives some strength and support to maritime history as it is broadly construed. The primary issue is not one of increased funding or additional manpower; the major challenge is one of changing the Navy's current mind-set and culture, which result in failure to conserve a permanent record of recent activities. They tend, specifically, to consider the Naval Historical Center as the only agency with any responsibility for the Navy's historical interest and to disregard the historical assets that are already at hand.

The historians who work for and advise the Navy can only point out, as they have repeatedly done in recent years, that the Navy and the country are in jeopardy of losing the record of a significant portion of their recent past and that the Navy is not making effective use of its historical assets and information. Only those who bear direct responsibility, the U.S. Navy's senior civilian and uniformed flag officers, can ever hope to change this mentality. Changing a service-wide attitude toward something so

fundamental as history is no easy task, but it can be done if flag officers throughout the Navy actively engage themselves in the process. Even so, however, it cannot happen overnight. To understand how a professional can use history effectively requires education, reading, reflection, and knowledge.

The lack of general historical understanding within the U.S. Navy and its current inability to use history effectively is emblematic of the larger issue that the Navy faces in graduate and professional education as a whole. At least 90 percent of the general officers in the other U.S. armed services have attended both an intermediate and a senior service college, where historical understanding plays an important role in educating senior officers in policy, strategy, and the nature of warfare. In contrast, only around 30 percent of the serving flag officers in the U.S. Navy have attended even one senior service college, while less than 5 percent have attended both an intermediate and a senior service college.^[30] Thus, even at the highest level, naval professionals lack education in the whole range of disciplines that provide enhanced critical thinking and decision skills for dealing with our modern world, with its increasing complexity and potential for information overload.

It is astonishing that anyone would seriously argue that historical insight is irrelevant to professional understanding, but that is a view one often finds today in the U.S. Navy. Among the many uses of historical understanding in and for the Navy, perhaps the most important is the need that our highly technological and interconnected society creates for an interdisciplinary education.^[31] Precisely because our world is highly technological, education in technology and science alone is insufficient. Among all the disciplines and forms of understanding that naval professionals can and should use to broaden their outlook and to sharpen their abilities to deal with the present and the future is history, particularly maritime history, a resource and tool with which the U.S. Navy has made limited progress. Much more could and should be done for and with maritime history.

^[1] Reprinted in the IJNH with permission from both the author and the *Naval War College Review*.

^[2] The classical statements of the argument in this essay were written by Sir John Knox Laughton, “The Scientific Study of Naval History,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* 18 (1879), 508–27, and Admiral Herbert W. Richmond, “The Importance of the Study of Naval History,” *Naval Review* 27 (May 1939), 201–18, reprinted in *Naval Review* 68 (April 1980), 139–50. Their ideas are subsumed and extended herein.

^[3] History Associates Inc., *History and Heritage in the U.S. Navy* (Rockville, Md.: 16 October 2000), 3

^[4] *Ibid.*, executive summary, 3.

^[5] As quoted from the National Historic Properties Act in H. T. Johnson, Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Installations and Environment), memo to Vice Chief of Naval Operations and Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, 16 November 2001.

^[6] Richmond, 201

^[7] James Goldrick, “The Problems of Modern Naval History,” in *Doing Naval History: Essays toward Improvement*, ed. John B. Hattendorf (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1995), 11.

^[8] Robert Jervis, “Navies, Politics, and Political Science,” in *ibid.*, 46.

^[9] N. A. M. Rodger, “Considerations on Writing a General Naval History,” in *ibid.*, 117–28.

^[10] For the application of the distinction between basic and applied history to naval history, I am grateful to Dr. Rodney P. Carlisle and Dr. Philip L. Cantelon and the work

of History Associates, Inc., Rockville, Maryland, in the report of their independent evaluation for the under secretary of the Navy, *History and Heritage in the U.S. Navy: A Status Report*, 16 October 2000, 5. Some writers have used the terms “public history” and “applied history” interchangeably to describe all historical work outside academia. In this article, I argue that there is a need to make a distinction between “public history” that is designed to inform the wider public outside academia and “applied history” that is used for highly specialized purposes with a profession. In the case of the Navy, this involves the development of professional pride as well as using the assistance of historical findings in developing policy.

[11] Basil Liddell Hart, *Thoughts on War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), 138.

[12] History Associates, Inc., iv.

[13] William S. Dudley, “Reinventing Naval History,” *Shipmate*, July–August 2002, 40.

[14] See D. W. Knox, “The Role of Doctrine in Naval Warfare,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 41 (March–April 1915), 31–75.

