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## *Mayday: The Decline of American Naval Supremacy*

Seth Cropsey. New York: Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc., 2013. 336 pp. Map. Illus. Index. \$29.95.

Reviewed by Commander T. J. Zerr, U.S. Navy

**A**thens, Venice, Spain, and Britain all dominated the sea lanes and leveraged their maritime might to become the undisputed unilateral power of their day. None, however, survived at the top. In

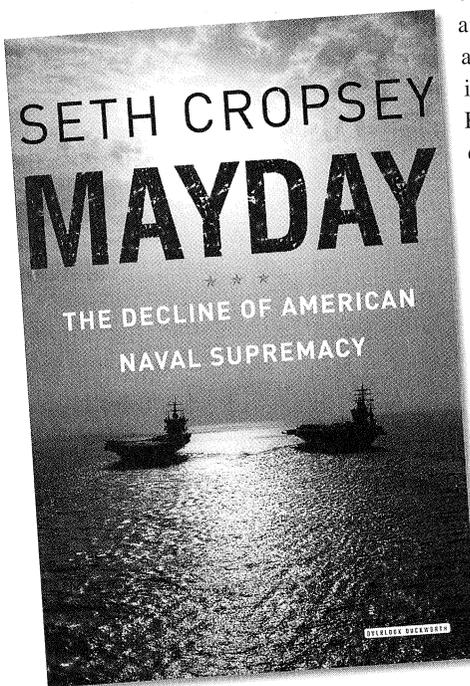
*Mayday*, Seth Cropsey—part history professor, grand strategist, military expert, policy wonk, soothsayer, and realist—asserts the cause was a diminution of sea-power supremacy. The United States, he claims, is trending toward a similar fate. A Deputy Undersecretary of the Navy for two administrations, his insight gleaned from experience is reinforced through extensive research punctuated with 20 pages of endnotes. In Cropsey's view, world superpower status is inexorably linked to a country's ability to dominate the high seas. He details in exceptional clarity this Mahanian argument with a litany of historical examples.

Cropsey argues forcefully that the status quo is eroding American naval power and, consequently, threatens the United States' preeminent stature on the world stage. Importantly, it is this status that enables the United States to shape and influence the world order on every issue, including trade, international norms, freedom on the seas, human rights, liberty, rule-of-law, self-reliance, and self-determination.

In clarifying the term "naval supremacy," Cropsey emphasizes that it is not simply about numbers of ships but rather about maintaining a quantitative and qualitative advantage that competitors can't conceive it to be in their interests to contend. With potential threats contained, waterways—key enablers of both commerce and security—remain free for all mariners assuming a benevolent hegemony.

Cropsey bluntly states the requirement for a clear-eyed and holistic review of our national, military, and supporting naval strategies that addresses the proverbial elephant in the room: China. Here, the author's realist bonafides shine through the pages as China's growing naval power

takes center stage. "If we continue down the path we are on," he writes, "we will be unable to tangibly demonstrate our commitment in the Asia-Pacific and ultimately this will result in a loss of influence and relationship with partners and allies in the region as any shrinking of our bonds in the region will create space for Asia to slip into Chinese hegemony."



While the United States supplanted Britain as the world's leading sea power, Cropsey emphasizes that this transfer occurred between countries that embodied the same world view, principles, and ethics. The same could not be said for a Chinese ascent.

The author may be the first to succeed in moving the military discussion on China away from the unending debate about its long-term naval ambitions and into the realm of our policy priorities

and commitment. The question is not one of whether we want to retain the ability to fight and win a specific kinetic naval engagement with the Chinese—which we must—but whether we want to preserve the ability to shape events and deter such an engagement. By investing in a Navy worthy of a first-rate superpower, the United States will retain its influence in the Asia-Pacific region and create windows of effective diplomatic engagement when tensions rise.

To build his case, Cropsey makes a series of assertions that some policy professionals might challenge: that the military relationship with China is, in fact, competitive; that China's push to naval supremacy, evidenced by facilities buildup around the Indian Ocean (the so-called "string of pearls" theory) is real and progressing; and that the Chinese are committed to a zero-sum game of influence and power in the Indo-Asia-Pacific. However, *Mayday's* broad and consequential conclusions hold despite any of the well-worn arguments against these assertions.

Though he stops short of sounding alarmist, the conclusions Cropsey draws are significantly concerning. To reverse current trends, two facts must be acknowledged. First, that American naval supremacy can still be restored, though doing so requires bold choices and funding levels beyond anything currently debated. Second, the American public must consciously decide that it wants to remain a global leader worthy of the investment. Civilian and uniformed leadership should openly debate not only what it takes to be a naval superpower

but what such power provides: stable security environment, freedom of trade, international norms and the rule of law, deterrence from aggression and military adventurism, and assurance to our allies. Likely, most citizens who now enjoy the benefits that resulted from peace and prosperity as a result of the world order secured in World War II are unaware of the foundational role naval supremacy played in establishing and maintaining that world order. How ironic that this

same peace and security has facilitated the rise of America's latest challenger.

Commander Zerr has served on five ships; the National Security Council Staff at the White House as a Director, Defense Policy and Strategy; and Naval Reactors as the Executive Assistant to the Deputy. He currently serves as the Executive Officer of the USS Kidd (DDG-100) on deployment in the Asia-Pacific.

