

**“THE FOURTH DIMENSION OF NAVAL TACTICS”: THE U.S.  
NAVY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS, 1919-1939**

A Dissertation

by

RYAN DAVID WADLE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2011

Major Subject: History

“The Fourth Dimension of Naval Tactics”: The U.S. Navy and Public Relations, 1919-  
1939

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	James C. Bradford
Committee Members,	Ralph Adams
	Terrence Hoagwood
	John C. Lenihan
	Brian Linn
Head of Department,	Walter Buenger

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## **ABSTRACT**

“The Fourth Dimension of Naval Tactics”: The U.S. Navy and Public Relations, 1919-1939. (May 2011)

Ryan David Wadle, B.A., Iowa State University; M.A., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. James C. Bradford

Prior to 1917, the United States Navy only utilized public relations techniques during times of war or to attract recruits into naval service. Following World I, the Navy confronted several daunting problems, including the postwar demobilization of naval assets, the proposed creation of an independent air service, and a public desire for naval arms limitation which many officers believed would endanger the Navy’s ability to fulfill its missions. These issues threatened the generous support that the Navy had received from Congress for a quarter of a century, and also hampered the service’s attempts to incorporate new weapons systems into its arsenal and recruit high-quality manpower.

In response to these challenges, the Navy developed a peacetime public relations capability during the interwar period, despite the fact that many senior naval officials placed a low priority on public relations. Their attitude led subordinates in different parts of the Navy Department to perform public relations tasks despite lacking official orders to carry out such work. Such efforts were haphazard, redundant, handicapped by tradition, and dependent largely upon individual initiative.

To augment its meager capabilities, the Navy relied upon external groups, such as the Navy League, to lobby the public for naval expansion. The service also developed formal and informal ties to the mass media, particularly the rapidly expanding motion picture industry. These disparate elements attempted to convince the public that the Navy was a haven for morally upright masculine behavior, a service able to integrate aircraft and submarines into its force structure and keep their operators safe, and a vital national asset with value beyond basic national defense.

During the interwar period, the Navy expanded and reorganized the ways in which it courted public opinion. By forging ties with motion picture studios, radio broadcasters, and the print media, it was able to improve the image of the service, attract high quality recruits, and gained the public support for its drive to gain the resources needed to modernize and expand the fleet. During the same era, naval officials became more adept at minimizing the negative impact of the accidents linked to the development of aviation and submarines. Developments of the era laid the foundation for the institutional development of public relations and enhanced media relations during World War II and in the decades that followed.

To Jenny, who makes all of this worth it.

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The projected required extensive research in a number of different archives scattered throughout the country, and the staffs at each facility contributed to the success of my research. I thank the staffs of the Houghton Library at Harvard University, the Warner Brothers Archive at the University of Southern California, the Bancroft Library at the University of California-Berkeley, and the Library of Congress for their research assistance. I want to single out Charles Johnson and Nate Patch at the National Archives, Dr. Evelyn Cherpak at the Naval War College Library, Barbara Hall at the Margaret Herrick Library, Dr. David Chapman at Texas A&M's Cushing Library, and Mark Quigley at the UCLA Film and Television Archive for their valuable assistance in locating new and valuable sources that I incorporated into this project.

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I accept responsibility for any errors found in the text of this dissertation.



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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERWAR NAVY PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Among the trends which defined the twentieth century, the rise in the scope and power of mass media was one of the most important. Beginning with controversial newspapers publishers such as Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst goading the American public towards intervention in Cuba in the late 1890s, and continuing up through the Internet Revolution of the present, the relatively rapid changes in mass media forced the American people and institutions to adjust to the new circumstances. Expansion of the media forced the Army and Navy, like virtually all elements of the modern nation-state, to adjust and, in time, to find ways to utilize the new forms of communication to their advantage. This process of adaptation has led the military, in recent years, even to employ video games both to stimulate recruiting and to train pilots to “fly” unmanned aerial drones. Historical inquiry into how the military services have used changing media conditions to enhance their public image is of much importance today as the U.S. military attempts to deal with increasing political pressures amid nationwide fiscal distress to justify current levels of defense spending.

The experience of the Navy between the World Wars provides a useful case with which to examine this phenomenon for three reasons. First, the interwar period saw the advent of rapid political and cultural changes which radically altered the Navy’s base of

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This dissertation follows the style of *The Journal of Military History*.

domestic support. The milieu in which the interwar Navy sought to influence popular opinion was far from favorable. The modern steel navy begun during the 1880s faced several challenges in the aftermath of World War I, not the least of which was how best to counter a public opinion which blamed the naval arms race for contributing to the outbreak of war. Growing dissatisfaction with high taxes and President Woodrow Wilson's and Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels' insistence upon a massive naval construction program led the American public to demand naval disarmament. This public protest movement, which drew its members from a wide cross-section of American life, including the women's movement, organized labor, college students, and the churches, insisted that further naval construction was politically, morally, and economically irresponsible. The disarmament movement resulted in the naval limitation treaties signed at the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922 and its successors. These developments denied the Navy access to its traditional sources of support and funding: the President and Congress.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, these upheavals caused the Navy's budget to remain stagnant during the 1920s and into the 1930s. The onset of the Great Depression only further compounded these problems since it left many convinced that the Navy was an unaffordable luxury for the nation. Budgetary issues complicated the Navy's gradual transition from a surface fleet centered around the battleship to a balanced fleet which sought to control the "three planes" of naval warfare: the air, the surface, and subsurface.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence C. Hoag, *Preface to Preparedness: The Washington Disarmament Conference and Public Opinion* (Washington, DC: American Council on Public Affairs, 1941), 89-123. Although dated, the book provides an excellent survey of the different groups formed to support disarmament and of the newspapers editorials written on the issue; George F. Baer, *One Hundred Years of American Sea Power: The U.S. Navy 1890-1990* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 39-40, 48, 59-61, 86-7.

The cost of developing new weapons systems, particularly aircraft and submarines, threatened to overwhelm the Navy's increasingly limited budgets during the latter 1920s.

Finally, the numbers and types of media available to the public dramatically increased during the interwar period. The various forms of printed media, including newspapers, periodicals, and literature, continued to thrive, and they were joined by the rapidly growing radio and film industries during the 1920s. Adapting to this expansion of sources for information and entertainment would not be easy for the Navy because, as some officers claimed, the service traditionally eschewed direct involvement in public relations. This attitude was perhaps best expressed by Rear Admiral William A. Moffett who said, "... to the average Naval officer, the word "publicity" is anathema. I was brought up to hate it myself, and I still hate it."<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation analyzes how the interwar Navy sought to shape public attitudes by generating a positive public image of the service and its missions utilizing both the new media outlets as well as traditional forms of publicizing the service. As one naval officer surmised, the interwar Navy needed to master the "the fourth dimension of modern naval tactics" to successfully navigate these dramatic changes in politics, naval policy, and culture.<sup>3</sup> This study answers two primary questions: How did naval officers – professionals who were ostensibly above politics – attempt to influence public perceptions in order to secure service goals? How well did the Navy adapt its message to specific events, long term trends, and different forms of media?

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Vincent Davis, *Postwar Defense Policy and the U.S. Navy, 1943-1946* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 46-7.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Beskin, "Public Relations: The Fourth Dimension of Modern Naval Tactics," United States Naval Institute *Proceedings* [hereafter referred to as *Proceedings*] 67, no. 9 (September 1941), 1296.

This dissertation examines the evolution of the Navy's public relations efforts from the end of World War I to the outbreak of World War II in 1939. For the purposes of this study, the term public relations refers to the methods and activities employed to establish a favorable image with the public at large. The evolution of the Navy's public image is placed within a larger cultural context. The 1920s are often regarded as the birthplace of modern advertising and public relations techniques. When appropriate, this project incorporates fundamentals from the field of public relations as it existed at that time.

The Navy's public relations efforts are ripe for examination as no study has fully analyzed their development during the interwar period. The most pertinent works appeared under the guidance of public relations historian Scott M. Cutlip at the University of Wisconsin in the 1960s. At that time, the military services assigned public affairs officers to study under Cutlip with the goal of researching and writing the history of their craft. Two studies in particular, F. Donald Scovel's "Helm's a Lee: A History of the Development of the Public Affairs Function in the United States Navy, 1861-1941" (1968) and R. Dale Klinkerman's "From Blackout at Pearl Harbor to Spotlight on Tokyo Bay: A Study of the Evolution in U.S. Naval Public Relations Policies and Practices During World War II" (1972) examine some of the Navy's interwar public relations efforts. Both projects benefit greatly from personal interviews of key individuals who worked within the Navy's public relations offices that provided information not found in documentary sources. Klinkerman, in particular, argues that the Navy remained passive in developing its public image, opting to refrain from doing so unless asked for

assistance by the media. Unfortunately, both studies narrowly define what constituted public relations and thus only briefly examine or completely ignore other aspects of Navy publicity, including the activities of the Navy Recruiting Bureau, the Historical Section, and the Navy Department Motion Picture Board. In addition, the authors deliberately chose not to analyze the image the Navy attempted to project to the public and instead confined their analysis to matters of policy and organization.<sup>4</sup>

Vincent Davis' *The Admirals Lobby* (1967) provides a worthy overview of the topic but is over forty years old and does not provide a complete description of the service's activities during the interwar period. Davis argues that decentralization of responsibility in the Navy Department aided – but did not generate – public promotion of naval programs. He distinguishes between *direct action* intended to sway members of Congress and *indirect action* that attempted to influence public opinion and through citizens to secure greater political support of the service from elected representatives. Davis also addresses fledgling institutions such as the Information Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence that helped direct the Navy's public relations campaigns during the interwar period. He concludes that the Navy – excepting the naval aviation community – generally eschewed indirect action in favor of direct personal lobbying of congressmen by senior naval officers and thus devotes little attention to indirect promotional

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<sup>4</sup> Scott M. Cutlip, *Public Relations History: From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Antecedents* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995), xiv-xv; F. Donald Scovel, "Helm's a Lee: A History of the Development of the Public Affairs Function in the United States Navy, 1861-1941" (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1968), ii-iii, vii; R. Dale Klinkerman, "From Blackout at Pearl Harbor to Spotlight on Tokyo Bay: A Study of the Evolution in U.S. Naval Public Relations Policies and Practices During World War II" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1972), 10.



activities.<sup>5</sup> This dissertation contends that the Navy often used the relationships forged with political and media elites as a means of generating a positive image among the general public.

Other scholars have discussed the use of public relations by supporters of the Navy's burgeoning air arm in the decades prior to World War II. William F. Trimble's *Admiral William A. Moffett: Architect of Naval Aviation* (1994) shows how Moffett, as head of the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics from 1921 to 1933, used public displays of naval aviation's technical prowess to curry public and congressional support for naval aviation. Moffett did this by entering naval aircraft in air races and ordering highly visible tests and endurance flights designed as much to attract public attention as by the need to measure the capabilities of new aircraft. Trimble's work rightly places Moffett at the forefront of Navy public relations, but this dissertation endeavors to place Moffett's activities within the context of the Navy's overall public relations efforts.<sup>6</sup>

Most previous studies either examine public relations as they pertained to a specific issue or focus simply on a single facet, such as the relationship between the Navy and Hollywood. Despite these limitations, such works offer interesting hypotheses and demonstrate the need for follow-up inquiry based upon their findings. Peter Karsten and Mark Shulman both contend that the Navy consciously engaged in public relations as early as the late nineteenth century and became quite adept at using celebrations of naval history to promote the contemporary fleet. In *Manning the New Navy: The*

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<sup>5</sup> Vincent Davis, *The Admiral's Lobby* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 46-7, 94-100, 251.

<sup>6</sup> William F. Trimble, *Admiral William A. Moffett: Architect of Naval Aviation* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 120-4.

*Development of Modern Naval Enlisted Force, 1899-1940* (1978), Frederick Harrod argues that the recruiting campaigns of the interwar period – although limited due to reduced manpower (approximately 80,000 enlisted men) requirements – emphasized personal gain and travel to exotic locales. Gerald Wheeler's *Prelude to Pearl Harbor* (1963) surveys the Navy's attempts to use of print articles and non-fiction books to make public its case for renewed naval construction in the aftermath of the Washington Conference. Finally, Phillip T. Rosen's "The Treaty Navy, 1919-1937" in Kenneth Hagan, ed., *In Peace and War: Interpretations of American Naval History, 1775-1978*, concludes that the Navy public relations sought to link the service to the economic prosperity of the 1920s and to economic recovery and neutrality in the 1930s. All of these works suggest the importance of Navy public relations, but more information is needed about the organizations which undertook public relations work. Additionally, more is needed to analyze the specific ways these organizations promoted specific policy goals.<sup>7</sup>

The other trend in scholarship pertaining to the Navy's public relations is the emphasis upon the relationship between the Navy and Hollywood film studios. While most of these studies examine the modern Navy, some works explore this relationship during the interwar period. Foremost among these is Lawrence Suid's *Sailing on the*

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Karsten, *The Naval Aristocracy: The Golden Age of Annapolis and the Emergence of Modern American Navalism* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 362, 367-71; Mark Russell Shulman, *Navalism and the Emergence of American Sea Power, 1882-1893* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 9-25, 50-1; Frederick Harrod, *Manning the New Navy: The Development of the Modern Naval Enlisted Force* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 45-6; Gerald E. Wheeler, *Prelude to Pearl Harbor* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1963), 57-8; Phillip T. Rosen, "The Treaty Navy, 1919-1937," in *In Peace and War: Interpretations of American Naval History, 1775-1978*, ed. Kenneth Hagan, 227-9 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984).

*Silver Screen: Hollywood and the U.S. Navy* (1996) which places films and the production process in the context of the competing interests of film studios and of the Navy. He relates the content of films to broader naval developments of the day and assesses how films enhanced or detracted from the Navy's public image. Thus he argues that the wave of Navy-themed films which appeared in the late 1930s and early 1940s represented an attempt to stress the importance of preparedness to the public in a time of growing international crisis.<sup>8</sup> This project expands further on Suid's work by incorporating additional analysis of the content of the films in question and places these films within the context of the Navy's other public relations activities.

In summation, the existing literature provides extremely useful background information, but is either dated, fragmented, or approaches the issue from a relatively narrow focus. This project builds on these previous ideas but makes three new and important contributions to the topic. First, it explores the relationships between the different of elements of Navy public relations, many of which have remained hidden or unknown to this time. Even after the Navy gradually accepted the necessity of performing public relations work, there remained an undercurrent of paranoia that the public might object if it learned too much about the service's public relations practices. Second, it serves as a case study of how an institution with little or no previous public relations experience tried to connect with the general public. As more pipelines of information opened to the public, the public in turn had multiple avenues to learn about

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Suid, *Sailing on the Silver Screen: Hollywood and the Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), x, 55. See also Carl Boggs, Tom Pollard, *The Hollywood War Machine: U.S. Militarism and Popular Culture* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2007), and David L. Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004).

and express their opinion on national policy. Third, it incorporates a cultural analysis of different themes of Navy public relations and how they worked to fulfill the service's basic needs of securing money and manpower. Earlier studies, while valuable, predate the development of several analytical methodologies, including media studies and theories of masculinity. Incorporating these new tools is crucial to broaden our understanding of how Navy public relations worked.

To broaden the understanding of the history of Navy public relations, this project incorporates many primary sources not utilized by previous studies. These sources include the files of press releases issued by the Navy News Bureau and its successor public relations organizations housed at the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., and the National Archives at College Park, Maryland, respectively, that describe how these Navy organizations operated. Numerous new personal paper collections are analyzed, including those of Navy League leaders William Howard Gardiner and Walter Bruce Howe that shed much light on the organization's operations. This project also explores the writings and papers of William Randolph Hearst as well as analyzing the pro-Navy films and newsreels produced under his company's auspices. Literature from the period also receives attention, especially juvenile fiction books whose authors sometimes claimed direct inspiration from naval authorities to write appealing stories of life in the Navy. These sources, when examined in combination with previously utilized sources, broaden the analysis beyond that of previous organizational histories or narrower policy studies.

Chapter II traces the history the Navy's public relations activities prior to 1918. During the Civil War, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles assigned a small staff to handle press relations, but this effort was disbanded with the end of the war. Attempts to informally bolster the Navy's image developed in the 1880s via the mass media and with the 1902 formation of the Navy League of the United States. Up to 1917, the Navy's receipt of adequate amounts of funding from Congress gave the service little incentive to reach out to the public. Only the Navy's Recruiting Bureau, in its attempts to secure manpower for the growing fleet, actively promoted the service. Not until the creation of the Navy News Bureau in 1917 by Secretary Daniels, did a formal structure exist to manage the Navy's public image.

The milieu of the interwar decades, including the popular rejection of naval expansion, is the focus of Chapter III. The public grew increasingly discontented with militarism and navalism and rejected the Navy's desire to resume naval construction. Brigadier General William Mitchell capitalized on this discontent to promote air power as a means for the nation to maintain a technological edge over adversaries, reduce military and naval expenditures, and prevent any further increase in international political tensions which accompanied naval construction. The Navy also engaged in an ill-timed bout of internecine warfare between Secretary Daniels and several prominent senior officers, especially Admiral William S. Sims, over the secretary's management of the service in World War I. While the furor over disarmament and Mitchell's claims receded by the mid-1920s after the successful implementation of the treaties signed at the Washington Conference, critics of naval expansion, notably the historian Charles

Beard, remained active well into the 1930s. In addition, this chapter describes the development of the public relations profession during the interwar period and the influence of Edward Bernays within the field.

Chapter IV examines the various institutions established within the Navy Department to manage the service's public image. The low priority given to public relations during most of the interwar period and the Navy's diffuse bureaucratic structure meant that many different parts of the service undertook public relations work. The three largest and most active structures were the Information Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence, the Navy Recruiting Bureau, and the Bureau of Aeronautics, but the Navy Band and the Office of Naval Records and Library also worked to bolster the Navy's image. Each of these organizations worked independently of one another towards securing specific goals, such as increasing the size and power of naval aviation or filling the Navy's manpower needs. The Navy's diffuse organizational structure allowed Captain Dudley W. Knox and Rear Admiral William Moffett in their capacities as officer in charge of the Office of Naval Records and Library and the Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, to initiate many public relations activities despite lacking an official mandate to do so. The capabilities of these organizations increased as the Navy continued to refine its policies and practices.

The Navy's public image depended on far more activity than what the service could accomplish on its own, and thus the service depended on relationships with external organizations to extend the reach of its public relations. In this vein, Chapter V studies the maintenance and growth of civilian lobbying and historical organizations.

The civilian-led Navy League led the way in lobbying on behalf of the Navy and collaborated with naval officers to establish the popular annual celebration of Navy Day. To better educate the public on the Navy's heritage, groups such as the Naval Order of the United States, the Naval Historical Society, and the Naval Historical Foundation worked on the service's behalf to promote naval history. The ambitions of these organizations varied widely and their efforts ultimately met with varying degrees of success, but they provided additional avenues for naval publicity to reach the masses.

Chapter VI explains the Navy's relationship with the mass media. During the interwar period, the Navy developed commercial relationships with the new and pre-existing forms of communication. Some retired naval officers pursued careers in journalism, print fiction, and the film industry and used their ties to the service to varying degrees to facilitate closer cooperation between their former and current employers. The film industry established particularly strong relationships with the Navy, facilitating the development of a symbiotic relationship which included feature film cooperation, permissions to film newsreels, and even support for recruiting efforts undertaken at film screenings. The chapter also discusses the advocacy undertaken by media magnate William Randolph Hearst, who used all parts of his media empire to support naval expansion throughout the interwar period.

To analyze the image that the Navy sought to project to the American public, the following three chapters explore specific themes of naval publicity. Chapter VII examines the Navy's attempt to project an image of the "ideal sailor" as part of its program to recruit young men to enter the Naval Academy or enlist with the fleet.

Recruiting posters, films produced by the Hollywood studios and the Navy Recruiting Bureau, and various forms of print media touted the ability of the service to transform boys into men. The Navy promoted a set of distinct traits that comprised the Ideal Sailor, including the acquisition of physical strength, the development of good morals and sound judgment, and the exclusion of non-whites from these benefits. The Navy intended this attractive vision of naval service to improve the quality of manpower after it had declined during the early 1920s.

Chapter VIII examines how the Navy's projected an image of technological transformation to the public. The chapter explores how the Navy balanced the need to demonstrate cutting edge technologies with its ability to ensure the safety of the officers and men tasked with operating such innovations. In particular, the Bureau of Aeronautics during the Moffett era entered aircraft into prominent air racing competitions and conducted endurance flights to emphasize innovation. The Navy used fictional films to promote advances in submarine safety following a string of highly publicized and controversial accidents that killed dozens of sailors. At times, this message could appear dichotomous as the Navy often sought to promote these new transformational weapons systems at the same time it argued for the necessity of a strong battleship fleet.

Chapter IX focuses on depictions of the Navy's basic responsibility for national defense. During the interwar period, the Navy and its supporters argued that the current fleet was inadequate to defend the nation, its interests, and its overseas commerce. Unfortunately for them, the relatively calm international situation and the ongoing



efforts at limiting naval armaments muted explicit calls for national defense. Supporters of naval expansion also focused on its role in maintaining national prosperity and pushed to expand America's merchant marine. At other points, however, the Navy sometimes relied upon historical analyses which typically argued for a strong fleet built to the limit of the naval disarmament treaties to maintain a credible national defense. Only on rare occasions were fears of a foreign threat, typically Japan or Britain, publicly expressed. The Navy relied upon more subtle means to promote its national defense capabilities, such as ensuring that its annual fleet problems received press coverage, although the amount of access granted the media varied and thus could affect the media's ability to cover the exercise. In addition, many of the films released in this period had an implicit message of preparedness as they portrayed naval personnel training to perform their duty to help defend the nation.

The concluding chapter addresses two primary themes. First, it briefly discusses how the Navy's public relations policy changed concurrently with the start of World War II in Europe. Beginning in 1939, the Navy's Public Relations Branch mobilized to a wartime footing and focused almost exclusively on the need for preparedness. Second, the chapter assesses whether the Navy's public relations campaigns from 1919 to 1939 succeeded or failed to enhance the service's image. The Navy's activities are judged using elements of public relations theory, examining data about the service's budgets and manpower, and contemporary public opinion polls concerning naval affairs and national defense. The thorough analysis of the Navy's public relations efforts during the interwar era places institutional developments in the context of decades marked by the

concurrent emergence of new naval technologies and mass culture which had great impact on American society and the naval service which defended it.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **FROM THE SIX FRIGATES TO THE NEW NAVALISM: NAVY PUBLIC RELATIONS, 1794-1918**

Prior to the interwar period, the Navy engaged in sporadic attempts to manage its public image. In general, these ventures only occurred when a distinct need arose, typically during periods when the Navy sought to expand its size or during wartime. Changes in naval policy usually involved little, if any, attempt by the service to improve its political or public status. During the early twentieth century, multiple proposals advocating the creation of a peacetime public relations organization were made, but all were ultimately ignored or rejected by the upper levels of the Navy's bureaucratic structure. Despite the hesitation to create a public relations bureau within the Navy, the service was not ignorant of the potential value of public relations and capitalized on specific events, especially the cruise of the Great White Fleet during 1907 and 1908. At the turn of the twentieth century, the need for additional manpower prompted the Navy to modernize its recruiting practices in order to broaden the geographic base from where it could attract recruits. Concurrently, several organizations founded during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries attempted to promote the service on a national level in order to increase the amount of political support the service received. In 1917, the Navy Department finally formed an official public relations entity capable of managing of the Navy's public image.

The United States Navy came into existence as a separate institution in 1794 in order to guard American interests against the political chaos in Europe and piratical raids

originating from the Barbary Coast. Seeking to build nationwide support for the Navy, the John Adams administration spread supply contracts for the nascent fleet as widely across the states as possible. Most political leaders agreed that the nation required a Navy, but this did not prevent Federalists and Republicans from vigorously debating naval policy for the next thirty years, resulting in several fluctuations in the size and mission of the fleet. While Federalists pressed for a Navy composed of capital ships capable of intervention in European conflicts, Republicans argued for the creation of a fleet of smaller ships capable of basic coastal defense and overseas commerce protection. These debates, however, occurred primarily amongst America's political leadership and rarely involved direct appeals to the general public. Eventually, the "anti-navalists" emerged victorious by the late 1820s, partially because the capital ships which navalists insisted the country should construct proved ill-suited to the patrolling duties required of American ships serving in overseas squadrons.<sup>1</sup>

The Navy remained a relatively small organization for most of the antebellum period, although the fleet did slowly expand its reach around the globe and established eight overseas squadrons. In 1842 a system of independent bureaus which reported to the Secretary of the Navy replaced the old Board of Commissioners which, while a useful first step in modernizing the service's bureaucracy, had proved increasingly unable to keep up with new naval technologies then in development. Some of this growth and reform came about due to pressures from a variety of interest groups and

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<sup>1</sup> Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 1; Craig Symonds, *Navalists and Antinavalists: Naval Policy Debate in the US, 1785-1827* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980). For an example of Congressional debate over naval policy, see pages 200-11.

individuals who had a stake in a stronger Navy. Investors in whale fishing, supporters of Manifest Destiny, and individual promoters lobbied Congress to authorize several expeditions throughout the globe, including the United States Exploring Expedition between 1838 and 1842 as well as later expeditions to the Northern Pacific and the Rio la Plata. These expeditions, which resulted in vastly improved charts for previously unexplored islands and territories, greatly aided the growth of American seaborne commerce in the 1840s and 1850s. Although many of these improvements and expeditions resulted from public and political pressure, these activities represented attempts by outsiders to change naval policy for their benefit and did not result from Navy-directed public relations.<sup>2</sup>

This did not mean, however, that the Navy rejected all attempts at self-promotion in the antebellum period. The USS *Princeton*, commissioned in 1843, emerged as a product of the various reform measures. The ship, designed by John Ericsson, incorporated several new technologies, including screw propulsion and the two heaviest guns then aboard an American warship. Captain Robert F. Stockton, the ship's commanding officer, actively promoted the vessel's advanced nature by inviting numerous Congressmen and newspaper reporters to take cruises aboard the ship. Unfortunately, the *Princeton* acquired unwanted notoriety on 28 February 1844 when one of its heavy guns exploded while the ship hosted President John Tyler, former First Lady Dolley Madison, and several members of the Cabinet and Congress aboard. The

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<sup>2</sup> John H. Schroeder, *Shaping a Maritime Empire: The Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy, 1829-1861* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985), 6-9.

explosion killed eight guests, including former Secretary of the Navy Abel Upshur, who by this time had become Secretary of State. Though the accident and the resulting funeral procession through the streets of Washington, D.C., likewise aroused much public and press attention, no public furor arose when a board of inquiry declined to assign blame for the accident to Captain Stockton.<sup>3</sup>

The onset of the Civil War required a rapid and extensive naval mobilization from both the Union and the Confederate States of America. Both nations mobilized numbers of ships and men previously thought unimaginable and the Union ended the war with a fleet larger than even Great Britain's Royal Navy. As the war raged, however, the Navy failed to receive as much press coverage as the Union Army due to three basic factors: the Navy's policy against assigning volunteer officers to positions of high command, the difficulty shipboard reporters encountered when conveying information to their publishers, and finally the disdain with which the upper reaches of the Navy's civilian hierarchy treated press correspondents. The former proved especially crucial as the Navy lacked an officer class comparable to the Army's "political generals" which could generate goodwill through their political or social standing in their communities.<sup>4</sup>

Even if the Navy failed to receive press coverage comparable to that given the Army, or proportionate to its contribution to Union victory, it did establish a closer relationship with the press than had existed prior to the war. Secretary of the Navy

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<sup>3</sup> Ann Blackman, "Fatal Cruise of the USS *Princeton*," *Naval History* 19, no. 5 (October 2005), 37-41.

<sup>4</sup> Richard West, "The Navy and the Press During the Civil War," *Proceedings* 63, no. 1 (January 1938), 36-8.

Gideon Welles, himself a former newspaper man, demonstrated the ability to exploit operational success more rapidly than his counterparts in the War Department, and he also attempted to maintain an open flow of information between his officer and reporters. Welles, however, hampered relations with the press corps and stifled some of the positive gains made during his tenure by routinely practiced self-censorship and inhibited the release of battle reports to the press corps.<sup>5</sup>

In what can be considered the first military operation of the war, a New York-based reporter and a self-described “sailor of fortune,” Bradley Sillick Osbon, accompanied the aborted expedition to relieve and resupply Fort Sumter just prior to the outbreak of war in April 1861. Although a civilian, Osbon secured a posting as a clerk and signal officer aboard the transport *Harriet Lane*, which allowed him to observe the bombardment and subsequent surrender of Fort Sumter. He would later receive a similar posting to serve aboard Admiral David Farragut’s flagship *Hartford*, most prominently during the attack on Mobile Bay. In the course of his service with Farragut, Osbon published dozens of newspaper articles syndicated in many Northern newspapers and also produced a reference book of naval vessels that other reporters used frequently throughout the war. Osbon, however, incurred the wrath of Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox because he omitted Fox’s name from the initial press reports regarding the unsuccessful naval attack on Charleston in 1863. This later came to a head in 1864 when Fox believed Osbon deliberately published sensitive material regarding the attack on Fort Fisher. As it happened, a newspaper which Osbon wrote for published a

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 40-1.

pre-written article too soon, but Osbon paid the price for this mistake by spending the remainder of the war in prison.<sup>6</sup>

The incident with Osbon highlights the balancing act naval officials managed between the desire of the public for information concerning naval operations and the Navy's need to maintain operational security. The release of too little information sometimes led an ill-informed public to press the Navy to alter its strategic plans for the sake of local considerations, such as demanding more patrols for fishing areas to protect against Confederate raiders. At the other extreme, the unregulated flow of information into the public sphere allowed, for instance, Captain Raphael Semmes, commander of the Confederate raider *Alabama*, to intercept Union shipping on the high seas. Officers themselves sometimes became the source of security leaks, prompting senior officers to order their subordinates to refrain from dealing directly with the press corps. These problems persisted throughout the war as the Union Navy's leaders never found an entirely satisfactory solution to the issue. As F. Donald Scovel argues, the war simply did not give the Navy enough time to iron out a public relations policy given the lack of a foundation on which such a policy could be developed.<sup>7</sup>

The end of the Civil War resulted in a rapid demobilization of the Navy, and the number of ships in service dropped from 671 in 1865 to only fifty-two by 1870. Given

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<sup>6</sup> Albert Bigelow Paine, *A Sailor of Fortune: Personal Memoirs of Captain B.S. Osbon* (New York: McClure, Phillips, and Co., 1906), 114; West, "The Navy and the Press," 38-9. Fox initially wanted his name left out of any reports concerning the attack, fearing that the assault's failure could damage his career, but later attacked Osbon for adhering to the deal once it was clear that the attack would not harm his career.

<sup>7</sup> Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 5-7



that the Navy returned to its traditional missions of overseas commerce protection and squadron service, Congress saw insufficient reason to appropriate more funds and accept the service's advice regarding naval expansion. Many within the Navy, however, viewed the situation quite differently. Instead of the service adequately performing the mission assigned to it by civilian leadership, they believed the inadequate funding created an ever wider gap in capability between the American fleet and those in Europe. In 1869, the Navy withdrew the frigate *Wampanoag* from active service just two years after its commissioning, a decision which angered many naval officers. The ship, designed to hunt down Confederate commerce raiders during the Civil War, proved exceptionally fast during its trials in 1868 and set a speed record for American naval vessels of nearly eighteen knots. However, the *Wampanoag*'s high rate of coal consumption and potential instability in heavy seas would have made the ship a liability in overseas squadron service and provided ample reason for the Navy to condemn the vessel. To some naval officers, however, this decision represented a mistake which removed from service the most technologically advanced ship in the fleet.<sup>8</sup>

In 1873, Spanish authorities captured the *Virginius* off Santiago, Cuba, as it carried passengers and contraband materials bound for Cubans rebelling against Spanish rule during the Ten Years' War. Capture of the ship and the execution of nearly half the ship's complement touched off a war scare in the United States against Spain. In response to the provocation, the Navy organized a series of fleet maneuvers off the

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<sup>8</sup> Lance C. Buhl, "Maintaining 'An American Navy,'" in *In Peace and War: Interpretations of American Naval History*, rev. ed., ed. Kenneth Hagan (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 112-33; Robert L. O'Connell, *Sacred Vessels: The Cult of the Battleship and the Rise of the U.S. Navy* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), 54-5.

Florida Keys and recalled the European Squadron to American waters. In hindsight, it is clear that the Navy overestimated its own readiness for war. The twenty-five warships assembled steamed near the Keys from January until May 1874. Rather than a display of naval strength, the affair was marked by numerous equipment breakdowns which demonstrated the deterioration of the material condition of the fleet. As Europe began transitioning towards modern, steel-hulled, oceangoing vessels, American sailors still toiled aboard wooden frigates and ironclad monitors. Magazines and newspapers criticized the performance of the American fleet so extensively that the Navy ended the maneuvers earlier than planned.<sup>9</sup>

By the early 1870s, the first stirrings of reform began to appear within the Navy's officer corps. Naval officers, distressed at the decline in naval strength and also their own opportunities for regular promotion due to the lack of ships with suitable billets, sought support for building new warships and to professionalize the officer corps. A forum for reform appeared with the establishment of the United States Naval Institute in 1873. The new organization, housed on the grounds of the Naval Academy in Annapolis, intended to stimulate discussion of naval history, policy, and strategy amongst naval officers. The following year, the Institute began publishing a journal, *Proceedings*, which allowed officers and interested civilians to debate past, present, and future naval affairs. Although not designed to conduct public relations, the Naval Institute came to function in such a role when civilians began subscribing to its

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<sup>9</sup> William Still, *American Sea Power in the Old World: The United States Navy in European and Near Eastern Waters, 1868-1917* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980), 68-70.

publications, leading to an expansion of the Institute in 1898 to include the publishing of books on naval topics.<sup>10</sup>

The pace of reform accelerated during the 1880s as proponents of the “new navalism” began to broaden their base of appeal both within the officer corps and also among the public. From this period until the outbreak of World War I, the Navy had its public image bolstered by three different means: the use of naval history to argue for expansion of the contemporary fleet, the activities of external organizations and media, and significant movements and displays of the contemporary fleet. When compared to the pre-1865 period, the Navy’s ability to promote itself increased dramatically, but also failed to grow consistently. Save for the expanded activities of the Navy Recruiting Service, nearly all of the growth in Navy public relations occurred outside of the Navy Department. The Navy would rely heavily upon external support for public relations until 1941, but this also meant that the service’s public image could wax and wane depending upon external events.<sup>11</sup>

A key reform for the Navy which eventually had far more reaching public consequences came in 1884 with the establishment of the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. The first of its kind, the War College afforded naval officers the opportunity to broaden their knowledge about the naval profession and of naval warfare. The college’s first president and chief proponent of its creation, Commodore Stephen B. Luce, sought to ensure that the Naval War College would have a faculty of the highest

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<sup>10</sup> Buhl, “Maintaining an American Navy,” 116.

<sup>11</sup> Shulman, *Navalism*, *passim*.

quality and recruited talented members of the officer corps to teach there. Luce's need for a Professor of Naval Warfare and his philosophical belief that lessons could be derived from the study of history led him to recruit Commander Alfred Thayer Mahan for the faculty. Mahan, himself the son of noted military theorist Dennis Hart Mahan, began teaching at the Naval War College in 1886 and assumed the presidency of the college when Luce transferred to sea duty that same year.<sup>12</sup>

Mahan transformed the lectures he delivered to his students at the Naval War College into his seminal work *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, which Little and Brown of Boston published in 1890. Influenced by a variety of sources, including Baron de Jomini, late nineteenth-century intellectual trends, and a desire to stamp out the "naval heresies" of the 1880s, Mahan intended his book to serve as a publically digestible rationale for the importance of navies in general and of a strong offensive navy in particular. Mahan argued that "control of the seas" represented the most important mission for a navy to undertake in time of war, but also advanced a theory of "sea power" which relied upon the creation of a strong navy, a far-reaching merchant fleet, and a series of bases from which these entities could replenish themselves for long voyages.<sup>13</sup>

Mahan followed up his seminal work with a series of articles in which he specifically advocated expansion of the U.S. Navy, and, in the process, became an

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<sup>12</sup> Ronald Spector, *Professors of War: The Naval War College and the Development of the Naval Profession* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1977), 27-30.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 43. Allan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1994), 275.

international celebrity. Mahan's theories of sea power, which argued that only nations with certain geographic and cultural characteristics could become maritime powers, appealed to a great many foreigners searching for justifications to expand their own naval programs. The British press and policy communities immediately lauded Mahan's work and disseminated it throughout the Royal Navy. In 1894, when Mahan visited Britain, he received honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge; dined with the Queen, Prime Minister, and the First Lord of the Admiralty; and became the first non-Briton to be a guest of honor at the Royal Navy Club. In Germany, Mahan's work likewise provided part of the intellectual foundation for Kaiser Wilhelm's naval construction programs designed to protect that nation's burgeoning merchant marine and expand its overseas possessions. Later, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz used translations of Mahan's writings in the public campaigns to win converts to the cause of naval expansion. The Japanese also translated and disseminated Mahan's work throughout their navy as it also entered into a period of growth during the 1890s.<sup>14</sup>

In his own country, Mahan gained a wide public audience for his writings, even if he never became quite the celebrity as he was in Britain. His theories and writings became fodder for debate both inside and outside the Navy. Adaptations of his doctrine guided American naval policy for decades afterward and proved adaptable to the rapid pace of technological change during the twentieth century. His importance to the greater public's understanding of sea power and the elements necessary to establish it cannot be

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<sup>14</sup> William E. Livezey, *Mahan on Sea Power*, rev. ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 59-76, 87-94.

understated, with one scholar saying of Mahan that his “primary concern was the indoctrination of his fellow countrymen.”<sup>15</sup>

Mahan helped alter the American approach to naval affairs, yet, as several scholars have pointed out, his achievements are not an isolated event in the growth of American navalism. On a fundamental level, most naval officers shared Mahan’s worldview and of the proper place of the United States in world affairs. Additionally, Mahan’s writings on naval affairs occurred as the Navy’s public profile began to rise through the efforts of numerous other individuals. In the realm of public relations, the use of naval history as a means to draw analogies to contemporary naval policy began earlier in the 1880s. These earlier histories reinterpreted the War of 1812 and argued the conflict offered lessons in the dangers unpreparedness. J.R. Soley’s *Naval Campaign of 1812* (1881) insisted that the small size of the U.S. Navy in the years leading up the outbreak of war failed to offer an effective deterrent to European powers which threatened the country and its interests. Future President Theodore Roosevelt argued in his *Naval War of 1812* (1882) that, once war broke out, the Navy performed valiant service throughout the conflict but remained hobbled by poor civilian leadership. Although these works had their critics, such as Henry Adams, they do indicate that the drive for naval expansion and the use of naval history to support just such a policy predated Mahan.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 335-7.

<sup>16</sup> Karsten, *Naval Aristocracy*, xii-xiv; Shulman, *Navalism*, 14-21, 23-5.

The increased interest in naval history also continued past the publication of Mahan's first book. In 1890, a group of naval veterans of the Civil War living in and around Boston organized the Naval Commandery. The Commandery restricted membership to those who served "in any of the wars or in any battle in which the United States Navy or Marine Corps has participated, or who served as above in connection with the Revenue or Privateer Services" and their descendants. The Commandery merged with a like-minded group based in New York City known as the Naval Legion in 1893, and afterwards became the Naval Order of the United States. The organization grew rapidly and established commanderies, or chapters, in six states by the turn of the century. Admiral George Dewey, invited to join the Naval Order just weeks after his victory at the Battle of Manila Bay in May 1898, became the Commander General, or chief executive, of the Order from 1907 until 1917. The Order intended to remain apolitical, although at times some of its more prominent members, particularly Herbert Satterlee, became involved in contemporary naval affairs. Satterlee and another companion, or member, of the Naval Order, Lieutenant Commander John Codman Soley, helped create the "naval militia" movement in the 1890s which eventually resulted in fifteen states raising more than 4,000 men for the Spanish-American War.<sup>17</sup>

Later, in 1909, several current and former naval officers led by John Samford Barnes met at the New York Yacht Club and organized the Naval History Society. Other distinguished and well-known naval figures attending the meeting included Rear

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<sup>17</sup> *Naval Order of the United States* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing, 2003), 8-9, 19; Kevin R. Hart, "Towards a Citizen Sailor: The History of the Naval Militia Movement, 1888-1898," *American Neptune* 33, no. 4 (October 1973): 264, 268-9, 276.

Admiral Luce and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who served as the meeting's secretary. This new organization intended to "affect public opinion and public interest in the Navy" through the preservation and display of key artifacts and paper collections in naval history. In essence, the Society planned to use history to "sell" the Navy to the general public, and by 1917 began to display its growing collection of historical naval artifacts to the public.<sup>18</sup>

The second category of naval public relations, the work of external organizations and media, became an important means of promoting the service and its needs. At least until the expansion of the Navy's own public relations capabilities after 1941, the service would rely heavily upon the assistance of commercial media sources to bolster its public image. The earliest example of such cooperation emerged by the late 1880s and early 1890s in the form of periodicals and literature. By the 1890s, magazines such as the *Ladies' Home Journal* began running numerous advertisements using a naval theme to pitch their respective products. In a very different example of the Navy's use of periodicals, *The North American Review* became a forum for senior naval officials such as Rear Admiral Luce and Secretaries of the Navy Benjamin F. Tracy and Hillary A. Herbert to expound on policy matters and occasionally stump for naval expansion. While the number of subscribers to the *Review* remained low throughout its entire

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<sup>18</sup> Karsten, *Naval Aristocracy*, 362, 364; Celia Hartmann, "Guide to the Records of the Naval History Society, 1907-1943," The New York Historical Society, 2003; available from <http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/nyhs/NHSRecords.html> (accessed 16 October 2009).



history, the magazine's audience of wealthy and learned persons meant that naval officials could use the magazine to target the most influential Americans.<sup>19</sup>

The Navy also began making appeals to America's youth by the 1890s. *The Youth Companion* included a growing number of articles in which boys grew up to join the Navy "in search of adventure and success." These articles fit into the larger themes and trends of the magazine's stories which emphasized a wide variety of potential careers in which such things could be found. Similarly, book publishers began offering titles with naval themes and plots during the same period, providing yet source from which young men could receive positive messages about the Navy and their potential place in it. A reduction in printing costs in the late nineteenth century allowed publishers led by Edward Stratemeyer, the founder of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, to create immensely popular characters for series of books but then assigned ghost writers to author the individual stories.<sup>20</sup>

These appeals to young males would continue up through World War I. By 1910, several series of books similar to those produced by the Stratemeyer Syndicate appeared that chronicled the adventures of young men either entering the Naval Academy or upon their graduation into fleet duty. Books in these series typically placed young men with good moral centers and patriotic vigor in positions where their character or even their manhood would face serious challenges in the face of their foes. Sometimes, these foes took the form of rivals resentful of the main characters' success,

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<sup>19</sup> Shulman, *Navalism*, 48-9.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 47. Deidre Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer and the Stratemeyer Syndicate* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 1-14.

but they could also include men from foreign countries bewildered at the apparent naiveté of young American naval officers. While many of the authors of these books had little formal connection to Navy, some possessed a background in naval service, as in the case of Lieutenant Commander Yates Stirling, author of the series *A United States Navy Midshipman Afloat*. These books kept abreast of current events, taking their protagonists to places where the Navy had a presence, such as the Philippines, Latin America, and, of course, World War I.<sup>21</sup>

While the Navy benefitted from external sources of public relations prior to the Spanish-American War, the war generated even greater positive publicity for the service. Press speculation shaped many facets of the naval war, partially because of the nearly unlimited access granted to correspondents. Perhaps taking their cue from Assistant Secretary of the Navy Roosevelt's candor and openness towards the press, the Navy allowed correspondents to travel with Dewey to Manila Bay and aboard Admiral William T. Sampson's squadron during blockade operations off Santiago, Cuba. The unlimited access likely helped the positive coverage the service received during the brief conflict.<sup>22</sup>

In particular, the Spanish-American War helped establish firm support for naval expansion by the "yellow" press. Even prior to the start of the conflict, Joseph Pulitzer's

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<sup>21</sup> Some, but not all, of the youth-oriented naval literature includes Irving H. Hancock, *Dave Darrin's First Year at Annapolis, or, Two Plebe Midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy* (Philadelphia: Altemus, 1910), Frank Gee Patchin, *The Battleship Boys at Sea, or, Two Apprentices in Uncle Sam's Navy* (Philadelphia: Altemus, 1910), and Yates Stirling, *A United States Midshipman Afloat* (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing, 1908).

<sup>22</sup> Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 11, 13-4.

*New York World* frequently expressed interest in American naval matters and included entries in his almanac series from the 1890s highlighting the growth of the Navy and its shortcomings when compared the latest ships in the service of Asian and European navies. William Randolph Hearst's relationship with the Navy, however, would outlast Pulitzer's by decades. Hearst, who took over the *New York Journal* in 1887 after its purchase by his father, began advocating naval expansion starting with the 1895 Venezuelan Crisis in which the United States forced Great Britain to accept arbitration over the border dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana. The Spanish-American War only increased Hearst's support for a strong Navy, a sentiment which he would continually express for the next several decades. Hearst's preoccupation with American sovereignty and fears of foreign degradation of American values made the Navy an ideal bulwark against these threats.<sup>23</sup>

The Spanish-American War also helped to establish a relationship between the Navy and the film industry. In 1898, cinema remained a nascent art form and means of mass communication, but its popularity grew exponentially during the first decades of the twentieth century. Filmed re-enactments of wartime battles attracted audiences throughout the country, with depictions of the Battle of Manila Bay and of Admiral Dewey making frequent appearances in these films. In the following years, the Navy began to experiment with film and use it for its own purposes, but the production of commercial films quickly became the predominant means by which the service

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<sup>23</sup> Shulman, *Navalism*, 49-50; Ian Mugridge, *The View from Xanadu: William Randolph Hearst and United States Foreign Policy* (Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 90-1, 100-2.

interacted with the new medium as filmmakers attempted to broaden the settings for their films. The Navy screened a series of films produced by the Biography Company about life in the service at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis and the following year at the Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland, Oregon. These early utilizations of film demonstrated that the Navy took film seriously as a means to promote the service and potentially add recruits, but the film industry would remain at an immature state of development until after World War I.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the clear benefits the Navy received from the war in forging ties with media outlets, the expanding media environment came at some costs in the midst of the conflict. Public opinion shaped American naval strategy partially due to press reports that helped to spread rumors of a possible raid by the Spanish fleet against the East Coast of the United States. The Army and Navy had long held that such a raid constituted the most significant national security threat, but the public's fear of such a raid forced the Navy to alter its strategic planning. For a time, Rear Admiral Winfield Scott Schley's "Flying Squadron" composed of the best and speediest ships stationed in the Atlantic remained in Hampton Roads to respond to any potential raiding force. Likewise, the remaining dilapidated Civil War-era monitors and a host of smaller vessels took up coastal defense duties all along the Eastern Seaboard. These deployments did

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<sup>24</sup> Lawrence H. Suid, *Guts & Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film*, 2nd. ed. (Frankfort: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 12.

not significantly hamper the Navy's war effort and the Spanish fleet never materialized, but they demonstrated the growing influence of public opinion on naval policy.<sup>25</sup>

Interest in naval matters remained high after the Spanish-American War and sparked the formation of one of the most significant elements of naval publicity. The growing interest in naval history during the 1880s and 1890s gave navalists a means to advocate an enlarged fleet in a public setting, but such arguments could only carry their policy plans so far. Groups such as the Naval Order, which drew some of its members from the active duty officer corps, felt uncomfortable with expanding their activities into direct public lobbying on behalf of the service. This reluctance materialized in spite of fears that the tradition of postwar American military and naval retrenchment would sacrifice many of the gains in naval strength which had made victory possible. Models for organizations devoted to naval lobbying, known as Navy Leagues, existed in both Great Britain and Germany by the turn of the century, each of them possessing hundreds of thousands of members. Although the events surrounding the formation of the two foreign navy leagues differed, both organizations intended to raise public awareness of the importance of a strong navy in maintaining the national interest.<sup>26</sup>

The Navy League of the United States, formed in December 1902, included a number of members of the Naval Order, including Herbert Satterlee, on its articles of incorporation. The League limited its membership to civilians and retired officers to

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<sup>25</sup> Brian McAllister Linn, *The Echo of Battle: The Army's Way of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 42, 54-6; Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 12-3.

<sup>26</sup> Armin Rappaport, *The Navy League of the United States* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), 1-4.

avoid any appearance of being a mere mouthpiece for the Navy which existed outside the normal chain of command, although congressmen and active-duty officers could become non-voting members. Despite the public support the League received from President Roosevelt, the League had little appreciable effect on public opinion for several years after its inception. Too few members and a miniscule operating budget devoted almost entirely to the publication of the *Navy League Journal* hampered the League's ability to promote the Navy, and the organization's exact goals appeared muddled to both Congress and to the public.<sup>27</sup>

By 1909, the League became much more effective in promoting the Navy for several reasons. The formulation of "Patriotic Reasons for the Navy League of the United States" gave the League a clear platform which formed the basis of its activities for the next decade: promoting a strong navy, a vibrant merchant marine, an effective naval militia, and a consistent construction program which would prevent the constant political wrangling in Congress that accompanied the introduction of new naval construction bills. Money now flowing in from numerous small donations and a membership base of more than 7,000 allowed the League to issue regular press releases to publicize specific issues of naval policy. Pamphlets, many of them produced by the League's secretary, Henry M. Ward, and the organization of speaking tours led to further expansion of the League and by 1914 it even attracted members from the usually disinterested or hostile Midwestern states.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 17; Richard L. Wright, *The Navy League of the United States: Civilians Supporting the Sea Services for More Than a Century* (Arlington, VA: Navy League of the United States, 2006), 45.

<sup>28</sup> Rappaport, *Navy League*, 17-43; Wright, *Navy League*, 53-4.

By 1911, the League advocated a program of naval construction which would raise the United States Navy to second in overall strength behind only the British Royal Navy. The League avoided involvement in partisan politics and as such had little problem supporting construction proposals by Republican or Democratic presidential administrations. Still, the League became a lightning rod for controversy at several points during this period of growth and success. Attacks by pacifist groups increased in number and intensity after 1909, which the League believed signified their effectiveness in securing converts to the cause of naval expansion. The attacks raised harsh questions about the depth of the relationship between the League and the Navy. The focus on the League had the unfortunate effect of sometimes turning the debates about American naval policy into one about the League and its methods. In spite of such problems, the League assumed an important position within the phalanx of external public supporters of the Navy.<sup>29</sup>

The third category of naval publicity, significant displays and movement of the contemporary fleet, gave the Navy opportunities to promote itself to the general public. Even prior to the birth of the “new navalism,” the Navy participated in the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia at the order of President Ulysses S. Grant. Indicative of the lack of appreciation by the Navy for public relations, the service only contributed a meager number of cheaply produced exhibits centered on static displays of Civil War-era and earlier ships and naval equipment. The Navy provided no exhibits

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<sup>29</sup> Rappaport, *Navy League*, 19, 24-6.

that would allow the public to truly interact with a service they still likely knew little about.<sup>30</sup>

Seventeen years later, the Navy created a grand spectacle of self-promotion for the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago which commemorated the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus' voyage to the Western Hemisphere. Coming at the height of the navalist movement, the Exposition afforded the Navy an excellent opportunity to showcase its growth to the public, and in this regard it did not disappoint as it had in 1876. The Navy spent \$50,000 on its displays, with the centerpiece consisting of a full-scale mockup battleship christened the USS *Illinois*. To heighten the level of realism, the Navy included a battery of six-inch guns on the vessel that would later form part of the secondary battery for the USS *Oregon*, one of the Navy's first true battleships when it entered service in 1896. In total, twenty million people attended the Exposition, giving the Navy an incredibly large audience that witnessed the service's growing might and technological prowess. A follow up celebration later that year organized primarily by the Navy called the International Naval Rendez-Vous and Review drew thousands of spectators to Hampton Roads and New York to witness parades of naval personnel and review the ships hailing from the U.S. and ten foreign navies.<sup>31</sup>

Naval exercises, especially those with ramifications for American foreign policy, could also attract much press attention. The winter maneuvers of 1902-1903 off Culebra attracted attention not only for the size of the exercises but because of their perceived

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<sup>30</sup> Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 8-9; Shulman, *Navalism*, 54.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 55-6.



effect on American foreign policy. In 1902, Germany, Italy, and Great Britain demanded that Venezuela repay their governments for the property losses sustained during the latter's civil war, and all three countries agreed to blockade the Venezuelan coast to achieve their goals. The Venezuelans quickly agreed to arbitrate the case, prompting British withdrawal from the blockade, which then focused American political and public attention on Germany. A fleet of fifty-four ships under the command of Admiral Dewey began conducting a series of maneuvers in the Caribbean at the height of the crisis. Roosevelt later claimed that Germany backed down from their blockade due to this impressive display of naval force, which included some of the first practice landings conducted by Marines. Whatever the truth of the claim, perceptions of the strength of the growing American fleet certainly received a very public boost.<sup>32</sup>

The world-circling cruise of the Great White Fleet lasting from 1907 until 1909 represents the most prominent peacetime public display of American naval strength prior to World War I. The voyage around the world, which consisted of three distinct phases of movement designed to test assumptions of American war plans and to raise the public profile of the Navy at home and abroad, had little real effect on international relations but had immense value as a public relations tool. The Navy's latest dreadnaught-type battleships did not participate in the cruise and never left American waters, but the older battleships that made the cruise displayed incredible reliability. Only the occasional problem with weather or nature limited the enthusiasm of onlookers to greet the American ships as they visited different port cities. Beginning with the departure

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<sup>32</sup> Henry J. Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt's Naval Diplomacy: The U.S. Navy and the Birth of the American Century* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 25-53.

ceremonies from Hampton Roads, the fleet drew large crowds at almost every point along its journey. An estimated one million spectators witnessed the entry of the Great White Fleet into San Francisco Bay in May 1908, a visit which the Navy intended as a demonstration to West Coast citizens of the Navy's ability to respond effectively to any crisis in the Pacific even though the bulk of the battleship fleet remained in Atlantic waters. The cruise stimulated debates in ship design and broke a Congressional deadlock that threatened to temporarily block new battleship construction.

Foreign citizens likewise greeted the fleet with incredible enthusiasm. Even Valaparaíso, Chile, a relatively small port city, drew a quarter million visitors during the fleet's visit in February 1908. A visit to Sydney also drew large crowds and helped build American goodwill in the Commonwealth countries of Australia and New Zealand, whose political leaders worried about the refocusing of British interests towards European affairs. In effect, the cruise became a masterpiece of political and public theater for both the Navy and the cruise's primary benefactor, Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>33</sup>

The cruise of the Great White Fleet was one of several instances in which Roosevelt utilized public displays of the fleet for political purposes. A series of visits, many of them orchestrated personally by Roosevelt, took American vessels overseas, with reciprocal agreements sometimes bringing their foreign counterparts into an American port. In addition to goodwill visits citizens and naval officers, Roosevelt utilized the Navy as his "big stick" in diplomacy. In 1906, for example, he sent a group

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<sup>33</sup> James R. Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988), x, 13, 44, 97.

of eight battleships to North Africa as a visible sign of American interest in the Algeiras Conference in which France and Germany attempted to solve their disputes over the future of Morocco. These ships returned to the United States just in time for a naval review at the Jamestown Exposition designed to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the English colony.<sup>34</sup>

Even as unofficial means for the Navy to promote itself expanded at the turn of the twentieth century, the Navy generally resisted attempts to create its own public relations office. In 1905, Admiral Dewey proposed to the both the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy that Congress allow the military to restrict the publication of potentially sensitive information during times of war or national emergency. As F. Donald Scovel argues, Dewey's proposal hinted at the necessity of military or naval public relations but did not propose creating any such organizations. Additionally, the proposal did not address peacetime public relations, which accounts for the decision by Secretary of the Navy Charles Joseph Bonaparte to set aside the proposal until a situation arose necessitating its reconsideration.<sup>35</sup>

In 1912, Secretary of the Navy George von Lengerke Meyer circulated a letter within the Navy's bureaucracy asking for suggestions to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the service. In response, an officer attached to the General Board, Lieutenant Commander Walter S. Crosley, suggested the creation of a formal public relations bureau capable of managing the Navy's public image. Crosley received a reply

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<sup>34</sup> Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 33-4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 31-2.

indicating that his plan would receive careful consideration by the Navy Department but nothing ever came of it and the matter quietly disappeared.<sup>36</sup>

The Navy's sister service, the Marine Corps, established its own Publicity Bureau in 1911. The Corps believed itself in constant threat of losing funding or relevance but also required new recruits to accommodate its near quadrupling of strength from 2,500 to 9,000 in the ten years after the Spanish American War. Rather than hire outside advertisers, the Corps chose to handle recruiting duties entirely in-house and established the Publicity Bureau to do so. Much of the Bureau's early work involved creating an image of Marines which differentiated from that of sailors through the publication of pamphlets, recruiting posters, and creating closer ties with the press corps to ensure favorable coverage of the Corps and its activities. Given the fears the Corps held about its own long-term ability to survive, a clear impetus to formalize its public relations activities existed.<sup>37</sup>

Only in the area of recruiting did the Navy become formally involved in managing its own public image. While the growth of the fleet greatly benefited an officer corps whose careers stagnated in the small fleet prior to the mid-1880s, finding enough men of high quality to operate the new ships proved a mammoth challenge. The authorized strength of enlisted personnel more than quadrupled from 10,000 in 1897 to

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<sup>36</sup> Helene Philbert, "History of Navy Public Relations" (talk given at the Navy Public Relations Course in Washington, D.C., on 23 July 1945), Box 121 [hereafter B]; Office of Information Subject Files, 1940-1958; Entry P 3 [hereafter EP 3]; Records of the Office of Information; General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1947-, Record Group [hereafter RG] 428, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD [hereafter NACP].

<sup>37</sup> Heather Pace Marshall, "'There's Nothing a Marine Can't Do': Publicity and the Marine Corps, 1911-1917" (Paper presented at the 2009 Naval History Symposium, Annapolis, MD, 10 September 2009).

44,500 in 1909. As a result, the Navy stepped up its recruiting efforts from inland states, expanded its infrastructure of recruiting stations and manpower, and adopted more modern methods of recruiting.

The first of these, recruiting in inland states, represented a major shift in the Navy's thinking. Traditionally, the Navy recruited from coastal areas and often took in either dregs or immigrants who sometimes spoke little English in the hope of securing men already familiar with shipboard life. By 1897, however, the Bureau of Navigation began to explore the possibilities of recruiting from non-traditional areas. Initially, the Navy hoped to secure men solely from the Great Lakes region so that it could continue to recruit personnel with at least some knowledge of ships or sailing. These restrictions quickly proved burdensome and the Navy began to expand its efforts to landlocked states after the turn of the century. The effort proved so successful that roughly three-quarters of the men recruited by the Navy in 1907 came from inland states, an almost complete reversal of previous recruiting trends.<sup>38</sup>

To complement its new recruiting policy, the Recruiting Service significantly increased the number of recruiting stations. In 1903, the Recruiting Service possessed only seven permanent recruiting stations but doubled this number by 1907. These numbers would continue to rise until the number of permanent stations peaked in 1919 at forty-nine along with 267 substations. Establishing uniform procedures throughout all

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<sup>38</sup> Harrod, *Manning the New Navy*, 11-2, 15-7

of its recruiting stations allowed the entire recruiting network to better fit into the Bureau of Navigation, which managed the Navy's personnel.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, the Recruiting Service began to modernize the methods by which it attracted new recruits. During the nineteenth century the Navy relied on paying bounties to landlords and other agents for bringing in new sailors. At the turn of the century the Recruiting Service experimented with a number of new recruiting practices, some more successful than others. The Post Office began distributing Navy literature after 1902 and helped spread Navy recruiting beyond the reaches of the growing number of recruiting stations. The Recruiting Service placed advertisements in newspapers and magazines, but the high cost of their placement limited the number used. Recruiters often found that papers would run articles extolling the benefits of the service free of charge and so began to focus on this avenue of publication. The Bureau of Navigation also expanded its operations into film and mailed pamphlets and brochures as these proved increasingly popular with recruiters by the early 1900s. Through all of these changes, however, the Navy took care not to convey overly optimistic impressions of Navy life in recruiting materials. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels even ordered increased movements of ships just so that the service could live up to the famous slogan "Join the Navy and See the World."<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, by 1913, the Navy also began to regulate its relationship with the film studios. The Navy became more conscious of protecting its image as the film

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 36-7.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 34-47.

industry grew, but only vague instructions existed regulating the cooperation between the service and filmmakers. In 1913, the Navy issued its new set of *Naval Instructions* which allowed filmmakers access to naval facilities, ships, and personnel only after its producers obtained written consent from naval officials to do so. The General Board issued Order No. 78 the following year to refine the previous year's policy. The new order demanded that filmmakers submit to the Navy any film produced using the cooperation of service prior to its public release, a requirement it would impose on filmmakers for decades afterward. Newsreels enjoyed access to ships and installations as long as sensitive material was not photographed. Feature films with a naval setting produced during this time, such as *The Peril* (1912) and *Via Wireless* (1915), received assistance from the service ranging from the shooting of scenes aboard the battleship *New York* to the sinking of a yacht supplied by film producers using a Navy torpedo boat. The Navy denied requests for cooperation on other films, such as an adaptation of the Puccini opera *Madame Butterfly* (1915), if the service deemed the film to be a detriment to the service's image.<sup>41</sup>

Although the Navy took steps to promote itself prior to 1914, the basic question still remains: why did the Navy fail to create an official public relations bureau? No clear record exists, but the Navy likely concluded that no apparent need for such an organization existed. The informal attempts to raise the public consciousness of the Navy and its mission since the 1880s succeeded in bringing to the service greater political and financial support for its cause. The need to increase the numbers and

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<sup>41</sup> Suid, *Guts & Glory*, 13; Suid, *Sailing*, 4-5.

improve the quality of recruits brought into the service prompted the expansion of the Recruiting Service. To fulfill its other needs, however, the Navy could rely on the generous, if occasionally inconsistent, political support it received from the executive and legislative branches of government. Whether by personal preference or by the pull of international events, many presidents supported naval expansion during their terms. Simply put, the Navy found that it could obtain much of what it desired by directly courting political allies without resorting to appeals to the general public.

Instead of public relations activities, the naval hierarchy devoted far more effort to what historian Vincent Davis called *direct action*, or direct lobbying to members of Congress. From the late 1880s onward, the Navy began to expand rapidly in the number and the quality of its ships. During the 1880s and 1890s, a bipartisan consensus emerged supporting naval expansion. Every president and Congress supported naval expansion to some degree, and debate focused on the size of building program and not whether there should be one at all. The Panic of 1893 barely slowed the pace of expansion, but naval construction temporarily halted during the first two years of William McKinley's presidency. While less than a year's duration, Congress authorized eight battleships, six armored cruisers, and a host of smaller vessels during the brief conflict with Spain.<sup>42</sup>

No other political figure matched the contributions to American naval growth made by Theodore Roosevelt. Prior to his presidency he consistently supported construction of a Navy capable of extending American influence abroad. Once in the

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<sup>42</sup> Davis, *Postwar Defense*, 251; Harold Sprout, Margaret Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), 183-91, 217-222. Only during the period 1883-1885 did Congress and President Arthur stalemate over the naval issue; Congress may not have fully understood the vagaries of modern naval technology. See *Ibid.*, 194.



White House, he continued to support naval expansion. Between 1901 and 1905, Congress supported Roosevelt's calls for a larger Navy and authorized the construction of ten battleships, four armored cruisers, and seventeen smaller ships. The appearance of the HMS *Dreadnaught* in the Royal Navy helped end a "breathing spell" in naval construction advocated by Roosevelt in 1905 and sparked an increase in the naval arms race worldwide. In 1907, Roosevelt and Congress disagreed over the pace of naval expansion, with Roosevelt calling for four new battleships while the Senate only supported one. The two parties reached a compromise and Congress authorized two new battleships. This agreement indicates yet again that little debate existed over the wisdom of naval expansion, but rather the pace at which it should proceed.<sup>43</sup>

Roosevelt's successor, William Howard Taft, likewise supported naval expansion, but Congress displayed reluctance to continue the present rate of expansion of two battleships per year. Although Congress disputed the size of Taft's proposed naval construction bills and capital ship construction fell to one battleship per year, the building of capital ships never entirely ceased. Navalists had high hopes for Taft's successor, Woodrow Wilson, but had their hopes briefly dashed when Wilson's failed to support new construction in his first year in office. During the summer of 1914 Wilson reversed his policy and signed into law a bill authorizing the construction of two new battleships as well as a third ship contingent upon the sale of two obsolete battleships.

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<sup>43</sup> Shulman, *Navalism*, 46; Sprouts, *American Naval Power*, 259-70.

Thus, between 1883 and 1914, support for construction crossed party lines, ensuring consistent growth in the size of the Navy.<sup>44</sup>

The outbreak of World War I in Europe in 1914 and fears that the conflict could spread to the Western Hemisphere ignited a preparedness campaign by several private societies, the Navy League among them. The preparedness movement echoed Wilson's concern for neutral rights and the pressure they exerted help bring about the monumental Naval Act of 1916 which included provisions for ten battleships, six battlecruisers (the first of their kind authorized for the Navy), and 127 smaller warships.<sup>45</sup>

Soon after the declaration of war against Germany in 1917, an executive order from President Wilson established the Committee for Public Information (CPI), headed by George Creel. This organization intended to promote the war effort throughout the country and utilized a variety of techniques for doing so. The CPI distributed films, many of them utilizing footage shot by the Army Signal Corps, as well as posters and other materials. The CPI also employed public speakers known as "Four Minute Men" to extol the virtue of the American war effort against Germany. Individuals prominent in the fields of advertising and public relations worked for the CPI in some capacity, most prominently Edward Bernays.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Baer, *American Sea Power*, 47-8; Sprouts, *American Naval Power*, 307-10.

<sup>45</sup> Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 56; Baer, *American Sea Power*, 59-60; *Congressional Record*, 64 Cong., 1 sess., 17 July 1916, 11167-94.

<sup>46</sup> Clayton R. Koppes, Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: MacMillan, 1987), 48-9; Larry Wayne Ward, *The Motion Picture Goes to War: The U.S. Government Film Effort during World War I* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 1; Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations* (New York: Crown, 1998), 16-21.

Concurrent with the establishment of the CPI, Secretary Daniels began to formalize the Navy's own public relations activities. Previously, in 1914, he had ordered that all press releases be submitted to him for clearance and used his personal secretary to informally organize public relations functions but otherwise established no official public relations organizations. On 17 April 1917, Daniels invited his friend and fellow newspaperman John Wilbur Jenkins to assume the new post of Civilian Director of Information and to manage the new Navy News Bureau which Daniels placed directly under his own office. Daniels soon asked Marvin Hunter McIntyre to join the new public relations office as Jenkins' assistant. The Navy News Bureau filled out the remaining positions with other men from the newspaper trade, but, at Jenkins' insistence, the office operated with as few employees as possible. Jenkins believed that a larger and more unwieldy organization would cause unnecessary delays in the release of information to the public and could cause potential harm to the Navy's image. The civilian members of the Navy News Bureau received their pay from the CPI and the Bureau occasionally cooperated with the larger organization but these ties ended with the dissolution of the CPI in 1919.

Given the predominance of civilians from the newspaper profession in the Navy News Bureau, its members had to liaise with officers to prosecute their duties effectively. The Assistant Chief of Naval Operations, Captain William Veazie Pratt, and the Aide to the Secretary of the Navy, a rotating position assigned to officers with the rank of commander, served as the naval advisers to the Navy News Bureau and often helped shape the material released to the public. The duties of the Navy News Bureau

involved the issuance of press releases regarding the Navy's activities during the war. The Bureau also prepared transcripts of the twice-a-day press conferences by Secretary Daniels, who had established these as part of his routine long before the advent of the Navy News Bureau. Releases and feature articles prepared for syndication by the Bureau, and sometimes by Jenkins himself, typically concerned the anti-submarine and convoying missions undertaken by the fleet.<sup>47</sup>

By 1918, many of the key organizations responsible for interwar publicity existed in one form or another, but the immediate postwar period would be greatly affected by two crucial decisions made by Daniels while the war still raged. First, Daniels prohibited filming aboard Navy ships and installations, arguing that wartime security prevented the Navy from cooperating in the production of feature films. Secondly, the Navy's primary mission of convoy protection during the war lacked the glamour of major surface engagements and lessened the attractiveness of Navy themed films.<sup>48</sup>

Daniels' second important wartime decision involved the banning of the Navy League from official ties with the service from 1917 until the end of his tenure as Secretary of the Navy. Dating back to Daniels' initial appointment, the Navy League had disagreed with some of his policy recommendations, such as the scaling back of the 1914 ship authorizations, but American entry into the war created new tensions between the two parties. Daniels blocked the Navy League from engaging in some types of relief

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<sup>47</sup> Philbert, "Navy Public Relations," 1-2; Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 53-4, 57, 61-2.

<sup>48</sup> Suid, *Sailing*, 7-8.

work for sailors and their families and turned over such duties over to the government and the Red Cross, but the final break between Daniels and the Navy League began with the July 1917 explosion at Mare Island which killed five individuals. The Navy League believed saboteurs aided by labor unions caused the explosion and that Daniels hid evidence to this effect. Daniels and the head of the Navy League, Colonel Robert Thompson, both issued calls for the other to resign due to their handling of the crisis. In response, Daniels issued an order in August 1917 banning the League and its representatives from all Navy ships and shore installations. The report of the initial inquiry released a week after the ban supported the claim of a deliberate explosion but disproved the other allegations, and the Navy League attempted to apologize to Daniels. Unfortunately for the League, the damage had been done and Daniels left the ban in place. This order would remain in effect until Edwin Denby became the Secretary of the Navy in 1921 as part of Warren G. Harding's administration. The League remained active in efforts to support naval personnel for the duration of the conflict, but the organization faced several serious problems when it lacked the official recognition of the Navy. The Navy itself suffered little from the ban, but, just as with the order preventing Navy cooperation with film studios, it disrupted Navy ties with an important source of external public relations support.<sup>49</sup>

By the end of World War I in November 1918, much of the necessary infrastructure for promoting the Navy existed in some form or another. The Navy had grown considerably in size and importance since its inception, and efforts had been

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<sup>49</sup> Wright, *Navy League*, 55-6; Rappaport, *Navy League*, 70-4.

made to give the service a national appeal and not one so narrowly based on the interests of coastal states. The Navy's own public relations institutions likewise grew during the time period, but only haltingly and only during times of clear need. Thus, the Navy entered the rapid political and cultural changes of the interwar period without having previously managed a sustained peacetime public relations campaign that encompassed all facets of the Navy's public image.

**CHAPTER III**  
**DISARMAMENT, AVIATION, AND THE BIG NAVY BOYS: THE POLITICAL**  
**AND CULTURAL MILIEU OF POSTWAR NAVY PUBLIC RELATIONS, 1919-**  
**1922**

By the 1920s, the United States Navy was forced to adapt to an entirely different domestic and international situation than it had enjoyed prior to World War I. Up through the war, the Navy benefitted from the friendly policies of both Congress and the President, thus giving the service no need to appeal to the public. The end of the war saw conditions change markedly, however, as the Navy no longer enjoyed consistent support from either branch of government or from the public. In fact, the Navy faced concerted challenges from multiple groups and organizations which questioned the Navy's role and, in some cases, even the need for the service. Post-war disillusionment, pacifism, assertions by Brigadier General William Mitchell that navies were now obsolete, several protracted bouts of ugly infighting within the Navy itself spilling into the public arena via Congressional hearings, and the disruption to traditional modes of bolstering of the Navy's public image coalesced into a significant loss of public support for the service. Additionally, the rapid emergence of the new consumer economy created conditions in which modern techniques of public relations and advertising began to alter how individuals and organizations conducted themselves in the public arena. Image was just as important as matters of substance, thus changing the cultural milieu. As the 1920s wore on, the issues of disarmament and the independent air service lost some of their power to evoke a significant public response, but the events and trends of

the immediate postwar period continued to shape American naval policy well into the next decade.

