

John B. Hattendorf and Pelham Boyer (eds.) *HM 28: To the Java Sea: Selections from the Diary, Reports, and Letters of Henry E. Eccles, 1940-1942*. Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, Historical Monographs 28, www.usnwc.edu, 2021. xxvi+292 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, appendices, index. Free download; ISBN 978-1-935352-50-1.

Officers attending the United States Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, quickly discover that the College's library is named in honor of Rear Admiral Henry E. Eccles, who retired in 1952. Eccles first came to the War College in 1948 to lead the Logistics Department. For more than thirty years, Eccles taught, wrote, lectured and advised those attending the College as well as its leaders, focusing on logistics, military strategy and theory, and civil-military issues. Eccles gained first-hand knowledge and experience with logistics and planning during the last two years of the Second World War in the Pacific, when he was tasked with leading the effort to develop advanced bases to support the US offensive against Japan. As Director, Advanced Base Section, for the entire Pacific Fleet, he was responsible for all aspects of advanced bases, including strategic planning, training, development, and support of the Navy's efforts. "He was known around the world as a military intellectual and as an expert" on these topics (xvii). Not surprisingly, therefore, he is best remembered for his work in these subject areas.

Often-overlooked, however, is the fact that Eccles commanded the twenty-year-old destroyer USS *John D. Edwards* from October 1940 until March 1942, barely considered when Eccles' naval career and life are recalled. Eccles was a combat veteran, twice decorated for gallantry and wounded in action. He fought in several major engagements in the early months of America's involvement in the war in the waters of Southeast Asia, while part of the brief American-British-Dutch-Australian (ABDA) command, including the Battles of Badoeng Strait, Java Sea, and Sunda Strait. It is this lacuna in the historical knowledge about Eccles that *To the Java Sea* ably fills.

To the Java Sea is the twenty-eighth monograph in the series of historical monographs published by the Naval War College based on materials in its archives. Edited by Ernest J. King Professor Emeritus of Maritime History, John D. Hattendorf, and Pelham G. Boyer, a volunteer research assistant to the War College's Hattendorf Historical Center, the book is based primarily on Eccles' letters, diary, reports, and other materials from the College's collection of his papers – with one significant exception. Eccles' widow provided the letters used in the monograph to the editors with the request that they be returned to her. She indicated that the letters would be bequeathed to the College after her death. Although she died in 2000, the editors note that the letters have not been received and their whereabouts are unknown. Accordingly, *To the Java*

Sea may represent the only source for Eccles' letters as quoted in the volume.

The book covers the period from 2 July 1940 to 27 March 1942. Eccles' diary entries and letters "express unguarded attitudes and candid opinions that, if written by an American naval officer today, might be considered unacceptable, as particularly surprising in a man of Commander Eccles's upbringing, education, and sensitivity" (xxiii). It begins with then-Lieutenant Commander Eccles sailing by passenger ship from New York City to Cape Town, South Africa, where he arrived on July 26. Eccles spent roughly three weeks sightseeing and traveling about, witnessing riots and engaging in discussion with local officials before departing for Manila in mid-August, again by passenger ship, to take command of *John D. Edwards*. Eccles took a circuitous route, stopping in Singapore, Calcutta (now Kolkata), Karachi, Dubai, and Bangkok, filling his diary and letters to his wife with candid observations. He finally reached Manila on 10 October 1940. Upon his arrival, Eccles sent a frank report to the Office of Naval Intelligence regarding the South Africa and Dutch governments' likely ability to defend against Japanese aggression. In particular, Eccles described the views expressed to him by Dutch officials, that the islands most likely to be targeted by Japan had "no defenses worth mentioning ... and ... a few hundred troops could take practically unopposed position" of most of the Dutch East Indies (70). His report was prescient given Japan's eventual conquest of the region.

The volume then moves to his command of the *John D. Edwards*, preparations for the likely coming war, and the sea battles in which Eccles' ship participated. In letters to his wife, he provides his opinions on events occurring in Europe and the lack of affirmative action against the Axis powers by the US. His letters and diary entries reveal the uncertainties, stress, and strain of an individual commander and his warship preparing for battle. It also shows Eccles' concern for his men, asking his wife in multiple letters to send "care packages" for the officers and sailors under his command.

After being attacked by Japanese bombers and multiple near-engagements, Eccles and *Edwards* fought their first surface action the night of 19-20 February 1942. He later told his wife it was "the most spectacular and terrific experience of my life" (236). He received the Navy Cross for his gallantry in the battle – a decoration he did not believe he deserved. The book culminates with the Battles of the Java Sea and of Sunda Strait, fought successively on February 27 to 28. In those battles, the ABDA forces were soundly defeated by the Japanese Imperial Navy. Using excerpts from Eccles' reports, letters, diary, and ship's log, the book paints a compelling picture of the intense and often-confused actions. He summarized the battles saying, "We had gotten the hell licked out of us" (255). Eccles bemoans the fact that his men have to fight the Japanese using old ships and weapons. The enemy uses American "ideas

on strategy and naval tactics” while the US has “thrown them to the winds and have borrowed others from God knows where—and they are not so hot.” Candidly, he tells his wife, “I felt like vomiting when I read the press reports from Batavia and London as to the situation in Java. I know, for I fought there. ... [G]et rid of the smoothies and routine boys, dig in and fight” (259). While recovering from his wounds, Eccles is relieved of command of the *John D. Edwards* and sent back to the States. The book concludes on 27 March 1942, with a final brief line to his wife while he was still in Australia: “A fine golf game. All relaxed – moral high. Good luck!” (265)

As Professor Hattendorf states in his introduction, “The three-year span between 1940 and 1942 was critical in Henry Eccles’s life and career” (xxii). *To the Java Sea* fills the gap in the historical record for Eccles and provides new insights not only into his subsequent career focusing on logistics and strategic thinking, but also this essential period where command of an old warship taught him the importance of those topics during war. The volume should prove an essential addition to the naval history of the early ABDA command in Southeast Asia, American successes and failures in the early months of the war in the Pacific, as well as the life of the man for which the library at the Naval War College is named.

Alan M. Anderson
London, England

Magne Haugseng. *The SS City of Flint: An American Freighter at War, 1939–1943*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., www.mcfarlandbooks.com, 2021. 254 pp., illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. US \$39.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-4766-8536-6. (E-book available.)

The SS *City of Flint* was just one of the many American ocean-going freighters that regularly plied the North Atlantic trade routes in the late 1930s calling on ports in Europe. It was not a particularly large or otherwise noteworthy ship, being rated at less than 5000 gross register tons (GRT). It had been ordered in May 1918 in the aftermath of the United States’ entry into the First World War, the vessel’s name commemorating the contributions of the residents of her namesake city toward the US Liberty Loans campaign. In fact, until 1939, *City of Flint*’s career was almost as unremarkable as the ship itself. It was, however, destined to become one of the most famous merchantmen of the early days of the Second World War.

First catapulted into international fame as a rescue ship, *City of Flint* was next a short-lived German prize vessel. Upon her release, it went on to sail in North Atlantic and Arctic convoys, as well as in the Persian Gulf before