

Book Reviews

The Politics of Procurement: Military Acquisition in Canada and the Sea King Helicopter, by Aaron Plamondon, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010, 205 pages (plus notes bibliography and index), ISBN 978-0-7748-1714-1

Reviewed by Gary Garnett and Dave Neil

Major Canadian defence programs have become increasingly complex. The cumbersome procurement process takes years, even decades. *The Politics of Procurement* is a groundbreaking case study of an acquisition process still underway. Author Aaron Plamondon's focus is political influence on defence procurement. He chose the replacement of the Sea King helicopter as his case study. The politically opportunistic and impetuous decision to turn a Canadian defence procurement into an election issue, the subsequent cancellation of this weapon system already in contract and the process to put the replacement back on track provides plenty of scope to speculate on intrigue, impropriety and flawed decision-making in government.

The initial chapter contains some historical examples of defence procurement that illustrate that such acquisitions have always had a political dimension. The book then delves into an account of the development of shipborne operations that will fascinate anyone with an interest in Canada's maritime aviation history. Plamondon then provides an insightful examination of how the Chretien Liberals misrepresented the facts of the New Shipborne Aircraft (NSA) project during the 1993 federal election campaign, and sacrificed the project for political gain. The consequences of the cancellation of the NSA contract following the election and the true costs to taxpayers, the aerospace industry and the Canadian economy are well explained.

The final chapters, which deal with the aftermath of the cancellation and the process that led to the procurement of the Sikorsky Cyclone, are far less satisfying. This part of the book fails to acknowledge the evolution of the post-Cold War force development environment in DND and the financial climate as the government moved to eliminate the deficit. The result is an incomplete assessment that lacks balance and unfairly implicates those involved in the requirements process of complicity in a government conspiracy engineered to avoid re-selection of the EH-101. Both of the reviewers were intimately involved in the requirements process and are named in the book.

Adapting to the new realities after the Cold War did not happen overnight. It took most of the 1990s to develop a process for defining requirements for new acquisitions. The capability-planning process was in use in 1997 and formally adopted in DND in 1999. At the same time, the Auditor-General directed the development of a set of scenarios describing the breadth of CF operations as a tool to push DND into the new paradigm. New acquisitions needed to be placed into these scenarios to determine what capabilities they needed to perform satisfactorily in each. The scenarios reflected post-Cold War operations from search and rescue to medium-intensity combat operations (the Gulf War) and peace support operations (the former Yugoslavia).

The Maritime Helicopter Project (MHP) was the first to be put through this new force development process. An examination of the Statement of Operational Requirement (SOR) for the cancelled EH-101 acquisition and the follow-on SOR approved in 1995 shows that they were developed in the earlier force development threat-based planning process. The critical requirement that led to the selection of the EH-101 was the need to counter Soviet cruise missile submarines in blue water. By the later 1990s, this threat had vanished, and trying to determine essential maritime helicopter attributes using a Cold War paradigm was totally irrelevant.

The process of developing an SOR that accurately reflected the needs of the maritime helicopter force in the post-Cold War era began in 1996. The MHP SOR was developed from a clean sheet of paper by applying the new force development approach rather than through a process of watering down or downgrading as Plamondon suggests. The commanders of both the air force and the navy endorsed the process and the product. The final document articulated a set of requirements that were very challenging for any helicopter, including the EH-101, to meet.

The timing of the helicopter project coincided with a huge funding reduction to DND in the mid- to late 1990s. The baseline reduction of 25% (33% adjusted for inflation) demanded that every program be subjected to intense scrutiny. Cabinet Ministers and Treasury Board officials needed to be convinced that the project was a priority and consumed minimal resources, or the project would never proceed. Ministers also needed clear explanations of capability requirements, as requirements drove costs. The judgement of Service Chiefs was no longer enough.