At the close of World War I, the Navy had several reasons to be optimistic to the point of hubris about its short and long term future. During its relatively brief period of involvement in combat operations, the Navy helped neutralize the threat that German U-boats posed to Allied shipping through anti-submarine patrols and mine-laying operations in the North Sea, thereby ensuring the safe passage of millions of soldiers and tons of materiel to the Western Front. The war arguably produced one genuine naval hero, Admiral William S. Sims, who served as the Navy's representative to the British Admiralty and would receive much of the credit for implementing the convoy system to protect Allied shipping. The wartime years fueled naval construction, beginning with the 1916 Naval Appropriations Act. This act, which its supporters promised would provide the United States with a "navy, second to none," authorized construction of ten battleships, six battlecruisers (the first of their kind in American service), and 127 smaller vessels. President Woodrow Wilson couched the need for the new construction in terms of upholding American honor and neutrality. He asserted that a strong navy would help him pursue his ultimate diplomatic goals: making "the world safe for democracy" and the creation of a League of Nations to ensure the peaceful resolution of international disputes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Baer, *American Sea Power*, 64-82; Stephanie Cousineau, "Preparedness for What: Woodrow Wilson and the Naval Appropriations Act of 1916," (master's thesis, University of Calgary, 2000), 113-30; John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1983), 297-302.



Within these apparent successes, however, lay the seeds of what would create serious roadblocks to naval policy in the immediate postwar era. The large and expensive battleship fleet which constituted the core of the United States Navy did not see any meaningful action during the war. In fact, the Mahanian fleet engagement that most participants anticipated occurred at Jutland in 1916, nearly a year prior to American entry into the conflict. The inconclusive battle between the German High Seas Fleet and the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet may have confirmed British strategic supremacy in the North Sea, but it did not prove to be the climactic naval duel that contemporary naval doctrine promised. A lack of fuel oil in the British Isles forced the U.S. Navy to send its older, coal-fired battleships to serve alongside the British Grand Fleet, relegating the most modern battleships to patrolling or lying in reserve in American waters. Given the impact of German submarines on the Allied war effort, modern capital ships appeared superfluous.<sup>2</sup>

The severity of the U-Boat threat to Allied shipping brought capital ship construction to a halt as demands for escort vessels took priority. A majority of the larger vessels authorized in the 1916 Naval Act sat unfinished on the ways at war's end when the inevitable public demand for demobilization endangered plans for their completion. Naval leaders, oblivious to emerging public opposition, continued to press for an ever larger expansion of the fleet. In 1918, the General Board called for the construction of twenty-eight capital ships in addition to the sixteen previously authorized

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<sup>2</sup> Jerry W. Jones, *U.S. Battleship Operations During World War I* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998), vii-viii, 27-8.

in 1916. Although Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels and President Wilson eventually pared the request down to sixteen ships, if completed, the new construction would give the United States a navy superior to all others in both quality and quantity.<sup>3</sup>

Japan and Great Britain looked upon the American construction programs with profound alarm. The latter especially hoped to avoid any new international disputes, particularly with their recent American allies, but felt compelled to respond to American naval expansion as it had to previous challenges to British naval supremacy. Between November 1918 and May 1919, leading British officials, including Admiral David Beatty of Jutland fame, proposed that the Royal Navy assume control over the lion's share of the German ships surrendered to the Allies at the end of the war. This desperate plan contained numerous flaws, but the crews of the German ships rendered it moot when they scuttled their ships *en masse* at Scapa Flow on 21 June 1919. To respond to the American naval challenge, the British adopted the so-called "One Power Standard" in spring 1920 and ordered four "super-*Hoods*" in October 1921; if completed, the new ships would be among the most advanced in the world, capable of speeds over thirty knots and carrying 16-inch guns and heavy armor plating.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Baer, *American Sea Power*, 73-4, 83-5.

<sup>4</sup> John R. Ferris, "The Symbol and the Substance of Sea Power: Great Britain, the United States, and the One-Power Standard, 1919-1922," in B.J.C. McKercher, ed., *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1990): 65-6, 79; Lawrence Sondhaus, *Navies of Europe, 1815-2002* (New York: Longman, 2002), 196; Stephen Roskill, *The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism, 1919-1929*, vol. I of *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, (New York: Walker, 1968), 227.

Like the British, the Japanese worried about American intentions should the new ships be completed. During World War I, Japan took advantage of Germany's near-total focus on Europe to seize the German-held Marianas, Marshall, and Gilbert Islands and sought to extend its influence in China. The expansion of the U.S. fleet threatened Japanese plans to achieve a dominant position in the region. Unlike the British, the Japanese believed that they could credibly counter the American program. In the fall of 1920, the Diet authorized the Imperial Japanese Navy to begin work on what became known as the "8:8" program. Eight battleships and battlecruisers each would constitute the core of a Japanese fleet roughly seventy percent as strong as the U.S. fleet, a level the Japanese believed sufficient to counter the American presence in the region.<sup>5</sup>

Congress had passed the Naval Act of 1916 with great enthusiasm, but the 1919 request for additional construction proved much tougher to sell, a signal of the coming decline in political support for the Navy. The proposed bill initially called for \$2.46 billion in new spending for the Navy. In testimony before the House Naval Affairs Committee in December 1918, Daniels not only pressed for the resumption of capital ship construction but argued that American naval expansion could also serve as a hedge against the failure of the postwar peace process. Depicting the League of Nations as a potential American adversary, Daniels advised that the nation must maintain a fleet equal to the combined naval strengths of eventual League members to ensure hemispheric security. At the same time, Daniels presented a second rationale for the 1919 program: should the United States enter the League, he asserted, it could use its

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<sup>5</sup> Baer, *American Sea Power*, 98.

expanded Navy to help enforce League decisions and as a deterrent against aggressive states. In this manner, the United States Navy and those of its fellow League members could serve as a naval policeman for the world. Several newspapers accepted this reasoning and printed several favorable editorials on the matter well into 1919 arguing that an enlarged Navy would strengthen the role of the United States within the League of Nations. The bill eventually passed through the House at the reduced but still staggering sum of \$1.1 billion.<sup>6</sup>

When Congressmen questioned the wisdom of passing such a bill while peace negotiations were underway, Wilson assured them that the new construction would be terminated if any potential disarmament conference came about. While Daniels' motives remained somewhat less clear, Wilson viewed the fleet as potential leverage in to negotiations involving any number of issues between the United States and the remaining Great Powers. In April 1919, as final passage of the bill in the Senate remained doubtful, British diplomats agreed to support the League Covenant in exchange for American cancellation of the building program contained in the bill. Thus the proposed building plan played a crucial role in securing Wilson's League of Nations.<sup>7</sup>

The end of the 1919 program did not deter Daniels from continuing to press for completion of the 1916 program, arguing that the failure of either the peace negotiations

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<sup>6</sup> Hoag, *Preface to Preparedness*, 22- 4; Josephus Daniels, *The Navy and the Nation: Wartime Addresses* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1919), 295-301; *Washington Post*, 31 December 1918, 2; *Washington Post*, 5 February 1919, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Roskill, *Anglo-American Antagonism*, 91;

in Paris or the League of Nations would force the United States to uphold the Monroe Doctrine and defend the Western Hemisphere from outside aggression. Only by constructing a fleet capable of deterring or repelling any potential aggressor could the United States guarantee the safety and sovereignty of neighboring nations. Therefore, Daniels reasoned, the United States needed to choose between accepting membership and participation in the League of Nations or building up its fleet to unprecedented strength. Some prominent newspapers accepted Daniels' view, while others remained unconvinced by Daniels' logic and opposed it. Perhaps more troubling for Daniels, editorials in the *Baltimore Sun* and other newspapers questioned whether American foreign and naval policy could be boiled down in such stark terms.<sup>8</sup>

During discussions of the new building programs, three distinct arguments materialized against continued naval expansion: first, the cost of the program would prevent any return to the lower pre-World War I tax rates; second, air power supporters, led by Brigadier General William "Billy" Mitchell, argued that a modern fleet of relatively inexpensive aircraft could prevent any rival naval force from threatening the United States and thus rendered a large and costly Navy obsolete; third, international naval disarmament appeared possible, leading opponents to assert that constructing more ships would be a waste. Despite the differing origins of these arguments and the motives of their purveyors, the three ideas coalesced into a single line of reasoning against further naval construction.

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<sup>8</sup> *New York Times*, "Sees War if League Fails," 16 October 1919, 3.

Americans had a long tradition of dramatic postwar reductions in military strength dating back to the American Revolution. The American people generally disliked standing armies, having been heavily influenced by Radical Whig ideology which originated in seventeenth century England. The American people and their leaders reflected their deep desires to avoid having large standing military and naval establishments by rapidly reducing the size of the Continental Army and selling off the meager remnants of the Continental Navy after the end of the American Revolution. The expansions of American military and naval strength during the next three major American conflicts – the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Civil War – came to abrupt ends at the conclusion of those conflicts. Such was not the case following the Spanish-American War due to a variety of factors, but this example did not necessarily mean that the trend had been broken.<sup>9</sup>

After World War I, concerns arose over the cost of continued naval construction. The 1916 and 1919 programs threatened to consume what some believed was a disproportionate amount of federal spending. The war years created an economic boom in the United States as the nation mobilized and this growth continued at least initially after the conclusion of World War I. The overall growth in the American economy, when combined with a doubling of the income tax rate in 1918, brought about an

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<sup>9</sup> Millett and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, 91, 124, 248-9.

incredible increase in the tax revenues collected by the federal government, from approximately \$800 million in 1917 to more than \$5 billion by 1920.<sup>10</sup>

Naturally, spending on national defense mushroomed during World War I to several times that of the prewar era, but the heightened defense expenditures continued even after the conclusion of the conflict. Whereas the Navy Department spent only approximately \$153 million in 1916, its budget for 1920 stood at \$736 million and remained more than double the 1916 figure well into the 1920s. Editors of several prominent newspapers questioned the wisdom of high levels of naval spending when few credible threats appeared on the horizon. In 1919, editors in Midwestern papers worried about the overall cost of the 1916 program as well as the soon-to-be-cancelled 1919 program. That this opposition originated in the Midwest was not a surprise since people from the region typically looked upon naval bills with skepticism if not outright disdain. The editorials also indicated that concern over the cost of new construction materialized long before a public crescendo in favor of naval disarmament appeared.<sup>11</sup>

The focus upon the cost of naval construction programs increased over time, and in the spring of 1921 a second and much larger wave of denunciations of the cost of the 1916 program appeared in several newspapers and magazines throughout the country. Much of this renewed opposition stemmed from a study released by the Bureau of Standards which stated that a staggering ninety-three percent of current government

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<sup>10</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Bicentennial Edition, Colonial Times to 1970*, pt. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office [henceforth GPO], 1976), 1095, 1107.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1114; Hoag, *Preface to Preparedness*, 24-5.

expenditures went to defense spending or to pay for previous wars. No longer confined to Midwestern newspapers, the editorial opposition now included prominent periodicals and newspapers, including *World's Work*, *The New York Times*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. Even the *Saturday Evening Post*, typically one of the most reliable supporters of naval expansion in the mass media, began to advocate disarmament in 1921 because it desired a reduced tax burden more than an enlarged Navy.<sup>12</sup>

While fiscal conservatives worried about federal expenditures on defense, Brigadier General William “Billy” Mitchell promised a cheaper solution to the problem of national defense: the airplane. Mitchell, born into a wealthy Wisconsin family in 1879, served in the Army’s Signal Corps in the early twentieth century but became interested in the military potential of aircraft. While a major, Mitchell took private flying lessons in late 1916 and, upon completing his training, was sent to Europe as an aviation attaché. He later served as the head of the air component of the American Expeditionary Force under the command of General John J. Pershing. A contentious personality, Mitchell created several enemies within the Army but served with such distinction in Europe that he emerged from the war as America’s most prominent, but by no means only, air power advocate.<sup>13</sup>

In 1918, Great Britain created a new Royal Air Force to counter the threat posed by German Gotha bombers which had launched attacks against British soil the previous year. This new air force consolidated all air assets under its auspices, including aircraft

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<sup>12</sup> Hoag, *Preface to Preparedness*, 74-7.

<sup>13</sup> James J. Cooke, *Billy Mitchell* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 13, 49-51, 66-7.



aboard Royal Navy ships. Mitchell closely monitored these developments and believed that the consolidation enacted by the British should be duplicated in the United States. Proposals for an independent air service that would include naval aviation assets first circulated in Congress in late 1918, but this first effort quickly failed to gain the support necessary for passage and rapidly disappeared. Mitchell's return to the United States, however, promised to breathe new life into the cause he championed as he remained a highly visible and forceful advocate for air power up until his death in 1936.<sup>14</sup>

The independent air service remained the goal of Mitchell's quest, and he viewed the Navy as an expensive, hidebound service which, in addition to hampering the development of air power in the United States, was growing increasingly obsolete as the technological capabilities of aircraft matured. The Navy had traditionally formed the "first line of defense" for the nation, but Mitchell believed his proposed independent air service could better accomplish that mission. His argument rested upon the ability of aircraft to destroy traditional naval vessels. Initially, his case proved a difficult one to make, but photographs of tests conducted on the battleship *Indiana* were leaked to the public in late 1920 and showed the effect of modern explosives on a naval vessel, albeit one nearly twenty-five years old at the time of the tests. The results of the tests emboldened Mitchell to testify to a Congressional committee in early 1921 that, "We

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<sup>14</sup> Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of American and British Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 30-4.

can tell you definitely now that we can either destroy or sink any ship in existence today.”<sup>15</sup>

*Our Air Force*, Mitchell’s book-length argument in favor of a united air service, appeared in the late spring of 1921. In it, Mitchell elaborated on many of the assertions made in various public settings over the previous two years. He argued that the “neither the Army nor the Navy nor both combined” could adequately manage an air service capable of providing all of the nation’s defensive needs. Only by cultivating officers trained solely in the ways of air power and placing them in their own executive department could the United States wrest the lead in the military development of air power from European nations. If the United States did not do so, Mitchell warned, the nation would become vulnerable to forms of air attack not seen during World War I and unable to exploit the military and commercial possibilities that aviation offered. The Navy, therefore, could not maintain its predominant national security role.<sup>16</sup>

Mitchell’s rhetoric harkened back to the likes of Colonel Emory Upton and Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, both of whom used European conditions to argue for changes in American defense policy. Both of Mitchell’s predecessors looked with awe at the state of military and naval development in Europe and attempted to convince the nation and their peers that the United States must incorporate key features of European advances. Mahan proved much more successful in this regard, and Mitchell co-opted

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Melhorn, *Two Block Fox: The Rise of the Aircraft Carrier, 1911-1929* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1974), 61.

<sup>16</sup> William Mitchell, *Our Air Force: The Keystone to National Defense* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1921), xviii-xx, xxiv-xxvi, 160. Quote is from p. xxi.

key points from Mahan and other sea power theorists when crafting his case. Most importantly, Mitchell believed Americans enjoyed the manpower, resources, and climate to become an air power much as Mahan posited that the United States possessed the geographic and cultural ability to become the leading sea power in the world. Mitchell also tried to link the development of military aviation to comparable advances in civilian aviation as much as Mahan linked the growth of naval power to a nation's merchant marine.<sup>17</sup>

The peak of Mitchell's crusade for an independent air service came during the summer of 1921. Following the controversy of the tests on the *Indiana*, Secretary Daniels ordered several new rounds of bombing tests on old American ships and several German vessels allocated to the United States as part of the Treaty of Versailles. Mitchell had anticipated the day when aircraft could conduct bombing tests against naval vessels and wrote an article on the subject that appeared in the April 1920 issue of *World's Work* entitled "Has the Airplane Made the Battleship Obsolete?" Mitchell believed that the thin deck armor of modern battleships combined with the accuracy of high-explosive ordinance from aircraft rendered even the most advanced warships defenseless against the new technology.<sup>18</sup>

Three U-Boats were the first vessels subjected to the bombing tests, which began on 20 June 1921. On 29 June, the old battleship *Iowa* served as a radio-controlled target

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<sup>17</sup> Millet and Maslowski, *For the Common Defense*, 272-6; Mitchell, *Our Air Force*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Melhorn, *Two-Block Fox*, 63; William Mitchell, "Has the Airplane Made the Battleship Obsolete?," *World's Work*, April 1920, 550-5.

for Navy aircraft engaged in mock search operations which culminated in the dropping of dummy bombs on the ship. Mitchell took part in the tests on 13 July, leading an attack on the German destroyer *G-102* that sent the ship to the bottom in twenty minutes. The German cruiser *Frankfurt* served as the next victim in the tests, and a combined force of Army and Navy aircraft sank the ship on 18 July.<sup>19</sup>

Members of the media covered these tests from the naval vessels monitoring the proceedings and described in detail the levels of damage inflicted by the aircraft on the various vessels. Their reports also highlighted the activities in which Mitchell engaged in during the various tests, such as leading the attacks or engaging in very low level flights to aurally inspect the damage inflicted on the *Frankfurt*. The climactic test against the German dreadnaught *Ostfriesland* received the most press attention because it was the first significant public test of air power against a capital ship. The first day of testing on 21 July left the ship largely intact due to bad weather and an inordinate amount of duds among the bombs dropped on the ship, prompting observers to label the vitals of the *Ostfriesland* “practically safe” from air attack.<sup>20</sup>

Mitchell, however, remained undeterred and returned the next day with six Martin bombers each armed with a single 2,000-pound bomb. Until then the rules of the tests dictated that attacks be followed when possible by inspections of the target ship to investigate the damage done to the hull and internal spaces. Needing the *Ostfriesland* to

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<sup>19</sup> Melhorn, *Two-Block Fox*, 70-2; *New York Times*, “Army Planes Sink Destroyer in Twenty Minutes,” 14 July 1921, 1.

<sup>20</sup> *New York Times*, “Bombs Fail to Sink the Ostfriesland,” 21 July 1921, 1. *New York Times*, “Bombing Aircraft Sink the Frankfurt,” 19 July 1921, 1.

sink in dramatic fashion in order to best prove the case he had spent the better part of three years making to the American public, Mitchell ignored the rules. His bombers attacked the *Ostfriesland* without pausing to allow the planned inspections. The *Ostfriesland* lacked the modern hull subdivisions and watertight protections of ships designed during the war years and sank after only twenty-five minutes. An apocryphal anecdote relates that senior naval officers observing the tests began to weep at the sight of the sinking battleship, but contemporary press accounts display a more mixed reaction to the tests. Certainly Mitchell's luster remained bright as the tests "vindicated" his rhetoric, but some press accounts made the distinction between the tests rendering battleships obsolete and merely pointing out that the tests proved that aircraft now posed a credible menace to surface ships of all sizes.<sup>21</sup>

The tests contained a number of flaws which some commentators quickly seized upon. First, the *Ostfriesland*, unlike the previous tests against the old *Iowa*, remained stationary throughout the entire process. The *Ostfriesland* also lacked any air defense capability so the bombers could fly over the craft unmolested. These factors cast doubt on some of Mitchell's claims, but Mitchell's exploits added to his already noteworthy public profile. For several months after the tests, Mitchell fielded interview requests from media outlets throughout the country and used these events to further his case for aviation development in the United States.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "2,000 Pound Bombs From Army Planes Sink Ostfriesland," *New York Times*, 22 July 1921, 1.

<sup>22</sup> *New York Times*, 29 July 1921, 8; Cooke, *Billy Mitchell*, 127-8.

The summer of 1921 may have given Mitchell a great public victory in his quest for an independent air service, but his tactics of ridiculing the Navy to further his cause cost Mitchell whatever chance he may have had at gaining the support of naval aviators. To be sure, Admiral William S. Sims later spoke out in support of Mitchell and retired Admiral William F. Fullam likewise agreed with the cause of air power. These voices, however, proved to be few as Mitchell's tactics drove away support from moderates. In addition, as Charles Melhorn argues, the Navy legitimately feared that Mitchell's quest for a separate air force which controlled all air power assets might succeed, prompting the service to better support its own aviation branch. In the midst of the bombing tests in June 1921, the Navy created the Bureau of Aeronautics to oversee the development of naval aviation and installed Rear Admiral William A. Moffett as its head. Moffett became adept at making a public case for naval aviation and successfully mollified the concerns of officers and naval aviators alike who believed the other to be a legitimate threat to their organizational existence.<sup>23</sup>

The third threat to the Navy – disarmament – traced its lineage to the previous century. Earlier attempts to limit arms, most notably the two conferences at The Hague in 1899 and 1907, respectively, failed for many reasons, but proposals to limit navies circulated during both conferences. Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan served as an American delegate to the 1899 conference with the intention of speaking out forcefully against any proposal for naval limitations, but no concrete proposals ever emerged from the debates. President Theodore Roosevelt, however, revived talk of naval limitations

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<sup>23</sup> Melhorn, *Two Block Fox*, 56-7.

by proposing a moratorium on battleship construction early in his second term in office. The building holiday would then serve as the nucleus of a proposal for naval limitations to be deliberated at the Second Hague conference in 1907. Roosevelt's plan quickly collapsed because, as in 1899, little support amongst the other principal naval powers existed for any limitations, and the issue died before the conference even met.<sup>24</sup>

During the Wilson administration, support for naval limitations reappeared, including in statements by Daniels himself, who would advocate international disarmament conferences in each of his annual reports from 1913 onwards. Even during his appearance before the House Naval Affairs Committee in December 1918 – the same appearance in which he argued for the completion of the 1916 and 1919 programs – Daniels continued to state his commitment to exploring potential avenues for disarmament. The firmest commitment towards disarmament during the period came from neither Wilson nor his Cabinet but from Congress. The original 1916 Naval Act included an amendment by Representative Walter Hensley, a Democrat from rural Missouri, calling for an international peace conference to settle the naval armaments issue. His amendment, however, provided for a conference to be held prior to the signing of contracts for construction, and, given the urgency of the bill and the uncertainty of the international situation, Hensley's clause quickly became obsolete as

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<sup>24</sup> Calvin DeArmond Davis, *The United States and the Second Hague Peace Conference: American Diplomacy and International Organization, 1899-1914* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975), 4-9, 24-5, 139-42.

the bidding process began on the first of the 1916 ships on 18 October 1916, only months after the bill's final passage in Congress.<sup>25</sup>

The rapid invalidation of Hensley's amendment by no means stifled the notion of naval disarmament. By the end of 1920, growing agitation over the naval armament problem prompted Senator William Borah, an Idaho Republican, to take action. Borah later argued that the naval race between Germany and Great Britain prior to 1914 prevented the two nations from settling their disputes, and he feared that the United States might be headed towards a similar path with its recent allies, Great Britain and Japan. On 14 December, Borah proposed a resolution calling for a "building holiday" which would suspend further naval construction for five years and for the leaders of the United States, Great Britain, and Japan to hold a summit to settle their disputes and thus try to put the brakes on any looming naval arms race. Learning of the proposal, Daniels rapidly appeared before the House Naval Affairs Committee denouncing the move due to the imbalance of completed construction between the United States, Britain, and Japan. Two days later, Daniels spoke before the committee again and threw his support behind a conference which would discuss the reduction of all armaments amongst all nations, not just the three principal naval powers.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Hoag, *Preface to Preparedness*, 38; Daniels, *Navy and the Nation*, 295-301; John Whiteclay Chambers II, ed., *The Eagle and the Dove: The American Peace Movement and United States Foreign Policy, 1900-1922* (New York: Garland, 1976), 309; Friedman, *United States Battleships*, 137. The first of the 1916 ships, the *Maryland*, did not enter service until 1921, nearly four years after being laid down at Newport News, Virginia.

<sup>26</sup> Chambers, *Eagle and the Dove*, 519; *New York Times*, "Borah Offers Plan to Reduce Navies," 15 December 1920, 1; E. David Cronon, *The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913-1921* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 575.



Borah's amendment tapped directly into the public's misgivings about the construction programs, and within days his measure received strong statements of support from many of the editors of the nation's newspapers with only fifteen of the major papers opposing the resolution. Concurrent with the Borah resolution, editors at Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* indicated their support for naval disarmament and published a series of interviews with key American and international political leaders about the issue. Prior to December 1920, the *World's* editors balked at supporting a building holiday because they believed a temporary halt would negate any of the cost savings that its advocates promised. In these articles, the *World* made no specific call for citizens to directly pressure their representatives in Congress to support disarmament, but within a matter of weeks thousands of letters poured into Capitol Hill from citizens all across the nation expressing support for the building holiday and disarmament in general.<sup>27</sup>

Concurrent with the debates over the fate of the Navy's construction programs, Daniels became subject to scrutiny due to several controversial decisions made during his tenure as Secretary of the Navy. These debates, while not directly linked to the disarmament issue, undermined Daniels' credibility and threw the naval establishment into disarray. Daniels had come to his post in 1913 after spending three decades in the newspaper business in North Carolina, most prominently as the owner of the *Raleigh News and Observer*. Daniels made a number of significant changes to the service during his tenure as Secretary of the Navy, including implementing a ban on alcohol aboard

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<sup>27</sup> Hoag, *Preface to Preparedness*, 45-9.

ships and naval stations through his General Order 99 of 1 July 1914 and the institution of several measures which increased the educational opportunities available to junior officers and enlisted men both aboard ship and ashore. Many of Daniels' reforms proved popular and successful over the long term. Yet his status as an outsider, while not necessarily harmful, helped to inspire a great deal of personal enmity within the Navy. Much of the criticism of Daniels from within the Navy's ranks disappeared after 1916 once it became clear to the Navy that Wilson and Daniels viewed the Navy as an important national asset and sought its expansion. Thanks to the advice of naval officers, particularly Admiral William S. Benson, the Chief of Naval Operations from 1916 until 1919, Daniels saw the wisdom of the 1916 and 1919 construction programs as a means of ensuring parity with Great Britain and the continued independence of American foreign policy.<sup>28</sup>

These actions on behalf of the service, however, did not completely eliminate opposition to Daniels' tenure at the Navy Department. Some notable critics of Daniels remained, particularly Admiral Bradley Fiske, who chafed at not becoming the first Chief of Naval Operations, a position whose creation Fiske had consistently advocated. After the war, the Navy became embroiled in Congressional hearings after the end of the war regarding its wartime conduct and the methods by which it awarded medals to its

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<sup>28</sup>C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, com. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 91. Daniels exhibited many of the traits common to Southern Progressives from the period, including strong support for temperance and support for racial segregation. ; Daniels, *Navy and the Nation*, 302; Baer, *American Sea Power*, 58-9; Mary Klachko, "William Shepherd Benson: Naval General Staff American Style," in James C. Bradford, ed., *Admirals of the New Steel Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 320-2.

servicemen. These hearings often pitted Daniels against well known naval officers, including Admirals Fiske and Sims, and forced the Navy to publicly discuss what many officers considered internal matters.<sup>29</sup>

The first of these conflicts came to a head in late in 1919 and involved Daniels' system of awarding decorations for wartime service. As World War I raged, Admiral Sims and Daniels disagreed over a regulation preventing naval officers and enlisted men from accepting foreign decorations. Congress eventually sided with Sims and passed a law allowing American servicemen to receive foreign decorations in late 1917. The two men came at loggerheads again in 1919 when Daniels began to issue medals to officers and men for wartime service. After receiving recommendations from commanding officers as well as a board appointed to review claims of meritorious service, Daniels issued a list of awards that omitted staff officers from the highest decorations. Admiral Sims objected to such omissions as well as the inclusion of officers who had lost their ships in the combat zone. Sims and Admiral Henry T. Mayo wrote letters to Daniels protesting the list, and Sims went further and refused to accept his Distinguished Service Medal. Other senior officers soon followed suit and gave up their own medals as well, but the protest failed to spread as Sims had hoped among junior officers. Congressional hearings held in late 1919 and early 1920 over the controversy revealed the haphazard and less than systematic methods by which Daniels arrived at his list, but the hearings also revealed fundamental disagreements between the officer corps and Daniels regarding the definition of meritorious service. Secretary Daniels rejected the views of

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<sup>29</sup> Klachko, "William Shepherd Benson," 300-4.

Sims and others, arguing that officers who lost their ships could still be worthy of decoration if their ships sank due to no fault or negligence of their own. The end of the hearings into the medals controversy failed to bring any noteworthy changes to the awards process and Daniels' list eventually stood unaltered.<sup>30</sup>

The medals hearings directly led to a second controversy between senior officers and Daniels, this time examining American preparedness prior to entering World War I. During the navalist movement of the late nineteenth century, many naval officers began advocating a centralized body modeled on the German General Staff to direct planning and operations for the service. The substantive issues discussed during the hearings traced their roots to the naval reform movement from the turn of the twentieth century. Reformers pressed for the modernization of the Navy's bureau system as well as other key improvements designed to enhance the operational control line officers wielded. The outbreak of World War I exacerbated the issue as naval officers as well as members of the public believed the United States should take a more overtly defensive posture. The crisis led to the adoption of some of the desired reforms, chief among them the creation of the post of Chief of Naval Operations in 1915. The new position appeared to satisfy the demands of those wanting greater centralization of the Navy's bureaucracy and the creation of a true Navy General Staff, but left many unsatisfied. Daniels' choice to become the first Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Benson, heightened tensions with senior naval officers who believed that a more senior officer such as Admiral Fiske,

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<sup>30</sup> *Washington Post*, "Congress Inquiry Into Navy Awards," 24 December 1919, 1; Elting Morison, *Admiral Sims and the Modern American Navy* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1942), 434-8.

who had long advocated the creation of the office and other reforms, deserved the appointment.<sup>31</sup>

In the midst of the medals hearings, a letter written by Sims to Daniels indicting the Navy's wartime administration became public. The letter, titled "Certain Naval Lessons of the Great War," attacked the Navy's overall war effort as ill-planned, under-supplied, and too small in size to fight a war which the United States observed the conflict for nearly three years prior to entry. As Sims wrote, these problems affected his administration of the naval war effort from London and combined to cost the Allies time, money, and manpower in the early months of 1917. The hearings, which lasted from early March until late May 1920, split the senior ranks of the Navy with Sims receiving support from Fiske and Fullam but being opposed by Benson and most other senior officers. Although Sims apparently hoped to gain public support for administrative reforms, the hearings devolved into a messy affair centered on the prominent individuals at the core of the dispute. Fiske, who had retired and become a noted public advocate for naval aviation by early 1920, testified before the committee in late March but spent much time attempting to support Sims' case by lobbying for support from prominent newspaper editorial staffs. However damming the accusations Sims made against the Navy Department and Daniels, he never provided enough evidence in support of the claims to move the dispute beyond the level of personalities or of political parties. The committee eventually faded from public view, and the final report issued in 1921 failed to recommend any of the substantive changes in administration of the Navy Department

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<sup>31</sup> Baer, *American Sea Power*, 54-9.

that Sims hoped might result from his criticisms. The hearings also undermined the case being made for naval construction: if the Navy could not manage itself competently during wartime, why provide an enlarged fleet for the service to mismanage in peace? From the Navy's perspective, the hearings provided an unnecessary public distraction away from the case for construction and conjured up memories of a war Americans seemed eager to forget.<sup>32</sup>

During 1921, the issue of naval arms limitation was transformed into a widespread public movement in which groups drawing their membership from all walks of life rapidly formed and offered their support for the cause. Rather than a mere elite phenomenon driven by supportive press coverage and the policies of Senator William Borah, the cause of naval arms limitation rapidly gained support in the American public. Women's groups, farmers' associations, organized labor, and interdenominational religious organizations all pressured Congress and President Warren G. Harding to support disarmament, but Harding proved more difficult to persuade than Congress. Harding's previous record in the Senate indicated his general support for naval construction bills and on the campaign trail he only agreed to the principle of disarmament if the United States could negotiate from a position of strength and dictate the terms. Harding worried about the ability of the nation to defend its overseas interests as well as the potential loss of prestige should the United States relinquish naval superiority to its rivals. In addition to Harding's sentiments, his Secretary of the Navy,

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<sup>32</sup> Morison, *Admiral Sims*, 441-62; 1; *New York Times*, "Sims Arraigns Navy Department," 18 January 1919, 1; Paolo E. Coletta, *Admiral Bradley Fiske and the American Navy* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), 200-6.

Edwin Denby, as well as the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., also frequently spoke out in favor of continuing naval construction.<sup>33</sup>

The first, and largest, of the groups which formed to support disarmament grew out of the women's movement. The nascent peace movement which first appeared in the years following the Spanish-American War amidst the American effort to consolidate colonial rule in its new possessions frequently ignored the desires of women to contribute to the movement. After several years of continued slights, the female supporters formed the Women's Peace Party, later the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, in 1915. During the spring and summer of 1921, several additional women's organizations rapidly coalesced and began to place pressure on Congress to support the cause of naval disarmament. The most effective of these new organizations, the Women's Committee on World Disarmament, formed in March 1921 following a split in the National Women's Party on the issue of disarmament. Emma Wold served as the head of the new organization which established very close ties to Borah himself during its early months. Other prominent women's political organizations, including the National League of Women Voters and the Women's Non-Partisan League, also expressed their support for disarmament.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Phillips Payson O'Brien, *British and American Naval Power: Politics and Policy, 1900-1936* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 158-9.

<sup>34</sup> Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace Without Freedom: Race and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1975* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 4-5; Hoag, *Preface to Preparedness*, 89-92.

The disarmament movement attracted support from across the ideological spectrum. The head of United States Steel, Elbert Gary, spoke out in favor of disarmament in December 1920, and several leading business journals followed suit the following year, desiring a reduction of taxes and government expenditures. At a time when labor and industry remained at odds with one another, the leading industrial union, the American Federation of Labor, also began to favor the cause of disarmament. Its leader, Samuel Gompers, attempted to distinguish between disarmament, which he regarded as a legitimate and noteworthy issue, and pacifism, which he detested and strove to avoid. During a meeting with President Harding in June 1921, Gompers pressed the president on the issue of disarmament and later called upon foreign labor unions to make similar demands of their own governments. Gompers would later help form the General Committee on the Limitation of Armaments in October 1921 and molded the new organization's beliefs to match his own.<sup>35</sup>

The growing public support for disarmament began to overwhelm the Harding administration. During his first few months in office, Harding's opposed disarmament but was under pressure to alter his stance on the issue. Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon and Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover argued against further naval construction so that government expenditures could be reduced. Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes also opposed a naval buildup and his dominance of the foreign policy establishment allowed his views on the issue to dominate. The combination of the social movement, Hughes, and overtures from the British on disarmament finally

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<sup>35</sup> Hoag, *Preface to Preparedness*, 47, 113-20.



compelled Harding to formally announce on 11 July 1921 that a naval conference would be held in Washington in November. Secretary Hughes sent out formal invitations to foreign nations ten days later.<sup>36</sup>

In the months after Harding's announcement, the tide in favor of disarmament continued to grow. Non-denominational religious bodies as well as nationally organized student groups became strong public advocates for disarmament. The Federal Council of Churches and the Church Peace Union openly supported the *New York World's* campaign in December 1920. Several new organizations rapidly appeared in the following year all supporting disarmament. The Quakers as well as the Women's Christian Temperance Union collected more than thirteen million letters or signatures on petitions to Congress from the public all desiring disarmament and for "divine intervention" to make it possible. The Eastern College Committee for the Limitation of Armaments formed in 1921 and quickly organized a meeting of representatives from forty-nine colleges and universities in an effort to coordinate student support for disarmament. As with the religious organizations, the student organization grew rapidly and the National Student Committee formed in November to incorporate the Eastern College Committee and groups in the Midwest.<sup>37</sup>

The Harding administration gave further credence to the disarmament movement in the months between his announcement and the beginning of the conference. Harding created the American Advisory Committee and appointed former Utah Senator George

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<sup>36</sup> O'Brien, *British and American Naval Power*, 158-9; Roskill, *Anglo-American Antagonism*, 301.

<sup>37</sup> Hoag, *Preface to Preparedness*, 100-6, 120-3.

Sutherland to head the new organization. The committee would monitor newspaper editorials and letters sent in by citizens and provide the American delegation to the conference with “sound and well-informed public opinion.” Curiously, Secretary Hughes feared that the data provided by the committee would overwhelm the delegation and make it too reliant upon the whims of the public, but his objections failed to prevent the committee from carrying out its work. In all, the committee received more than fourteen million letters, eleven million of those favoring disarmament, during its short time in operation.<sup>38</sup>

The Washington Conference convened on 12 November 1921 and met for nearly three months. Secretary Hughes served as the chair of the conference and almost immediately proposed that the participants suspend all naval construction, accept existing ratios of strength relative to the other powers, scrap older and obsolete vessels in their inventories, and accept capital ship tonnage as the basis of comparison between nations. Hughes’ proposal received immediate public support, and many of these central ideas served as the basis for negotiations in the weeks that followed. Other issues remained the subject of contentious debate, including the upper limit of battleship tonnage, whether to abolish submarines as a legitimate weapon of naval warfare, the exact ratio of Japanese construction relative to the United States, and the status of naval aviation developments in the respective countries. Over time, however, the nations

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<sup>38</sup> *Washington Post*, “Lists Arms Advisers,” 2 November 1921, 1; Hoag, *Preface to Preparedness*, 126-31.

involved reached compromises so that the Conference resulted in the signing of nine treaties and twelve resolutions.<sup>39</sup>

Two of the treaties agreed upon at the Conference had lasting impact on American naval policy. The Four-Power Treaty between the United States, Japan, Britain, and France terminated the controversial Anglo-Japanese Alliance and created a non-aggression pact in the Pacific built on the recognition of the territorial claims of each party. In addition, the treaty also called upon its signatories to not fortify their possessions. The Five-Power Treaty codified building ratios for capital ships and aircraft carriers at 5:5:3:1.75:1.75 between the United States, Britain, Japan, Italy, and France, respectively. This latter treaty established naval parity between the United States and Britain and also included the ten-year building holiday for battleships proposed by Hughes during the conference's opening session.<sup>40</sup>

The treaties signed at the Conference quickly passed through the ratification process in the United States and avoided the protracted struggle which had marked the Treaty of Versailles. It is difficult to gauge just how strong opposition ran to naval expansion in the aftermath of the Washington Conference due to the lack of public opinion polling data for the 1920s. With that caveat accepted, the Conference appears to have been the crescendo of the disarmament movement during the interwar period. Many of the organizations created in the months prior to the Washington Conference dissolved or faded from public notice in succeeding years. At no point before or after

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<sup>39</sup> Roskill, *Naval Policy*, 310-2, 328.

<sup>40</sup> Baer, *American Sea Power*, 99-101; Roskill, *Naval Policy*, 316-7.

the major disarmament conferences of the latter 1920s and 1930s did such a broad-based public movement form in response to the issue of naval construction. The lack of an organized protest movement to oppose future naval construction did not necessarily mean that the public no longer held any interest on the issue. Until at least the early years of Franklin Roosevelt's administration, proposals from the Navy for construction typically met with outright opposition or apathy. Between 1922 and 1933, only two major naval construction bills passed Congress, thus fulfilling the goals of some of those who had supported the initial disarmament movement in 1921 by limiting the growth in costs expended in the Navy. The aging of ships in American service by the early 1930s, however, sowed the seeds of arguments made on behalf of construction bills later that decade.<sup>41</sup>

The system of disarmament created at the Washington Conference continued well into the 1930s. The exclusion in the Five-Power Treaty of "auxiliary" vessels, e.g., cruisers and destroyers, helped spark a potential arms race in subsequent years after Washington, eventually prompting the United States to press for a new conference to impose limits on these types of ships. The Geneva Naval Arms Limitation Conference convened in 1927 to resolve this issue, but differences between the American and British delegations over the cruiser issue led to its conclusion without settlement. A further attempt to remedy the problem at London in 1930 resulted in an agreement between the United States, Britain, and Japan over the cruiser issue but the public showed less

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<sup>41</sup> Rappaport, *Navy League*, 101-2, 113; Stephen Svonavec, "Congress and the Navy: The Development of Naval Policy, 1913-1947" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2000), 7-8, 91, 102-19.

interest in the Conference than in the previous one. By the time of the 1935 London Conference, the system of naval arms limitation had broken irrevocably with the decision by Japan to withdraw from any future agreements the year prior.<sup>42</sup>

The peace movement grew in the years after the Washington Conference and resulted in the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact in which its signatories, including the United States, renounced the use of war. The agreement helped to inspire activists, primarily in European countries, to push for a general disarmament conference. Following several years of proposals, the World Disarmament Conference began at Geneva in February 1932. President Herbert Hoover proposed further reductions in military and naval strength to the conference in June of that year, but the conference failed when disputes between Germany and France brought the proceedings to a halt.<sup>43</sup>

General Mitchell's quest for an independent air service and criticism of the Navy also continued well into the 1920s. In 1925, Mitchell published a second book-length examination of aviation policy in the United States titled *Winged Defense*. It contained few new ideas, but restated Mitchell's assertions of the technological and economic superiority of air power over sea power. Specifically, he believed that sea power maintained its dominance only in those areas of ocean where aircraft could not reach, an area which shrank with each advance in aircraft range. In his account of his involvement

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<sup>42</sup>The American delegation to Geneva favored small numbers of large, 8-inch gun cruisers suitable for a Pacific Ocean campaign, while the British favored large numbers of smaller, 6-inch gun cruisers for imperial patrolling. Emily O. Goldman, *Sunken Treaties: Naval Arms Control Between the Wars* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 190.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Richard Davies, *The Possibilities of Transnational Activism: The Campaign for Disarmament between the Two World Wars* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 2007), 79, 126-7, 147-8.

in the 1921 bombing tests off of the Virginia Capes, Mitchell argued that the naval vessels expended in the tests stood no chance against the combined might of the Air Corps squadrons, but he conveniently left out the participation of naval aircraft in some of the earlier tests. Mitchell looked upon the tests as a high point in aviation development in the United States but complained that the nation was constantly “falling back” in the race to utilize aircraft. Mitchell’s criticisms of aviation policy continued outside of this book as he accused the Navy and War Departments of criminal negligence in September of that year just after the crash of the Navy airship *Shenandoah*. His actions following the accident brought about Mitchell’s court martial later that year.<sup>44</sup>

With the outlawing of war in the Kellogg-Briand Pact and Mitchell’s continued aviation writings, sentiment against naval funding continued into the early 1930s. Progressive historian and intellectual Charles Beard emerged as one of the most outspoken critics of naval expansion by the early 1930s and wrote several articles on the subject in late 1931 and early 1932. Most of these appeared in *The New Republic* in a series entitled “The Big Navy Boys.” The editors of *The New Republic* apparently believed enough in the power of Beard’s articles that a display ad for new and renewed subscriptions in January 1932 cited the incomplete series as the main selling point for subscribers. In his final article in the series, Beard attacked the Navy League directly, questioning the influence of what he deemed its propaganda on naval policy. Beard also

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<sup>44</sup> William Mitchell, *Winged Defense* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1925), 18-9, 56-76. Quote is from p. 76.; Cooke, *Billy Mitchell*, 178.

bemoaned the influence of Mahan's writings, which he believed had led the United States to develop a large navy for its sake alone. He ascribed Germany's transformation from an agrarian continental power to an imperial sea power to its leaders' acceptance of Mahan's ideas. The result was to bring Germany into a ruinous conflict with Great Britain. Beard offered no specific remedies to the issues raised in his articles, but expressed grave concerns about the past and future directions of American naval policy.<sup>45</sup>

In 1932, Beard published the full-length book *Navy: Defense or Portent?* which incorporated many of the points from his earlier articles and greatly expanded the scope of his analysis. Beard believed that propaganda spread by the supporters of pacifism as well as those advocating naval buildups ultimately clouded the issue of "adequate preparedness for national defense." The Navy, Beard argued, presented numerous standards by which the size of the fleet should be assessed, ranging from the ability to protect global commerce to a fleet of ample size to defend the Philippines from a foreign aggressor. Dating back to the 1880s, naval expansion stemmed partly from the self-interested desires of the Navy and various political constituencies rather than as a result of a well-thought out national policy. This situation continued to perpetuate itself so that, by the time of Beard's writing, the General Board had accumulated a wealth of potential supporters which included, but was certainly not limited to, the steel and

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<sup>45</sup> Charles A. Beard, "Making a Bigger and Better Navy," *New Republic*, 14 October 1931, 223-6; Charles A. Beard, "Big Navy Boys I: Selling Increased Armaments to the Taxpayers," *New Republic*, 20 January 1932, 258-62; Charles A. Beard, "Big Navy Boys II: What is a Naval Expert and Why?," *New Republic*, 27 January 1932, 287-91; Charles A. Beard, "Big Navy Boys III: Who is Behind the Navy League?," *New Republic*, 3 February 1932, 314-8.

munitions industries, Congressmen with financial stakes in Navy success, and “the jingo press, [which was] making money out of rabble-rousing.” According to Beard, the complex nexus of overlapping interests strongly resembled the situation which took hold in Germany at the turn of the century during its period of ultimately ruinous naval expansion. Rather than reaching a policy decision under a cloak of secrecy, Beard advocated clear statements of naval policy so that the exact needs of the service could be met. Additionally, he argued the people and their elected representatives must be the driving force behind national and naval policy and these bodies must not surrender themselves to the supposed expertise of individuals, including naval officers, with a vested stake in naval expansion. Although Beard at times overstretched his case and resorted to the incongruence of using statistical data despite devoting several pages to describing the ease with which such data can be manipulated, it represented a powerful critique of American naval policy and of those in a position to shape it.<sup>46</sup>

Although Beard focused his attacks upon the Navy, his writings touched upon the suspicions which long existed after World War I that the American munitions industry engaged in profiteering against the national interest before and during American involvement in the conflict. By 1934, enough public pressure had developed that Congress launched a formal investigation into what critics called the “merchants of death.” The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom’s president, Dorothy Detzer, joined forces with North Dakota Senator Gerald P. Nye, and the latter formed the Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry, which popularly became

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<sup>46</sup> Charles A. Beard, *Navy: Defense or Portent?* (New York: Harper’s 1932), 1-3, 5-6, 8, 35-7, 195-8. Quotes are from p. 1 and p. 5.



known as the Nye Committee. The committee did not solely represent pacifistic interests as Senator Arthur Vandenberg, a noted proponent of preparedness, lent his support to the committee's proceedings. Although the committee conducted hearings for two years, from 1934 until 1936, its final report failed to offer specific conclusions concerning the matters it investigated. The committee studied ties between the Navy and the private shipyards and steel industries, seeking to determine whether or not the Navy grossly overpaid for construction assigned to private shipyards. The committee believed that the so-called "Big Three" shipyards – Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock, Bethlehem Shipbuilding, and New York Shipbuilding – colluded with one another to prevent other companies from receiving significant building contracts from the Navy. Senior naval officers involved in the bidding process often worked for these same private shipbuilders soon after their retirement from the service. In addition, Nye also explored charges that the Electric Boat Company, the DuPont Corporation, and other companies pooled profits and supported lobbying efforts to prevent disarmament. Only circumstantial evidence existed to prove the charges leveled by the committee against the Navy and its corporate partners, but the investigations provided further evidence that political leaders remained skeptical of the service well into the 1930s.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to the significant political upheavals confronting the postwar Navy, the nation's cultural landscape altered considerably during the 1920s. In particular, the practice of public relations took on added importance as the image of individuals and

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<sup>47</sup>Paul A.C. Koistinen, *Planning War, Pursuing Peace: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1920-1939* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 253-65.

organizations came to affect their standing with the public. The curry of public favor dates from the days of colonization. Supporters of the Virginia Company and other colonial ventures of the seventeenth centuries described the lands to be settled in almost idyllic terms, leaving out the harsh and dangerous struggle that often accompanied these early attempts at settlement in North America. In a similar vein, agents of nineteenth century railroad lines used promotional techniques in order to sell the tracts of land given to the various companies by the government. The abundance of land for sale and competition between the railroad companies prompted them to resort to overt salesmanship to secure the desired outcome.<sup>48</sup>

Modern publicity took shape during the Progressive era when reformers sought to curry support for their programs. Muckraking journalists of the late nineteenth century exploited the power of the increased number of newspapers and middle-class magazines to expose social, economic, and political problems that confounded the United States during the Industrial Revolution. These journalists, notably Henry Demarest Lloyd and Ida Tarbell, hoped to shed light on the workings of the powerful men and institutions shaping contemporary American life which had heretofore remained mysterious to an overwhelming majority of Americans.<sup>49</sup>

To some Progressives, however, the ability of muckraking to arouse the public could potentially go too far and lead to widespread social unrest. Leading Progressive politicians and intellectuals such as Walter Lippmann and Theodore Roosevelt worried

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<sup>48</sup> Cutlip, *Public Relations History*, ix, xiii, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 46-59.

that excessive scrutiny of business and other institutions threatened to destroy what made American success possible. Their concerns mirrored the work of social scientists such as Gabriel Tarde who began studying the behaviors of “the public” at the turn of the century and postulated means by which control of the masses could be achieved. The solution lay in the same mass media that the muckrakers had used to their own benefit in previous years but now to be used for diametrically opposed purposes. The new science of public relations promised to diminish anti-corporate fervor and transform the public into a passive audience accepting of the new industrial order.<sup>50</sup>

These notions of passivity and inactivity could also be found in the writings of Edward Bernays, one of the earliest professional practitioners of public relations and probably the individual most responsible for popularizing the profession amongst the American public. Born in Vienna in 1891, Bernays received early guidance from his uncle, the famed psychologist Sigmund Freud. Following his graduation from Cornell University in 1912, Bernays worked as a journalist, in public relations, and for the Committee for Public Information during World War I.<sup>51</sup>

Bernays first important work on public relations, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, appeared in 1923, but only became a major success following its reissue in 1961. There is no evidence that anyone directly involved in Navy public relations drew from ideas presented in the book, but its contents offer remarkable insights into the state of the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 60-81.

<sup>51</sup> Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays and the Birth of Public Relations* (New York: Crown, 1998), 5-9, 16-21.

public relations profession at the time. Bernays argued that the opinions of the masses could be shaped by utilizing the media of the era—newspapers, magazines, and film. To succeed in influencing people, public relations (PR) practitioners should craft messages that appealed to basic human needs—self-preservation, sex, and hunger—and instincts—flight-fear, repulsion-disgust, curiosity-wonder, pugnacity-anger, self-display-elation, self-abasement-subjection, and parental-love-tenderness. PR men must assume the role of the “creator of news” so that their product or issue stands out in an increasingly media-saturated environment. In using such techniques to mold public opinion, Bernays likened public relations counsels to “judge and jury” who can essentially make up the public’s mind for it.<sup>52</sup>

The immediate post-World War I era profoundly affected American naval policy for years to come. Congressional reluctance to pass further naval construction bills and the desire for the presidential administrations of the postwar era to participate in the disarmament process ended the near-constant support the Navy enjoyed in the pre-World War I era. Lack of clearly defined naval policies encouraged potential alternatives to naval construction, such as air power, and the public wanted to prevent anything similar to World War I from occurring again. The Navy’s own internal squabbles provided further evidence of discord within the Navy Department. The changed political and cultural conditions during the postwar years created an impetus for the Navy to enhance its own public relations machinery over the next decade in an effort to restore its public image.

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<sup>52</sup> Edward L. Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923), 34-40, 63-5, 103, 122, 150-2, 170-2, 178.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **A SUSTAINED PUBLICITY: NAVY PUBLIC RELATIONS, 1919-1939**

For a majority of the interwar period, the Navy's nascent public relations organs remained diffuse. Because the Navy did not attach a high priority to public relations work, the public relations function remained scattered throughout its labyrinthine bureaucracy. The World War I-era Navy News Bureau ceased operating in 1921 and its functions were placed under the authority of the Office of Naval Intelligence, itself part of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. Until just prior to American entry into World War II, the Navy never established a single centralized bureau or office to perform public relations work, nor were the official public relations organizations placed directly under the most powerful posts within the Navy Department: the Secretary of the Navy or the chiefs of the Navy's bureaus.

Given these conditions, the responsibilities of public relations fell onto multiple organizations. The Information Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence succeeded the Navy News Bureau in 1922 and became the Navy's first true peacetime public relations entity. This new organization focused primarily upon providing information to the press, but its small size and limited mandate allowed other parts of the Navy to informally assume the role of image management. A significant portion of naval publicity, thusly, originated not from the entity tasked with its creation but rather from individuals and organizations who took up the task of their own accord and in furtherance of specific goals. The Navy Recruiting Service remained active throughout the interwar period in spite of the reduced manpower needs of the service by the mid-

1920s. The Bureau of Aeronautics, formed in 1921, under the leadership of Rear Admiral William A. Moffett became the most proactive of all parts of the Navy in attempting to manage its image. From his position as the head of the Office of Naval Records and Library, Captain Dudley W. Knox offered commentary and issued statements explaining the rationale behind contemporary naval policy. Several other active-duty naval officers, lacking an official title or the backing of a Navy bureau, took it upon themselves to try and improve the service's image through a variety of means, including the authoring of books and screenplays. Thus, throughout the interwar period, the Navy remained active in a wide spectrum of public relations activities in spite of its lack of cohesion.

As the Navy emerged from World War I, its capacity to manage its own public relations stood far better developed than at any previous point in the service's history. While Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels initially created the Navy News Bureau in order to facilitate cooperation between the service and the Committee for Public Information, the Navy News Bureau survived the war and began to function independently in the postwar years. Turnover occurred at the top of the Navy News Bureau in April 1919 when John Wilbur Jenkins, the Civilian Director of Information, became an aide to Secretary Daniels, and Marvin McIntyre, who had been serving as Jenkins' subordinate since the creation of the Bureau in April 1917, succeeded to the top post. McIntyre took a leave of absence from the Bureau to manage Franklin Delano

Roosevelt's campaign for vice president during the 1920 election but otherwise worked in the position until late 1921.<sup>1</sup>

The Navy News Bureau continued to bring public attention to the service in the early months following the end of the war. Reverting to prewar tendencies, movements of the fleet became fodder for public relations. In late 1918, the Bureau encouraged press coverage of a massive fleet review held in New York harbor beginning on Christmas Day. It issued press releases, coordinated visits to vessels of the fleet, and made other arrangements to facilitate reportage of the event; in addition, local media eagerly added their own flourishes in an editorial labeling the review as a "spectacle of sea power." Bad weather forced a day's postponement of the affair but otherwise had little effect on the proceedings once the fleet arrived in New York. Secretary Daniels assisted in drumming up support for the fleet's arrival and reviewed the incoming ships from the presidential yacht *Mayflower*. A parade of 10,000 sailors added to the festivities which attracted tens of thousands of local spectators. Throughout the fleet's time in port the press chronicled the movements of the sailors as well as the fleet commander, Admiral Hugh Rodman.<sup>2</sup>

In April 1919, another publicity opportunity presented itself when the Navy launched the battleship *Tennessee* from the New York Navy Yard in Brooklyn. As it

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<sup>1</sup> Philbert, "History of Navy Public Relations," 1-2; Henry H. Douglas, "Public Relations, United States Navy," *Proceedings* 67, no. 10 (October 1941): 1432.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, "Navy Week," 18 December 1918, 14. Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 72; *New York Times*, "Bad Weather Delays Arrival of Fleet," 19 December 1918, 3; *New York Times*, "Daniels Lauds Navy as Fleet Nears Home Port," 25 December 1918, 1; *New York Times*, "Ovation to Sea Fighters," 27 December 1918, 1; *New York Times*, "Night Ashore for Sailors," 27 December 1918, 5; *New York Times*, "Men from Warships get Shore Leave," 28 December 1918, 18; *New York Times*, "Rodman Pictures the Fleet's Work; The New York Rammed by U-Boat," 27 December 1918, 1.

had done with the fleet review five months earlier, the Navy encouraged press coverage and public attendance at the event. The Navy issued more than 75,000 tickets for what was billed as the launching of the “largest battle unit in the world.” A newspaper reporter described the crowd of at least 50,000 as a varied lot in which “the banker and the merchant rubbed elbows with the mechanic and the carpenter.” A dozen bands hired specifically for the occasion played “The Star Spangled Banner” as the ship slid down the ways in perfect weather; the scene prompted siren calls from the battleship *New Mexico* and other vessels in the harbor. Acting Secretary of the Navy Franklin Delano Roosevelt watched as Helen Roberts, the daughter of the governor of Tennessee and the sponsor of the new ship, christened the vessel.<sup>3</sup>

The Navy Recruiting Bureau, which had been renamed the Navy Mobilization Service during World War I, likewise also made the transition to peacetime operations following the end of World War I. Because of the wartime expansion in manpower, the Navy grew to more than 400,000 personnel by the end of World War I, but then faced an almost equally rapid demobilization. By the summer of 1919, the Navy discharged more than eighty percent of the men who served during World War I but continued to require a large force of enlisted personnel to man its ships. The Recruiting Bureau resorted to a variety of methods to make the service appear an attractive option to prospective recruits. For a time, the Recruiting Bureau utilized men in their final months of enlistment to engage in recruiting activities in their hometowns prior to their release, but

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<sup>3</sup> *New York Times*, “To Launch Tennessee Soon,” 21 April 1919, 14. *New York Times*, “Throng at Launch of the Tennessee,” 1 May 1919, 16. Jonathan G. Utley, *An American Battleship at Peace and War: The USS Tennessee* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 2.



the plan ultimately failed. As Frederick Harrod wrote in his study of naval enlistments, “The irony of men who were leaving the service trying to persuade others to join could not have been lost on potential recruits.”<sup>4</sup>

Other recruiting methods produced more promising results. For example, when recruiting the crew of the *Tennessee*, the Navy targeted the state of Tennessee, guaranteeing new enlistees assignment to the battleship. The Navy also sent out recruiting parties of current enlisted men with money and brand new uniforms, tasking them with luring new recruits. Captain Richard Leigh of the Bureau of Navigation and the Governor of Tennessee, Albert Houston Roberts, undertook separate speaking tours throughout the state extolling the virtues of naval service. Larger towns and cities reserved concert halls for these speaking events, and many smaller towns interrupted their school days to allow children to attend speeches. The Navy deemed this particular recruiting effort successful as more than 2,000 men volunteered during the course of the campaign, giving the service enough men from which to form an effective crew.<sup>5</sup>

The work of these organizations devoted to managing the Navy’s public image did not provide many tangible benefits to the service between 1919 and 1922 since the growing public support for disarmament hampered the ability of the Navy to promote itself. As early as 1919 and long before the disarmament movement’s efforts came to fruition at the Washington Conference, naval officers recognized the potential peril that disillusionment and pacifism could cause the Navy if not countered. Captain Dudley W.

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<sup>4</sup> Harrod, *Manning the New Navy*, 30, 37-8.

<sup>5</sup> Utley, *An American Battleship*, 3-5.

Knox, who emerged as one of the Navy's most frequent public defenders during the interwar period, published an article entitled "Our Post War Mission" in the August 1919 issue of the Naval Institute's *Proceedings*. Knox claimed that only a change in "human nature" could successfully eliminate war, yet he concluded that the tide against the service ran strongly and predicted that the Navy would need to weather a storm of low budgets and limited public support in the coming years. Such changes in the political and public mood threatened to recreate "former conditions of hostility" towards "adequate naval preparation," although Knox never specified exactly when in the past such conditions of hostility existed. To remedy these problems, Knox made a series of recommendations to the service and his fellow naval officers, including the maintenance of adequate standards of training and readiness to ensure the Navy's continued effectiveness during hard times. Knox also believed that a "certain amount of publicity be given the Navy constantly." He acknowledged the possibility that overt public lobbying on the behalf of the service could be detrimental both to the officers undertaking such a task and to the Navy itself, but believed that the "importance of the matter" necessitated officers supporting civilian efforts to publicize the service.<sup>6</sup>

While not responding specifically to Knox's plan, naval officials attempted to cope with the problems he described. In 1921, the new Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., advanced an idea titled "Intelligent Publicity." Roosevelt believed that the Navy's public image suffered because journalists lacked basic

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<sup>6</sup> Dudley W. Knox, "Our Post War Mission," *Proceedings* 45, no. 8 (August 1919), 1293-302. Quotes are on pp 1294, 1295, 1296, and 1298.

knowledge of the Navy and sea power. To remedy the situation, Roosevelt proposed a two-pronged solution: first, he recommended that summer courses be established at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, designed specifically for journalists. The course would not be exceptionally rigorous, but would provide journalists with enough information to enable them to write more frequently and with greater accuracy about the Navy after they returned to their jobs. Secondly, Roosevelt proposed that the Navy encourage major daily newspapers throughout the country to publish a weekly column covering naval affairs. Information for the column would be supplied by a high-ranking naval officer capable of exercising “discretion” when choosing which news items to release. The plan received enthusiastic endorsements from the General Board and the Naval War College, but the funds required to maintain the program at the War College could not be carved out of the Navy’s appropriation and the idea died stillborn.<sup>7</sup>

By 1921, the already meager financial and personnel resources for public relations dwindled even further. In these early years, the organizational capabilities of the Navy’s primary public relations arm remained limited. When directing the Navy News Bureau, John Wilbur Jenkins preferred a deliberately small staff structure because he believed it promoted efficiency and timeliness in relaying the news to the public. As the inevitable postwar drawdown occurred, any hope of increasing the numbers of

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<sup>7</sup> Assistant Secretary of the Navy to the Secretary of the Navy, “Intelligent Publicity for the Navy,” 8 March 1921, Box 12 [hereafter B], General Correspondence, 1913-1926, Entry 19 [hereafter E19], Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Navy, Records of the Navy Department, 1798-1947, RG 80, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. [hereafter NAB]. Senior Member Present, General Board to SecNav, “Intelligent Publicity for the Navy,” 18 April 1921, B12, E19, RG 80, NAB; Admiral William S. Sims to SecNav, “Intelligent Publicity for the Navy,” 4 April 1921, B12, E19, RG 80, NAB; Chief of the Bureau of Navigation to SecNav, “Intelligent Publicity for the Navy,” 13 May 1921, B12, E19, RG 80, NAB.

personnel devoted to public relations quickly disappeared. Given this situation, the Navy's public relations bureaus lacked the resources and direction to counteract the public's turn towards disarmament. The election of Warren G. Harding further complicated the situation as the new president pushed for significant reductions in government spending. This proved particularly problematic for the Navy, coming as it did during the peak of the disarmament movement in the United States, and the service found itself unable to pay the salary of Marvin McIntyre, the Director of Information. In September 1921, cutbacks forced the Navy News Bureau, now renamed the Navy Press Room, to reduce staff. Reserve Lieutenant Wells Hawks, the new Information Officer, had proven himself an accomplished publicist since the end of World War I. His handling of a 1919 Mississippi River recruiting tour which included an anti-submarine warfare flotilla, Navy baseball team, several Navy bands, and even a glee club had attracted notice, plus Hawks also occupied a leadership position within the American Legion and had enticed former officers into publicity work. But despite his talents, Hawks was severely handicapped by the lack of a staff to support his endeavors.<sup>8</sup>

The reduced public relations capability came at a critical time for the Navy as it coincided with the Washington Conference. The public information situation rapidly became intolerable and prompted a response from within the Navy Department. In January 1922, the Director of the War Plans Division, Rear Admiral Clarence Williams,

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<sup>8</sup> Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 79; Officer in Charge to BuNav, "Publicity," 17 May 1919, B395, General Correspondence, 1917-1925, Entry 89 [hereafter E89], General Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel and its Predecessors, 1801-1966, Records of Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, 1798-1991, RG 24, NAB; Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Bureau to BuNav, "Utilizing the Services of Ex-service Men for Publicity for the Navy" 1 October 1919, B396, E89, RG 24, NAB; Harrod, *Manning the New Navy*, 45.

sent a memo to the Chief of Naval Operations recommending the creation of an office of “Press Relations” within the Office of Naval Intelligence. Williams hoped that this plan would stem the recent decline in the number and quality of newspaper articles about the Navy, many of which he found to be factually incorrect. The new Press Relations office he envisioned would provide accurate information and respond to inaccurate information about the Navy which appeared in the public sphere. More broadly, the office could also work to promote “general interest” in the service and to facilitate greater understanding of the service and its mission by the general public. The head of the Office of Naval Intelligence, Captain Luke McNamee, was keenly interested in public relations work and so endorsed the plan adding the suggestion that “an officer of special talent” be assigned to run the proposed office and remain in close contact with the Chief of Naval Operations, the Secretary of the Navy, and other high ranking officials within the Navy Department.<sup>9</sup>

On 21 February 1922, Secretary of the Navy Edwin Denby ordered the creation of the Information Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence with Commander Ralph A. Koch as its head. While certainly an improvement over the situation of the previous months, this new public relations office would be far less powerful and ambitious than that envisioned by either the War Plans Division or Captain McNamee. Reflective of the cost-consciousness of the time, Denby directed that the responsibilities of the new office be spread across other offices and bureaus to save on personnel. The Information

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<sup>9</sup> Director, War Plans Division to the Chief of Naval Operations, “Press Relations,” 12 January 1922, B12, E19, RG 80, NAB. Memorandum for the CNO, “Press Relations,” 14 January 1922, B12, E19, RG 80, NAB.

Section itself would handle daily press contacts, the Photographic Section of the Bureau of Aeronautics would fill photographic needs and the Morale Division of the Bureau of Navigation would manage the collection and dissemination of general service information. Though not formally linked, the Office of Information and the Recruiting Bureau in New York were ordered to cooperate closely. For most of the interwar period, the Information Section included a staff of three: the Director of Information, the Press Officer, and a civilian aide. Helene Philbert served as the section's civilian aide while the other postings changed at varying intervals through the years.<sup>10</sup>

Following the creation of the Information Section, Secretary Denby further defined the service's public relations policies. In May 1922, Denby ordered each major command to assign one or more officers to collect information and photographs and then to prepare a newsletter. These officers would then forward all of this material to the Information Section for recruiting or publicity purposes. Denby, perhaps sensing hesitancy of naval officers to comply with even this limited public relations policy, issued a memo in February 1923 which reminded the officer corps that, "It is the right of the Congress and the people of the United States to be fully informed concerning the ships, men, and operation of the Navy." To live up this mandate, Denby ordered the entire officer corps to cooperate fully with the press and ensure the release of all non-classified information for public consumption. The order also tasked the Director of

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<sup>10</sup>SecNav to All Bureaus and Offices, "Navy Department Information Section under the Office of Naval Intelligence," 21 February 1922, B2617, E19, RG 80, NAB; Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 85-6; Klinkerman, "Blackout at Pearl Harbor," 17.

Naval Intelligence with coordinating the work of other bureaus, offices, and commands to ensure compliance with these policies.<sup>11</sup>

While the Navy had partially restored its public relations capabilities by the mid-1920s, the Information Section was shackled by a cautious approach to public relations. In 1924, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral E.W. Eberle, described the Information Section as having not been “organized for purposes of propaganda, but to furnish the public with correct information regarding the Navy, its mission, and its use in peace and war.” The press releases issued by the Navy during much of the interwar period reflected this conservative approach to public relations. The Information Section’s releases dealt with a wide range of service activities, including the announcement of fleet maneuvers, anniversaries of historic events, or accidents which happened to both men and machines. Yet for much of the interwar period, the mandate to avoid propaganda reigned supreme when issuing press releases. Henry H. Douglas, an officer attached to the Office of Public Relations in 1941, asserted that a Congressional restriction on the use of funds for propaganda purposes prevented the Navy from overtly shaping information prior to release. The Navy’s policy to train line officers for public relations work rather than using trained public relations specialists to perform such tasks may have also played a role in the decision to avoid propagandizing in press releases.

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<sup>11</sup> SecNav to the Naval Service, “Press Relations,” 3 February 1923, B44, EP 3, RG 428, NACP.

Whatever the reason, the contents of Navy press releases were limited to the perfunctory statement of information and consciously avoided “spinning” the news.<sup>12</sup>

The limitations of the Navy’s public relations policies revealed themselves in other ways. Continuing a practice started by Josephus Daniels, successive secretaries of the Navy held twice-daily press conferences for purposes of releasing information, but, as Admiral Eberle admitted, “he frequently ha[d] no news to give [the press].” The Navy intended the Information Section to function as a centralized clearing house for naval information, but the small staffing of the office forced it to rely upon information submitted to it from the ships and stations of the fleet. The Information Section created reference files so that requests for information from the press or other sources could be responded to in a timely manner, but sometimes the office would forward these requests to officers with the appropriate expertise for response. This encouragement of direct contact between the press and individual officers, while not necessarily a negative, undercut the purpose of the Information Section and led future secretaries of the Navy to remind officers to forward press inquiries to proper authorities.<sup>13</sup>

In the midst of the evolution of the Navy’s public relations policies, current and former naval officers used the Naval Institute’s *Proceedings* to offer critiques or suggestions they felt the service needed to adopt to increase effectiveness. Lieutenant C.K. Blackburn authored one of the earliest lamentations on the state of the Navy’s

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<sup>12</sup> Memo to All Bureaus and Offices, 27 August 1924, B2617, E19, RG 80, NAB. The press releases issued by the Navy News Bureau, the Information Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence, and the Office of Public Relations reside Entry 113 of Record Group 80, NAB; Douglas, “Public Relations,” 1433.

