

The United States emerged from World War 2 with the most powerful Navy in history. It had fought and was victorious in two oceans, each of which could be considered a separate war. Only in the strength and presence of the Soviet Navy during the last years of the Cold War has the U.S. Navy been seriously challenged in the half century since the end of World War 2. Compared to the Navy of the 1990s with its nuclear "supercarriers", submarines and ICBM missiles, the World War 2 Navy seems as antique as Greco/Roman triremes. The huge floating machines and their locust swarms of metal raptors that defeated the Japanese Navy and helped drive Nazi Germany out of the Atlantic Ocean hardly inspire the terror or awe they did half a century ago.

Control of the world's oceans since World War 2 has been more or less exclusively the United States' Navy's. The war ended Britain's 150 year naval supremacy and subsequently its empire, and the U.S. Navy quite naturally filled the vacuum in accordance with Mahan's maxims. The Navy raced into the nuclear age, participating in nuclear tests in the Pacific (in which a target fleet of World War 2 ships was sunk by one bomb), developing missiles and nuclear-powered supercarriers and submarines. The Navy immediately took over the world's sea-lanes and expanded the nation's hegemony. It built or occupied naval bases in nations and on islands and kept immense fleets at sea in the Pacific, Atlantic, Mediterranean and Indian Oceans. All but two of America's 40-odd Cold War allies were overseas, which meant that American servicemen and women were freighted across the oceans to all those bases and stations (by air as well as ship), and were supplied by fleets of more shipping.

The end of World War 2 left both the United States and the USSR as the most powerful nations on earth. Ideologically opposed since the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 (the famous U.S. cruiser *Olympia*, Dewey's flagship at Manila Bay in 1898, landed a detachment of infantry in concert with British forces at Archangel in 1918 and seized the Russian city of Murmansk), the two nations contested each other for world supremacy. The U.S. began the Cold War with two distinct advantages. The first was the atomic bomb, which had ended the World War; the second was the immense cost Russia paid in lives (20 million?) and in its ravaged land and industry. A third advantage was that the U.S., which emerged from the war as the greatest industrial and economic power in history, also had history's largest Navy. The Russians had nothing that could be considered a navy.

But Russia rebuilt its industry and became a nuclear power in only a few years, and in a series of surrogate wars challenged American power in Asia and Africa after dominating Eastern Europe. American troops fought in two of those wars, though most were conducted by peasant armies against peasant insurrections, and the Russians were content with supplying clients without confronting the U.S. with its own forces.

For the most part the Soviet Union concentrated its military power in its army and landbased airforce and in nuclear weapons. But in the last years of the Cold War the Soviet Navy grew remarkably in surface craft and submarines. For many years it was built for a one-shot war strategy to ambush western warships in devastating attacks, which included tactical nuclear weapons. In its latter years, before the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Navy adopted Mahan's concepts and moved from a strategy of denying the seas to an enemy to control of them. (Mahan's ideas, however, pose problems for strategists in the nuclear age, particularly his stress upon concentration of forces in the face of homing weapons and nuclear missiles.)

Dominance of the oceans for both the U.S. and USSR centered around what are called "chokepoints," which are places the ocean is strategically squeezed by the land and great fleets can be bottled up with small amounts of firepower — such as the chokepoint that runs from Scotland to Greenland, or the Kattegat in the Baltic Sea, both of which favored the U.S. fencing in the Soviets; or the Strait of Hormuz, which favored the Soviets who were in a position to interfere with a major portion of the world's oil supply. The most important chokepoint was the Greenland-Scotland point, and the U.S. Navy weaved an underwater trap of sonar sensors, dormant minefields, attack submarine ambush areas, surface ship patrols and antisubmarine pickets to cork the Russian fleet before it could reach the sealanes of the North Atlantic.

In 1970, the U.S. Navy had more than 1000 ships. Ten years later it was down to less than half that number yet its global commitment had increased rapidly due to the loss of American land bases in Asia following Vietnam and the remarkable growth surge of the Soviet Navy. Most of the decline was from the obsolescence of ships built just after World War 2, which included more than half the Navy's carriers. The Navy clamored for a massive shipbuilding program—the so-called 600 ship Navy Pentagon admirals claimed was necessary to maintain naval parity with the USSR. News of the construction of a Soviet supercarrier helped push three new carriers through Congress. The specter of supercarrier battles in midocean prompted frantic changes in strategies and tactics which called for newer types of ships, aircraft and missiles. It takes at least 10 years for modern ships to be built and launched from drawing boards to the ocean, and rapid changes in technology quickly render ships obsolete or impractical.

