From the Battle of Manila to the submarine hunters of the First World War, the American navy experienced an unprecedented level of importance, support, and growth during the first decade and half of the twentieth century. In 1916, Congress cemented this expansion with a mammoth ship-building agreement. How quickly things can change. The end of the “War to End All Wars,” the prospect of a lasting peace, evolving military ideals, and the shift in American politics threatened to return the navy to the dark and underfunded days of the nineteenth century. As naval commanders and planners faced the challenges of disarmament talks, technological innovation, and attacks by the likes of Billy Mitchell, the branch had little organizational capability or cultural foundation to control public discourse or disseminate information. Ryan Wadle’s *Selling Sea Power* is an important work on the history of early-twentieth-century naval public relations, focusing on the story of the American navy’s struggles to both control and disseminate publicity and information during the challenging interwar years.

Covering the years 1917 to 1941, this book provides the first complete chronological narrative of American naval public relations efforts and apparatus leading into the Second World War. Wadle argues that at the end of World War I and the peace that followed, the “silent culture” of the US Navy along with the lack of internally functional capabilities prohibited the branch from effectively “selling” itself as the nation’s first line of defense going forward. Naval culture dating back to the Civil War, according to Wadle and other naval historians, emphasized a “silent” approach toward sharing information with the American people and therefore the navy could not defend itself or its ambitious construction programs and the costs of the 1916 ship-building program. The struggles of multiple naval attempts to rectify this gap, first the Navy News Bureau, then the Information Section of the Office of Naval Intelligence, and finally the Public Relations Branch, highlight the complete dearth of naval institutional and cultural capability to sell itself.

Organized into two basic sections, Wadle first covers the chronological narrative of the period and the various offices and institutions. Taking the reader from 1917 to 1939, this book covers all the stumbles and setbacks the navy endured as it attempted to wrest control of its image and more importantly its position as America’s first line of defense in a new century. The second half is organized more thematically and discusses the various social and cultural implications and influences the navy exerted during the period. Of particular interest in this second half, Wadle outlines the re-
lationship between the navy and the burgeoning American film industry. The Navy Department’s Motion Picture Board made decisions on whether to advise and cooperate with film directors and producers in the name of or publicizing the navy itself. As Wadle shows, this process was never made clear. Some films, like 1930’s *Men Without Women* and 1933’s *Pigboat*, were given navy advisors and assistance. But as the situation in Europe changed over the course of the 1930s, the navy became ever-weary of maintaining its secrecy. A once useful tool in naval public image creation, films and newsreels received much less assistance from navy officials as the decade came to an end.

In one of the most effective chapters, Wadle examines the presentation of manhood and masculinity within naval recruiting materials. In print pamphlets, recruiting posters, and film newsreels, the navy tried to present itself as a place for morally sound and upstanding young men. Combating decades-old stereotypes of drunken sailors riddled with venereal disease, navy officials like Secretary Josephus Daniels sought any avenue available to present a new image of the navy and boost recruiting efforts during the early 1920s drawdown. While the navy found limited success in changing the public perception of sailors and naval stations, the Great Depression itself solved its recruiting issues, as the navy remained a steady source of income for desperate Americans. This section is particularly representative of Wadle’s work as the concerted attempts to shift public perception, regardless of effectiveness, highlight the ongoing transformation of naval public relations efforts.

Wadle contributes to a rich historiography of the interwar navy and its transition from a battleship-centric force to one prepared to fight on the “three planes” of the ocean: the skies above, the surface, and the depths beneath. More specifically, this book joins a series of works discussing the history of American naval public relations, offering the first attempt to cover the entire interwar period and its implications. While it is unclear whether these naval organizations ever reached their institutional goals, Wadle provides a complete and exhaustively researched picture of American naval public relations efforts from World War I to eve of Pearl Harbor.

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