<sup>13</sup> Memo to All Bureaus and Offices, 27 August 1924, B2617, E19, RG 80, NAB.



public image in a 1922 article entitled “Mistaken Publicity.” Blackburn argued that press coverage of the service in recent years created a false impression of the Navy in the public mind. Instead of a committed and professional organization devoted to national defense, Blackburn believed the public viewed the Navy as an institution rife with needless ceremony that allowed its officers and men a “joy ride” as a career. This mistaken view of naval service led to the decreased political support for the service and required a response from the Navy. Echoing comments made throughout the 1920s, Blackburn advocated publicizing foreign visits by American naval vessels highlighting the role the Navy played in facilitating trade and diplomatic relations with other nations. He also believed that an untapped source of publicity existed in the fleet’s annual training exercises, such as the winter cruises in the waters of the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. Press releases describing the results of target practices, Blackburn argued, could not only highlight the hard work the officers and men aboard ship put into their profession but also illustrate the commitment of the Navy to defending the nation.<sup>14</sup>

Three years later, in 1925, Lieutenant R.E. Daniels argued in his “Indoctrinating Civilians in Matters of Naval Defense” that the Navy could not function properly without adequate levels of public support in the modern age. Daniels’ case for the necessity of “indoctrination” rested entirely upon geographic considerations. The inability of past foes to credibly threaten the continental United States as well as the presence of helpful allies allowed civilians the luxury of not needing to fully understand naval matters. Daniels, however, asserted that the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans no longer

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<sup>14</sup> C.K. Blackburn, “Mistaken Publicity,” *Proceedings* 48, no. 1 (January 1922), 77-9. Quote is on p. 77.

provided the same level of security that they once did, and the change in America's strategic position required that Americans to re-evaluate their relationship to martial activities. Where Daniels differed from typical thinking on Navy public relations the 1920s were in his proposed remedies to the problem. While Daniels advocated the use of radio to broadcast important speeches on national defense, he thought that the most success could come from the formation of a comprehensive educational system designed to spread knowledge of naval affairs to the majority of citizens. Such a system should include the establishment of naval training units at the university level, better utilization of naval reservists to share their knowledge with their fellow citizens, and even the creation of a program where prospective State Department employees would receive basic instruction in naval affairs. Interestingly, none of these programs were intended to create "any young Mahans" because Daniels reasoned that only trained professionals could truly understand the intricacies of naval warfare. Daniels' prescriptions reveal that at least some naval officers viewed the general public in the same condescending light as that of the early public relations theorists.<sup>15</sup>

Two articles published in *Proceedings* in the middle of the interwar period illustrate the gulf that separated opinions on the subject. Dudley Knox's article entitled "The Navy and Public Indoctrination" (1929) reflected many of the same elitist attitudes previously expressed by other naval officers and public relations practitioners. Knox believed that Navy-generated propaganda was an acceptable means of gaining public

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<sup>15</sup> R.E. Daniels, "Indoctrinating Civilians in Matters of Naval Defense," *Proceedings* 50, no. 11 (November 1925), 1854-9. Quote is on p. 1858.

support for the service. The article, however, focused primarily upon a subject – foreign propaganda – that consumed much of Knox’s time and work with respect to Navy public relations. Many of Knox’s writings, most notably his critique of the Washington Conference titled *The Eclipse of American Sea Power*, surmised that Americans were inclined to agree with navalist policies or could easily be persuaded to support them. What prevented this public support from forming, however, was not apathy but insidious propaganda against the American navy spread by agents of Great Britain who had infiltrated the American media. According to Knox, this propaganda lulled Americans into a sense of complacency and explained why the United States sacrificed far more than did the other powers during the Washington Conference. Only by eliminating or neutralizing foreign propaganda, Knox believed, could the Navy regain public favor.<sup>16</sup>

Hanson Baldwin’s “Newspapers and the Navy” (1930) offered an entirely different perspective on the state of Navy public relations. A Naval Academy graduate, Baldwin resigned from active duty in 1927 to become a newspaper reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* and later for the *New York Times*. Baldwin maintained a commission in the Naval Reserve into the 1930s and thus remained well-connected to contemporary naval affairs. Whereas Knox placed blame for the state of Navy public relations on an external problem, Baldwin insisted that the Navy need only to look at itself for its predicament. By not doing enough to encourage “effective and sustained publicity,” the service had failed to properly explain its importance to the public. An insular officer corps was incapable of recognizing the faults of its own publicity apparatus and tended

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<sup>16</sup> Dudley W. Knox, “The Navy and Public Indoctrination,” *Proceedings* 55, no. 6 (June 1929), 479-90.

to mistrust the press. Rather than considering journalists as an avenue for gaining popular support for the Navy, Baldwin argued that officers tended to view journalists as incompetents, drunks, or, as in the case of Knox, tools of foreign propaganda desiring to squelch any positive news about the service. Baldwin criticized the Navy for the poor treatment he received from the service as a member of the press corps even though his background as a naval officer probably led him to receive somewhat better treatment than his peers who lacked a service connection. Baldwin acknowledged the Navy Recruiting Bureau performed “noble work,” but believed that its effort was confined solely to garnering enlistments. To address its public relations problem, the Navy needed to designate officers on each ship or in each command and charge them with fostering better ties with local media. Beyond this structural improvement, the Navy needed to reassess its attitude towards the media and respect the representatives of the press. Only by understanding how publicity could aid the service, Baldwin reasoned, could these changes truly take hold amongst naval officers.<sup>17</sup>

Baldwin’s scathing analysis of Navy public relations failed to give the Recruiting Bureau its due. “The public relations function... became an integral part of the recruiting process” throughout the nation while the Information Section remained confined to Washington. Officials in the capital sometimes coordinated their efforts with local commands for certain events, but the office did little to encourage contact between individual commands and local media. The New York-based Recruiting Bureau, on the other hand, possessed a national infrastructure explicitly designed to

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<sup>17</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin, “Newspapers and the Navy,” *Proceedings* 56, no. 12 (December 1930), 1085-90.

generate publicity in every area in which it operated. The Recruiting Bureau, unlike the resource-strapped Information Section, typically received enough funds with which to produce its own publicity materials. Even as early as May 1919, individuals in the Recruiting Bureau recognized the deteriorating public relations situation for the Navy and moved to address the problem. Traveling recruiting parties, such as those used to recruit men for the *Tennessee*, proved to be an increasingly ineffective method of finding new recruits. A temporary shortage of new publicity materials compounded the problem, prompting the Bureau to seek out alternative methods of attracting public attention, such as the aforementioned Mississippi River recruiting trip of 1919.<sup>18</sup>

During the interwar period the Recruiting Bureau recognized that many of the best sources of publicity could be found in the recruiting officers who manned its stations. By 1931, the Bureau managed forty-one recruiting stations scattered throughout the country, and each of these stations, in turn, oversaw several substations. The authorized complement of enlisted personnel for the Navy remained stable at roughly 80,000 men from 1923 until 1936. The Recruiting Bureau continued its attempts to improve the quality of recruits by improving the service's public image. The Bureau released occasional directives on policies, but usually left officers free to use their own discretion in trying to drum up public support for the Navy and for recruiting. Typically, recruiters designed campaigns around local individuals who had previously entered the Navy. Showing the advantages of the naval life conferred upon a fellow citizen, recruiters argued, would lead individuals to consider joining the service

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted from Harrod, *Manning the New Navy*, 48. Bureau of Navigation Circular Letter No. 101-19, 19 July 1919, B396, E89, RG 24, NAB.

themselves. Recruiters received support for this program when the Bureau of Navigation instructed fleet commands to submit photographs of its men for distribution to the recruiting stations closest to each man's hometown. The recruiting officers would then add brief stories and submit these and the photos to local newspapers for publication. Recruiting officers also contacted local radio stations seeking air time for the officers to give brief recruiting speeches. Since recruiting officers often served in their hometown areas, these efforts by recruiters created networks of local media and business contacts to draw upon to improve the Navy's image.<sup>19</sup>

The Recruiting Bureau also adopted successful practices from other organizations. In 1919, the Army signed contracts with advertising firms to modernize its recruiting methods, causing Navy recruiters to press the Bureau of Navigation to copy the Army's campaign. The idea quickly received official approval and within three months the Navy entered into a \$300,000 contract with the Advertising Agencies Corporation. Although the contract stipulated that money be spent on newspapers in traditional recruiting areas, the firm also allocated considerable sums to papers in small farming communities, and daily and weekly newspapers in larger towns not currently serviced by naval recruiters. Recruiters soon complained about the centralized method of distribution of the funds for the campaign, suggesting that if the Navy renewed its contract or enlisted another firm for the purpose, portions of the fund should be set aside

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<sup>19</sup> Chief of BuNav to All Ships and Stations, "Recruiting Publicity," 25 June 1931, Box 65, General Correspondence 1925-1940, Entry 90 [hereafter E90], General Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel and its Predecessors, 1801-1966, RG 24, NAB; Chief of BuNav to the All Ships and Stations, "Recruiting Publicity," 1 December 1927, B64, E90, RG 24, NAB; Chief of BuNav to All Ships and Stations, "Recruiting Publicity," 25 June 1931, B65, E90, RG 24, NAB; Chief of BuNav to the Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Salt Lake City, "Radio Publicity," 16 August 1929, B64, E90, RG 24, NAB.

for use by the recruiting stations. This would provide recruiters who presumably had better knowledge about local newspapers to target sympathetic publishers and curry their favor. Naval officials in Washington and New York objected to these suggestions, arguing that many recruiting officers simply lacked the knowledge or ability to design and manage recruiting campaigns on their own. One commenter on the subject argued uncharacteristically for the Recruiting Bureau that “the Navy is not a local affair.” It is not clear exactly when the Navy’s foray into paid advertising ended, but the experiment ended sometime in the early 1920s.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the direct employment of professional advertisers, the Recruiting Bureau also attempted to glean methods from modern business practices to aid recruiting. In 1920 Captain C.E. Courtney, the Recruiting Inspector for the Eastern Division, pushed for the Recruiting Bureau to adopt standard “sales talks” such as those given by the salesmen at the Marshall Field’s department stores in order to increase the effect of Bureau posters and advertisements. During a period of lag in enlistments in 1922, the Bureau of Navigation directed that each recruiting station initiate competitions among its various substations in an effort to drive up the number of enlistments. The Bureau argued that “competition is an important principle of salesmanship” and that such a program would lead recruiters to become more aggressive in their efforts. The

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<sup>20</sup> Officer in Charge, Navy Publicity and Morale to BuNav, “Paid Advertising Campaign,” 4 August 1920, B396, E89, RG 24, NAB. Memo for Commander Culp, 7 June 1919, Box 395, General Correspondence, 1917-1925, RG 24, NAB; Richard H. Leigh to Josephus Daniels, “Bids for advertising in periodicals and newspapers for recruiting purposes,” 17 June 1919, B395, E89, RG 24, NAB; James O’Shaughnessy to Daniels, 18 September 1919, B395, E89, RG 24, NAB, 1-8; F.M. Poteet to BuNav, “Paid Advertising Campaign,” 13 January 1920, B396, E89, RG 24, NAB.

scheme was immediately effective, but it was abandoned once the Bureau achieved its recruiting goal.<sup>21</sup>

The Recruiting Bureau continued to produce posters and handbills to attract recruits, but began to shift attention and resources to the production and display of recruiting films. The Navy, which had first experimented with the production of recruiting films just after the turn of the century, increased their production dramatically during World War I. The Recruiting Bureau typically assembled finished films from footage collected by camera crews sent out amongst the fleet. In 1919, the Bureau departed from this pattern when it authorized the recruiting station in St. Louis, Missouri, to enter into a six-month contract with the National Film Publicity Corporation to produce a series of short animated films for recruiting purposes. Although the pace of production on recruiting films slowed in the immediate aftermath of World War I, more than a dozen films remained in circulation by 1921. Budget cuts led to curtailment in the production of films, and, by 1931, when the Recruiting Bureau estimated that while it needed to produce four films per year to prevent any repeats in circulation, it lacked the resources to do so. This limitation did not prevent recruiting films from continuing to serve as an important means of conveying the recruiter's message through the remainder of the decade.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> C.E. Courtney to BuNav, "Sales Management Doctrine," 31 July 1920, B396, E89, RG 24, NAB. Chief of BuNav (Thomas Washington) to the Navy Recruiting Service, "Competition in Recruiting," 10 November 1922, B901, E89, RG 24, NAB. Harrod, *Manning the New Navy*, 38.

<sup>22</sup> Recruiting Bureau to Navy Recruiting Station, St. Louis, Mo., "Motion Picture Film Publicity," 10 July 1919, B396, E89, RG 24, NAB; Harrod, *Manning the New Navy*, 44; Navy Recruiting Inspector, Northeastern Division to the Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Des Moines, "Films for Navy Publicity," 29 October 1932, B1384, E90, RG 24, NAB.



The Recruiting Bureau began to phase out older titles by 1922 in an effort to retain more films with “live news interest” or that were “of an artistic or unique educational value.” In fact, the Bureau began to vary the subject matter of its titles considerably, producing films highlighting naval cruises and stations overseas, such as *Our Navy in the Near East* (1923), which dealt with the Navy’s post-World War I intervention in Turkey and interspersed footage of sailors aiding the transport of refugees with that of sailors visiting such landmarks as the Giza pyramids and St. Peter’s Basilica. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Recruiting Bureau produced *Crossing the Line* (1920), a comedy about the bizarre rituals staged for officers and enlistees who cross the Equator for the first time and which showed men singing, dancing, and having their heads shaved by the “Royal Barbers.” These films proved increasingly vital tools for recruiters because they believed the public reacted more enthusiastically to the films than posters or still photographs.<sup>23</sup>

The Recruiting Bureau found multiple ways of presenting its films to the general public. Movie theaters were the most obvious venue of display, and the recruiting officers frequently solicited the cooperation of theater owners and managers to arrange screenings. For a time just after World War I, the Bureau entered into an agreement with the Fox Film Corporation which provided for the screening of recruiting films in the theaters owned by the company free of charge. Recruiting officers did not focus

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<sup>23</sup> Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Bureau, to Chief of BuNav, “Motion Picture Publicity,” 4 August 1922, B316, E89, RG 24, NAB. Film 24.24; *Our Navy in the Near East*, 1923, Records of the Navy Recruiting Bureau, RG 24, NACP; Film 24.12; *Crossing the Line*, 1920, Records of the Navy Recruiting Bureau, RG 24, NACP; Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Providence, RI to the Chief of BuNav, “Exhibition of Pictures,” 2 May 1923, B316, E89, RG 24, NACP; Officer in Charge, Baltimore Recruiting Station to BuNav, 19 March 1920, B315, E89, RG 24, NAB.

their efforts solely upon theaters, and, in 1922, the Recruiting Bureau recommended to the Bureau of Navigation it be allowed to loan out films to boys' clubs and patriotic organizations such as the American Legion for screenings. Some enterprising recruiters found yet more ways to exhibit films, and by the early 1920s recruiting stations began to mount film projectors and other equipment on the back of trucks which would then be sent out to different locations for screenings. This last method proved unworkable in some areas as high fuel consumption and the dilapidated condition of many roads drove up the ancillary costs considerably. One officer who confronted this latter problem turned instead to local schools to screen films.<sup>24</sup>

In the drive to reach the public, some recruiters took their inventiveness too far. In 1925, a recruiter in Cincinnati, Ohio, distributed a fabricated story to local newspapers about a woman who attempted to enlist in the Navy so that she could be reunited with her lover already in the service. The editor of the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* apparently believed the story to be true initially, but, upon discovering it was not, printed a story stating that the "Recruiting Office Descends to Faking" and wrote an angry letter to Secretary of the Navy Curtis Wilbur about the incident. The Chief of the Bureau of Navigation wrote the recruiting officer that he had failed to "stimulate recruiting or reflect honorable credit to the service" and admonished him not to repeat

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<sup>24</sup> BuNav to Josie Henderson, 6 August 1921, B315, E89, RG 24, NAB; Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Bureau to Chief of BuNav, "Lending of Navy Property," 8 July 1922, B316, E89, RG 24, NAB; Inspector of Recruiting, Central Division to BuNav, "Moving Picture Machines," 24 February 1920, B315, E89, RG 24, NAB; Officer in Charge, US Navy Recruiting Station, St. Louis to BuNav, "Use of Motion Pictures and Kodaks," 6 April 1923, B316, E89, RG 24, NAB.

the scheme. More importantly, the chief recognized that such incidents would hurt relations with local media that recruiters relied upon to convey their message.<sup>25</sup>

In the late 1920s, some recruiting officers began placing advertisements on roadside billboards or even on the face of large rocks and boulders lying next to major roadways. These practices proved particularly unpopular in Oregon because they conflicted with highway beautification campaigns. Later, Secretary of the Navy Charles F. Adams, responding to complaints about roadside signs from the New Jersey State Highway Commission, consented to their removal, believing that “this can be done without injury to the securing of recruits.” The Recruiting Service then moved quickly to remove any offending advertisements from sight. This did not completely eliminate roadside signs as a means of advertising as Adams directed the recruiting officer in Philadelphia to continue placing such signs as long as they had the permission of the highway authority and private property owners to display them.<sup>26</sup>

Although the Navy intended that recruiting publicity appeal to the widest possible audience, the service often tried to avoid attracting men from less desirable sectors of society. Specifically, the Recruiting Bureau faced difficulties in deciding whether ethnic minorities should be included in their recruiting campaigns. While serving as the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin Roosevelt objected to allocating

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<sup>25</sup> Chief of BuNav to the Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Cincinnati, “Naval Publicity,” 26 June 1925, B64, E90, RG 24, NAB. Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Cincinnati to Chief of BuNav, “Navy Publicity,” 19 June 1925, B64, E90, RG 24, NAB; Wade Mountfort to Curtis Wilbur, 20 June 1925, B64, E90, RG 24, NAB.

<sup>26</sup> Acting SecNav Ernest Lee Jahncke to J.L. Bauer, 19 March 1930, B65, E90, RG 24, NAB. Ray Liman Wilbur to Charles F. Adams, 26 October 1929, B789, E90, RG 24, NAB; Bauer to Jahncke, 17 April 1930, B65, E90, RG 24, NAB; Chief of BuNav to the Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Philadelphia, 26 April 1930, B65, E90, RG 24, NAB; Harrod, *Manning the New Navy*, 45.

any funds for advertising in foreign language newspapers, fearing that too many non-citizens would enlist as a result. African-Americans also presented a special problem for recruiters when attempting to plan recruiting campaigns. In 1922, the Navy sent a group of F-5-L seaplanes up the Mississippi River to attract recruits and directed recruiting officers to arrange local media coverage of the trip. Officers at the recruiting stations in Little Rock and New Orleans sent specific instructions as to proper landing sites for the aircraft with the objective of avoiding any “overwhelmingly Negro” areas or not attracting too many of the “the class of people we [do not] want.” In 1935, recruiting officers in segregated areas objected to the release of a brief trailer specifically produced for theaters owned or frequented by African-Americans. While desiring the continued enlistment of African-Americans as messmen, the recruiters believed that the trailer would lead audiences to “assume that Negro enlistments are the same as white enlistments. Such an impression would take years of hard work on the part of the Recruiting personnel to correct.” In its stead, the recruiters recommended a pictorial campaign depicting African-American messmen working in ship’s galley or serving meals to white officers.<sup>27</sup>

Baldwin’s assessment of the status of Navy public relations in 1930 also failed to mention the public relations efforts initiated outside of the two offices, the Information Section and the Recruiting Bureau, tasked with such work. Three other groups within

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<sup>27</sup> Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, New Orleans to BuNav, “Trip of aircraft from Pensacola to Chicago about 1 August 1922,” 25 July 1922, B396, E89, RG 24, NAB. Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Bureau to the Chief of the BuNav, “Trailers for Motion Picture Films,” 28 January 1936, B65, E90, RG 24, NAB. Franklin D. Roosevelt to D.W. Reynolds, 18 August 1919, B396, E89, RG 24, NAB; Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Little Rock to BuNav, “Trip of aircraft from Pensacola to Chicago about 1 August 1922,” 25 July 1922, B396, E89, RG 24, NAB.

the Navy Department actively promoted the service despite lacking an official mandate. The first of these, the Office of Naval Records and Library, traced its roots to the earliest years of the Navy's existence. The Navy Department Library, initially devoted to the maintenance of a few important books and documents, expanded considerably in the 1880s as it received funding to compile and publish the records of the Union and Confederate navies from the Civil War. Congress recognized the expanded scope of the library's activities in 1915 and conferred the new title of the Office of Naval Records and Library. The office reported directly to the Secretary of the Navy at this time, but in July 1919, Secretary Daniels merged the office with the Historical Section attached to the Chief of Naval Operations and placed the organization under the nominal control of the Office of Naval Intelligence. Despite this arrangement, the Office of Naval Records and Library functioned autonomously for the entire interwar period and maintained little contact with its parent organization.<sup>28</sup>

In October 1921, Captain Dudley Knox succeeded Colonel E.K. White as the officer-in-charge of the Office of Naval Records and Library, a position he would hold until his retirement in 1946. Knox received the appointment presumably because of his prior ties to the office as well as his past experience in historical work. Just after the end of World War I, Knox and a staff of seventy began collecting records generated by Admiral Sims' command in London as part of a project to publish an official history of

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<sup>28</sup> "History of the Navy Department Library," <http://www.history.navy.mil/library/ly6.htm> (accessed 2 December 2009); Isabel Smith, Elliot Snow, "Historical Sketch of the Navy Department Library and War Records," March 1926; <http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/ndl-sketch.htm> (accessed 2 December 2009); Dudley W. Knox to S.M. Reynolds, 21 January 1925, B1, Papers of Dudley W. Knox, Library of Congress [hereafter Knox Papers].

World War I. Over several months, Knox and his staff studied the records in Britain, developed a system of organization, and attempted to fill in any known gaps in the documents by requesting additional material from other Allied navies. Knox's section completed the collection phase of its work in August 1919 and arranged for the shipment of the material to the United States.<sup>29</sup>

During his time at the Office of Naval Records and Library, Knox dealt with a slow and steady decline in the numbers of personnel under his control stemming from the elimination of a separate appropriation for the management of the Navy's World War I records. The reductions in personnel, however, only served to increase Knox's power as he became the Superintendent of the Navy Department Library in 1931 when budget cuts forced the merger of that position with Knox's. The previous year, Secretary of the Navy Charles F. Adams appointed Knox to the post of Curator of the Navy as a first step in the eventual creation of an official Navy Museum. Despite the multiple responsibilities, Knox worked to make his office better known to the public and encouraged favorable press articles covering its work. He helped facilitate the publication of historical volumes based upon the growing collection of materials held by the Office of Naval Records and Library, including Thomas G. Frothingham's three volume series *Naval History of the World War*. Unlike his predecessors, Knox desired that publications utilizing the Navy's archival collections not follow the template

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<sup>29</sup> Smith and Snow, "Historical Sketch of the Navy Department Library and War Records," passim; J.W. McElroy, "Navy Department Office of Naval Records and Library, 1882-1946," 1 June 1946; <http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/ndl-sketch.htm>; Internet (accessed 12 August 2007).

established with the Civil War documentary series whereby masses of documents would be published without context.<sup>30</sup>

Two activities in particular marked Knox's tenure at the Office of Naval Records and Library. In 1922, the Office of Naval Records and Library ceased publishing its series of documentary collections based upon naval records from the Civil War. Twelve years later, the increase in naval appropriations stemming from the seminal Vinson-Trammel Act offered a new opportunity for the publication of documentary collections. Knox drew up a plan to publish volumes of naval documents dating from the signing of the Constitution up to the beginning of the Civil War. President Franklin Roosevelt wholeheartedly approved of the project which he referred to in correspondence as his "pet child," had funds set aside for Knox's use, and provided a foreword to the first volume to result from the project, volume one of the *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War Between the United States and France: Naval Operations From February, 1797 to December 1801*. Publicity for the initial volume aroused such interest in the project that its printing run was increased more than threefold from roughly 700 to 2,500 copies per volume. Knox called upon Roosevelt again to promote the project as it neared completion in 1938, but the outbreak of World War II in Europe led to the suspension of the grand project after the end of the Quasi-War series.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.; Memorandum for CMDR McCain, 15 August 1930, B3, Knox Papers; Knox to ADM R.E. Coontz, 26 May 1922, B1, Knox Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the Acting Director of the Budget, 12 February 1935, B24, Knox Papers. Knox to Marvin H. McIntyre, 4 April 1934; Knox to Stephen Early, 13 June 1934; Knox to Marvin H. McIntyre, 7 February 1935; and Roosevelt to Knox, 17 December 1938, all in B24, Knox Papers; J.W. McElroy, "Navy Department Office of Naval Records and Library, 1882-1946."

Throughout the interwar period, one of the most common means of generating publicity for the service remained public appearances by senior naval officers. Their speeches could cheaply and effectively communicate thoughts on naval policy to influential audiences. As the radio industry matured and rapidly expanded throughout the country, this new medium allowed officers to speak to much larger audiences about naval subjects. Knox frequently wrote speeches for delivery by other officers and civilian officials. Many of these speeches had historical themes but Knox sprinkled them with sections designed to promote the Navy. For example, the speech Knox authored for Assistant Secretary of the Navy Lee Jahncke to deliver at the re-commissioning of the USS *Constitution* in June 1931 argued for the Navy's role as a peacemaker and depicted the ship as an icon of patriotism.<sup>32</sup>

Upon its creation in June 1921, in the midst of the debates over the proposed unified air service, the Bureau of Aeronautics also became a locus of public relations activity for the service. The Chief of the Bureau, Rear Admiral William A. Moffett, sought to present a positive image of naval aviation to the public as often as possible. Born in 1869 to a Confederate veteran of the Civil War in Charleston, South Carolina, Moffett graduated from the Naval Academy in 1890. Over the next quarter century of naval service, Moffett served with distinction and received a Medal of Honor for his service during the Navy's occupation of Veracruz, Mexico, in 1914. After serving in Mexico, Moffett took command of the Great Lakes Naval Training Station in 1914 and

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<sup>32</sup> Speech prepared by Dudley W. Knox, "The Re-Commissioning of The Constitution for Secretary Jahncke," June 1931, B20, Knox Papers.



continued to command the station into World War I as the Navy's manpower needs grew exponentially. The station's existence stemmed from the Navy's desire to build up the service's presence in the Midwest which typically spawned much of the political and public sentiment against the service during the nineteenth century. While in command of the station, Moffett became keenly aware of the value of public relations and inaugurated a variety of practices designed to raise the stature of the station within the region. Assistance from an editor of the *Chicago Tribune* helped in the creation of a base newspaper. Moffett's wife Jeanette was the subject of an article printed in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1918 highlighting the contributions of women to the war effort. Moffett persuaded the retired bandleader and composer John Phillip Sousa to head the Battalion Band and play concerts throughout the Midwest and Eastern states.<sup>33</sup>

When he took charge of the Bureau of Aeronautics, Moffett, who would serve as its chief from 1921 until his death in 1933, faced three separate challenges. First, he needed to improve the standing of the aviation branch within the service as a whole by convincing skeptical senior officers of the value of the new aviation technology. The so-called "gun club" of admirals and other senior officers had difficulty accepting the possibility that naval aviation could deliver on the promises many of its proponents frequently made and eventually supplant the surface ship as the arbiter of naval combat. Second, Moffett had to maintain control of aviators resentful toward the perceived lack of regard for naval aviation by the rest of the service. Moffett lacked total control over

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<sup>33</sup> Trimble, *Admiral William A. Moffett*, 53-4; Jimmy Wayne Dyess, "A History of the United States Navy Band, Washington, D.C.," (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 1988): 20-3.

aviation operations and had to deal with officers such as Henry Mustin who had had strong disagreements with past superiors over the proper course of aviation policy. Finally, Moffett also faced the external threat posed by Brigadier General William Mitchell's campaign to create a unified air service. Few, if any, officers in the Navy accepted the proposition that naval aviation might benefit from Mitchell's proposed arrangement, so Mitchell's threat required a response.<sup>34</sup>

Improving the public image of naval aviation could help meet each of the three challenges, so Moffett launched promotional campaigns. Convincing Congress and the general public of the effectiveness of naval aviation could also strengthen the organizational support for naval aviation and potentially increase the appropriation of funds to expand its operational capabilities. Moffett consistently emphasized the benefits of naval aviation to the fleet as a whole, indicating that naval aviation could not and should not be divorced from the broader context of naval war. Moffett also directly courted prominent political and financial allies, but public relations activities formed a defining aspect of his management of naval aviation.<sup>35</sup>

Though regarded by many of his peers as an excellent publicist, Moffett maintained personal reservations of such activities. In a 1926 letter, Moffett wrote that, "As you know, to the average Naval officer, the word 'publicity' is anathema. I was brought up to hate it myself, and I still hate it." Moffett feared that his activities could cause bitterness and resentment among his fellow officers who still clung to notions of

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<sup>34</sup> Trimble, *Admiral William A. Moffett*, 7-10.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

the Navy as a “silent service” unwilling to engage directly in public relations. At other times, however, Moffett openly chafed at the conservatism of naval officers towards public relations. Following Commander Eugene E. Wilson’s assignment to the Bureau of Aeronautics in 1923, Moffett told him that the “old fogeys” in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations had prevented him from publicly responding to Brigadier General William Mitchell’s claims about the Navy and aviation during the 1921 bombing trials. Recognizing his own aptitude for public relations, Moffett also boasted to Wilson that, “If they had let me handle the publicity on the bombing off the Virginia Capes, I could have made a monkey out of [Mitchell].”<sup>36</sup>

Moffett’s position at the Bureau made him the public face of naval aviation and he often accepted requests for appearances and speaking engagements. In late 1923, Moffett represented the Navy at the Celebration of the Twentieth Anniversary of the first flight by the Wright Brothers in Dayton, Ohio, and at a gathering of the Navy League in Little Rock, Arkansas, in honor of Navy Day. Moffett also sought to capitalize on the fame of well-known naval aviators. In June 1923, he ordered Commander A.C. Read, the pilot of the transatlantic flight of the flying boat NC-4, to represent the Bureau at a celebration commemorating a new airline route between New York and Newport, Rhode Island. Moffett took advantage of such engagements to build goodwill with the American public for naval aviation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Davis, *Postwar Defense Policy*, 46-7. Eugene E. Wilson, *Slipstream: The Autobiography of an Air Craftsman* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1950), 9-10.

<sup>37</sup> The Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics to Chief of BuNav, “Recommending Temporary Additional Duty Orders for Rear Admiral W.A. Moffett, USN,” 17 December 1923, B4148, General Correspondence, 1925-1942, Entry 62 [hereafter E62], General Records of the Bureau of Aeronautics, 1917-1961, Records

Moffett utilized a variety of means to publicize naval aviation. In June 1923 he arranged for the USS *Langley*, the Navy's first aircraft carrier, to visit Washington, D.C. Commissioned from the conversion of the collier *Jupiter* in 1922, the *Langley* spent much of the next decade as the Navy's sole testbed for carrier flight operations and thus became a valuable asset despite the ship's numerous technical limitations. Its commanding officer, Captain S.H.R. Doyle desired a year's worth of uninterrupted time to experiment with flight operations at Pensacola before proceeding on a scheduled cruise up the Atlantic coast the following July. Moffett, however, recommended to the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Robert E. Coontz, that the carrier steam northward earlier so that it could reach Washington in time for the Shriner's Convention in early June 1924. Even at this juncture when much remained unproven regarding the management of flight operations from a carrier deck, Moffett reasoned that the ship's display would put "the accomplishments of the Navy and Naval Aviation before the people throughout the country" and as such outweighed the extra month of training and experimentation. Ultimately, Moffett's view prevailed and he even joined the *Langley* for some of its port visits along the Atlantic Coast in the summer of 1924.<sup>38</sup>

Moffett also strongly supported the Navy's entry into competitive air-racing and often attended the races himself. He publically mentioned that much of the research and

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of the Bureau of Aeronautics, 1911-1972, RG 72, NAB; BuAer to the Honorable Clark Burdick, 25 June 1923, B4148, E62, RG 72, NAB.

<sup>38</sup> Chief of BuAer to CNO, "USS Langley – Movements of," 2 May 1923, B202, E50, RG 72, NAB. Commanding Officer USS *Langley* to CNO, "USS *Langley*, Schedule of Employment; Recommendation, re," 30 June 1923, B202, General Correspondence, 1917-1926, Entry 50 [hereafter E50], Records of Predecessors, 1911-1930, Records of the Bureau of Aeronautics, 1911-1972, RG 72, NAB; Trimble, *Admiral William A. Moffett*, 106-7.

development that went into constructing the Navy's racing craft improved the quality of the Navy's air arm, but such comments glossed over the fact that air racing and combat operations required very different levels of performance from their respective aircraft. In actuality, entering aircraft in competitions such as the Schneider Cup allowed naval aviation to demonstrate its capabilities in a public setting against the United States Army Air Corps, which had entered into air racing largely at the insistence of General Mitchell. The Bureau took these races so seriously that one of its pilots, Lieutenant Alford Williams, spent much of his time in the service preparing for and participating in the races.<sup>39</sup>

Outside of air races, Moffett frequently staged flights designed to demonstrate the capability of naval aircraft. He also encouraged publicity for the Navy's rigid airship program that he maintained throughout his tenure at the Bureau of Aeronautics. Moffett himself flew aboard some of the first flights of the *ZR-I*, later named the *Shenandoah*, in September 1923, which attracted an estimated 15,000 onlookers and set the stage for a series of promotional flights prior to the airship's formal commissioning ceremony the following month. Two years later, Moffett used film footage of the *Shenandoah* and other significant naval aviation events to liven up a presentation delivered to professional engineering societies in an effort to turn interested groups away from potentially supporting Mitchell's unified air service concept.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Trimble, *Admiral William A. Moffett*, 120-5.

<sup>40</sup> BuNav to Moffett, "Orders of 26 September 1923, Modified," 16 October 1923, B4148, E62, RG 72, NAB.

In 1924, Moffett proposed one of the more ambitious plans of his tenure which would have involved a series of flights from the Pacific coast of the United States to Hawaii and then to Australia. The flights were planned to coincide with naval exercises held in Hawaiian waters and a subsequent goodwill visit by the fleet to Australia and New Zealand, but Admiral Robert E. Coontz, the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet, objected to the lengthy flight due to the considerable logistic support the aircraft would require. Coontz's letter to the Chief of Naval Operations indicated that at least some in the Navy Department disagreed with Moffett's desire to constantly to promote naval aviation for he noted that "while he favors the advancement of Navy aviation in every possible line, he does not consider that flights of this character which bring no commensurate Naval advance, and which are exceedingly costly, should be undertaken at the expense of approved Departmental Joint problems, approved Departmental overseas expeditions, or even of Fleet training of a routine nature."<sup>41</sup>

The Navy also began using bands to increase the public awareness of the service. The Navy supported various bands attached to its ships and stations throughout the years, including the aforementioned Battalion Band headed by John Philip Sousa during World War I, and maintained a musician's school at Norfolk, Virginia. Charles Benter, a young naval enlistee, trained there in 1905. He served as the bandmaster aboard various ships until 1919 when he became the bandmaster at the Washington Navy Yard and set about rebuilding a band which had lost many performers due to the postwar

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<sup>41</sup> CINCUS to CNO, "Proposed Flight from Honolulu to Australia," 27 December 1924, B141, E62, RG 72, NAB.

demobilization of manpower. In this endeavor Benter received the backing of the Navy Department which desired the band to “superbly represent the United States Navy, both in the Nation’s Capital and throughout the country.” To do this, Benter offered musicians various inducements, such as higher pay and living allowances, to enlist in the Navy solely to join the band at the Navy Yard.<sup>42</sup>

Once reconstituted, the Washington Navy Yard Band played live shows in Virginia and the Washington, D.C., area but lacked a following outside of the region. The growing network of commercial radio stations which developed after World War I gave the band an opportunity to broaden its audience. When the band began its concerts in 1923, only radio stations in and around the Washington area broadcast the shows, but soon other stations, one of which received backing from the Radio Corporation of America, began rebroadcasting the concerts all across the nation. As a sign of the band’s growing popularity, the Navy Department received thousands of laudatory letters and telegrams praising it. The Navy rewarded Benter’s efforts with increased funding; by allowing the band to accompany President Harding on his cruise to Alaska in the summer of 1923; and by increasing its size to seventy-five after January 1924.<sup>43</sup>

The Navy began referring to the Washington Navy Yard Band as “The Navy Band” as early as 1922, but this title lacked any official standing. President Calvin Coolidge rectified this situation when he signed a law on 4 March 1925 designating the Washington Navy Yard Band as the official United States Navy Band. This new status

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<sup>42</sup> Dyess, “United States Navy Band,” 32-5.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 35-6, 39-40, 45-7.

enhanced the profile of the band and enabled it to mount lengthy tours and play at several key events during the next several years. The band's first tour in late 1925 took it to seven states over an eight-week period in which the band played fifty-one shows. The band played numerous shows with the president in attendance, and also performed at benefit concert for the restoration of the USS *Constitution* in June 1926 as well as the reception ball for Charles Lindbergh following his return from his transatlantic solo flight in 1927. Its radio profile increased as the band played four weekly concerts for the Columbia Broadcast System and the National Broadcasting Company. In 1929 and 1930, the band also became the subject of three newsreel shorts produced for Fox Movietone News and the Hearst Metrotone newsreel services.<sup>44</sup>

The Depression forced reductions in funding that led the band to suspend touring from 1932 until 1936. The Navy Band maintained a position of prominence throughout the country due to the dozens of phonograph recordings of the Band's concerts. At one point, the Navy Department attempted to cancel the broadcasts of Navy Band concerts but relented when listeners sent a deluge of complaint letters to Secretary of the Navy Claude Swanson. In spite of its small size and limited budget, the Navy Band achieved a national reach during the interwar period and added to the Navy's prestige by showing that "poets" served in the Navy.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 50-61, 64.

<sup>45</sup> "A History of Band Music in the Navy and the United States Navy Band." Undated. B10, EP 3, RG 428, NACP. Ibid., 65-9, 73-5, 81-2; Navy Press Room, For Immediate Release, 4 May 1933, B10, EP 3, RG 428, NACP.



Another band of note was maintained by the Navy in the Virgin Islands. In 1917, the Navy began administrating the islands after the United States purchased the group from Denmark. The wife of the naval commander attended a concert by the Adams Juvenile Band conducted by Alton Augustus Adams and was so impressed that she implored her husband to have the band serve as a cultural liaison between the Navy and the islanders. Soon afterwards, Adams' entire band enlisted in the Navy as a unit and Adams himself began managing other bands in the islands. Adams was the first black Navy bandmaster and his musicians stood in contrast to the all-white Navy Band in Washington. An admirer of John Philip Sousa, Adams composed patriotic pieces of music and acquired a favorable reputation as a bandleader within the Navy by the 1920s. In 1924, the band traveled to the mainland United States for a highly successful tour with stops in New York, Washington, and Philadelphia. Radio stations in urban markets granted the band airtime, further increasing its audience. The band continued to be a mainstay in the Virgin Islands until 1931 when the end of Navy control led the band to relocate to the base at Guantanamo Bay.<sup>46</sup>

These public relations entities operated independently of the Information Section, and only through the Navy Department Motion Board, the activities of which are discussed in a later chapter, did these organizations coordinate their activities. In spite of the handicaps the Information Section operated under, it began to encourage greater ties with the media in 1930s. A 1930 memo issued by the Director of Naval

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<sup>46</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, "Alton Augustus Adams: The First Black Bandmaster in the U.S. Navy," *The Black Perspective in Music* 5, no. 2 (Autumn 1977): 173-87; Mark Clague, "Instruments of Identity: Alton Augustus Adams, Sr., the Navy Band of the Virgin Islands, and the Sounds of Social Change," *Black Music Research Journal* 18, no. 1/2 (Spring/Autumn 1988): 21-65.

Intelligence, Captain Alfred W. Johnson, to each of the naval districts solicited suggestions for a public relations policy to be drafted for inclusion into the Monthly Information Bulletin and in the Intelligence Manual. Johnson believed the Navy had successfully mastered the ability to craft press releases but concluded the service was “not so well informed” on how to disseminate information via other means. “All points of contact with the public” should be considered in crafting public relations policy, but, Johnson reasoned, “press relations are of primary importance.” Johnson’s memo advocated a policy of transparency and equality in public relations so that officers showed no favoritism towards particular media outlets and that individual press releases “should be confined to a concise, clear statement of facts and attending circumstances” and that “care should be exercised to eliminate expression of opinion.” Officers could speak publicly on policy matters if granted prior clearance to do so, but Johnson implored officers to display good judgment and to not attempt to withhold information from the public. Johnson specifically directed that officers attempt to correct any mistaken facts about the service which make it into the public realm.<sup>47</sup>

To further remedy the deficiencies in press relations noted by Johnson, Secretary of the Navy Charles F. Adams directed later in 1930 that the Information Section release any and all information “not incompatible with military secrecy.” Adams also ordered the service to cooperate with the Office of Information and to direct all inquiries related to the media to the office for review. The attached memo, “The Supply of Naval

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<sup>47</sup> Director of Naval Intelligence to Commandants of Naval Districts, “The Supply of Naval Information to the Press – Public Relations,” 18 March 1930, B44, EP 3, RG 428, NACP. Scovel, “Helm’s a Lee,” 108-9,117.

Information to the Public – Discussion of Press Relations,” reasoned that constant and cordial contact must be maintained with the press to ensure that unexpected crises would not result in negative portrayals of the service. The prompt and accurate release of information would counter the natural tendencies of curiosity and suspicion of most reporters. The memo also encouraged the development of feature stories apart from the basic factual press releases which could arouse “human interest” in a part of the Navy’s operations which typically remained unknown to the general public.<sup>48</sup>

In April 1930, President Herbert Hoover and numerous other political figures and luminaries attended a massive fleet review off the Virginia Capes. Recognizing the obvious potential publicity, Navy officials began coordinating the press coverage of the event weeks in advance. Although the Navy considered granting open access to the media, the large numbers of guests attending and the desire to manage visitors aboard the ships caused the service to more strictly limit the number of invitations granted. In all, the Navy approved access to representatives from four major wire services, three photographic services, three silent newsreel producers, and two sound newsreel makers. All were assigned to either the carrier *Lexington* or to the transport *Aroostook*. To ensure that each of the different types of media would not immediately compete with one another and also to multiply the amount of publicity received, the Navy dictated that the release of newspaper stories and newsreel footage be staggered with the newswire services allowed to release their stories first and the sound newsreels given the final

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<sup>48</sup> SecNav to All Bureaus and Offices, “Information Section, Office of Naval Intelligence – Duties of, and Assistance to be Given to,” 17 November 1930, B2098, E22, RG 80, NAB.

place in line. The only stipulation given by the Navy to the various correspondents was that they not use Navy communications equipment to file their reports and that any photographs or films taken aboard ship could be subjected to possible censorship. The Navy was so willing to accommodate the press that it granted a request by Paramount Pictures to have a blimp overfly the fleet during the review solely for the purpose of providing different camera angles for the event.<sup>49</sup>

The 1930 fleet review easily attracted media attention, but such events were rare. More typically, they had to campaign to get coverage for naval activities. The Navy's system of annual exercises known as Fleet Problems represented an excellent opportunity to publicize the service. After the fleet reorganization in 1922, the Navy formalized its annual winter training schedule as the Fleet Problem system that allowed the Navy to test strategic and tactical applications at least once a year. These exercises occurred in warmer waters, usually in the Caribbean, around Panama, or in the Eastern Pacific, and tested various elements of Navy war plans against potential enemies, most commonly Japan and Great Britain. The Scouting Fleet, stationed in the Atlantic, and its counterpart, the Battle Fleet, stationed in the Pacific, usually comprised the opposing forces with one assuming the role of the friendly Blue Fleet and the other being the

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<sup>49</sup> "USS Lexington, Press and Photographic Policy," n.d.; CNO to Commandant, 5<sup>th</sup> Naval District, et.al., "USS Lexington, Press and Photographic Arrangements for Exhibition Flights for Congressional Party – April 26, 1930," 22 April 1930; CNO to CinCBat, "Radio broadcasting from ships – Radio publicity offer from OUR NAVY Magazine and Station WGBS," 5 April 1930; Stephen T. Early to ADM William H. Standley, 18 March 1930; and Commanding Office, Lakehurst Station to CNO, "Non-rigid airship – sound picture recordings from," 1 April 1930, all in B44, EP 3, RG 428, NACP.

hostile Black Fleet; with transfers between the two forces taking place to achieve the desired composition of each.<sup>50</sup>

During the winter of 1923-1924, Secretary of the Navy Edwin Denby inaugurated a program of inviting newspaper editors and publishers to attend some of the Navy's maneuvers. This provided a logistical challenge for the reporters involved as the Navy generally frowned upon the use of its communications equipment by the press, but the service began lifting this restriction during the 1927 maneuvers. For some Fleet Problems, the Navy denied all press access for the sake of secrecy. In other years, however, significant press coverage of the Fleet Problem occurred depending on the timing and circumstances of the exercise. Fleet Problems V and XIII in 1925 and 1932, respectively, occurred during periods of heightened tensions with Japan which then prompted press speculation as to the Navy's motives in staging the exercise. The demonstration of new units of the fleet, such as the large aircraft carriers *Lexington* and *Saratoga* in Fleet Problem IX (1929) and the airship *Los Angeles* in Fleet Problem XII (1931), also attracted press attention. The Navy sought accurate coverage of the exercises and lauded it when the media fulfilled this desire. In 1929 the Secretary of the Navy, Curtis Wilbur, remarked in his annual report that the coverage of Fleet Problem earlier that year was "unusually accurate."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Craig C. Felker, *Testing American Sea Power: U.S. Navy Strategic Exercises, 1923-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007); Ryan Wadle, "U.S. Navy Fleet Problems and the Development of Carrier Aviation, 1929-1933" (master's thesis, Texas A&M University, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> "Secretary's Notes," *Proceedings* 55, no. 5 (May 1929), 475. Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 90-1; *Reminiscences of Hanson Weight Baldwin, U.S. Navy Retired*, 2 vols. (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1976), I: 235-9; Fleet Problem X, held in 1930, is one example of the Navy blocking press access to the Fleet Problems. Only brief mentions and secondhand reports of exercise appeared in daily newspapers.

Policy memoranda issued by the Secretary of the Navy to the service during the mid-1930s further encouraged granting the public access to naval information except for that necessitating secrecy. In March 1933 the new Secretary of the Navy, Claude Swanson, issued an order which put limits on the amount of technical information which naval officers could release or publically discuss with regard to the disarmament treaties. Two years later, Swanson followed this order with a series of policy directives which defined in greater detail how the Navy would interact with outside groups. General Order No. 32 regulating naval equipment allowed the Navy to turn over obsolete equipment to museums and other public entities for display in public settings. Should a modern piece of equipment or technology be exhibited, the order required that it be escorted by naval personnel who were to monitor it all times. General Order No. 36 allowed commercial advertisers to specify in their ads that the Navy used their product subject to review by officers of the naval district in which the advertisement was produced and released. Perhaps most importantly, General Order No. 9 granted naval officers permission to express their opinions publically but warned that the release of any information which the Navy Department found objectionable would be deemed as an “offense against military discipline.”<sup>52</sup>

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See *New York Times*, “American Fleets Fight Deadly Battle; Call Truce to Decide War Game Off Haiti,” 16 March 1930, 16; *New York Times*, “Our Fleet is Ready for Far East Call,” 30 January 1932, 2; Lewis Freeman, “Commander’s Story of Saratoga’s Raid,” *New York Times*, 19 February 1929, 14; *New York Times*, “Canal Zone Will Learn Full Power of Naval Aviation,” 4 January 1931, sec. IX, p. 6; Hanson Baldwin, “Planes Save Panama From Enemy Attack in Naval War Game,” *New York Times*, 21 February 1931, 1; Hanson Baldwin, “Battleship Stands as Navy Backbone,” *New York Times*, 23 February 1931, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Scovel, “Helm’s a Lee,” 117-8. “General Order No. 32,” 13 May 1935, B1, EP 3, RG 428, NACP; “General Order No. 36,” 13 May 1935, B1, EP 3, RG 428, NACP.

While ready to cooperate with outside institutions and advertisers, the Navy worked to ensure that it maintained control over the content of information about the service. In 1935, Swanson issued instructions directing officers to refer all press inquiries to the Information Section, now referred to as the Public Relations Branch. This had been standard procedure for several years, but Swanson felt that it needed reinforcement because leaks sometimes appeared in the press when officers failed to follow this policy and dealt with the media themselves. The first assignment of Lieutenant Bernard L. Austin, the Navy's Press Relations Officer from 1937 until 1940, was to determine who had leaked information regarding the Navy's legislative agenda to the press. Such incidents prompted Swanson to remind the officer corps again in November 1938 to follow established procedures regarding press inquiries.<sup>53</sup>

The Public Relations Branch was handicapped by the small size of its staff during most of the period. In 1935, the Marine Corps attempted to remove from the branch an enlisted Marine whose duties included stenography and delivering Navy press releases to the headquarters of patriotic organizations and "administrative and publicity centers" in Washington. A Marine had been performing these duties since 1923, but Major General John H. Russell, the Commandant of the Corps, explained that the shortage of enlisted men in the Corps necessitated the elimination of a position initially intended as only an emergency expedient. Acting Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral J.K. Taussig, vetoed the removal because it would force the department to either employ

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<sup>53</sup> Scovel, "Helm's a Lee," 118-9; It is not clear when the Information Section became the Public Relations Branch, but internal memoranda refer to the Public Relations Branch as early 1932. Wyman H. Packard, *A Century of U.S. Naval Intelligence* (Washington: Department of the Navy, 1996), 332; *The Reminiscences of Vice Admiral Bernard L. Austin, U.S. Navy, Retired* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1971), 55-7.

a civilian messenger or to rely wholly upon commercial messenger services to distribute its material. Such a change would disrupt the office at a time when “its activities have expanded and its responsibilities increased.” Three years later, the Navy Department augmented the Public Relations Branch by adding five officers, two enlisted men, and six civilian aides, thereby more than quadrupling the number of personnel assigned to the office.<sup>54</sup>

Clearly, the Navy’s ability to promote itself improved considerably between 1919 and 1939 and the guidelines that governed how it did so were formulized. It encouraged a greater degree of openness with the public and better ties with the press. The fact that no single organization within the Navy Department was charged with the oversight of all public relations activities led to the dissemination of a variety of information than would have been likely in a more centralized system. While the public may have benefitted from this by receiving a more multifaceted view of the service, this diffuse approach was inefficient and may have prevented the Navy from presenting a more focused image to targeted audiences. In addition, the Navy’s campaigns sometimes displayed a lack of sophistication compared to the public relations work occurring in the civilian world. At times, the Navy’s public relations activities lacked sophistication and seemed geared to merely ensure that the service appeared in media outlets as frequently as possible. According to public relations historian Scott M. Cutlip,

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<sup>54</sup> CNO to Major General Commandant, Marine Corps, “Marine Orderly Detailed to Duty in the Navy Press Room,” 17 April 1935, B2098, E22, RG 80, NACP. Major General Commandant to CNO, “Withdrawal of Marine on duty in the Navy Press Room,” 9 April 1935, B2098, E22, RG 80, NACP; Douglas, “Public Relations,” 1433.



merely accumulating brief mentions of an organization by the media reflect only a small part of what constitutes public relations work.<sup>55</sup>

Whatever flaws existed in the Navy's approach to public relations, the service's efforts were typical among government agencies in the era. The Army created its Press Relations Section in 1921 and attached it to its General Staff. When he headed the Commission for Relief in Belgium in World War I, Herbert Hoover wrote copy for advertisements and issued press releases and ordered the printing of pamphlets. He continued such activities while serving as the Secretary of Commerce in the Harding and Coolidge administrations by forming a core staff with press experience and by using radio to spread the department's message. In the late 1920s, however, Hoover inexplicably abandoned these successful methods during his presidency, leaving him extremely vulnerable to negative public opinion when the Depression wrecked the American economy.<sup>56</sup>

Under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the attention paid to public relations within the executive branch increased significantly. His administration issued frequent press releases, particularly during his first two years in office, and often tailored news for rural newspapers with low circulation. New Deal agencies eagerly embraced radio as a means to spread news and information to a wide audience efficiently, and Roosevelt

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<sup>55</sup> Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center, Glen M. Broom, *Effective Public Relations*, 8th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 3, 10.

<sup>56</sup> F. B. Marbut, *News From the Capital: The Story of Washington Reporting* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971), 198-9; Craig Lloyd, *Aggressive Introvert: A Study of Herbert Hoover and Public Relations Management, 1912-1932* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 39-46, 60-73, 76-82, 158-70.

also used the medium to great advantage via his “fireside chats.” New Deal agencies also realized that while maintaining a steady flow of information to the public certainly helped, the withholding of information from the public could often be just as effective in shaping agendas. Interestingly, the favorable relationship between the press and the administration soured somewhat after 1935, but Roosevelt still managed to use this to advantage as his personal attacks on the media could arouse the public’s mistrust of the media.<sup>57</sup>

A 1939 survey of government publicity assessed the public relations abilities of government agencies and departments. The study used several measures to gauge the relative effectiveness of each department and agency, including content studies of periodicals and the *New York Times* during random intervals to determine the levels of coverage each department received. The Navy polled well in the newspaper study, placing in the upper third of the nearly forty government agencies surveyed, but fared worse in the periodical study. Even though the Navy trailed behind several other departments in the study, other evidence suggests that the haphazard growth of the Navy’s public relations capabilities mirrored that in other parts of the government. The aggressiveness of the New Deal agencies in promoting themselves did not carry over into most departments which still guided their policies based on intuition instead of relying upon the latest theories and methods in the field. Additionally, a lack of coordination both within government departments and across departmental lines

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<sup>57</sup> Richard W. Steele, *Propaganda in an Open Society: The Roosevelt Administration and the Media, 1933-1941* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 5-16, 35-6, 44-52, 62-5.

remained a noticeable handicap in 1939, indicating the Navy was not alone in this regard.<sup>58</sup>

By 1939, the Navy's public relations capabilities had advanced considerably over the previous two decades. This growth was marked by three significant problems: first, Navy public relations suffered due to a lack of coordination; second, senior naval officials only paid attention to the subject intermittently and usually in response to a problem; and, third, the service maintained conservative policies governing the release of information. This meant that, in spite of the service's development of the public relations function, it depended on assistance from other, non-governmental organizations in conveying to the public the needs of the Navy and its importance to the nation.

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<sup>58</sup> James L. McCamy, *Government Publicity: Its Practice in Federal Administration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 63, 75, 159, 183, 187, 190.

**CHAPTER V**  
**FIRST RATE IDEAS: THE NAVY AND LOBBYING AND HISTORICAL**  
**ORGANIZATIONS, 1919-1939**

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Navy possessed far more ability to shape its own public image than it had prior to World War I. Within the service several separate organizations focused, at least partially, if not wholly, on bolstering the image of the Navy. While the developments of these institutions indicated clear and notable improvements upon past practice, external organizations devoted to promoting some aspect of the Navy constituted one of the most important means of public relations assistance for the service. These groups included combinations of interested citizens and former officers among their ranks and provided a lobbying function that the Navy and its active-duty personnel officially lacked. While these groups functioned outside of the Navy's official public relations apparatus, the lines between the two often blurred. What the public may have perceived as support for the Navy by disinterested outsiders often received clandestine support from the Navy itself.

The Navy League of the United States represented the most obvious source of such support, but its feud with Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels during World War I nearly crippled the organization. Daniels remained unhappy with the apparent obstinacy of the League when elections in 1918 kept the current leadership in place, thus precluding any possibility of him lifting the ban on contact between the Navy and the League. The League's Comforts Committee and other relief work performed on the behalf of sailors serving in the war demonstrated the organization's willingness to not

lose sight of its mission, but these activities placed a severely drained League finances. The publication of the journal *Sea Power* also burdened the League, and the organization struggled on more than one occasion to pay for issues while still at the printers. Several fundraising attempts barely affected the League's balance sheet. The confluence of these factors caused a spike in the League's debts, which increased from \$39,000 in April 1918 to \$138,000 a year later. Funds provided by Colonel Robert Thompson, the League's former president, saved the organization from bankruptcy.<sup>1</sup>

The postwar turn towards disarmament helped bring about the Navy League's increasingly enfeebled position and caused members concern about the organization's future. Reflecting the public's disenchantment with the Navy, the League's membership rolls declined precipitously with the League losing two-thirds of the 9,300 members it had in 1918. As early as 1916, members began to openly debate the possibility that the organization's continued usefulness given the passage of the Naval Act of 1916, but the League's desire to aid the naval war effort temporarily halted such talk. Between 1918 and 1920, further efforts at cost cutting and fundraising came to naught, and even the restoration of ties between the League and the Navy Department in March 1921 failed to have an appreciable effect on the group's fortunes. In June 1921, the same month that President Warren G. Harding formally announced the Washington Conference, the Navy League's president, Henry L. Breckenridge, recommended that the organization formally disband. Secretary of the Navy Edwin Denby supported this initiative, believing that the League had achieved its goal of lobbying for an enlarged

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<sup>1</sup> Rappaport, *Navy League*, 77-78; Wright, *Navy League*, 74.

navy, and he and Breckenridge both agreed that the financial future of the organization looked bleak. While the League's directors disagreed with Breckenridge's assessment and wanted to continue operating at least temporarily, Breckenridge resigned rather than wait for conditions to improve.<sup>2</sup>

From summer 1921 until spring 1922, the League continued on a meager existence and chose not to respond to the Washington Conference in any way. Under the leadership of Robert Kelley, the League shed staffers and ceased publishing *Sea Power* in an effort to remain financially solvent. This newfound commitment to austerity caused the League to pass up a chance to expand into the Chicago area in 1923, believing that the new chapter, which some hoped would provide a basis of support for naval policy in the Midwest, could eventually become a financial drain for the organization should it falter. These decisions, however drastic, allowed the League to renew its efforts at lobbying on behalf of the Navy, focusing its first lobbying efforts in 1922 on defeating a bill in Congress proposing significant cuts to the Navy's authorized personnel strength. For much of the remainder of the interwar period, the League worked to build the Navy to the maximum strength allowed under the terms of the Five-Power Treaty signed at Washington and lobbied both political parties for support.<sup>3</sup>

As the Navy League renewed lobbying on behalf of the Navy, the composition of its membership became a topic of debate in 1923. No prohibition existed prior to this

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<sup>2</sup> Herbert F. Hill, "The Navy League, Past, Present, and Future," *Sea Power* 5, no. 6 (December 1918): 365-6; AENAV Twenty One, 7 March 1921, B200, E89, RG 24, NAB; Wright, *Navy League*, 75-6.

<sup>3</sup> Rappaport, *Navy League*, 89-90; R.A. Koch to William R. Galvin, 24 January 1923, B1, Walter Bruce Howe Papers, Naval War College Library, Newport, RI [hereafter Howe Papers].; Minutes of the Meeting of Directors, 23 May 1923, B1, Howe Papers; Robert W. Kelley to Chairman, Democratic National Committee, and Chairman, Republican National Committee, 5 June 1924, B1, Howe Papers.

time on officers joining the Navy League, but, in order avoid any accusations of impropriety, the League banned naval officers from seeking leadership positions within the organization. The Navy's General Board, however, believed that preventing officers from joining the League would strip potential ammunition from critics who frequently alleged that the League served as the Navy's mouthpiece in Congress. League secretary William Galvin opposed the measure because the reduction in member dues would adversely affect the organization's financial standing. Several naval officers supported the new restriction and the General Board's reasoning for it, but also believed that the League itself would benefit from remaining free of an overt connection to the Navy. One officer even suggested that a ban go into effect before the heretofore unaware general public learned that the League accepted naval officers. A compromise measure of admitting officers into a segregated section of League membership proved unpopular and the section disappeared after several months of existence.<sup>4</sup>

When the League renewed lobbying in the spring of 1922, William Howard Gardiner began to occupy a key role in the operations of the group. Gardiner had worked in public utilities prior to his retirement, but maintained a long-standing interest in sea power and world affairs. In 1921, other members of the League began pushing Gardiner to become the next president of the organization primarily because he advocated halting publication of *Sea Power* due to its considerable expense and because of its failure to further the League's goals. For the next decade, Gardiner was one of the

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<sup>4</sup> Rappaport, *Navy League*, 98; Robert E. Coontz to William Howard Gardiner, 18 January 1923, Item [hereafter I] 31, William Howard Gardiner Papers, 1875-1952, MS Am 2199 (b), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA [hereafter Gardiner Papers]; Luke McNamee to Gardiner, 20 January 1923, I31, Gardiner Papers; Thomas Washington to Gardiner, 23 January 1923, B200, E89, RG 24, NAB; Robert R. Belknap to Gardiner, 23 September 1922, I31, Gardiner Papers.

most prominent individuals within the League, serving as a member of its Executive Committee and often personally designing the organization's publicity campaigns. Throughout the era, he maintained close ties with civilian and uniformed leaders of the Navy, and even received permission from Secretary of the Navy Curtis Wilbur to view confidential documents generated by the General Board. In 1928, the Navy League elected Gardiner as its president, a post he filled until 1933. While many other individuals, such as Kelley and Walter Bruce Howe, remained influential during this period, Gardiner was the driving force behind the League's advocacy on behalf of the Navy for more than a decade.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to his activities as part of the Navy League, Gardiner suggested several new policies to naval officials intended to enhance the Navy's own public relations organizations. In 1921, Gardiner sent to the new Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., a lengthy memorandum outlining a plan for Navy public relations. Gardiner argued that the public would only fully support the Navy if it possessed the prerequisite knowledge of national policy and the Navy's place within it. Gardiner suggested framing broad themes of its message to the public around the Navy's ability to protect the nation's "social evolution" by defending the country and its overseas possessions. Gardiner told Roosevelt that he believed the public underestimated the importance of the Navy's infrastructure ashore and that it consistently measured the strength of the fleet by the number of active battleships. To

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<sup>5</sup> Rappaport, *Navy League*, 91-92; Gardiner to Curtis Wilbur, 22 October 1924, I29, Gardiner Papers.



remedy the problem, the public needed to have a deeper understanding of the Navy and its value to the nation.

To accomplish this task, Gardiner proposed that the service create an Office of Public Information headed by a senior captain well-versed in naval affairs and other issues so that he could better relate to the public. He also suggested that the Secretary of the Navy should issue regular statements to the public and the press either directly or through this new office. Improving the discourse would require naval officers to begin publishing professional discussions in books and periodicals. Perhaps more importantly, Gardiner argued that the Navy must foster the growth of a class of civilian naval experts capable of bridging any gaps that remained between naval officers and the public at large. Perhaps mindful of tumultuous relationship between the Navy League and Secretary Daniels, Gardiner also called upon the Navy to rely more upon external organizations such as the League and the Naval Institute to help increase awareness of naval affairs. Finally, Gardiner also believed that the Navy should sponsor an initiative to have a memorial erected in honor of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan and his contributions to the naval art. This last proposal would have given sanction to an idea Gardiner initially concocted two years earlier. There is no indication that Roosevelt acted directly upon any portion of Gardiner's plan, but it is worth noting that the Navy created the Information Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence only five months after Gardiner submitted this memo.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Gardiner to Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., "Memorandum on Naval Publicity," 19 September 1921, p. 3, I32, Gardiner Papers. Gardiner to Henry Breckenridge, 26 May 1921, I31, Gardiner Papers.

In January 1923, Gardiner narrowed his focus to one of the elements outlined in his 1921 plan and proposed a civilian writers' course at the Naval War College. The idea proved very similar to Roosevelt's "Intelligent Publicity" plan first proposed two years prior and discussed at length in Chapter III, but Gardiner credited the initial idea to Admiral William S. Sims, who had served as the president of the Naval War College when Gardiner visited the campus during the summer of 1922. Gardiner believed that many members of the press corps lacked a basic understanding of naval affairs and required instruction so that they could "correctly" write on the subject for their readers. A four-month course, he reasoned, would be sufficient to familiarize newspaper correspondents, authors, and editors with the value of sea power as a tool of statecraft. Rather than serve all four months contiguously, those taking the course would attend for one month at a time and then break for many months while working through a reading list of important works on naval affairs supplied by their War College instructors. By breaking up the course in this fashion, Gardiner hoped that the effect of "indoctrination" would be more pronounced than if the course were taken in a single four-month period.<sup>7</sup>

Though the idea was not wholly original, Gardiner elaborated much further than Roosevelt had on what he hoped the course could accomplish for the Navy. Gardiner admitted that he and Sims agreed on the necessity of creating such a program but differed considerably on its desired results. Sims favored an approach whereby the writers graduating from the program would endeavor to write as many articles as

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<sup>7</sup> Gardiner to Roosevelt, Jr., "Introduction of Civilian Writers at the NWC," 18 January 1923, pp 2-3, I32, Gardiner Papers. AsstSecNav to SecNav, "Intelligent Publicity for the Navy," 8 March 1921, E19, RG 80, NAB.

possible describing the Navy and its activities, believing that it would provide the general public with a positive image of the Navy. Gardiner, on the other hand, believed that appealing to the general public would be inefficient because the average citizen was “inadequately informed, his intellectual reasoning faculties are not developed, and his willful control over his emotions is slight.” Instead, Gardiner advocated appealing to elite decision makers and those whose faculties were controlled “somewhat more by reason.” He argued that Alfred Thayer Mahan’s *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* had attracted an audience of “thinkers and doers” rather than the masses. Gardiner did not endorse finding a new Mahan, but believed that his program would find success by appealing to the influential segment of the public.<sup>8</sup>

In January 1923, Gardiner proposed to Roosevelt a narrower scheme designed to utilize retired officers in public relations work. Retired officers represented a source of publicity as yet untapped by the Navy’s official public relations apparatus and offered a means of circumventing the reticence that naval officers in uniform sometimes possessed about such work. Gardiner suggested that the Navy initiate regular communiqués, perhaps on a bimonthly schedule, for circulation to retired officers which included recent information about the service and its activities. Gardiner outlined three significant advantages of this scheme to Roosevelt: retired officers could remain up-to-date with latest news of the fleet, external organizations such as the Navy League or the media would gain new sources of information to draw upon, and the Navy would have a

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<sup>8</sup> Gardiner to Roosevelt, Jr., “Introduction of Civilian Writers at the NWC,” 18 January 1923, pp 3-4, 132, Gardiner Papers.

reliable means of getting accurate information out to the general public. This scheme proved far more attractive to Roosevelt given the miniscule costs required to initiate the plan, unlike Gardiner's more expensive Naval War College plan, and he quickly approved its implementation.<sup>9</sup>

Gardiner's publicity work for the League generally focused on writing press releases in support of larger policy goals. Instead of making direct appeals for mass public support, Gardiner directed his press releases to Congressmen for use in debates over naval policy or to members of the media hoping they would generate comment in the editorial pages of newspapers and periodicals. Such a strategy made sense when two separate factors were considered; first, Gardiner recognized that the limits of the League's resources prevented the organization from undertaking any vast public education campaign on its own accord. The League's budget for publicity work averaged \$2,000 per year, a paltry sum with which to manage a nationwide campaign. Thus, by stimulating opinion through Congress and the media, League releases could affect those closest to power, and, should the releases generate much comment in the 150 newspapers that Gardiner believed possessed "a higher grade of editorial mind," the ideas contained in them could achieve much wider dissemination than otherwise possible. Second, Gardiner's strategy also made sense if the League is placed within the context of the Navy's own public relations units: the Navy could direct its message to the general public while the League focused on influencing key decision makers. Gardiner's ambitious schemes to expand the Navy's public relations apparatus met a

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<sup>9</sup> Gardiner to Roosevelt, Jr., "Memo, Periodic Confidential Communiqués to Retired Naval Officers," 19 January 1923, I32, Gardiner Papers; Gardiner to Roosevelt, Jr., 14 February 1923, I32, Gardiner Papers.

mixed record, but he viewed the League as occupying a specific role within the phalanx of official and unofficial organizations working to improve the Navy's public image. The Navy reciprocated the sentiment. In 1923, Commander Ralph A. Koch, the first head of the Information Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence stated that he was convinced that the "country will never become indoctrinated without the Navy League" and advised the League on the focus of its recruiting efforts.<sup>10</sup>

While targeted appeals marked Gardiner's work at the Navy League, he also played a role in the Navy League's most significant public relations coup – Navy Day – which became the primary means by which the organization cultivated pro-Navy sentiments among the general public. Until now, Gardiner's exact role in its creation has eluded historians. The Navy Day established during the interwar period had some precedence because, in October 1906, the Navy League section in Philadelphia staged an event dubbed Navy Day in Atlantic City, drawing more than 2,000 people to hear Secretary of the Navy Charles Bonaparte and other speakers celebrate the Navy. This gathering was a one-time event, and nearly sixteen years passed before anyone resurrected the idea. The traditional narrative of Navy Day, propagated by the Navy League itself, describes how League president Robert Kelley proposed the creation of "Navy Day" to the Navy Department in August 1922, suggesting October 27, Theodore Roosevelt's birthday, as the date in honor of the former president's contributions to naval expansion over the course of his life. Secretary of the Navy Denby signed off on

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<sup>10</sup> Gardiner to Leeland P. Lovette, 11 November 1942, I32, Gardiner Papers. Ralph A. Koch to William M. Galvin, 24 January 1923, B1, Howe Papers. Report of the President of the NLUS to the Annual Meeting, 21 June 1933, I30, Gardiner Papers.

the proposal, and the endorsement of Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., gave the endeavor added legitimacy. With this masterstroke, the Navy League had finally come up with a means of capturing the public's attention and moving beyond its traditional, more targeted calls for an expanded navy.<sup>11</sup>

This version of events, however, omits mention of the original source of the Navy Day idea. The idea originated not in the Navy League but rather in the Office of Naval Intelligence which nominally housed two of the offices – the Information Section and the Historical Section – tasked with public relations work on the Navy's behalf. Captain Luke McNamee, the head of the Office of Naval Intelligence, a good friend and frequent correspondent of Gardiner, first suggested the idea of Navy Day in a letter to Gardiner in late July 1922. Recognizing the potential controversy that his proposal could create, McNamee instructed Gardiner to keep this correspondence secret to all but Kelley and a few other high-ranking and trustworthy League officials. The plan must appear to have originated with the Navy League, McNamee reasoned, or the scheme would be denounced by Congress and dismissed by the public as a blatant attempt at self-promotion. He continued, “The plan would come as a complete surprise to the Navy Department, but being put up to us would of course gracefully assist and then we would go to the limit – ‘get me’?”<sup>12</sup>

McNamee argued that making “the whole country pause for an hour and give serious thought to its Navy” could significantly enhance the public perception of the

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<sup>11</sup> Scovel, “Helm's a Lee,” 1, 29-30; Rappaport, *Navy League*, 92-94; Wright, *Navy League*, 78.

<sup>12</sup> McNamee to Gardiner, 28 July 1922, p. 1, I32, Gardiner Papers.

service. He predicted dire circumstances should the Navy not improve its image, writing that, “If we cannot sell the Navy to the people, it will not take long to start bankruptcy proceedings in Congress.”<sup>13</sup>

McNamee conceived of Navy Day as a means of displaying many different aspects of the service to the public and thus suggested a variety of activities:

- (1) Navy Day to be declared a holiday throughout the service.
- (2) Ships to be distributed along both coasts at appropriate places – some sent up the Mississippi River.
- (3) Air force to be sent inland where ships cannot go.
- (4) Marines to participate.
- (5) Naval Stations throughout the country to make this a great day.
- (6) Civil organizations, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, etc. to cooperate.
- (7) Speakers to make speeches throughout the country on appropriate topics.
- (8) Numbers of enlisted men encouraged to take leave so that they might be in their home towns on that day.
- (9) Ships to be decorated and a national salute of 21 guns fired at noon.
- (10) A football game between the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets staged somewhere in the middle of the country.<sup>14</sup>

The goal was to reach as wide an audience as possible and thereby address several of the Navy’s concerns, including Brigadier General William Mitchell’s charges that the Navy

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. McNamee to Kelley, 1 August 1922, I32, Gardiner Papers.