The book spends some time articulating the shortcomings of the weapon system ultimately chosen – the CH-148 Cyclone – and the challenges associated with bringing

it into service, but a similar treatment of the EH-101 is missing. While it is a fine helicopter, no mention is made of the EH-101 crashes experienced by the Royal Navy or the problems experienced by the CF with the CH-149 Cormorant, the search and rescue version of the EH-101. It seems easy to criticize the Cyclone as it is undergoing the integration and certification process, because problems inevitably arise in this phase of a project. The EH-101 would have needed to undergo a similar process. This process would also not have been without its challenges.

The Politics of Procurement is based on open-source documentation and interviews of individuals with an interest in the project but not those intimately involved in the requirements process. The book offers an interesting historical treatment of the development of shipborne helicopter operations in Canada and a valuable perspective on how the replacement of the Sea King helicopter became a casualty during the 1993 election campaign. Plamondon does an excellent job of illuminating the high costs of the Chretien government's cancellation of the project. However, his treatment of the follow-on project that resulted in the selection of the Sikorsky Cyclone contains gaps and lacks balance. It also fails to appreciate the impacts of a more sophisticated, post-Cold War force development process and deficit reduction measures on overall military acquisitions. Government procurements will always be influenced by politics, but this book fails to substantiate the author's contention that the MHP SOR was deliberately shaped to facilitate the government's preferred outcome rather than to reflect the needs of the CF. 🍷

Black Flag: The Surrender of Germany's U-Boat Forces, by Lawrence Paterson, Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2009, 196 pages, \$37.50 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-7603-3754-7

Reviewed Colonel P.J. Williams

There is a photo found in many books about the Battle of the Atlantic. It depicts a U-boat pulling up alongside a jetty in Wilhelmshaven, Germany, at war's end in 1945. A young boy watches from dockside. The crew members are deliberately avoiding the camera, and are all staring down at the deck, and in the various captions accompanying this photo are "crestfallen"¹ or are "in sullen grief."² *Black Flag: The Surrender of Germany's U-Boat Forces* tells the story of the events leading up to the scene depicted in this iconic photo (which, ironically, was not reproduced in this book) and what happened to the men and their boats afterward.

Lawrence Paterson is a well-established writer on the Battle of the Atlantic, and focuses mainly on the German perspective in what was the longest campaign of the war. As with his previous works, he has made extensive use of oral history provided by participants in the events described in this book. Appendices at the end of the book list the U-boats at sea (some 59 of them) when Admiral Karl Dönitz issued the order to cease fire. The appendices also include the surrender instructions, which among other things directed U-boats to surface and to fly a large black or blue flag by day, and to burn navigation lights at night.

The book is divided into several sections. These sections cover the actual surrender at sea, the surrender on land (in which some U-boat bases on the French Atlantic coast held out until the very end), the subsequent imprisonment of the crews by the Allies and the destruction of the U-boats in what became known as *Operation Deadlight*, the terms of which had been agreed upon by the Allies at war's end. The fate of each boat is briefly described.

Not all U-boats fell into Allied hands however. On 2 May 1945 within days of the German surrender, Admiral Dönitz issued the codeword for *Operation Regenbogen* (Rainbow), the scuttling of the German fleet, an order followed by some 217 U-boats.

Paterson has introduced new material into the book. He describes in some detail a German plan to mount missiles on U-boats, as there were lingering rumours at war's end of German plans to launch ballistic missiles from sea at Allied cities. In addition, he covers events surrounding a massacre of six Norwegian civilians by German sailors on 6 May 1945.

Given the key role the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) played in the Atlantic campaign, I was rather hoping for a detailed account of the part the RCN played in these events, but given the author's British heritage, it is perhaps understandable that he did not include such an account. That said, Paterson does describe the surrender of U-889 to the Canadian escort group W6 off Flemish Cap on 10 May, as well as that of U-190, the working periscope of which can be viewed at the Crow's Nest in St. John's, Newfoundland. Canada also provided one of the escorts along with one each from the Royal Navy and US Navy, to the formal surrender ceremony of the U-boat to Admiral Sir Max Horton, Commander in Chief Western Approaches, at Loch Foyle, Scotland, on 14 May, 1945. As part of the division of the spoils, so to speak, at war's end, Canada did receive U-889, which was commissioned into the RCN for experimental purposes, before being transferred to the United States. U-190, which had sunk HMCS

Esquimalt, the last Canadian warship to be lost in the war, was taken to the same spot where she had sunk her quarry and was dispatched by rockets.

