



The Origins of the Grand Alliance: Anglo-American Military Collaboration from the Panay Incident to Pearl Harbor by William T. Johnsen.

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Review by Kevin Smith, Ball State University (ksmith@bsu.edu).

Another book on Anglo-American relations in the Second World War? Yes, and a most welcome one. Military historian William Johnsen's personal and scholarly mastery¹ of inter-allied military conversations opens new vistas for students of military and diplomatic history. *The Origins of the Grand Alliance* provides a valuable, thorough analysis of the development, extent, and value of British and American military and naval staff officers' cooperation in 1937-41. It shows that they had already forged an effective strategy for the Atlantic theater, though not yet for the Pacific. "The lack of initial success against the Axis Powers was not ... an accurate indicator of either the quantity or quality of work accomplished by the U.S. and British military establishments" (244) in the years prior to the US entry into the war:

Battles and campaigns alone, although vitally important, are never enough to secure victory. Within a coalition, national interests and policies must meld to create grand strategy, which then guides the coalition's strategy that balances ends, ways, and means to place battles and campaigns in their proper context. The conception, planning, development, and execution of policy and strategy require command-and-control and liaison organizations, ... and communication channels to coordinate these activities. In a global war, where strategic requirements always exceeded available resources, there had to be mechanisms for ensuring the appropriate allocation of materiel and resources necessary to support strategy. (xx)

Thus Johnsen gives careful attention to competing national interests, inter-service rivalries, staff work, and resource procurement. Scholarship on the Anglo-American relationship tends to stress the period after Pearl Harbor, the relationship between President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and/or military or naval issues. By contrast, Johnsen foregrounds staff talks in the context of broader political and military developments as both naval and military commanders took hesitant steps toward effective cooperation in both the Pacific and the Atlantic: "a close relationship between Roosevelt and Churchill was helpful, indeed fortuitous, but ultimately not essential.... A functioning collaboration between British and U.S. militaries was the sine qua non for success..." (235-36). Thus this book will reward both scholars and beginning students interested in Anglo-American relations, the Second World War, military history, naval history, and the development of grand strategy and coalition strategy.

Another strength of the book is its author's realization (based, no doubt, on experience) that staff officers operate within a historical context. Johnsen begins by examining the "intellectual baggage" (11) officers brought to their relations with French and British counterparts. Civil-military difficulties and coalition command questions posed serious problems. American Vice Adm. William S. Sims' effective liaison service during World War I inflamed American Anglophobia because his supposed subservi-

1. As an infantry officer, he learned the nuances of staff planning. As a professor at the US Army War College, he has published extensively on American military strategy of the past thirty years.

ence to the Royal Navy seemed an obstacle to the United States' ascent to naval supremacy. This attitude persisted among some American naval officers in the interwar era and the Second World War.

After a well-informed and perceptive discussion of interwar contacts, Johnsen embarks on a chapter-by-chapter scrutiny of relations between British and American staff officers as global war engulfed Britain and threatened the United States. Conversations between US Capt. Royal Ingersoll and British Capt. Thomas V. Phillips in 1938, despite the “absence of clear political, policy, or strategic guidance” (54), facilitated the coordination of signals procedures and intelligence sharing. Throughout, Johnsen identifies constraints on progress toward cooperation: American officers lacked political guidance and President Roosevelt had to navigate the shoals between a looming global conflict and the American people's profound reluctance to enter another war. British officers struggled to develop strategic priorities that would favorably influence American industrial and naval decision-making, but “the British propensity to add new requirements and shift priorities without warning ... continually disrupted American plans” (201). In the event, however, the sharing of

tactical and technical information ... undoubtedly saved hundreds, if not thousands of American lives in the initial period after American intervention.... In the Atlantic, [officers] ... achieved substantial progress on delimiting command relationships, liaison arrangements, the amount of U.S. assistance required, and the means for protecting shipping as well as numerous technical matters, such as codes, cypher systems, and recognition signals. (128)

Johnsen's analysis of British strategy in the Far East is appropriately damning. He observes, for example, that British ideas about deploying the US Pacific fleet from a base in Singapore (!) offered “a scenario more befitting a Lewis Carroll novel than a strategic operating plan” (115). As one Royal Navy admiral admitted in a moment of candor,

On the one hand, we shall say to the Americans that the whole safety of the Far East depends upon the arrival of their battle fleet at Singapore. On the other hand, we shall also have to say that we have not placed a garrison in Malaya sufficiently powerful to ensure that the base at Singapore will be intact when the United States fleet arrives.... United States land and air forces ... could hardly arrive in Malaya in advance of their fleet ... to cover their passage. (115)

In the same vein, Johnsen comments that

The British also blithely ignored the fact that basing large elements of the U.S. Fleet at Singapore exposed U.S. possessions in the Pacific and the entire U.S. West Coast to Japanese attacks.... British plans envisaged British and dominion forces focusing on trade-route protection while the U.S. Navy undertook the most difficult and dangerous missions against the main units of the Imperial Japanese Navy. This ... gave the impression ... that Britain was once more scheming to get the United States to pull its imperial chestnuts out of the fire. (123)

Despite the example of successfully combined Anglo-American strategy in the Atlantic, no similar collaboration was achieved in the Pacific. While Johnsen downplays errors in American prewar planning, he correctly asserts that “U.S. strategic planners were much more clear-eyed in their analysis than were their British counterparts (144),” and his indictment of the British for refusing to make necessary “hard choices” rings true.

Johnsen also refutes conventional wisdom regarding American strategic disarray and incompetence: “the idea that the British led the strategic dance or, worse still, duped their less sophisticated or naïve American cousins does not stand up to scrutiny. In reality, the Americans drove the development of grand strategy in this period” (251). Scholars of Allied grand strategy will henceforth need to take account of Johnsen's demonstration that 7 December 1941 was a bridge rather than a chasm: “the

elemental grand strategy and the implementing of strategic principles crafted eight months *before* the United States entered the war would endure through to victory almost four years later” (158, my emphasis).

The book contains a few minor errors of interpretation and fact. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge’s rejection of the Versailles Treaty was not primarily motivated by its failure to address the question of Irish independence (35). The crusade of Representative Louis Ludlow (D-IN) to amend the Constitution to require a national referendum prior to a declaration of war was not narrowly defeated—it never came up for a vote.² In his discussion of the legacy of the First World War, Johnsen cites Gen. Fox Conner’s wry assessment that “dealing with the enemy is a simple and straightforward matter when contrasted with securing close cooperation with an ally” (30). But when he then quotes (without elaboration) Conner’s claim that, while its European allies had ulterior motives, the United States did not, he ignores the American exceptionalism that exacerbated inter-allied difficulties in both world wars.

These reservations aside, William Johnsen’s comprehensive new analysis presents a compelling and salutary challenge to received opinion about Anglo-American military and naval staff planning in 1937–41. Both specialists and beginning students of the Second World War should read *The Origins of the Grand Alliance* and carefully consider how prewar planning shaped wartime events and outcomes.

2. The January 1938 vote was only to determine whether discussion could bypass committee and proceed to debate by the House as a whole (55).