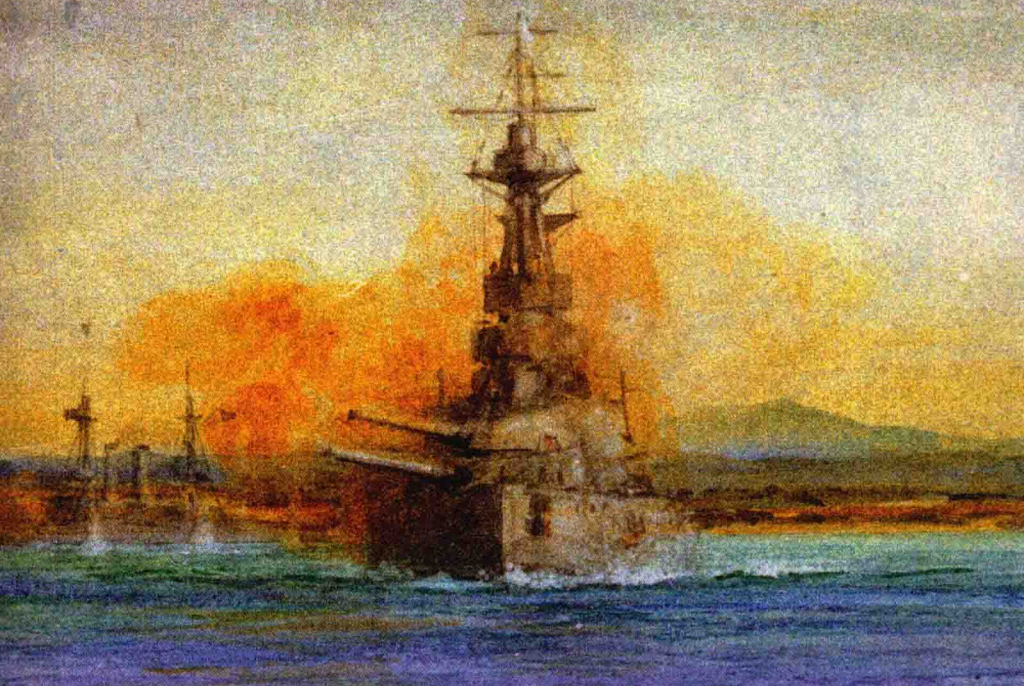
FROM THE DARDANELLES TO ORAN

STUDIES OF THE ROYAL NAVY
IN WAR AND PEACE 1915–1940



ARTHUR J MARDER
INTRODUCTION BY BARRY GOUGH

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Naval Institute Press
Annapolis

Seaforth
PUBLISHING

THE MAPS
Large-scale versions of the maps located at the back can be downloaded from the book's page on the publishers' websites.

First published in Great Britain in 2015 by
Seaforth Publishing,
Pen & Sword Books Ltd,
47 Church Street,
Barnsley S70 2AS

Published and distributed in the
United States of America and Canada by the
Naval Institute Press,
291 Wood Road, Annapolis,
Maryland 21402–5034

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015938192

(UK) ISBN 978 1 84832 252 3
(US) ISBN 978 1 59114 585 1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

ARTHUR J MARDER was a meticulous researcher, teacher and writer who, born in 1910, was to become perhaps the most distinguished historian of the modern Royal Navy. He held a number of teaching posts in American universities and was to receive countless honours, as well as publish some fifteen major works on British naval history. He died in 1980.

BARRY GOUGH, the distinguished Canadian maritime and naval historian, is the author of *Historical Dreadnoughts: Arthur Marder, Stephen Roskill and the Battles for Naval History*, and contributed new introductions to Marder's five-volume history of the Royal Navy in the First World War, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, all recently published by Seaforth Publishing.

Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, 14 October 1939

To
the memory of
JOHN CRESWELL
Captain, R.N.
gentleman, scholar
and dear friend

Introduction

LONG will Arthur Jacob Marder (1910–1980) be remembered for his five-part *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904–1919* (original edition 1961–1970; reprinted by Seaforth Publishing, 2013–2014, with introductions for each volume by myself). That work is today classified by the naval historical profession as 'core history', although well might it be regarded (across the larger canvas of historical enterprise) as a classic of historical research and writing. Marder came to the Admiral Sir John Fisher era of British naval history, 1904–1920, when the official documents were finally released to him. In the meantime, he had published *The Anatomy of British Sea Power: A History of British Naval Policy in the Pre-Dreadnought Era* (1940; English edition, 1941). Then he had edited the diaries of Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond, *Portrait of an Admiral: The Life and Papers of Sir Herbert Richmond* (1952). He also produced three volumes of Fisher's edited letters *Fear God and Dread Nought*. Taken altogether these formed a significant contribution to the corpus of history especially on the lead up to the First World War and the direction of that conflict at sea, and in doing so they raised the standard of naval history. That these books were written by an American provided not a little amusing comment by the British. And that his last name carried the initial 'M' as did that of US Admirals Alfred Thayer Mahan and Samuel Elliott Morison, likewise attracted idle chatter.

By 1970 and the time Marder had come to the completion of his *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* he had been employed on historical enterprises for almost four decades. And as of that year he knew in his inner heart that he was exhausted, as his correspondence with Oxford University Press discloses. His spirited and furious production of these several works completed at breakneck speed, his other academic obligations (for he carried heavy teaching obligations, graduate and undergraduate), his mid-career switch in university affiliation from Hawaii to Southern California, and then a climactic, triumphant year at Baillol College, Oxford, as Eastman Professor spelled an accumulation of pressures amounting to a personal crisis that he could not ignore. Exhausted and perhaps in despair, he wrote to his publisher, Geoffrey Hunt, at Oxford University Press and said he could do no more.

The ever solicitous Hunt decided to leave Marder well enough

alone and to await the course of events. Sure enough in early April 1971 he received a letter from Marder in sunny California announcing that he had had further thoughts. 'I was deadly serious a year ago, and in my last letter, when I told you that I had written my last book.' As he now explained, no subject appealed to him sufficiently: the interwar period would have been 'the logical thing to do, that is till [Captain Stephen] Roskill moved in. (*Entre nous*, Vol. I of his *Naval Policy [Between the Wars]* is a horror. Still he has pre-empted the period.') Then, Marder went on, he needed more time for his teaching and for his family. However, if Hunt were willing to publish a different sort of book, Marder was prepared to explain what he had in mind. 'I could be persuaded to do a book of essays and articles,' he said, and by these he meant a mix of published and unpublished pieces. He gave a long list of possibilities, including a seminal article on early Japanese seapower that he had published in the *American Historical Review* in 1945, based on some Japanese materials. Another prospective item was his delightful and (still) unpublished 'That Hamilton Woman,' all about Horatio Lord Nelson and Emma Hamilton, an engrossing story of that ever so promising book, not yet written, 'The Women Behind the Fleet.'

Such was Marder's reputation and such were the sales of his books that Hunt jumped at the prospect. Hunt had rich pickings from which to choose. In the end, these five were to make up the new volume: 1. 'The Dardanelles Revisited: Further Thoughts on the Naval Prelude'; 2. 'The Influence of History on Sea Power: The Royal Navy and the Lessons of 1914–1918'; 3. 'The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935–1936'; 4. 'Winston is Back': Churchill at the Admiralty, 1939–1940'; and 5. 'Oran, 3 July 1940: Mistaken Judgement, Tragic Misunderstanding, or Cruel Necessity?' As is explained below, each of the five has a history of its own, and only the last of these (and the major) was truly original in the sense that it had not appeared before in earlier form. That having been said, each of the five constitutes a commentary on the Royal Navy in those very circumstances that tested its very mettle, during war or in phases of peace. Because Marder was fascinated by 'the war behind the war', the last three chapters give insights into the relationships of statesmen and admirals, naval administration, and the higher management of war. As to the first two, and with which this engaging book commences, Marder was returning to his earlier preoccupations, in turn: What lessons had the Admiralty and the Navy learned from the First World War? What had separated British forces from a victory at the Dardanelles?

