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The Influence of Seapower Upon Small Wars: A Review Essay

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Over the past decade the United States has rediscovered the challenges of counter-insurgency, unconventional operations, and hybrid wars. Much of the discussion and development of twenty-first century warfare has been led by the efforts of land forces. The United States Army and Marine Corps worked together jointly to develop a new counter-insurgency doctrine, studying the past as a way to help focus the experiences of the present. While the role of air power has also been sharply debated, the role of sea power has had little discussion. Maritime forces have long played a vital role in small wars, from the mercenary army led by Naval Agent William Eaton and his Marines in the First Barbary War to riverine forces in the Mekong Delta during Vietnam. It is time for Sailors, Marines, and Guardsmen to learn from their history, and realize that they have a central role in today's global conflict.

The following three books provide important background for members of the sea services and students of complex modern warfare when approaching today's global challenges. Counter-insurgency doctrine is founded on the experiences of the past. The effort to develop naval irregular warfare would benefit greatly by plotting a similar course. These books are selected neither because they provide a comprehensive view of the subject, nor because they share a philosophical approach. Instead, they are books that provide a starting point from which a study of naval power in small wars can set sail.

Brown-, Green-, and Blue-Water Fleets: The Influence of Geography on Naval Warfare, 1861 to the Present by Michael Lindberg and Daniel Todd. Praeger, 2002.

Michael Lindberg and Daniel Todd have produced a book that addresses naval strategy and fleets from a unique and incredibly useful perspective. By viewing naval affairs through its relation to the academic study of geography they provide new material for consideration in the debates on fleet make up, operational planning, and naval strategy. Because a great deal of naval irregular warfare will take place in the green- and brown-water operating areas the influence of geography is particularly important to the study of maritime small wars.

The authors, geography professors who previously co-wrote the book *Navies and Shipbuilding Industries*, organize the book into nine chapters that discuss a broad range of naval subjects through the prism of geographical challenges. The book begins with a useful comparison between land warfare and sea warfare. This comparison focuses on the central element of distance, and its relation both to strategy and combat in each domain. From this theoretical

background the work of Alfred Thayer Mahan and Julian Corbett, as well as airpower and land warfare thinkers, are described for the reader in order to link the geographical theory with naval and military strategy.

Following the discussion of theory Lindberg and Todd begin an investigation into the relationships between naval warfare, strategy, and geography in the blue-water of the open ocean, the green-water of the littorals, and the brown-water of the riverine environment. The historical case studies selected are varied and discussion of blue-water fleet makeup and operations include the Russo-Japanese War and battle-fleet operations in the First World War. The chapter on littoral combat develops the connection between fleet operations and the challenges of amphibious warfare by discussing the Dardanelles-Gallipoli Campaign and amphibious operations in the Pacific during WWII. The section on brown-water operations is particularly interesting. The authors outline the history of British riverine warfare in the Sudan and Mesopotamia in the late 1800's and early 1900's, river operations during the American Civil War, and gunboat operations on the rivers of China.

After recounting the wide-ranging history, Lindberg and Todd analyze the experiences across the spectrum of naval warfare. In the final two chapters they illuminate the influences of geography on everything from fleet constitution and classification to vessel design. Their analysis of warships is informative and links hull design, range, and propulsion to geographical considerations. While some of their analysis appears intuitive, it is also material that generally has little discussion in naval affairs since conventional wisdom claims to have solved some of the problems. The introduction of discussions that lead to the challenging of conventional wisdom is always encouraging. It is important to point out that as operations grow ever closer to shore they become more joint, suggesting that modern naval irregular warfare may benefit from the strong joint environment that has developed within the American military.

Frequently open water battle-fleets, amphibious operations, and riverine/near-shore forces are addressed separately. *Brown-, Green-, and Blue-Water Fleets* serves a valuable purpose by creating analytical linkages between all three operating environments. The historical case studies are interesting, and the discussions of ship design and fleet constitution add to the modern discussion of littoral operations and irregular warfare.

Swamp Sailors in the Second Seminole War by: George Buker, University of Florida Press, 1996.

The Second Seminole War was fought by the United States to enforce the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which decreed the movement of all Indians to reservations in the west. While many tribes in the southern United States complied, there were several bands of Florida Seminoles who refused. They moved into the interior of Florida and initiated a guerilla campaign based out of the wild and ungoverned Everglades. It was in response to the attacks of the Seminoles that the United States Navy became involved in its first maritime counter-insurgency campaign.

Swamp Sailors in the Second Seminole War tells the story of the Navy's involvement in the conflict, from traditionalist blockade attempts to radical new units designed to penetrate the swamps in small boats and canoes. Written by George Buker, a professor emeritus at

Jacksonville University and retired U.S. Navy Commander, the book is based on significant primary source and archival research. It recounts the early experiences of numerous naval officers and civilian guides in their fight against the Native Americans of Florida, including Rafael Semmes and Stephen Mallory who would become major leaders in the Confederate Navy. The book is arranged chronologically and broken up into ten chapters. Of particular interest are the early chapters on the efforts of the Navy's West Indies Squadron and last chapters which recount the Everglades task force organized under Lieutenant John T. McLaughlin that was dubbed the Mosquito Fleet.

