

a veteran, might hold a professional appreciation for certain wartime tactics and technologies regardless of who wielded them, praising *U-534*'s tactical competence and *Admiral Graf Spee*'s Nazi commander as a hero, even to his adversaries, glosses over too quickly the genocidal regime served by the commander and both aforementioned vessels.

With millions of shipwrecks globally, though, and an author-stated mission of remembering those lost at sea, the book falls short on a more fundamental level. Eurocentric and biased toward wrecks dating to between 1900 and the present, the supposed superlatives encompassed in the text are a smattering of stories more similar than they are distinct, all but ignoring the contributions of seafarers and seafaring technology from most of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America. When ships from these regions are detailed, comparatively more time is spent emphasizing the mechanical shortcomings of the vessels and the technical ineptitude of the crews than for their European and North American counterparts. Historically, seafaring in Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America has been not only an important part of global maritime trade and exploration, but it was often a forebearer of technologies and skills such as astronomical navigation, mariner's compasses, stern-hung rudders, and the perennially-popular catamaran hull style. Temporally and geographically limiting what qualifies as exceptional and worthy of memory, whether tacit or explicit, reifies Enlightenment-informed notions of European exceptionalism stemming from the Age of Sail and the mythos of savage others. The obfuscation of global sailing histories in both the recent and deep past in a book dedicated to "those who have no known grave but the sea" inherently values those lives that are in the social memory of living Britons more than the countless many who came before them.

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**Paul Kennedy. *Victory at Sea: Naval Power and the Transformation of the Global Order in World War II*. With paintings by Ian Marshall. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, [www.yalebooks.yale.edu](http://www.yalebooks.yale.edu), 2022. 544 pages, illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. US \$37.50, hardback; ISBN 978-0-30031-917-3.**

Paul Kennedy is among that select group of historians working today who broke from the confines of academia to become a leading public intellectual. His 1987 book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, was a national bestseller when it was published, and it was just one of many works written over a prolific career stretching back nearly half a century. Now, at a time when most of his

contemporaries have eased their scholarly labours to bask in their accumulated honours, Kennedy has written a new book. Originating in a collaboration with the late marine artist Ian Marshall, it is a beautifully illustrated volume that examines the interrelationship between sea power and the global balance of power during the Second World War, and chronicles how a new international order emerged from the interaction between the two.

To demonstrate this, Kennedy begins by describing the major pre-war navies and how they addressed the strategic challenges they faced. Focusing on the six key naval powers – Great Britain, the United States, Japan, Germany, France and Italy – he examines their force structures, the missions they faced, and the choices they made to achieve them. The best part of this is his description of the interaction between economics and contemporary geopolitical thought among naval strategists, as it provides valuable context for the decisions made by these countries both before and during the war. Kennedy regards naval planners on all sides as acutely aware of the constraints they faced in addressing the challenges before them and shows how each country adapted as best it could – if not necessarily in the most economically rational manner – to achieve its goals. The composition of their respective navies reflected this, consisting of vessels designed to best meet their distinct goals.

The test came with the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939. Initially a limited naval conflict, the balance changed in the spring of 1940 with Germany's conquest of Norway and the entry of northwest Europe and Italy into the war. During this period, the Royal Navy felt for the first time the impact of modern air power, for which they proved lamentably unprepared. Moreover, Germany's conquests removed the French Navy from the war while simultaneously gaining them access to Atlantic ports which magnified the threat to British trade. Yet not only did these victories cost Germany the bulk of their surface fleet, they pushed the United States Congress to pass the momentous Two-Ocean Navy Act, which authorized a massive expansion of the US Navy. It was through this exploitation of the nation's latent industrial capacity, Kennedy argues, that the United States laid the foundation for America's post-war naval dominance. Until the US entered the war, though, the Royal Navy had to carry on alone against the Germans and the Italians, which they did successfully only by concentrating its finite resources in the Mediterranean and Atlantic theatres. This created for Japan an opportunity to seize Europe's imperial territories in Southeast Asia, one which they judged could only be successful if it was preceded by an attack on the United States, the one unengaged naval power that could thwart Japanese ambitions.

With Japan's offensive in the Pacific, the maritime struggle was now truly a global one. Though Kennedy calls 1942 "the fighting-most year in all of naval history" (197) and summarizes the battles that justify such a label, he

regards the following year as the truly pivotal one in terms of deciding the war. This was due to the change in fortunes over the course of it. As Kennedy notes, at the end of 1942 the United States had just one fleet carrier active in the entire Pacific while Germany was preparing to launch the largest-ever U-boat offensive against Allied convoys in the Atlantic. By the end of 1943, however, the Axis navies were either on the defensive or, in Italy's case, out of the war altogether. Kennedy credits two joint factors in this shift: the mounting results of American industrial productivity and the successful deployment of the vessels it produced. For him, the interrelationship between the two is key. As he notes, Karl Donitz "would have been dumbfounded to read later statements by Western historians that the surge of US shipbuilding output . . . assured *inevitable* victory in the Atlantic campaign to the Allies," adding that "[i]f Donitz's U-boats had not been beaten squarely, in mid-Atlantic waters, during certain key May and June 1943 convoy battles, the story *would* have been different" (264-6).

Nevertheless, the sheer scale of America's economic output contributed to the shift in global power taking place. Not only did it result in a navy that surpassed Great Britain's in size for the first time in history, the vessels produced, most notably the aircraft carriers, redefined the nature of naval power. Air power plays a major role in Kennedy's analysis, as fast-attack carrier forces succeeded battleships as the supreme form of naval power. Nothing demonstrated this better than the sinking of the Japanese super-battleships *Musashi* and *Yamato* by dive-bombers and torpedo planes, in both cases well before they were able to engage the warships they were sent out to attack. In that respect, the true display of America's naval power at the end of the war came not with the signing of the surrender on the deck of the USS *Missouri*, but when the more than 400 carrier-based planes flew overhead during the ceremonies—the new symbol of maritime power in the age of Pax Americana.

Most of the details in Kennedy's book will be familiar to students of the period. He makes no claim to have plumbed the archives for new material, relying instead on published works ranging from the official histories of the naval war by Stephen Roskill and Samuel Eliot Morison to relevant Wikipedia entries for his information. Nevertheless, his book shines for the quality of the analysis within its pages. Its greatest strength is his explanation of the interplay between various factors—economic, geostrategic, and technological—in shaping the outcome of the war, which he integrates into a smoothly readable narrative of the conflict. It's a book that is destined to become a standard work on the naval history of the Second World War, one that can be read for enjoyment as well for the insights contained within its pages.

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