[15] See Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press; and Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1997), and his “[New Insights from Old Books: The Case of Alfred Thayer Mahan](#),” *Naval War College Review* 54, no. 3 (Summer 2001), 100–11.

[16] See David A. Rosenberg, “Process the Realities of Formulating Modern Naval Strategy,” in *Mahan Is Not Enough: The Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond*, ed. James Goldrick and John B. Hattendorf(Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1993), 141–75.

[17] *Naval Historical Center*, www.history.navy.mil.

[18] Jay Thomas, Navy Cultural Resources Officer, Naval Facilities Command, e-mail to Naval Historical Center Stakeholder Working Group, 7 October 2002.

[19] On making available official documents, see “Purpose and Contribution in Editing Naval Documents,” in *Naval History and Maritime Strategy: Collected Essays*, ed. John B. Hattendorf(Malabar, Fla.: Krieger, 2000), 91–108; and Christine Hughes in a yet-to-be-published paper “Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dudley W. Knox, and Naval Documents.”

[20] See Benjamin W. Labaree, “The State of American Maritime History in the 1990s”; Kenneth J. Hagan and Mark R. Shulman, “Mahan Plus One Hundred: The Current State of American Naval History”; and David Alan Rosenberg, “Beyond Toddlerhood: Thoughts on the Future of Naval History”; all in *Ubi Sumus? The State of Maritime and Naval History*, ed. John B. Hattendorf(Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1994), 363–419. See also, Frank Broeze, ed., *Maritime History at the Crossroads: A Critical Review of Recent Historiography*, Research in Maritime History 9 (St. John’s, Nfld.: International Maritime Economic History Association, 1995). For reflections on more recent developments, see Jaap R. Bruijn, “Reflections on the Recent Past of Maritime History in the Netherlands and Abroad,” and Frank J. A. Broeze, “Riding the Wave: The State of Maritime History, Opportunities and Challenges,” in *Frutta di Mare: Evolution and Revolution in the Maritime World in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Paul C. van Royen et al. (Amsterdam: Batavian Lion International, 1998), 9–18, 195–207, and Sarah Palmer, *Seeing the Sea: The Maritime Dimension in History. An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of Greenwich 11th May 2000* (Greenwich, U.K.: University of Greenwich, 2000).

[21] Benjamin W. Labaree et al., *America and the Sea: A Maritime History* (Mystic, Conn.: Mystic Seaport, 1998)

[22] *Mystic Seaport: The Museum of America and the Sea*, www.mysticseaport.org/.

[23] Over the years, the conference proceedings have appeared under slightly different titles and from different publishers. The first published volume was Robert Love, ed., *Changing Interpretations and New Sources in Naval History* (New York: Garland, 1980). The fourth and fifth symposia papers appeared under the title *New Aspects of Naval History*, by two different publishers (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1981; and Baltimore: Nautical and Aviation, 1985); the sixth and seventh appeared under the title *Naval History* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1987, 1988). From the eighth symposium (1987) to the fourteenth symposium (1999), the Naval Institute Press published the proceedings under the title *New Interpretations in Naval History*. The fifteenth symposium was planned to begin on 12 September 2001 but was canceled due to the terrorist attacks on the previous day in New York and Washington. However, many of the papers that were to have been presented there were published as the first issue of the e-journal *International Journal of Naval History* 1, no. 1 (April 2002), www.ijnhonline.org/index_apr_02.html.

[24] "Sources on U.S. Naval History in the United States," *Naval Historical Center*, www.history.navy.mil/sources/index.htm.

[25] "Naval War College Library: Naval Historical Collection," *Naval War College*, nwcinet/library/2general%20information/libarch.htm. The library site is www.nwc.navy.mil/library.

[26] This quotation and the information in this paragraph is based on Dr. David A. Rosenberg, chairman, “The Report of the Secretary of the Navy’s Advisory Subcommittee on Naval History for 1998,” to Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig, 27 June 1999, quotation from p. 1.

[27] Dr. David A. Rosenberg, chairman, “The Report of the Secretary of the Navy’s Advisory Subcommittee on Naval History for 2001,” to Secretary of the Navy Gordon R. England, 7 December 2001, 6.

[28] Ibid., 1.

[29] OPNAV [Navy Staff] Instruction 5750.4D of 23 August 2002.

[30] “Transforming Graduate and Professional Military Education,” Graduate Education Review Board briefing, 2002, 14 (using 1998 data).

[31] Richard Suttie [Capt., USN], “The Value of Graduate Education for Corporate America,” white paper for the Graduate Education Review Board, 2002, 4.



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