At the start of the Second Seminole War the Army requested assistance and the Navy's reaction was to apply traditional naval strategy to the conflict. A blockade was established with naval ships and revenue cutters. The long coastline of the Florida peninsula also made transportation by sea the most advantageous way to move troops. However because of the limited resources of the early American Navy, and constant tasking of the squadron for a multitude of missions, it was impossible to cover the entire coastline. While the Navy attempted to meet the requirements of the Army there were significant parochial and personal conflicts between the leaders at the upper levels of command that limited the effectiveness of any attempts at joint operations. In all, the early operations of the West Indies Squadron had little impact on the war.

In a move that would be recognized by many of today's Sailors, the Navy began assigning men to Army units. One of these men was LT John McLaughlin who worked well in the joint environment. The Army, recognizing that the Navy did not have the ships needed for the irregular warfare mission in the treacherous waters around the Florida peninsula, began buying its own ships and small boats and manning them with men under orders from the Navy. Over time this force grew and was organized into what became known as The Mosquito Fleet, made up of shallow draft vessels, small boats, gun barges, and canoes. These were used by McLaughlin and his men to launch joint counter-insurgency raids deep into the Everglades which eliminated Seminole safe havens and drove many bands of guerillas to surrender. It also resulted in the first mapping of the Everglades and opened up the area to later scientific study.

CDR Buker's *Swamp Sailors in the Second Seminole War* raises many important questions about naval irregular warfare. The role of joint operations, the value and creative leadership of junior officers, and the importance of purpose designed littoral vessels and equipment are all discussed. While the writing is at times academic and dry, Buker's operational understanding and love of a good story breaks out as he discusses McLaughlin's development of the Mosquito Fleet and raids deep into the glades. *Swamp Sailors* demonstrates that American naval history has examples of irregular warfare which can provide direct lessons to the twenty-first century.

Waves of Hope: The U.S. Navy's Response to the Tsunami in Northern Indonesia (Newport Paper #28) by: Bruce A. Elleman, Naval War College Press, 2007. Available from the Naval War College at: <http://www.nwc.navy.mil/press/newportpapers/newportpapers.aspx>

The last decade has seen the rise of "soft power" and the leaders of the sea services have realized the important role that naval forces play in modern humanitarian efforts. Dr. Bruce Elleman's *Waves of Hope: The U.S. Navy's Response to the Tsunami in Northern Indonesia* provides the first historically minded account of Operation Unified Assistance, the U.S Navy's role in saving

thousands of lives following the tsunami that struck Sumatra in December of 2004. Dr. Elleman served as a research professor at the U.S. Naval War College and produced a well researched and engaging study of the relief effort. The mission delivered 9.5 million pounds of relief supplies to an Islamic nation that was suspicious of American intentions and in a region with an active insurgency.

Through nine chapters the author illuminates the mission's successes and failures. Chapters are broken up by subject and include the intelligence limitations that resulted from faulty media reports and the importance of developing logistics and supply systems. After the initial humanitarian crisis had ended *Waves of Hope* outlines the post Tsunami mission of the USNS Mercy and the positive post-mission political results of the operation.

Dr. Elleman spends a chapter discussing the vital importance of sea-basing during the mission. The capability to mount the operation from the sea, with sailors returning to the ships of Combined Support Force 536 each night for hot chow and a navy rack, proved an important strategic capability for the United States Navy. It significantly reduced the possibility of an incident between Americans and local authorities, which was vital in a suspicious Islamic land. Sea-basing also limited the force protection issues while operating in a region with an active insurgency. The coordination required to bring hundreds of military relief personnel ashore every day and return them to the ships every night, while moving people and supplies around the region, was awe inspiring.

The author dedicates a chapter to the centrality of helicopter-assisted air access in the success of the operation, something operators in Iraq and Afghanistan have also pinpointed. He uses the reports and oral histories of several aviators, giving him a solid understanding of the helicopter's importance. The region, which already had a limited infrastructure, was decimated. Roads and bridges were destroyed and for a vast area and the helicopter was the only transport available. Like the Berlin Airlift six decades before Operation Unified Assistance demonstrated that airpower comes in many forms beyond the fighter/attack aircraft of a carrier air wing.

Overall *Waves of Hope* makes a compelling case for the inclusion of humanitarian missions in naval strategy and the study of naval warfare. The intersections of military power and successful diplomacy have been highlighted in recent years through operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. For students of soft power, naval diplomacy, and small wars Bruce A. Elleman's *Waves of Hope: The U.S. Navy's Response to the Tsunami in Northern Indonesia* is an important read.

The preceding three books provide unique and varied views of maritime operations. *Brown-, Green-, and Blue-Water Fleets* provides important background in naval strategy, unique case studies, and introduces important analysis to naval operations. The authors help to illuminate the littoral and riverine environment where most irregular missions are likely to take place. Many naval leaders brush off irregular warfare by saying "we should do what we've always done." *Swamp Sailors of the Second Seminole War* demonstrates that American naval history has important examples of naval small wars and irregular campaigns. From the early republic to the present day, this history provides important lessons for the future. *Waves of Hope* provides readers with a view of naval soft power and important lessons on the operational requirements of such missions.

As naval leaders look to address the challenges of modern maritime operations, and develop capabilities for naval irregular warfare, naval history plays a central role in the discussion. Joint operations, leadership, and fleet design are all illuminated in historical studies of naval small wars. Analysis of these experiences can help today's maritime leaders read the charts and identify the shoal waters of irregular operations. By studying the past we can see the great influence of seapower upon small wars throughout history.

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