<sup>14</sup> McNamee to Gardiner, 28 July 1922, p. 1, I32, Gardiner Papers.

was obsolete and obstructing the development of air power. The program would reach a wide geographical area, including inland states, and develop bonds between the service and local leaders.<sup>15</sup>

Gardiner responded enthusiastically to McNamee's proposal, saying it contained "FIRST RATE ideas." McNamee provided Gardiner with detailed instructions on how Kelley should write to Secretary of the Navy Edwin Denby to ask for permission to hold Navy Day, but Gardiner suggested that McNamee ghostwrite Kelley's letter of proposal as well as a response letter to be signed by Assistant Secretary Roosevelt. The available records do not indicate whether McNamee followed through on Gardiner's suggestion to ghostwrite the letters, but, in any case, McNamee clearly instituted the chain of events that resulted in the creation of Navy Day and shaped the way it would be celebrated in succeeding years.<sup>16</sup>

In later correspondence Gardiner informed McNamee of the poor state of League finances at the time saying this shortage of funds would likely inhibit the League's ability to promote Navy Day. Gardiner continued to work despite this handicap and wrote Secretary Denby to request a clear statement of naval policy which he could use to better design a promotional campaign for Navy Day. Denby responded with a five-page document that outlined the historical context for the Navy's development, its current missions, and the value of the Navy to the nation. The Navy, Denby argued, provided for the nation's defense, assisted in humanitarian operations, and served as a "training

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Gardiner to McNamee, 2 August 1922, I32, Gardiner Papers. Gardiner to McNamee, 8 August 1922, I32, Gardiner Papers.



school for the youth of the country.” The Navy promoted international peace and stability for only the Navy’s power and potential dominance after World War I made possible the disarmament agreements reached at Washington.<sup>17</sup>

The Navy itself also worked to ensure the success of Navy Day. Secretary Denby ordered ships to return to port, and for their crews to prepare them for receiving visitors. While most of the fleet gathered at New York City for the first Navy Day, Denby dispatched ships along the Atlantic seaboard from Bath, Maine, to Miami, Florida, and at various West Coast ports. The Navy also sought to highlight its past successes and traditions for Navy Day and exhorted officers to evoke the exploits of John Paul Jones, John Barry, and Stephen Decatur, among others. Rather conspicuously, this same list omitted David Farragut, David Dixon Porter, Raphael Semmes, and other prominent Union and Confederate naval heroes from the Civil War, likely in an attempt to avoid any possibility of associating the Navy with sectional discord. The film industry also pitched with a number of theaters across the country pledging to show naval films to the public. Radio stations devoted blocks of time in their programming schedules to Navy Day material. Solicitations for media coverage also went out, and the Navy ultimately received assistance from newspapers and several periodicals, most prominently *McClure’s* magazine. The November 1922 issue of *McClure’s* included two naval articles. The first, a glowing tribute to Admiral William S. Sims authored by S.S. McClure, the magazine’s founder, credited Sims with several reforms, including the development of long range gunnery and his involvement in the post-World War I

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<sup>17</sup> Edwin Denby to Gardiner, 17 October 1922, B19, E19, RG 80, NAB.

hearings into the Navy Department's management of the war effort. Sims himself wrote the second article in the issue. Entitled "Roosevelt and the Navy: Recollections, Reminiscences, and Reflections," it described the support Theodore Roosevelt provided to the Navy throughout his life. *McClure's* ran parts two and three of Sims' article on Roosevelt in succeeding months.<sup>18</sup>

The Midwest became a key target for Navy Day proponents because they believed that a lack of information about the Navy available in the region created an atmosphere of indifference and even hostility towards the service. As McNamee had initially proposed, naval aviation units flew to inland cities and towns on Navy Day. A group of seaplanes flew from Pensacola to Hannibal, Missouri, stopping several places en route to demonstrate the capability of naval aviation. Another aircraft flew from Washington, D.C., to Indianapolis, making similar landings along its route. The *Chicago Tribune* editorialized that the public's "unthinking optimism" had led to the degradation of the Navy and implored all "clear-headed Americans" to recognize the value of the service to the nation's physical security and economic well-being. Hopefully, the *Tribune* added, the holiday would stimulate discussion amongst the

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<sup>18</sup> SecNav to All Ships and Stations, "Navy Day," 12 September 1922, B19, E19, RG 80, NAB; Memorandum for Officers in the Bureau, "Navy Day," 18 September 1922, B361, E89, RG 24, NAB; CNO to Commandant, Thirteenth Naval District, "Radio Telephone Broadcasts," 14 October 1922, B19, E19, RG 80, NAB; S.S. McClure, "Admiral Sims," *McClure's*, November 1922, 26-31; William S. Sims, "Roosevelt and the Navy: Recollections, Reminiscences, and Reflections," *McClure's*, November 1922, 32-41; William S. Sims, "Roosevelt and the Navy," *McClure's*, December 1922, 56-62; William S. Sims, "Theodore Roosevelt at Work," *McClure's*, January 1923, 61-6, 95-101.

public and lead citizens to realize that the Washington Treaty did not eliminate war or the need to maintain an adequate national defense.<sup>19</sup>

In some of areas of the country, the Navy succeeded in attracting public attention to the service, if only for a single day. Officers in the Nashville area submitted articles to papers throughout Tennessee which prominently displayed the date of Navy Day and emphasized the peacetime duties of the service, including the education of enlisted men and humanitarian work. The advance publicity they arranged for Navy Day included references to Navy Day by ministers in their weekly church sermons, using specially made rubber stamps for mail which included the date of Navy Day, and notices placed into menu cards in restaurants. Local officials were called upon to promote Navy Day and the governor of Tennessee led a parade of the local ROTC organization through the streets of Nashville, and many schools held special outdoor exercises and events for students. This combination of activities proved so successful that the Information Section, when drawing up plans for Navy Day in 1923, circulated a description of the advance publicity and events held in Tennessee to other areas to serve as a model.<sup>20</sup>

Prominent naval officers also promoted Navy Day. General Board member Rear Admiral Ledyard Rogers granted an interview with the *Chicago Tribune* in which he argued that the Five-Power Treaty signed at the Washington Conference determined the nation's naval policy and that the Navy had no intention of advocating expansion of the fleet beyond the ratios set by the treaty. Rogers, however, warned of the price paid for

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<sup>19</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, "Navy Day," 24 October 1922, 8. Memo for the Press for Release Morning Papers, 23 October 1922, B5, E113, RG 80, NAB; *Chicago Tribune*, "Navy Day: A Summons to Patriotic Thought," 27 October 1922, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Information Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence to Recruiting Officers and Inspectors for Material Bureaus, Etc., "Suggestions for Navy Day," 24 September 1923, B361, E89, RG 24, NAB.

“unpreparedness” brought on by the desire for reduced government expenditures and a lower tax burden. Inland areas received visits from prominent naval officers, including most conspicuously Admiral Hugh Rodman, the commander of the American battleships attached to the British Grand Fleet during World War I, who spoke at a public gathering in Des Moines, Iowa. In his speech, Rodman highlighted the growth of the Navy over the last 40 years, the importance of Theodore Roosevelt in fostering the growth of the service, and pointed out the benefits of a strong navy.<sup>21</sup>

Yet while Navy Day proved a successful venture in some areas, considerable room for improvement existed. The late start in planning such a large and complex event limited the effect that it could have in mobilizing public opinion. To some, Navy Day failed in its purpose to improve the service’s public standing, particularly in the inland areas which McNamee believed vital to the ultimate success of the venture. A naval reservist in Worcester, Massachusetts wrote Secretary Denby to complain that the Navy Day celebration in his town relied too much upon the rehashing of war stories rather than providing more information about a “sailor’s life.” If the Navy included more of this type of information, the public would gravitate more towards the service because they presently “know little or nothing” about the service and have yet to find an acceptable means of satisfying their curiosity.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Grafton Wilcox, “Admiral Tells why U.S. Must Have Big Fleet,” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 October 1922, 12. Hugh M. Rodman, “A Navy Day Address,” 27 October 1922, Press Releases and Transcripts of Press Conferences, 1917-1936, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>22</sup> LT Paul P. Spaulding, USNRF, to SecNav, “Report on Navy Day,” 7 December 1922, B316, E89, RG 24, NAB.

The Navy League believed that it had tapped into a latent pro-Navy sentiment which had previously gone unnoticed, but continued concern about the group's financial condition led some members to question the wisdom of holding a second Navy Day in 1923 despite of the success of the 1922 celebration. Only with the pledge of funds from Kelley and several other donors did the League's leadership feel secure enough to press for a repeat of Navy Day. League officials began by contacting the Navy Department seeking assurances that it would support the undertaking, to which Assistant Secretary Roosevelt heartily agreed.<sup>23</sup>

The initial ambivalence caused by the League's financial picture certainly failed to scale back the group's ambitions for the second Navy Day, and the group contacted automaker Henry Ford, who had spoken in favor of an expanded Navy in recent months seeking his endorsement for the celebration. Samuel Gompers, the aged head of the American Federation of Labor, soon pledged his support for Navy Day, saying the Navy was the institution most responsible for the defense of "the lives and the heritage of our citizenship." The media became a focal point for cooperation again as the Navy League concentrated its efforts on newspapers, radio stations, and the film industry to publicize various scheduled events. The latter proved even more helpful in 1923 as the head of the new Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, Will Hays, pledged his support in securing publicity for Navy Day.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Rappaport, *Navy League*, 98; Robert W. Kelley to SecNav, 25 August 1923, B361, E89, RG 24, NAB; Roosevelt, Jr., to Kelley, 28 August 1923, B361, E89, RG 24, NAB.

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Gompers to Roosevelt, Jr., 20 September 1923, B361, E19, RG 80, NAB. Kelley to McNamee, 17 August 1923, B1, Howe Papers; Howe to Marion Eppley, 11 August 1923, B1, Howe Papers.

The combined efforts of the Navy League and the Navy Department made the second celebration of Navy Day much larger than the first. The Navy dispersed the fleet far more widely than in 1922, although the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral E.W. Eberle, sent an entire battleship division to San Francisco harbor. In all, more than 2,100 local celebrations were planned and announced in advance. The governors of 36 states and more than 1,000 city mayors issued statements or proclamations regarding Navy Day, and businesses, women's groups, and other organizations all pledged their participation in 1923. Small ceremonies were held in foreign countries wherever the service had a presence, spanning from Constantinople to Chungking. Naval aircraft overflew inland areas with the Navy's new airship *Shenandoah* a featured participant. The *New York World*, whose reportage helped give credence to the disarmament movement in late 1920, even issued an editorial on Navy Day advocating construction of enough warships to bring the Navy up to treaty limits.<sup>25</sup>

In the days following Navy Day, accounts reached Washington of celebrations held across the country. Two junior naval officers who visited Fresno, California, reported receiving a warm welcome from the mayor of the city and that more than 5,000 people attended a local luncheon to celebrate the event. Some of the most promising reports from Navy Day originated from naval reservists. The reserve unit in Cincinnati opened its new reserve center on Navy Day and also arranged for flag displays throughout the city. The sole naval reservist in Sandusky, Ohio, took it upon himself to

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<sup>25</sup> CNO to Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet, "Navy Day," 14 September 1923, B19, E19, RG 80, NAB; Memo for the Press for Immediate Release, 25 October 1923, B6, E113, RG 80, NAB; Rappaport, *Navy League*, 99.

perform a considerable number of tasks to promote Navy Day. After speaking before the local chapter of the American Legion, that group persuaded the local press to print several articles for Navy Day, some of them contributed by the reservist himself. He also secured the cooperation of local ministers and the Boy Scouts to make public announcements in the days and weeks leading up to Navy Day. A lieutenant commander visited Sandusky and the reservist arranged for the officer to speak at the local Kiwanis Club.<sup>26</sup>

The success of the first two Navy Days entrenched it as an annual celebration for the remainder of the interwar period and provided a regular and consistent source of publicity for the Navy. The celebrations themselves followed the same basic pattern established by the 1922 and 1923 iterations. Vessels visited ports along both coasts and were opened to the public for tours, and prominent individuals gave public addresses celebrating Navy traditions and call upon the public to insist upon the maintenance of the fleet. As the radio industry matured, the number of radio stations airing Navy Day broadcasts increased and allowed audiences to listen to speeches and other naval-themed programming. In 1926, the motion picture industry increased its support for the celebration after the Navy requested films for production and distribution to theaters. This proved somewhat of a challenge as each of the primary newsreel makers wanted footage which differed from that of their counterparts, but the Navy ultimately secured this support by granting the companies permission to film a variety of activities,

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<sup>26</sup> Commanding Officer, Seventh Division, Twelfth Naval Reserve Brigade, "Navy Day at Fresno, California, October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1923," 29 October 1923, B361, E89, RG 24, NAB; W.J. Confer to SecNav and BuNav, "Navy Day – participation in – report of," 2 November 1923, B361, E89, RG 24, NAB; H.W. Brooks to BuNav, "Navy Day," 30 October 1923, B361, E89, RG 24, NAB.

including a mock air attack by aircraft from the Scouting Fleet on a group of destroyers. The support from the film industry also resulted in a film produced by Adolph Zukor's Paramount Pictures with the assistance of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association entitled "Don't Give Up the Ship" (1926) which highlighted the importance of the nation's merchant marine and its effect on the national economy. Secretary of the Navy Curtis Wilbur screened the film on 1 October 1926 and quickly endorsed it, giving the MPPDA time to produce 200 copies of the film for exhibition on Navy Day.<sup>27</sup>

The League's involvement in the planning and publicity for Navy Day continued throughout the era, but at times its level of participation fluctuated. While the organization worried about the expenses it incurred to stage each Navy Day, primarily through the subsidization of travel for officers to inland areas for public gatherings, the League continued with the subterfuge that it created Navy Day and must continue to "sponsor" the event so as to avoid any public perception of impropriety by the Navy itself. It also continued to seek endorsements of Navy Day from key political and naval figures, and fretted that President Calvin Coolidge might not provide one in 1927 coming so soon on the heels of the Geneva Naval Conference that summer. In 1928, the Navy League believed that Navy Day might prove a distraction to the heated electoral campaign waged by Herbert Hoover and Alfred Smith, and so chose to reduce its involvement for that year. The League returned to its former levels of activity in

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<sup>27</sup> CNO to CinCBat, "Navy Day," 30 August 1926, pp 1-2, B433, E22, RG 80, NAB; CNO to the Commander, Scouting Fleet, et al., 24 September 1926, B433, E22, RG 80, NAB; CNO to the Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station, San Diego, and the Commandant of the Eleventh Naval District, 27 September 1926, B433, E22, RG 80, NAB; Memo to Howe, "Navy Day 1926," c. October 1926, B1, Howe Papers.



succeeding years, but the Navy itself ultimately subsidized a greater portion of Navy Day activities for both 1929 and 1930.<sup>28</sup>

In 1930, the ascension of Admiral William Veazie Pratt to the post of Chief of Naval Operations and the onset of the Great Depression presented two new challenges to the League's commitment to Navy Day. The Depression had a significant impact on economic activity during the first months of 1930, and the escalating crisis brought into question the expenditures incurred by the service to promote Navy Day. Pratt initially questioned the value and utility of many of the key components of Navy Day celebrations, especially the financially costly dispatch of ships to port cities all along the coasts. When the Navy League presented Pratt data regarding the past successes of Navy Day in drawing visitors and public attention to the fleet, the CNO ultimately agreed to participate in the celebration that year and made a public speech to mark the occasion. In the end, the level of press coverage and attendance continued to remain high. By this point, the regularity of the event allowed the League to reduce its expenditures on Navy Day because sufficient momentum had been created to allow for regular coverage of the event absent the prompting and requests which had marked previous Navy Days.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Howe to Gardiner, 29 May 1931, pp 1-2, B2, Howe Papers. "Memorandum to Present in Obtaining Financial Support for Navy Day," undated c. August 1925, B3, Howe Papers; Howe to Gardiner, 8 April 1927, pp 1-4, B1, Howe Papers; Memorandum, "Navy Day 1928," 16 May 1928, B3, Howe Papers; Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Navy League of the United States, 23 June 1931, I30, Gardiner Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Rappaport, *Navy League*, 135; Howe to Gardiner, 6 October 1930, pp 1-10, B2, Howe Papers; Howe to John Stapler, 7 November 1930, B2, Howe Papers; "Summary Report – Navy Day 1930," 12 January 1930[sic], B3, Howe Papers; Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Navy League of the United States, 23 June 1931, B2, Howe Papers.

Although Navy Day became popular, self-sustaining, and inextricably linked to the Navy League, this did not shield the organization against strong criticism from prominent individuals. In February 1931, Representative Burton French, an ardent opponent of naval expansion, alleged on the floor of the House that the Navy League was a front for arms manufacturers and other industries with a vested interest in naval expansion. Walter Bruce Howe drafted a strong reply to French in which he itemized the League's sources of income, denied the remaining charges, and reaffirmed the League's commitment for naval construction within the confines of the treaty limits. While French overstated possible ties with industry, he remained unaware of the deep connection between the League and the Navy Department. His allegations created a more cautious atmosphere within the League, some of whose members feared an eventual investigation into the League's activities. When the organization circulated a draft of the minutes of an executive committee meeting held in June 1931, member James W. Wadsworth was appalled at the level of detail regarding the League's present and future activities included in the transcription. He wrote Howe that future examples of meeting minutes should be written more vaguely so as to avoid "embarrassment" for the League and any of its supporters should any outsider ever view them. Howe recognized the value in Wadsworth's warning and pledged that the group would not produce such detailed records of future meetings.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> ; James W. Wadsworth to Howe, 6 July 1931, B2, Howe Papers. Rappaport, *Navy League*, 137-8; Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Navy League of the United States, 23 June 1931, B2, Howe Papers; Howe to Wadsworth, 10 July 1931, B2, Howe Papers.

By the fall of 1931, Gardiner had been at the forefront of League policymaking for nearly a decade. In the last years of his formal involvement with the League, however, Gardiner's presence and personality started to become liabilities for the Navy League and its desire to promote naval expansion. Gardiner provoked a public feud with President Herbert Hoover when he issued a press release on 28 October 1931 entitled "The President and the Navy." The communiqué attacked Hoover's proposed cuts in naval spending as rooted in "abysmal ignorance," believing it would force the United States to fight "bigger and bloodier wars" and subordinated American naval policy to foreign powers. At two points in recent years, the League had restrained itself from openly criticizing key officials so brazenly, fearing the potential political consequences. In 1924, the League scrapped a proposed release attacking Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes' decision to ignore the advice of his naval advisers at the Washington Conference, and in 1926 the organization refrained from criticizing President Calvin Coolidge for his failure to support naval expansion. Gardiner failed to show the restraint of his predecessors, and the press release brought forth a wave of denunciations from the nation's newspapers, eventually leading to the resignation of some Navy League members in protest, most prominently the wife of Rear Admiral Harry Yarnell. The attacks also angered the Naval Order of the United States, whose Commander General, Rear Admiral Albert Gleaves, exhorted his organization and its companions to support Hoover in this matter. Hoover even organized a committee stocked with political allies to investigate the League's accusations, but the committee's final report issued in late

1931 only noted some factual errors in Gardiner's release but otherwise ignored the opportunity to further discredit the League or defend the president.<sup>31</sup>

Gardiner's attacks on President Hoover's naval policy created a deep schism within the Navy League itself. Other members of the League, particularly Walter Bruce Howe, disapproved of Gardiner's decision to criticize the president, and the disagreement between the two men helped bring about the long-term dissolution of their relationship. In May 1932, Howe informed Gardiner that he would not continue serving as the League's Chairman unless he approved of all of Gardiner's writings prior to their public release. Given that Gardiner wrote nearly everything released under the League's auspices since 1921, such loss of control represented an affront to Gardiner's authority, but he ultimately consented to the restriction. This arrangement did not last long because, in 1932, disputes over the Navy League's fundraising efforts again led Howe and Gardiner into open conflict. Gardiner enlisted other League members' support by arguing that Howe's inattentiveness toward fundraising in recent years had limited the organization's ability to operate, although Gardiner's controversial attacks likely complicated fundraising efforts. At a pivotal meeting in January 1933, Gardiner maintained his hold on the League's presidency, thus precipitating the Howe's withdrawal from the organization and that of several other longstanding and prominent members. While Gardiner prevailed in this challenge, the feud drained the League of talent and helped bring an end to Gardiner's term as president of the Navy League later

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<sup>31</sup> *Washington Post*, "Hoover Held Ignorant on Naval Affairs," 29 October 1931, 1. Rappaport, *Navy League*, 100-6, 113-22, 144-9; Wright, *Navy League*, 87-8; Howe to Gardiner, 26 November 1924, B1, Howe Papers; Howe to Gardiner, 7 January 1926, B1, Howe Papers; Report of the Recorder General, 6 November 1931, B2, Records and Papers of the Naval Order of the United States, 1890-2005, Cushing Library, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX [hereafter NOUS Papers].

that year. Relinquishing the leadership position did not mean Gardiner completely divorced himself from the League's affairs as he continued to work with the League for the next two years, cooperating closely with its next president, Nathaniel Hubbard. Only in 1935 did Gardiner finally remove himself entirely from the League's affairs, bringing to an end his status as the League's most influential member. With Gardiner's final departure in 1935, former League members he had alienated returned to the fold, including Howe, who rejoined the League's Board of Directors.<sup>32</sup>

While Gardiner's retirement from office removed a polarizing figure from the League, the organization faced new challenges. Membership remained low, and a controversial press release authored by Hubbard and Gardiner questioned the naval intentions of Great Britain caused the League to form a permanent public relations subcommittee to screen releases prior to circulation. Hubbard's attempts to raise funds proved inadequate leading the League to seek financial support from shipbuilding firms. The ascension of Nelson Macy to the League presidency in July 1934 ushered in an era of expansion. Early in his term, Macy embarked on a cross-country trip in an effort to attract more members, and the trip proved so successful that newspapers in the Los Angeles area printed Navy League membership application forms in their pages. Over the next several years, membership and income grew enough that the League revived the

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<sup>32</sup> Walter Bruce Howe's papers at the Naval War College Library in Newport, Rhode Island, contain no references to the dispute. Gardiner's collection, however, contains numerous pieces of correspondence detailing the height of the dispute in late 1932 and early 1933. Gardiner to Walter C. Cole, 9 February 1932, I30, Gardiner Papers; Gardiner to Wadsworth, 30 December 1932, I30, Gardiner Papers; Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Navy League of the United States, 20 January 1933, I31, Gardiner Papers; Rappaport, *Navy League*, 153-5; Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Navy League of the United States, 16 January 1936, B3, Howe Papers.

publication of *Sea Power* in 1935. Thus, as the 1930s drew to a close, the Navy League had staged a remarkable recovery and became a vital cog in the Navy's public relations machine.<sup>33</sup>

The Navy League of the United States filled a niche as a direct lobbying organization nominally separate from the service, but other means existed to bolster the service's image. The publications produced by the United States Naval Institute examined both contemporary naval affairs and naval history. *Proceedings* remained a valuable forum for officers and interested civilians to discuss naval policy, but the circulation of the journal remained limited to these groups. Occasionally, articles in *Proceedings* prompted further analysis in the nation's newspapers. The *Washington Post* posted a summary and analysis of William Howard Gardiner's February 1926 article "National Policy and Naval Power" in which he argued that the failure to build up the fleet as an invitation to an attack by a foreign naval power. Admiral William V. Pratt's "Disarmament and the National Defense" published in the September 1929 issue of *Proceedings* received similar treatment. In the article, Pratt, echoing the comments made by Gardiner three years earlier, contended that the Navy only possessed enough strength to put down "minor uprisings" and could not engage the forces of another great power navy with confidence.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Wright, *Navy League*, 96-102; Rappaport, *Navy League*, 155-76.

<sup>34</sup> *Washington Post*, "America Too Weak Today for Safety," 4 September 1929, 2. William Howard Gardiner, "National Policy and Naval Power," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 52, no. 2 (February 1926), 229; John Edwin Nevin, "U.S. Naval Policy is Held Dangerous by Naval Expert," *Washington Post*, 1 February 1926, 1; William V. Pratt, "Disarmament and the National Defense," *Proceedings* 55, no. 9 (September 1929), 751.

The other area in which the Naval Institute reached the public came through its book publishing arm. While publishing books on a variety of naval topics, the Institute's publication of naval history attracted public attention. Charles Lee Lewis' *Matthew Maury: The Pathfinder of the Seas* (1927) was the first major biography of the longtime head of the Naval Observatory whose charts of wind patterns and currents had dramatically improved the quality of navigational aids during the mid-nineteenth century. Commander Richard E. Byrd, who had achieved fame through his overflight of the North Pole in 1926, penned a foreword for Lewis' book which linked the value of Maury's work to present day naval aviation. The Institute published several other prominent naval histories during the interwar period, including Holloway H. Frost's *We Build a Navy* (1929) and *The Battle of Jutland* (1936).<sup>35</sup>

During the interwar period, the promotion of naval history again became a conduit for public relations, sometimes with ties to the Navy's Historical Section. The Naval Order of the United States also continued to operate into the interwar period, but, much like its progeny, the Navy League, it fell on hard times during the period of public aversion to the military services. During the last quarter century of operation the Order, comprised wholly of officers had served during wartime, naval veterans of the Civil War and Spanish-American War, particularly Admiral George Dewey, sustained the Order's membership rolls. Unfortunately for the Naval Order, few veterans of World War I chose to join. Membership thus declined and the entire organization itself appeared

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<sup>35</sup> Charles L. Lewis, *Matthew Maury: The Pathfinder of the Seas* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1927); *Washington Post*, "Maury, Sea Pathfinder, Brought to Life in Book From Charles Lewis' Pen," 8 September 1928, sec. S, 11; Holloway H. Frost, *We Build a Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1929); Holloway H. Frost, *The Battle of Jutland* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1936).

poised for financial insolvency. Whereas the Naval Order's half-dozen commanderies, as local chapters were called, at the turn of the century spanned the entire country: Massachusetts (Boston), New York, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), Illinois (Chicago), the District of Columbia, and California, the latter three disappeared by 1923, leaving only the three oldest commanderies, all on the East Coast, with fewer than 200 members in total. The only bright spot from an organizational perspective came in 1927 with the addition of a new commandery based in New Jersey. Known as the Aviation Commandery, this new reflected the transformation of the Navy's technology and organization and allowed the Naval Order to tap into a young and growing segment of the Navy's officer corps. Unfortunately, any optimism stemming from this solitary expansion proved short-lived because, by 1931 the Aviation Commandery severed ties with the Naval Order and began to function independently. Making matters worse, the Pennsylvania Commandery ceased operating entirely by 1931, reducing the number of functioning chapters to two. Not until after the end of World War II did another opportunity for expansion present itself to the Naval Order.<sup>36</sup>

The dire straits of the Naval Order and its relatively small size did not deter the organization from continuing to promote history. In 1926, Herbert Satterlee proposed that the Order raise funds to commission a bust of Admiral David Farragut to be placed in the Hall of Fame at New York University. The project held special significance for

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<sup>36</sup> Minutes of the Eleventh Triennial Congress of the NOUS, 2 November 1928, B11, NOUS Papers; Report of Recorder General Presented at Meeting of the General Council Held in Philadelphia, 26 May 1923, B2, NOUS Papers; Minutes of Meeting of the General Council of the Naval Order of the United States Held at India House, Hanover Square, New York, NY, 29 May 1928, B2, NOUS Papers; Report of the Recorder General, 6 November 1931, p. 4, B2, NOUS Papers.



the Order because of the involvement of Farragut's son Loyall in the founding of the organization in 1890. Although the plans nearly fell through due to the inability of the Order to raise the necessary \$3,000, a last minute appeal for funds made by New York University placed in the *New York Times* allowed the Order to dedicate the bust on schedule in 1927. Later, in 1931, the New York Commandery drew further attention to the Order's work to promote history when it began offering prizes to midshipmen at the Naval Academy. The prizes went to one midshipman from each of the first, second, and third classes who took a competitive examination and demonstrated "the broadest knowledge and most thorough understanding of world history to the present day."<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps the most significant activity undertaken by the Naval Order to accomplish its goals came in 1925 when it became involved with the Save "Old Ironsides" Fund. This fund intended to provide for a complete restoration of the USS *Constitution* in the absence of any Congressional appropriation for the purpose. The *Constitution*, one of the first ships of the U.S. Navy, had remained on active duty until 1882, but the ship decayed significantly in the years after its decommissioning. In its efforts to raise money for the fund, the Naval Order published a booklet in 1927 about the ship's history and solicited donations from companions. The New York Commandery also underwrote the publication of *James Durand, An Able Seaman of 1812* with Yale Press to promote the fundraising efforts. Ultimately, it is unknown how

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<sup>37</sup> Report of the Recorder General, 3 November 1934, p. 3, B2, NOUS Papers. Minutes of Meeting of the General Council of the Naval Order of the United States Held at India House, Hanover Square, New York, New York, 7 December 1926, B2, NOUS Papers; Herbert Satterlee to Robert Underwood Johnson, 16 March 1927, B6, NOUS Papers; Robert Underwood Johnson, "Farragut Bust Unveiling," *New York Times*, 4 April 1927, 22; *New York Times*, "Six Busts Unveiled at Hall of Fame," 6 May 1927, 6.

much money the Naval Order raised through its methods. The effort to restore the *Constitution* eventually succeeded, and, after its recommissioning in 1931, the Navy sent the ship on a three-year promotional tour which visited ports from New England all the way to the Pacific Northwest.<sup>38</sup>

Shortly after World War I, the Naval Order began to expand its focus to include promotion the contemporary service. The organization demonstrated this newfound emphasis on contemporary affairs in 1922 when, in the aftermath of the Washington Conference, the Naval Order issued a brief statement calling upon the nation to build the fleet up to the limits set out in the Five-Power Pact. Worries about the state of “radicalism, anarchism, and pacifism” prompted the Naval Order to participate in The All-Americanism Conference in May 1923. This meeting brought together many different patriotic and veteran’s societies wishing to rid the nation of such negative influences and encourage patriotic sentiments among the public. That same year, the Order chose to stand alongside the Navy League of the United States, the National Security League, and other groups and protest the proposals for naval personnel reductions circulating in Congress. In 1928, the Naval Order wrote Representative Thomas Butler and, while noting that the group was “loath to interfere in political matters,” encouraged him to pass a naval appropriations bill which he sponsored out of the House Naval Affairs Committee. The bill passed Congress in February 1929 and authorized the construction of fifteen heavy cruisers and an aircraft carrier which

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<sup>38</sup> A.H. Scales to John S. Muckle, 5 October 1925, B7, NOUS Papers; General Commandery Pamphlet, 1927, B6, NOUS Papers; The Commander to Members of the Council of the NY Commandery, “James Durand, An Able Seaman of 1812,” 16 February 1928, B10, NOUS Papers.

eventually became the USS *Ranger*. In a letter dated December 1928, the Naval Order's General Recorder informed the head of the Naval Academy Graduates Association that, instead of focusing on history and veteran's affairs, the Order's "principal interest now is in matters affecting the welfare of the United States Navy."<sup>39</sup>

The Naval History Society also continued to operate into the interwar period but, unlike its contemporaries, failed to survive the era. While the Naval Order occasionally commented on contemporary events, the Society remained focused on the preservation of naval history documents and artifacts for public display. William Howard Gardiner served for a time as secretary of this organization, and he and James Barnes, the Society's president, devised the initial aforementioned scheme to create a memorial for Alfred Thayer Mahan. The Society opened a library with books and artifacts in 1916, but the Society sought a merger with the larger and better-funded New York Historical Society in 1923. Dislike of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who served as the Society's representative in the negotiations with the New York Historical Society, prevented some former naval officers from supporting the Society's operations, thus limiting its membership. The merger between the two organizations occurred in 1926, and the collections of the Naval Historical Society were used in a 1932 "Ships and Steamboats" exhibition. The Naval Historical Society, however, failed to survive the 1936 death of

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<sup>39</sup> Garland M. Powell to Francis J. Higginson, 12 June 1924, B10, NOUS Papers. Moore to Daniel M. Garrison, 6 December 1928, B10, NOUS Papers. Transcript of Minutes of Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> General (10<sup>th</sup> Triennial) Congress, New York, NY, 14 November 1922, p. 2, B2, NOUS Papers; New York Commander Report, 15 June 1923, B10, NOUS Papers; John Constable Moore to Thomas S. Butler, 3 March 1928, B10, NOUS Papers.

its longtime head, James Barnes and its collections became the property of the New York Historical Society.<sup>40</sup>

While these external bodies worked on behalf of the Navy, the service also benefitted from the public relations efforts of its officers, often acting of their own accord. As discussed in Chapter III, Rear Admiral William Adger Moffett and Captain Dudley W. Knox utilized the power of their positions as head of the Bureau of Aeronautics and the Historical Section, respectively, to generate publicity on behalf of their own offices as well as the service as a whole. The activities of these two men and their bureaus, however, represented a rarity within the Navy because so few individuals were in positions in which they could utilize bureaucratic resources in such a manner. Officers occasionally worked on their own to promote aspects of the service to the public. For instance, Holloway H. Frost became a noted author during the interwar period with numerous published works to his credit, including several articles and books among the first to provide detailed analysis of the Battle of Jutland. He also wrote about naval history, publishing *We Build a Navy* in 1930, as well as a popular souvenir program “Some Stories of Old Ironsides” sold to the public during the nationwide tour of the *Constitution* in 1932 and 1933. This program became so popular that the Navy decided to make copies available for sale in ships’ stores throughout the fleet. Frost

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<sup>40</sup> Gardiner to James Barnes, 26 June 1921, Item 31, Gardiner Papers; “Barnes Library Opened,” 13 January 1916, *New York Times*, 22; J.K. Taussig to Gardiner, 18 April 1921, Item 30, Gardiner Papers; Hartmann, “Guide to the Records of the Naval History Society, 1907-1943.”; *New York Times*, “Society to Exhibit Photos of Old Ships,” 16 October 1932, sec. F, 10.

capitalized on his experiences as an active duty officer to put past and present naval events before the public.<sup>41</sup>

Knox, apart from his duties at the Navy's Historical Section, worked to further the study and preservation of naval history through other organizations. Knox wrote an article which appeared in the January 1926 edition of the Naval Institute's *Proceedings* entitled "Our Vanishing History and Traditions" in which he described the disappearance of documentary sources on naval history in Europe with alarm. Desiring to prevent a similar occurrence in the United States, Knox pleaded with the officer corps to preserve their own papers for future research. Knox's call to action led to the creation of the Naval Historical Foundation in 1926. This new organization received support from other like-minded groups such as the Naval Institute and the Naval Historical Society and many members of these and other organizations become members within the Foundation. Rear Admiral Austin M. Knight served as the Foundation's first president, but Knox became a fixture within the organization and served as the Foundation's secretary for the next two decades.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Frost's work on the Battle of Jutland includes: "Naval War Notes," *Proceedings* 42, no. 11 (November 1916), 1691-8; Holloway H. Frost, "A Description of the Battle of Jutland," *Proceedings* 45, no. 11 (November 1919): 1829-50; Holloway H. Frost, "A Description of the Battle of Jutland (cont.)," *Proceedings* 45, no. 12 (December 1919): 2019-40; Holloway H. Frost, "A Description of the Battle of Jutland (cont.)," *Proceedings* 46, no. 11 (November 1920): 1721-70; Holloway H. Frost, "The High Seas Fleet at Jutland," *Proceedings* 46, no. 1 (January 1920): 61-86; Holloway H. Frost, "The Results and Effects of the Battle of Jutland," *Proceedings* 47, no. 9 (September 1921): 61-86; Holloway H. Frost, *Diagrammatic Study of the Battle of Jutland* (Washington: Office of Naval Intelligence, 1921); Frost, *The Battle of Jutland*; Frost, *We Build a Navy*; CINCUS to Commander Battle Force, et al., "Naval Institute Booklet Entitled 'Some Stories of Old Ironsides,'" 28 November 1932, B318, E90, RG 24, NAB.

<sup>42</sup> Dudley W. Knox, "Our Vanishing History and Traditions," *Proceedings* 52, no. 1 (January 1926): 15-25; *Washington Post*, "Naval Foundation Selects Officers and Receives Gift," 4 April 1926, sec. S, 2.

The Foundation's stated purpose was to aid in the "diffusion of knowledge" of American history through the acquisition, collection, and preservation of naval artifacts and materials. The Foundation worked for the remainder of the interwar period to fulfill this vision, collecting materials, some of which it placed on public display as it did in 1938 when it loaned a collection of nearly 300 naval paintings to the Smithsonian Institution for a month-long exhibit. Later that same year, the Foundation initiated a fundraising campaign to save a former home of famed naval hero John Paul Jones. The Foundation also aided in the public exhibition of the Decatur House on Lafayette Square in 1937. First built in 1819 for Commodore Stephen Decatur, the home later became the residence of Martin Van Buren and Henry Clay, and also served as an embassy for Great Britain and the Russian Empire. Furthering the naval connection, the house came into the possession of descendants of another naval hero, Commodore Thomas Truxtun.<sup>43</sup>

The Naval Historical Foundation sponsored an even more ambitious plan in 1936 which called for the creation of a large naval museum along the Potomac River in Washington, D.C., for "educational" purposes. Plans for the museum called for the Naval Historical Foundation to place its collection of more than 1,600 prints on display and to set aside space to berth some of the Navy's most historic vessels, including the frigate *Constellation*, sloop *Hartford*, and cruiser *Olympia*. The idea originated in 1919 with the then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, although each of the three ships was moored elsewhere. The Navy, in 1939, requested more than \$23

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<sup>43</sup> *Washington Post*, "Naval Collection to be Displayed at Smithsonian," 29 May 1938, sec. TT, 6; *Washington Post*, "Civic Groups to Make Shrine of Naval Hero's Home," 9 February 1938, sec. X, 4; H.A. Baldrige, "Van Buren and Others Lived There," *Washington Post*, 18 April 1937, sec. F, 6.

million to begin construction on the complex which would have housed the museum. Congress refused to appropriate the funds, but, despite this setback, the Foundation had succeeded in gaining greater public recognition of the Navy's traditions and of key individuals who shaped the service.<sup>44</sup>

As the Navy's public relations capabilities evolved, the efforts of external groups provided valuable support when the service's own capabilities were limited. A resurgent Navy League of the United States reemerged as the most consistent ally of the Navy in the campaign to modernize the fleet and build it up to treaty strength, but it was only one of several organizations that sought, directly or indirectly, to improve the Navy's image. The Navy relied heavily upon the support of these external sources, such as in the creation of Navy Day, because these organizations, by virtue of their "neutral" status, performed tasks that the Information Section or the Recruiting Bureau could not. Over time, the organizations with the closest ties to the Navy – the Navy League and the Naval Historical Foundation – prospered, while the Naval Order stagnated and the Naval Historical Society faded into oblivion. These close ties ultimately allowed for these external organizations to assume roles within the Navy's overall public relations effort which reduced redundancy and allowed for each group to assume only portions of responsibility.

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<sup>44</sup> Oliver McKee, Jr., "Home For Old Warships," *New York Times*, 26 April 1936, sec. XX, 12. J. Gilbert Norris, "Collecting of Historic Ships May Be First Step in Development Along Potomac's Banks," *Washington Post*, 12 March 1939, sec. A, 7; *Washington Post*, "Navy Asks \$23,466,000 for Buildings," 14 June 1939, 17.

## CHAPTER VI

### OFFICERS AND MOGULS: THE NAVY AND THE MEDIA, 1919-1939

Concurrent with the Navy's growing need to improve its public image during the interwar period, changes to the nation's mass media offered many new avenues for the service to appeal directly to the public. The older print forms of media remained strong and highly influential, but the introduction of radio and the explosion in the popularity of film provided the public with new sources of news and entertainment. This cultural transformation and the public's rejection of navalism in the early 1920s forced the Navy into developing deeper ties with the nation's media during this period of growth. These ties varied widely from the informal publicity provided by retired naval officers working in the mass media to the frequent expressions of pro-Navy sentiments promulgated by all parts of William Randolph Hearst's media empire. Most importantly, the Navy itself established political and commercial relationships with media organizations willing to collaborate with the service. These organizations may not have always been conscious of the support they provided the Navy or consistent in advancing a positive image of the service, but this marriage of convenience and politics between the service and private entities allowed the service many opportunities to improve its public standing.

The Navy depended heavily on these external sources of publicity partially because of restrictions the service placed on its own officer corps regarding publications. In a policy dating back to 1911 and George von Lengerke Meyer's tenure as secretary of the navy, the Navy Department required that all officers wishing to publish articles submit their articles to the Office of Naval Intelligence for approval prior to release. The



order only allowed officers to publish freely “information concerning the naval establishment or forces” if such work constituted part of the author’s official duties. This general policy remained in effect until 1935, thus making it difficult for officers to work on their own initiative in a public relations capacity. This did not stop officers from engaging in public relations work, but those who did risked the wrath of the Department itself. On 24 September 1927, the *Saturday Evening Post* published an article entitled “The Navy and Economy” authored by Rear Admiral Thomas P. Magruder. While this was not the first nor the last article published in the *Post* by Magruder, Secretary of the Navy Curtis Wilbur demanded an explanation for the numerous inaccuracies and factual errors contained in the article. Among the more egregious errors cited in the Secretary’s letter to Magruder was the admiral’s statement in his article that the fleet reviewed by President Calvin Coolidge in 1927 was “inferior” in strength to the fleet reviewed by President Theodore Roosevelt two decades earlier despite the significant advances in naval artillery in the intervening years. Secretary Wilbur also asserted that Magruder had incorrectly reported the Navy’s personnel strength and the costs incurred for both repairs and the construction of the naval base at Alameda. Given that the Navy’s press policies listed the inaccurate spread of information as a primary menace, an article authored by an admiral that contained factual mistakes could not be tolerated. After the flap, the Navy transferred Magruder from his post as commandant of the Philadelphia Navy Yard later that year, although the service claimed that the move was not a punishment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Scovel, “Helm’s a Lee,” 48, 117-8. Thomas P. Magruder, “The Navy and Economy,” *Saturday Evening*

In such a restrictive environment, retired officers provided the press with information supplied by active-duty officers and their work emerged as one of the primary means by which the Navy reached the public. The advantages of retired officers – their knowledge of the service and the lack of official restriction placed upon their speech – was recognized by Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., when he endorsed William Howard Gardiner’s plan to brief retirees in 1923. This officially sanctioned scheme accounted for only part of the work undertaken by retired officers, many of whom acted on their own initiative to promote the service. By the late 1920s, the Navy had established strong working relationships with the purveyors of print, radio, and filmed media as a result of the informal penetration of the mass media by former naval officers.<sup>2</sup>

Yet again, Dudley Knox provides an instructive example of the blurring of the lines between official and unofficial public relations. In addition to his work with the Historical Section and the Naval Historical Foundation, Knox maintained an active career as a “naval propagandist.” A retired officer, Knox viewed publicity as a “duty” because he believed that without retired officers taking up the slack caused by restrictions placed upon those on active duty, the country would remain “uninformed” in naval affairs. Acting on this conviction, Knox assumed the editorship of the *Army and*

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*Post*, 24 September 1927, 6-7. SecNav to Magruder, “Article on ‘The Navy and the Economy’ *Saturday Evening Post*, of 24 September 1927,” 1 October 1927, pp 1-10, B411, E22, RG 80, NAB. *Literary Digest*, “Disciplining Magruder,” 5 November 1927, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Gardiner to Roosevelt, Jr., “Memo, Periodic Confidential Communiqués to Retired Naval Officers,” 19 January 1923, and Gardiner to Roosevelt, Jr., 14 February 1923, I32, Gardiner Papers.

*Navy Journal* in 1921 and through the journal published his critique of the Washington Conference, *The Eclipse of American Sea Power*, in 1923.<sup>3</sup>

Knox frequently sought to combat what he saw as overt British propaganda adversely affecting the Navy. Even prior to the closing of the Washington Conference in early 1922, Knox began to believe that British success at the negotiating table stemmed from their ability to infiltrate American newspapers with pro-British sentiments. He further argued that this propaganda caused the public to question the need for a large Navy and left American possessions in the western Pacific virtually undefended. Knox's paranoia not only kept him vigilant to any press articles that might confirm his suspicions of foreign propaganda, but also led him to allege that British interests controlled the content of the *New York Times*.<sup>4</sup>

One of Knox's most frequent targets was the periodical *Scientific American*. By 1925, he became convinced that the magazine propagandized the public against a pro-American naval policy, and over the next several years Knox engaged in a bitter feud with its editor, Orson Munn, and with its British-born contributor Bernard Walker. Knox argued that a biased article authored by Walker had led to the defeat of a bill in Congress authorizing the modernization of older American battleships, thus leaving the Navy's battle line inferior to that of the British. In October 1926, Knox wrote Munn to

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<sup>3</sup> J.H. Adams to Knox, 14 January 1927, B2, Knox Papers. Knox to CAPT Leonard M. Cox, 12 May 1924, B1, Knox Papers. N.C. Twining to Knox, 7 December 1921, B1, Knox Papers; Dudley W. Knox, *The Eclipse of American Sea Power* (New York: Army and Navy Journal, Inc., 1923).

<sup>4</sup> Planners involved with drafting War Plan Orange concluded that the U.S. could not adequately defend its possessions in the western Pacific before the Washington Conference. See Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 53-6, 111-3. Knox to Wat T. Cluverius, 20 January 1922, B1, Knox Papers; Knox to Thomas C. Frothingham, 24 April 1925, B9, Knox Papers; Knox to James T. Williams, Jr., 14 September 1925, B1, Knox Papers.

complain that a recent article by Walker which disparaged the American “treaty cruiser” design would harm American interests. Knox deepened the criticism by accusing the magazine of deliberately publishing the article to coincide with Navy Day in the United States. Munn denied publishing propaganda and cited praise received by the magazine from secretaries of the navy. The letter had little effect on Knox, who wrote Munn the following month that “technical inaccuracies” printed in the *Scientific American* and other publications constituted a primary cause of American naval weakness. In Knox’s view, the American public refused to press for naval construction because such inaccurate analyses claimed that America’s navy remained strong. The feud only ended when Munn left the magazine and Walker died in 1928. Succeeding editors soon invited Knox to contribute to the magazine.<sup>5</sup>

Occasionally, Knox’s broadsides against the *Scientific American* targeted Hector C. Bywater, a British-born naval affairs writer who occasionally contributed to the magazine but who also wrote for American newspapers after World War I. Initially, Bywater’s articles appeared in the *New York Herald*, but in 1921, the *Baltimore Sun* hired Bywater to cover the Washington Conference for the paper. The *Sun* article that announced his hiring to readers described Bywater as a “neutral but friendly” analyst, and Bywater remained employed by the paper for a decade. Over the course of his career, Bywater authored several influential books, including the non-fiction works *Sea Power in the Pacific* (1921) and *Navies and Nations* (1927), but his most famous work

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<sup>5</sup> Knox to Orson Munn, 23 November 1926, B2, Knox Papers. Knox to Munn, 23 October 1926, Munn to Knox, 29 October 1926, and Knox to James P. Baxter, 7 February 1929, all in B2, Knox Papers.

was his speculative fiction of a future war between the United States and Japan entitled *The Great Pacific War* (1925).<sup>6</sup>

Beginning in 1924, the *Baltimore Sun* periodically enlisted Knox to comment on naval affairs, first assigning him to work alongside Bywater to cover the Navy's Fleet Problems held in Panama that January. The two authors entered into a lively debate in the pages of the *Sun* beginning in July 1926 when Bywater wrote that the American decision to start a major naval aircraft building program signified that the United States was not as peaceful as was believed. Knox replied that Bywater's charges unfairly focused on the last two years in which naval construction seemed to be making a comeback. Bywater's response pointed out that the massive American 1916 program and the proposed 1919 program helped initiate the entire system of disarmament. The debate renewed in early 1927 when Knox alleged that articles appearing in the *Sun* had unfairly criticized the 5:5:3 ratio and glossed over American naval inferiority. Bywater believed that while Great Britain held advantages in aircraft carriers and cruisers, the United States Navy was unsurpassed in all other ship classes. Knox rejected Bywater's numerical analysis and argued that the continued inability of the U.S. Navy to receive funding to modernize its battleship force, which Knox attributed to British propaganda, gave the Royal Navy a two-to-one superiority in the strength of their battle line. While the debates between the two men often appeared acrimonious, Knox's favorable reviews

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<sup>6</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, "Mr. Bywater's Articles," 11 November 1921, 8. The only full-length biography of Bywater is William H. Honan, *Visions of Infamy: The Untold Story of How Journalist Hector C. Bywater Devised the Plans That Led to Pearl Harbor* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991); Hector C. Bywater, *Sea Power in the Pacific: A Study of the American-Japanese Naval Problem* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1921); Hector C. Bywater, *The Great Pacific War: A History of the American-Japanese Campaign of 1931-1933* (London: Constable and Co., 1925); Hector C. Bywater, *Navies and Nations* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1927).

of Bywater's *The Great Pacific War* and *Navies and Nations* indicates that he held his British counterpart in some esteem. Knox resigned from the *Sun* in protest in 1929 following the *Sun*'s publication of a political cartoon alleging that the United States and Great Britain had colluded over the years to prevent true disarmament.<sup>7</sup>

Knox was not the only retired naval officer whose post-Navy career put him in a position to publicize the activities of the service. Former naval officers branched into several different media in the interwar period, including journalism, fiction, and comic strips, and the film industry. These individuals did not enter their new professions solely to promote the Navy, but their positions made them ideal conduits for reaching wide public audiences.

Among retired officers who enjoyed new careers in other fields, Hanson Baldwin stands out. Baldwin grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, and attended the Naval Academy to obtain a college education without draining his family's limited finances. He graduated from the Academy in 1924 and served for three years on active duty before resigning his commission in 1927 to "see more of the world." After a brief stint at the *Baltimore Sun*, Baldwin took a position with the *New York Times* in 1928. Initially, his reporting had little connection to his naval background, but, by the early 1930s, Baldwin began to cover military and naval affairs. His career took another step forward when

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<sup>7</sup> Knox to CAPT Leonard M. Cox, 12 May 1924, Box 1, Knox Papers; Hector C. Bywater, "US is Told Bluntly to Review Own Record," *Baltimore Sun*, 15 July 1926, 14; Dudley W. Knox, "Replies to Bywater's Criticism of America," *Baltimore Sun*, 21 July 1926, 11; Hector C. Bywater, "US is Told Bluntly to Review Own Record," *Baltimore Sun*, 22 August 1926, 7; Dudley W. Knox, "Capt. Knox Criticizes the Sun's Naval Views," *Baltimore Sun*, 8 January 1927, 7; Hector C. Bywater, "Bywater Meets Attack Made by Captain Knox," *Baltimore Sun*, 18 January 1927, 15; Dudley W. Knox, "Capt. Knox Returns to Battleship Question," *Baltimore Sun*, 21 January 1927, 9; Dudley W. Knox, "Captain Knox Reviews 'Great Pacific War,'" *Baltimore Sun*, 21 September 1925, 7; Dudley W. Knox, "Bywater's New Book Provokes Criticism," *Baltimore Sun*, 2 October 1927, 9.

new management of the *Times* decided to increase military and foreign affairs coverage in the mid-1930s. Baldwin prospered as a result, and, in 1937, he became the *Times*' official military affairs correspondent.<sup>8</sup>

Baldwin's work as a military and naval correspondent coincided with an increase in the *New York Times*' daily circulation from some 400,000 in 1928 – his first year at the paper – to 526,000 in 1937. Baldwin's prior naval service gave him an advantage over his contemporaries in his dealings with officers. By the mid-1930s, Baldwin had developed close contacts with Secretary of the Navy Claude Swanson as well as with senior admirals such as William Veazie Pratt, William Leahy, Harold Stark, and William H. Standley. Initially, Baldwin maintained a commission in the Naval Reserve, but he resigned in 1934 rather than divulge a confidential source to a Bureau of Navigation officer. This severance of formal ties notwithstanding, Baldwin "maintained an interest" in naval affairs and believed that he still owed a debt to the service. In the course of his work at the *Times*, Baldwin frequently reported on the Navy's annual Fleet Problem system of exercises. While Baldwin claimed no bias in his reportage, he acknowledged instances where his work supported the Navy's stance on specific issues. During a time when the Navy often believed that it struggled just to obtain news coverage, Baldwin's reportage indirectly fulfilled a public information function the Navy desired.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Mason, *Hanson Weight Baldwin*, I:181-2. Ibid., 11-2, 239-41, 316-7.

<sup>9</sup> Meyer Berger, *The Story of the New York Times, 1851-1951* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), 107-18, 570; Mason, *Hanson Weight Baldwin*, I:188-90, 200-1, 230-5, 248-50, 285; In his coverage of Fleet Problem XII, articles written by Baldwin appeared in nearly every daily edition from 5 February to 28 February 1931. See Hanson Baldwin, "Scouting Fleet Off to Enter War Game," *New York Times*, 5 February 1931, 5, for the first of these stories. Hanson Baldwin, "Airplanes Vs. Ships," *New York Times*, 30 August 1931, sec. E, 1. In the article, Baldwin defended the Navy's opposition to a unified air service

Former naval officers also established themselves in the juvenile fiction industry. The publication of juvenile fiction books featuring naval themes ebbed following the reaction against all things military in the aftermath of World War I. New installments of the prewar *Dave Darrin* and wartime *Navy Boys* series' ceased publication by 1921. This genre was revived in the mid-1930s and coincided with the appearance of the first comic strips to prominently feature the Navy. Comic strips first began during the late nineteenth century, but the early strips typically avoided the humorous content for which the medium eventually became known. Indeed, the violent content of these comics led members of the women's movement to press for reform of the medium during the 1910s. By the interwar period, most comic strips avoided including any potentially controversial subject matter, such as religion or politics. Interwar comic strips, nonetheless, became known for their topicality, with strips featuring "flapper girls" becoming popular in the 1920s and aviators during the 1930s.<sup>10</sup>

Within this context, a Navy-themed strip entitled "Don Winslow of the Navy" entered syndication in 1934. Its author, Frank Martinek, had served in the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) during World War I as the fleet intelligence officer for the Asiatic Fleet. He also trained for investigative work with Scotland Yard and became an early proponent of scientific investigation techniques, including fingerprinting. Martinek shared his expertise with other members of the ONI and helped organize its

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and used a failed test by Army aviators to find and sink a target ship attempting to approach the American coastline to justify the service's stance.

<sup>10</sup> H. Irving Hancock, *Dave Darrin After the Mine Layers, or, Hitting the Enemy a Hard Naval Blow* (Philadelphia: Altemus, 1919); Halsey Davidson, *Navy Boys on Special Service, or, Guarding the Floating Treasury* (New York: G. Sully, 1920); Martin Sheridan, *Comics and Their Creators: Life Stories of American Cartoonists* (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1977), 16-21.



Physical, Chemical, and Photographic Laboratory. He continued this work after the end of the war as an agent for the Bureau of Investigation – the forerunner of the modern Federal Bureau of Investigation – but left public service for a career with Standard Oil.<sup>11</sup>

Despite his transition to civilian life, Martinek remained in close contact with some officers still serving with the fleet, including Rear Admiral Wat T. Cluverius. In 1934, Cluverius, then the head of the Ninth Naval District and the Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Chicago, remarked to Martinek that the Navy still had difficulties in appealing to recruits from the Midwest. That same year, Martinek published a juvenile fiction book entitled *Don Winslow of the Navy* which he loosely based on his own career with the ONI. Cluverius' suggestion about recruiting inspired Martinek to transform Winslow into a comic strip character. Martinek and Leon Beroth, the strip's artist, quickly found a publisher with the *Chicago Daily News*, then headed by Frank Knox, the future secretary of the navy. Knox helped sell the strip to the Bell Syndicates, and Martinek's creation soon graced the pages of more than 150 papers across the country. Martinek's series and the character became so popular over time that they crossed into other forms of media; a weekly *Don Winslow of the Navy* radio show began in 1937, a series of books began publication in 1940, and film serials were released starting in 1942. Not until the 1950s did production cease on the *Don Winslow of the Navy* books and comic strip.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Coulton Waugh, *The Comics* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1947), 126-7; Sheridan, *Comics and Their Creators*, 227.

<sup>12</sup> Sheridan, *Comics and Their Creators*, 227; Waugh, *The Comics*, 128.

Since Martinek based Don Winslow partly on his own experience, the character engaged in intelligence and counter-intelligence work rather than serving on ships. The books and strip depicted Commander Winslow, along with his band of sidekicks – including a crippled admiral who was his superior officer, the admiral’s daughter, and his loyal subordinate, Lieutenant Red Pennington – constantly battling the forces of the Scorpion. The Scorpion had no national affiliation but, from his “secret” base in the South China Sea, plotted to bring the United States and other peace-loving countries into a state of general war. Martinek claimed to infuse the stories with as much “authentic Navy” material as possible and assured readers that, “Since Don Winslow is approved by the Navy Department, I cannot allow him to do anything that is contrary to the ideals, traditions, or motives of the Navy.” Interestingly, in 1937, when a listener of the *Don Winslow* radio show complained that it propagated “insidious militarism” to young American boys, the Navy stated that the program was “in no respect sanctioned, supported, or inspired by the Navy.”<sup>13</sup>

The lynchpin of Navy and media cooperation came from the expanding film industry. Movie makers and the Navy collaborated during the interwar period for the same reasons they had prior to World War I: the service received publicity while filmmakers used the service as an exotic and visually exciting setting for their films. This collaborative dynamic assumed greater importance during the interwar period as

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<sup>13</sup> Sheridan, *Comics and Their Creators*, 227. Wendell A. Link to Senator George McGill, 3 February 1938, B258, E22, RG 80, NAB. William H. Standley to Senator George McGill, 18 February 1938, B258, E22, RG 80, NAB. Frank Martinek, *Don Winslow, U.S.N., in Ceylon with Kwang, Celebrated Chinese Detective* (Chicago: Rosenow, 1934), 5-6; Waugh, *The Comics*, 128; Martinek received positive recognition for his work from Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox in September 1941, and the Navy would cooperate with the production of a *Don Winslow* film serial the following year. See Knox to Martinek, n.d. (circa September 1941), B28, Office File of Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, RG 80, NACP.

film evolved into not only a more popular medium of entertainment but also one that appealed to all classes of Americans.

Prior to World War I, the film industry sometimes struggled to attract middle- and upper-class audiences; further, legal battles over technological patents limited its growth as a form of entertainment. Nickelodeons that exhibited single-reel films at low cost dominated the industry, and such establishments, including those built close to middle- and upper-class neighborhoods in large cities, largely attracted a working-class audience. These nickelodeons received most of their films from the Motion Picture Patents Company, a consortium formed by American film producers to standardize production. While many of its contemporaries, as well as future scholars, labeled the company “The Trust” and painted it as having stifled the early film industry, the Motion Picture Patents Company significantly aided in the overall development of the American film industry. Specifically, the company’s efforts brought about a shift in movie production and distribution, ending the dominance of European producers, such as the French company Pathé, in American theaters. The improved quality of films and an expanding audience brought about a large spike in movie attendance from twenty-six million weekly viewers in 1908 to forty-nine million by 1914.<sup>14</sup>

The wartime years expedited further changes within the industry. Movie theaters became larger and more ornate to attract a higher class of viewers, and some of the more ambitious theater owners saw an opening in the industry to begin producing their own

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<sup>14</sup> Russell Merritt, “Nickelodeon Theaters, 1905-1914,” in *The American Film Industry*, rev. ed., ed. Tino Balio, 91 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Robert Anderson, “The Motion Picture Patents Company: A Reevaluation,” in Balio, *The American Film Industry*, 133-52.

films. The Hungarian-born Adolph Zukor helped pioneer what would become the beginnings of the Hollywood studio system during the war when he merged his production company with a distribution firm called Paramount in 1916. Over the next several years, Zukor began a campaign of aggressive expansion which slowed only temporarily during World War I due to an excise tax placed on theater admissions. Zukor's business produced more than eighty films in 1916 alone. Carl Laemmle of the Independent Moving Pictures Company had helped create the "star system" in 1910, and Zukor would later adopt the same practices to promote his key acting talent, especially Mary Pickford. After World War I, Paramount vertically integrated and began purchasing movie theaters, giving the company control over every phase of the movie business: production, distribution, and exhibition. By 1921, Paramount controlled more than one-fourth of the film business within the United States, and Zukor began to create distribution systems for his films in several other countries. As a result, Paramount became the largest studio in the Hollywood system during the 1920s.<sup>15</sup>

A number of imitators soon appeared in Zukor's wake and created their own burgeoning movie studios by the 1920s. These competitors included Loew's-Metro Goldwyn Mayer, Fox Film Corporation, and Warner Brothers. Each of these companies possessed different strengths, but they also essentially mimicked Zukor's formula of controlling all three aspects of the film industry. The combined effect of their formation and consolidation was to monopolize an overwhelming share of the film industry in the

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 7-26, 81-91; Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 112-3.

hands of a small number of firms. The studios also created the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association in 1922 to act as a lobbying organization to work on behalf of the industry; later, it would most famously devote itself to warding off campaigns of censorship initiated by state and local governments. With the growth and consolidation of the studios and the existence of a professional lobbying organization on its behalf, the film industry was rapidly transformed into a powerful and mature industry. The introduction of sound pictures in the late 1920s only served to further increase the popularity of the medium as the average weekly attendance in theaters reached eighty million in 1929. The onset of the Depression led to a decline in attendance to between sixty and seventy million by 1933, but half of the nation's population still attended films on a regular basis. These large audiences indicated the degree to which movie attendance had become a social ritual and, when combined with the content of the films themselves, allowed movies to become a dominant socializing influence for Americans.<sup>16</sup>

The Navy clearly recognized the ability of motion pictures to shape attitudes among the American public, and after World War I the Navy established a commercial relationship with the motion picture studios. Soon after the Armistice, the Navy entered into a series of agreements with the emerging film studios to create the Navy Motion Picture Exchange to ensure that sailors aboard ship or in distant stations could, for morale purposes, view movies. In September 1919, the Navy contracted to buy films

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 27-70, 175-6; Tino Balio, "A Mature Oligopoly, 1930-1948," in Balio, *The American Film Industry*, 256; Garth Jowett, James M. Linton, *Movies as Mass Communication*. 2nd ed. (New York: SAGE, 1989), 19, 118-119.

from the motion picture studios at a discounted rate for exhibition aboard ships and naval stations. From the beginning of the enterprise, studios supplied two copies of each film to the Exchange simultaneously with their release in theaters so that ships in both the Atlantic and Pacific could view them in a timely fashion. To house the films, the Navy converted a warehouse in New York into the headquarters for the Motion Picture Exchange. It took time for the Exchange to build up its film library, and in 1920 it was estimated that the Navy would need to spend more than \$200,000 to fully meet the demands of the service. Over the next several years, the Exchange grew into a much larger operation, and by 1925 it possessed more than 2,200 complete eight-reel films and purchased new films at a rate of twenty-five per month. The Exchange also developed a system of distribution during these years, first sending new films to the Navy's principal commands – after 1922, the San Pedro-based Battle Fleet and the Hampton Roads-based Scouting Fleet – and out to the lesser commands, such as the Special Service Squadron in the Caribbean and the Asiatic Fleet in the Philippines.<sup>17</sup>

This relationship between the Navy and the studios benefited all of those involved. Officers and men aboard ships and naval stations enjoyed almost nightly screenings of films thereby reducing the amount of cultural isolation which previously marked life in the naval service. The Navy as an organization benefited as it believed that film screenings prevented its sailors from engaging in potentially destructive behaviors by frequenting less-reputable establishments ashore. The studios profited

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<sup>17</sup> LCDR J.G. Ware to William J. McGinley, 17 April 1920, pp 1-6, B857, E89, RG 24, NAB; W.D. Puleston to Will Hays, 3 October 1925, B1359, E90, RG 24, NAB; BuNav to All Ships, Stations, and Marine Corps Posts, "Navy Film Service," 16 June 1924, B859, E89, RG 24, NAB.

from the arrangement as the films granted them access to a market that oftentimes remained out of the reach of typical centers of film exhibition. The agreements between the Navy and the film studios stipulated that movies could only be shown to naval personnel and must not compete with any local screenings of the respective titles. The Navy argued that the system had ancillary benefits, believing that sailors who liked the films provided positive word-of-mouth “advertising” to increase a film’s box office earnings. Additionally, the Navy reasoned that if sailors liked a film well enough they would take their wives and girlfriends to local commercial screenings of the same films. The Navy always ensured adherence to the terms of the contract with the film studios and even went so far as to rebuke the San Diego Naval Air Station for purchasing films through commercial means rather than procure them through the service.<sup>18</sup>

This commercial link between the Navy and the film industry did not stem from recent collaboration between the two nor did it immediately spur a resumption of the pre-1917 relationship on film production. Secretary Daniels’ ban on cooperation with film studios ended when he left office in 1921, but the film industry did not rush to produce naval films in succeeding years. The Navy’s service during World War I failed to inspire riveting plot lines, and the Navy lacked a consistent presence in American cinemas until the mid-1920s. The temporary divide over film content between Hollywood and the Navy meant that the service had absolutely no control over films with a naval setting released during the period. A few films released immediately after World War I drew the ire of naval officials who believed the films to be detrimental to

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<sup>18</sup> Puleston to Hays, 3 October 1925, B1359, E89, RG 24, NAB. BuNav to Commanding Officer, US Naval Air Station, San Diego, “Navy Film Service,” 4 September 1924, B859, E89, RG 24, NAB.

the service and to recruiting. A 1919 film entitled *Broken Blossoms* contained several scenes of sailor drunkenness and prompted the Navy to demand that the offending scenes would be cut prior to the film's export overseas; the correspondence failed to clarify how these edits would occur. Another 1919 film, a Keystone Cops comedy called *Bright Lights*, also featured scenes of inebriated sailors riotously destroying a waterfront dive. Such portrayals of enlisted men created "unfavorable advertising" for recruiters who argued that the films demeaned the naval service as a whole. Unfortunately for the Navy, little could be done to prevent the production of negative images so long as the film's producers did not request any assistance from the Navy Department.<sup>19</sup>

A rare example of a film in which the Navy figured prominently was Fred C. Newmeyer's *A Sailor Made Man* (1921). The film's producers requested and received limited production assistance from the Navy Department, which facilitated the filming of scenes aboard the USS *Frederick* and the use of sailors as extras; its subject matter, however, did not involve any contemporary issues. The film's primary purpose was to showcase rising comedic film star Harold Lloyd, a task at which the film succeeded. Naval officers displayed a decidedly mixed reaction to the film. One recruiting officer argued that it represented "the best picture he [had] ever seen" for recruiting purposes. By contrast, the head of the Navy Recruiting Bureau refused to endorse purchasing copies of the film for the Motion Picture Exchange because of the film's "harmful

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<sup>19</sup> M.E. Montgomery to Brooks, 20 October 1919, B315, E89, RG 24, NAB. Officer in Charge, St. Louis Recruiting Station to Josephus Daniels, 23 October 1919, B315, E89, RG 24, NAB.



influence” which “ridicule[d] the sailor’s profession, cast[ed] aspersions on the quality of our discipline, and [held] the navy generally in disrespect.” Divided opinions on a film’s merits for publicity and recruiting would remain a point of contention throughout the interwar period.<sup>20</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1920s, the film studios overcame their reluctance to release military pictures and produced several notable critical and commercial successes. The first of these, King Vidor’s *The Big Parade* (1925) depicted World War I combat for American film audiences on an epic scale. The film was followed by *What Price Glory* (1926) and *Wings* (1927) which also focused on the war from the perspective of Marines and fighter pilots, respectively. While none of these films depicted the Navy, each of the productions attracted large audiences, turned incredible profits, and set standards for later films to follow. More importantly, the success of the pictures likely convinced the film studios that military films could turn a profit.<sup>21</sup>

A 1924 film set at the United States Military Academy entitled *Classmates* became a financial success and provided filmgoers with an extremely positive illustration of cadet life at the institution. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer soon started producing a similar film set at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, to capitalize on the previous film’s success and received hearty cooperation from naval officials. The Navy hoped *The Midshipman* (1925) would feature a well-known actor and was granted its

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<sup>20</sup> Memo for CAPT Courtney, 9 November 1922, B316, E89, RG 24, NAB. Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Bureau to Chief of BuNav, 10 November 1922, B316, E89, RG 24, NAB. Jeffrey Vance, Suzanne Lloyd, *Harold Lloyd: Master Comedian* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 2002), 64-72. The film confirmed Lloyd’s status as a comedy star and propelled to him new heights in his Hollywood career.

<sup>21</sup> Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 29, 32, 39.

wish when the studio cast rising film star Ramon Navarro to head the cast. To improve upon the template provided by *Classmates*, the service granted the filmmakers liberal access to the Academy and took the extraordinary step of allowing a uniformed Navarro to participate in the Academy's graduation ceremony.<sup>22</sup>

The film sparked a sustained interest in Naval Academy films for the next dozen years but, more broadly, solidified the relationship between the service and Hollywood. As the number of collaborations increased over the next decade and a half, the relationship between the Navy and the film industry grew from a commercial one to a political one as well. In the all-important quest for profits, the motion picture industry developed a propensity to distort perceptions of the nation's past and present and shy away from entirely realistic treatments of controversial subjects. To that end, the medium tended to create "a semblance of reality" in which a heavily manufactured representation of everyday life appeared on movie screens and created heightened expectations among viewers. Religious and government authorities fretted that movies could bypass the usual methods of social control and profoundly influence the public, but, as Garth Jowett and James M. Linton argue, film content during the interwar period tended to reinforce prevailing social attitudes and beliefs.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Suid, *Sailing*, 9-11; William R. Shoemaker to E.W. Creecy, 24 February 1925, B859, E89, RG 24, NAB.

<sup>23</sup> Slavoj Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (New York: Verso, 2002), 13-14. Jowett and Linton, *Movies as Mass Communication*, 120-121; Neal Gabler, *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 57-58; Nick Roddick, *A New Deal in Entertainment: Warner Brothers in the 1930s* (London: British Film Institute, 1983), 11-12.

These tendencies of the film industry positively affected its relationship with the Navy as both institutions sought to exploit the other for its own benefit. In the case of films in which the motion picture industry and the Navy cooperated with one another, neither party wished to depict any of the negatives that might accompany a brief stint or a lengthy career in the service. Films did not necessarily shy away from showing the potential for injury or death while in naval service, but the long separations from families during cruises of the fleet and the low pay of servicemen were issues not typically dwelt upon. Because of this, film became one of the ideal mediums through which the Navy could improve its public standing.<sup>24</sup>

As the relationship between the motion picture industry and the service developed, the number of Navy films increased significantly in the 1930s, a decade that historian Laurence Suid labels “the golden age of navy movies.” This renaissance coincided with the rise to prominence of former naval officers in the employ of the Hollywood studios. These former officers served in key roles in the production of feature films during the 1920s and 1930s. Film directors such as Christy Cabanne and Lloyd Bacon had previously served in the Navy, and sometimes relied upon their knowledge of the service when making naval-themed films during the period. A third director, John Ford, helmed a quartet of films set in the service and later entered the Naval Reserve in 1934. With the backing of Rear Admiral Frank Schofield, Ford taught courses on the uses of photography, and some of these emphasized the use of film for propaganda. The three directors combined to direct more than one hundred films during

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<sup>24</sup> Suid, *Sailing*, 18.

the latter 1920s and 1930s. Their Navy films only made up a small percentage of their total output, yet the three accounted for one-third of the film collaborations between the Navy and the motion picture industry. The studios could draw upon their naval experience to aid in the production process or the promotion of these films upon their release.<sup>25</sup>

Former naval officers also worked in the film industry as screenwriters. Retired Commander Harvey Haislip served as the technical adviser to *Follow the Fleet* (1936) and later received credit for writing *Flight Command* (1940). Easily the most prolific and influential booster of the Navy's public image in interwar Hollywood was screenwriter Frank "Spig" Wead, a former naval officer and aviator. A 1916 graduate of the Naval Academy, Wead first achieved fame in the early 1920s as part of the Navy's teams which participated in the Schneider Cup seaplane races, but a freak accident in his home in 1926 left him paralyzed and brought his promising flying career to a premature end. While still in the service, Wead had written several insightful articles about naval aviation and, following his rehabilitation, Wead capitalized on his skill as an author for a new career. He initially devoted himself to writing fiction for print outlets, but soon turned his attention to screenplays. In 1928, Wead served – at the suggestion of future Chief of Naval Operations Arthur Radford – as the technical adviser for the MGM film *The Flying Fleet* (1929) and contributed enough to the writing of the film that he

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<sup>25</sup> Suid, *Sailing*, 17. Cabanne had attended the Naval Academy during the 1910s, and Bacon served in the Navy's Photo Department during World War I. See Suid, *Sailing*, 9-11, and William R. Meyer, *Warner Brothers Directors: The Hard-Boiled, the Comic, and the Weepers* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1978), 17-24, Hal Wallis to William Guthrie, 3 March 1941, Box Navy Blues 1 of 1, Warner Brothers Archive, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA [henceforth Warner Brothers Archive], and Joseph McBride, *Searching for John Ford: A Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 67, 98, 138, 171-4, 203-5, 266.

received his first screenplay credit. *The Flying Fleet* became the first film of the interwar period to focus primarily on the development of naval aviation, and served as the foundation for Wead's new career.<sup>26</sup>

Between 1929 and 1941, Wead worked on more than two dozen feature films with nearly all of them centering on the Navy, aviation, or some combination thereof. He drew upon his experiences in the Navy to create scenarios and sold his work to several studios, including MGM, Columbia, and Warner Brothers. Wead's work in Hollywood was a microcosm of the larger relationship which developed between the Navy and the film studios. All three parties in this particular relationship benefited from one another: the Navy benefited from the positive depictions in Wead's scenarios, Wead profited handsomely from his screenwriting work which allowed him to pay off his considerable debts, and the studios had a prolific screenwriter who could facilitate the production of exciting feature films.<sup>27</sup>

As the number of films with naval settings increased in the latter 1920s, the Navy attempted to streamline its relationship with the motion picture industry. In December 1928, the head of the Bureau of Navigation, Rear Admiral Richard H. Leigh, suggested to the Chief of Naval Operations that a permanent board be created to review motion picture scenarios and determine the appropriate level of cooperation. Secretary of the Navy Curtis Wilbur approved of the proposal, and in January 1929, created a standing

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<sup>26</sup> Roddick, *A New Deal*, 24-5; In 1955, John Ford would direct a film about Wead's life entitled *The Wings of Eagles*. The best printed source for information on Wead's life is Harvey M. Beigel, "'Spig' Wead: Naval Aviator and Screenwriter," *Journal, American Aviation Historical Society*, Winter 1997, 302-9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

Motion Picture Board. The Navy Department Motion Picture Board was composed of four permanent members: the morale officer within the Bureau of Navigation, the head of the Navy Recruiting Bureau, the officer in charge of Censorship and Domestic Intelligence within the Office of Naval Intelligence who monitored attempts at foreign subversion within the United States, and the head of the Information Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence.<sup>28</sup>

This Motion Picture Board was reformed in 1931 by order of Assistant Secretary of the Navy David S. Ingalls who added three provisional members from the office of Ship Movements, the Bureau of Aeronautics, and the Marine Corps. The new orders directed that film studios send all requests for cooperation to the Board, and between 1929 and 1939 the studios submitted approximately sixty requests for cooperation. The Board's members would review the submitted scripts and then make the appropriate recommendation to the Chief of Naval Operations. After accepting a script and cooperating with the subsequent production, the Board viewed the completed film prior to its release to ensure compliance with the Navy's wishes. The Chief of Naval Operations revised the orders in 1937, but the system outlined in 1929 and 1931 remained in place for the remainder of the interwar period.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Memo for the CNO from the Chief of the BuNav, 18 December 1928, B412, E22, RG 80, NAB; SecNav to the CNO and the BuNav, "Motion Picture Plays of Naval Subjects," 15 January 1929, B412, E22, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>29</sup> SecNav to All Bureaus and Offices, "Review of Motion Picture Scenarios and Screenplays," 5 August 1931, B432, E22, RG 80, NAB; Suid, *Sailing*, 17-8; CNO to All Ships and Stations, "Policy Concerning Cooperation with Motion Picture Producers," 29 June 1937, B431, E22, RG 80, NAB.