Marder re-examined the Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign in the period mid-February to late April 1915 – that is, from its inception to when landings took place at Cape Helles and Anzac. Two situations presented themselves to the Navy to force the Straits and, as a consequence, dominate the Bosporus, threaten Constantinople and, it was to be hoped, drive Turkey out of the war. Had, first, the enemy forts been destroyed at the Narrows entrance the enemy minefields might have been swept and the unrestricted fairway opened. The tragedy here lay in the fact that seaplanes were unable to render effective assistance in spotting the fall of shot from the powerful HMS *Queen Elizabeth*. Marder charges that Admiral Sir Sackville Hamilton Carden, then naval commander in chief, dissipated his naval air assents and squandered stocks of ammunition. Had the forts been put out of action a different result would have eventuated. Had, second, the minesweeping force under Commodore Roger Keyes, then Chief of Staff to Admiral Sir John de Robeck, now commander in chief, been properly employed as it could have been after a successful air attack an altogether different result would have occurred at the Narrows. Marder's views on the Dardanelles differed somewhat from what he had written in *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow Vol. 2: The War Years to the Eve of Jutland*. Such opinions as he now expressed were based on the so-called Mitchell Report (named for Commodore F.H. Mitchell, president of the committee appointed to investigate the Dardanelles campaign) and on the papers of Group Captain H.A. Williamson, second-in-command and senior flying officer in the carrier *Ark Royal* at the Dardanelles. Captain L.A.K. Boswell, who served in trawlers and helped in fitting out destroyers as sweepers, provided minesweeping retrospectives. This chapter reflected Marder's zeal for finding new sources and seeking out informants (for he was an early practitioner of oral history). Such estimations as to possible Turkish responses in the event of a breakthrough remain speculative. The might-of-beens continue to accumulate. It was a near-run thing – in defeat – and it engrossed Marder to his last days. Marder, we note a little sadly, did not extend his analysis to the autumn of 1915, a pity, for after the Suvla landings attempts by Keyes when he returned to London to argue for a naval attempt proved unsuccessful. Such an attempt would have at least brought higher chances of success. Moreover, had specially designed vessels been made available perhaps running the Narrows might have brought about the desired result. Then again, by this time, Bulgaria had entered the war on the side of the Central Powers and rail communications had been opened between Germany and Con-

stantinople. The Dardanelles was a graveyard of Allied possibilities and efforts, and it took Churchill and Fisher out of the active affairs of the war. Thereafter the Dardanelles Commission inquiry into the origin, inception and conduct of operations refought the episode and reported to Parliament. The conclusion was telling: 'If, however, the result of our investigations should assist in bringing about such an improvement in organization and management as will render impossible a recurrence of events as sad as those with which we have had to deal, the work of the Commission will not have been in vain.'

In his second chapter, 'The Influence of History on Sea Power' – all about the British naval lessons of the First World War – Marder sought to examine and to elucidate 'lessons learned' by the Admiralty and the Navy. We sense that his findings made him sorely disappointed. British failures to learn from the First influenced the conduct of the Second. Such naval staff work and command courses as there were tended to focus on Jutland and to prepare for another great fleet action. Naval aviation was not developed, as it should have been. Bold thinking and forthright criticism were not welcome at the Admiralty, he says. The stringencies of the Ten Year Rule (no major war for ten years) were a formidable factor. We get the feeling in reading this retrospective that despite the appalling losses and failures of the Navy in the First World War reticence and conservatism were the predominant features of naval thinking in the interwar interval. Certainly the establishment of the Naval Staff College at Greenwich in 1919 reflected one lesson happily learned, or as Admiral Lord Beatty, the First Sea Lord, put it at the time, 'Such naval disasters as occurred during the war were the direct result of the lack of sufficient and efficient staff.' An interesting sidelight to this chapter's subject may be given from Marder's own later experience. In the 1970s while researching what became known as *Old Friends, New Enemies*, all about the relationship of the Royal Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy, Marder visited the naval academy Etajima and found there to his pleasant surprise that his 'The Influence of History on Sea Power' had been translated into Japanese and was required reading by all staff and students. What Japanese naval academy staff and students had learned from their own recent experiences in the First and Second World Wars must have been of interest to Marder. At Etajima the spirit of Nelson lived. As for the Japanese, they regarded Marder as the reincarnation of Admiral Mahan, who in his several books had taken as his theme the influence of sea power upon history.