Half a century after World War 2 the U.S. Navy continues to be built around the aircraft carrier. Within a month of the war's end the first two postwar carriers were launched. In 1955 the first supercarriers built to specifically operate jet aircraft were commissioned, and in 1961 the world's first nuclear powered aircraft carrier, the *USS Enterprise*, named after the famous World War 2 carrier, joined the American fleet. Seven years earlier the U.S. launched the world's first nuclear-powered vessel, the submarine *Nautilus* (from Jules Verne).

The modern nuclear supercarrier is able to operate for 13 years without refueling and it carries an air armada capable of striking targets anywhere on earth. A carrier battle group can theoretically control 600 miles of ocean, above, beneath and on the surface. Carriers are fast, moveable and cannot be overrun, which is not true for land bases. On the other hand they are tremendously expensive, about \$3 billion for the ship and \$15 billion for its airwing, submarine and surface escorts, which does not include operating costs. And a carrier can be sunk. Though they are designed to take about four hits from conventionally armed missiles, carriers are not likely to survive for very long in a nuclear war, if one is still possible in the post-Cold War era. In the past carriers were sent to show the flag or put pressure on hotspots. U.S. Navy carrier forces intervened in local or international disputes more than 200 times during the Cold War (including intense airwars in Korea and Vietnam), conducted last year's landings on Haiti, and currently await orders off the coast of Bosnia/Herzegovina. Carriers proved vulnerable to Kamikaze attacks during World War 2 and current fears are that in the nuclear age they are sitting ducks.

Following World War 2 the old rivalry between battleship and carrier admirals changed to one between nuclear sub-



KEM (USA, 1945)

marines and supercarriers. The submarine admirals (led by Hyman Rickover) claimed that Russia's most dangerous threat was the terrible combination of (nuclear) submarines equipped with missiles armed with nuclear warheads. Such a theory, if unchallenged, would force the Navy to spend a greater part of its energy and money on anti-submarine warfare. Since this, per se, was defense, and since the Navy's whole tradition was to take the offensive... (this stand) was regarded... just short of treason. (But the rivalry) confused the tactical with the strategic... The truth is this. Once both sides had maximum capability in hydrogen weapons and efficient means of delivering them there was no sane alternative to peace. (Pat Frank, *Alas Babylon*)

Though the major Navies of the Cold War never met each other in combat, scenarios projected that the great state-of-the-art ships of both fleets would be just so much junkyard metal littering the ocean floor if the fleets clashed. More ominously, it was planned that after the great carriers and their air-planes and escorts were destroyed a few nuclear-armed submarines on each side would remain and launch their missiles at the world's civilizations. That this war between those superpowers never happened is astonishing even now six years after the end of the Cold War and four years since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Naval History gallery in the Columbia River Maritime Museum is an incomplete portrayal of the U.S. Navy from Revolution to global supremacy. Nothing yet represents the Korean or Vietnam wars, when U.S. power shrank from its post-war peak, nor is evolution of the nuclear Navy since World War 2 depicted. Yet a growing sense of the enormous investment a nation makes in a Navy, politically and socially as well as the costs of wood, steel, powder and flesh, is impressed upon visitors as they move through the gallery. Among the models of warships, paintings of naval engagements, photographs, swords, medals, torpedoes, cannon balls and bombs, is a wood sculpture by Fred Rice of a cannon crew at work aboard "Old Ironsides." One of them lays dead and decapitated in a vivid splash of blood on the deck, about to be dragged out of the way by his shipmates as they ready to fire another shot. It is the mortal eloquence of this scene that brings the gallery into focus.

Vestiges of World War 2 remain in Astoria. The balcony and wood dance floor of a nightclub that was crowded every night during the war years with servicemen and local ladies is part of a garage of an auto parts store. The wharves at Tongue Point after the war berthed a fleet of 500 mothballed ships that were later dismantled or sent north to Puget Sound. And of course the old houses, the city's most conspicuous residences which have sheltered its population through two world wars as well as this entire century and earlier when Astoria was a booming riverport and its canned salmon was a world-class delicacy. It is remarkably easy to step back into the World War era near the Flavel House. Up a grassy knoll from Astoria's most famous Victorian is an old frame house that headquarters the local Red Cross chapter. A French boxcar that hauled American soldiers to the frontlines in both world wars is exhibited in a corner of the Flavel estate as a donation from France. On its sides are shields of every U.S. Army unit that served in World War 1's trenchlines and World War 2's liberation of France from Nazi occupation (painted by Don Osborne). Plans are to remove the boxcar to Fort Stevens, the only American military installation in the lower 48 states attacked by an enemy in either world war (Hawaii was a U.S. territory at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack; and the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor on Unalaska Island in June 1942 to protect their invasion of two other Aleutian islands).