If the Board objected to a film in any way, it conveyed its objections to the studios and advised how the studio should attempt to fix the flaws noted by the board for resubmission at a later date. The recommended changes specified by the Board ranged from rewriting specific lines of dialogue to altering significant portions of the film's plot or characters. After accepting a script, the Board would notify the Chief of Naval Operations whose responsibilities included notifying any affected ships, stations, or personnel of the decision reached. Following the conclusion of filming, board members viewed the completed film prior to granting approval for its release. The Navy also typically received two prints of each completed film free of charge for inclusion in the rotation of the Motion Picture Exchange, which was no small financial consideration as completed films normally sold for approximately \$1,000 dollars apiece.<sup>30</sup>

The system the Navy established to manage its cinematic image usually functioned smoothly during the 1930s, but occasionally breakdowns and gaps in the system led to miscommunication between the Navy Department Motion Picture Board and the film studios. In 1937, the Navy collaborated with Twentieth Century Fox on the production of *Love Under Fire* but never reviewed the finished film before its release. The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William D. Leahy, asked studio officials why they had not submitted the film for approval and made it known that such transgressions could lead to an automatic rejection of future requests. The studio replied that the transfer of the film's original producer to a new project and the company's decision to

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<sup>30</sup> Memorandum for the CNO, "Navy Cooperation in the Production of Motion Pictures," 5 August 1931, B432, E22, RG 80, NAB.

delete almost all the footage shot under Navy auspices led to the decision to not submit the film. Despite its explanation, the studio feared losing Navy assistance in the future and rushed a completed print to the Navy Department to rectify the situation.<sup>31</sup>

To further facilitate the production of favorable films, the Navy sometimes offered the film studios the assistance of technical advisers. Initially, the Navy frowned upon the practice and believed that providing the advisors would become a burden on the service as every studio would request the assignment of an adviser; they also harbored fears that the public would disapprove if it discovered just how closely the Navy and film industry worked with one another. No clear policies existed governing the work of technical advisers, and the advisers themselves included both active duty and retired naval officers. These advisers fulfilled two basic functions, both of which ultimately benefited the Navy and the film studios; first, they increased the level of realism, accuracy, and atmosphere of the films on which they worked. Given the importance the Navy attached to films favorably depicting the service and its customs, the assignment of advisers meant that the films they worked on would depict the service positively. The studios also recognized that an increased sense of realism in their pictures improved the overall quality of the film when seen by the general public. The second benefit accrued by both the Navy and the film studios was the assistance rendered by technical advisers in eliminating potentially objectionable material in the screenplays even prior to their review by the Navy Department Motion Picture Board.

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<sup>31</sup> CNO to the Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 1 September 1937, Jason S. Joy to J.O. Richardson, 10 September 1937, and CNO to Jason S. Joy, 20 September 1937, all in B425, E22, RG 80, NAB.



This reduced the amount of time the Board needed to review film scripts, and given the factory-like nature of the studio system, meant a cost savings if a film did not have go through a protracted development process.<sup>32</sup>

Ultimately, the Navy Department Motion Picture Board accepted a majority of the requests for cooperation because the film studios desired assistance so strongly that they accepted the Navy's stringent conditions. Requests for cooperation rejected by the Board typically fell into three categories. First, the Board refused to assist when screenplays called for U.S. Navy vessels to stand in for those of a foreign country. This added a complication to films which depicted fictionalized combat of the Navy during World War I. Some films set during World War I, such as *The Seas Beneath* (1931) and *Submarine Patrol* (1938), received cooperation, but the Navy rejected a request from Samuel Goldwyn to assist in the production of his proposed film "U-Boat" because it believed that the film might be upsetting to the now-friendly German navy.<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, the Board occasionally argued that concerns about security prevented the Navy from offering any assistance in film production. For obvious reasons, the Navy preferred not to publicize doctrine or equipment of a sensitive technical nature and rejected screenplays which delved too deeply into such matters. Should such

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<sup>32</sup> DNI to CNO, "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer requests assignment of officer to assist in preparing motion picture scenario," 31 October 1931, B432, E22, RG 80, NAB; William Goetz to William D. Leahy, 2 May 1938, B419, E22, RG 80, NAB; CNO to the Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station, San Diego, "Cooperation with Warner Brothers Pictures, Inc.," 8 October 1938, B423, E22, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>33</sup> Suid, *Sailing*, 19-20; CNO to the Chief of BuAer, "M.G.M. Picture 'Hell Divers,'" 21 August 1934, B432, E22, RG 80, NAB; Samuel Goldwyn to the Senior Member, Standing Board to Review Motion Picture Plays, 3 June 1932, B431, E22, RG 80, NAB; Goldwyn to the Senior Member, Standing Board to Review Motion Picture Plays, 8 June 1932, B431, E22, RG 80, NAB; Navy Department Motion Picture Board to CNO, "United Artists proposed photoplay - 'U-Boat,'" 13 June 1932, B431, E22, RG 80, NAB.

information reach the screen, it might prove invaluable to a foreign navy seeking to advance its own naval technology. In 1931, the Motion Picture Board denied a request for cooperation on the film “Anchors Aweigh” because it would have contained images of Navy catapults and directoscopes. A later screenplay, “Soldiers of the Sea” (1935) was rejected by the Board for several reasons which included the presence of “communistic sequences” and the potential release of information about aircraft operations and the use of shipboard anti-aircraft guns.<sup>34</sup>

The Board also cited security concerns when screenplays depicted the Navy’s involvement in espionage or counter-espionage activities. Given the attachment of many of the Board’s members to the Office of Naval Intelligence, they remained uncomfortable with the public learning about the activities the office and its agents performed. While clandestine activities may have been tolerated in the aforementioned *Don Winslow of the Navy* series of books and comic strips, the Motion Picture Board discouraged the production of films which featured the service’s involvement with clandestine operations. In 1935, MGM submitted a screenplay for *Murder in the Fleet* which the Navy rejected due to the depictions of an incident of espionage aboard a naval vessel as well as scenes implying the disloyalty of Filipino messmen. Not even Frank Wead’s authorship of the screenplay could secure assistance for the project. In this case,

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<sup>34</sup> CNO to Lucien Hubbard, 2 May 1935, B429, E22, RG 80, NAB. Herbert A. Jones to William A. Orr, 21 January 1931, B1362, E90, RG 24, NAB.

the studio decided to proceed even without cooperation and the film reached theaters later that year.<sup>35</sup>

Thirdly, the Navy Department Motion Picture Board rejected screenplays for their inaccurate portrayals of the life and customs of servicemen. Typically, the Navy and the studio overcame these problems by revising the scenario prior to production. For instance, the screenplay of the Fred Astaire musical *Follow the Fleet* was revised after the Board objected to several scenes, including those showing officers drinking wine aboard ship – a practice outlawed in 1914 – and the enlisted men aboard ship striking an officer during a melee on deck. Representatives from RKO Studios ultimately agreed to the changes requested in order to retain Navy cooperation with the production. Sometimes, however, the screenplays in question proved so inaccurate that the Board saw fit to deny the request for assistance without any possibility of reconsideration. One proposed film entitled “Heroes Come High” submitted to the Board in 1938 was to have depicted naval aviation training. A member of the Board found the script so problematic that he informed his colleagues that it “does not deserve an official critique” due to numerous problems. The problems cited included an overemphasis on a “chief instructor” who had no real-life counterpart at Pensacola, the weakness of the training staff in handling ill-behaved cadets, and several inaccuracies in training procedures.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Orr to Claude Swanson, 8 February 1935, Navy Department Motion Picture Board to CNO, “Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Photoplay - ‘Murder in the Fleet,’” 19 February 1935, CNO to Orr, 2 March 1935, and F.H. Bastedo to C.H. Baker, 29 August 1935, all in B429, E22, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>36</sup> Memo to Senior Member Navy Department Motion Picture Board from S.H. Hurt, “Motion Picture Script ‘Heroes Come High’ dated 28 June 1938, - Columbia Pictures,” 12 July 1938, B419, E22, RG 80,

While the Navy hoped that positive cinematic depictions would aid the service, it ensured that the films it cooperated with did not make overt statements critical of contemporary naval policy. In 1928, the Navy received an inquiry from Lieutenant D.L. McCarthy who was then developing a film screenplay entitled “The Big Gun” that he intended to pitch to the major film studios in Hollywood. He argued to the head of the Bureau of Navigation that the Navy should emulate the Army, which had recently been the subject of the successful *The Big Parade*. McCarthy reported that his unfinished screenplay supported expansion of the merchant marine to bolster national prosperity, which would in turn require a larger Navy for support and protection. The Office of Naval Intelligence labeled the scenario submitted by McCarthy as “propaganda” and called a scene in the screenplay in which a corporation used its own submarines to attack a foreign navy to be “ludicrous.” Ultimately the Navy refused to provide any cooperation on the grounds that it could not approve a story which “constitutes propaganda for a bigger Navy and Merchant Marine.” The Navy understood the benefit of assisting in film production to boost its image, but, as with the case of Navy Day, the service still sometimes clung to the “silent service” and believed that the less the public knew or understood about its public relations practices, the better.<sup>37</sup>

On more than one occasion, the Navy fielded inquiries from Congress and members of the public about the depth and purpose of its relationship with Hollywood.

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NAB. CNO to Anthony Muto, 7 October 1935, B427, E22, RG 80, NAB; Pandro S. Berman to CNO, 23 October 1935, B427, E22, RG 80, NAB; Irene Muto to Leahy, 25 April 1938, B419, E22, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>37</sup> DNI to Chief of BuNav, “Approval of Scenario “The Big Gun” by Lt. D.L. McCarthy, US Navy,” 6 December 1928, and Leigh to McCarthy, 15 December 1928, in B1360, E90, RG 24, NAB. LT D.L. McCarthy to Leigh, 25 July 1928, B1360, E90, RG 24, NAB.

These interrogators questioned how this relationship worked or whether it benefited the nation as a whole. In 1930, a woman named Maud C. Stockwell complained to President Herbert Hoover that the nation's defense establishment should uphold the spirit of the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 which had committed several dozen nations, including the United States, to renouncing war as an instrument of national policy. Stockwell accused the War and Navy Departments of the "use of the screen for purposes of advertising" and that any such practices that encouraged militarism and the glorification of war should be brought to a halt. Admiral Leigh, the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, responded that the Navy "does not and, to my knowledge, has not at any time in past used the motion picture screen for purposes of propaganda" and that films depicting the Navy are produced "solely for entertainment purposes."<sup>38</sup>

While the Navy could dismiss the complaints of regular citizens, members of Congress occasionally inquired about the system of collaboration between the Navy and Hollywood. The questions posed by congressmen often contained no malice and instead focused upon finding out just how the system worked. The responses authored by the Navy Department rationalized the links between the service and film studios but otherwise failed to acknowledge many basic facts of the relationship. In 1934, Senator Elbert Thomas wrote the Navy Department after reading a column by Arthur Brisbane in the William Randolph Hearst-owned *Washington Herald* praising the recent film *Devil Dogs of the Air*, which mentioned the assistance the Navy provided in producing the film. Secretary of the Navy Claude Swanson replied that the Navy only cooperated in

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<sup>38</sup> Leigh to Maud C. Stockwell, 25 April 1930, B1360, E90, RG 24, NAB. Stockwell to President Herbert Hoover, 2 April 1930, B1360, E90, RG 24, NAB.

“rare cases” with the production of commercial films and that, “It is believed that the benefits derived by the Navy in having appropriate scenes of Naval life presented to the public in good pictures, more than compensates for the amount of work involved.” A 1936 inquiry by Representative Thomas Amlie requested information on every instance of collaboration between the Navy and Hollywood in the last two years. Admiral Standley wrote back that the Navy only cooperated on films which “acquaint our citizens with their Navy” and that these films were not intended to give the general public “a view of propaganda or a glamorous presentation of the Navy.” While the Navy rejected assisting with the production of blatant propaganda pieces, such as McCarthy’s “The Big Gun,” it evaded any direct examination from outside sources that had guessed at the depth and scope of its cooperation with the motion picture industry. Having in fact benefited from favorable film images in its collaboration with the film industry, the Navy publicly sought to dispel suspicions of having enlisted the industry as a tool for propaganda.<sup>39</sup>

The establishment of the Motion Picture Board represented a major step forward for Navy public relations, but the Board possessed one significant flaw from its conception. The attempt for uniformity in policy could not totally compensate for changes to personnel who composed the Board. Scenarios approved for cooperation in one instance sometimes failed to receive the same consideration in others. For instance, the Navy approved two films, *Submarine* (1928) and *Men Without Women* (1930), which

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<sup>39</sup> Swanson to Senator Elbert D. Thomas, 28 January 1935, B429, E22, RG 80, NAB. CNO to Thomas R. Amlie, 11 March 1936, B427, E22, RG 80, NAB. Thomas to Swanson, 18 January 1935, B429, E22, RG 80, NAB; Thomas R. Amlie to the SecNav, 2 March 1935, B427, E22, RG 80, NAB.

included submarine accidents as major plot elements. Yet, in 1933, the Board refused to approve the proposed film “The Goldfish Bowl” with no other reason stated for the objection save that it believed it “unwise to feature submarine disasters” so prominently in motion pictures. When describing the Board, Lawrence Suid notes that “inconsistency became the hallmark” of its decisions.<sup>40</sup>

*Submarine* offers another example of the potential for inconsistency in the Navy Motion Picture Board. In 1937, Columbia Pictures remade its silent film *Submarine* for release as a sound picture entitled *The Devil’s Playground*. In fact, *The Devil’s Playground* changed little about the overall plot of the first film, which involved two enlisted men whose friendship dissolved due to a bar maid who cared for neither of the men. Yet while the Navy cooperated on the first film, the Board initially rejected the screenplay of the remake citing its poor treatment of enlisted men and the “unnecessary worry” the film might cause for the families of submariners through the depiction of a submarine accident. One of the members of the Board argued against cooperation, believing that the public would recognize the “cheapness” of such a remake. The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William H. Standley, desired that Columbia Pictures be given the opportunity to revise the script. The studio eventually chose to cooperate with the Navy only because the service could otherwise block the reuse of stock footage from *Submarine* for inclusion in *The Devil’s Playground*.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Suid, *Sailing*, 18. William V. Pratt to Irene C. Crisp, 24 December 1931, B432, E22, RG 80, NAB; Irene C. Crisp to CNO, 15 December 1931, B432, E22, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>41</sup> Memo to the Navy Department Motion Picture Board from H.A. Badt, “Script of film ‘The Depths Below’ – Comments on Script of,” 4 August 1936, B425, E22, RG 80, NAB. Memo for RADM Sinclair

The Board could not totally eliminate the objections that some naval officers continued to have toward the production of feature films. In July 1931, the Navy Motion Picture Board approved a request for cooperation on a film entitled *Mystery Ship*, but the Commander of the Battle Force, Rear Admiral Frank Schofield, raised an objection to the proposal. Schofield, who three years later would help film director John Ford join the Naval Reserve, cited no specific problem with the film at hand, but rather objected to the entire scheme of cooperating with Hollywood film studios in any way. Schofield complained that recent cooperation in the filming of *The Seas Beneath* had disrupted the fleet's normal operating routines. In addition, he stated that while the Navy cooperated on films in an effort to improve its image, the studios continued to produce movies such as *Shipmates*, which Schofield believed "injurious" to the service and conveyed numerous misconceptions to the public about life in the Navy. Schofield offered no remedy for this state of affairs except the complete elimination of all future cooperation on commercial films. His proposal still allowed for the filming of events for newsreels, which, ironically, were owned by the same studios whose cooperation he otherwise deemed non-beneficial for the Navy. Schofield renewed his protest the following month when he recommended the Navy not participate in the production of a screenplay entitled "Summerville Number Four," arguing that the film would "cheapen the Naval Service in the eyes of the public."<sup>42</sup>

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Gannon from H.A. Jones, 2 September 1936, B425, E22, RG 80, NAB. CNO to Harry Cohn, 12 August 1936, and C. Young to Alfred Bolton, 25 September 1936, B425, E22, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>42</sup> ComBatFor to CNO, "RKO Pathe Corporation, Ltd. – Cooperation with, in Production of Photoplay 'Mystery Ship,'" 18 July 1931, B432, E22, RG 80, NAB. ComBatFor to CNO, "Motion Picture



Schofield's protest prompted a reply from Admiral William Veazie Pratt, the Chief of Naval Operations, who saw the merit in the work that Schofield detested and provided a clear rationale for the service to cooperate with the film studios. Cooperating with the film studios meant that the Navy could control its image on screen whereas a film produced entirely within the studio remained outside such control. The films generated goodwill among the studios, and made it more likely that films released which depict the Navy will provide the service with good publicity and generate recruits. This goodwill also extended to the financial realm as, in addition to the two free prints the Navy received, the Motion Picture Exchange could keep its film library current for \$250,000 a year, or roughly half of what it might cost if the Navy bought its films at market rates. The studios absorbed any cost beyond those normally incurred by Navy's normal operating routines, and the rules for cooperation also stated that the filming could not significantly disrupt normal operations. Thus, in Pratt's view, the Navy received numerous benefits and was "well repaid" for the relatively low cost of minor interruptions to the Navy's training routines. Pratt's defense of the system of cooperation would be reaffirmed in 1935 when his successor, Admiral Standley, argued that films allowed the public to "understand the advantages of sea power" and desire a fleet "commensurate with our interests and responsibilities."<sup>43</sup>

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'Summerville Number Four,' Naval Cooperation with Universal Pictures Corporation in Production of," 16 August 1931, B432, B425, E22, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>43</sup> CNO to ComBatFor via CINCUS, "Policy with Respect to Naval Cooperation in Production of Photoplays," 8 September 1931, pp 1-3, B432, E22, RG 80, NAB. CNO to CINCUS, "Demands Upon the United States Fleet in Filming Motion Pictures," 13 November 1935, B427, E22, RG 80, NAB.

Occasionally, the Navy had to contend with the film studios, even those that cooperated with the service, continuing to release films which dramatized the service in a negative light. Part of the Navy's rationale for assistance was to ensure that the service itself had some control over what aspects of the Navy the public ever saw. The Paramount Pictures film *A Lawyer's Secret* (1931) aroused attention because it showed a sailor gambling away significant sums of money, losing a service automatic in a gambling parlor, and stealing a car in an attempt to make it back to his ship before the end of liberty. The Navy could attempt to eliminate objectionable film content, as when it persuaded RKO to delete scenes from the film *Sailor Be Good* (1933) after its commercial release, but this was not always guaranteed to succeed. Fortunately for the Navy, such films proved exceptions to the rule of a functional relationship between the service and the film industry.<sup>44</sup>

By the late 1920s, the Navy attempted to capitalize on positive reactions from filmgoers to Navy-themed films by coordinating recruiting activities in theater lobbies before and after screenings. In 1926, the Navy received an offer from the producer of the film *Shore Leave* to coordinate recruiting activities with local premiers of the film. The Navy quickly rejected the offer because the film "had no special publicity value for the Navy," although the film had been partially shot aboard the battleship *Arkansas*. By the end of the decade, however, inconsistency in policy appeared yet again and the Navy

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<sup>44</sup> Adam G. King to the Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Los Angeles, 28 May 1931, B1362, E90, RG 24, NAB; Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Los Angeles to the Recruiting Inspector, Western Division, "Paramount Moving Picture 'The Lawyer's Secret,'" 29 May 1931, B1362, E90, RG 24, NAB; Recruiting Inspector, Western Division to Chief of BuNav, "Paramount Moving Picture 'The Lawyer's Secret,'" 1 June 1931, B1362, E90, RG 24, NAB; Memo, "Conference between representatives for the Navy Department and Mr. Will Hays in connection with R.K.O. photoplay 'Sailor Be Good,'" 10 March 1933, B431, E22, RG 80, NAB.

began looking favorably upon such requests. Beginning with the release of *Annapolis* in 1928, the Recruiting Bureau requested that recruiting stations across the country coordinate with local theaters so that recruiters could help publicize the film. The Bureau hoped that filmgoers would be so enthralled with a positive depiction of life at the Naval Academy that they might entertain the notion of joining. Recruiters in San Diego provided significant support for the film when it arrived in local theaters, which included the preparation of elaborate Navy-themed displays in theater lobbies. The recruiting officer in Baltimore, Maryland reported that local theater owners profited handsomely from *Annapolis* and hoped that the Navy might assist with the production of similar pictures each year.<sup>45</sup>

Not everyone shared this level of enthusiasm about cooperating with the promotion of commercial films in such an overt fashion. The Commander of the Battle Fleet, Vice Admiral William Veazie Pratt, objected to anyone under his command cooperating with local theaters for the promotion of the film and described such activities as “ill-advised, undignified, and cheap.” Pratt clearly supported the principle of cooperation between the Navy and Hollywood, but believed that the job of promoting the finished films fell on the shoulders of the studios rather than the service. Recruiting officers deemed *Annapolis* beneficial overall for the Navy’s image, but found that the public displayed no extraordinary enthusiasm for the film or that it possessed much

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<sup>45</sup> William R. Shoemaker to Frederick James Smith, 14 August 1925, B859, E89, RG 24, NAB. Smith to the Navy Department, 5 August 1925, B859, E89, RG 24, NAB; G.R. O’Neill to F.H. Poteet, 17 October 1928, B1360, E90, RG 24, NAB; Chief of BuNav to Commandants, 1<sup>st</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> Naval Districts, et al., “Cooperation with Motion Picture Theaters,” 17 October 1928, B1360, E90, RG 24, NAB; Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Baltimore to Chief of BuNav, “Motion Picture ‘Annapolis,’” 2 January 1929, B1389, E90, RG 24, NAB.

value in recruiting. A recruiting officer in St. Louis, Missouri, suggested the film might only succeed in areas of the country where the public already held positive views of the Naval Academy.<sup>46</sup>

The mixed reaction amongst naval officials regarding screenings of *Annapolis* did not prevent the Navy from continuing the practice with other films. In 1929, a new opportunity to cooperate with local theater owners came with the release of the film *Salute*. Like *Annapolis*, *Salute* was set at the Naval Academy but the newer film combined the setting with a story centered upon the Academy's football team. Recruiting officers remained divided on the ability of the film to affect short-term recruiting needs. Two officers questioned the value of attempting to drum up recruits at events designed to showcase the appeal of becoming a naval officer. Others, however, believed the film improved the Navy's image, with one reporting that ticket sales for the film ran fifty percent higher than typical film releases at local theaters.<sup>47</sup>

By the 1920s, several motion picture studios began producing their own newsreels for distribution alongside their fiction film releases, providing yet another medium for the public to get a glimpse of the Navy. While filming of newsworthy

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<sup>46</sup> CinCBat to the Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Los Angeles, "Motion Picture 'Annapolis,'" 28 November 1928, B1390, E90, RG 24, NAB. Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, San Francisco to BuNav, "Motion Picture 'Annapolis,' Report on as to its Value as Navy Publicity," 23 November 1928, B1390, E90, RG 24, NAB; Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, St. Louis to BuNav, "Cooperation with Motion Picture Theaters," 19 November 1928, B1360, E90, RG 24, NAB.

<sup>47</sup> Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Newark to Chief of BuNav, "Review of Motion Picture 'Salute,'" 1 October 1929, Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, New York to Chief of BuNav, "Cooperation with Motion Picture Theaters, Re: Motion Picture 'Salute,'" 18 October 1929, Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Richmond to Chief of BuNav, Motion Picture "Salute," Report on" 13 September 1929, and Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Baltimore to Chief of BuNav, "Motion Picture 'Salute,'" 19 September 1929, all in B1367, E90, RG 24, NAB.

events occurred at the same time of the advent of the medium, the regular production of newsreels began with the creation of the *Pathé Journal* in 1909. The Pathé company distributed this first newsreel in Europe for two years before it began producing the *Pathé Gazette* for American audiences in 1911. The first release of the *Gazette* showed images of European armies marching on maneuvers as well as American warships steaming at sea. Even in these early years, newsreel producers favored visually-stunning and easily obtainable material – a practical consideration given the size and clumsiness of many early film cameras – and these two factors continued to determine much of the content put into newsreels until their demise in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>48</sup>

Like the motion picture industry that supported it, the newsreel business underwent a significant transition period during and after World War I. Newsreels exploded in popularity during the war years, and in the United States the public's desire to view footage – much of it staged – of the fighting overseas helped fuel the growth of the format. The Committee for Public Information began producing a newsreel entitled the *Official War Review* which often drew upon footage shot by cameramen from the Army Signal Corps and was distributed to theaters by Pathé. Newsreels, as a result, became one of the most widely available sources of news and information available to the public.<sup>49</sup>

By the late 1920s, the transition to sound led to a period of consolidation in the production of newsreels, leading five companies affiliated with the film studios to

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<sup>48</sup> Raymond Fielding, *The American Newsreel: A Complete History 1911-1967*. 2nd. ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2006), 45-6.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 63-76; Ward, *The Motion Picture*, 45, 75-6.

dominate the format: Fox Movietone, Hearst Metrotone (MGM), Universal, Warner-Pathé, and Paramount. Most newsreels consisted of approximately ten minutes of footage beginning with the primary story and then followed by stories of progressively shorter length. The Navy required newsreel crews to request permission from the service to film specific events, but the service typically approved these requests. Newsreels benefited from the cooperative relationships established between the studios proper and the service, and the activities of the Navy constituted a ready source of footage from which the newsreels could draw when compiling their releases. Ship launchings, the commencement ceremonies at the Naval Academy, and the movements of ships and formations of aircraft fit the criteria of easy access, visually exciting, and non-political. For the Navy, newsreels containing footage of any service activities constituted perhaps the most widely disseminated of all sources of naval publicity. The public may not always have read newspapers with stories about the Navy or attended feature films in which the service cooperated in its production, but a filmgoer would almost certainly view newsreels while waiting for feature films.<sup>50</sup>

The dramatic growth of radio in the post-World War I era provided another media outlet through which the Navy could reach the public. Compared to its relationships with the print and cinematic media, the Navy's relationship with the radio industry was much more haphazard and inconsistent. This is ironic given the Navy's

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<sup>50</sup> Fielding, *The American Newsreel*, 86, 147; For examples of each naval newsreel subject see "First of US Navy's 'Pocket Battleships'" Launched on Coast," *Universal Newsreel*, 27 March 1933, "Uncle Sam Gets 403 'Future Admirals' at Middy Graduation," *Universal Newsreel*, 8 June 1930, "Seas Sweep Decks as Cruiser Battles Gale in Speed Test," *Universal Newsreel*, 12 March 1930, all in Universal Newsreel Catalog, RG 200 UN, NACP.

direct involvement in the development of the American radio industry prior to the 1920s. The Navy developed an interest in the technology for practical purposes upon its invention, but the Radio Act of 1912 conferred upon the Navy a virtual monopoly of the then-available electromagnetic spectrum. During the Wilson administration, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels had used the act to encourage a governmental monopoly over the nascent radio industry, but the Naval Communications Service disagreed with this position, arguing instead for civilian control of most of the industry. To advance private development, the Service encouraged General Electric to establish the Radio Corporation of America in 1919. By 1922, the Navy's idea of maintaining control over the radio industry became increasingly untenable, leading the service to conduct a brief public relations campaign directed at the radio industry to ensure that the Navy would remain in control of radio functions deemed vital to maintain efficient operation. In spring of 1923, the Interdepartmental Radio Advisory Committee and the Second National Radio Conference allowed the Navy to maintain control of some essential communications functions but otherwise removed the service from managing radio broadcasting.<sup>51</sup>

Commercial radio broadcasting began in 1920 with the establishment of the radio stations KDKA in Pittsburgh and WWJ in Detroit. Over the next several years, the number of broadcasting stations grew, with many of them either attached directly to manufacturing interests or owned by local newspapers. The National Broadcasting

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<sup>51</sup> Philip T. Rosen, *The Modern Stentors: Radio Broadcasters and the Federal Government, 1920-1934* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 21-57. See also Memo for CMDR Farquhar from H.E. Fisher, "The United States Navy and Radio," 7 May 1929, B415, E22, RG 80, NAB.

Company formed in 1926 and the Columbia Broadcasting System the following year, providing the industry with two national networks. Yet while the radio industry underwent a significant expansion in the 1920s, its biggest growth did not occur until the following decade. In 1924, only a fraction of American households owned a radio, but by 1938, ninety-one percent of urban and seventy percent of rural homes had one. This rising number of households owning radios coincided with the increasing number of broadcast stations, which allowed audiences to pick up radio signals in much of the country and for radio to truly become a national medium.<sup>52</sup>

Due to its closeness to the development of the technology, the Navy established an early presence on America's commercial radio airwaves and by 1922 began to use the medium frequently. The Navy League proved especially helpful in securing time on radio networks for Navy Day, particularly by 1925 when it secured airtime on more than 100 radio stations nationwide. In 1927, the Navy League renewed its radio contacts when NBC agreed to support broadcasts for that year's Navy Day.<sup>53</sup>

The Navy itself never developed specific policies to guide relations with the radio industry but attempted to do so in 1930. The Commander, Fleet Base Force and the Commander, Battle Fleet, submitted suggestions for a department-wide radio policy which called for broadcasts to receive prior approval, that no Navy communications

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<sup>52</sup> Rosen, *The Modern Stentors*, 62-3; Jim Cox, *American Radio Networks: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 16-25, 45-55.

<sup>53</sup> Clipping from *Syracuse Post-Standard*, "Radio Program Today," 22 June 1922, Box 1, Newspaper Clippings and Miscellaneous Publications, 1911-1923; Entry 40; Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations; RG 38, NAB; BuNav to All Retired Officers Above Commander, "Navy Day," 8 October 1924, B361, E89, RG 24, NAB; William M. Galvin to Howe, 11 July 1927, B2, Howe Papers; Howe to Gardiner, 6 August 1927, pp 1-2, B2, Howe Papers.



equipment be used for such a purpose, that the Navy could incur no expenses for such activities, and that broadcasts be restricted during maneuvers or other sensitive activities. When broadcasts originated from naval personnel, the plan's authors argued that the Navy should grant access to all broadcasting companies. Programs intended to entertain naval personnel required prior approval, but such events did not require equal access for all broadcasters. These suggestions were sent to the Chief of Naval Operations, but do not appear to have been formally implemented.<sup>54</sup>

In the absence of a clear policy, the Navy tended to utilize radio in ways similar to how it interacted with print media. Speeches by senior officers and the civilian leadership were frequently distributed to radio stations. For instance, in August 1933, CBS broadcast a speech by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William H. Standley in which he described the positive benefits of the inclusion of naval construction in the recent National Industrial Recovery Act, saying that he hoped the bill might prove a catalyst for a consistent building program which would build the Navy up to the treaty limits.<sup>55</sup>

The radio industry also broadcast regular and special programs which reflected favorably on the Navy. As mentioned in Chapter IV, NBC, as well as CBS, broadcasted regular concerts by the Navy Band on its stations by the late 1920s. On the local level, the Navy fielded requests for assistance in broadcasting naval-themed programs as well.

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<sup>54</sup> CinCBat, to CNO, "Radio Broadcasts from Ships," 15 April 1930, E22, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>55</sup> Speech prepared by Dudley W. Knox, "The United States Navy: Address by Admiral William H. Standley, USN, Chief of Naval Operations, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1933, over JSV, Columbia Broadcasting Company," 19 August 1933, B20, Knox Papers.

In March 1936, a representative of a radio station in San Diego asked for the Navy's help in producing a series of broadcasts which focused on instances of peacetime heroism. While the broadcasts would be produced in San Diego, the station had reached an agreement to have the series retransmitted on stations all across the country. The station proposed granting the Navy near-total control over the project, including the approval of scripts, materials, and even advertising support for the venture. Somewhat surprisingly, the Navy resisted the offer of creative control, but encouraged the station to move forward.<sup>56</sup>

The Navy benefited from the ties it developed with individual media outlets, but it also received support from William Randolph Hearst's multi-media empire. Hearst used his holdings, including newspapers, feature films, and newsreels, to support programs and organizations that he favored, such as the Navy. Hearst began writing editorials in favor of naval expansion during the Venezuelan Crisis of 1895. As his media holdings expanded so did the importance of Hearst's support for the Navy. Hearst had shown his media acumen as far back as the 1880s when he transformed the flagging *San Francisco Examiner* by adopting of methods pioneered by Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, including expanding its circulation by lowering the cost of the paper and increasing the amount of salacious content within its pages. Shrewdly, Hearst also employed reporters at his paper who provided journalism of a quality rarely matched by his competitors. Hearst described his business strategy in 1922, "Try to get scoops in

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<sup>56</sup> Dyess, "United States Navy Band," 61; John B. Lyman, Jr., to CNO, 11 March 1936, B413, E22, RG 80, NAB; CNO to John B. Lyman, 19 March 1936, B413, E22, RG 80, NAB.

pictures. They are frequently as important as news... PAY LIBERALLY for big exclusive stuff and encourage tipsters... Make a paper for the NICEST KIND OF PEOPLE – for the great middle class. Don't print a lot of stuff that they are supposed to like and don't... Be Fair and Accurate.” Hearst's formula of mixing news and entertainment turned the *Examiner* into a leading paper within the city and allowed Hearst to expand into other large newspaper markets, particularly by buying the *New York Journal* in 1895.<sup>57</sup>

Hearst embarked on a major expansion of his print media holdings during the early 1920s, and this segment of his empire reached its peak size in the mid-1930s. In 1937, Hearst owned papers in nearly every major market in the country and could boast a circulation of 6.9 million papers for weekday editions and 7.3 million for Sundays. Total daily readership of the papers in the Hearst chain totaled approximately thirty million people or just shy of one-quarter of the entire population of the United States at that time.<sup>58</sup>

During this period of rapid growth, Hearst maintained close editorial control of the newspapers in his chain via wire services and through a series of editors with whom he maintained contact. This gave Hearst the ability to affect the size, content, and even the placement of stories within his newspapers. When revenues declined during the

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<sup>57</sup> “Mr. Hearst Outlines How His Newspapers Should be Made,” 1922, B 4, William Randolph Hearst, Sr., Papers, BANC MS 77/121 c, Bancroft Library, University of California-Berkeley, Berkeley, California [hereafter Hearst Papers]. Mugridge, *The View from Xanadu*, 100-2; David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 53, 69-70, 74-80, 100, 152. The *Journal* was renamed the *New York Journal and American* in 1901 and eventually became just the *New York American*. Gabler, *Life: The Movie*, 66-9.

<sup>58</sup> Nasaw, *The Chief*, 322; Mugridge, *The View from Xanadu*, 19.

early years of the Depression, Hearst began placing editorial pieces in prominent positions on the front of his papers. Hearst wrote some of these, but other writers, such as James T. Williams, also contributed. Hearst personally approved all editorials that were published across the Hearst line, a system which allowed him to conduct sustained personal campaigns in favor of issues close to his heart.<sup>59</sup>

The Navy occupied a key position within Hearst's view of the United States and its place within the international system. In his writings, Hearst zealously advocated maintaining American sovereignty and freedom of action within an international system that he viewed as predatory and covetous of American success. He believed American diplomats lacked the guile necessary to stand up to their European counterparts, which prevented the United States from receiving repayment on war debts incurred during World War I. He generally distrusted disarmament as practiced in the 1920s and 1930s and viewed the various naval arms limitation treaties as a British conspiracy to limit American power. Hearst also frequently warned his readers about the rise of Japanese power in his writings. In fact, Hearst often alleged that Japan and Britain secretly maintained the naval alliance formally abandoned at the Washington Conference, putting the U.S. Navy at a distinct disadvantage in a potential war. As a result, Hearst's America sat isolated and surrounded by potential threats, and only a strong Navy – backed by a strong land-based air arm – could guarantee American security.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Nasaw, *The Chief*, 386, 426-9; Mugridge, *The View from Xanadu*, 20-3.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Joseph Wren to Hearst, 25 June 1941, B6, Hearst Papers; Mugridge, *The View from Xanadu*, 41-2, 57-8, 90, 103-5; Memo to Editors All Hearst Morning Papers and Afternoons Where No Mornings, 6 November 1932, B4, Hearst Papers.

A significant portion of the American public received their news from Hearst's papers, but these papers proved by no means the only manner in which Hearst could share his unique blend of news and entertainment with the public. Throughout his professional life, Hearst maintained a strong interest in the film industry, and his power granted him considerable influence among industry leaders. Louis Pizzitola argues that Hearst understood the ability of images – particularly moving images – to transfix the public mind. Even prior to the turn of the twentieth century, Hearst began to experiment with early film technology and assisted in the production and promotion of films shot during the Spanish-American War. He later used the medium during his unsuccessful campaign for the governorship of New York in 1906 and over the next several years experimented with films using a mix of real and faked footage designed to sensationalize contemporary events. In 1914, Hearst financed his first feature film and five years later formed Cosmopolitan Pictures to focus on feature film production. Between 1919 and 1924, Cosmopolitan distributed its films through Paramount Pictures, but afterwards he shifted affiliations to Metro Goldwyn Mayer.<sup>61</sup>

Near the end of his relationship with MGM, Hearst took particular interest in the film adaptation of Thomas F. Tweed's *Gabriel Over the White House* (1933) which depicted the visit of the archangel Gabriel to hapless president Judson Hammond in the midst of the Great Depression. Following this visit, Hammond transforms himself into an ideal president capable of solving the problems of contemporary America, including

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<sup>61</sup> Louis Pizzitola, *Hearst Over Hollywood: Power, Passion, and Propaganda in the Movies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), x, 29-36, 86-9, 174-5, 217; Nasaw, *The Chief*, 209, 278-80, 314.

the issue of naval armaments. Hearst toned down the revolutionary politics of its source novel and instead inserted his own political views, particularly concerns over lingering European debts from World War I, Prohibition, and national defense. Hearst intended the film as a hopeful prediction of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency and a criticism of his predecessors. One specific scene that Hearst focused upon depicts Hammond's attempt to solve the naval armament problem by demonstrating to foreign leaders the power of American military might and thus compel them to accept true disarmament. As fictional President Hammond gives a speech aboard an American battleship to foreign dignitaries in which he derides previous attempts at naval limitations as inequitable to the United States, a horde of naval aircraft attacks several battleships moored in the distance and sinks them. The scene reflected Hearst's beliefs that disarmament stemmed from American strength and not European subterfuge and in the destructive capabilities of air power. Hearst resisted interference on the project from Louis B. Mayer, the production head of MGM, who, after receiving a request from Roosevelt himself, insisted to Hearst that the speech's setting be changed from the deck of a battleship to the presidential yacht. Hearst only agreed to the change so long as the scene retained its power to persuade audiences.<sup>62</sup>

Cosmopolitan and MGM parted ways in 1933, leading Hearst to sign a new distribution deal with Warner Brothers Pictures the following year. Hearst's contract with Warner Brothers called for the two companies to collaborate on twelve films over

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<sup>62</sup> Nasaw, *The Chief*, 453; Reader Report submitted by A. Cunningham, 14 January 1933, Production Code Authority Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Hollywood, CA [hereafter PCA Papers]; Joseph Breen to Will Hays, 10 February 1933, PCA Papers; Hearst to Louis B. Mayer, 25 March 1933, B38, Hearst Papers.

two years, and for Cosmopolitan to receive thirty percent of the net receipts for each of the films produced. Four of these films were showcases for Hearst's longtime mistress Marion Davies, but Warner Brothers retained the right to select which eight films on its production schedule would receive the Cosmopolitan label. For Warner Brothers, Hearst's media holdings became the primary consideration as the studio sought to choose films which would receive the biggest benefit from coverage in Hearst's newspapers. Naturally, Warner Brothers selected films which reflected Hearst's political viewpoints, and four of these films – *Shipmates Forever*, *Devil Dogs of the Air*, *Submarine D-1*, and *Wings of the Navy*, all directed by Lloyd Bacon – had naval themes.<sup>63</sup>

Hearst's support for the Navy was also reflected in the various newsreels his company produced during the interwar period. He first began producing newsreels in 1913 when he partnered with William Selig to distribute newsreels nationwide under the banner of his International News Service. In 1920, Hearst began distributing his *International Newsreel* through Universal, and in 1927 began producing a second newsreel, this time for MGM. Two years later, Hearst became exclusively affiliated with MGM and produced a silent newsreel and a new sound reel entitled *Hearst Metrotone News*. From its inception, the *Hearst Metrotone* newsreel quickly gained a reputation for controversy and salacious content reflective of the style often associated with Hearst's

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<sup>63</sup> Nasaw, *The Chief*, 305-8, 350; Agreement Between Warner Brothers, Inc. and Cosmopolitan Corporation, 31 October 1934, Box Cosmopolitan Legal File 1 of 2, Warner Brothers Archive; Hal Wallis to McCord, 3 October 1938, Box Wings of the Navy 1 of 1, Warner Brothers Archive; Einfield to Wallis, 26 October 1938, Box Wings of the Navy 1 of 1, Warner Brothers Archive; R.J. Obringer to Jack Warner, 8 June 1936, Box Cosmopolitan Legal File 1 of 2, Warner Brothers Archive; Obringer to Warner, 8 May 1938, Box Cosmopolitan Legal File 1 of 2, Warner Brothers Archive.

newspapers. Some of this criticism likely stemmed from Hearst's reputation in his other media ventures, but his newsreel's coverage of naval affairs reflected his own politics. Naval matters became frequent subject matter in Hearst newsreels, with Hearst's clear bias in favor of the Navy showing through, such as the 7 June 1930 edition of the newsreel which gave Representative Fred Britten, the Chairman of the House Committee on Naval Affairs from 1927 to 1931, a forum to harshly criticize the terms of the recent London Naval Conference. A later edition gave a similar opportunity for Senator Frederick Hale of Maine, the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs from 1923 to 1933, to likewise heap scorn upon the London Treaty and the overall materiel condition of the Navy. It is unclear how audiences reacted to these scenes, but the dislike of Hearst and his politics expressed in some segments of the public led to visibly negative reactions towards the screening of his newsreel. After the chorus of boos grew with each screening and picketers threatened to block entrances to theaters that played Hearst's newsreel, *Hearst Metrotone News* became *News of the Day* in 1936.<sup>64</sup>

This public dissatisfaction with Hearst reflected a key problem in the relationship between the Navy and Hearst. Hearst remained a divisive figure throughout his life and held many views that contradicted his navalist sentiments, such as supporting a strong air force or sympathizing with fascism as when Hearst invited Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini to produce articles for his newspaper syndicate. Some of Hearst's causes,

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<sup>64</sup> Fielding, *The American Newsreel*, 110, 167; "What the London Pact Really Means," *Hearst Metrotone News*, 7 June 1930, "Navy Treaty Fight Stirs the Capital," *Hearst Metrotone News*, 16 July 1930, and "America Warned Navy is Weak," *Hearst Metrotone News*, 10 February 1932, all in Hearst Metrotone News Collection, Film and Television Archive, University of California-Los Angeles, Los-Angeles, CA [hereafter FT Archive].



such as isolationism and anti-communism, did not necessarily conflict with the Navy's worldview, but the service had to contend with the possibility that the public would see the service as tainted so long as it received Hearst's endorsement. As it was, naval officials maintained their distance from Hearst and avoided any direct prodding for support of naval policy. Though it all, Hearst's advocacy of a strong Navy gained the service increased publicity, but the Navy had little control over Hearst or his views.<sup>65</sup>

By 1939, the Navy had established systems of cooperation with a variety of different media. Commercial and political ties aided the development of relationships between the Navy and the media facilitating the flow of information to the public. News and positive fictional depictions of the service now reached audiences nationwide and, particularly in the case of juvenile fiction, cut across generational lines. This is not to say that the media thoroughly saturated the public with a positive depiction of the Navy; in fact, far from it. The Navy was only one organization or issue competing for public attention among many others. Yet, when the Navy's own ability to openly engage in public relations work remained limited, support from the media allowed the Navy to reach a far wider audience than it could have otherwise.

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<sup>65</sup> Nasaw, *The Chief*, 470-7, 504.

## CHAPTER VII

### **“THE FINEST QUALITIES OF AMERICAN MANHOOD”<sup>1</sup>: THE IDEAL**

#### **SAILOR, RECRUITING, AND MASCULINITY, 1919-1939**

The Navy's development of its public relations capabilities was motivated by its perceived needs to bolster its ability to obtain congressional funding, to counteract specific problems in its public image, and to improve the quality of the recruits it attracted. Concerns over its image and a need to attract high-quality officers and enlisted men led the Navy to develop the image of the Ideal Sailor. While partially rooted in the enhanced recruiting efforts that accompanied the initial burst of naval expansion during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the image of the Ideal Sailor reflected the cultural milieu that it inhabited. The Ideal Sailor of the interwar period epitomized a masculine archetype described by gender theorist R.W. Connell as “normative masculinity,” i.e., one who exemplified the qualities of the ideal man, such as superior physical conditioning, their ethnicity, or their courage in difficult situations. Through a variety of media, including officially-produced recruiting films, juvenile fiction, newsreels, and Hollywood feature films, the American public was exposed to a set of traits that naval officers and men should embody. The types of media produced, the level of official sanction given each, and the intended audiences varied considerably, but they created conditions that provided as many potential attractions for men wishing to enlist or attend the Naval Academy in Annapolis. Yet, throughout the various means

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Martinek, *Don Winslow Saves the Secret Formula* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1941), 2-3.

used to attract manpower, the overall intent remained constant: to show how the Navy could make men out of American boys.<sup>2</sup>

The Navy promoted the Ideal Sailor in response to two distinct public relations problems related to recruiting and manpower. The first of these problems – the image of sailors as drunks and derelicts – had long been held by a significant portion of American society. In the words of Frederick Harrod, “The [Navy] was often thought of as the last refuge of the drunken or incompetent.” Poor living conditions aboard ship failed to attract a high grade of enlisted man, and desertion rates remained high throughout most of the nineteenth century. The Navy began to address these problems by reforming the conditions of enlisted service and improving its recruiting methods at the turn of the century. Although these efforts began improving the quality of the Navy’s enlisted force soon after their implementation, even as late as 1929 the Navy still found itself attempting to dispel the stereotype of sailors as “riffraff.”<sup>3</sup>

The second reason for altering and expanding recruiting campaigns appeared only after the end of World War I when the service found it difficult to attract enough quality recruits to man its ships. The interwar Navy’s small authorized personnel strength, which stood at approximately 90,000 officers and men from 1923 until 1936, allowed the service to consistently procure enough new enlistments, but retention rates dipped during the boom years of the early 1920s. The quality of personnel accepted into

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<sup>2</sup> R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 68-71.

<sup>3</sup> Harrod, *Manning the New Navy*, 11-3. Quote is from p. 11. M. MacKaye, “Modern Bluejacket, No Longer Recruited From the Nation's Riffraff,” *Outlook and Independent*, 31 July 1929, 532-3.

the Navy, however, declined considerably as scores on aptitude tests given to new recruits remained low for most of the 1920s.<sup>4</sup>

The media that helped create the image of the Ideal Sailor . Media produced by the Navy's Recruiting Bureau, such as posters and films, focused directly on attracting new enlisted men into the service. Articles written by naval officials and published in the press could also extol the virtues of naval service. During the production process for Hollywood films, the Navy Department Motion Picture Board could force the motion picture studios to delete any potentially disparaging materials from screenplays and completed films. The motion picture studios depended heavily enough on cooperation from the service to create authenticity that they consented to changes in content to maintain their access.

While the Navy could exert influence over some of the media produced about the service, the factors that defined the externally-produced media often dovetailed with the Navy's goals in improving the quality of its manpower. A common character arc in Hollywood films regardless of their setting or subject matter has been the maturation of characters from a figurative childhood into adulthood, a transformation that screenwriting expert Syd Field labeled as "an essential aspect of our humanity." Many of the films set in the Navy arcs of personal growth and maturation and thus reinforced the notion that naval service could benefit those who took advantage of the opportunity. Similar notions also affected the juvenile fiction with naval settings that appeared during

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<sup>4</sup> Utley, *An American Battleship*, 62; Congress officially authorized the Navy to have approximately 86,000 enlisted personnel after the passage of a personnel bill in 1923. In 1928, the Secretary of the Navy reported a shortage of 2,000 men for due to funding shortages and the need to provide men for naval aviation. *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1928* (Washington: GPO, 1929), 166.

the interwar period. To attract readers and the approval of their parents publishers of juvenile fiction sought to convey an attractive image of naval service by depicting sailors as sober, hardworking, intelligent young men who visited exotic places and engaged in patriotic adventures. These books built directly on the Navy's traditional "Join the Navy and See the World" recruiting appeal.<sup>5</sup>

Projecting the image of the Ideal Sailor took on added importance in light of several broader cultural trends during the era. By the turn of the twentieth century, a new conception of masculinity had emerged in the United States which, as expressed through Theodore Roosevelt and his advocacy of the "strenuous life," emphasized physical strength and military service. Such a philosophy reflected the nation's drive for empire, but this outlook changed markedly by the interwar period. The continuing expansion of the industrial economy and the psychological shock of World War I combined to make American men feel increasingly powerless and unimportant. Women, while confined to narrow positions within the workforce, nonetheless continued to work in larger numbers than before and encroached upon a male domain. Sociologist Michael Kimmel argues that the interwar "crisis" of American masculinity only increased with the advent of the Great Depression. The severe economic turmoil of the 1930s prevented many American men from fulfilling their responsibilities as

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<sup>5</sup> Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, rev. ed. (New York: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 2005), 63, 68.

“breadwinners” and often left them, much like World War I veterans, psychologically and physically broken and unable to realize the “American Dream.”<sup>6</sup>

In this cultural context, the Ideal Sailor offered an antidote to these societal ills. The Navy’s overall cultural impact was slight, but the prospect of foreign travel, steady employment, and the opportunity to improve their physical and moral well-being provided a means for young American men to avoid the emasculating poverty and hopelessness found in civilian society.<sup>7</sup>

The Ideal Sailor depicted in the channels of naval publicity had several clear characteristics and traits that defined his image. First and foremost, the Ideal Sailor was always white. Recruiting posters, fictional stories, and Hollywood films universally focused on the actions and exploits of white officers and enlisted men. This is unsurprising given that the interwar Navy was comprised overwhelmingly of white officers and men with only a small and low-ranking contingent of racial minorities. Though the Navy had recruited large numbers of African-Americans during and immediately following the Civil War and had also permitted their entry into the Naval Academy, the number of African-Americans in the service declined in the latter nineteenth century, and no African-American entered the Naval Academy from 1874 until 1935. With the 1893 creation of steward and mess attendant ratings, the Navy

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<sup>6</sup> E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 236; Peter N. Stearns, *Be a Man!: Males in Modern Society* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 110; Joe L. Dubbert, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity in Transition* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 198-9, 209; Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 127-36.

<sup>7</sup> Christina S. Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War II* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 3-4, 11, 14.

slowly segregated African Americans into these billets, but the process would not be codified until the World War I years. At their peak representation in 1920, blacks only comprised 2.78 percent of the enlisted force, or 3,037 men. From 1919 to 1932, Navy recruiters forbade the enlistment of African-Americans, but some recruiters continued to admit blacks into the service during that time period. As a whole, the service consciously avoided any recruiting appeals aimed at the African American audience; this was seen in 1922 when the Bureau of Navigation ordered the New Orleans Recruiting Station to ensure that a visiting floatplane did not land near the “overwhelmingly negro” parts of the city neighboring Lake Pontchartrain. After the recruiting of African-Americans resumed in 1931 so that the Navy could maintain a constant supply of messmen and stewards, the images in Figure 1 demonstrate that the materials that the service produced showed men in these ratings serving white officers. Given the limited tasks which the Navy allowed African-Americans to perform and the far fewer resources expended to bring such men into the service, the Ideal Sailor archetype obviously did not apply to African-Americans.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, New Orleans to BuNav, “Trip of aircraft from Pensacola to Chicago about 1 August 1922,” 25 July 1922, B396, E89, RG 24, NAB. Charles Hughes Williams III, “‘We have...kept the negroes’ goodwill and sent them away’: Black Sailors, White Dominion in the New Navy, 1893-1942” (master’s thesis, Texas A&M University, 2008): 25-6, 29-30, 74-6; Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Bureau to Chief of BuNav, “Trailers for Motion Picture Films,” 28 January 1936, B65, E90, RG 24, NAB.



Fig. 1: Still frames from film trailer intended for the recruitment of African-Americans, 1936. B65, E22, NAB.



The other significant racial minority within the Navy, Filipinos, received even less recruiting attention than African-Americans from the service. Filipinos began entering the service in 1901 when President William McKinley authorized the induction of 500 men into the Navy so it could maintain an effective presence in East Asia, but the Navy restricted Filipinos in the fleet to steward ratings, a policy which did not change until 1971. During the interwar period, the Navy counted as many as 3,667 Filipinos among its ranks by 1934, but the numbers dwindled by half by 1940. The resumption of African-American enlistments in 1932 and the projected independence of the Philippines led the Navy to discontinue enlistments of Filipinos into the service after 1935.<sup>9</sup>

The combination of media used to draw young men into the service incorporated ideas of racial and cultural imperialism. Recruiting posters showed American sailors enjoying the opportunities that overseas cruises offered them, but narratives found in films and books explicitly highlighted the superiority of American values relative to those found in foreign nations and cultures. Rather than a purely physical definition of masculinity, these narratives emphasized the humanity and justness of the American male when compared to the barbarities inflicted upon the innocent in other parts of the world by so-called men who do not embody such values. Such depictions harkened back to the turn of the century when Theodore Roosevelt and others sought to define the American man as a “manly” embodiment of civilization and a symbol of human progress

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<sup>9</sup> Robert M. Jiobu, *Ethnicity and Assimilation: Blacks, Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Koreans, Mexicans, Vietnamese, and Whites* (New York: SUNY Press, 1991), 50; Williams, “Black Sailors, White Dominion,” 5, 94.

shaped by the subjugation of non-white peoples, including Native and African Americans.<sup>10</sup>

The earliest postwar portrayals of interaction between white sailors and their foreign other came through juvenile fiction. Some of the book series which began their publishing runs before or during World War I attempted to place their characters to different settings. *Dave Darrin's South American Cruise* (1919) took the eponymous character and his trusty sidekick Dan Dalzell to the fictional Latin American country of Vengara and embroiled them in a coup plot. The savage ways of the tyrannical Benedito and his men, which include the execution of unarmed prisoners, are contrasted throughout the novel with Darrin's "civilized" vision of American masculinity. In an encounter with one of Benedito's men, Darrin said, "Manhood includes truth, justice, honor, mercy, and all attributes of whatever is divine in man." As the book's plot unfolds, only the actions of the righteous Americans save the Vengarans from disaster as Darrin and Dalzell repel Benedito's coup attempt.<sup>11</sup>

The *Navy Boys* series transitioned its characters, a group of teenaged enlisted men hailing from an idyllic New England town, from World War I convoy duty to a peacetime setting in which foreign naval threats remained on, or under, the seas. *The Navy Boys on Special Service, or, Guarding the Floating Treasury* (1920), appeared in

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<sup>10</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 170-216.

<sup>11</sup> H. Irving Hancock, *Dave Darrin's South American Cruise; Or, Two Innocent Young Naval Tools of an Infamous Conspiracy* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Co, 1919), 134-6. For more on the imperialistic overtones in turn of the century children's literature, see Brian Rouleau, "Childhood's Imperial Imagination: Edward Stratemeyer's Fiction Factory and the Valorization of American Empire," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 7, no. 4 (October 2008), 479-512.

the midst of the First Red Scare and saw the sailors encounter a highly advanced Soviet submarine while escorting a shipment of gold bullion across the Atlantic. The boys, awestruck and concerned by the advanced technology of the submarine, contrasted the “fanatical” nature of the communist crew with their own sense of righteousness and justice as they worked to remove this new threat from the seas.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the interwar period, the Navy and its supporters acknowledged the rhetoric of “Americanism” espoused by such men as publisher William Randolph Hearst and political figure and administrator Herbert Hoover. This creed maintained that Americans now represented a distinct and superior people free of the political and social baggage which continued to plague Europe. In an address to the Naval Academy’s graduating class of 1922 Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., argued that America stood ascendant among the relatively small number of “great high-thinking countries.” The Navy, he continued, served as one of the guarantors of power and status in the world, and, along with other seafarers, upheld a tradition of broadening both cultural contact and commerce for centuries. Thus, officers and men who served in the Navy embodied these values as they served their nation and visited foreign lands.<sup>13</sup>

Such perceptions of Americanism factored heavily into one of the longest-running themes of naval publicity: foreign travel. When the Navy drastically modified

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<sup>12</sup> Davidson, *Navy Boys on Special Service*, 203.

<sup>13</sup> Navy News Bureau, Release Afternoon Papers, 2 June 1922, B4, E113, RG 80, NAB. The rhetoric of Americanism was also adopted by a resurgent Ku Klux Klan during the 1920s. See Dubbert, *A Man’s Place*, 200-1; For an example of a speech by a naval officer explicitly acknowledging and supporting Americanism, see Address by William H. Standley to the Daughters of the American Revolution, Washington, D.C., 22 April 1936, pp 1-10, B26, E113, RG 80, NAB; Mugridge, *The View from Xanadu*, 28, 90-1; Herbert Hoover, *American Individualism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, and Co. 1922), 1-14.

its methods of procuring manpower at the start of the twentieth century, the earliest campaigns touted the opportunities of sailors to travel while earning a steady income. The Navy's popular recruiting slogan "Join the Navy and see the world!" appealed to the curiosity-wonder instinct described by Edward Bernays and implied that sailors could travel to exotic and remote locations for free simply by joining the naval service. This slogan certainly reflected the Navy's increased deployment to both Asian and European waters at the turn of the century, but, as discussed in Chapter II, the Recruiting Bureau feared that prospective sailors would develop an overly optimistic view of the service. This concern led the Navy to sometimes send its ships overseas just so that it could live up to the slogan, but these deployments represented a temporary solution to the problem.<sup>14</sup>

After World War I, the Navy retired the slogan "Join the Navy and see the world!" but continued, at times, to emphasize opportunities for aspiring officers and men to travel overseas. Many of the recruiting posters which emphasized foreign travel contrasted the Navy's "representative Americans" with the strange, yet wonderful foreign peoples and cultures. In a series of recruiting posters entitled "What the Navy is Doing" issued just after the end of the war, the Recruiting Bureau presented a multifaceted view of naval service to the public at large and potential recruits. Since the service desired that recruits and entrants for the Naval Academy come from all regions of the country, travel still held the power to entice individuals from inland states who otherwise had little to opportunity to venture from their hometowns. At times, the Navy

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<sup>14</sup> Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, 152; Harrod, *Manning the New Navy*, 34-47.

even highlighted the possibilities of men from small towns or inland states to visit domestic locations they had never seen before. A recruiting poster issued in 1921 claimed men could visit “strange lands” all around the world or, visit large, cosmopolitan cities closer to home such as New York and San Francisco (Fig. 2).<sup>15</sup>

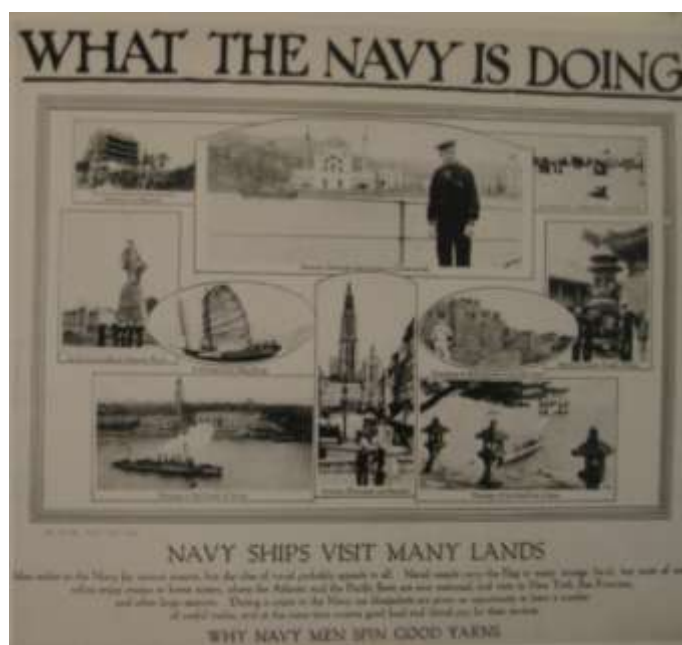


Fig. 2: “Navy Ships Visit Many Lands,” 1921. Photo NH 76765-KN, Photographic Section.

That same year also marked the release of *A Sailor Made Man* (1921), one of the first films released with a naval setting after World War I. Naval officials held a decidedly mixed view concerning the movie’s value as a recruiting tool, but the film was important for demonstrating the moral superiority of American values as represented by sailors. Harold Lloyd’s character, The Boy, was an arrogant dilettante who mistakenly

<sup>15</sup> Photo NH 76765-KN, Photographic Section, Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C [hereafter referred to as Photographic Section]. Navy News Bureau, Release Afternoon Papers, 2 June 1922, B4, E113, RG 80, NAB.

enlists in the Navy and embarks on a naval vessel bound for the fictional south Asian country of Khairpura-Bhandanna. The Boy was a less-than-ideal sailor during his time aboard ship, until, that is, he coincidentally happens upon a former flame, The Girl, and has to rescue her from the clutches of evil foreigners. The distinction between American and foreign values is made apparent as The Boy's actions stand in sharp contrast to the opulence and barbarism of the local Rajah, who covets The Girl for his harem. The Boy reacts instantly and rescues the girl after several madcap comic chase sequences through the Rajah's palace and the surrounding city. The Boy ends the film newly transformed into a defender of womanly virtue and a resourceful young sailor.<sup>16</sup>

In a similar vein, the 1923 recruiting film *Our Navy in the Near East* focuses upon the humanitarian relief provided by the Navy during the Turkish War for Independence. In particular, the film shows some of the more than 200,000 Greeks and Armenians transported to safety aboard American naval vessels. The effort was described as the Navy "bringing credit to itself and the country of which it is a part," but the film strongly emphasizes the contribution of American sailors in bringing about such a positive result. Only the intervention of this "this country's best manhood" – the quoted text in this case laid over the image of a smiling American enlisted man – could save the disadvantaged from their fate (Fig. 3).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *A Sailor Made Man*, directed by Fred C. Newmeyer, Hal Roach Studios, 1921.

<sup>17</sup> Film 24.24; *Our Navy in the Near East*, 1923, Records of the Navy Recruiting Bureau, RG 24, NACP.



Fig. 3: Closing shot of *Our Navy in the Near East*, 1923. Film 24.24, RG 24, NACP.

While many of the depictions of overseas travel either served to reinforce the superiority of American values or the exoticism of foreign lands, they also showed potential recruits the educational possibilities that the Navy provided. The recruiting poster “Fellowship of the Sea,” released by the Recruiting Bureau in late 1924, showed a jovial group of American sailors posing for the camera in front of a non-descript building in a European city. Rather than promoting mere sightseeing, the poster invited men to seek an “education and experience through travel” (Fig. 4).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Photo NH 76783-KN, Photographic Section.

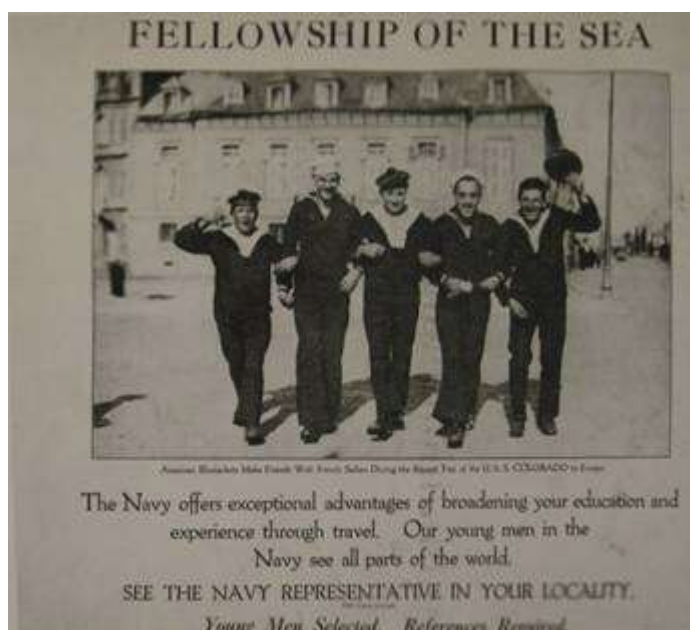


Fig. 4: “Fellowship of the Sea,” 1924. Photo NH 76783-KN, Photographic Section.

Likewise, a pair of recruiting posters issued by the Bureau in 1935 highlighted the beauty and ruggedness of the territories of Hawaii and Alaska, promising men visits to picturesque Waikiki Beach on Oahu or cruises along the dramatic peaks of the Alaskan coast. Use of these posters coincided with an increase in tensions abroad, and attempted to highlight the possibilities for breathtaking, if not exactly exotic, locales safely within the confines of American territory (Fig. 5).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> “On the Sand at Waikiki,” 12 July 1935, Navy Art Gallery, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. [hereafter cited as Navy Art Gallery]; “Picturesque Alaska,” 27 April 1935, Navy Art Gallery.



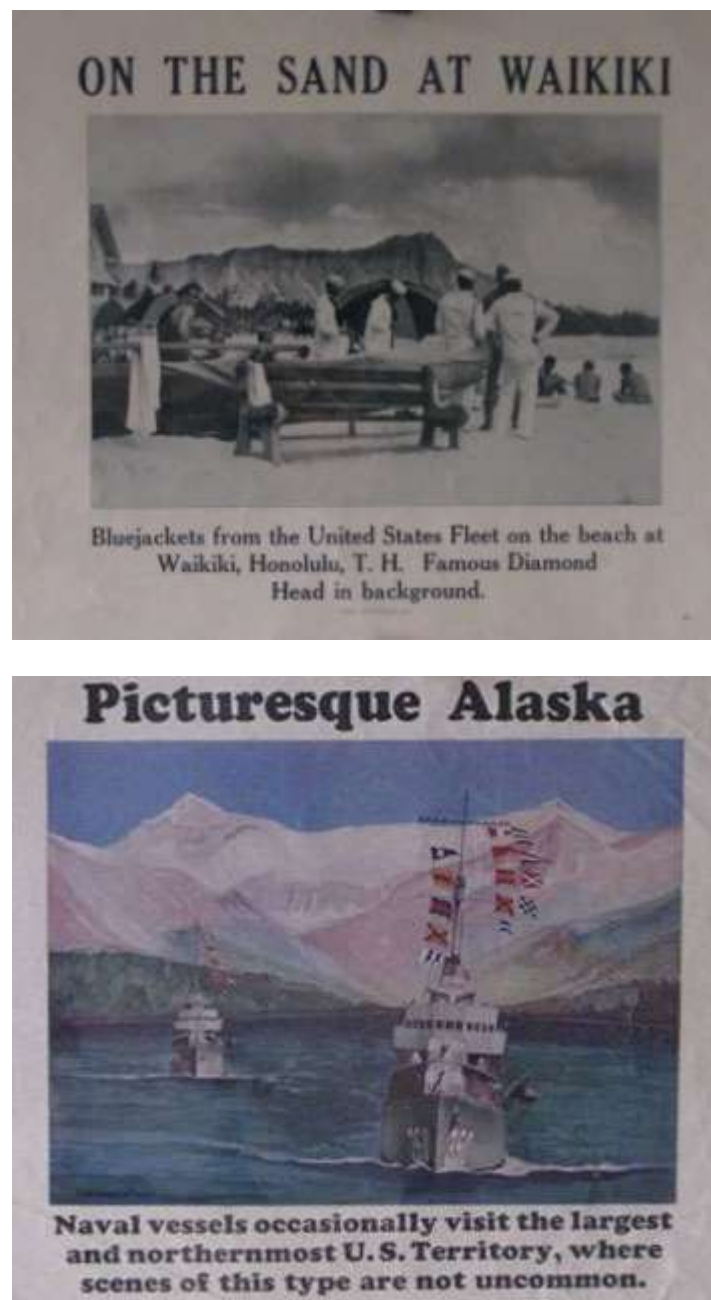


Fig. 5: “On the Sand at Waikiki” and “Picturesque Alaska,” 1935. Navy Art Gallery.