## Thank You for Your Service

David Finkel. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013. 256 pp. \$26.

Reviewed by Lieutenant (junior grade) Katherine E. O'Donnell, U.S. Navy

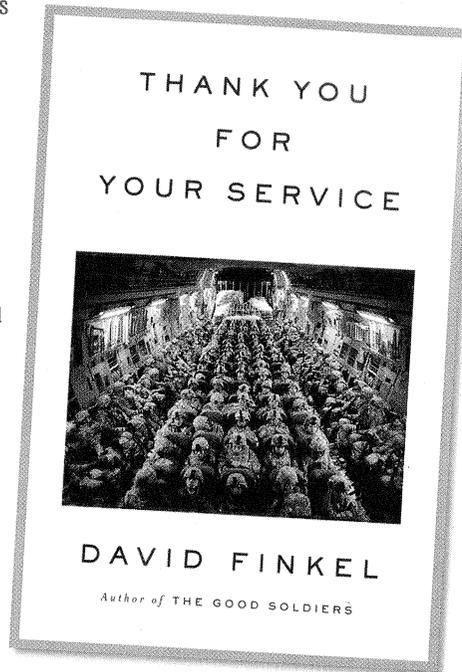
After more than a decade of armed conflict, one of the great challenges facing academics, policy-makers, and the American citizenry has been how best to support and care for U.S. military veterans returning from war. In his new book, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Finkel examines the struggle of veterans and their families as they return from Iraq and Afghanistan only to face a new kind of war. Though not all veterans carry with them physical manifestations of their pain, many returning servicemen and women bear the weight of mental wounds.

Finkel's first book, *The Good Soldiers*, released in 2010, is a best-selling account of soldiers in the U.S. Army's 2-16 Infantry Battalion during the "surge" in Afghanistan. Finkel reunites with that same group of soldiers and their families in *Thank You for Your Service*, chronicling their return from the 15-month deployment and recounting the intimate, sometimes-tragic stories of their reintroduction to American society and life after war.

In this effort, Finkel spent nearly two years interviewing, observing, and researching. For the instances when he did not personally observe an event, his depictions are gleaned from interviews, Army records, and personal letters, among other sources. Throughout the book, it is clear that Finkel spent a great deal of time with each soldier and their family—all members of the same small Kansas community near Fort Riley—and was privy to many personal moments.

The book opens with story of Adam Schumann, an infantry sergeant who was medically evacuated from his third

deployment to Afghanistan as a result of PTSD and suicidal thoughts. Back home with his family (his wife, a newborn son, and a school-aged daughter) he finds himself out of work and depressed. Finkel reveals Schumann's innermost thoughts—



about how he has put a gun to his head, threatening to pull the trigger on more than one occasion. His wife is frustrated, overwhelmed, and at a loss. "Where did my husband go?" she often thinks.

The narrative continues with the story of Amanda Doster, widow of James Doster, Sergeant Schumann's platoon sergeant who was killed by an improvised explosive device on a day he was supposed to stay in the office and Skype with his family. Instead, he offered his comfortable spot to Schumann and went on patrol, revealing much about his character. Amanda cannot let go of James. She keeps his ashes close to her at all times, and with two children to care for, finds re-building her life and adjusting to her "new normal" exceedingly difficult. She relies on support from a few friends and surviving members of James' platoon.

Moving from the deeply personal narratives to the political side, Finkel explores the Department of Defense's role in treating wounded warriors and preventing suicides. Readers are a "fly on the wall" during a monthly meeting held at the Pentagon by General Peter

Chiarelli, then-U.S. Army vice chief of staff. The meeting is held to review the suicides that have occurred in the past month and chart a way ahead for treatment and prevention. In one such meeting 29 suicides are discussed. Chiarelli has a personal connection to these meetings—he lost 169 soldiers while serving as the commanding general of the 1st Cavalry Division in Iraq in 2004–05. A monument was erected to honor those lost, but only 168 names are represented. The omitted 169th name is of a soldier who had taken his own life. The surviving soldiers in the division did not feel he deserved the recognition, because his "wounds" were not "real." The general later recognized his horrible mistake and became passionate about supporting wounded veterans and preventing suicides.

The reader is present for many aspects of the soldiers' return home, including in some cases a variety of treatments through the Army such as counseling, medication cocktails, transfer to a special wounded warrior battalion, and inpatient PTSD treatment. There are many avenues for help, but there is no silver-bullet solution. Even receiving treatment can pose challenges. Inpatient treatment means no work or paycheck for the soldier; it also means being away from home for weeks or months at a time. The family struggles are real and deep, and the reader shares in them first hand.

*Thank You for Your Service* is personal, vivid, and painful. However, the book would benefit from a few suggestions from the author on what our government can improve in future policy changes. As it is descriptive, rather than prescriptive, the book is focused on the anecdotes and stories of soldiers and their families and does not present a pragmatic way ahead. That notwithstanding, Finkel movingly demonstrates the scope of this challenge, and his writing is an important addition to the current literature on the topic of care for those who have sacrificed so much. Through his effort we learn that we can, and must, do more than just thank them for their service.

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