Jeffrey G. Barlow has been a historian with the U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command since 1987. He served in the U.S. Army from 1967 to 1970, stationed in South Korea and on assignment at the Army’s Military History Research Collection at Carlisle Barracks, PA. Dr. Barlow authored the prize-winning Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight for Naval Aviation, 1945–1950 (1994). His volume From Hot War to Cold: The U.S. Navy and National Security Affairs, 1945–1955 (2009) was awarded the Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt Prize in Naval History by the New York Council of the Navy League. He has authored numerous book chapters on World War II and the Cold War, and conducted scores of interviews with senior and mid-level military officers.

Interview by Benjamin Guterman

Your graduate school studies were in international relations. Has that perspective continued to influence your approach to historical work?

It has in the sense that looking at aspects of national history through the lens of larger organizational decision-making frameworks such as national security and foreign policy provides a means of increasing the variety of ways such historical events can be examined. In addition, I found that studying under professors who had held significant jobs in Departments of the federal government furnished me with insights into how and why actions are taken that continue to have value for my writing.

Can you generally describe your history-related assignments during your military service and later as a defense analyst?

During my military service, I was fortunate enough to be assigned in 1969 to the newly created U.S. Army Military History Research Collection at the Army War College in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. One of the first projects I helped on was an effort to canvass the surviving veterans of the Philippine Insurrection, the Boxer Rebellion, and the Spanish American War. As part of this process, we sent detailed questionnaires about their service experiences to hundreds of men who had taken part in these conflicts more than half a century before. Another project I took part in was the creation of a museum to honor General of the Army Omar Nelson Bradley, a major combat commander during World War II and a postwar Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Bradley actually attended the opening of the museum in 1970.

While serving as a defense analyst in the mid-1980s, I wrote several chapters examining the history of World War II naval strategies for the book Seapower and Strategy. It was eventually published in 1989.

Did your early research and writing on Allied and Axis naval strategies during World War II lead you to any new insights or reevaluations in a broad sense?

While I can’t say that my research effort for this project led me to any major new insights, it did allow me to examine many of the original naval records. At that time, the Naval Historical Center at the Washington Navy Yard maintained the vast majority of the U.S. Navy’s World War II records and also held copies of many Royal Navy wartime reports, as well as copies of documents from the captured archives of the German Navy. Therefore, in conducting my research at the Center I was able to immerse myself in these valuable historical materials.

In researching your award-winning book Revolt of the Admirals on the crucial 1949 controversy about naval aviation, what convinced you that the topic merited reexamination?

While reading the existing historical literature on the Admirals’ Revolt, I became convinced that significant aspects of the events had not been thoroughly examined. By that time the originally classified Army, Navy, and Air Force records related to the events had been opened for scholarly research. And, in addition, significant numbers of individuals who had been involved on the Navy’s side of the “Revolt” were still available to be interviewed about their experiences. For these reasons I sought and received permission to write a new history on the topic.

For your extensively researched book From Hot War to Cold, you gained new insights into decision-making and policy developments from previously unused naval records. Can you discuss some of those revelations?

Talking about a “general” rather than a “specific” revelation, I would say how interesting I found it that a number of important decisions during those days were made as contingent choices rather than as carefully calibrated ones. I would not have expected that contingency could play as significant a part in the way some vital matters were decided upon as it did, but in carefully examining the available documentary record and adding to it the oral recollections of participants, I became convinced that this indeed was sometimes the case.

As an example, during the 1949 “Admirals Revolt,” then Captain Arleigh A. Burke was heading up a shop in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations designated OP-23 that was coordinating the Navy’s testimony in the congressional hearings.
Navy Secretary Francis P. Matthews was very much against the Service taking a strong stand that opposed the Air Force position when it defended its views before Congress, and he made this clear in meetings with the Navy’s senior admirals. This information later surfaced in a story by Washington Post reporter Jack Norris that revealed the Secretary’s position.

The embarrassed Francis Matthews was determined to find out who had betrayed his confidence, and someone mistakenly suggested to him that the OP-23 office was connected to the leak. Some weeks later, as Matthews reviewed the selection list for Rear Admiral, he proceeded to strike Arleigh Burke’s name from the list and ordered the Selection Board to reconvene and select another officer in his place.