While these recruiting posters offered a benign view of the Navy and travel in the 1930s, literary sources continued to depict the exotic locales visited by the fleet as sites

of potential conflicts with foreign threats. Throughout the *Don Winslow of the Navy* comic strip, books, and radio shows, the character battles the forces of the nefarious Scorpion. The Scorpion had no specific racial identity, but his base of operations sat in the South China Sea, perhaps reflective of an American concern with the security situation in East Asia. From his hideout, the Scorpion directed plots against the United States all around the globe, ranging from the Caribbean to the Philippines. The Scorpion used any method imaginable, including torture, murder, and black magic, to try and destroy western civilization in order to create a global dictatorship.<sup>20</sup>

Media outlets portrayed the Navy's far-flung China Station, where the Navy maintained a fleet of river gunboats to patrol and protect American interests, as one of the last frontiers available to American men. This portion of the service stood a world apart from the bulk of the fleet, both literally and figuratively. The China Station, along with the Caribbean-based Special Service Squadron, represented the last vestiges of the American drive for empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The officers and men who served on Yangtze River gunboats engaged pirates and rebels, visited polyglot cities like Shanghai and Nanking, and, sometimes, engaged in acts of debauchery unavailable to their counterparts in the American-based Battle and Scouting Fleets. To appeal to men to serve in these remote locales, the Recruiting Bureau emphasized the exoticism and novelty of cultures very different from that which the men were familiar. The recruiting poster "The Navy Sees the Far East" displayed Shinto

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<sup>20</sup> Martinek, *Don Winslow, U.S.N.*, 9-14.

monuments in Nagasaki and the ubiquitous rickshaws in Chinese cities as attractions available to men who committed themselves to naval service (Fig. 6).<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 6: “The Navy Sees the Far East,” n.d. Photo NH 76751-KN, Photographic Section.

This depiction of service in Chinese waters would be more fully explored in John Ford’s 1930 submarine film *Men Without Women*. Released in the years prior to the implementation of the Production Code the film opens with a scene showing enlisted men from an American submarine in a Shanghai bar replete with prostitutes and other seedy characters. The film overtly portrays Shanghai as a polyglot city with numerous native Chinese and foreign citizens, but also as a place where white men could invent entirely new personas and identities and thus leave their old lives in the West behind.

<sup>21</sup> Kemp Tolley, *Yangtze Patrol: The US Navy in China* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1971), 81-267; Photo NH 76751-KN, Photographic Section.

One of the film's central characters, Chief Burke, is recognized by a British officer early in the film as a former Royal Navy officer named Quartermain who was reputed to have given information to the Germans which allowed his submarine to be sunk during the war. Burke eventually admits his true identity to a shipmate, Ensign Price, proclaims his innocence for the past transgression, and heroically sacrifices himself by remaining on board to control the torpedo tube valves and allow the other men to escape their doomed submarine.<sup>22</sup>

The second major theme of the Ideal Sailor involved the Navy's sailors living a physically and morally correct lifestyle. The conscious casting of sailors as bastions of moral behavior had its roots in the changes to naval recruiting at the turn of the twentieth century. Sailors had traditionally comprised a vagabond social class which had long been associated with hard, transient living. Indicative of the lifestyle were tattoo shops, bars, and brothels in heavily trafficked port cities. The poor conditions of these establishments and the association of Navy men with such places negatively affected their standing within the community.<sup>23</sup>

During his tenure as Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels initiated a series of reforms designed to improve living conditions and reform the morals of both officers and enlisted men. These reforms included banning alcohol aboard ships and campaigns to clean up areas around naval bases to decrease the temptations presented to sailors. Daniels believed that enacting these reforms would lead to an increase in the operating

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<sup>22</sup> *Men Without Women*, directed by John Ford, Fox Film Corporation, 1930.

<sup>23</sup> MacKaye, "Modern Bluejacket," 532-3.

efficiency of naval personnel by reducing the amount of time lost to drunkenness or venereal disease. In a speech entitled “Men Must Live Straight if They Would Shoot Straight,” which he delivered during World War I, Daniels outlined his efforts to straighten the moral compass of enlisted men. He appointed a Naval Commission on Training Camp Activities which created alternative forms of recreation, namely athletic events, for the men on or near naval stations. The Navy also worked alongside the Army to persuade individual communities to eliminate “red light” districts which often catered to soldiers and sailors. Daniels carried out this campaign to eliminate sexual vice within the service so fiercely that, for a time, he even banned the distribution of prophylaxis to sailors going on liberty, believing that the restriction would further incentivize the men to modify their behavior. He eventually relaxed his stance on issuing prophylaxis after exposure to venereal disease, but Daniels maintained throughout his tenure a “patriarchal” and heavy-handed approach to improving the lot and the morals of men in the Navy.<sup>24</sup>

The reforms enacted by Daniels had varied legacies. The attempts to clean up the waterfront areas did not always persist, and enlisted men continued to describe some waterfront areas, such as downtown San Diego, as “dirty and sleazy” as late as 1940. Setting aside the practical effects of Daniels’ reforms, his desire for a cleaner, sanitized view of a sailor’s life continued in the two decades after the end of his tenure. Daniels’ emphasis upon good morals and clean living certainly influenced how the service approached recruiting and its public image in the years after he left office. The Navy

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<sup>24</sup> Daniels, *Navy and the Nation*, 56-69; Harrod, *Manning the New Navy*, 28-31, 135-6.

combated the stereotype of the drunken, rowdy, and lascivious sailor in a variety of ways, and the chief of the Bureau of Navigation went so far as to ordering crews aboard ships to use less foul language lest it dissuade any upstanding youth from entering the service.<sup>25</sup>

One of the most common means of countering negative perceptions of sailors came through the interaction between the major film studios and the Navy Department Motion Picture Board and its predecessors. The threat of withholding Navy cooperation on film production could lead to the deletion of scenes in films, although, as recounted in Chapter VI, the Board approved many films which included scenes that some officers found objectionable. The Navy also occasionally relied on relationships with local media outlets to prevent publication of stories linking sailors to criminal acts. In November 1928, the Navy learned that a local judge in Bay Shore, New York, gave a local criminal a choice between jail time or an enlistment in the service. The judge did so because he believed his own prior naval service had helped him tremendously, but the Navy did not want the public to believe that men entered the service in such a manner. The judge apologized and the local recruiting officer persuaded other local papers not to run stories on the matter so as not to embarrass the Navy or harm its recruiting efforts.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Theodore C. Mason, *Battleship Sailor* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 42. Chief of BuNav to CINCUS, et al., "Effect on recruiting of Profane and Vulgar Language on Board Ship," 15 December 1931, B849, E90, RG 24, NAB.

<sup>26</sup> W.F. Newton to Judge Frank A. Page, 2 November 1928, Page to Newton, 5 November 1928, and Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Bureau to Chief of BuNav, "Clippings From the Bay Shore Journal of 25 October 1928 – "Youth Charged with Disorderly Conduct is Permitted to Join Navy," 21 November 1928, all in B64, E90, RG 24, NAB.

Authors of children's literature, including Frank Martinek, who intended their books be used primarily as recruiting material for the service, also depicted their characters as having high moral standards to serve as models for young men. The characters in the major children's book series published in the interwar period refrained from drinking, smoking, and other miscreant behaviors. Even while combating the Scorpion, Don Winslow remained "skilled in the art of the righteous endeavor" and refused to take the life of either humans or animals in his quest to stop his arch nemesis: the Scorpion. As further evidence of his high and incorruptible moral standards, Winslow lived a chaste lifestyle free of any romantic attachment. Although Winslow frequently received assistance in his adventures from Mercedes, the daughter of his commanding officer, Admiral Michael Splendor, Winslow tended to view women with suspicion and as potential threats to operational security. In *Don Winslow, U.S.N., in Ceylon with Kwang, Celebrated Chinese Detective* (1934), Winslow asks his loyal but dimwitted sidekick, Lieutenant Pennington: "Haven't you learned enough about women decoys or 'come-on girls?' With their synthetic and glamorous charms they have destroyed many men and nations as well."<sup>27</sup>

In 1934, the same year as the release of *Don Winslow, U.S.N., in Ceylon with Kwang, Celebrated Chinese Detective*, naval officials demonstrated their commitment to protecting the image of enlisted men by censoring a piece of artwork that reflected poorly on servicemen. With funding from the Public Works of Art Project of the Works

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<sup>27</sup> Martinek, *Don Winslow, U.S.N.*, 15. Ibid., 63. Sheridan, *Comics and Their Creators*, 227; Waugh, *The Comics*, 126-128.

Progress Administration, artist Paul Cadmus created an oil painting entitled “The Fleet’s In.” The painting contains numerous ribald images, including a pair of drunken sailors flirting with two transvestites, a woman angrily rebuffing a third sailor’s advances as he gropes her, and two Marines in the company of a homosexual man (Fig. 7). The Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington, D.C., displayed “The Fleet’s In” as part of an exhibition of Public Works of Art Project paintings in the spring of 1934, but the display of this artwork prompted complaints from the public. The *Washington Evening Star* printed a letter of complaint regarding the painting, and Secretary of the Navy Claude Swanson said of it that, “It was right artistic but not true to the Navy. It shows all the derelictions of the Navy and none of its virtues.” Swanson ordered Assistant Secretary of the Navy Henry L. Roosevelt to remove the painting from the exhibition.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Washington Post*, “The Post Impressionist,” 24 April 1934, 8. Memorandum from Gale Munro to File, 17 November 1998, Navy Art Collection Files, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. The transvestites in the painting have noticeable Adam’s Apples visible in the plunging necklines of their dresses, and the prominently displayed red tie of the man in the suit was, during the 1930s, an open display of homosexuality.





Fig. 7: "The Fleet's In," Paul Cadmus.

Secretary Swanson was not the only naval official angry about the painting. Admiral Hugh Rodman publically condemned the painting, but the *Washington Post* used Rodman's attack to question the Navy's attempt to suppress Cadmus' work. The *Post* rebuked the Navy's actions and attacked the service for attempting to censor the painting. More damningly, the *Post* implied that the painting's portrayal of sailors carried some truth and dismissed standard Navy pictures of "fronded palms lift[ing] branches to a cloudless sky" or "slim boys wander[ing] through foreign parks, snapping their Kodaks at distinguished statues, 'seeing the world,'" as "far from the life of a sailor." The *Post* would return to the controversy surrounding "The Fleet's In" two months later when sailors from the battleships *Arkansas* and *Wyoming* attacked a woman and started riots while on shore leave in Nice, France. When comparing the actions of the sailors overseas to those depicted in the painting, the *Post* editorialized that "the orgy staged in this Riviera city made Paul Cadmus' second-rate painting appear like a sketch

of a tea party.” The painting was removed from public exhibition for the next year, but, even though the painting remained public property, Assistant Secretary Roosevelt donated “The Fleet’s In” to the Alibi Club in 1936 just before his death.<sup>29</sup>

Part of the Navy’s emphasis on living correct lifestyles focused upon the officers and men maintaining not only their moral well-being but sustaining or improving upon their physical condition. The Navy intended for athletics and physical activity instill discipline and order into the lives of sailors. Reflective of the growing interest and participation in organized sports in the civilian world, the Navy encouraged enlisted men to take up one of several sports, such as football or boxing, while in the service. This change occurred during Daniels’ tenure as he believed that athletics represented a positive and desirable form of recreation that helped to enrich both mind and body and keep men away from more lascivious pursuits. As with Daniels’ campaign to rid the Navy of vice and improve the moral reputation of sailors, the Navy’s support for athletics continued into succeeding administrations and such events became fixtures in the lives of Navy men.

One of the earliest promotions of Navy athletics occurred in 1920 when the Navy sent its own team to the Olympic Games in Antwerp. The Bureau of Navigation managed a training regimen for participants months in advance, and the Navy hoped to send athletes to compete in rowing, fencing, boxing, gymnastics, swimming, track and shooting competitions. Trials were held in July in Chicago, and the Navy team traveled to Antwerp aboard the cruiser USS *Frederick*. The men trained in a temporary

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<sup>29</sup> *Washington Post*, “The Fleet’s In,” 20 April 1934, 8. *Washington Post*, “The Fleet’s In,” 8 July 1934, sec.B, 4.

gymnasium constructed on the deck of the cruiser, and the athletes were released from performing any duties save for training. The Navy's wrestling team, which included midshipman Daniel V. Gallery, failed to medal, but the Navy team found its greatest successes in shooting and rowing. The eight-oared crew described as "husky giants" became the "great favorites" of the crowd as it broke the record at the 2000 meter distance by more than five seconds. The Navy's shooting team, including Lieutenant Commander Willis A. Lee, Jr., won more medals in the sport than the Marine and Army teams combined. In all, the Navy's team won nine of the twenty-six American gold medals and thirteen of the forty-two total medals earned during the competition.<sup>30</sup>

While the Olympics represented a monumental achievement in Navy athletics and afforded the service wide publicity of the exploits of its members, football stood out as the service's most widely promoted sport during the 1920s. Naval stations and ships formed teams that competed with another when possible or, sometimes, against teams from nearby cities and towns. While these teams accomplished the basic goal of maintaining the physical health of naval personnel and strengthening ties with local teams, on a national level the Naval Academy's football team garnered the most attention for its gridiron success. The Naval Academy began fielding teams as early as the 1880s, but enjoyed its most notable successes after World War I.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *New York Times*, "Navy Eight Wins Trip to Antwerp," 25 July 1920, 19. Navy News Bureau, Immediate Release, 3 September 1920, pp 1-2, B2, E113, RG 80, NAB. Robert Shenk, "To the 1920 Olympics by Cruiser," *Naval History Magazine* 22, no. 4 (August 2008), 34-39; Navy News Bureau, Immediate Release, 12 March 1920, pp 1-4, B1, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy News Bureau, Immediate Release, 6 July 1920, pp 1-4, B1, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy News Bureau, Release Monday Morning, 20 September 1920, B2, E113, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>31</sup> Mason, *Hanson Weight Baldwin*, II: 152-6.

The Naval Academy's rivalry with the United States Military Academy grew in stature in the interwar period as the popularity of college football increased around the country. The game itself and its outcome provided officials with reason to praise the "high morale and unconquerable Navy spirit which honors the Navy alike in battle and on the gridiron." The 1926 game between the two academies broke from tradition as the game, typically held in Philadelphia, was moved to Chicago in honor of the opening of Soldier Field. A virtual frenzy occurred when officials opened the stadium's boxed seats for bidding, eventually netting more than \$100,000 or nearly \$40 per seat. The game itself took on extra importance after Navy beat Michigan to remain undefeated and prompted speculation that the annual rivalry game with Army could decide the national championship. Before a crowd of 110,000 and a radio audience which spanned the globe as the Navy broadcast the game over its network of radio stations, the two teams fought to a 21-21 tie in a game hailed as "one of the greatest football games ever played." The Midshipmen's successful season earned the Naval Academy a shared national championship. The *Chicago Tribune* hoped the game would provide Midwesterners with a "new understanding, a new upholding of the national defense" and lead to greater scrutiny of the diminished state of the armed forces since the end of World War I.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Navy News Bureau, Immediate Release, 29 November 1920, B2, E113, RG 80, NAB. Walter Eckersall, "Army-Navy Game to Stay Forever in Fans' Memory," *Chicago Tribune*, 29 November 1926, 21. *Chicago Tribune*, "A Great Game and its Meaning," 30 Nov. 1926, 10. *New York Times*, "Army Navy Elevens to Play in Chicago," 23 January 1926, 1; Genevieve Forbes Herrick, "\$100,000 Paid for Army Navy Box Seats," *Chicago Tribune*, 2 October 1926, 1; Walter Eckersall, "Army Navy Game in Chicago May Decide U.S. Grid Title," *Chicago Tribune*, 1 November 1926, 29; *New York Times*, "Navy is to Broadcast Play-by-Play Story of Army Game to U.S. Fleet the World Over," 18 November 1926, 21; Walter Eckersall, "Army-Navy Thrill; All Even," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 November 1926, 1, 4.

The annual rivalry came to a temporary halt in 1928 and 1929 as the two schools failed to reconcile the different standards of eligibility for both entrance to the respective academies and to play on the football teams. After the rivalry resumed in 1930, Navy continued to post respectable records each season, prompting some speculation that the Navy recruited men to Annapolis simply to play football, but never replicated the heights achieved in 1926. The football team, however, remained in the public eye as Hollywood studios produced several films that featured the Academy's football team. The first of these, John Ford's *Salute* (1930), established the pattern for later Naval Academy football films by incorporating an athletic storyline into a plot which became a staple of interwar Navy films; namely, the transformation of new midshipmen into budding naval officers. In the film, Paul Randall, a physically slight young man, lives in the shadow of his older brother, John, a cadet at West Point, and his grandfather who served alongside Admiral George Dewey at Manila Bay. Paul participates in the athletic activities offered at the Naval Academy, including crew, but believes that only through success on the football field can he achieve a sense of independent manhood. Sensing his drive and determination to succeed, two upperclassmen who had previously hazed Paul assist him in his quest to become a valuable player for the team. In the film's climax, Paul comes into direct competition with his brother John during the annual Army-Navy game and helped the team battle to a tie score. The film reinforces the excitement and the prestige of these games by including numerous shots of the thousands of excited and cheering spectators in the stands who try to will their team to victory. While *Salute* and other films were produced by the studios to vary the settings

of football pictures, they provided a means for the Navy to publicize the value it placed on athletics.<sup>33</sup>

While the promotion of athletics allowed the Navy to emphasize the physical health of sailors, other means existed of demonstrating such physical prowess. By showcasing the physicality of everyday duties and training, the Navy and its supporters linked the physical strength of the men to the figurative strength of the service or of the nation as a whole. The frontispiece for the novel *Navy Boys Behind the Big Guns, or, Sinking the German U-Boats* (1919) showed the men aboard the fictional battleship *Kennebunk* as it steamed into battle against the German High Seas Fleet in a sequel to the Battle of Jutland. Whereas the *Navy Boys* often relied upon their quick thinking and selflessness to succeed in combat situations aboard the destroyer *Colodia*, service aboard the battleship required more muscle than the boys were accustomed to as they handled the shells fired by the larger guns of the battleship. The image of the boys “stripped for action” highlighted the ability of men to develop their bodies in the service.<sup>34</sup>

The desire for sailors to develop and display their newfound physical stamina did not always occur in a nationally-covered athletic event or through combat. Athletics constituted a primary source of entertainment for men aboard ship during the interwar

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<sup>33</sup> “Sport: Army vs. Navy,” *Time*, 26 December 1927, 25. The two academies had different age restrictions on who could enter and also different rules regarding the length of eligibility for players; Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 8 January 1932, B19, E113, RG 80, NAB; “Salute, Dialogue Taken From the Screen,” 30 July 1929, Box 776, Performing Arts Collections, University of California-Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA; Later football films set at the Naval Academy included *Hold ‘Em Navy*, directed by Kurt Neumann, Paramount Pictures, 1937, and *Navy Blue and Gold*, directed by Sam Wood, Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1937.

<sup>34</sup> Halsey Davidson, *Navy Boys Behind the Big Guns, or, Sinking the German U-Boats* (New York: George Sully and Company, 1919), frontispiece.

period, and the fleet concentrations, such as those at Guantanamo Bay with its athletic facilities and few other opportunities ashore, offered ample opportunity for the crews of the various ships to compete against one another. In his diaries of the early 1920s, Lieutenant Dan Gallery, a member of the Navy's 1920 Olympic team, described the fevered preparations made by the crew of the battleship *Delaware* before it arrived at Guantanamo in January 1921. During the eight days his ship moored there, he observed or participated in numerous sporting events, including baseball, wrestling, and boxing. The competitions involved advanced planning and practice to the point that the crew erected batting cages on the ship's deck just to keep their batting strokes fresh.<sup>35</sup>

The Navy's establishment of athletic events for officers and men certainly encouraged the growth and development of sailors, but it also helped sailors maintain their competitive spirit. Throughout the interwar period, Navy officials would call attention to other means of instilling this spirit among the fleet. During the fleet concentration periods that occurred during the winter and spring months, the Navy held a variety of target and engineering competitions among the ships and crews of the fleet. Successful crews could then proudly display their "E" pennants for the next calendar year in recognition of their achievements. The Navy attempted to promote the results of these annual competitions and impart a sense of pride in the accomplishment of the victorious crews. For example, in a 1922 press release, Admiral E.W. Eberle labeled the crew of the battleship *California*, which had recently won the Battle Efficiency Pennant,

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Shenk, ed., *Playships of the World: The Naval Diaries of Admiral Dan Gallery, 1920-1924* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 7, 69-77. While at Guantanamo, Gallery transferred from the *Delaware* to the *Arizona*.

as embodiments of the “true Navy spirit.” These competitions also became fodder for Hollywood films. In the 1930 comedy *True to the Navy*, “Bull’s Eye” McCoy is an extraordinarily accurate gunner aboard the battleship *Mississippi* who commands respect for his ability to aim shots for his turret crew. As the annual competition nears, McCoy runs afoul of gamblers in San Diego who, through several plot twists, place bets against the *Mississippi* earning the coveted “E.” This competitiveness has its limits in the film, however, as McCoy is saved from a bar brawl when his girlfriend beckons dozens of enlisted men from other battleships to rescue him.<sup>36</sup>

The third and final characteristic imbued in the Ideal Sailor was selflessness, both to the nation and to his shipmates. The peacetime Navy largely attempted to showcase the value placed upon the individual while in naval service, but the Navy imparted to recruits that they could only truly benefit from their time if they were willing to subordinate themselves both to the Navy and to the nation as a whole. Much of the time this involved conforming to group expectations, but also implied that only through clear demonstrations of heroism and sacrifice could the Ideal Sailor acquit himself in the eyes of the Navy and of his peers.

The Navy defined selflessness in terms of suppressing one’s selfish and petty desires, and rededicating one’s life “to a noble cause,” and becoming “inspired by a noble motive.” For the officer corps, this process of assimilation occurred at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. The Academy could “shape character,” teach “self-

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<sup>36</sup> Navy Department, Memo for the Press, 14 August 1922, pp 1-2, B4, E113, RG 80, NAB. Utley, *An American Battleship*, 62; *True to the Navy*, directed by Frank Tuttle, Paramount Pictures, 1930.



control,” and forge a “band of brothers” with a shared outlook and purpose.

Midshipmen learned by example, either from their instructors or from their senior midshipmen-students, and did so while living “a life of simplicity, governed by rigid discipline.” The Navy argued that the Academy provided an ideal environment for molding raw young men into worthy naval officers.<sup>37</sup>

The spate of Hollywood films set at the Naval Academy in the latter 1920s and 1930s constituted the most widely visible means through which the Navy could demonstrate the values of a naval career. These films tended to emphasize the process of assimilation through which troubled midshipmen finally learned the responsibilities involved in becoming an officer and serving the nation. Jack Austin in *Midshipman Jack* (1933) repeats his senior year due to issues with discipline and conduct. In *Shipmates Forever* (1935), popular bandleader Richard Melville III enters the Academy to prove to his father, an admiral retired from fleet command now serving as the Academy’s superintendent, that he could pass the entrance examination and excel academically. Roger Ash in 1937’s *Navy Blue and Gold* views the Academy as the ticket to “780 bucks a year, [a] swell uniform, plenty of hot groceries, [and] every chance in the world to marry a nice hot blonde bankroll.” All three characters lacked the maturity and selflessness to effectively integrate into the officer corps when they were plebes, i.e., first year students, and each of the films shows how their classmates resent this lack of dedication. The attitudes and actions of the principal characters stand in

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<sup>37</sup> Extract from *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 June 1929, B87, EP 3, RG 428, NACP. Mason, *Hanson Weight Baldwin*, I:111. Office of Naval Intelligence, *Information Concerning the U.S. Navy and Other Navies* (Washington: GPO, 1925), 14.

stark contrast to the numerous visual signifiers used to depict life at the Academy. All three of these films visually display the level of coordination and discipline necessary to become officers, including shots of dozens of new plebes taking the oath of enlistment in hallowed Bancroft Hall to numerous long shots of midshipmen marching in formation on drill fields.<sup>38</sup>

Invariably, the service's core values as expressed as their fellow midshipmen transform these characters. Melville, a dilettante and outcast from much of the rest of his class, begins to understand the value of naval service from Johnny "Coxswain" Lawrence, an enlisted man who earned a competitive appointment to the Naval Academy but was profoundly disappointed that he could not maintain a good academic record. Roger Ash undergoes a similar transformation thanks to John Cross, a midshipman who changed his name to hide his lineage, his father having been blamed for running his destroyer aground in World War I and killing twenty-six of his crew. Cross, like Lawrence, could not bear the thought of giving up his dream of becoming a naval officer, a desire which rubs off on Ash. Jack Austin decides to accept blame for an accident caused by a lower classman under his command so that the man could remain in the Academy, but the commandant declines both a punishment and his resignation.

While the Academy could transform the lives of the men who attended it, the inculcation of selflessness was not confined solely to depictions of aspiring officers. The 1934 film *Here Comes the Navy* depicted rough-and-tumble shipyard worker Chesty O'Connor becoming a dependable, if still rough around the edges, enlisted man. As with

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<sup>38</sup> *Shipmates Forever*, directed by Frank Borzage, Warner Brothers Pictures, 1935; *Navy Blue and Gold*; *Midshipman Jack*, directed by Christy Cabanne, RKO Radio Pictures, 1933.

the characters entering the Naval Academy, Chesty's motives for enlisting are far from pure. Following several encounters with petty officer Biff Martin, including a brawl outside of a dance hall, Chesty decides to enlist to get back at Biff and prove that the Navy made a mistake in accepting Biff as a man. Chesty fails to take heed of his ex-girlfriend's warning, "They only take men in the Navy," and found the transition to naval discipline difficult. Like many other naval films of the period, *Here Comes the Navy* uses shots of men marching in formation to represent the orderliness and attractiveness of naval service, but the importance of such sights are lost on Chesty. Following an incident in which Chesty circumvents his orders denying him further liberty, Chesty is court-martialed and shunned by the other enlisted men. Even after receiving the Navy Cross for putting out a fire in the gun turret of his ship, the battleship *Arizona*, the honor and significance of the decoration is lost on Chesty. In the midst of a grand ceremony with the crew of the ship looking on and an admiral in attendance, Chesty visibly smirks at the level of attention focused upon him. Chesty finally proves himself to the Navy and receives the respect of Biff when he rescues Biff from certain death. Biff is caught up in the trailing lines of the airship *Macon* as it hovers above an air show, and the film depicts the level of risk Chesty assumes by selflessly lowering himself down a rope and then carrying Biff to the ground via parachute. While not explicitly stated at the end of the film, it is strongly implied that Chesty, now fully conformed to the naval lifestyle and discipline, will remain in the service for the duration of his career.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Here Comes the Navy*, directed by Lloyd Bacon, Warner Brothers Studios, 1934.

Another way in which enlisted men could demonstrate their commitment to service was by attending the Naval Academy. In yet another program created during Daniels' tenure at the Navy Department, the program allowed enlisted men to take an exam to measure their qualifications and for twenty-five to enter the Naval Academy each year via this route. Intended as a means of "democratizing" the Navy and narrowing the gulf between officer and enlisted man, the program proved immediately successful as the first man to graduate from the Academy under such terms did so at the top of his class. The small number of appointments available perhaps limited the impact of the program, but its small size did not prevent it from factoring into Navy publicity. Both *Midshipman Jack* (1933) and *Shipmates Forever* (1935) prominently featured the transition faced by enlisted men who rotated out of the fleet and into Academy life. The characters, Russell Burns and Johnny "Coxswain" Lawrence are both shown as bright, knowledgeable men, but their strongest assets are their personal character. Burns' self-discipline wore off on his superior, Jack Austin, who had to repeat his fourth year at the Academy due to a "conduct problem." Johnny upbraids Richard Melville for his disregard for a naval career, thus leading Melville to rededicate himself towards succeeding. In fact, both Austin and Melville become so transformed by their relationships with the former enlisted men that they nearly sacrifice their careers and lives to protect them when tragedy strikes. In these instances, the enlisted men-

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turned-midshipmen thus served as models of personal discipline and reverence for naval tradition that many of their peers lacked.<sup>40</sup>

The acceptance of selflessness called upon officers and men to act decisively when confronted with dangerous situations. At times, publicity and positive press coverage resulted when men displayed heroism in such pressure-filled situations. On 8 September 1923, a squadron of destroyers attempted to transit the Santa Barbara Channel at 9 pm during a speed run from San Francisco to San Diego when they ran aground at Point Honda just outside the entrance to the channel proper. Seven of the destroyers ran aground on the jagged rocks of the California coastline and three of the other ships barely escaped catastrophe in the midst of a dense fog. Rescue operations proved difficult in the surf, and eventually twenty three men from two of the destroyers died. The number of casualties from the disaster made it one of the deadliest accidents suffered by the interwar Navy.<sup>41</sup>

While the aftermath of the accident brought about recriminations and the assignment of blame, the actions of the men involved in the rescue efforts received significant press coverage that conveyed to the public the willingness of Navy men to risk their own lives for those of their shipmates. A feature story in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* about the accident described the “coolness and courage” which led to the rescue of hundreds of men on the trapped destroyers despite the terrible conditions at the

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<sup>40</sup> Navy Department, Hold for Release, 30 September 1926, B86, EP 3, RG 428, NACP. *Midshipman Jack; Shipmates Forever*.

<sup>41</sup> For a detailed account of the Point Honda disaster, see Charles Lockwood, Hans Christian Adamson, *Tragedy at Honda: One of America's Greatest Naval Disasters* (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1960). For additional detail and a discussion of the Navy's handling of news of the accidents see Chapter VIII.

scene. The destroyer *Young* suffered the worst in the accident when it struck the rocks and began to capsize. The article notes how men from the *Chauncey*, a destroyer which had run aground when it moved in to provide assistance to its stricken sisters, engaged in daring rescue operations to remove many of the men from the *Young* before the latter ship capsized. The article also recounted the efforts of the crewmen aboard the *Delphy* who tried to rescue a shipmate, a fireman covered in fuel oil, but were unable to remove him to safety in time before the man drowned in the surf. Perhaps the most selfless act occurred in the aftermath of the accident when the squadron commander, Captain Edward Watson, accepted all of the blame for the accident in an effort to spare the other senior officers involved. Watson's actions earned him praise and likely helped all but one of the other officers tried by court martial to escape punishment.<sup>42</sup>

The Navy would continue to single out heroic actions of service members in the 1930s when circumstances arose. During Fleet Problem XV in 1934, a plane from one of the participating aircraft carriers went down at sea, leaving its pilot in a precarious position. A nearby torpedo plane arrived on the scene, and a member of its crew left the cockpit and crawled along the wing of the aircraft so that he could drop an inflatable rubber boat to the stranded pilot while he waited for a rescue vessel to arrive. Secretary of the Navy Claude Swanson praised the actions of the crewmember for his actions during the rescue and issued a special press release on the matter to call attention to the deed.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Charles G. Ross, "Untold Stories of High Heroism in Recent Destroyer Disaster," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 2 December 1923, 13. B114, EP 3, RG 428, NACP.

<sup>43</sup> Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 8 April 1934, pp 1-2, B24, E113, RG 80, NAB.

If the interwar Ideal Sailor demonstrated to the public his desire and ability to serve in the Navy, the archetype also projected acceptable ways to die while in naval service. Given that a majority of depictions of the Navy from the period focused on the routine peacetime operation of the fleet, the incidence of death was significantly reduced. Obviously, the Navy could not hope to attract men into the service if the specter of death loomed large for any prospective midshipman or recruit. That said, the depictions of death established the circumstances under which officers and men could be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice while serving in the interwar Navy.

Most commonly, the proper death of the Ideal Sailor involved a noble sacrifice for his shipmates. For instance, in the climax of the film *Hell Below* (1933), Lieutenant Thomas Knowlton is a troubled officer but eventually comes to greatly respect his commanding officer. Nearing the end of a suicide mission intended to destroy a German submarine base, Knowlton pushes his commanding officer overboard so that he can helm his explosive-laden submarine, the *AL-14*, into a concrete bastion protecting the bastion. Knowlton completes the mission despite receiving three separate wounds from German machine guns and shore batteries. The film's closing shot dramatizes his death by showing the machine gunning of his cap floating on the surface of the water. While personally tragic, the sacrifice of his life and of his boat allowed the Allies to maintain control of the sea lanes in the region.<sup>44</sup>

One significant variation to the rule occurred in the 1935 film *Annapolis Farewell*. The bulk of the film focuses upon the activities of a group midshipman at the

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<sup>44</sup> *Hell Below*, directed by Jack Conway, Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1933.

Naval Academy, but an aging naval veteran, Commander Fitzhugh, receives a significant amount of screen time. Fitzhugh is shown as an old man prone to delusion but who fondly recalls to the aspiring officers his role in the triumphant Battle of Manila Bay in the Spanish-American War. The midshipmen treat Fitzhugh as a curiosity, but the aging officer is saddened to discover that the ship he served on at Manila Bay, the fictional battleship *Congress*, was to be destroyed as a target during gunnery exercises. Fitzhugh decides to visit his ship on the eve of its destruction and remains aboard as the exercises begin. This bizarre chain of events eventually allows the fading warrior to go down with his ship, but it grants Fitzhugh a more honorable and dignified death than he was otherwise likely to receive.<sup>45</sup>

Sometimes, however, films depicted more ignominious ways to die in the Navy. Rather than coolly accepting one's fate or saving one's comrades, sometimes sailors found themselves panicked and became hysterical when faced with the end of their lives. The submarine films of the interwar period provide interesting contrasts between noble and ignoble ways of accepting one's fate. In Frank Capra's *Submarine* (1928), the men on the stricken boat initially react calmly to their plight, believing rescue to be imminent. Yet, as the hours pass by, the men grow increasingly disenchanted, and the film emphasizes their plight by showing the poor light, thickened air, and the tight spaces the sailors must endure. One man becomes hysterical under these circumstances, but he is not derided by his comrades; instead, the camera shows the calm, almost stoic reactions of the sailor's shipmates to their collective plight. The submarine's captain offers to let

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<sup>45</sup> "Annapolis Farewell – Release Dialogue Script," 16 August 1935, Paramount Script Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA.



the men kill themselves with a pistol rather than asphyxiate or descend into madness, but rescuers reach the submarine before anyone took up the captain's offer. Later films depicting submarine accidents would show similar reactions among the crew. A small number inevitably break under the extreme stress of their situations while the majority respond coolly to their respective crises and display the courage the Navy argued its men embodied. These behaviors can be seen in several other depictions of the submarine service produced during the interwar period, including *Men Without Women* (1930), and the remake of *Submarine*, *The Devil's Playground* (1937).

One of the most important facets of the image of the Ideal Sailor is the relationship between officers and enlisted men in such publicity. The traits of the Ideal Sailor cut across such divides, but this did not mean that there was no great distinction between the two classes; on the contrary, recruiting materials often emphasized key differences between officers and men. The Navy advocated far different standards of discipline for officers as opposed to enlisted men when asking for changes to film scripts; however, the most significant difference between the two classes came in the length of their expected careers. As demonstrated previously, films set at the Naval Academy sometimes shows midshipmen with less than a whole-hearted commitment to a naval career being shunned by classmates. Talk of resigning one's commission was seen as an act of near-heresy. Thus, officers formed an ascetic professional class apart from the men.

For enlisted men, however, the Navy attempted to show that even a brief stint in the service could result in learning a trade useful in the civilian job market. In fact, the

Navy rebuked an attempt by recruiters in West Virginia in 1919 to denigrate civilian jobs relative to that of a naval career. In 1921, at the end of his tenure as Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels authored an article entitled “Training Men for the Navy and the Nation” which appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Daniels described a fictional everyman turned naval recruit named George Dewey Jones, a “tall, clear-eyed, boyish chap.” Jones decided to enlist in the service to break free of his “land-born and land bred” background and to see the “wide, wide world.” Once in the Navy, Jones took advantage of the opportunities that the service had to offer, including “manly sports” and educational opportunities designed to have a “democratizing” effect on both the service and the nation, and, most importantly, to develop technical skills which earned the praise of business leaders on the lookout for better employees. Thus, the Navy served as a means for enlisted men, especially those who had no desire for a lengthy naval career, to forge ahead in their own lives. For years thereafter, recruiters and naval officials described the Navy as the “largest trade school in the nation,” one capable of taking relatively raw and unskilled men from across the nation and teaching them not just morals and discipline but practical skills valued in the civilian job market.<sup>46</sup>

This emphasis on brief enlistments did not mean that the Navy failed to encourage men to make the service their career or demonstrate the benefits which would result from such a choice. By the 1930s, as the Great Depression eviscerated the civilian job market, many enlisted men made this choice or had it made for them, leading to re-

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<sup>46</sup> Josephus Daniels, “Training Men for the Navy and the Nation,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 9 April 1921, 21-4, 78-83. BuNav to Officer in Charge, Navy Recruiting Station, Parkersburg, WV, “Gratuitous Advertising,” B396, E89, RG 24, NAB.

enlistment rates above ninety percent and a marked increase in the quality of personnel recruited. Despite this development of long term service in the Navy, its leaders still continued to argue that the service trained men suitable for civilian employment as late as October 1939 when it promoted the learning of a “useful trade” for young men wishing to join the service (Fig. 8).<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 8: “Service Afloat,” 1939. Photo NH-76806, Photographic Section.

By the end of the interwar period, the process of idealizing naval service had become an entrenched part of Navy public relations. The media that created the image of the Ideal Sailor profoundly altered patterns of naval recruiting. The Navy may have succeeded in its general goal of depicting its officers and men in the most positive ways,

<sup>47</sup> *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1932* (Washington: GPO, 1933), 22; Photo NH-76806, Photographic Section.

but this process of image enhancement relied greatly upon the complicity and support of external actors. These external media, including books and films, broadened the narrative scope and helped provide deeper motivations for joining naval service beyond those conveyed in posters and brief recruiting films. From an organizational perspective, the Navy benefitted from the relationships it had forged during the interwar period and allowed the service to maintain itself as the nation's "first line of defense."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Hugh M. Rodman, "A Navy Day Address," 27 October 1922, B5, E113, RG 80, NAB.

## CHAPTER VIII

### REPLACING THE FAMILIAR WITH THE NEW: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF NAVAL TRANSFORMATION, 1919-1939

A recurring theme of Navy publicity throughout the interwar period was the service's reliance upon technology. Of course, technology is necessary simply to venture out to sea, but the U.S. Navy's ability to master new technologies available in the interwar period was called into question by aviation advocates, such as Brigadier General William Mitchell. To the service's credit, it expanded its force structure during the interwar period to include larger combat roles for both aviation and submarines to create what was called the "three plane" Navy: it would dominate the surface of the ocean, the air above it, and the depths beneath it. This was a transparent process as the general public could gauge the Navy's progress through newspapers, periodicals, newsreels, and feature films. At times, however, technology and its users failed one another. The Navy suffered numerous high-profile accidents during the interwar period, requiring the service to develop a means of responding to specific incidents and crises. These incidents resulted in the loss of men, machines, and public confidence in the service's ability to innovate. Thus, the service needed to convince the public that it valued the lives of its aviators and submariners and worked to make them safe despite the dangers these men faced when venturing into hostile environments.

At the end of World War I, the battleship remained the dominant weapon in naval warfare. The vessel had sat atop the hierarchy of naval warfare since the days of the ship-of-the-line in the Age of Sail, and, to many, the conduct of the war had done

little to shake faith in a proven technology. The U.S. Navy had expanded rapidly beginning in the 1890s and the number of battleships built benchmarked each of the construction programs authorized by Congress. To gain credibility with the public and with foreign competitors, the Navy constructed a fleet of large, modern battleships. The wartime construction boom, most notably the 1916 authorization for ten battleships and six battlecruisers passed just after the Battle of Jutland, solidified the battleship's status within the Navy.

The positions taken by Secretary Josephus Daniels and other naval officials during the postwar debates over naval policy seemingly revealed that the Navy's conception of warfare had changed little from the prewar era. Daniels, citing a recent General Board study, argued in February 1921 that the lack of battleship engagements during the war had only reinforced the notion that battleships constituted the "basis of sea power." Later that year, during the bombing trials off the Virginia Capes, the Navy claimed that these tests had done little to shake its faith in the battleship; for the remainder of the interwar period, the Navy continued to define the battleship as the final arbiter of naval warfare. This would lead to the perception that a "Gun Club" of battleship officers dominated the Navy and inhibited the development of alternative weapons systems. This perception masked the Navy's status as a "progressive" institution desiring to integrate the latest technologies into its arsenal. If naval officers

inhibited innovation, they risked personal, professional, and national pride to justify technological ossification.<sup>1</sup>

While senior naval officials publicly expressed support for the battleship's continued importance, other avenues of naval publicity emphasized the benefits of a strong air arm. A poster issued by the Recruiting Bureau after the 1921 bombing tests depicted the ability of aircraft to sink warships. Released under the "What the Navy is Doing" series, the poster entitled "Naval Vessels Sunk by Aerial Bombs" shows the German destroyer *G-102* struggling to stay afloat following an attack by Army aircraft (Fig. 9). While the poster notes that the Army and Navy jointly conducted the tests, the fact remains that the *G-102* was attacked only by Army aircraft; it was the first vessel attacked and sunk after General Mitchell became personally involved in the tests. Curiously, the Navy decided not to use photographs of the German light cruiser *Frankfurt* sunk later during the round of tests by aircraft from both services.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Navy News Bureau, Release Noon Thursday, 3 February 1921, p. 8, B12, EP 3, RG 428, NACP. The "Gun Club" factors heavily into Clark G. Reynolds' *The Fast Carriers: The Forging of an Air Navy* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968) and Robert O'Connell's *Sacred Vessels: The Cult of the Battleship and the Rise of the U.S. Navy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Photo NH 76739-KN, Photographic Section.

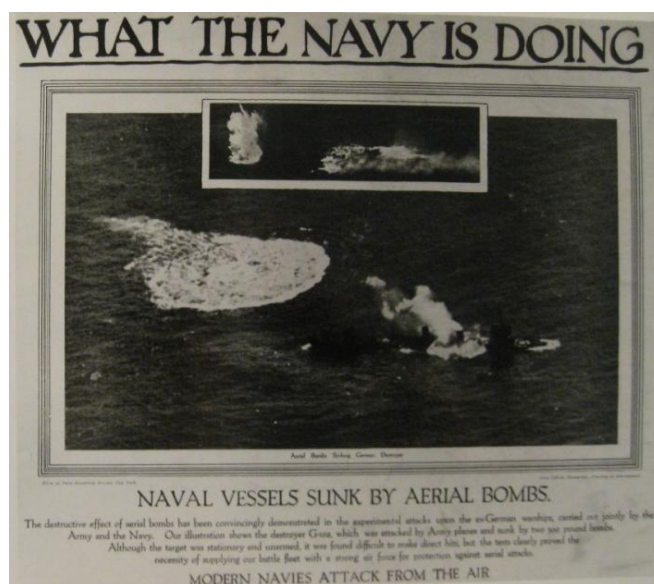


Fig. 9: “Naval Vessels Sunk by Aerial Bombs,” c. 1921. Photo NH 76739-KN, Photographic Section.

The strong public statements made by officials in favor of the battleship also threatened to overshadow the service’s touting of a “three plane” navy. The service had recognized from its experience in World War I that aircraft and submarines – both recent inventions compared with the battleship – could have profound effects on naval warfare. As the Navy emerged from the war, however, its capabilities in both of the new technologies lagged in comparison to the major European powers. The battleship-building holiday consented to at the Washington Conference retarded battleship development and channeled resources into aviation and submarines. Given that the service had measured its strength by the size of its battleship fleet since the turn of the century, reorienting the fleet to incorporate new technological paradigms would not be easy. Analyses of these potential changes in the force structure began to appear in the press and argued that the Navy needed to replace “the familiar” with the new and to stay



abreast of these new technologies. While the public may have agreed that the balanced fleet was a desirable outcome, it needed to be convinced that the Navy could develop and effectively utilize these new technologies.<sup>3</sup>

Promotion of aviation began just after World War I when the technology itself was still in its infancy. At the time, the bureaucracy that managed aviation remained limited to the Director of Naval Aviation position and a small staff with only limited control of the fleet's aviation arm. This did not prevent the service from showcasing its aircraft for public relations purposes. In May 1919, following a recommendation from Commander John Towers, the Navy sent a group of three large Curtiss NC flying boats to fly across the Atlantic. Two of the flying boats encountered mechanical difficulties en route, but the third, the NC-4, completed its journey from Newfoundland to Lisbon in nearly eleven days. This achievement placed the Navy and the crew of the plane, led by pilot Lieutenant A.C. Read, on the front pages of newspapers around the country and was a cornerstone of Navy public relations for several years. But in the pantheon of long-distance flights, the NC-4 quickly lost significance two weeks later when British aviators John Alcock and Arthur Whitten-Brown completed a nonstop transatlantic flight from Newfoundland to Ireland. In spite of the difficulties encountered during the flight

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<sup>3</sup> E.G. Lowry, "Three-Plane Navy," *Saturday Evening Post*, 11 June 1921, 16. The effect of the Washington Conference development is explored in several books, including John T. Kuehn, *Agents of Innovation: The General Board and the Design of the Fleet that Defeated the Japanese Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008) and Norman Friedman, et.al., *American and British Aircraft Carrier Development, 1919-1941* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999).

of the NC-4, Daniels encouraged more long distance flights and suggested that long-range flying boats attempt a distance flight at least once every quarter.<sup>4</sup>

The Navy also began to show an interest in air racing by 1920 and submitted several entries to both the National Balloon Races and the heavier-than-air Pulitzer Trophy races, a competition designed to improve the top speed of aircraft. Air racing began in 1909 when France hosted the first major competition at Reims, and, by 1914, *New York Herald* publisher James Gordon Bennett and airplane enthusiast Jacques Schneider financed competitions designed to develop land-based aviation and seaplanes, respectively. World War I disrupted the sport's growth, but these competitions and a host of new races appeared in the aftermath of the war. The Navy had low expectations for the 1920 races but they proved important enough that Secretary Daniels attended them and foretold of a greater commitment of military resources into such competitions.<sup>5</sup>

While the Navy News Bureau had issued press releases to promote naval aviation prior to 1921, the amount of public exposure to naval aviation increased exponentially with the creation of the Bureau of Aeronautics in June of that year and the appointment of Rear Admiral William A. Moffett as its chief. As discussed in Chapter III, Moffett had a distinguished career and demonstrated an aptitude for public relations prior to his

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<sup>4</sup> Clark G. Reynolds, *Admiral John H. Towers: The Struggle for Naval Air Supremacy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), 127-66; Navy Department, Memo for the Press, 3 October 1922, B5, E113, RG 80, NAB; *New York Times*, "Alcock and Brown Fly Across Atlantic," 16 June 1919, 1; Navy News Bureau, Immediate Release, 25 March 1920, B1, E113, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>5</sup> Don Berliner, *Airplane Racing: A History, 1909-2008* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 9-46; Navy News Bureau, Immediate Release, 23 November 1920, B2, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy News Bureau, Immediate Release, 24 November 1920, pp 1-8, B2, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy News Bureau, Immediate Release, 24 November 1920, B2, E113, RG 80, NAB.

term at the Bureau. Moffett would quickly expand many of the activities already in place and use those to increase public interest in naval aviation.

Moffett built upon the Navy's nascent efforts in air racing and viewed these competitions as a means of attracting public attention. During air racing's peak in the 1920s, the Navy focused its energies on competing in three different races: the Pulitzer Trophy, the Schneider Cup; and the Curtiss Marine Trophy. The Navy enjoyed its most significant successes in 1923; in late September, a team of naval aviators captained by Lieutenant Frank "Spig" Wead represented the United States during the Schneider Cup races in Cowes, England. Lieutenants David Rittenhouse and Rutledge Irvine finished in first and second place and Rittenhouse set a seaplane speed record of 177 miles per hour. A week later, Lieutenant Alford J. "Al" Williams flew at a record speed of 243 miles per hour to win the Pulitzer Trophy. In early November, Lieutenant H.B. Brow flew an aircraft in excess of 265 miles per hour during an exhibition over Mitchell Field in New York with Williams close behind.<sup>6</sup>

These events provided several opportunities for the Navy and for the Bureau of Aeronautics to trumpet the advancement of naval aviation. In the weeks leading up to the 1923 races, Navy press releases predicted that existing speed records would be "shattered" at the upcoming competitions. When speaking with reporters after his record-setting Pulitzer Trophy run, Williams reported that the physical strains were so immense that he slipped in and out of consciousness during the tight, high speed turns

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<sup>6</sup> Navy Department, For Release, 19 July 1923, B5, E113, RG 80, NAB; *New York Times*, "Americans First in Cowes Air Race," 29 September 1923, 2; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 28 September 1923, B5, E113, RG 80, NAB; *Baltimore Sun*, "World Record Made by Flyer in Race," 7 October 1923, 1; *Boston Globe*, "Fastest Flight Just Cuts Five Miles a Minute," 3 November 1923, 1.

and that his “damned legs were asleep” due to the lack of blood flow. The press eagerly covered these races and other record-setting events in a variety of sports for subscribers to marvel at. Editorialists speculated on the top speeds possible with propeller driven aircraft. The usually enthusiastic Brigadier General William Mitchell claimed that speeds could top out at 300 miles per hour, while others argued that 500 mph remained attainable. Due to the nature of the flight course, which involved several tight turns, Williams’ Pulitzer Trophy achievement would be seen as a “freak” record of human progress for years to come and he would be held up as one of a select group of “speed champions.” In September 1925, Williams set another speed record. He surpassed Mitchell’s threshold when he piloted his Curtiss racer to a speed of 302 miles per hour; this feat made front page news in numerous prominent newspapers.<sup>7</sup>

The constant striving for speed drew attention to the air racing program, and naval officials reasoned that the development had more practical effects on aeronautical progress. As previously stated, Moffett justified air racing efforts to further the performance of combat aircraft. Air races showcased “radical innovations in aircraft design” guaranteed to improve naval aircraft, such as the use of monoplanes or retractable landing gear. To further reinforce this point the Navy argued after the 1923 Schneider Cup competition that seaworthiness and speed were the most desirable characteristics of seaplanes. The maintenance of these racing teams allowed the Navy to

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<sup>7</sup> Navy Department, For Release, 19 July 1923, B5, E113, RG 80, NAB. *New York Times*, “High Speed Hazards in Aviation,” 7 November 1923, 16. Navy Department, Immediate Release, 31 October 1923, pp 1-2, B6, E113, RG 80, NAB; Robert Edgren, “Speed Champions Found Are Found in Numbers,” *Baltimore Sun*, 15 March 1925, sec. S, 2; *Boston Globe*, “Navy Plane Goes Five Miles a Minute,” 19 September 1925, 1. The *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times* likewise ran front-page stories detailing Williams’ flight.

develop stronger ties with aircraft manufacturers, even though the aircraft used in the races often bore little technical resemblance to machines used in operational settings.<sup>8</sup>

Beginning in 1924, one of the Navy's primary motivations for participating in air racing – to demonstrate the effectiveness of naval aircraft in relation to those of the Army Air Corps – disappeared by mutual agreement. In correspondence revealed to the public during Mitchell's court martial in 1925, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., proposed to General Mason Patrick that the two services cooperate in future races. Initially, the Army balked at this suggestion but relented weeks later when it appeared that funding cuts would limit future participation in air races. Mitchell's revelations were not surprising since a Navy press release issued on 30 March 1925 described the plan for the Army and Navy to collaborate during upcoming racing events that fall. While interservice cooperation in air racing pooled resources for both parties in an attempt to maintain their teams, the services had previously withdrawn from the 1924 Pulitzer Trophy race. The team sent to the Schneider Cup races in 1925 included fliers from both services, but Army Lieutenant James Doolittle bested his Navy counterparts and won the trophy for the United States.<sup>9</sup>

By the late 1920s, cutbacks in funding for air racing caused the Navy to curtail its involvement in the sport. In February 1927, the Navy issued a press release explaining its absence from the upcoming Schneider Cup race, arguing that "it has

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<sup>8</sup> Navy Department, Memo for the Press, 11 September 1922, B4, E113, RG 80, NAB. Navy Department, Immediate Release, 28 September 1923, B5, E113, RG 80, NAB; Trimble, *Admiral William A. Moffett*, 121-122.

<sup>9</sup> James O'Donnell Bennett, "Economy Plan Blamed for Air Service Fiasco," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 November 1925, 2; Navy Department, Release Morning Papers, 7 November 1926, pp 1-6, B10, E113, RG 80, NAB.

fostered racing as far as it [could] under present conditions.” The service hoped that civilian manufacturers would maintain an American presence in competitive air racing, and after 1929, the Navy’s involvement in races would be confined to events involving standard service aircraft or balloons. The Navy would enter aircraft for the Curtiss Marine Trophy during the next few years, but these races involved aircraft not specifically designed or modified for racing. During a speech in 1931, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for the Air David S. Ingalls repudiated previous statements regarding the factors shaping the design of naval aircraft when he stated that current planes, while fast, are designed for “cruising radius,” the ability to carry weapons and equipment, and the “extreme ruggedness,” to survive carrier landings. When discussing the end of the Navy’s involvement in racing, Moffett argued that the funds expended on developing high speed aircraft was “money well spent.”<sup>10</sup>

The drawdown of the Navy’s racing program occurred much to the dismay of Congress and the Navy’s most prominent pilot: Lieutenant Al Williams. During the late 1920s, the Navy allowed Williams to spend much of his time developing the Mercury Racer at the Naval Aircraft Factory in anticipation of future races, but the Williams plane failed to make a single flight in the 1929 Schneider Cup due to technical issues. Members of the House Naval Affairs Committee publicly claimed that they could not understand why the Navy, which had long touted the benefits of entering major racing competitions, suddenly lost interest in racing and appeared to allow foreign rivals to gain

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<sup>10</sup> Navy Department, Immediate Release, 9 February 1927, B10, E113, RG 80, NAB. Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 24 June 1931, B18, E113, RG 80, NAB. Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 23 July 1931, pp 1-2, B18, E113, RG 80, NAB.

a technological edge. Williams complained bitterly at the Navy for revoking his special status and ordering him to sea duty. Congress debated a resolution to promote Williams to captain and to place him on the retired list, but the Navy opposed the move, believing that it unfairly favored Williams over other prominent racers, such as Rittenhouse. Congress dropped the proposed resolution and Williams resigned his commission; he later joined the Marine Corps with the rank of captain and served in that branch until 1940 when he was forced to resign for advocating an independent air force. In hindsight, the imbroglio over Al Williams signaled the end of the Navy's interest in international aircraft racing.<sup>11</sup>

As the Navy's involvement in air races declined in the 1930s, the service continued to send aircraft to the air shows accompanying races during the period. These aircraft did not race but offered demonstrations of formation flying and other types of maneuvers to the large crowds in attendance. As early as 1928, Navy pilots established informal flight demonstration teams; the first of these was known as the Three Sea Hawks. The group consisted of pilots from the carrier *Saratoga* and flew at several public gatherings on the west coast, the most prominent of these being the 1928 National Air Races in Los Angeles. The team disbanded in 1929 when its members received new orders. While the Navy did not create permanent teams until the post-World War II creation of The Blue Angels, the service sent aircraft to the National Air Races each year to stage exhibition flights. The exhibitions provided excellent fodder for newsreel

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<sup>11</sup> Navy Press Room, For Release Wednesday Morning, 7 August 1929, pp 1-3, B13, E113, RG 80, NAB; *Los Angeles Times*, "Navy Air Work Inquiry Called," 16 March 1930, 12; Navy Press Room, For Information, 31 March 1930, B14, E113, RG 80, NAB; Report on Senate Resolution 235, 27 May 1930, B15, E113, RG 80, NAB; *New York Times*, "Alford Williams, Aviation Expert," 16 June 1958, 23.

cameras as Navy aircraft performed complicated maneuvers for delighted spectators below. The Navy only insisted that no other air show participants execute dangerous stunts lest the public link the service with daredevil maneuvers. Even if the Navy's participation in air races remained limited to exhibition flights, popular works of entertainment continued to associate the service with racing. The 1939 film *Tail Spin*, written by Frank Wead, focused upon the activities of female pilots as they compete in transcontinental races based on an actual event, the Women's Air Derby. To add color to the proceedings, Wead included a character who was a Navy pilot participating in the races.<sup>12</sup>

As part of his efforts to improve the public perception of naval aviation, Admiral Moffett also utilized the Navy's rigid airships for public relations work. During his tenure as the Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, Moffett became enamored with the possibilities posed by lighter-than-air craft. He emerged as the most outspoken advocate for airships within the Navy and proved instrumental in spurring the development of a series of progressively larger vessels. During World War I, Germany deployed a fleet of "Zeppelin" airships to serve as scouts and, more famously, to launch bombing raids against British cities. During the 1920s, when the development of fixed-wing aircraft

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<sup>12</sup> John Fry, *USS Saratoga CV-3: An Illustrated History of the Legendary Aircraft Carrier, 1927-1946* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1996), 27; Gordon Swanborough, Peter M. Bowers, *U.S. Navy Aircraft Since 1911* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1976), 71; Paul R. Matt, Bruce Robertson, *United States Navy and Marine Corps Fighters, 1918-1962* (Fallbrook, CA: Aero Publishers, 1962), 39-43; *Los Angeles Times*, "Throngs Cheer Vikings of the Air," 15 September 1928, sec. A, 1; Information on one of the earliest non-racing appearances at the National Air Races can be found in: Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 12 August 1929, B13, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 10 August 1928, B12, E113, RG 80, NAB; *Tail Spin*, directed by Roy Del Ruth, Fox Film Corporation, 1939.



stagnated, the airship was seen as an increasingly vital weapon of war. For Moffett, the endurance of airships made the type an ideal scouting craft for the fleet.<sup>13</sup>

While Moffett deserves credit for developing the airship for the Navy, the service first attempted to develop such craft prior to Moffett's appointment. The Navy ordered its first two airships in 1919 to not only study the type but also to stimulate private interest in developing airships. At the time of Moffett's appointment to the Bureau of Aeronautics in June 1921, the roles airships could assume in combat were well-defined; unfortunately, the utility of airships masked several key weaknesses. In fact, the Navy's second airship, the *ZR-2*, crashed in Britain in 1921 during a test flight before the service took formal possession of the craft. Though this crash did little to decrease enthusiasm for the type, it revealed that the technology involved in making airships into practical weapons had its limitations.<sup>14</sup>

The Navy's first domestically-built rigid airship, the *ZR-1*, entered service in late 1923 and instantly became an asset in Moffett's public relations campaigns as the craft attracted prominent media coverage. The maiden flight of the "dreadnought of the air" on 4 September 1923 over Lakehurst, New Jersey, attracted 15,000 spectators eager to catch a glimpse of the large, silver-doped airship. The following week the *ZR-1* flew over New York City and Philadelphia to great fanfare and intense media coverage. The airship would later fly over Washington D.C. and journeyed to St. Louis in a trip timed to coincide with the International Air Races. Moffett, who attended the air races,

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<sup>13</sup> Friedman, et al., *American and British Aircraft Carrier Development*, 22-3.

<sup>14</sup> Trimble, *Admiral William A. Moffett*, 127-28; Douglas H. Robinson, Charles L. Keller, *Up Ship!: A History of the U.S. Navy's Rigid Airships, 1919-1935* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 11, 43-9.

returned to Lakehurst aboard the *ZR-1*. The publicity blitz during the fall of 1923 ended with the airship, re-christened as the *Shenandoah*, making Navy Day overflights of Washington and Baltimore.<sup>15</sup>

During the next two years, Moffett tasked the *Shenandoah* with a seemingly never-ending series of promotional flights as he believed that additional appropriations for airships would be forthcoming from Congress if the public could witness the mighty craft. Of the *Shenandoah*'s fifty-nine flights undertaken between 1923 and 1925, those with a clear public relations function (nineteen) outnumbered the flights in which it operated as a member of the fleet (thirteen). Though the public and members of Congress routinely viewed this technological marvel, this came at the price of the Navy's failure to gain the operational experience necessary to turn the *Shenandoah* from a novelty into a proven asset.<sup>16</sup>

In October 1924, the *Shenandoah* undertook its longest journey yet when Moffett desired to visibly demonstrate the reliability of rigid airships by sending the craft on a cross-country, round-trip flight from Lakehurst to California. Flights across the continental United States proved troublesome because the warm, turbulent air over land wreaked havoc on a technology designed to function in the cool, relatively stable air masses found over the world's oceans. Moffett accepted these substantial risks so that

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<sup>15</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, "American Dreadnought of the Air Takes Trial Flight," 4 September 1923, 1. *New York Times*, "ZR-1 Encircles City in a 12-Hour Flight Over Three States," 12 September 1923, 1; BuNav to Moffett, "Orders of 26 September 1923, Modified," 16 October 1923, B4148, E62, RG 72, NAB; *Baltimore Sun*, "Shenandoah, New Giant Dirigible, To Fly Over Baltimore Navy Day," 23 October 1923, sec. SS, 24.

<sup>16</sup> Robinson and Keller, *Up Ship!*, 71.

the Navy could publicly respond to the recent around-the-world flight undertaken by the Army Air Service. To Moffett, the *Shenandoah* needed to prove that it was not just a “fair weather ship” and that it could successfully fly for long distances as would be necessary during scouting missions over the Pacific. Moffett personally flew aboard the *Shenandoah* as it crossed the country and encountered some difficulties over the southern Rockies; the craft survived without damage and completed the trip in only forty hours.<sup>17</sup>

The use of the latest and most advanced aircraft in the Navy’s arsenal won Moffett and the Bureau public acclaim and, when combined with Moffett’s keen political maneuverings, tempered threats to establish an independent air service. Using naval aircraft and airships for public relations, however, always posed risks and these manifested in September 1925. In the previous months, the Bureau of Aeronautics had planned a long distance “hop” from California to Hawaii using a pair of PN-9 flying boats. Moffett had initially proposed to employ Navy aircraft for an around-the-world flight similar to the Army’s circumnavigational flight, but the Army’s mission had involved a significant logistical effort and eventually required Navy ships and personnel to maintain the flight. The press estimated that the flight cost the Army \$200,000 but that the Navy spent \$300,000 to support the venture. The Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet, Admiral Robert E. Coontz, rejected Moffett’s proposal for a round-the-world flight and instead scaled back the flight to traverse the California-Hawaii route.

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<sup>17</sup> Navy Department, Immediate Release, 22 September 1923, B5, E113, RG 80, NAB. *New York Times*, “Story of the Trip by Wireless from Airship,” 8 October 1924, 1; *New York Times*, “Shenandoah Makes Pacific Coast Goal,” 11 October 1924, 1.

The Pan-Pacific Union, a group dedicated to fostering ties between nations along the Pacific Rim, had already broached the subject of such a flight to Moffett, arguing that proving the feasibility of the California-Hawaii route would garner interest from airlines interested in establishing a regular route.<sup>18</sup>

In September 1925, the Bureau also planned a flight of the *Shenandoah* to several sites in the Midwest to visit state fairs and other public gatherings from Ohio to Minnesota. The airship's commanding officer, Commander Zachary Lansdowne, attempted to postpone the trip from the first week of September to the following week to avoid predicted thunderstorms. Lansdowne's experience with the 1923 transcontinental flight of the *Shenandoah* allowed him to recognize the potential dangers of extended overland flights, but the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral E. W. Eberle, denied his request for postponement because the state's fairs would conclude by Lansdowne's proposed starting date. Lansdowne raised no further objection to the flight plan, but, privately, expressed some reservations to his wife prior to the *Shenandoah*'s departure from Lakehurst on 2 September. The next day, the *Shenandoah* encountered a violent updraft while flying through a storm and broke apart over Ava, Ohio. The crash killed fourteen of the forty-three men aboard the airship, including Lansdowne. It was one of the deadliest accidents the Navy suffered throughout the interwar period.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Literary Digest*, "Army, Navy and the Airplane," 14 Mar. 1925, 71-2; CINCUS to CNO, "Proposed Flight from Honolulu to Australia," 27 December 1924, B141, E62, RG 72, NAB; A.H. Ford to Moffett, 2 October 1924, B141, E62, RG 72, NAB; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 24 August 1925, pp 1-3, B8, E113, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>19</sup> Robinson and Keller, *Up Ship!*, 104-9; Navy Department, Immediate Release, c. September 1925, pp 1-3, B8, E113, RG 80, NAB.

On that same day, news reports began appearing announcing that one of the PN-9 flying boats making the California-Hawaii flight had disappeared somewhere over the Pacific Ocean. The plane, piloted by Commander John Rodgers and crewed by four men, exhausted its fuel supply before reaching its destination and failed to appear over the guardships positioned to provide essential navigational aid and fuel. Using ships and aircraft the Navy searched the seas east of Hawaii but found no trace of the PN-9. In conjunction with the crash of the *Shenandoah*, the first week of September 1925 marked the nadir of Moffett and the Navy's efforts to persuade the public of the efficacy of naval aviation.<sup>20</sup>

The twin crashes opened the Navy to a torrent of criticism in the press as it questioned the Navy's ability to manage its advanced technological assets. Some news outlets speculated that a radical overhaul of naval aviation policy lay ahead and that the Navy's airship program would come to an end with the crash of the *Shenandoah*. Others debated whether naval aviation "need[ed] advertising badly enough" to justify the risks associated with lengthy flights and argued that senior officials should show "prudence" and watch out for the pilots' safety. Secretary of the Navy Curtis D. Wilbur responded to the criticism by stating that senior officers had issued the orders "lawfully," that the motivations for the flights did not stem from "political maneuverings," and that Rodgers

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<sup>20</sup> Address by CMDR John Rodgers over WCAP radio, Washington, D.C., 27 October 1925, pp 1-4, B8, E113, RG 80, NAB.

and Lansdowne both had the right and opportunity to cancel their respective missions and failed to do so.<sup>21</sup>

The Navy had given up hope of finding the PN-9 but, on 11 September, the craft appeared off the coast of Kauai with all of its crew members alive and in good spirits. After having run out of fuel, Rodgers and his crew fashioned a makeshift sail in the hope that the wind currents would carry them through the Hawaiian Islands and allow them to be seen before drifting to their seemingly unavoidable deaths in the Central Pacific. Rodgers would later testify at a board of inquiry hearing that the Navy Department and the Bureau of Aeronautics should remain blameless for its handling of his flight. In response to criticism that the Navy rejected any assistance offered by the Army to search for his plane, Rodgers argued that the Navy did so wisely due to the lack of available rescue vessels in the area. Rodgers and his crew would be lauded as heroes in the press, and Rodgers remained in the public eye for months afterwards, serving as a featured Navy Day speaker that year. The story of his flight would be dramatized favorably in the 1929 film *The Flying Fleet*.<sup>22</sup>

The crash of the *Shenandoah* sparked a debate concerning the practicality of airships given the high number of fatal crashes in the United States and abroad during

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<sup>21</sup> *Boston Globe*, "Terrible Risks," 5 September 1923, 16. Navy Department, Press Release, 9 September 1925, pp 1-2, B8, E113, RG 80, NAB. *Washington Post*, "Loss of Two Ships Expected to Force Change in Program," 4 September 1923, 1; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 2 October 1925, pp 1-6, B8, E113, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>22</sup> Navy Department, Immediate Release, 2 October 1925, pp 1-6, B8, E113, RG 80, NAB; Address by CMDR John Rodgers over WCAP radio, Washington, D.C., 27 October 1925, pp 1-4, B8, E113, RG 80, NAB; *Washington Post*, "Heroes of the PN-9," 12 September 1925, 6; Rodgers recounted the tale of survival for himself and his crew in "First PN-1 Story by John Rodgers," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 1925, sec. A, 1; *The Flying Fleet*, directed by George W. Hill, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1929.

the 1920s. Moffett's lofty promises of airships blazing new trails for civilian controlled craft and the usefulness of the type in naval warfare remained hypothetical. The *Shenandoah* crash underscored the dangers airships confronted in rough weather. Fortunately, Navy airships did not have to worry about the danger of fire as other nations' airships did since the United States possessed the only helium supply in the world. On 3 October, Moffett insisted in his speech made during the launching of new aircraft carrier *Lexington* that the Navy would move forward and continue airship development, but his proclamation did not end the criticism. One editorial argued that, "If the *Shenandoah* could not make a daylight flight over peaceful country fairs, what could the Navy expect of her in a wartime flight at night over enemy bases spouting shrapnel?"<sup>23</sup>

The fatal crash of the *Shenandoah* loomed over the Navy for several weeks. The press and General Mitchell, upset at the loss of his friend, Lansdowne, continued to disparage the Navy and Secretary Wilbur for their handling of the affair. Commander Lansdowne's widow spoke openly about her husband's reservations of the flight, given that he originally hailed from Greenville, Ohio, a town 200 miles west of the *Shenandoah*'s crash site, and knew the unpredictability of Midwestern weather. In the initial aftermath of the crash and during the board of inquiry hearings in October, Lansdowne's widow stated that her husband opposed making a flight with no obvious

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<sup>23</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, "The Impracticable Dirigible," 12 October 1925, 8. Address of William A. Moffett at Launching of USS *Lexington*, Quincy, MA, 3 October 1925, pp 1-6, B8, E113, RG 80, NAB; Howard Mingos, "Shenandoah Disaster a Costly Lesson to Aviation," *New York Times*, 6 September 1925, sec. XX, 1;

military purpose. President Calvin Coolidge stood by and supported Wilbur during the crisis, but it did not halt the questioning of the Navy's handling of its affairs.<sup>24</sup>

Mitchell's criticisms would have repercussions for him and the development of aviation in the United States. Because of accusations of negligence made against his superiors in the Army and the Navy, Mitchell was court-martialed in a trial that attracted significant media attention. The trial turned into a public examination of military aviation, and Mitchell eventually lost his case. He chose to resign rather than accept a five-year suspension from the Army.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the criticisms leveled by Mitchell, the Bureau of Aeronautics continued to believe in the viability of rigid airships and remained steadfast in its efforts to procure more of these crafts for the Navy. The Morrow Board hearings followed in the wake of the *Shenandoah* crash and called for an expansion of the Navy's air arm. The resulting authorizations included two new mammoth airships. Moffett hoped that the Navy's development of airships for military purposes would spark the development of a vast fleet of commercial airships that would transport cargo and passengers across the United States and around the globe. He went on to label the crew of the *Shenandoah* "builders of a new age and a new freedom for the human race."<sup>26</sup>

The Navy, however, did learn several important lessons from the crash of the *Shenandoah*. The Navy's successive rigid airships rarely flew over the continental

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<sup>24</sup> *Boston Globe*, "Widow Claims Lansdowne Declared Journey Unsafe," 4 September 1925, 1; *Boston Globe*, "Mrs. Lansdowne in Repetition of Charge," 12 October 1925, 1; *Literary Digest*, "Now Another Naval Tragedy," 10 October 1925, 7-9.

<sup>25</sup> An even-handed account of Mitchell's trial can be found in Cooke, *Billy Mitchell*, 187-224.

<sup>26</sup> Navy Department, Release Evening Papers, 11 June 1926, p. 3, B9, E113, RG 80, NAB.



United States and did so out of necessity and rather than desire to generate publicity. When the first of the two new airships, the *Akron*, entered service in 1931, the Navy reluctantly agreed to grant media access to the ceremony at the behest of Goodyear, the company that constructed the new airship. Moffett himself limited media access to the *Akron* until after the completion of its initial tests, and the Navy denied any requests for access when the *Akron* completed a trans-continental flight in May 1932. While these actions hinted at the Navy's new found caution towards publicity, other avenues were taken to keep the airship in the public eye. The commissioning of the *Akron* coincided with the release of the film *Dirigible* (1931), which was based on a Frank Wead screenplay and intended to promote the Navy's airship program. Starring Jack Holt as Jack Bradon and Ralph Graves as "Frisky" Pierce, the film focuses on the friendly rivalry between lighter- and heavier-than-air pilots in competition to fly to the South Pole. The film showcases many key elements of the airship program, including the massive shed hangars that stored the Navy's airships at Lakehurst and the recently-tested capability to launch and retrieve aircraft by means of a "trapeze" system fitted to the underside of an airship's hull. These details required the construction of extensive models and location shooting, making it the most expensive film produced by Columbia Studios at that time. Upon its release, *Dirigible* became both a critical and box office success.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> CNO to Commandant, 4<sup>th</sup> Naval District, et al., "USS Akron – Press relations on flight to Pacific Coast," 26 April 1932, B4211, E22, RG 80, NAB; *Dirigible*, directed by Frank Capra, Columbia Pictures, 1931; Michael Paris, *From the Wright Brothers to Top Gun: Aviation, Nationalism, and Popular Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 111.