Like most cities Astoria has a monument to the world wars, a "doughboy" from World War 1 scrambling through barbed wire with his Springfield '03 rifle held aloft, shouting no doubt to inspire his comrades across 'No Man's Land.' The statue looks more completely a soldier when local pranksters stick an empty whiskey or wine bottle in his other hand.

Compared to cities all over the world that were devastated by World War 2, their populations decimated by bombs, fire, disease and starvation, Astoria's postwar problems were minor. It did not have to rebuild or recreate its reasons for being a city. Its countryside, though ravished by forest fires during the war years, had not been obliterated. The war's end provoked an economic dislocation that was a microcosm of the early postwar years nationwide. Astoria was without a manufacturing base and did not profit from the reconversion to consumer goods (though some of its markets and shops did). The Korean War caused a flurry of activity, but afterward the Navy abandoned its Tongue Point base. Even back then there were signs of the imminent collapse of the region's resource based economies. Perhaps that is why Robert Lovell's *Cumtux* reminiscence of wartime Astoria seems to end on a dismayed note: *Our population still has not returned to its level of the 1940s.*

The World War 2 generation, so young in the incessant replays of 1940s war movies, is old now. World War 2 veterans, though often negligently regarded in the postwar, are experiencing a golden anniversary comeback, resplendent with enthusiasm as well as apologetic respect and genuflection for "saving freedom." World War 1 veterans, who fought the "war to end all wars" and were honored for "saving the world for democracy," are almost all dead. Korean and Vietnam veterans will soon enough be the nation's aged war survivors, but those were very different wars.

The authors of *On The Edge* (Carroll, Lee & Horowitz) write that World War 2 altered the relationship between government and the American citizen and that the two oceans no longer protected the United States. Any adverse event could affect "national security", which in turn necessitated a strong and vigilant government dominated by an alert executive branch:

World War 2 had profound and lasting consequences for American government and society. The magnitude of the war effort involved more private citizens — soldiers, civilian employees, workers, and consumers — in government activities than ever before. Total warfare also justified the federal government's assumption of new powers, including an expanded bureaucracy, executive policy making, and secrecy about important public issues. These changes laid the basis for the postwar national security state, which demanded large military budgets and the creation of a political consensus on the homefront. The war effort also required immense costs in dollars, casualties, and the disruption of ordinary lives. Yet ultimate American victory encouraged a belief that military action was not simply a last resort, but the prime means of achieving specific foreign policy goals.

World War 2 is called the 'Good War.' The 20th century has obviously proved there is no such war. Both world wars might have been prevented if nations and the human beings they reflect were not greedy or ready to commit violence for their aspirations. The Hitlers, Stalins and Mussolinis of this century could never have so devastated the world if their populations had not so blindly or fearfully followed them into the hell they brought upon humanity. That should be the lesson of World War 2.

And one other. The preamble to the United Nations Charter, adopted in June 1945, a month after Nazi Germany collapsed but while Japan was still at war, stressed a determination to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetimes has brought untold sorrow to mankind. Half a century of a Cold War and a reckless nuclear arms race between the two main victors of World War 2 sorely tried the effectiveness of the UN. The same narrow interests that doomed American participation in the League of Nations before the war continue to threaten the country's involvement in the UN despite its achievement of helping prevent nuclear war. More than ever the UN is necessary. Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev spoke to the future when he said, *War is an inadmissible means of securing a nation's defense.* Add that war is also an inadmissible means of achieving a nation's ambitions, retaliation against a rival or eradication of a despised minority and there is no reason for war whatever.

This article is dedicated to Paul French, USMC sergeant who was badly wounded on Guadalcanal and died 45 years after World War 2 ended as a result of his war wounds; and to Melvin ("Mac") McCleary, who spent most of his life on Columbia River tugboats after serving on a U.S. Navy destroyer during the war. Mac died recently in Astoria; 50 years ago the day he died he and his destroyer were off the coast of Okinawa on picket duty dodging kamikazes.

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