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Braisted: The United States Navy in the Pacific

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Book Reviews

THE UNITED STATES NAVY IN THE PACIFIC, 1909-1922, by William Reynolds Braisted. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1971. xii, 741 pp.

America achieved a world imperial power status following the "Great Aberration" of 1898. Contrary to popular belief, however, her annexation of the Philippines did not necessarily mean that she was the undisputed mistress of the Pacific Ocean, nor that that vast body of water had become an American lake. Great Britain still had the distinction of being the greatest naval power, with Germany and Japan not too far behind. The former was gaining ascendancy in the Atlantic, the latter in the Pacific. In fact, Japan became the acknowledged mistress of East Asian waters after the Japanese decisively beat the Russian navy in 1904-1905.

William R. Braisted's thick and meticulously documented book must be read within the context of Japan's emergence as a potential threat to the United States' interests and security on both sides of the Pacific. Throughout the entire length of the book, the theme that the United States and Japan would someday face each other in a naval showdown for supremacy in the Pacific runs like a thread, with the dark shadow cast by Germany in the Atlantic complicating matters in so far as American naval men were concerned. The German menace certainly increased the fears of United States naval strategists that America might be placed in a situation of fighting a two-ocean war with only a one-ocean navy.

To solve the dilemma, America decided to support the British navy in the Atlantic in order to check the effectivity of the German High Fleet. The presence of a strong British fleet in the Atlantic would enable the United States to concentrate on improving her naval defenses and positions in the Pacific, particularly with regards to the feasibility of building strong naval bases and fortifications along the western coast of America, the construction of the Panama Canal to assure a fast link-up between the Atlantic and the Pacific fleets of the United States navy, and the establishment of a well-equipped naval base in Pearl Harbor.

A strong naval posture in the eastern Pacific was deemed essential to the successful advancement and defense of United States political, military, and neo-mercantile interests in the western rim of the ocean (e.g., the Bethlehem Steel Company, which had a stake in the supply of naval and military hardware to China). A powerful navy meant having not only bases and fortifications, but also more battleships, cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and carriers than the potential enemy.

There were indeed not a few reasons why America viewed Japan as her future enemy in the Pacific. Among others, their objectives collided over China. America liked to see China on her side because "American naval men saw in her resources ingredients the control of which could make Japan invulnerable." Furthermore the Japanese and the Americans were at loggerheads over the Siberian affair. As Braisted put it, the "Japanese insisted that their troops were in Siberia to provide stability, but the Americans believed otherwise." The Americans were suspicious that a sizeable Japanese force in the Asian mainland would only be used for purposes other than "stability," i.e., to assure Japanese primacy in Asia.

Then there was the row over the question of alien exclusion or immigration. A crisis had already occurred in the relations of the Japanese and the Americans in 1913 in connection with the discriminatory legislation adopted by the California state assembly declaring aliens who were "ineligible to citizenship" from acquiring landholdings. Non-Caucasoids and non-Negroids were disallowed by United States federal immigration laws from becoming American citizens, and the California law seemed to the Japanese to add "gratuitous insult" to injury. Later in 1920, the Californians in a referendum approved more "stringent prohibition on alien (Japanese) landholdings in the state."

Finally, there was the American fear that Japan was really entertaining hegemonial ambitions in the Pacific because of her planned eight-eight naval building program, i.e., the simultaneous construction of eight battleships and eight battle cruisers. It will be noted that the Japanese took with them the eight-eight principle to the Washington Naval Conference in 1921. The fulfillment of the eight-eight plan would surely have threatened the security of the United States insular possessions in the Pacific.

Considering, therefore, the threat posed by Japan, it was only natural that United States navy men advocated naval preparedness. It is interesting to note that America in her naval war plans resigned herself to the idea of losing the Philippines in the event of conflict with Japan, although the Americans were committed to the "defense of Manila and Manila Bay." Braisted's findings confirm assertions made elsewhere that America regarded the Philippines as her "Achilles heel." He also shows that the criterion of military preparedness which the United States

wanted for the Philippines before granting her political freedom was far from realized even when independence was already seriously considered just prior to the commonwealth period.

Braisted has admirably accomplished his main purpose of showing how America sought to increase and maintain her naval strength in the entire span of the Pacific Ocean. This work is an expansion of an earlier book by the same author dealing solely with United States naval operations in East Asia. To support his thesis, it is evident that the author engaged in systematic and exhaustive spadework. Braisted went through voluminous and hitherto unavailable records at the United States Naval War College and the War Department.

On the whole, the book is factual and accurate. His literary style is easy to read and understand, his chapters are logically organized. Undoubtedly, the book is intended for students of naval history, but it is my opinion that non-experts can read it without necessarily being plunged into complexities which presuppose a general knowledge of the subject on the part of the reader. The author's narrative approach succeeds in conveying the excitement of the original historical situation discussed.

LESLIE E. BAUZON

SULOD SOCIETY, by F. Landa Jocano. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1968. 303 pp.

Dr. Jocano here presents a data-packed volume about the "Sulod," the name outsiders give to a group of Kiniray-á speakers who live and make kaingin in the mountains of Central Panay. The field research was done in 1957-58. Following introductory sections orienting the reader to the Sulod's location, language, and history (pp. 1-33), Jocano gives us an overall picture of Sulod settlements and economic activities (34-66). Then he gets into what is, for him, the heart of the matter—the kinship system (67-100) and kinship behavior (101-24). After this there follows the longest chapter of all, an amply illustrated discussion of the typical Sulod life cycle ((125-240). Between this chapter and his summary (271-84), Jocano inserts an interesting but (to my mind) out-of-place section on ceremonies (214-70). There is a bibliography and an index.

The volume is, as I said above, a copious collection of facts. It also makes many pronouncements on "the" Sulod view of various aspects of reality. As a matter of fact, these broad generalizations make me more than a little uneasy. For my own experience prepares