

IN CONTACT

The Zumwalt Era

Commander Terry McKearney,
U.S. Navy (Retired)

As a midshipman and then junior officer who lived through the Admiral Elmo Zumwalt era, I have some concerns about Commander Joel Holwitt's observations, particularly those related to readiness and the material condition of the fleet during the Zumwalt years ("Lessons from Admiral Elmo," December, pp. 36-41.)

In his description of material readiness, he's right on the facts but not on the cause. The fleet of the early 1970s was in terrible shape. Long years of hard service in Vietnam had worn down the material condition of my ship and others on the water-front. The fault didn't lie in the Chief of Naval Operation's office, the wardroom, or the chief petty officers' mess; it was the result of poor resourcing and a lack of funds, because of budget cuts of the postwar era, that was frustrating and crippling. As a division officer at the time, I continually had to scrape and beg for precious dollars just to buy parts and supplies needed to keep my equipment running.

I also reject the author's suggestion that Zumwalt's personnel reforms as set forth in the Z-grams resulted in widespread disciplinary issues and poor sailor performance. To be sure, many sailors of that era came from a civilian population that was disillusioned with governmental authority and the military. Many sailors had joined the Navy to escape the draft, not because they wanted to serve the Navy. They could be cynical and occasionally arrogant, and we had some disciplinary problems that would not be tolerated today. However, this was a time of long hours of hard work to repair worn-out equipment, long deployments, and renewed material readiness inspections.

These occasionally long-haired and snotty sailors worked the long hours, operated frequently broken equipment, and rose to the occasion in the midst of crises. The vast majority were willing to do their jobs and, if led well, got the mission done. It took honest, frank, and engaged leadership from us JOs and senior enlisted, but, particularly given the lack of resources, we can be proud of what we did accomplish with the war-weary and tattered fleet of the mid '70s.

Treaty's Speed Limit

Lieutenant Commander David Chessum,
Royal New Zealand Navy (Retired)

In his article on the USS *Erie* in the August issue ("Historic Ships," pp. 10-11), J. M. Caiella states that Admiral William V. Pratt argued at the 1930 London Naval Conference for a 20-knot limit over the originally proposed 18-knot limit for exempt vessels not exceeding 2,000 tons standard displacement. He also suggested that gunboats built to these limits might have been intended to replace cruisers and destroyers in a fleet-screening role.

In testimony before the Senate Naval Affairs Committee on 14 May 1930, Commander Harold C. Train testified it was the Japanese who wanted the speed limit increased to 20 knots, and this is also reflected in the meeting minutes of the London Naval Treaty "Experts Committee," where this decision was made. Notably Commander Train was at those meetings, whereas Admiral Pratt was not.

When Pratt appeared before the Senate Naval Affairs Committee on 15 May, he said that while the United States had not brought up raising the speed limit, it had been "more or less agreed to all together." He testified that the United States had supported the treaty clauses providing for these vessels to safeguard the Coast Guard's ability to build ships that would carry out "ordinary peace-time duties without having to be classified as combatant ships."

The other principal U.S. Navy delegate to the 1930 conference, Admiral Hilary Jones, provided somewhat contrasting testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the same day, stating that the U.S. delegation had opposed such a high speed in an unlimited category, preferring a 15-knot limit. Furthermore, Admiral Jones stated that the new limit would allow construction of "a very formidable antisubmarine craft, and also a formidable commerce raider in any restricted areas."

It is hard to see how ships with a maximum speed of 20 knots could have been viewed as being particularly suited to screening the fleet; they would have been slower than the ships they supposedly were screening. The limits did, however, provide an opportunity to build very effective convoy escorts outside of the treaty quotas for cruisers and destroyers—an opportunity the

Royal Navy took advantage of to build several classes of very successful antisubmarine sloops between the wars.

Mr. Caiella responds:

My statement was based on p. 167 of Norman Friedman's *U.S. Cruisers: An Illustrated Design History* (Arms and Armour Press, 1985). Admittedly, this is a secondary source, but one of higher credence than most. I appreciate Lieutenant Commander Chessum basing his comments on primary sources.

A Fifth Star for Spruance

Donald F. Warren

While serving in the Royal Canadian Navy, I spent three years as an exchange officer with the U.S. Navy, during which time I became interested in Admiral Raymond Spruance. To me, he was the epitome of a great admiral. Thoughtful and possessing a brilliant mind, he could think beyond the present battle or campaign and plan accordingly. He did not seek glory; he just got on with the job at hand.

Spruance assumed command of U.S. forces at the Battle of Midway and made the critical, although unpopular at the time, decision not to pursue the retreating enemy fleet. Doing so probably would have meant the loss of two U.S. carriers.

As the Pacific war progressed, Spruance and Admiral William F. Halsey led the Fifth and Third fleets, respectively, each doing an excellent job. But while Spruance did his quietly and efficiently, Halsey broadcast his achievements through his own news team. Halsey also made one of the major errors of the Pacific war during the Battle of Leyte Gulf when he chased a decoy carrier force, leaving landing operations vulnerable to Japanese battleships. Fortunately, U.S. escort carriers, destroyers, and destroyer escorts saved the day.

Despite this, Halsey was promoted to the five-star rank of fleet admiral, while Spruance was left as a four-star. Legislation creating the five-star rank authorized four Navy officers to hold it, and they would be William Leahy, Ernest King, Chester Nimitz, and Halsey. But Congress could have authorized a fifth Navy five-star.

Is it too late to correct this injustice and posthumously promote Spruance to five-star rank? I urge it be done and Naval Institute members to support the effort. 