In examining the Ethiopian crisis of the mid-1930s Marder moved to less speculative matters. He exploited very rich Admiralty papers recently released into the public realm. Here was new material with all sorts of fresh insights into British naval and foreign policy realities. He showed how British naval weakness limited Britain's ability to respond to Italian actions. Overstretched by obligations, notably in the Far East, the Admiralty took the position that really Britain was acting on the assumption of a one-power standard. The Mediterranean needed to be made secure, and Admiral Lord Chatfield, First Sea Lord, was acutely conscious of the folly of creating a danger on the main line of communications to the Far East. The 'moral motive' of dealing with the Italians without a guarantee of French support was a contingent factor. As Marder explains, when the Rhineland crisis occurred in 1936, insufficient naval force existed in Home waters while other obligations had to be met in the form of protecting British trade and preventing a possible German bombardment of British coasts. It was impossible, then, for Britain to fight simultaneously in Asian waters against Japan and in Home waters against Germany unless Britain could count on a friendly, or at least, neutral Italy. Such talk as went on in the well-intentioned League of Nations had to be matched by firm action, but that was impossible against the rising calculation of a hostile alliance of Japan, Italy and Germany. This chapter represents Marder's highest capacities as a writer of historical articles, and in its preparation the work in question had had the benefit of the guidance at the *American Historical Review* of its editor Robert Webb, the English historian, and prominent, judicious anonymous reviewers. The author made slight additions to the original. Marder also included as an appendix his discussion of a naval war plan, much of it concerned with Fleet Air Arm prospects and possibilities.

Chapter 4, 'Winston is Back' – all about the return of Churchill to the Admiralty and his tenure there until relieved by his own nominated successor, A.V. Alexander – will always be of compelling interest. Some readers of this book will consider it 'the main event.' At the same time, by no means is it a piece without criticism, for it is so very much a clear defence of Churchill and almost appears to be so as a partisan effort. One almost feels as if Marder is protesting too much. On the other side of the ledger, however, this chapter is a fine example of the historian proving his case by truly a remarkable body of evidence duly laid on, layer upon layer.

The title comes from the famous message flashed to the fleet upon Churchill's return to the Admiralty on 3 September 1939. Whether

that message was greeted with cheers or groans (or perhaps both, in whole or part) is not known. Given what we now know about his domineering actions and meddling in the First World War, even against the powerful Lord Fisher, and what he did to dominate admirals, generals, chiefs of staff and underlings in the Second, it seems entirely unique and unusual that we should be given such a picture of Churchill *not* dominating the Admiralty and *not* interfering with commands at sea. Marder states his position clearly, and he marshals all his facts to sustain his thesis. 'The fact is that, notwithstanding his great influence as First Lord (for better or worse), he did not dominate his professional advisers' (p. 109). The work had first been published as a supplement to *The English Historical Review* in 1972.

Marder defended Churchill against charges of interference. And he defended Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord at the beginning of the war until his death in October 1943. 'Pound feared neither God, man, nor Winston Churchill.' Marder's view is that he did not interfere with Pound. The story behind this is of interest, and I have written about it more fully in *Historical Dreadnoughts*.

It turns out that Marder's cartographer, Noel Atherton, had been telling his brother-in-law, Sir Eric Seal, all about Marder's work on his 'W.C.' project, with all its intriguing possibilities. Marder – as was his technique – had already opened an extensive correspondence with professional naval and civil servants who knew about those years. Now at the eleventh hour new information was unexpectedly provided. Seal's letter, and subsequent exchange of letters, was something volunteered, out of the blue. Seal had served at the Admiralty before the war; he became Churchill's private secretary at the beginning of the war.

In replying to Seal's first letter, Marder, who did not then have a publisher for the intended article, explained to his new correspondent that his problem was keeping his narrative within word limits. He was struggling with two alternatives: treating the whole story of Churchill at the Admiralty by thinning the various segments, or singling out for adequate treatment what he considered to be the most important part of his tenure – the strategic ideas, influence on naval operations – with Norway as the centre piece. At this stage he had intended an article for the *English Historical Review*. Seal wrote: 'May I say that I think that I am almost the sole survivor of those who were close to Winston as First Lord senior enough to know what it was all about, and I feel a corresponding responsibility.' Seal recounted how Churchill, when reading the draft text, had become disturbed by Stephen Roskill's

official *War at Sea*, 'which enlarged upon the undoubted fact that the Admiralty had intervened seriously in Naval operations in the early years and suggested, quite falsely, that the prime factor in this was Churchill's influence as First Lord.' When the text of Roskill's *War at Sea*, Volume 1, came to the Cabinet Committee for approval in advance of publication, Churchill, then prime minister, had become alarmed by Roskill's inference that the First Lord had meddled in naval operations in Norway. Seal had been sent at Churchill's request to examine the Norway campaign records; he had found that there was no undue interference on the part of the First Lord. In the end, the irritated and emotionally exhausted Roskill was obliged to make some changes. Only then was the work released for printing and binding. This was 1954 and Seal had not forgotten. Nor had Roskill.