Paterson is a very good storyteller. He takes what could have been a very dull and technical event and makes it something more than a mere footnote to the Atlantic campaign. He tells the often very human story of what happened after the shooting stopped. One gets the impression that the author has somewhat of a soft spot for the U-boat crews, who in his words were “never fully defeated in battle until ordered to lay down their arms by their Commander in Chief.” One also wonders whether our veterans of the Battle of the Atlantic would hold the same view. Strongly recommended. 🍷

Notes

1. John Costello and Terry Hughes, *The Battle of the Atlantic* (London: Collins, 1977), p. 302.
2. Douglas Botting, *The U-Boats* (Amsterdam: Time-Life Books, 1979), p. 167.

Struggle for the Middle Sea: The Great Navies at War in the Mediterranean Theatre, 1940-1945, by Vincent P. O’Hara, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009, 324 pages, ISBN 978-1-59114-648-3

Reviewed by Dave Mugridge

Vincent O’Hara’s timely addition to the accumulated works on the naval campaign in the Mediterranean and Red Sea during WWII tackles the subject with a fresh and controversial perspective. It is well researched and examines the conflict from the collective history of the main combatants: Royal Navy, Regia Marina, Marine Nationale, Kriegsmarine and United States Navy. For the student of wartime grand strategy it provides an excellent digest of why this theatre became vital ground for each of these naval powers. This book analyses the entire five-year campaign with an exhaustive coverage of the main engagements, taking the reader on an historical journey before reaching its unconventional but welcome re-analysis of the overall campaign.

The naval campaign in the Mediterranean was the most keenly fought of any in WWII and this book allows the reader to review the conflict as a whole rather examining it in its two dominant phases (1940-43) Anglo-Italian ‘guerre de course’ and (1943-44) Allied amphibious operations. The author covers the whole campaign and for the first time introduces the reader to French regional interests and the Kriegsmarine’s successful asymmetric campaign in the face of overwhelming Allied strength. (Perhaps those who champion conventional fleet structures rather than balanced capability and employability should take note!)

This author is to be congratulated for overturning myths which emanate from wartime propaganda. We see new evidence of the Regia Marina’s determined opposition to the Royal Navy and arguments that support the notion of the latter being bled white by a campaign which refused to follow a predictable path. If history is written by the victor it is certainly re-evaluated by historians like O’Hara, who can banish stereotypical conclusions with the stroke of a pen.

This readable tale is all the more compelling because of the value of its source material. The author has spared little effort to ensure his conclusions are based upon a solid and wide foundation of credible evidence. Just as he overturns wartime propaganda successfully so he also manages to shed new light on the flawed or human characters of the main protagonists – men like Admiral Andrew Cunningham, Admiral James Somerville and Admiral Angelo Iachino. Perhaps it is this re-evaluation that has proved so controversial in a Europe which is now depressingly familiar with its wartime history being rewritten by US historians and film-makers.

In short, I can recommend this book to CNR’s readership. I feel that O’Hara’s enduring contribution to naval history may well be to show future generations the value of re-engaging with the past and learning the valuable lessons of objectivity. Now we just need to convince today’s strategists of this lesson. 🍷

Editor’s Note

We would like to make a correction to the review of Brian Lavery’s *The Royal Navy Officer’s Pocket Book 1944* by Colonel P.J. Williams published in the Summer 2010 issue (Vol. 6, No. 2). In the review it was stated that “some 204,562 officers” passed through the gates of HMS King Alfred during the war. This figure is incorrect and actually represents the size of the Royal Navy at the outbreak of war in 1939. Thank you to a sharp-eyed reader for pointing out this incorrect statement. 🍷



HMCS *Huron* in the Persian Gulf in 1991 in pre-TRUMP configuration with additional self-protection systems needed for Operation Friction.