President Truman and his Naval Aide, Rear Admiral Robert L. Dennison, were down in Key West when the selection list arrived. Dennison was a classmate of Burke’s and knew what an outstanding officer he was. He convinced the President that Burke should stay on the list. On returning to Washington, Mr. Truman called in Secretary of Defense Louis A. Johnson and Navy Secretary Matthews and “persuaded” them that Burke should remain on the selection list, which he did.

A few years later, Arleigh Burke was selected by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to be the Chief of Naval Operations, and he eventually served three two-year terms. If his classmate Robert Dennison had not been Truman’s Naval Aide in the fall of 1949, and if he had not pushed for Burke’s reinstatement on the list, then Arleigh Burke would never have had the opportunity to become known as one of the Navy’s greatest CNOs.

Focusing on the efforts of several Chiefs of Naval Operations (CNOs), From Hot War to Cold takes us to the core of the debates over formulation of national security policy, specifically over Truman’s plan of unification of the armed services. The book suggests that those domestic debates had greater influence than foreign crises in shaping the new security policies. Is that correct?

Yes, it is. It’s important to understand that the initial support for what became defense unification had come from the Army Staff during the final two years of the war. Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall was convinced that if the existing defense organization continued into the postwar period the Army was likely to obtain less support for its budgetary requirements than the Navy would receive. While at the same time, Navy leaders were concerned that the Army’s proposal for a separate Air Force could lead to a diminished capability for the Service’s naval aviation component. These domestic debates were thus the primary movers in the unification fight.

What were the CNOs’ basic arguments for preserving the Navy’s independence and strategic value as the Air Force and the Truman administration began placing more emphasis on the deterrent use of atomic weapons in national defense? And how did operations in Korea affect that debate?

Navy leaders were convinced that in a war with a major land power such as the Soviet Union, launching a strategic air offensive on the interior of the USSR as proposed by the Air Force would not be enough to defeat a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. Defending Western Europe and the Mediterranean would also require relying on significant naval forces to establish and hold the essential sea and air lines of communication to Europe and Africa. When the Korean War broke out, the presence of Navy aircraft carriers in the waters off the Korean peninsula provided vital additional tactical air support to the air forces fighting to maintain the defending Allied troops in South Korea.

You conclude that in the long term, the “reasoned” opposition of Navy Secretary James Forrestal and other officers to unification of the services had a “positive” effect on our national security structure. Can you explain that?

The “reasoned” opposition led in the end to an effectively balanced compromise—the National Security Act of 1947—which not only established three separate military departments (the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force) under a civilian Secretary of Defense but also created three high-level government bodies that were to play a vital role in national security decision-making in the coming years. These were the National Security Council, the National Security Resources Board, and the Central Intelligence Agency.

You cite several oral histories as being invaluable in your reinterpretation of Cold War-era planning and reorganization. Can you provide a few examples of such insights?

I should start by noting that I have always found oral histories to be an important aspect of the historical research effort required when writing books dealing with 20th- and 21st-century topics. They can be particularly helpful when one is writing about matters of high-level decision-making. If you are able to interview people who were key staff members for military and civilian leaders, you may gain important insights into how and why particular decisions were made.

I will mention two such instances. In interviewing an Army colonel who was serving on General George Marshall’s immediate staff during his Mission to China in the early postwar period, I learned that General Albert C. Wedemeyer, the senior American officer assigned to the China Theater, had been removed from his job because of his private insistence to Marshall that the U.S. needed to continue its efforts to support Nationalist Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek over the Communist Chinese leader, Mao Tse-tung. On an entirely different topic, in my interviews with a Navy captain who was close to CNO Robert B. Carney, I learned that Admiral Carney failed to be reappointed as CNO
because he refused to share information with Navy Secretary Charles S. Thomas that Thomas believed that he had the right to see as Secretary.

How do you feel about the differing approaches of federal and nonfederal military historians—by their differing research questions? Certainly, the former are guided by agency needs and priorities.

