



Blue versus Purple: The U.S. Naval War College, The Soviet Union, and the New Enemy in the Pacific, 1946 by Hal M. Friedman.

Newport, RI: Naval War College Pr, 2017. Pp. xxxvi, 442. ISBN 978-1-935352-31-0.

Review by Jack Binkley, Loyola University of Chicago (jackbinkley@icloud.com).

After World War II, all three US military services had to confront two fundamental challenges. The first was all too expected—the demand for instant demobilization. The second was less expected—the need to adjust their roles and missions to the new geopolitical reality of an aggressive Soviet Union. The USSR controlled all of Eastern Europe, posed a threat to Western Europe and the Middle East, and, through its proxies, could exert its influence in China and Southeast Asia. At the same time, the United States would have to integrate such military advances as guided missiles, strategic airpower, and the atomic bomb. The Soviet Union’s postwar power posed a special conundrum for the US Navy planners: what exactly would the Navy’s role be in dealing with a new Eurasian superpower that lacked significant naval assets?

To shed light on this question, military historian Hal Friedman (Henry Ford College) has written *Blue versus Purple*,¹ the third installment in a series he has authored on the role of the Naval War College and the lessons it learned from the Second World War.² Friedman has astutely used the College’s war games as a means to explore this transition in the Navy’s interests regarding the USSR. The reader should be aware that the book is less a history of this shift of focus than an in-depth narrative distillation of the primary sources of the war games themselves. While Friedman has done a great service by bringing to light these sources,³ there is not much analysis or assessment here of the decision-making of the wargamers, nor of the quality of the games themselves.

The first of the book’s twenty-one chapters sets the stage for the Naval War College’s change-over to its new mission. We learn about the organization of the College and the content and structure of its curriculum in 1946–47. While the chapter clarifies the make-up of the institution itself and the role of its faculty, it does not explain how the Navy dealt with its new Cold War responsibilities vis-à-vis the Soviet Union as regards the defense of Western Europe prescribed in the 1946 Joint Outline War Plan “Pincher.”⁴

Chapters 2–7 concern the rules governing the war games, how they were applied, and the use of early generic games to familiarize students with the rules process. Readers interested in war

1. The title refers to the traditional color-coding used by the US Navy in its war games: Blue=United States, Orange=Japan, Red=Great Britain, and Purple=Russia/Soviet Union.

2. *Digesting History: The U.S. Naval War College, The Lessons of World War Two, and Future Naval Warfare* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Pr, 2010) focuses on the lectures and student theses concerning the war and the future of naval warfare. *Blue versus Orange: The U.S. Naval War College, Japan, and the Old Enemy in the Pacific: 1945–1946* (id., 2013) concerns the Navy’s ongoing preoccupation with the role of Japan.

3. He has also helpfully equipped his book with 14 maps, 149 figures (charts, forms, etc.), and no less than 162 period photographs.

4. On which, see, e.g., Jeffrey Barlow, *From Hot War to Cold: The U.S. Navy and National Security Affairs, 1945–1955* (Stanford: Univ Pr, 2009), and Vincent Davis, *Postwar Defense Policy and the U.S. Navy, 1943–1946* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Pr, 1962).

gaming will appreciate Friedman's meticulous description of rules and their operation, including the sophisticated models devised to assess combat damage. Naval war games could incorporate both the capabilities of new weapons and the vagaries of chance in wartime.

The book's other chapters elucidate in granular detail various Blue vs. Purple games set in the Northern Pacific region around the Aleutian Islands and the Kamchatka Peninsula. While the geography of these scenarios makes sense, given the proximity of Russia to the United States in the Northern Pacific, more problematic is the absence of scenarios reflecting the Navy's actual Cold War-era missions, such as the use of carrier forces in the Mediterranean to help defend Western Europe. It is unclear whether the author chose to restrict his selection of games to the Northern Pacific or the War College itself concentrated only on that region. Another oddity is the improbable force structures assigned in the scenarios: Purple forces are fully equipped with *Iowa*-class battleships and fleet aircraft carriers, none of which existed in the Soviet Navy then or later. Why do the game scenarios fail to reflect some semblance of geopolitical realities of the moment?

Hal Friedman should be applauded for drawing attention to these war games and for his daunting mastery of the various primary sources associated with them. By its very nature, his choice of subject will narrow his book's appeal to dedicated wargamers and those with an uncommon interest in the Naval War College curriculum. Such readers will not be disappointed. Students and historians of US Navy policy more broadly, however, may miss a fuller contextualization of the Navy's transition to face a new enemy.⁵

5. Happily, *Blue versus Purple* is available (gratis) online – www.miwsr.com/rd/1906.htm .