

Communication: Nicholas Tracy on *The Collective Naval Defence of the Empire, 1900-1940*

To the Editors:

On the assumption that your reviewer of my Navy Record Society volume *The Collective Naval Defence of the Empire, 1900-1940*, Greg Kennedy, is not himself above criticism, I would appreciate the opportunity to help your readers with some of the points he raised. I confess that I was staggered by the assertion that my introduction and selection of documents evinces "a sub-text of colonial or dominion persecution at the hands of an exploitive and domineering motherland and Admiralty." I conceived the Navy Record Society volume as a corrective to that very tendency, which, as he notes, is certainly inappropriate and outdated. If he can really detect a prejudice in favour of dominion aspirations, I can at any rate feel confident that I have not overdone the "imperial perspective" of which I was accused when working for the Directorate of History.

Kennedy's other assertion – that I see the tactical doctrine of the decisive naval battle as being of "prime interest" in the first decades of this century – I will not dispute. Nor will it be difficult to defend the prominence given it in my introduction, because it was that doctrine which it was most difficult to reconcile with decentralization of operational control, and hence with decentralization of imperial and dominion politics.

His criticism that my selection of documents is not "well defined in terms of overall concept and...theoretical context" is more interesting, although in fact, on page two in the introduction/finding aid, I explain the basis of my selection and make clear the limitations of a book of "only" 700 pages. Indeed, it was a minor miracle that the NRS allowed me to produce the longest book in their publication history apart from the centennial volume. It is easy to wish for more documents, but every additional one would have had to be paid for by cutting out another.

It is easy to criticise the volume for not including Foreign Office papers, but it is really a destructive idea. If a collection of papers is to be at all useful to scholars working on the subject area it needs to be good at what it does rather than attempting to do everything. It is appropriate that a Navy Record Society volume should fulfil its mandate of publishing naval documents. Any serious scholar of imperial history will know that Admiralty and Committee of Imperial Defence papers provide only a part of the story. Nor will they make the mistake of thinking Foreign Office papers complete the jig-saw puzzle. The suggestion that all the cross-currents of imperial relations could be spelled out in an introduction, even one of fifty-four pages, does not bear serious examination. I was careful to make clear that I conceived of the effort as a "finding aid."

Anyone who has read exhaustively through the Admiralty papers for this period will be aware of the themes which interested contemporaries, and they will be aware of the debates within the Admiralty, and between the Admiralty and other government depart-

ments, and with Dominion naval boards, by which policies were developed. For those who have not had the leisure to do such reading themselves, I have put together a collection which illustrates themes and processes. Space limitations has obliged me to be selective, but I have always tried to represent the debate rather than give any impression of governance by fiat.

In one respect I will gladly agree with your reviewer, and indeed with all the reviewers of this collection. The references to sources ought to have been located with the documents themselves, rather than placed together in the back of the book. I argued that point with the General Editor of the Navy Record Society, but lost. The "house style" of the services dictated that I conform with other NRS volumes which, because they tend to be volumes of personal papers, have less need for easy identification of source.

Thank you for giving me this space.

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