It seems to me that there can be a very useful interplay between the writing efforts of federal and nonfederal military historians on similar historical topics. As you note, federal historians receive guidance from their agencies about the subjects they examine, whereas nonfederal historians are free to pursue their topics as they see fit. A significant advantage provided by many officially sponsored histories, however, is that the author is provided the time and support to undertake detailed research on topics of extensive scope.

Can you tell us something about the decisions in the past two decades to widen the scope of research and publication topics at the Naval History and Heritage Command? We’ve seen books on African Americans and women in the service, and on naval aviation, for example.

In the mid-1980s, Secretary of the Navy John F. Lehman suggested that the Naval Historical Center could substantially increase its interaction with active-duty Navy personnel by establishing a program to write narrative histories about the U.S. Navy in the post–World War II period. The Center’s Contemporary History Branch began operating in early 1987 under Edward J. Marolda, and in the more than 20 years since it has managed to produce award-winning books and monographs on a range of diverse topics, including the development of early postwar U.S. naval strategy, American submarine construction, racial integration at the U.S. Naval Academy, and the role of senior Navy leaders during the first decade of the Cold War. It continues its valuable work today as part of the Naval History and Heritage Command’s Histories Branch.

What projects are you currently working on?

I am in the process of completing a history of the development of the U.S. Navy’s antisubmarine warfare efforts during the first decade-and-a-half of the Cold War. The narrative actually begins with the Navy’s defense against the German U-boat campaign to decimate Allied shipping during World War II and goes through 1960, a time when the Service was seeking to adequately respond to the potential threat posed by the Soviet Union’s substantial submarine fleet.

**SHFG DIRECTORY**

SHFG is compiling the Directory of Federal Historical Programs online. Visit [http://shfg.org/shfg/publications/directory-of-history-offices/](http://shfg.org/shfg/publications/directory-of-history-offices/) to complete and submit a directory form. Send form to webmaster@shfg.org

---

**Federal History Office Profile**

The Federalist profiles a different history office in each issue. Please direct texts, comments, and inquiries to Editor Joan Zenzen at joanz10@verizon.net.

**The U.S. Navy’s Ship Model Program**

*Dana Wegner*

The birth of the modern American steel Navy in 1883 was the result of the combined efforts of the Executive and Legislative branches of the federal government plus a considerable amount of public sentiment favoring a modern, high-tech Navy reflective of growing national pride. To justify funds spent and keep the positive momentum going, one of the ways the Navy promoted the expanding fleet was through the creation of large, highly detailed scale models of each type of new ship. The models, originally built in-house, were made at the same time the real ships were being planned and built. These exquisite, museum-type, official exhibition models were made solely as public relations pieces and, despite their size and intricacy, were sturdily constructed and capable of shipment to world fairs and commercial exhibitions nationwide to maximize their public exposure. Built to a standard scale of 1/48th actual size, early models ranged in size from about 5 feet long for a gunboat to about 10 feet long for a battleship.

The earliest official models were built by a team of full-time government model builders employed by the Navy’s Bureau of Construction and Repair located at the Washington (DC) Navy Yard, where the bureau designed ships and directed ship construction. The model-making group also made large hydrodynamic test models used in the Navy’s 470-foot Experimental Model Basin and made aircraft models used in the Experimental Wind Tunnel, both located at the Washington yard. Models of each new type (class) of Navy ship continued to be made at Washington and then at other naval shipyards, too. In 1910 a key member of the government model-building group resigned and founded the first American commercial ship model-building firm. Since 1982 nearly all of the Navy’s official ship models have been made by contractors.

In 1940 several of the Navy’s technical operations were reorganized, and the Bureau of Construction became part of the new Bureau of Ships. By then the bureau had accumulated and meticulously maintained about one hundred exhibition models, which were displayed in the passageways of the temporary Navy buildings scattered over the National Mall in Washington. Shortly following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt, a ship model builder himself, ordered the Navy models moved to the new David Taylor Model Basin, located in a neighborhood known as “Carderock” on the banks of the Potomac River a few miles upstream from the city. Having