During most of the 1920s, Admiral Moffett and the Bureau of Aeronautics relied upon “manufactured” events to draw attention to naval aviation. In other words, the Bureau called attention to events designed to maximize public interest but of questionable military value. Examples of such practices included air racing competitions and distance flights. In the midst of the debates over an independent air service, such activities demonstrated that the Navy could operate aircraft effectively and develop types equivalent to those produced for the Army Air Corps. The Navy reaped the benefits from these aviation-based activities during the 1920s and kept naval aviation in the public eye. Unfortunately for the Navy, employing aircraft strictly for public relations purposes slowed the integration of these emerging weapons systems into its force structure.

Beginning in 1929, the Navy’s new aircraft carriers, the *Lexington* and *Saratoga*, began operating regularly with the fleet and, for the first time, participated in the Navy’s annual Fleet Problems. The ships themselves were technological marvels; constructed on the unfinished hulls of battlecruisers authorized in the 1916 program, they ranked as the largest aircraft carriers in the world until 1945 when the Imperial Japanese Navy converted the *Shinano* from a mammoth *Yamato*-class battleship hull. In comparison to the Navy’s first aircraft carrier, the diminutive and lumbering *Langley*, these two carriers represented a monumental leap forward. The ships’ powerplants generated 180,000 horsepower via turboelectric motors and endowed the ships with very high steaming speeds of up to thirty-five knots. The sheer size of the new ships and their large

complements of aircraft – usually between seventy-five and eighty-five, but capable of 100 or more – could attract attention simply by operating with the fleet.<sup>28</sup>

Their first major exercise with the fleet, Fleet Problem IX in January 1929, resulted in significant media attention. Reports published prior to the commencement of the exercise speculated that interest among naval powers in the exercise would be high because Fleet Problem IX would be the first operational test of carriers of that size. Newspapers dispatched special correspondents to the event, with the *New York Times* employing a former Royal Navy officer, and the *Los Angeles Times* utilizing an active duty officer, Lieutenant Arthur Ageton. The climax of the exercise occurred on 26 January when the *Saratoga* approached the Panama Canal from the south and launched an 83-plane attack on the Pedro Miguel and Miraflores Locks on the Pacific side of the canal. The raid caught the defenders by surprise and umpires ruled the locks destroyed, although planes from the *Lexington* and gunfire from battleships “sank” the *Saratoga* while its aircraft were away. The attack, masterminded by Rear Admiral Joseph M. Reeves, was the subject of press articles for weeks afterwards. These news articles reinforced the idea that the new carriers, with their high speeds and large air groups, constituted significant expansion in the capabilities of naval aviation.<sup>29</sup>

On occasion, the *Lexington* and *Saratoga* would generate headlines for reasons other than standard fleet operations. The city of Tacoma, Washington, relied upon

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<sup>28</sup> Navy Department, Release Sunday Papers, 6 November 1927, pp 1-10, B11, E113, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>29</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, “Fleet Leaves for Isthmus,” 15 January 1929, 1; Lewis Freeman, “Commander’s Story of Saratoga Raid,” *New York Times*, 19 February 1929, 14; The 1949 film *Task Force* directed by Delmer Daves would reference the events of Fleet Problem IX and even included a partially-fictionalized Rear Admiral Reeves as one of its central characters.

hydroelectric power to fulfill its energy needs, but a terrible drought left the nearby rivers dry and prevented the city from drawing upon its standard power source. By November 1929, the situation had become so acute that the city cut off power to its streetlights and encouraged residents to refrain from using any household appliance requiring electricity. Civic officials appealed to the Navy for a remedy, proposing that the *Lexington*, which was undergoing a refit at nearby Puget Sound Navy Yard, be moored dockside so that its unique electric drive system could generate electricity for the city. Secretary of the Navy Charles F. Adams initially rejected the request on the advice of the Bureau of Engineering, but he finally relented and agreed to the proposal on 12 December. Crowds of onlookers watched as the tugs maneuvered the *Lexington* into position on 15 December, and the ship generated 20,000 kilowatts of electricity two days later following the construction of temporary transmission lines from the ship to the city's electrical grid. While in port, the Navy encouraged greater contact with the public and invited a group of more than 500 Boy Scouts from all over the state of Washington to come aboard the ship. Dudley Knox used the incident to argue that the utilization of the *Lexington* in this role constituted "a proper naval function and one of the by-products of the national investment in a Navy." After rains finally restored the water flow to nearby rivers the *Lexington* left Tacoma on 17 January 1930 after supplying Tacoma's electricity for an entire month.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Knox to Kendall Banning, 15 September 1931, B3, Knox Papers. *Los Angeles Times*, "Tacoma Cuts Down Use of Electricity," 21 November 1929, 9; *New York Times*, "Ask That Plane Ship Feed Power to Two Cities," 21 November 1929, 44; *New York Times*, "Lexington Ties Up at the Tacoma Dock," 16 December 1929, 4; *Los Angeles Times*, "Navy Goes to Rescue of Tacoma, Wash., in Serious Power Shortage," 19 December 1929, sec. A, 8; *New York Times*, "500 Boy Scouts Visit Plane Carrier in Dock," 12 January 1930, 51.

Fleet Problem IX confirmed that naval aviation could draw attention to itself by testing the practical application of airpower, but it was not until 1931 that the public received another glimpse of carrier operations. Fleet Problem XII called for the *Lexington* and *Saratoga* to defend a hypothetical canal in Nicaragua from the Black fleet, which consisted of the Navy's battleship force and the carrier *Langley*. Immediately, the press seized upon the exercise as a test of naval aviation and a revival of the "airplanes versus battleships" debate which had peaked during the early 1920s. The exercise was an operational disappointment due to the complete imbalance of the fleets and the inability of the two carriers to concentrate their strength against a single enemy force, which allowed Black to safely achieve its objectives and end the exercise. Analyses of the exercise concluded not that naval aviation was weak or flawed in failing to prevent Black success, but that the Navy simply needed more carriers to have a solid "naval air force." Hanson Baldwin argued that the maneuvers proved that aircraft had the potential to revolutionize naval warfare, and believed that "the influence of airpower upon naval history" existed to make fleets dependent upon strong air forces in combat situations.<sup>31</sup>

After Fleet Problem XII the carriers continued to attract large crowds, but the Navy succeeded in showing that the carriers had been fully amalgamated into the fleet. The carriers received additional publicity in early 1932 with the release of the film *Hell Divers*. Starring Clark Gable and Wallace Beery, the film was shot aboard the *Saratoga*

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<sup>31</sup> *Washington Post*, "Naval Air Force," 1 March 1931, sec. S, 1. Hanson Baldwin, "Navy Revises its Technique," *New York Times*, 12 April 1931, sec. MS, 3. *Baltimore Sun*, "Planes to Get Big Test in War Game," 16 February 1931, 1.

in 1931 and features numerous scenes of naval aircraft engaging in tactical maneuvers with one another and depicts the delicate choreography characteristic of flight deck operations aboard a carrier. Overhead shots of the *Saratoga* emphasize the size of the carrier and its large complement of aircraft. Interestingly, the Navy required the filmmakers to black out a portion of the screen depicting landing operations. Otherwise, the arresting hook responsible for stopping aircraft on a carrier deck with limited space would have been revealed. The value of the film, which one media outlet proclaimed was a “first class” publicity stunt not seen since the days of the Great White Fleet, rested in its focus on naval aviation training for a variety of potential missions. The carriers also continued to attract attention for their operations in later Fleet Problems such as Fleet Problem XIV in 1933 in which the *Lexington* and *Saratoga* conducted mock raids against San Francisco and Los Angeles. The carriers only occasionally participated in purely public relations events. In 1934, aircraft from the *Lexington* staged a mock dive-bombing attack on a destroyer in full view of New York City as the carrier departed the city after a large fleet review that spring. This emphasis on growth and training of carrier aviation would continue for the remainder of the interwar period.<sup>32</sup>

Concurrent with increased visibility and public relations success of carrier aviation, the Navy’s rigid airship program suffered an ignominious end. On 4 April 1933, the *Akron* crashed while en route from Washington to Lakehurst. Admiral

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<sup>32</sup> Memo for CAPT Neyes, 13 January 1932, B1362, E90, RG 24, NAB. Fry, *USS Saratoga CV-3*, 56; *Hell Divers*, directed by George W. Hill, Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1932; Husband E. Kimmel to William A. Orr, 7 January 1932, B1362, E90, RG 24, NAB; Hanson Baldwin, “The Navy ‘s Realistic War Game,” *New York Times*, 26 March 1933, sec. MS, 4; *New York Times*, “Wings of Navy Dip in Salute at Sea,” 1 June 1934, 13; Address by Arthur B. Cook at Air Defense Day Program, Cleveland, OH, 2 September 1937, pp 1-3, B29, E113, RG 80, NAB.

Moffett, along with seventy-two crew and passengers, was killed when the airship broke up during a heavy storm off the New Jersey coast. The Navy responded quickly to the accident, but ships in the vicinity rescued only three survivors. Adding to the tragedy, the blimp *J-3* crashed and killed two its crew while searching for wreckage and survivors. The loss of Moffett cast a pall over the accident, and American filmgoers could watch footage of both wrecks and the convalescing survivors via newsreel. Analyses of the accident did not criticize the Navy's handling of the airship as was the case with the *Shenandoah*, but instead focused exclusively on the future of the airship in naval service. Articles and editorials argued the airships had "checkered career[s]" in every foreign and domestic military service and questioned whether the crash would cause the demise of the airship program. Some still believed, "If the rigid airship was of use before this disaster, it cannot be argued now that the disaster has destroyed it." The new head of the Bureau of Aeronautics, Rear Admiral Ernest J. King, confirmed that the Navy would continue to operate the *Akron*'s sister ship, the USS *Macon*, and that he expected it to have a long life of "usefulness."<sup>33</sup>

The *Macon* operated with the fleet over the next two years, but the craft failed to succeed in its scouting mission during Fleet Problem XV in 1934. In a flight from California to Florida in April 1934, the *Macon* began to show signs of structural defects near its tail fins while en route. These defects eventually proved fatal to the *Macon* and

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<sup>33</sup> Reginald M. Cleveland, "Record of the Airship: Disasters and Victories," *New York Times*, 9 April 1933, sec. XX, 8. *New York Times*, "The Akron Tragedy," 5 April 1933, 18. Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 24 June 1933, B22, E113, RG 80, NAB. "Mighty Akron lost at sea! 73 perish!," *Hearst Metrotone Newsreel*, 8 April 1933, FT Archive;

caused it to crash on 12 February 1935 when a strong gust of wind struck it as it flew near Point Sur, California. The lessons learned from the *Akron* – namely, the inclusion of proper survival gear – contributed to saving the lives of all but two men out of a crew of eighty-three. While the Navy still possessed the old USS *Los Angeles* in reserve, the press immediately recognized that the crash of the *Macon* would mark the end of the Navy's experimentation with rigid airships.<sup>34</sup>

Most of the debate surrounding the balanced fleet and the Navy's needs focused on surface ships and aircraft. By comparison, the submarine assumed a lesser position when the Navy and its supporters attempted to make their case for broadening the service's force structure. After World War I, the submarine faced its own image crisis due to Germany's use of the type to wage a virtual blockade of the Allies during World War I. Since submarines were essentially torpedo boats with a rudimentary capability to submerge for short periods of time, their relatively small size and reliance upon stealth made them ideal weapons for commerce raiding. The vulnerability of submarines forced their captains to reject the standard rules of war and attack surface ships without following the rules of naval warfare; these included notifying the targeted vessel prior to firing upon it and allowing its crew and passengers to leave the ship safely. The German submarines nearly sparked a major international incident after the 1915 sinking of the liner *Lusitania*, and the decision to resort to unrestricted submarine warfare precipitated American intervention into the conflict. The very factors which made submarines

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<sup>34</sup> Robinson and Keller, *Up Ship!*, 186-192; *Christian Science Monitor*, "Macon's Loss Scraps U.S. Airship Plans," 13 February 1935, 1; *Washington Post*, "Capital Sees End of Airship Plans," 13 February 1935, 1; *Los Angeles Times*, "The Macon Disaster," 14 February 1935, sec. A, 4.



effective in these roles, however, led the Allies to view the German submarine threat as a “scourge” unleashed upon the Atlantic Ocean.

This moral outrage over German submarines carried over into popular depictions of the war effort. In the book *Dave Darrin and the German Submarines* (1919), the titular hero listened to survivors of a sunken freighter report that the “brutes shelled us” even after escaping to their lifeboats. Darrin maintains his professional demeanor until he discovers that an enemy submarine torpedoes a vessel carrying his wife, then declares that “now he HATED those German fiends!” In their wartime service, the *Navy Boys* frequently found themselves on missions where they uncovered German submarine nests on small islands in the eastern Atlantic or on the shores of Maine. In their experience, the Germans had little compunction to abide by the niceties of war, and even managed to disguise a submarine as a surface steamer to avoid detection by Allied ships. The threat the Germans posed could be found anywhere, and only the determined efforts of the Allies eliminated the peril.<sup>35</sup>

This negative perception of the submarine led to many public discussions of banning the type through international agreement. Representatives from Great Britain took the lead in proposing such a ban. This idea factored into the debates over the fate of the American 1916 and 1919 programs soon after the end of the war and continued into the negotiating process at Washington in 1921. The idea of a ban gained some traction in the United States concurrent with the public support for naval arms limitation,

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<sup>35</sup> Hancock, *Dave Darrin and the German Submarines*, 230. Davidson, *Navy Boys After the Submarines*, 151-206; Davidson, *Navy Boys at the Big Surrender*, 95-146.

and many of the same groups and individuals who had helped push for the Washington Conference in 1921 focused their attention on the submarine. Idaho Senator William Borah believed that all submarines should be scrapped, and held fast to this position throughout the disarmament era. As the debate raged in Washington, the *New York Times* came out in favor of a total ban on submarines and argued that, “If the conference were to agree to scrap all the submarines in commission and building, the whole world would applaud, in such abhorrence is submarine warfare held.” By this time, the idea of banning submarines appeared to have gained support within influential circles of policymaking.<sup>36</sup>

The clamor against the submarine eventually amounted to nothing. No firm ban emerged from the Washington Conference because all of the participants, save for Britain, saw a need for the submarine in their fleets. Dudley Knox argued that the United States fared badly at Washington and that the parity agreed to in the 5:5:3 ratio was an illusion; to him, a submarine ban would only have tilted the treaty even more heavily in Britain’s favor. In any case, Knox predicted that submarines would eventually grow dependent on guns rather than torpedoes as their main armament, thus losing their “ruthless” character and becoming a more accepted weapon of war.<sup>37</sup>

The United States Navy believed the submarine should occupy a valuable role within its force structure, although in the 1920s it remained unclear exactly what mission that would be. In a potential war predicted by War Plan Orange, submarines would act

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<sup>36</sup> *New York Times*, “Outlaw the Submarines,” 17 November 1921, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Knox, *Eclipse*, 69, 79-82. Quote is on p. 79.

as advance scouts for the fleet as it steamed across the Pacific to meet the Imperial Japanese Navy in battle. The Navy also employed submarines to deny the enemy sea control in major exercises such as Grand Joint Exercise 4 held in Hawaiian waters in February 1932. Gradually, the Navy began employing its submarines in independent offensive operations and, in an experience comparable to that of the aircraft carriers, “freed” submarines from being tied to the battle line as it continued its inexorable advance. Reflective of this shift in employment, the Navy began working toward a standard submarine design capable of trans-Pacific voyages and operating independently in an offensive capacity. Only in 1939 did the Navy begin internally discussing the utilization of the submarines in a *guerre de course* campaign against enemy merchant shipping.<sup>38</sup>

However important these developments were, many of the doctrinal and technical debates took place out of the public view and ultimately hampered the development of a positive image of Navy submarines. The lack of agreement on the utility of submarines and the technical requirements to build boats necessary to carry out specific missions prevented the creation of any public relations campaigns similar to those created for naval aviation. Moreover, submarines faced the simple fact that their most distinctive quality – the ability to submerge – meant that it could not capitalize on highly visible public events. While surfaced, the relatively small size of the submarines, combined with the design considerations that allowed them to submerge, meant that the

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<sup>38</sup> Felker, *Testing American Sea Power*, 61-75; Joel Ira Holwitt, “Execute Against Japan”: *The U.S. Decision to Conduct Unrestricted Submarine Warfare* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009), 76-8.

type would be dwarfed if placed alongside other surface ships. Given that newsreels tended to include only visually interesting subjects, submarines rarely factored into this form of media. When they did appear, it was usually in a relatively unexciting way, although *Universal Newsreel* once touted the dangers involved to a cameraman as he operated a camera mounted on a submarine's mast as it dove beneath the waves. As such, the doctrinal change towards independent operations received only scant publicity during the 1930s.<sup>39</sup>

Instead, the thrust of Navy public relations efforts on behalf of submarines focused entirely on safety and reliability. Concern over the ability of submarines to perform their missions without error became the theme defining its public image. As early as 1920, Secretary Daniels complained that, "Our submarine builders have never quite gotten up to the place I think they ought to be...." Others in the Navy lamented that the even the most advanced American submarine class, the *S*-class boats, paled in comparison both in size and in capability to the German U-boats that effectively served during the war. A series of highly-publicized accidents plagued the Navy's submarine force in the 1920s and compromised attempts to portray the submarine as a reliable and effective piece of technology. The first major accident to occur after World War I happened on 1 September 1920 when the *S-5* attempted a test dive as it steamed near Cape May, New Jersey. A crewman left the submarine's main induction valve open as it slid beneath the waves, and caused the boat to flood rapidly. The flow of water

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<sup>39</sup> One of the rare exceptions to the lack of coverage of submarine operations is Lewis Freeman, "Submarines' Value Shown at Panama," *New York Times*, 1 February 1929, 9; "Cameraman Risks Life to Film Dive of Huge US Sub" *Universal Newsreel*, 18 October 1933, Universal Newsreel Catalog, RG 200 UN, NACP.

concentrated in the forward torpedo room, and the submarine settled bow first on the bottom. Fortunately for the crew, the submarine's stern protruded above the waves and a passing freighter eventually sighted the stricken submarine. Rescuers from a second ship eventually cut a hole in the submarine and freed the entire crew.<sup>40</sup>

The press published a stream of articles on the incident describing the initial rescue operations and the desperate measures the men aboard the submarine resorted to when attempting to signal the freighter as it passed by the sunken submarine. While the men's conduct was seen as beyond reproach, editorials lamented that the technological progress of the age had found its limits. One editorial stated, "None of the new and wonderful inventions that are supposed to make this age so far ahead of all of its predecessors in human history" played a role in securing the rescue of the men of the *S-5*. While hyperbolic, the editorial expressed some unease on two fronts: submarines could potentially consign dozens of men to their death in an instant, and the Navy appeared to have no means of responding to such an emergency. This concern that the Navy could not adequately safeguard the lives of its submarine crews foreshadowed problems in the years ahead for the service.<sup>41</sup>

A series of relatively minor accidents plagued the submarine force in succeeding years. In December 1921, the *S-48* sank off the coast of Connecticut while on builder's trials, but its crew brought the bow of the flooded submarine to the surface to facilitate

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<sup>40</sup> Transcript of Afternoon Press Conference by Josephus Daniels, 16 December 1920, p. 6, B3, E113, RG 80, NAB. Gary E. Weir, *Building American Submarines, 1914-1940* (Washington: Naval Historical Center, 1991), 28-38; *New York Times*, "Rescuing the Crew Imprisoned Hours in Submarine S-5," 3 September 1920, 1.

<sup>41</sup> *New York Times*, "This Rescue Without a New Feature," 6 September 1920, 6.

rescue and all escaped unharmed. The *O-5* sank in October 1923 near the Atlantic entrance to the Panama Canal after being rammed by a steamer, drowning three of the submarine's crew. Neither accident attracted the level of public attention like that of the *S-5* sinking, but the Navy would endure not one but two accidents in 1925. The first of these involved the hapless *S-48* again which ran aground off the coast of New Hampshire on the night of 29 January. The submarine suffered heavy damage due to a storm, but rescuers saved the entire crew and the Navy salvaged the submarine in early February.<sup>42</sup>

The second submarine accident in 1925 caused a major public outcry against the Navy Department and raised questions about the overall viability of submarines. On the night of 25 September, the merchant steamer *City of Rome* encountered the *S-51* off Block Island, but the low silhouette of the submarine caused confusion among the steamer's lookouts and officers when determining proper right-of-way. When the *City of Rome* finally caught sight of the smaller *S-51*'s stern running lights, it was too late to change course and the steamer collided with the smaller vessel, striking it amidships. Of the thirty-six men aboard the *S-51*, only three escaped.<sup>43</sup>

The Navy quickly dispatched vessels to the scene, but initial dives on the *S-51* wreck revealed the ship to be a total loss and its entire crew dead. The accident came quickly on the heels of the brief disappearance of John Rodgers during the California-

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<sup>42</sup> "S-48," *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, <http://www.history.navy.mil/DANFS/s2/s-48.htm> (accessed 15 June 2010); "O-5," *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, <http://www.history.navy.mil/DANFS/o1/o-5.htm> (accessed 15 June 2010).

<sup>43</sup> Edward Ellsberg, *On the Bottom* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1928), 1-6.

Hawaii flight and the crash of the *Shenandoah*, worsening an already poor public opinion of the service. Prominent newspapers such as the *New York World* and the *Baltimore Sun* editorialized that the recent series of disasters likely occurred because of mismanagement and asserted that Secretary Wilbur resign. The *Brooklyn Eagle* also argued that the Navy's inability to get a salvage derrick to the *S-51* quickly represented a "scandal of inefficiency" and that the service "showed nothing but an eagerness to hush everything up." Wilbur responded by insisting he would not resign, but, in an apparent attempt to revive public confidence in his leadership, Wilbur ordered that rescue operations on the *S-51* continue long after divers maintained there was no hope of survivors.<sup>44</sup>

The *S-51* sinking also reignited talk in the United States of allowing a ban on submarines to pass through at the next disarmament conference. The renewed calls for the ban originated in Britain which had just lost one of its own submarines, the *M-1*, in an accident, killing its crew. The desire for a ban also revived the humanitarian issues posed by submarines during World War I, and the seemingly inordinate risks endured by the officers and men assigned to such vessels. Supporters of the ban conceded, however, that the risk to the crews did not provide a significant enough reason for nations to ban submarines.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, "Two Other Newspapers Join in Demand for Wilbur's Scalp," 30 September 1925, 1, 8. *Boston Globe*, "Wilbur Unwilling to End Efforts to Rescue Crew," 2 October 1925, 13.

<sup>45</sup> R.L. Duffus, "Submarine Again Becomes a World Issue," *New York Times*, 22 November 1925, sec. XX, 3.

The salvage operations intended to lift the *S-51* from the sea bottom and return it to port became a source of both heroism and embarrassment for the Navy. Initially, the Navy planned to contract with civilian firms to raise the submarine, but Lieutenant Edward Ellsberg, a diver stationed at the New York Navy Yard, helped persuade officials in Washington to use the service's own ships and men for the task. The operation, managed by Captain Ernest J. King, turned into an extended ordeal as the ocean depths, weather, and technical hurdles all limited the progress of the divers and salvagers. Overly optimistic articles continued to appear in the nation's newspapers and promised a quick resolution to the operation. The onset of winter weather forced a postponement of the salvage operations until spring, thus leaving the issue unresolved and the sinking briefly faded from public view.<sup>46</sup>

When the salvage vessels returned to the *S-51* site in April 1926, the Navy finally gained praise and respect for its handling of the affair. Lieutenant Ellsberg's suggestion that the Navy manage its own salvage operation – while potentially risky and motivated by a sense of duty and professionalism rather than public opinion – proved valuable in rehabilitating the service's image. After further difficulties, the Navy finally brought to the *S-51* the surface using pontoons in July 1926 and towed the submarine to the New York Navy Yard in Brooklyn for inspection. In an outpouring of grief, respect, and morbid curiosity, more than 50,000 people filed by the dry dock at the Navy Yard which housed the *S-51* to catch a glimpse of the submarine which served as a watery grave for

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<sup>46</sup> Ellsberg, *On the Bottom*, 12-15; Thomas Buell, *Master of Sea Power: A Biography of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 57-8; *Hartford Courant*, "Hope to Raise S-51 Within Ten Days," 13 November 1925, 1.



its crew. Newspapers lauded the Navy's "spirit to carry on" in spite of the dangers and hoped that the service learned valuable lessons that would prevent future disasters. The media also praised Lieutenant Ellsberg and the rest of the divers who made the salvage of the *S-51* possible. Ellsberg became a national celebrity, and his recounting of the salvage operations in various press outlets led to the publication of his memoir of the incident, *On the Bottom*, in 1928.<sup>47</sup>

The resolution to the *S-51* crisis temporarily ended debates on submarine viability, but, on 17 December 1927, the *S-4* collided with the Coast Guard cutter *Paulding* when it attempted to surface after a short dive near Provincetown, Massachusetts. Initially thought to be a total loss, the submarine settled on the bottom partially intact and six men in the forward torpedo room survived the incident. The Navy rushed vessels to the scene and recalled many of the veterans of the *S-51* operation, including Captain King and a retired Commander Ellsberg. When divers reached the *S-4* on 19 December, they communicated with the survivors aboard the submarine by tapping on the hull. Bad weather delayed the rescue efforts, and the six men asphyxiated before divers could attach an air hose to the stricken submarine.<sup>48</sup>

The Navy's inability to rescue the survivors of the collision created a storm of criticism in the press and rekindled many of the same issues debated during the aftermath of the *S-51* sinking. Secretary Wilbur came under fire yet again for his

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<sup>47</sup> *Washington Post*, "Raising the S-51," 12 July 1926, 4; *Los Angeles Times*, "Sea Yields Death Ship," 6 July 1926, 1; *New York Times*, "Salvaging S-51," 25 July 1926, sec. E, 6.

<sup>48</sup> *New York Times*, "More S-51 Divers Called to the S-4," 20 December 1927, 3; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 4 January 1928, pp 1-2, B11, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 5 January 1928, pp 1-4, B11, E113, RG 80, NAB.

apparent lack of energy and inability to properly administer the Navy Department. Editorials questioned whether the Navy had learned anything from the *S-51* disaster or took seriously any of the suggestions it received to develop a reliable means of rescuing submariners. Wilbur quickly responded to the criticism by releasing to the press a letter from Admiral George H. Rock of the Bureau of Construction explaining the various means considered and rejected by the bureau to improve the safety of submarines. This letter failed to stem the tide of suggestions from “experts” and members of the public published in the press. As a result, the Navy appeared to lack the ability to learn from its mistakes or properly care for its sailors. Some press articles even resurrected the idea of banning the submarine altogether due to the dangers their crewmen routinely faced.<sup>49</sup>

More problematic were charges that “red tape” clogged the Navy’s bureaucracy and made the service ill-suited to respond to crisis situations like the *S-4*. Coincidentally, Rear Admiral Thomas P. Magruder, the commandant of the Philadelphia Navy Yard, leveled similar accusations three months earlier in his *Saturday Evening Post* article entitled “Navy and Economy.” Magruder claimed that Navy was anything but an efficiently run bureaucracy and pointed out instances of rampant waste, including the maintenance of seven Navy Yards when three could likely perform all of the necessary work. *The Nation* echoed Magruder’s charges and argued that the lackluster quality of many recent secretaries of the navy had contributed to the problem. The Navy

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<sup>49</sup> *Literary Digest*, “Who is to Blame for our Submarine Disasters?,” 7 January 1928, 5-7; *Los Angeles Times*, “The S-4 Disaster,” 26 December 1927, sec. A, 4; *New York Times*, “Wilbur Answers Criticism of Navy,” 23 December 1927, 1; *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, “Invent Device for Raising Submarine,” 14 January 1928, 1; *Washington Post*, “Germans Offer Way to Raise S-4,” 15 January 1928, sec. M, 14; *New York Times*, “Plans Submarine Derrick,” 15 January 1928, 18; *New York Times*, “Urges End of Submarines,” 25 December 1927, 12.

Department disagreed so strongly with the article that it sent Magruder a ten page letter rebutting his comments, correcting factual errors (for instance, fixing the number of typewriters for the *Saratoga* at forty-four and not sixty-six), and demanded to know how he arrived at his conclusions. In a move widely seen as a punishment, the Navy transferred Magruder out of his post in December, causing Hearst's usually pro-Navy paper, the *New York American*, to label it as yet "another example of a high-handed dictatorship in Washington."<sup>50</sup>

This controversy had only been settled weeks prior to the sinking of the *S-4*, and the Navy's apparent tardiness during the rescue operation resurrected many of the charges made in 1925 and repeated by Magruder. Even the news of King and Ellsberg's recall failed to stem the flood of negative press. The press labeled Secretary Wilbur's visit to the salvage site a week after the *S-4*'s sinking a fit of "belated energy" to solve the crisis. Ellsberg, still held in high regard as an expert on such matters, defended the Navy Department's efforts in attempting to rescue the crew of the *S-4*, but he would later argue that several feasible means existed for the Navy to improve the safety of submarines without compromising their operational utility.<sup>51</sup>

The submarine tragedies of the 1920s shaped the public image of submarines for years to come. Even though the submarine force suffered no major accident in the dozen

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<sup>50</sup> Magruder, "The Navy and Economy," 6-7. *Literary Digest*, "Disciplining Magruder," 5 November 1927, 9. "Navy and Army Waste," *The Nation*, 12 October 1927, 354; Wilbur to Magruder, "Article on 'The Navy and Economy,' Saturday Evening Post, of 24 September 1927," 3 October 1927, B411, E22, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>51</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, "Mr. Wilbur's Belated Energy," 25 December 1927, 6. *Chicago Tribune*, "Justifiable Criticism," 18 January 1928, 8; Edward Ellsberg, "A Grapple With Death on the Ocean Floor," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 Apr. 1928, sec. K, 12.

years after the *S-4* sinking, media coverage of submarines focused on attempts to improve safety and the probability of rescuing crewmen after accidents. Released three months after the sinking of the *S-4*, Frank Capra's motion picture *Submarine* (1928) tells the story a love triangle plot involving a Navy diver, a bosun's mate, and a disreputable woman who comes between them. The film prominently features a submarine sinking to the ocean floor with many of its crew still alive and trapped beneath the waves. At the film's climax, the Navy diver implausibly rescues the crew by diving to unheard-of depths to attach an air hose to the stricken submarine. To its credit, the Navy refused to shy away from allowing depictions of such tragedies to reach movie screens, but the impossible method which enabled the crew's rescue in the film underscored the depth of the public relations problem the Navy faced.<sup>52</sup>

In the months and years after the *S-4* disaster, the Navy publicized several concurrent efforts to improve submarine safety. In 1928, the Navy began work on two devices intended to allow men trapped aboard submarines to reach safety. The first of these, the Momsen Lung, was developed by Lieutenant Charles "Swede" Momsen in 1929. Attached to the Submarine Safety Test Unit, Momsen and his assistants utilized the salvaged *S-4* to test their new device. Men successfully escaped from the submarine at depths of more than 200 feet, or nearly twice the depth at which the submarine had sank in 1927. The Navy publicized the tests and the successful result, leading to very positive assessments in the press of the service's ability to solve this urgent problem. Concurrent with these tests, the Navy announced that it would permanently attach a

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<sup>52</sup> *Submarine*, directed by Frank Capra, Columbia Pictures, 1928.

submarine salvage ship with a crew of divers to each of the Navy's fleet organizations to allow for rapid responses to accidents. To further promote these advances, in August 1930, the Hearst Metrotone newsreel featured footage of "thrilling" and successful tests of the Momsen Lung conducted aboard the *S-22* off New London, Connecticut. At one point, the Navy even arranged for an officer attached to its diving unit to give a public lecture at the YMCA in Washington, D.C., that included the screening of several films made during the testing of the new rescue equipment.<sup>53</sup>

While the Navy may have been working to correct deficiencies in submarine rescue equipment, the release of *Men Without Women* (1930) failed to correct any falsities regarding submarine disasters. Like *Submarine*, the plot of John Ford's film climaxes with the sinking of an American submarine, this time off the coast of China. The crew of the submarine ultimately escapes via swimming out of the torpedo tubes without any sort of breathing device, a scenario even more implausible than that seen in the preceding *Submarine*. As the eminent film historian Laurence Suid notes, these films conveyed false impressions to the public of the feasibility of rescuing men from trapped submarines while the Navy lacked this capability.<sup>54</sup>

By 1937, the Navy began using Hollywood's submarine films to demonstrate its new rescue equipment. These new means of rescue for submariners were first depicted with *The Devil's Playground* (1937), a sound remake of *Submarine*. In a scene that had

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<sup>53</sup> "Metrotone Films Undersea Escapes From Submarine," *Hearst Metrotone Newsreel*, 19 August 1930, FT Archive. Navy Department, Hold for Release, 4 April 1929, pp 1-17, B13, E113, RG 80, NAB; CNO to the CINCUS, et al., "Submarine Rescue Vessels and Training of," 21 May 1929, B13, E113, RG 80, NAB; *Washington Post*, "Submarine Rescue Work to be Shown," 13 Mar. 1932, sec. S, 10.

<sup>54</sup> *Men Without Women*, directed by John Ford, Fox Film Corporation, 1930; Suid, *Sailing*, 25-7.

no counterpart during the earlier *Submarine*, the submarine initially sinks to a shallow reef before descending to the depths. While at the shallower depth, many of the crew members escape the submarine using their Momsen Lungs and ascend to the surface. The remaining crew are saved by the still-implausible act of a diver carrying an air line to the downed submarine, but the film offered the Navy a high profile venue to demonstrate its new rescue equipment. That this initial portrayal of the Momsen Lung occurred in a film which the Navy remained profoundly unhappy with was all the more remarkable.<sup>55</sup>

Later that year, *Submarine D-1* (1937), the last major submarine film of the period, the service showcased another new submarine rescue device. The Submarine Safety Test Unit which produced the Momsen Lung worked concurrently on this second device which eventually became known as the McCann Rescue Chamber. To develop the device, the Navy received prototype chambers from the Bureau of Construction, the Electric Boat Company, and New York Navy Yard and combined the most promising features of each model into a single successful design.<sup>56</sup>

*Submarine D-1* depicts the development of a device similar to that of the McCann Rescue Chamber, but attributes its development to Butch Rogers, a submariner attempting to make amends for the loss of his friend in an accident similar to that of the *S-51*. The Navy desired cooperation so greatly for the film that it allowed Warner Brothers to film scenes aboard a submarine. All previous submarine films only shot

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<sup>55</sup> *The Devil's Playground*, directed by Erle C. Kenton, Columbia Pictures, 1937; C. Young to Alfred Bolton, 25 September 1936, B425, E22, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>56</sup> Navy Department, Immediate Release, 24 May 1939, B33, E113, RG 80, NAB.

exterior scenes using Navy submarines and instead relied upon constructed sets for any interior shots. These earlier films approximated the trappings of life aboard a submarine but sometimes failed to show the tight internal spaces in which submariners lived and worked on a daily basis. The Navy previously objected to filming aboard submarines due to security concerns, but, by 1937, the *S*-class submarines had reached obsolescence and specific information about their design was out of date. In this case, the need of the Navy to positively and accurately portray its submarine force in Hollywood films trumped earlier worries.<sup>57</sup>

By the late 1930s, the Navy had attempted to convince the public of the importance and the effectiveness of its aviation arm and of its submarine force. The expiration of the battleship building holidays agreed to at the Washington Conference, however, changed the equation somewhat as the service needed to justify capital ship new construction. Many officers argued that only the battleship could attain “real command of the sea” and that the type was “still supreme” in the pantheon of naval weapons systems. Articles in the popular press argued that aviation, even after the rapid developments of the past decade, could only harass the battleship and not sink it in combat. The Navy itself added to the confusion in 1938 when the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral William D. Leahy, remarked that the battleship remained “the bulwark of offensive and defensive power upon which all other types must depend for support when driven back by superior forces.” These speeches and articles dismissing

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<sup>57</sup> Suid, *Sailing*, 41-43; Frank Wead, “Submarine Story, Revised Temporary Script,” 28 July 1936, B426, E22, RG 80, NAB; *Submarine D-1*, directed by Lloyd Bacon, Warner Brothers, 1937.

the new upstart technologies in favor of the battleship did not entirely repudiate the parallel campaigns to develop aviation and submarines, but rather demonstrated that naval officials altered their messages depending on specific circumstances.<sup>58</sup>

In the midst of the debating the merits of specific technologies, the Navy's public relations organizations frequently had to respond to accidents when the technology or their users failed one another. As has been recounted already, the interwar Navy suffered from its share of accidents that resulted in the loss of millions of dollars of equipment and the lives of trained officers and men. To study this evolution in greater detail, the focus will shift to discussing the first and last of the Navy's major accidents of the interwar period, the Point Honda disaster of 1923, and the sinking of the submarine *Squalus* in 1939.

In the early part of the interwar period, the Navy appeared reluctant to release information when accidents occurred involving the Navy's ships and aircraft. While many of the high profile incidents involved aircraft or submarines, one of the most notable accidents of the interwar period involved the Navy's surface ships. The accident at Point Honda in September 1923 killed twenty-three men and wrecked seven destroyers of recent design and construction. Five days elapsed before the Information Section issued a formal press release which detailed the Navy's preliminary thoughts on the matter. The release briefly summarized the facts of the incident, described the progress of the salvage operations, and listed and the names of the mothballed destroyers

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<sup>58</sup> Jonas H. Ingram, "Why the Battleship?," *Scientific American*, August 1934, 82-4. Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 8 February 1938, pp 1-2, B30, E113, RG 80, NAB. J. Lincke, "Airplanes Can't Sink Battleships," *Saturday Evening Post*, 10 April 1937, 12-3, 83-6.



to be re-commissioned to replace the ships lost. It also described a near-collision reported by the battleship *Texas* with a civilian steamer in the same vicinity as the destroyer accident. In response, the *New York Times* expressed frustration with the Navy's sluggishness to release reliable information about the accident even after nine days had elapsed.<sup>59</sup>

To its credit, the Navy quickly decided to open the preliminary hearings on the accident to the public. The hearings began on 17 September – the same date as the *Times* editorial – and within days the media was satisfied that the Navy was not engaged in a cover-up. Witnesses reported that the navigator aboard the lead destroyer, the *Delphy*, ignored information relayed to the ship by radio compass and direction-finding beacon because the technology itself was new and considered suspect. This caused the navigator and the ship's captain to turn into the Santa Barbara Channel too early. Other destroyers followed the lead of the *Delphy* thereby condemning the other thirteen ships of the squadron to their fate. Such an admission was ironic when one considers that the Navy had depicted its sailors as well-trained to use the machinery of the modern age. Irony aside, only the decision to open the hearings to the public and the press prevented any further criticism of the Navy's handling of the incident.<sup>60</sup>

The Navy's response to accidents improved over time due to the number of incidents endured, and these capabilities would be put to the test again in 1939. The newly commissioned submarine USS *Squalus* made a routine diving test off Portsmouth,

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<sup>59</sup> Navy Department, Immediate Release, 13 September 1923, B114, Office EP 3, RG 428, NACP.

<sup>60</sup> *New York Times*, "Destroyers Ignored Radio," 20 September 1923, 5.

New Hampshire, on the morning of 23 May. Dives over the preceding ten days had gone smoothly, but in this instance the boat's main induction valve failed and caused several internal compartments to flood and twenty-six men drowned instantly. The *Squalus* quickly sank to the ocean floor, but the crew dispatched a marker buoy carrying a telephone to the surface and established contact with a nearby submarine. The rescue vessel *Falcon* arrived at the scene within twenty-four hours and used its McCann Rescue Chamber to bring up survivors. Good weather and the decision made by the Chamber's operators to exceed the capacity tested in training exercises made possible the rescue all of the remainder of the crew in a remarkable thirty-nine hours after the accident. As with the *S-51* and *S-4*, the Navy raised the *Squalus* to the surface and repaired and re-commissioned the boat as the *Sailfish*. The *Sailfish* went on to compile a credible combat record during World War II.<sup>61</sup>

The Navy's efforts to educate the public on the improvements in submarine safety paid off handsomely in press coverage of the incident. The intensely critical tone that marked the coverage of previous submarine disasters almost entirely disappeared during the *Squalus* affair. Occasionally inventors claimed that the Navy had ignored devices that could have prevented the accident, but criticism of the Navy remained muted throughout the peak of the crisis in late May through the end of June. Instead, the media again praised the Navy's rescue and salvage personnel as heroes and singled out

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<sup>61</sup> Carl LaVO, *Back From the Deep: The Strange Story of the Sister Subs Squalus and Sculpin* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 34-74.

the work of Commander Momsen for developing the critical advances – the McCann Rescue Chamber and the Momsen Lung – which enabled a successful rescue.<sup>62</sup>

The Navy's ability to rescue the *Squalus* survivors certainly influenced the positive coverage, but two additional factors contributed to an improved public opinion. First, the Navy rescued the crew of the *Squalus* just days before two other fatal submarine accidents. On 1 June, the British submarine HMS *Thetis* began a practice dive when water rushed into its forward torpedo room due to an improper seal on a tube. The submarine nosedived into the floor of Liverpool Bay, leaving the stern of the craft exposed. Four men escaped, but a lack of sufficient rescue equipment contributed to the loss of the remaining ninety-nine men on board. Two weeks later, the French submarine *Phenix* sank during an exercise in Cam Ranh Bay, killing its entire crew of seventy-one. American newspapers and magazines reported that the U.S. Navy had surged ahead on developing advanced diving and rescue equipment in previous years while other two navies declined to purchase any McCann Rescue Chambers for their own fleets.<sup>63</sup>

The second reason for the overwhelmingly positive coverage of *Squalus* derived from the Navy's improved handling of press relations during the incident. In contrast to the slow and limited release of information during previous accidents, the Navy's Public Relations Branch acted quickly and decisively during the *Squalus* affair. The senior

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<sup>62</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "Lake Sees Lack of Safety Device," 25 May 1939, 3; *Hartford Courant*, "Local Man Says His Invention Could Raise Squalus in Six Hours," 26 May 1939, 19; *Los Angeles Times*, "Diving Chief Called Thinker," 25 May 1939, 2; Momsen also helped develop a helium-gas air mixture that enabled deep diving. Hanson Baldwin, "Submarines Made Safer but Big Hazards Remain," *New York Times*, 28 May 1939, sec. E, 10.

<sup>63</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, "Third Disaster," 5 June 1939, 8; *Chicago Tribune*, "Fourth Disaster This Year," 17 June 1939, 1. These articles reference the sinking on 2 February 1939 of a Japanese submarine, the *I-63*, which drowned its entire complement of 81 officers and men.

Press Relations Officer, Lieutenant Commander Bernard L. Austin, relayed information to press correspondents as soon as he received it from the scene. Within three days of the accident occurring, the Public Relations Branch issued a flurry of press releases detailing each step of the rescue operations, the identities of the men known to have been killed or who survived the accident, and information on the development of the “Momsen” lung earlier the decade. At the Portsmouth Navy Yard, the Navy established a makeshift information center capable of receiving radio traffic from the rescue vessel *Falcon* which could then be conveyed to the correspondents gathered at the base. Enterprising reporters who trekked out to the *Squalus* site on a lobster boat during the early days of the crisis communicated with naval officers on the scene via megaphone and found the salvagers responsive to questions about conditions on the ocean. This level of access continued throughout the rescue and subsequent salvage operations in the following weeks. Newsreel captured many key events during the salvage, including the first attempt to raise the *Squalus* to the surface that ended in failure when the submarine slipped out of the cables attached to the pontoons bringing it to the surface.<sup>64</sup>

Tellingly, the media openly praised the Navy’s willingness to aid its efforts to release information to the general public. Reporters complained that the Navy prevented the public from receiving any worthwhile information when both the *S-51* and *S-4* sank,

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<sup>64</sup> *Vice Admiral Bernard L. Austin*, 60-62; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 23 May 1939, B33, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 24 May 1939, pp 1-3, B33, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 24 May 1939, B33, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 24 May 1939, B33, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 25 May 1939, B33, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 25 May 1939, B33, E113, RG 80, NAB; LaVO, *Back From the Deep*, 51-2; *Christian Science Monitor*, “Naval Officials Commended for Aid to Newsmen,” 26 May 1939, 10; “*Squalus* on Bottom Again in Dramatic Salvage Disaster,” *Universal Newsreel*, 14 July 1939 Universal Newsreel Catalog, RG 200 UN, NACP.

but they found no such reluctance on the part of naval officials during the *Squalus* incident. Instead, press correspondents found naval officers inquiring about their deadlines so that press conferences and releases could be timed accordingly. The Navy also allowed the small boats gathered at the scene to close within 100 yards of the cruiser *Brooklyn* as the cruiser took on the survivors after their transfer from the *Falcon*. In a test of the Navy's policy designed to produce a speedier and more liberal release of information, media outlets judged the service as having passed with flying colors.<sup>65</sup>

Reflective of the "transformational" nature of the period, interwar Navy publicity showed the public that the service had committed itself to modifying its conception of naval warfare. By 1939, the Navy had done much to integrate the airplane and the submarine into the fleet and simultaneously to demonstrate that progress to the public. Aviation and submarines not only attracted press coverage but their attainment of greater operational success or enhanced mechanical reliability reached the public via several means, including newsreels and feature films. This transition was not always a smooth one, nor was it entirely consistent, as seen with the incredibly defensive language used to justify the resumption of battleship construction in the late 1930s. The components of naval transformation often appeared in isolation to one another, thus perhaps devaluing the rhetoric used to support the concept of a balanced fleet or a "three plane" Navy. That said, the Navy had shown during the 1920s and 1930s how each of the new

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<sup>65</sup> *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, "U.S. Navy Helps Newsmen Meet Their Deadlines," 4 June 1939, 8A; *Christian Science Monitor*, "Naval Officials Commended for Aid to Newsmen," 26 May 1939, 10; *New York Times*, "Navy to Liberalize Its Policy on News," 18 May 1939, 8.

technologies could operate successfully, and do so with an acceptable level of risk to man and machine.

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **“NATIONAL INSURANCE”: PUBLIC DEFINITIONS OF THE NAVY’S**

#### **MISSION, 1922-1939**

It was not difficult for the interwar Navy to make the case that it could mold young men into productive citizens, and Navy also conveyed to the public its ability to integrate new technologies in spite of a series of prominent accidents. With these specific goals to focus on, the Navy could fine-tune its public relations campaigns. The service, however, faced a more difficult challenge in explaining its role in national defense since many Americans perceived the nation to be secure from foreign menaces. The treaties signed at the Washington Conference established a system of naval disarmament and worked to reduce tensions in China and the Pacific. Even more ambitiously, the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 attempted to outlaw war itself. When the 1930s descended into violence, Congress passed a series of Neutrality Acts rather than risk involvement in foreign conflicts. In this environment, naval leaders could not easily justify the force structure that they considered vital to American security or in the organizational interests of the service. In essence, the Navy, an institution which viewed itself as the nation’s “first line of defense,” often resorted to justifying its value without focusing on national security. Simple appeals to the flight-fear instinct described by Edward Bernays stood little chance of convincing the public of the necessity of increased naval appropriations. Thus, during the 1920s and 1930s, the Navy publicized activities of the service that benefited the country in non-military ways, including its role in fostering the growth of American commerce and the provision of humanitarian relief.

As the 1930s wore on and the international situation deteriorated, however, the Navy began to adjust its message and put national security at the forefront of naval policy.<sup>1</sup>

After the end of World War I, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels argued in favor of completing the ships of the 1916 program and justified his stance as necessary to maintain American security and sovereignty in a chaotic world. These arguments in support of naval construction failed to alter the country's prevailing mood against militarism and navalism. The issue of naval disarmament loomed over the entirety of American naval policy in the interwar period, and, indeed, the Navy itself believed that the treaties constituted the first, clear statement of naval policy in recent memory. While the Navy certainly benefitted from the pre-World War I construction programs, the service had disliked the spasmodic building and top-heavy fleet that eventually resulted. The limitations agreed to at the Washington Conference proved immensely popular with the general public, and the Navy would frequently state over the next decade that it accepted the principle of naval arms limitation and asked only that the fleet be kept at the maximum levels agreed to in the Five Power Pact. But even this goal appeared to be beyond its reach.

In the aftermath of the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922, the Navy and its supporters developed two distinct rationales for justifying naval expenditures. Some chose to attack the issue of disarmament directly. Most senior naval officers opposed the treaty terms, although Captain William Veazie Pratt, who later served as both the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet, and the Chief of Naval Operations,

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<sup>1</sup> Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, 152.



became one of the few notable proponents of disarmament within the Navy.<sup>2</sup> Since many sources of publicity and lobbying, such as William Randolph Hearst, the Navy League, and, to some degree, Dudley W. Knox, existed outside of the Navy Department, they could more freely state their opinions on disarmament and whether they believed it good for the Navy or the nation as a whole. One of the first major critiques of the Washington treaties was penned by Retired Captain Knox who published his *The Eclipse of American Sea Power* through the *Army-Navy Journal*, a news publication directed towards the services for which he occupied the post of editor.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout his book, Knox argued that the general public remained profoundly ignorant of the true state of naval affairs in the aftermath of the Washington Conference. The culprit, Knox surmised, was the American news media which ceded its duties to report pertinent information to the public to pacifistic societies. According to Knox, naval officers shared in the blame for the outcome of the conference:

But American naval officers have long since formed the habit of ultraconservatism in regard to publicity, partly on account of many years of officially imposed repression, and partly because of seeming belief in many quarters that American naval officers differ from other Americans, and from officers of other nationality, in that they place selfish interests above their patriotism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pratt was later ostracized by the naval officer corps for his contrarian viewpoints. See Gerald Wheeler, *Admiral William Veazie Pratt, U.S. Navy: A Sailor's Life* (Washington: GPO, 1974), 342, 355.

<sup>3</sup> Knox, *Eclipse*, passim.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, v, 14-5.

Knox claimed to support disarmament in principle but believed that specific provisions of the treaty profoundly weakened America's position in the international system. Knox viewed the post-World War I international system as one in which the United States possessed all the advantages relative to its peers and had the opportunity to exploit that power. Britain was reluctant, Knox knew, to cede naval supremacy to the United States but could do little to stop it, while the Japanese were spending far beyond their means in order to continue expanding in East Asia. Yet the United States, the presumably dominant power, surrendered its naval advantages to the other two nations. The United States acted out of a misguided idealism, Knox reasoned, while Britain and Japan jealously guarded their own interests with little regard for the international stability. The Five-Power Pact, in Knox's estimation, placed the United States at a disadvantage due to the abandonment of its new naval construction programs and Secretary of State Charles Hughes' decision to set the treaty limits – not the ratios – based on existing construction. This left the United States unable to properly secure all of its global dependencies, particularly the Philippines, which Knox believed were rendered much more vulnerable to a Japanese attack.<sup>5</sup>

The Washington Conference only occurred because of the overwhelming strength of the United States relative to Britain, Japan, and the other sea powers invited to the participate. Ultimately, the United States surrendered this advantage at the bargaining table. In Knox's words:

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1-15, 23, 132-40.

But with noteworthy generosity *America offered to give up a certain first place* (with no close second) *in sea power and a positive ability to safeguard American interests the world over – and furthermore offered to do so at stupendous financial loss to herself* [emphasis his].<sup>6</sup>

Knox clearly believed that Hughes and the rest of the negotiating team failed to settle all of the issues under discussion at Washington and thus failed to fully benefit from the threat of completing the 1916 program. Their failure to dictate favorable terms for the United States led Knox to predict the likelihood of calling future conferences merely to redress the grievances left or created at Washington. To fix these problems, the nation must maintain a fleet within treaty limits but large enough to give the United States leverage at future conferences.<sup>7</sup>

Other naval officers shared Knox's and argued the necessity of maintaining a large fleet after the conclusion of the Washington Conference. Captain Luke McNamee, the head of the Office of Naval Intelligence, spoke before the Women's Republican Club of Massachusetts in January 1923 and contended that coming global instability and resource competition required a Navy and that it remained the best instrument capable of ensuring American economic sufficiency. As part of the sea control triad, McNamee maintained that the Navy could successfully enforce national policy through the maintenance of trade routes, the protection of overseas territories, and the enforcement of American diplomatic policy, of which he stated, "It is a sad commentary on human

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 41-2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 140.

nature to note what an emphasis a battleship adds to diplomatic note.” McNamee argued that “disarmament by example” was a foolish policy resulting from falsehoods found in foreign-based propaganda. Without the Navy, he asserted that there would be no way to maintain American prestige in the international system or to “guard our families and firesides.”<sup>8</sup>

Later that spring, as Congress debated a new appropriations bill which threatened to reduce the Navy’s enlisted personnel strength to 65,000 – a reduction of nearly half and 31,000 shy of the Navy Department’s estimated manpower needs – prominent officials attempted to raise public awareness on the issue. Congressmen argued that any further decline in naval efficiency threatened to turn the United States into “the third naval power” behind Great Britain and Japan and alleged that more than one-third of American battleships would need to remain out of commission should the personnel bill pass. In a public appearance, McNamee pointed out that, “A modern Navy is not something that one can take out of one’s pocket when war breaks out and then toss merrily on the scrap heap when it is over.” Naval officers, he argued, genuinely desired peace and hoped that another war would never come but recognized that only through the maintenance of an efficient naval establishment could American security be guaranteed, now or in the future.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Keep Our Navy Strong,” Address Delivered by CAPT Luke McNamee to the Women’s Republican Club of Massachusetts, 22 January 1923, p. 6, 14, B5, E113, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>9</sup> Navy Department, Released for Publication, 31 March 1922, p. 2, B4, E113, RG 80, NAB. Address Delivered by Luke McNamee to National Council for Reduction of Armament, 4 April 1922, p. 2, B4, E113, RG 80, NAB. Radio Talk by CAPT Luke McNamee, 8 November 1922, B157, EP 3, RG 428, NACP.

The Navy League agreed with many of the arguments made by Knox and likewise believed that the Washington Treaties left much something to be desired, yet League officials feared that an open and forceful denouncement of the treaties would lead to ruin for both the organization and its cause. Instead, many of the League's press releases advocated building the fleet to the limits specified as part of the Five-Power Treaty. Since building to the treaty limits constituted expansion in an absolute sense, it provided the Navy League with the rhetorical cover that the construction it coveted merely allowed the United States to uphold a major international agreement. Beginning just after the Washington Conference adjourned, but lasting well into the 1930s, the Navy League would issue press releases highlighting the ratios of fleet strengths as they existed to make their case for new rounds of naval construction.<sup>10</sup>

The problem for the Navy with developing an explicit message of preparedness in the 1920s lay with the fact that there appeared to be no clear threat to American security on the horizon. The public showed little enthusiasm for a rivalry between the United States and Great Britain despite the suspicion of British motives. The interwar Navy incorporated Red fleets into battle simulations performed at the Naval War College and even some early 1920s Fleet Problems, but, beyond these measures and a few half-hearted and grossly underdeveloped war plans, the Navy agreed with public sentiment.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Navy League Press Release, 27 November 1922, Item 31, Gardiner Papers; Rappaport, *Navy League*, 89-90.

<sup>11</sup> William Braisted, "On the American Red and Red-Orange Plans, 1919-1939" in *Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century, 1900-1945: Essays in Honour of Arthur Marder*, ed. Gerald Jordan, 167-82 (New York: Crane Russak, 1977); Thomas Wildenberg, *All The Factors of Victory: Admiral Joseph Mason*

Because Bolshevism was contained within the boundaries of the Soviet Union and Germany restricted by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, only Japan possessed the means to endanger American physical or economic security. War planning against Japan began near the turn of the century after its military victories over China and Tsarist Russia. Japan's acquired several island groups formerly held by Germany attempted to impose a series of demands on China during the war, causing American policymakers to fear that Japan coveted the Philippines.

While the Washington Conference brought calm to the Pacific Rim, new sources of tension appeared in 1924 and 1925. The rise of nativist sentiments after World War I led to a Congressional debate over the exclusion of non-Northern European immigrants into the United States for both racial and political reasons. West Coast citizens and legislators successfully pressed for the inclusion of a total ban on Japanese peoples into the Immigration Act of 1924 that President Calvin Coolidge signed into law on 9 May. Press outlets, particularly in Japan but in other countries as well, were outraged by the creation of racial quotas and speculated on the future of American-Japanese relations.<sup>12</sup>

By happenstance, the Navy's fleet concentration during the winter of 1924-1925 was scheduled to take place in Hawaiian waters, a noteworthy event since most of the recent concentrations had focused on areas near Panama and the Caribbean. Further exacerbating matters, the Battle Fleet planned an extensive cruise to Australia and New Zealand following the conclusion of Fleet Problem V and Grand Joint Exercise 3. Press

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*Reeves and the Origins of Carrier Air Power* (New York: Brassey's, 2003), 110-15; Felker, *Testing American Sea Power*, 114.

<sup>12</sup> Wheeler, *Prelude to Pearl Harbor*, 31-5.

speculation ran rampant as to the intent of the maneuvers and potential provocation that could result from holding the exercises in the central Pacific. Editorials, however, defended the Navy's need for extensive training so that it could maintain a high level of readiness and resented the implications made by domestic pacifist groups or their media counterparts in Japan. In response to claims by a Tokyo newspaper that war would be inevitable should the planned maneuvers occur, the *Baltimore Sun* labeled the statement as a "stupid outburst" and argued that the American news media did not react in fear each time the Imperial Japanese Navy trained in Pacific waters. In December 1924, Congress briefly debated passing a resolution calling upon the Navy to cancel the exercises, an event which inspired more invective on the issue, but discussion ended without a vote. Japanese leaders ended the brief flap the following month when they declared the American maneuvers a non-threat to their nation.<sup>13</sup>

When they began in April, the maneuvers received extensive media coverage at home that emphasized the vulnerability of the Hawaiian Islands to attack. The Black forces defending the islands accurately anticipated the method of advance utilized by Blue yet found itself completely unable to stop the advance. To some reporters, this was solid evidence that the Navy and the combined power of the battle line comprised the most effective means of defense should war ever break out in the Pacific. Also garnering attention was the subsequent cruise of the Battle Fleet to Australia and New Zealand, which intended to demonstrate the ability of the fleet to execute operations far

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<sup>13</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, "A Stupid Outburst," 16 November 1924, 10. *Baltimore Sun*, "Japanese Paper Sees War Threat in U.S. Maneuvers," 15 November 1924, 1; Wheeler, *Prelude to Pearl Harbor*, 36-7.

removed from its home ports and to develop closer political and military ties with the Commonwealth nations. The *Sydney Morning Herald* believed that “no other power today could so lightly face the cost of this far cruise of so great a naval force.” The visit of the fleet was well-received in Australia as thousands of onlookers greeted the fleet’s arrival at Sydney and led to a glowing exchange of messages between officers of the fleet and the Australian Prime Minister.<sup>14</sup>

In August 1925, just as the fleet returned to American waters, a new potential source of inflammation between the United States and Japan appeared with the publication of *The Great Pacific War: A History of the American-Japanese Campaign of 1931-1932*. Its author, Hector Bywater began writing on naval affairs for the *Baltimore Sun* during the Washington Conference and for a decade remained one of the paper’s military and naval correspondents. Prior to the conference, he displayed skepticism towards the intentions of its participants, particularly Japan, but at its conclusion he argued that the proceedings had prevented a naval race from growing into a new world war. This optimism quickly abated as he began questioning the sincerity of the signatories’ intentions towards honoring both the letter and the spirit of the terms to which they had agreed. A year after the conference’s conclusion, Bywater wrote a column titled “America Not to Blame if Arms Treaty Fails” in which he revisited his suspicions of Japan due to recent proposals to build up its treaty-exempt auxiliary forces, especially cruisers, destroyers, and submarines. The worsening of tensions in the

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<sup>14</sup> *Washington Post*, “Plane and Subsea Craft Fail to Save Hawaii from ‘Foe,’” 28 April 1925, 1; *Sydney Morning Herald*, “The American Fleet,” 26 June 1925, 8; *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Sydney Welcomes the U.S.A.,” 24 July 1925, 12; *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Link of Friendship,” 7 August 1925, 8; *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Warm Thanks,” 7 August 1925, 9.



months following the passage of the National Origins Act of 1924 led Bywater to conclude that a war between the United States and Japan, while certainly not inevitable, was more likely than many persons cared to admit. Bywater then set out to write a speculative account of a war between the two powers might unfold.<sup>15</sup>

The war, as Bywater saw it, would result from Japanese overpopulation and a fear of growing Chinese strength, causing its leaders to see the necessity of a war to cement its position in East Asia. Upon commencing hostilities, he speculated Japan would explode a freighter in the Panama Canal, destroy many of the locks, prevent the rapid transfer of American naval units from the Atlantic, and thus giving its own fleet a free hand to seize Guam and the Philippines. After suffering heavy losses, the remaining units of the United States Navy would, in his account, retreat back to safer waters in the Eastern Pacific. The Japanese would then launch a series of raids against the West Coast, but the Japanese repulsed an American quick counteroffensive aimed at capturing part of the Bonin Islands. After a period of regrouping, the Navy initiated a slow, cautious advance across the Pacific, seizing island bases and eventually forcing the Japanese to a climactic battle near Yap Island. The American naval victory opened the Home Islands to air attack, and, when taken in combination with a full-scale offensive

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<sup>15</sup> Hector C. Bywater, "Japan: A Sequel to the Washington Conference," *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1923, 240-9; Hector C. Bywater, "America Not to Blame if Treaty Fails," *Baltimore Sun*, 25 Mar. 1923, 8; Bywater had taken the position during crisis over the exercises that the Japan had nothing to fear from the American plans. See Hector C. Bywater, "Tokio Criticism of Maneuvers by U.S. Navy Held Unjustified," *Baltimore Sun*, 16 November 1924, 1; Bywater to Ferris Greenlet, pp 1-3, 28 August 1924, B6, Honan Papers.

waged by the Chinese against Japanese forces on the mainland of Asia, finally forced a Japanese surrender nearly two years after the war began.<sup>16</sup>

The conduct of the war as viewed by Bywater contained many noteworthy features. First, Bywater had long appreciated the rapidly evolving technology of naval warfare and incorporated the extensive use of both carrier-based aircraft and submarines into naval combat. During this anticipated conflict, however, the Navy lagged behind the Japanese in integrating new technologies into its arsenal and only the humiliating defeats suffered in the early part of the war convinced naval leadership of the need for a balanced fleet. Second, Bywater anticipated that any potential American advance to meet the Japanese would involve a long sustained drive through the atolls of the Central Pacific, thus providing a public hint of the Navy's secret War Plan Orange which, in its various guises, called for a similar offensive. Third and finally, Bywater's narrative highlighted many potential disadvantages the Navy faced in a Pacific conflict. American resiliency and doggedness eventually carried the day, but Bywater argued that several key American positions in the Pacific remained vulnerable. As he saw it, the U.S. fleet remained incapable of accomplishing the tasks required of it without major reinforcement.<sup>17</sup>

Bywater demonstrated the depth of his knowledge of naval affairs in *The Great Pacific War* and received abundant praise for his abilities, particularly in reviews by Dudley Knox and Nicholas Roosevelt, a first cousin of Theodore and writer for the *New*

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<sup>16</sup> Bywater, *The Great Pacific War*, passim.

<sup>17</sup> In his biography of Hector Bywater, Honan argues that Bywater's book convinced American war planners to alter the details of War Plan Orange. See Honan, *Visions of Infamy*, 196-7, 268-9.

*York Times*. Knox, in particular, was struck by the immense cost incurred by the US to fight the war but the seemingly little return it eventually received on that investment when drawing up the peace terms after the Japanese surrender. Others, however, questioned the timing of the book's release and its effect on American-Japanese relations. An editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* roundly criticized the book's appearance on the heels of previous discord between the U.S. and Japan, calling it "most unpleasant" in its timing and apparent determination to inflame tensions. The *Los Angeles Times* argued that the book unfairly painted Japan as an aggressor nation and contended that its leaders no longer considered war as a viable policy option. The press and the public had no penchant for a new American war in the 1920s and resented any attempt to imply that one could break out in the near future.<sup>18</sup>

While the mid-1920s saw some Navy leaders and their allies attack the system of disarmament and become entangled in international political controversies, the service began developing alternative methods of justifying its value to the nation. A strong fleet capable of an effective national defense composed just one part of Mahan's triad of sea control. The Navy and other sources of public relations support began spending much effort pointing out the more benign and beneficial aspects of naval development and of being a true sea power. This included linking the Navy to industrial prosperity, peaceful scientific developments, and missions of relief and humanitarian aid that the service could perform on account of its considerable physical reach.

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<sup>18</sup> Dudley W. Knox, "Capt. Knox Reviews Great Pacific War," *Baltimore Sun*, 21 Sept. 1925, 7; Nicholas Roosevelt, "If War Comes in the Pacific," *New York Times*, 13 September 1925, sec. BR, 5; *Chicago Tribune*, "Calling Our Next Unpleasantness," 18 August 1925, 8; *Los Angeles Times*, "Trouble Breeders," 21 September 1925, sec. A, 4.

One way the service responded to the lean years of the 1920s was to demonstrate its commitment to administrative and financial efficiency. Soon after the Washington Conference, Secretary of the Navy Edwin Denby stated before Congress that the Navy would immediately begin selling old ships and surplus material left over from World War I in an effort to lighten its financial burden. He followed this by publicizing a directive calling for greater supervision of supplies and accounts in order to streamline efficiency; he also ordered officers aboard ship to manage their expenses “on a strictly business basis.” Rather than hidebound naval officers bent on maximizing the amount of funds received and spent each fiscal year, the Navy sought to emphasize that its Supply Corps used modern business practices to aid its assigned task of administering the hundreds of millions of dollars appropriated to the service each year. The Supply Corps received compliments for its “freedom from red tape” and ability to maximize financial efficiency within the Navy Department. At times, this could encompass actions such as allowing men to disembark in Los Angeles where their ship was docked rather than force them to travel to San Francisco for processing by the receiving ship.<sup>19</sup>

While publicizing these efficiency measures was designed to convey to the public the Navy’s commitment to frugality, one action designed to lower administrative costs led to a major political scandal. Over the protest of officers within the Navy Department, President Warren G. Harding allowed the Department of Interior to assume

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<sup>19</sup> Navy News Bureau, Immediate Release, 4 March 1922, p. 1, B4, E113, RG 80, NAB. Address by RADM David Potter, Atlantic City, NJ, 6 May 1922, p. 5, B4, E113, RG 80, NAB. Statement by Edwin Denby before the House Naval Affairs Committee, 13 February 1922, pp 5-7, B4, E113, RG 80, NAB. The Navy continued to list several ships, including the USS *Rochester* (ex-*New York*, ex-*Saratoga*), dating to the 1880s and the early years of the “new” steel navy on the active list. The *Rochester* itself would remain on active duty until its decommissioning in 1933;

jurisdiction over the Navy's oil reserves at Teapot Dome, Wyoming. Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall could lease any of the lands to private companies or individuals. After taking control of the reserves, Fall accepted gifts and considerable sums of money to lease the land to oilmen Harry F. Sinclair and Edward Doheny; these transactions sparked a Senate investigation and a significant political scandal. The order transferring the reserves required that Denby be consulted and agree to the transfer of the leases, which he did without taking any bribes. Before Congress, Denby defended the leases authorized by Fall and himself as protective measures to ensure that non-licensed private concerns did not drain the reserves of oil before the Navy could utilize them. Most of the wrongdoing rested in Fall's hands, but Denby's acquiescence to the leases eventually forced him to announce his resignation on 18 February 1924 while blaming his fate on "partisan trickery." Fortunately for the Navy Department, the controversy remained confined to Denby alone and eventually led to the restoration of control over the oil reserves in 1927.<sup>20</sup>

The Navy's publicizing of its efficiency measures demonstrated its commitment to adaptation in difficult times, but the service needed to promote more active and far-reaching ways in which it could aid the nation. Thus, by the mid-1920s, the Navy frequently linked the health of the service to the development and maintenance of American commercial and industrial prosperity. Since the nation appeared economically secure, the strategy of promoting the Navy's boost of commerce and industry appeared

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<sup>20</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, "Denby Resigns as Navy Head; Retires March 10," 19 February 1924, 1. Layton McCartney, *The Teapot Dome Scandal: How Big Oil Bought the Harding White House and Tried to Steal the Country* (New York: Random House, 2009), 83-4, 173, 215; *New York Times*, "Insists Oil Reserves are Being Drained," 5 May 1922, 33; *San Francisco Examiner*, 4 February 1924. Clipping in B114, EP 3, RG 428, NACP; Navy Department, Memo for the Press, 18 February 1924, pp 1-3, B6, E113, NAB.

sound. It allowed the Navy to argue in favor of an enlarged force structure capable of overseas commitments, but did so without ever needing to identify any specific threat to those interests. These efforts began after the Armistice, and in 1920 the Navy highlighted the use of aircraft from naval air stations to perform “fish patrols” that relayed information to local fishermen that led to an increase in daily hauls. Through a variety of means, naval officials touted the ability of the Navy to protect American commerce overseas and used specific moments, such as a public appreciation delivered by Standard Oil to the Navy for protection provided during the Chinese unification crisis in 1926-1927 for safeguarding the company’s personnel and assets from “greater financial loss.”<sup>21</sup>

To further the image of the Navy as an agent of economic prosperity, the service and its allies also devoted time to promoting the growth of the American merchant marine, the size of which had been in steady decline since the Civil War. As in the Navy’s thinking on present and future conflicts during the interwar period never deviated from basic Mahanian theory, neither did its publicity. As part of his triad upon which seapower was based, Mahan argued that one of these legs must be composed of a strong merchant marine, overseas bases, and a strong battle fleet. Building from this model, the interwar Navy often argued that it must protect and support a maritime trade for the nation to remain wealthy and secure. In doing so, the Navy and, particularly, the Navy League, spent much effort educating the public on the value of seaborne commerce.

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<sup>21</sup> Navy News Bureau, Immediate Release, 3 September 1920, B2, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 28 June 1927, B10, E113, RG 80, NAB.

From as early as 1922, the Navy increasingly viewed its own fate as intertwined with that of the Merchant Marine. The Morale Division of the Bureau of Navigation issued a bulletin warning of the consequences should the Navy's funding be drawn down too far by Congress in the midst of the public debate over disarmament. To remedy the problem, the Bureau recommended that naval officers educate themselves on the value of the Merchant Marine because it was imperative that officers tell the public "how the Navy can be made to effectively advance the business of our citizens." Dudley Knox made similar claims, arguing that the volume of foreign trade factored heavily into America's economic well-being and that only the Navy and a strong American merchant marine could guarantee continued growth.<sup>22</sup>

In 1926, the Navy League began accentuating the importance of a strong merchant marine during the annual Navy Day celebration. To enhance the publicity of this cause, Dudley Knox distributed a memo intended to guide the speeches of those slated to make appearances at Navy Day events across the country. The memo provided speakers with specific statistics to cite in their talks, such as the decline of the volume of trade carried in American hulls to thirty four percent in 1925. Knox also advised that speeches include a section arguing that the United States was not economically self-sufficient and that foreign trade constituted the lifeblood of American prosperity. By

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<sup>22</sup> BuNav, Morale Division, "Bulletin No. 2," 16 February 1922, B1, Knox Papers; Knox to LCDR Emmet, 29 September 1922, B1, Knox Papers.

1928, Navy Day organizers specifically instructed that the desire for a balanced fleet and an “adequate Merchant Marine” should constitute the goals of each Navy Day.<sup>23</sup>

During the same era, the Navy also publicized its ability to serve as a humanitarian force in case of dire emergencies. Oftentimes, the Navy’s involvement in disaster relief during this period occurred within the borders of the United States. Personnel from all over the Washington, D.C. area aided in the rescue efforts after the collapse of the Knickerbocker Theater on 28 January 1922, an accident that killed 98 and injured 133 more. The Navy also assisted in the investigation into the cause of the accident.<sup>24</sup>

The most prominent instance of domestic disaster relief ensued during the terrible 1927 flooding of the Mississippi River. Heavy rains beginning in 1926 were followed by record single-day rainfalls on 15 April 1927, flooding thousands of square miles of land in the river valley. The Navy played a key role in the relief efforts coordinated by Herbert Hoover and others when it mobilized tugs and other small craft to navigate the troubled waters. The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral E.W. Eberle, suspended training operations at the air station at Pensacola so that thirty-one seaplanes, the bulk of the force stationed there, could assist in the relief operations. The press praised the Navy’s seaplanes as “winged messengers of mercy” for assistance they

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<sup>23</sup> McNamee to J.G. Harbord, 25 September 1928, B254, E22, RG 80, NAB. “Skeleton Form for Use of Navy Day Speakers,” October 1926, B2, Knox Papers.

<sup>24</sup> *Washington Post*, “Army and Navy Experts Trace Theater Crash to Swaying Wall,” 8 February 1922, 1; Navy News Bureau, Immediate Release, 11 February 1922, B4, E113, RG 80, NAB.



rendered to marooned families and reminded readers that the service “[did] its full share” when disaster struck.<sup>25</sup>

The Navy provided humanitarian relief overseas as well as at home. The 1923 recruiting film *The Navy and the Near East* showcased the Navy’s movement of refugees from Smyrna during the Greco-Turkish War the previous year, but this was far from the only time where the Navy intervened in such a crisis. The Asiatic Fleet responded rapidly to the 1923 earthquake in Japan that killed more than 100,000 in Tokyo and the surrounding areas. In all, more than a dozen ships and several aircraft helped bring much needed aid to the Japanese people. The relief briefly led to hopes of increased goodwill between the two nations, as did the Navy’s donation of complete sets of charts and maps as a gift to the Japanese Navy to replace those lost in the earthquake.<sup>26</sup>

On the domestic front the Navy sought to employ the USS *Constitution* as a symbol both of preparedness and of the triumph of American democracy over the previous 150 years. In early 1926 as the “Save Old Ironsides” fund began to accumulate, Secretary of the Navy Curtis Wilbur referred to the donations from thousands of New York City school children as giving “proof their young faith in the

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<sup>25</sup> *Washington Post*, “Airplane Relief Work,” 6 May 1927, 6. *New York Times*, “H.M. Baker Dictator,” 24 April 1927, 1; *New York Times*, “Flying 48 Planes for Flood Relief,” 5 May 1927, 2; John M. Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 173-201.

<sup>26</sup> Film 24.24; *Our Navy in the Near East*, 1923, Records of the Navy Recruiting Bureau, RG 24, NACP; Navy Department, Memo for the Press, 4 September 1923, pp 1-3, B5, E113, RG 80, NAB. Among other effects, the earthquake irreparably damaged the Japanese battlecruiser *Amagi* as it lay in drydock which prevented its conversion to an aircraft carrier. See Robert Gardiner, et. al., *Conway’s All the World’s Fighting Ships, 1906-1921* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 232; *New York Times*, “Gives Charts to Japan,” 11 November 1923, sec. E, 14.

ideals for which that ship fought and which it now represents.” Such references continued over the next year as the fundraising drive collected enough money to fund the ship’s full restoration at the Boston Navy Yard. During a visit to the yard in July 1927, Wilbur explicitly linked the aged warship to the contemporary cause of preparedness by comparing the microbes which had rotted the wooden hulk of the old frigate to anti-navalist forces doing much the same to the modern naval establishment; both of the threats lay hidden beneath the surface but had the potential to destroy the afflicted.<sup>27</sup>

To a Navy Department attempting to rally support among a divided public for valuable appropriations, the ship stood as “a great national instrument” which had inspired “patriotism and national unity at a critical time in the country’s development.” In 1931, Secretary of the Navy Charles F. Adams used a speech delivered aboard the *Constitution* to defend President Hebert Hoover’s record on naval preparedness. Adams argued that the president believed in “preparedness as a safeguard of peace” and linked this claim to the ship’s history as a symbol of America’s commitment to protect itself from any potential threat. The *Constitution*’s victories in combat, he argued, laid the foundation for years of peace.<sup>28</sup>

The Navy also publicized the many surveys and expeditions it carried out during the interwar period to facilitate everything from the expansion of trade routes to a general broadening of scientific knowledge. One geographic area the Navy spent much

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<sup>27</sup> Navy Department, Immediate Release, 4 February 1926, B9, E113, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>28</sup> Address by Curtis Wilbur at Boston Navy Yard, 16 June 1927, p. 1, B11, E113, RG 80, NAB. Address by Ernest Lee Jahncke at the Ceremonies of Commissioning the United States Frigate *Constitution*, Boston Navy Yard, 1 July 1931, p. 1, B18, E113, RG 80, NAB. Navy Press Room, For Release After Delivery, 27 October 1931, p. 2, B19, E113, RG 80, NAB.

effort exploring during the 1920s and 1930s was the Arctic. The Navy had first become linked to Arctic exploration in 1909 when Rear Admiral Robert E. Peary claimed to be the first person to reach the North Pole, leading to widespread praise and fame for the achievement. While the war years delayed further expeditions to the region, the interwar Navy's interest in the Arctic came alive during the interwar era. Rear Admiral William Adger Moffett planned for several years to have one of the Navy's new airships, the *Shenandoah*, become the first craft to fly over the North Pole. The Navy asserted that polar exploration was not a publicity stunt and missions dispatched to the region could provide numerous benefits. Most importantly, the Navy argued that the expeditions into the Arctic would foster a greater understanding of weather systems which form in the cold air masses and descend upon the more temperate climate zones of the Northern Hemisphere. The service also hoped that polar exploration by air could open up new travel routes over the Arctic routes that would save thousands of miles and large amounts of fuel on long distant flights. Some naval leaders believed that valuable mineral resources may lay hidden beneath the ice sheet—like those recently discovered in Spitzbergen and Alaska. The service also pointed out several other lesser ancillary benefits of Arctic exploration, including the survey of more than 500,000 square miles of completely uncharted territory, investigating any land masses known to be locked in by the polar ice sheet, and the charting of tides in the region.<sup>29</sup>

Due to the high costs and risks involved, President Calvin Coolidge cancelled the proposed airship flight over the North Pole in 1924 but this did not prevent the Navy

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<sup>29</sup> Navy Department, Memo for the Press, 26 December 1923, B41, EP 3, RG 428, NACP.

from associating itself with further exploration of the region. In a series of privately funded ventures, Lieutenant Commander Richard E. Byrd – on leave from the Navy – achieved celebrity for claiming to overfly both the North and South Pole during expeditions which received some assistance from the Navy. The first of Byrd's highly publicized flights took place in May 1926 when Byrd and co-pilot Floyd Bennett overflew the North Pole, an accomplishment which brought Byrd widespread glory in the United States and led Admiral E.W. Eberle to proclaim him as measuring "up to the highest and best traditions of the American Navy."<sup>30</sup>

In the weeks after Byrd's flight over the North Pole, he spoke openly of his desire to explore the Antarctic region by air, but before doing so he set his sights on crossing the Atlantic Ocean. In June 1927, Byrd successfully flew from the United States to France in a Fokker trimotor aircraft, but, although Byrd had successfully reached Paris, he found the airfield too crowded with traffic and the flight nearly ended in disaster when the plane crashed near the Normandy coast. The other three crew members survived with some injuries but waited several hours before rescuers finally reached their crash site. Parisians celebrated Byrd's achievement, but the flight had the unfortunate distinction of coming just weeks after Charles Lindbergh successfully reached Paris in his nonstop solo flight.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *New York Times*, "First News of Byrd's Great Feat As It Reached the New York Times," 10 May 1926, 1; *New York Times*, "Nation's Leaders Laud Byrd's Feat," 10 May 1926, 3; Byrd later wrote a full-length account of the North Pole expedition entitled *Skyward* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1928).

<sup>31</sup> Edwin L. James, "Byrd Hurlled Through Window Into Water," *New York Times*, 2 July 1927, 1; *New York Times*, "All Paris Gives Byrd a Rousing Welcome; Acosta Found to be Hurt, Chief Must Rest; Commander Writes of Perils of the Trip," 3 July 1927, 1; P.J. Phillip, "Paris Receives Byrd As It Did Lindbergh," *New York Times*, 3 July 1927, 1.

In 1928, Byrd's long-discussed plan to explore Antarctica finally came to fruition, again allowing the Navy to reap the publicity rewards from his privately financed venture. The Navy also provided Byrd with equipment, namely radio transmitters and a ground sonar unit capable of penetrating the dense ice to determine the topography of the land below. En route, Byrd received navigational assistance from the Navy, but easily the grandest declaration of support came from Admiral Moffett on 26 October 1929. During a radio broadcast, Moffett promised that the airship *Akron* would be made available to Byrd for Antarctic exploration should he desire it. While this promise never came to pass, the remainder of Byrd's expedition brought him further acclaim when, on 28 November 1929, Byrd flew in a Ford Trimotor piloted by Bernt Balchen and crewed by two other men over the South Pole in an accomplishment labeled a "splendid feat." The press also partially attributed this exploit to the Navy as it credited George Washington Littlehale with providing the navigational data Byrd needed to determine when he had passed over the pole. The expedition returned home the following year to public fanfare, and Byrd received a promotion to Rear Admiral for his feats. He would return to the Antarctic again in 1933 and 1939.<sup>32</sup>

While Byrd's expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic received the most attention, since both regions lay relatively unexplored, the Navy sought to publicize its surveying

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<sup>32</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, "Air Officials Applaud Byrd," 30 November 1929, 2. *New York Times*, "Byrd Will Sound Ice in Antarctic," 10 June 1928, 131; *New York Times*, "Navy Sends Data to Guide Byrd," 18 December 1928, 15; *Washington Post*, "Cmdr. Byrd Told Navy's Airship Will Aid Him," 27 Oct. 1929, sec. M, 1; Russell Owen, "Start is Made at 10:29 PM New York Time," *New York Times*, 29 November 1929, 1; *Christian Science Monitor*, "Naval Figures Told Byrd When He Was at Pole," 30 November 1929, 2; *New York Times*, "Hoover's Pen Makes Byrd Rear Admiral For Polar Exploits," 22 December 1929, 1.

work closer to the continental United States. Although far less glamorous and exciting than Byrd's expeditions, these did allow the service to call attention to an indirect means of aiding commerce and other activities. In 1926, the Navy began a multiyear aerial survey of uncharted territory in Alaska using three aircraft capable of photographing more than 2,000 square miles of territory an hour. The service assumed the job from the Interior Department because the latter had proven demonstrably slow in surveying the more than 400,000 square miles of virgin territory that lay within the nation's borders. The Navy also undertook aerial survey work outside the United States by helping Haitian surveyors locate the source of two inland lakes prone to flooding in an effort to safeguard the property of nearby residents.<sup>33</sup>

Even while promoting surveying and other peacetime missions, external events continued to dictate the level of attention the Navy and its allies focused upon preparedness. After several years of discussion both in the United States and abroad regarding the "cruiser issue," a conference in Geneva, Switzerland was called for in June 1927. France and Italy declined to participate in the conference, thus leaving the United States, Great Britain, and Japan to discuss cruisers and other issues left outstanding after the Washington Conference. The Geneva Conference, which lasted for approximately six weeks, failed to result in any substantive agreements due to the inability of the United States and Great Britain to resolve their differences over the size and type of cruisers each nation should be allowed to build and maintain. The United States favored

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<sup>33</sup> Navy Press Room, For Immediate Release, 6 November 1925, B2, EP 3, RG 428, NACP; Frank B. Howe, "Navy Will Map Alaskan Wilds With Airplanes," *Los Angeles Sunday Times*, 14 February 1926, B2, EP 3, RG 428, NACP; Navy Press Room, For Immediate Release, 21 February 1929, B2, EP 3, RG 428, NACP; Navy Department, Immediate Release, 11 May 1926, B9, E113, RG 80, NAB.

relatively limited numbers of eight-inch gun vessels designed to fight a trans-Pacific campaign while the British sought a much higher tonnage limit for the type but a restriction on armaments over six inches. As historian William F. Trimble noted in his study of the conference, Geneva proved an excellent “example of how not to conduct naval arms limitation talks.”<sup>34</sup>

While the press had found little to criticize about the Navy’s conduct before, during, or immediately after the Geneva Conference, the service found itself involved in yet another scandal in August 1929; William B. Shearer, a noted naval expert, a friend and ally of Navy League president William Howard Gardiner, and a sometime writer for William Randolph Hearst’s newspaper syndicate, sued shipbuilding firms for failure to pay him more than \$250,000 in lobbying work conducted during the Conference. Shearer claimed that while in the employ of the shipbuilding companies, he sought to sabotage the negotiations to ensure the resumption of construction in private yards. The Navy’s involvement stemmed from claims that Shearer acquired information and encouragement from several senior naval officers while in Geneva. Admiral Hillary P. Jones, the Navy’s member of the delegation at the conference, was believed beyond reproach, but Shearer’s allegations led to a Senate investigation into the links between the Navy, shipbuilders, and private lobbying concerns. The charges, if true, threatened to destroy the credibility of the Navy Department with respect to national defense and its cause of preparedness. It was one thing for naval officials to speak their minds, even if

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<sup>34</sup> William F. Trimble, “The United States Navy and the Geneva Conference for the Limitation of Naval Armament, 1927.” (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1974): 3-6, 255-277, 386.

their opinions ran counter to present policy, but quite another if the Navy Department was thought to be actively undermining the policies set by civilians.<sup>35</sup>

Shearer's efforts had no real discernable effect on the outcome of the Geneva Conference. Problems in both the negotiating process, such as the failure of the participants to discuss parameters for the talks ahead of time, and the inability of the United States and Britain to reconcile their vastly different stances on auxiliary ship construction caused the Conference to fail, not Shearer's lobbying. Congress held hearings on the Shearer matter shortly after the charges surfaced, but the initial proceedings focused upon the shipping magnates who hired Shearer. On 26 September, however, *Baltimore Sun* columnist Drew Pearson alleged that several naval officers aided Shearer's lobbying efforts, including Rear Admirals Joseph Reeves and Frank Schofield in addition to naval historian Commander Holloway H. Frost. Appearing before the committee, Reeves denied the allegations and reiterated that the Navy supported an "equitable" system of arms limitation as a means of guaranteeing certainty in the size of navies at home and abroad. Speculation about the Navy's involvement in the affair receded after Reeves' defense, but the entire imbroglio did not end until June 1930 when the Senate declined to file an official report on its investigation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, "Shearer, 'Big Navy Man,' In Pay of Warship Builders," 22 August 1929, 1; *Washington Post*, "Hearst Disclaims Shearer Lobbying," 3 October 1929, 2; *Baltimore Sun*, "Shearer Says 4 Admirals Urged Him to Conduct Big Navy Propaganda," 9 September 1929, 1; *Chicago Tribune*, "Admiral Jones Not Thought of as Aiding Shearer," 10 September 1929, 18.

<sup>36</sup> *Washington Post*, "Why Was This Story Told?," 1 October 1929, 8. *Christian Science Monitor*, "Naval Officers Face Charge of Aiding Shearer," 27 September 1929, 1; "Closes Shearer Matter," *New York Times*, 12 June 1930, 3.



The most tangible result of the Shearer flap was that President Hoover declined to place any naval officers in the delegation to the London Conference in 1930; instead, he relegated officers to adviser status only. Unlike the previous conference, the negotiations in London produced a new agreement that extended the battleship building holiday for five years to 1936; set cruiser tonnage between the United States, Great Britain, and Japan at a 10:10:7 ratio; and capped destroyer tonnage at 150,000 tons for the United States and Britain. The London Conference convened free of intrusion from outsiders, a result of the decisions made by Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson and the American delegation which chose not to divulge to the press many negotiating specifics during the course of the conference.<sup>37</sup>

Most press outlets supported the ratification of the London treaty, but Hearst made personal, and ultimately unsuccessful, pleas with the Senate to “exercise their own judgment” and prevent ratification. Hearst’s newsreels provided platforms for Congressional naval affairs committee chairmen Representative Fred Britten and Senator Fred Hale to denounce the treaty, with the former declaring that it would spur a new naval race and that the “British have us hamstrung and hogtied and there they will keep us long as limitations of armament are the order of the day.” The Navy’s civilian heads and Admiral Moffett defended the results of the conference for different reasons. Moffett, an adviser to the delegation in London, was pleased by the lack of reductions on carrier tonnage and allowances in American cruiser tonnage to construct “flying deck cruisers” or hybrid warships which could greatly increase the number of carriers.

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<sup>37</sup> Wheeler, *Prelude to Pearl Harbor*, 164-76.

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Ernest Lee Jahncke spoke out in favor of the treaty because it committed the United States “to an orderly and normal advance” in the coming years.<sup>38</sup>

During this period, some advocates of preparedness and of a more vigorous naval policy resorted to using historical examples to make their case. Holloway H. Frost’s *We Build a Navy* (1931) provided readers with episodic descriptions of naval battles from the days of the Continental Navy up to the War of 1812. From the outset, Frost acknowledged that his work should not be taken as a definitive history of the United States Navy nor should readers expect any lengthy discussion of naval policy in that era. In explaining the episodic structure of the book, Frost stated in the preface that, “This volume is a story, not a history. It recounts those chapters of our early naval annals which I conceive to be the most interesting, the most dramatic, and the most instructive.” Frost alluded to contemporary ambivalence towards the Navy when he wrote of the Navy after the War of 1812, “It is difficult for us in these days to realize the place our Navy then had in the hearts of Americans.” In light of such statements, Frost hoped that the book would explain to its readers the “vital necessity of a Navy... and of a vigorous national policy.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> William Randolph Hearst, “The Senate is the Treaty Making Power of the United States,” in *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Randolph Hearst* (San Francisco, 1948), 198-200. “Navy Treaty Fight Stirs the Capital,” *Hearst Metrotone News*, 16 July 1930, FT Archive. Address by Ernest Lee Jahncke over NBS radio, 28 July 1930, p. 1, B15, E113, RG 80, NAB. “What the London Pact Really Means,” *Hearst Metrotone News*, 7 June 1930, FT Archive; Address by William A. Moffett, Akron, OH, 27 October 1930, pp 1-9, B16, E113, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>39</sup> Frost, *We Build a Navy*, vii, 411.

While debate raged over the London Conference and its meaning for the Navy, the country began to slide deeper into the depths of the Great Depression. The economic crisis began to take its toll by early 1930 and led to calls of reduction in government expenditures. As it had done during the lean years after the Washington Conference, the Navy again argued that it could streamline its operations so as to limit its financial burden to the country. Economy measures included reusing the steel intended for use in the battleships scrapped under the terms of the Washington Treaty and increasing the use of arc welding in shipyards. The Navy also promoted the “rigid economy” practiced in flight operations that limited the number of practice flights and practically forbade familiarization flights which had no discernable operational purpose. Fortunately for the Navy, more extreme reductions, including the placement of the *Lexington* and *Saratoga* in rotating reserve whereby only one of the ships would be in commission at a time, were never implemented.<sup>40</sup>

The institution of draconian measures did not prevent the Navy from continuing to assert its value to national prosperity during times of peace. In 1931, the Office of Naval Intelligence issued a publication entitled *The United States Navy in Peacetime: The Navy in Relation to the Industrial, Scientific, Economic, and Political Developments of the Nation*. The publication added only a few new ideas to the public debate, but instead elaborated upon many of the themes of Navy public relations over the previous ten years. In it, the authors argued that the Navy was an inherently “progressive

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<sup>40</sup> Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 23 September 1930, p. 1, B16, E113, RG 80, NAB. Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 19 August 1930, pp 1-7, B34, EP 3, RG 428, NACP; Wheeler, *Admiral William Veazie Pratt*, 313. Pratt, while serving as the Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet, recommended such a plan to the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Charles F. Hughes.

institution” with “industrial, social, scientific, and diplomatic” responsibilities to the nation. The book used a mixture of contemporary and historical examples to highlight the diverse contributions the Navy made to the betterment of the nation. Its authors maintained that trade protection was the Navy’s primary mission, but they pointed to other domestic benefits of naval expansion, including the subsidization of the domestic steel industry in the late nineteenth century to produce armor plating or the more recent examples of the assistance provided to the radio and aviation industries during their formative years. The book chronicled the histories of the Hydrographic Office, Naval Observatory, and the Navy Communications Service and pointed out their contemporary tasks of facilitating the easy movement of commerce by air and sea through the distribution of navigational aids and the broadcasting of weather reports. The book also touched upon other aspects of naval publicity, including humanitarian missions, exploration, and the Navy’s role in international diplomacy.<sup>41</sup>

The humanitarian relief mission described by the ONI publication was put to the test that same year as the Navy provided emergency aid to Nicaragua in April 1931 following a powerful earthquake on 31 March which killed at least 2,000 people. Coincidentally, the Navy had ships in the region since Fleet Problem XII had recently been staged off the coast of Central America. The carrier *Lexington* steamed at flank

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<sup>41</sup> *The United States Navy in Peacetime: The Navy in Relation to the Industrial, Scientific, Economic, and Political Developments of the Nation* (Washington: GPO, 1931), iii.

speed to put its aircraft within range of Managua in order to transport doctors and supplies to the capital city.<sup>42</sup>

The publication *The United States Navy in Peacetime* was one of the final significant pieces of publicity to not address the Great Depression. By 1932 Admiral Moffett began touting the idea that naval construction constituted an effective means of alleviating the nation's economic ills. Only with the change in presidential administrations, however, did the Navy's strategy for procuring more funds and ships begin to change. After the inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt in 1933, the Navy began promoting its value as an agent of economic recovery and provided promotional assistance for the New Deal agencies created during Roosevelt's first "Hundred Days." In October 1933, the Recruiting Bureau released a poster containing the crew of the carrier *Saratoga* posed in formation on the flight deck in the shape of the letters "NRA" and a Blue Eagle signaling the Navy's support for the ambitious National Recovery Administration and its ubiquitous logo (Fig. 10).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 31 March 1931, pp 1-2, B17, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 4 April 1931, pp 1-2, B17, E113, RG 80, NAB; "Ships at Canal Rush to Nicaragua's Aid," *New York Times*, 1 April 1931, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Address by William A. Moffett before American Legion, Macon, GA, 23 June 1932, pp 1-7, B20, E113, RG 80, NAB; Photo NH 76793, 12 October 1933, Photographic Section.

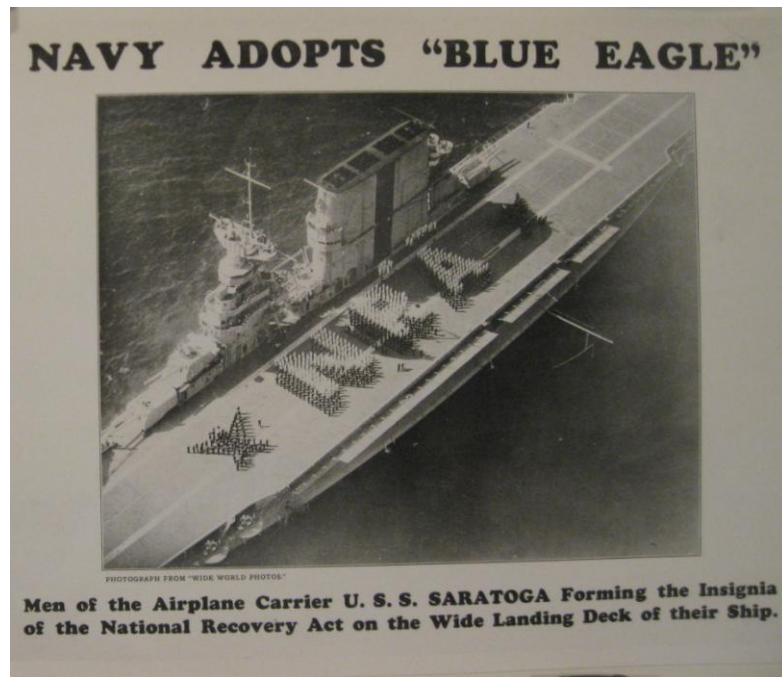


Fig. 10: "Navy Adopts 'Blue Eagle,'" 1933. Photo NH 76793, Photographic Section.

The legislation passed by Congress during the Hundred Days provided many direct benefits for the Navy. The National Industrial Recovery Act which created the NRA also created the Public Works Administration through which more than \$238 million of funds were appropriated for naval construction, some of which resulted in the carriers *Yorktown* and *Enterprise*. To better spread the economic benefits of such work, the Navy contracted half of the construction paid for with these funds to private yards and performed the rest in its own shipyards.<sup>44</sup>

Officials justified the construction as a "start" towards building the Navy to treaty limits and linked this idea to using naval construction as an economic stimulus to

<sup>44</sup> Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 24 May 1933, pp 1-5, B22, E113, RG 80, NAB; Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 13 June 1933, B22, E113, RG 80, NAB.

maintaining employment for thousands of Americans. The Navy used this linkage of preparedness and industrial recovery when discussing the Vinson-Trammell Act of 1934, the largest construction bill passed by Congress since the infamous 1916 bill. Passed by Congress in March 1934, the new act eventually allowed for the construction one carrier, four cruisers, fifty-one destroyers, and twenty-eight submarines. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Henry L. Roosevelt stated in nationally broadcast radio addresses that the new construction closed a significant gap between the present size of the fleet and the tonnage allowed by the limitation treaties and that they constituted a method by which the United States could achieve its “legitimate naval aspirations.” Of perhaps greater interest to the public, Roosevelt also stated that the new building could lead to the hiring of as many 14,000 workers over the next year just to maintain the desired pace.<sup>45</sup>

The Navy coupled the creation of jobs with the need for preparedness to gain public and congressional support for building the Navy up to “Treaty Limits.” Recruiting posters used the dramatic image of a battleship’s guns firing at night at some unseen target, making clear its slogan that the Navy is “Always Alert” (Fig. 11).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Address by Henry L. Roosevelt over NBC radio, 27 October 1934, p. 4, B25, E113, RG 80, NAB. James F. Cook, *Carl Vinson: Patriarch of the Armed Forces* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004), 100-3; Address by Henry L. Roosevelt over NBC radio, 19 September 1934, pp 1-11, B25, E113, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>46</sup> “Always Alert,” 26 October 1933, Navy Art Gallery.

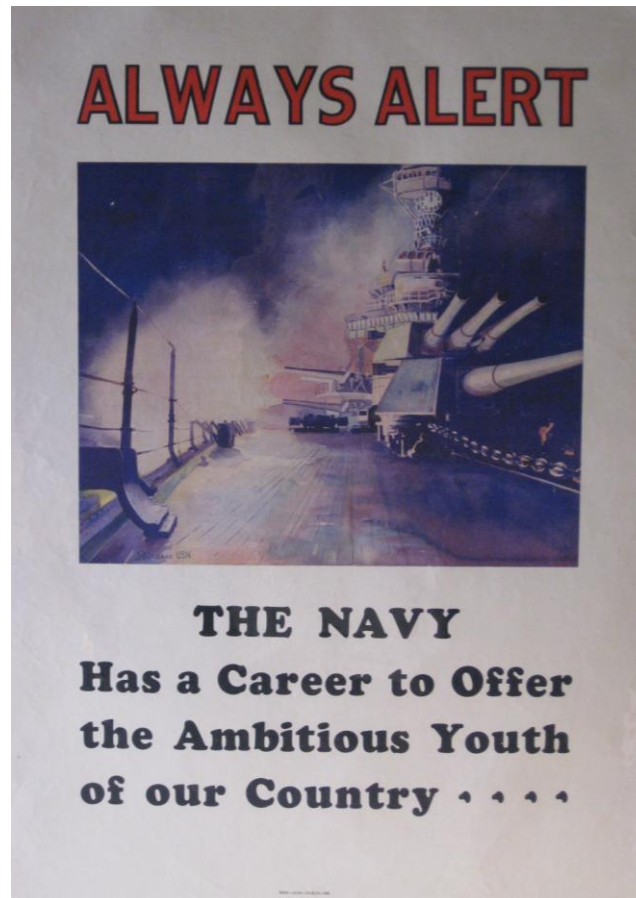


Fig. 11: "Always Alert," 1933. Navy Art Gallery.

The growing number of Hollywood films on the Navy likewise indicated the ability of the Navy to defend the country. In fact, most films, or, at least those not set within the confines of the Naval Academy, depicted their protagonists undertaking some kind of training exercise to maintain readiness and efficiency. The first naval aviation film, the Frank Wead-authored *The Flying Fleet* (1929) shows two of its primary characters engaging in a mock dogfight against one another over the air station at Coronado. *Hell Divers* (1933) depicts numerous operational training sequences which included dogfighting, a live fire dive-bombing attack against a radio controlled



battleship, and a search problem which pitted fixed-wing aircraft against the airship *Macon*.<sup>47</sup>

The depictions of training likewise carried over into films about submarines and surface ships, although perhaps not as frequently or strongly as in the aviation films of the period. *Son of a Sailor* (1933) climaxes with Handsome, after inadvertently foiling an international espionage plot, parachuting onto a target ship just as it is bombed by aircraft from the *Saratoga*. Frank Capra's *Submarine* (1928) and Lloyd Bacon's *Submarine D-1* (1937) show their respective boats participating, with much success, in fictionalized Fleet Problems. Thus, even in the midst of comedies, melodrama, or disaster films, the Navy's commitment to preparedness appeared on the nation's movie screens.<sup>48</sup>

On two specific occasions in the early 1930s, much public speculation circulated again about an increase in tensions with Japan possibly leading to conflict. Japan invaded Manchuria in September 1931 that led to repeated American demands that Japan withdraw from the region. When Japan refused, Secretary of State Henry Stimson suggested to President Hoover that portions of the Asiatic Fleet proceed to Shanghai to demonstrate American resolve. Hoover rejected the advice but allowed Grand Joint Exercise 3 and Fleet Problem XIII to occur as scheduled in February 1932. While the exercise had been planned long in advance, some members of the media assumed that the timing of the maneuvers in Hawaii was not a coincidence. An ominous article that

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<sup>47</sup> Suid, *Sailing*, 38; *The Flying Fleet*; *Hell Divers*.

<sup>48</sup> *Son of a Sailor*, directed by Lloyd Bacon, Warner Brothers Pictures, 1933; *Submarine*; "Submarine D-1, Final Script," 11 June 1937, Box Submarine D-1, Warner Brothers Archive.

appeared in the *New York Times* just before the Battle Force sailed for Hawaiian waters on 30 January denied any change in plans had been made as a result of the crisis, yet included a statement from Admiral Leigh stating that the fleet would be “fully prepared for any contingency.”<sup>49</sup>

The 1932 crisis quickly passed, but a similar incident occurred in 1935 when the Navy scheduled Fleet Problem XVI for the waters of the northern Pacific between Midway Island and the southern coast of Alaska. When first announced in September 1924, the press assumed that the location of exercise – the first held west of Hawaii – held greater significance, including American interest in an Alaskan naval base or to the recent Japanese demands for naval parity at the upcoming limitation conference in London. Further complications occurred on 29 December when Japan announced its withdrawal from the Washington treaties. The Japanese protested the maneuvers occurring so far into the Pacific, but American commentators, including Navy League President Nelson Macy, noted that Japan planned its own similar exercises in the central Pacific. As in 1925 and 1932, the crisis abated with the end of the maneuvers, but it left many worried that such deployments by the Navy could lead to an unintended war.<sup>50</sup>

Following the conclusion of the 1935 London Conference, preparedness began assuming an even larger place among the Navy’s publically stated missions. The

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<sup>49</sup> *New York Times*, “Our Fleet is Ready for Far East Call,” 30 January 1932, 2. Armin Rappaport, *Henry L. Stimson and Japan, 1931-1933* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 119-20.

<sup>50</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, “Navy to Hold 1935 War Game in Alaska Area,” 20 September 1934, 1; Elliott Thurston, “U.S. Decides on War Show by Fleet Off Pacific Coast,” *Washington Post*, 20 Sept. 1934, 1; *Chicago Tribune*, “U.S. Churchmen in Japan Protest Navy Maneuvers,” 21 April 1935, 19; *Chicago Tribune*, “Japan’s Protest on U.S. Fleet is Held Baseless,” 17 May 1935, 14.

growing troubles overseas allowed the Roosevelt administration and the heavy Democratic majorities in Congress to continue push forward naval construction programs. The Navy recognized the growing amount of public support for naval construction in recent years but tried to allay fears of navalism by expressing sympathy for those who did not want to build an excessively large fleet.<sup>51</sup>

Clearly, by the end of 1925, Navy and its public relations apparatus become more aggressive in advocating preparedness. In 1936, Dudley Knox published his single volume *A History of the United States Navy*. The introduction, authored by Admiral William L. Rodgers, argued that book “provide[d] a record of naval events which illustrate[d] the value of the Navy and inspires the Navy itself.” Unlike Frost’s earlier naval history, Knox incorporated analysis of peacetime naval policy into the narrative and argued that sea power had decided every conflict the United States had fought. Knox frequently criticized civilian meddling into naval policy, particularly President Thomas Jefferson’s gunboat policy, the demand for a direct Union naval assault on Charleston in 1863, and President Woodrow Wilson’s decision to prevent the Navy from preparing for war in 1914. Knox ended his narrative in contemporary times and offered yet another lamentation on the Navy in the disarmament era similar to *The Eclipse of American Sea Power*. Reviews called Knox’s work as a “plea for naval preparedness,” and Hanson Baldwin, while critical of Knox’s lack of objectivity, argued that “all Americans will do well to weigh the lesson Captain Knox draws for us.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> “Your Navy of Today,” Address by RADM Charles Russell Train, Cleveland, OH, 27 October 1936, pp 1-16, B27, E113, RG 80, NAB.

<sup>52</sup> Dudley W. Knox, *A History of the United States Navy* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1936), ix.  
 “‘History of Navy’ Held Worth While in a Mad World,” review of *A History of the United States Navy*, by

Occasionally, ancillary missions performed by the Navy outside of the preparedness framework garnered publicity during the latter 1930s. In 1937 the Navy aided in the search for aviator Amelia Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, who disappeared during the final legs of their circumnavigational flight when they attempted to reach their refueling point near the remote Howland Island some 3,000 miles southwest of Hawaii. This kind of search was not without precedent as the Navy had participated in the search for French aviators Charles Nungesser and Francois Coli during their failed attempt to fly nonstop from Paris to New York in May 1927. Naval officials, upon discovering that Earhart's plane had gone missing, felt that "it was incumbent upon the Navy to render whatever aid practicable in the interest of humanity." PBY patrol planes from Pearl Harbor launched their first searches on 3 July, and within three days, the Navy dispatched several ships to the scene, including the battleship *Colorado* and the carrier *Lexington*. Planes from the *Lexington* continued to search for Earhart until the Navy called off the search on 18 July after searching more than 90,000 square miles of ocean and isolated islets.<sup>53</sup>

While the value or conduct of the Navy's previous humanitarian efforts had never been questioned the search for a single missing plane prompted public criticism of the time and, especially, the expense involved in mounting such operations. The 15-day

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Dudley W. Knox, *Chicago Tribune*, 17 October 1936, 17. Hanson Baldwin, "The Fighting Ships Pass in Review," review of *A History of the United States Navy*, by Dudley W. Knox, *New York Times*, 20 Sep. 1936, sec. BR, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Statement by Worthington, n.d., B34, EP 3, RG 428, NACP. Robinson and *Up Ship!*, 151; Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 3 July 1937, B34, EP 3, NACP; Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 6 July 1937, B34, EP 3, RG 428, NACP; *New York Times*, "63 Planes Posed for Earhart Hunt," 13 July 1937, 12; *New York Times*, "Navy to Stop Hunt for Miss Earhart," 18 July 1937, 12.

search cost an estimated \$4,000,000 in fuel oil and aviation gasoline, the use of both of which had often been limited in recent years. On the final day of searching, Representative Byron Scott broached the idea of passing legislation ensuring that the Navy could only be used for search purposes if the flight had had any “scientific value.” Three days later, the president responded to such criticism by noting the need for naval aircraft to remain aloft for a certain number of hours per day and that the *Lexington* steamed no faster during the search than it would have during a Fleet Problem. President Roosevelt declared the Navy’s actions above reproach and argued that the search would have occurred regardless of who had been behind the controls of the aircraft.<sup>54</sup>

By 1937, the Navy’s rhetoric became even more strident in supporting preparedness. Officers publically asserted that “passive defense” should be rejected by all right-thinking citizens and that pre-World War I Germany should have taught everyone that “there is little or no use in having an inferior navy.” The bombing of the gunboat *Panay* on 12 December 1937 by Japanese aircraft as it steamed down the Yangtze River prompted Hearst to describe Japan as an “aggressive, belligerent, militaristic, ambitious and impudent nation, intoxicated by its continual success in predatory warfare.” The Navy did not directly utilize incident further promote preparedness, but the language employed by officials over the next year in support of preparedness became ever more ominous. In a statement in February 1938, Admiral William D. Leahy argued that the Navy “does not have in mind any particular possible

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<sup>54</sup> “Navy to Stop Hunt for Miss Earhart,” *New York Times*, 18 July 1937, 12. “President Defends Hunt for Earhart,” *New York Times*, 21 July 1937, 23.

enemy,” but that the world looked upon the United States with “covetous eyes” because of the nation’s wealth and prestige. Naval officers concluded that “wars and near wars, the remaking of maps, and general chaotic conditions that prevail over large areas of the earth” necessitated an increase of naval construction and alterations to the nation’s defense posture. In March 1939, Leahy asserted that “vigilance within, vigilance without” must be practiced to keep America safe from “antagonistic” governing philosophies currently dragging the world into chaos.<sup>55</sup>

As the preparedness drive reached new heights in 1939, it received further historical justification from a pair of differing sources seeking to revive interest in Mahanian theory. In April of that year, Yale University Press published *Mahan: The Life and Work of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, U.S.N.*, by retired Captain William D. Puleston, a former head of the Office of Naval Intelligence. Intended to show how circumstance and background influenced thinking of the “exponent of sea power, the apostle of expansion,” Puleston analyzed Mahan’s most significant writings and their intended effect to advance the study of naval warfare but also to serve as a guide for American policymakers. The same month that Puleston’s biography appeared, Harold and Margaret Sprout published *The Rise of American Naval Power*, a chronicle of

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<sup>55</sup> Address by Arthur B. Cook at Air Defense Day Program, Cleveland, OH, 2 September 1937, p. 1, B29, E113, RG 80, NAB. “Our Navy,” Address of Hugh Rodman to Combined Service Clubs, Terre Haute, IN, 27 October 1937, p. 4, B29, E113, RG 80, NAB. William Randolph Hearst, “The Japanese Menace,” in *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Randolph Hearst* (San Francisco, 1948), 282-3. Navy Press Room, Immediate Release, 7 February 1938, p. 1, B30, E113, RG 80, NAB. Address of William D. Leahy to the Society of Sponsors of the American Navy, Washington, DC., 24 February 1938, p. 2, B30, E113, RG 80, NAB. Address by RADM A.F. Fairfield over WOL radio, 27 October 1938, p. 1, B31, E113, RG 80, NAB. Address by William D. Leahy at Army and Navy Dinner, Worcester, MA, 29 March 1939, p. 6, B32, E113, RG 80, NAB.

American naval policy from the days of the revolution to the end of World War I which used Mahan's ideas as a framework for its analysis.<sup>56</sup>

Reviewers of both books hoped that policymakers and members of the public wanting to understand contemporary military and naval affairs would take to heart the lessons prescribed in each. Knox found the Sprouts more capable than most civilian authors in interpreting "semi-technical material dealing with naval policy and operations" and especially praised their having performed a "national service" for illuminating the process through which civilians and senior officers formulate said policies. Hanson Baldwin reviewed both books for the *New York Times*. He praised Puleston for his frequent allusions in the text to contemporary affairs, while regretting that Puleston did not spend more time using Mahan's ideas to analyze the present situation and for failing to incorporate the alternative viewpoints on Mahan advanced by Charles Beard and others. In contrast, Baldwin found the work of the Sprouts' of greater value because they explained the origins of American naval policy in a clear and cogent manner. Regarding its contemporary significance, Baldwin stated, "No book could be more timely today when the doctrines of Mahan are again influencing the destiny of man." He felt that the Sprouts may not have given enough credit to the Navy League and the "power of propaganda" in explaining modern navalism, but hoped that civilians and military officials alike would learn from the historical examples provided by the Sprouts. The examples cited by Baldwin included the effects of the European balance of

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<sup>56</sup> William D. Puleston, *Mahan: The Life and Work of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), 93-136; Harold Sprout, Margaret Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939).

power on American national security and the historical record of the United States entering wars militarily unprepared.<sup>57</sup>

Throughout the interwar period, the Navy and its allies developed a number of rhetorical strategies to convey the value of the service to the nation. This task was quite difficult for the service because events well beyond the Navy's control often influenced how the public viewed the service. Yet naval leaders and their civilian allies achieved significant success in adjusting their messages in reaction to current events. Naval leaders believed many Americans saw no need for a navy or believed that economic conditions rendered a Navy unaffordable. To combat these perceptions the Navy and its allies conveyed to the public the multiple services performed by the Navy, such as humanitarian relief, and the benefits of constructing and maintaining a modern navy, such as the jobs created in steel plants and shipyards. As the world moved closer and closer to war during the 1930s, the service's arguments in favor of preparedness found a more receptive audience and the national security threat made it easier for the Navy to develop a coherent message explaining its value. By the time the German invasion of Poland precipitated a second World War, the Navy developed the methods and the tenets of the message it would present to the American people over the next two years.

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<sup>57</sup> Dudley W. Knox, review of *The Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918*, by Harold Sprout, Margaret Sprout, *The Journal of the American Military Institute* 3 (Summer 1939): 122-3. Hanson Baldwin, "Captain Mahan, Spokesman of Sea Power," review of *Mahan: The Life and Work of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan*, by William D. Puleston, *New York Times*, 30 April 1939, 110. Hanson Baldwin, "America as a Great Sea Power," review of *The Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918*, by Harold Sprout, Margaret Sprout, *New York Times*, 4 June 1939, sec. BR, 1.



## CHAPTER X

### CONCLUSIONS: EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NAVY PUBLIC

#### RELATIONS ON THE EVE OF WAR

On 29 April 1939, twenty-eight Navy vessels arrived in New York Harbor to participate in a massive fleet review to commemorate the opening of the World's Fair. The arrival of these American ships was to be followed by visits of vessels representing Great Britain, Canada, Argentina, and Mexico to the city over the next several months. The Navy had not made a large-scale visit to New York since President Franklin Roosevelt reviewed the fleet there in 1934. The size and scope of the fair, which included historical exhibits, radio broadcasts, and pictorials for *Life* magazine, led Navy and local officials to begin preparing for the event months in advance. In January 1939, some three months before the visit, the Chief of Naval Operations ordered the Commandant of the Third Naval District, Rear Admiral Clark Woodward, to liaise between the service and the mayor of the city, Fiorello LaGuardia. The Navy assigned Lieutenant Commander Bernard L. Austin and civilian staffer Helene Philbert to work with Fair organizers over a period of several weeks. Austin's task was to coordinate and plan the various activities in which the Navy participated from the opening of the Fair on 30 April to Navy Day the following October. To highlight the Navy's presence, local officials promoted the arrival of ships at the port and printed a series of posters entitled

“The Fleet’s In” so that potential visitors knew the correct times and locations to view and go aboard the ships.<sup>1</sup>

Unbeknownst to its participants, the Navy’s participation in the World’s Fair was one of the last truly peacetime public relations events the service staged. Due to the ongoing troubles overseas, the Navy had gradually reduced its level of participation in the Fair during the weeks leading up to the event. Initially, plans called for the ships of both the Scouting Force and the Battle Force, 119 in all, to visit New York Harbor and participate in the ceremonies. Reduced to eighty-six in March, President Franklin Roosevelt further reduced the contingent by two-thirds when, on 15 April 1939, he ordered the bulk of the United States Fleet to immediately return to Pacific waters. By the time Roosevelt issued the order, several vessels had already arrived in New York. The suddenness of Roosevelt’s decision prompted Admiral Woodward to have a message broadcast on local radio to recall the twenty percent of men either on liberty or leave. Two battleships, the *West Virginia* and the *Tennessee*, which had arrived at the New York Navy Yard for scheduled overhauls, likewise had their stays cut short. This sudden recall came as a blow to the organizers of the Fair who estimated that as many as one million people would visit the fleet during its stay in the city.<sup>2</sup>

Although Roosevelt gave no explanation for his ordering of the Battle Force back to the Pacific, the move came just two weeks after Japan had annexed the Spratly Islands

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<sup>1</sup> Memorandum for the CNO from Leeland Lovette, “Fleet Review and New York Visit; Suggestions for Press Arrangements,” 5 April 1939, Report of the Meeting of the Public Relations Committee, c. April 1939, pp 4-5, and poster from Interborough Rapid Transit Company, April 1939, all in B99, EP 3, RG 428, NACP.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, “Fleet for Fair Reduced,” 22 March 1939, 25; *New York Times*, “Navy Aim Mystery,” 16 April 1939, 1; *New York Times*, “Recall Navy Men to 3 Ships Here,” 16 April 1939, 36.

in the South China Sea to help facilitate its expansion in Southeast Asia. The departure of the ships certainly came as a disappointment given the incredible amount of effort expended on preparing the city for the fleet's arrival, but also served as an unpleasant reminder of the increasingly dangerous situation overseas. This disruption failed to completely dampen the mood for the Navy's visit as the city hosted balls on 1 and 2 May for the officers and enlisted men of the fleet, respectively, and coordinated several smaller events, including athletic competitions at the New York Athletic Club. The remaining ships welcomed visitors aboard every day from 1 pm until 5 pm. Over the next several months, more than eight million people viewed a Navy display in the Federal Building depicting the lives of sailors and naval policy, and more than 360,000 attended a special Navy Day celebration at the World's Fair that fall.<sup>3</sup>

By the time the 1939 Navy Day celebration occurred, however, the world was at war. On 1 September, forces from Nazi Germany invaded neighboring Poland and, two days later, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. On 8 September, President Roosevelt declared a national emergency and initiated a series of measures designed to prepare the United States for a potential conflict. While for most Americans the conflict remained remote and distant until the fall of France in June 1940, it quickly began to affect the Navy's public relations practices.

By 1939 the Public Relations Branch of the Office of Naval Intelligence had eight staffers: the Officer-in-Charge, Commander Leland P. Lovette; Assistant for Press

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<sup>3</sup> Sadao Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor: The Imperial Japanese Navy and the United States* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 210; Naval Liaison Officer-New York World's Fair 1939 to CNO, "Report on US Naval Participation at New York World's Fair 1939," c. May 1940, pp 1-14, B99, EP 3, RG 428, NACP.

Relations, Lieutenant Commander Austin; Assistant for Photography, Lieutenant W.G. Beecher, Jr., two civilian assistants, two stenographers, and a Marine Orderly. The onset of war overseas spurred an expansion of Navy public relations as the service expanded the staff to thirteen in July 1940, but the biggest structural changes occurred during 1941. Former newspaper editor Frank Knox became Secretary of the Navy and he appreciated and understood the necessity of an effective public relations organization. On 1 May 1941, Knox replaced the Public Relations Branch with a new Office of Public Relations.<sup>4</sup>

The new office made three significant advances over its predecessors, the first of which was Knox's decision to place the office directly under the authority of the Secretary of the Navy. The old Navy News Bureau had been directly under Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, but the succeeding Information Section and Public Relations Branch were relegated to Office of Naval Intelligence and thus several steps removed from the secretary's office. Knox's restoration of the public relations function to the secretary's office promised to significantly increase its importance and power within the Navy Department. Second, Knox increased the staff to seventy-seven over the next several months and filled many key positions with capable individuals he knew from his newspaper days. No longer did the Navy's public relations office suffer from a fundamental lack of resources. Finally, Knox appointed a flag officer, Rear Admiral Arthur J. Hepburn, as the Director of Public Relations. This was a significant improvement on past practice as old Information Section was headed by commanders.

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas, "Public Relations," 1433; Klinkerman, "Blackout at Pearl Harbor," 25, 36-7.

These three enhancements clearly signaled Knox's commitment to improving the Navy's public relations capabilities.

During much of the interwar period, the service had relied extensively upon external organizations, such as the Navy League, to bolster its public standing. As the Navy expanded its own operations, the role of external organizations declined. The Navy League of the United States resumed publishing its journal *Sea Power* in 1939, but the group's poor financial state and a drop in memberships limited its participation in preparedness drives. The growing public support for a strong national defense by 1940, especially after the fall of France that June, and the continued enlargement of the Navy's own public relations capabilities meant that the Navy League, the Naval Order of the United States, the Naval Historical Foundation, and other like-minded groups diminished in importance.<sup>5</sup>

The themes that dominated interwar Navy public relations – the Ideal Sailor, safe and advanced technology, and the value of the Navy to the nation – continued in some form or another until Pearl Harbor but were subordinated to an overriding message of preparedness. Whereas preparedness had been one message among many put forth by the Navy and its supporters in the 1920s and 1930s, the need of an enlarged Navy to protect national security became the dominant theme in the two years prior to American entry into World War II. The increased size of the staff of the Public Relations Branch and the Officer of Public Relations allowed for a dramatic increase in the number of

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<sup>5</sup> Rappaport, *Navy League*, 177-9.

press releases issued from 1939 to 1941 with many of the new releases communicating the measures taken by the Navy to safeguard the nation.<sup>6</sup>

Recruiters continued to tout the benefits of naval service, but by June 1940, posters issued by the Recruiting Bureau melded the themes which had typified interwar recruiting, such as foreign travel and physical development, with the need for enhanced national security. Posters calling upon “young men of high character and sound physique” implied that, whereas the interwar Navy had sold itself as an institution capable of turning boys into men for the benefit of the nation, the present emergency did not allow for such niceties. Instead, the largest and boldest text of the advertisement was reserved for the statements regarding “national security” (Fig. 12).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Klinkerman, “Blackout at Pearl Harbor,” 24.

<sup>7</sup> Photo NH 77222, Photographic Section.

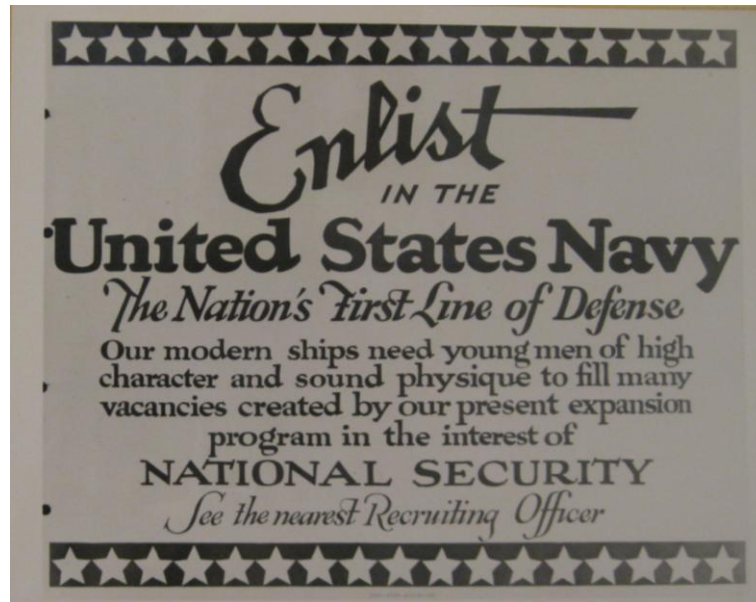


Fig. 12: “Enlist in the United States Navy,” 1940. Photo NH 77222, Photographic Section.

A poster issued in October 1940 explicitly called attention to the national emergency and showcased the Navy’s newest weapons. The images of sleek, modern monoplanes which had only recently begun entering naval aviation units combined with the surface craft not only reinforced the idea of the balanced fleet but were clearly called attention to the service’s national defense mission (Fig. 13).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Photo NH 77227, Photographic Section.



Fig. 13: "The United States Navy Has a Job to Do for America," 1940. Photo NH 77227, Photographic Section.

Hollywood continued to occupy a central place in providing public relations support for the Navy, and the films produced by the studios with service cooperation further reinforced the preparedness message. Several of these films emphasized the growth of naval aviation, including *Flight Command* (1940), a short film entitled *Eyes of the Navy* (1940), and culminated in the 1941 Warner Brothers film *Dive Bomber*. Starring popular box office draw Errol Flynn and with a screenplay authored by Frank Wead, *Dive Bomber* contained a number of features which set it apart from the films which had preceded it. First, and most obviously, Warner Brothers made the expensive decision to use Technicolor film, which drove the film's budget to the then-considerable



sum of \$1,038,000. Secondly, it was unique among the aviation pictures for focusing on the development of flight medicine. The film underwent strict scrutiny as the Navy became “triply careful” to ensure that no material which could be constituted as a breach of security reached the screen.<sup>9</sup>

A significant financial success, the film became the seventh highest-grossing film of 1941 behind number one *Fantasia* and the World War I story of *Sergeant York* (number two). *Dive Bomber*, however, also helped to arouse one of the last bursts of isolationist sentiment prior to American entry into World War II. In 1941, Senator Gerald P. Nye, who had previously launched the investigations into the so-called “merchants of death” in 1934, claimed that Hollywood studios intended their films, including *Dive Bomber*, to goad the United States into entering World War II. During a series of hearings that fall, film producers denied the allegation made by Nye and other isolationist members of the Senate. The hearings never produced any solid evidence to justify the charges, and not surprisingly, the Senate and the rest of the nation quickly lost interest in the proceedings after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941.<sup>10</sup>

These developments between 1939 and 1941 affirmed the Navy’s traditional willingness to mobilize public relations during times of crisis, and the service’s PR capabilities underwent a dramatic transformation. Unlike the previous conflicts in which the Navy participated, however, a true peacetime public relations establishment had laid

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Lord to McCord, 28 July 1941, Box Dive Bomber 1 of 1, Warner Brothers Archive. Budget, 18 March 1941, Box Dive Bomber 1 of 1, Warner Brothers Archive.

<sup>10</sup> Colin Shindler, *Hollywood Goes to War: Films and American Society, 1939-1952* (New York: Routledge, 1979), 27; Suid, *Sailing*, 54-5.

the foundation for such work. The mobilization of Navy public relations during the latest national emergency built upon nearly a quarter century of public relations development dating back to the establishment of the Navy News Bureau in 1917 and carried on through the Information Section and the Public Relations Branch. These organizations, as well as the Recruiting Bureau, the Bureau of Aeronautics, the Historical Section, and the Navy Band had all worked to improve the Navy's image. These naval organizations had also developed relationships with the mass media which helped to enhance the Navy's image campaigns.

Assessing the performance of the Navy's public relations establishment during the interwar period is a difficult task. First and foremost, contemporary public relations practitioners accepted the premise that their work could not radically transform public opinion. In *Propaganda* (1928), Edward Bernays observed that even successful public relations campaigns could, at best, only modify public opinion and had little or no hope of completely reversing the public's stance on an issue. Bernays may have waged dramatically successful PR campaigns even at that early stage of his life and career, but he also recognized that the profession which he thought had the power to shape public consciousness had finite limits.<sup>11</sup>

Several years before Bernays had made his point about the limits of public relations, the Navy had learned this lesson first hand. The Navy News Bureau established by Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels enjoyed the secretary's full support, was staffed with several individuals familiar with modern mass

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<sup>11</sup> Bernays, *Propaganda*, 28.

communications, and had been operating for approximately a year and a half when the end of World War I came. Despite these advantages, the Navy News Bureau could do little to stem the tide of the widespread social and political movement favoring naval arms limitations. By the time of the disbandment of the Navy News Bureau in September 1921, the Washington Conference had already been scheduled to convene two months later, in November, with little chance for the Navy to affect the proceedings. The Navy News Bureau also had no effective response to the charges leveled against the Navy by “Billy” Mitchell and other supporters of a unified air service who believed the Navy and its separate aviation arm hindered both national security and the development of aviation. Simply put, the Navy’s first serious attempt to form a public relations establishment lacked the extensive relationships with external groups and the mass media, thus making it impossible to significantly alter the public’s view of the service.

A key feature of modern public relations campaigns is the necessity of research to better gauge public attitudes towards a product, group, or issue. Unfortunately, given the absence of direct, detailed, and consistent public polling data, it is difficult to attribute improvements in the Navy’s fortunes to its enhanced public relations capabilities. Many factors affected the growth of the Navy in the 1930s, including the election of Democratic politicians to the executive and legislative branches committed to naval expansion, especially as a means of economic stimulus. The advent of new foreign threats in both Europe and Asia likewise increased the need for a strong Navy to protect the nation and its interests. Civilian public relations campaigns of the interwar period relied much more on the intuition of its practitioners rather than scientific analysis

of carefully researched information. These practitioners rarely received clear, direct feedback from the general public, and those in the Navy who participated in public relations activities operated in a similar manner.<sup>12</sup>

Nowhere is the issue of confusing data more evident than in manpower. Naval recruiting was profoundly affected by a number of trends during the interwar period, including the low authorized personnel strength from 1923 to 1936, the relative health of the civilian economy during the 1920s, and the slide of the country into the Depression during the 1930s. The Depression alone had a profound effect on naval manpower as the retention rates soared from just below seventy-two percent in 1930 to over ninety percent by 1932. In this environment, the Navy could afford to put men on waiting lists so that the service could select only the best men who applied. As a result, the percentage of enlisted men who scored above fifty on the General Classification Test reached ninety-seven percent, and eighty-six percent of enlisted men had attended some high school. These better educated enlisted men also showed improved discipline as the court martial rate fell to .86 percent in 1932. The Depression may have wrecked the national economy and drastically altered the lives of millions of Americans, but the Navy reaped some benefit from the problems as it now had a much improved cadre of enlisted men.<sup>13</sup>

Even prior to the onset of the Depression, retention rates and test scores for new enlistees were improving by the latter 1920s, which suggests that the refinement of the

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<sup>12</sup> Cutlip Center, and Broom, *Effective Public Relations*, 125.

<sup>13</sup> *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1930* (Washington: GPO, 1931), 23; *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1932* (Washington: GPO, 1933), 22, 142.

Navy's recruiting campaigns helped improve the quality of new recruits. The 1928 Report of the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation argued that the quality of enlisted men had improved in recent years. The re-enlistment rate remained near or above seventy percent by the latter 1920s, suggesting that many men had found the benefits of naval service worthwhile. Yet, such pronouncements and statistics cannot fully account for a temporary increase in the court martial rate – a measurement of the discipline of the enlisted force – from 1.59 percent in 1926 to 1.92 percent by 1928. The rate of courts martial only began falling after the onset of the Depression.<sup>14</sup>

Analyzing trends in naval spending also reveals no causal effects attributable to the Navy's public relations efforts. The Navy's budgets reflected the priorities placed upon naval spending by Congress, and during the interwar period the Navy's allocation waxed and waned. From a high of \$1.97 billion in 1919, naval spending fell to \$768 million by 1921, and, in the immediate aftermath of the Washington Conference, to less than half that, just over \$300 million per fiscal year, from 1923 until 1925. With some exceptions, spending remained constant at approximately \$350 million per year until 1933 when President Franklin Roosevelt and the heavy Democratic majorities in Congress increased spending until it reached \$673 million in 1939.<sup>15</sup>

The spending trends broadly illustrate the changing fortunes of the Navy during the interwar period, and polling results from 1935 onwards showed that significant

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<sup>14</sup> *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1926* (Washington: GPO, 1927), 142; *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1927* (Washington: GPO, 1928), 134, 164; *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1928* (Washington: GPO, 1929), 146.

<sup>15</sup> "Budget of the U.S. Navy, 1794-2004." <http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/budget.htm> (accessed 15 June 2010).

majorities of the American public – usually more than seventy-five percent – supported an increase in naval construction, but this did not mean the service enjoyed unequivocal support. Only fifty-seven percent of those polled in 1938 supported tax increases to pay for an enlarged fleet. A poll taken in July 1940 asked males under forty-six years of age which branch of the military they preferred to serve in if the country was directly attacked, the Navy lagged behind both the Army and the “air forces” with only twenty-four percent of all respondents compared to forty-four percent for the Army. Interestingly, respondents under the age of thirty showed more interest in naval service with the Army and air forces tied at thirty-four percent and the Navy only lagging by five percentage points.<sup>16</sup>

The results of these polls indicate that the public had rejected naval limitations by the latter 1930s and supported, at least to some degree, a more vigorous naval construction program. Interpreting these polls as a victory for the Navy’s public relations campaigns, however, is impossible due to the absence of the necessary questions found in the polls themselves, such as why respondents supported an increase in the appropriations. The shift could easily have been attributed to the growing international instability of the mid-1930s with the rise of the militarist faction in Japan and the Nazis in Germany. In any case, the continued public reluctance to serve revealed in 1940 polling also suggests that the public had not yet completely embraced an aggressive, navalist agenda.

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<sup>16</sup> Hadley Cantril, Mildred Strunk, ed., *Public Opinion, 1935-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 923, 939-41. Thanks to Dr. Lisa Munday for identifying the source.

If the data only provide an incomplete picture, then Navy public relations must be assessed in terms of organizations, policies, and process. In modern public relations practice, there are clear distinctions between closed and open system models of public relations. The two methods differ greatly in their approach to both the different publics they hope to reach and their assumption of the effectiveness of public relations. An open-system model of public relations attempts to allow the organization in question to adapt to the milieu it inhabits. By adopting a flexible approach to public relations, soliciting feedback on policies, and expanding its relationships with outside groups, such organizations work to anticipate any potential changes to its environment. Thus, the organization becomes proactive and attempts to predict the public's response to any moves which it desires to make.<sup>17</sup>

The other public relations approach, the closed-system method, operates quite differently from an open system organization. Whereas an open system attempts to create systems of feedback between the public and an organization, a closed system only reacts when an external issue threatens the viability of the organization. Closed systems often attempt to call attention to the organization with little clear design or motivation behind publicity beyond maintaining a presence in the public sphere. Such systems assume that the public's mind can always be changed on an issue, thus leading to efforts to gain public acquiescence for the organization's goals. The organization in question

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<sup>17</sup> Cutlip Center, and Broom, *Effective Public Relations*, 240-5.

develops its policies and needs internally and seeks little outside input on how those goals might be met.<sup>18</sup>

The interwar Navy does not fit neatly into either of the above models, but the methods employed by the service and its supporters typically hewed closer to the latter than the former. The Navy could rightly claim to be a “progressive institution” interested in innovation and emerged as a leader in a number of areas during the interwar period, including military aviation and its rigorous systems of training from individual sailors to the conduct of fleet operations. These innovations did not always carry over into the realm of public relations, but the Navy possessed an immense amount of innate organizational prestige that few other public or private institutions could match, which mitigated the need for more radical and ambitious use of PR. Even with the barrage of problems stemming from Mitchell’s campaign for a unified air service and the combination of pacifists, isolationists, and fiscal conservatives who supported disarmament, the Navy continued to find supporters and allies in the public sphere.<sup>19</sup>

The policies regulating the release of information initiated by the Information Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence in 1922 and 1923 governed public relations policy for many years afterwards. In many respects, the Navy’s stated policy of releasing information “not incompatible” with security requirements meant that there was often little thought to the creation of press releases beyond fulfilling what the Navy believed was an obligation within a democratic system. While the press releases

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 238-9.

<sup>19</sup> McCamy, *Government Publicity*, 76.



certainly reflected the Navy's policy that allowed the release of all non-secret information, the service's adherence to the policy led it to issue many releases with extraneous and unnecessary information which made it more difficult for the service to construct a consistent and coherent public image.

The Navy's labyrinthine bureaucracy also affected the consistency of the service's message. The Navy's public relations apparatus was a most haphazard system with often times little cooperation between the various individuals and organizations involved and sometimes led to conflicting messages. In an organization manned by tens of thousands of officers and enlisted men, nothing could be done to create unanimity of policy, agreement on messages to be conveyed to the public, or even the purpose of public relations. Some disagreements proved minor, such as whether individual Hollywood films would benefit recruiting, but other issues, especially the inability to reconcile the service's need for more battleships with an expanded air arm in the latter 1930s, struck at more fundamental issues of strategy and force structure.

Yet, many of the flaws in policy and structure that hampered Navy public relations also contributed to the most successful aspects of this work. The service's internal public relations organizations operated as a closed system, but Navy public relations on the macro level incorporated ideas and methods more akin to an open system arrangement. The service adapted to the numerous social and cultural changes around it and set up new institutions and policies to manage its image in the context of this change, although it never truly adopted a proactive stance towards public relations. The Navy never developed a clearly stated radio policy, but the Navy and the Navy

League often found radio outlets ready and willing to broadcast naval programs or speeches. Key members of the print media with naval experience, particularly Hanson Baldwin, served as reliable commentators on naval affairs and offered cogent criticism of Navy Department policy when warranted. The Navy readily adapted to the expansion and consolidation of the motion picture industry and established relationships with the film studios which gained the service exposure through feature film releases and the more-widely seen newsreel programs which preceded nearly all film showings. The relationships that the Navy forged during the interwar period assumed a central position in the service's public relations campaigns.<sup>20</sup>

It should be noted that these relationships also possessed their own limitations; first, it expanded the power of these external sources to significantly affect naval policy. Rightly or wrongly, it made institutions such as the mass media complicit in the development of naval policy. Secondly, these sources of outside support, no matter how tightly monitored by the Navy, could not always be counted upon to support the service's agenda. Even in a situation where one man, William Randolph Hearst, controlled a vast media empire, the Navy failed to receive consistent support because of Hearst's personal politics, the profound hatred he aroused in some of the general public, and the basic fact that Hearst sometimes advocated other means of national defense – a strong air service – that was antithetical to the Navy's goals. Despite these handicaps, the development and management of sources of publicity outside the Navy Department constituted the most important innovation in the Navy's interwar public relations

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<sup>20</sup> Suid, *Sailing*, 236-60.

practices and dramatically increased the possibilities for the service to directly appeal to the public.

The confusing bureaucracy of the Navy Department also created conditions whereby individual officers acting on their own initiative could undertake public relations work. These officers provided valuable contributions in the efforts to improve the Navy's image. Much of the publicity generated by the service and its supporters for public consumption during the interwar period came from a relatively small number of people inside and outside of the Navy Department. Retired Captain Dudley W. Knox, Rear Admiral William A. Moffett, and Commander Holloway H. Frost, among others, occupied key positions which allowed them to reach the public in ways that many of their peers could not. Former naval officers and political sympathizers in the mass media, such as Lloyd Bacon, Frank "Spig" Wead, Hanson Baldwin, and William Randolph Hearst, also aided naval publicity through their respective endeavors. William Howard Gardiner, a senior leader of the Navy League for more than a decade, strengthened the organization's ties to the Navy Department, and, in the estimation of historian Armin L. Rappaport, allowed the League to maintain the spirit of navalism during the lean years of the 1920s.<sup>21</sup>

The initiative displayed by individuals inside and outside the Navy Department was necessary to counteract the general disinterest in public relations work exhibited by most senior officers. Most obviously, the Navy's decision to place the public relations function under the Office of Naval Intelligence between 1922 and 1941 demonstrated

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<sup>21</sup> Rappaport, *Navy League*, 209-10.

the service's belief that public relations was a low priority. This lack of interest in public relations work by many interwar secretaries of the Navy allowed other elements of the Navy's bureaucracy, such as the Bureau of Aeronautics, to undertake public relations work without having a specific mandate. The Navy's bureau system granted the heads of each bureau an incredible amount of power within the service's bureaucracy, and Admiral Moffett in particular took advantage of this structure to publicize naval aviation. As a result, the Bureau of Aeronautics became the most active of the Navy's many different public relations organizations during the interwar period. The campaigns waged by Admiral Moffett and his successors at the Bureau of Aeronautics undercut any claims made by General "Billy" Mitchell and others that the Navy hindered the proper development of aviation for military purposes. Moffett's political ties meant that public opinion was not his sole recourse to defeat Mitchell's proposals, but naval aviation certainly benefitted from his stewardship, of which public relations ventures constituted a critical part.

A melding of public and private interests constituted the core of the Navy's image public relations capabilities, and the combination of these forces crafted effective responses to the service's problems in the public sphere. Among the visible effects of these changes included the development of public relations techniques so that the service could better respond to emergencies, including the several high-profile accidents suffered by aircraft, surface ships, and submarines during the interwar period. The Navy learned, for example, to publicize the development of rescue equipment capable of saving the lives of its submariners, a policy which paid dividends in 1939 during the

*Squalus* affair. The service also learned the value of managing the flow of information more effectively by releasing information to the media more promptly and by not discouraging media coverage of the tragedies.

The relationships forged during the interwar period endure to this day and have survived sweeping changes in society, culture, and the media that the public consume. Just as the interwar Navy intended maximize the public relations benefit of Hollywood films, the service reaped the benefits of its positive portrayal in *Top Gun* (1986) by reporting an increased interest in serving by young men. The Navy League, like Hollywood, still occupies an important role within Navy public relations. In 2008, the League sponsored a series of meeting entitled “Conversations with the Country” that helped formulate and propagate the *Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower*, a cooperative maritime strategy developed jointly by the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard.<sup>22</sup>

Navy public relations during the interwar period cannot be accorded all of the credit for the improved fortunes of the service by 1939 because too many elements outside of the service’s control factored into this change. Yet, during the 1920s and 1930s the Navy did, for the first time, recognize a need to reach out to the public and to communicate its actions and goals to a wide audience. To do so the Navy developed a system of public relations both inside and outside of the service which, while often chaotic, redundant, and sometimes ill-coordinated, operated successfully and laid the foundation for future expansion. Considering the Navy had previously given little

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<sup>22</sup> Suid, *Sailing*, 234; “Conversations With the Country,” <http://www.navy.mil/maritime/display.asp?page=cwtc.html> (accessed 24 May 2010)

serious and sustained thought to managing its public image, the advances in policy and practice made by the service in the interwar period were remarkable. The Navy utilized its network of supporters to relay information to the public about its ability to develop technologies, to provide a place for the physical and moral growth of America's youth, and to demonstrate its value to the nation. Finally, by 1939, Navy public relations had established the base upon which it could rapidly expand its operations during the period between the outbreak of war in Europe and Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor two years later. When war came, there was no need to create a public relations organization from scratch because Navy public relations had long since been mobilized.

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## VITA

Name: Ryan David Wadle

Address: c/o Dr. James C. Bradford  
Texas A&M University  
Department of History  
4236 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77843-4236

Email Address: [rwadle@tamu.edu](mailto:rwadle@tamu.edu)

### Education:

2011: Ph.D. in History, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX  
Major Fields: Military/Naval History, Twentieth Century U.S. History  
Minor Fields: Film Studies, Modern Britain

2008: Certificate in Advanced International Affairs, George Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX

2005: Master of Arts in History, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX  
Thesis Title: "United States Navy Fleet Problems and the Development of Carrier Aviation, 1929-1933"

2002: Bachelor of Arts in History and Political Science, Iowa State University, Ames, IA

### Teaching Experience:

2010-2011: Assistant Lecturer, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX  
Courses Taught: American History to 1877, American History since 1877, History of American Sea Power

2009-2011: Instructor, Blinn College, Bryan, TX  
Courses Taught: American History to 1877, American History since 1877