Seal held that interference from Whitehall was not Churchill's work but the spontaneous action of the Naval Staff and in particular Admiral Sir Dudley Pound and Vice Admiral Sir Tom Phillips.

> The plain fact of the matter was that Dudley Pound, who had recently been C in C Med, found it very difficult to keep his hands off the the control of the fleet, and he certainly had more and better information. But much suspicion attached to Winston, partly as an echo of the Dardanelles, and partly because it was generally known that he was always in the War Room, to which he was irresistibly attracted. Being aware of the Dardanelles legend, I was very alert to the problem. I am quite satisfied that Winston took scrupulous care not to transgress the proper limits of Naval and Political responsibility, and not to force his view on any professional decision.

Reading Marder's account we can see Seal's influence on every page. 'Read this account and shudder,' commented the *Navy News*, July 1972, when the article first appeared. 'The factual account of Churchill's forays into professional realms, and the general muddle of the early war months, require the reader to remind himself constantly of Winston's morale-building influence, lest the conclusions become distorted.'

Roskilll read Marder's account and became distressed, not least because Seal's investigation in the files, at Churchill's request, had exposed a story still kept secret in the Cabinet Papers about the official military histories. What alarmed Roskill most was Marder's printing of a damaging segment of the Seal letter to Marder (see

pp. 169–70 below and note 136). This accused Roskill of, among other things, 'near malice' towards Churchill, as Seal put it. Roskill, we know from his private papers, consulted his solicitor who remarked that the charge was unquestionably libelous. No legal action was pressed, but Roskill prepared a rebuttal to Marder's attack. This the editor of the *English Historical Review* declined to publish and so it eventually appeared in the more friendly *RUSI Journal*. Roskill disputed the value of Marder's witnesses to history, notably Seal. He thought Seal not a reliable source inasmuch as so much had transpired between Seal's investigation on Churchill's behalf into Roskill's account of the Norway campaign and Marder's revisiting of the same topic. Of this reply, Marder told Peter Kemp, the former Admiralty Librarian, that although he found Roskill's broadside interesting, provocative and amusing in places it told him more about Roskill than of Winston as First Lord. Marder's reply to Roskill's repost will be found below, in his long appendix entitled 'Musings on a Bolt from Olympus.' Marder buttressed his arguments about Churchill with two further and larger points that he felt had escaped historians of the war. These, he said, put Churchill's role and methods in proper historical perspective.

The first was that the Navy was not an expensive toy placed at the disposal of admirals in wartime: it was an instrument of national policy. Churchill had a clear idea of what the Navy could do, and Pound was in accord with this view. The second was that because Churchill was an historian of considerable merit, 'It could not have escaped him that throughout English naval history, when the admirals had been left to their own devices, they had made a mess of things, and that it was only when there had been strong political direction at the top, as in the Seven Years War and the Napoleonic War, that the Navy had really achieved the full measure of its capability.' Marder tipped the scale in favour of the professionals yet at the same time concluded that Churchill did not dominate his professional advisors. Did, therefore, Churchill infuse a new climate of morale into the administration of the Navy? Was this his greatest gift? And was Pound immune to Churchill's independent judgments and schemes that others classified as ill thought out?

Professor Bryan Ranft of Kings College London, a ranking authority on naval historical matters, wondered if there might not have existed a more complex relationship between Churchill and Pound than that of simple dominance of the sailor by the statesmen. Perhaps on occasion one of them might prevail; on other occasions there could be a clash of opinion. Pound's

professional pragmatism was bound to clash with Churchill's obsession for offensive action. 'Which view prevailed on particular occasions depended on the totality of circumstances of which personalities were only a part,' suggested Ranft. He went further:

> Disagreement between such eminent scholars raises important questions of historiography. To what extent does the available evidence permit precise answers to the matters in dispute? What different criteria should be applied to the interpretation of official documents and personal papers, and, most important of all, to contemporary historians, what measure of reliability can be applied to the reminiscences of those once employed in great matters?

Marder's final study, the main event, offered the first fully documented published account of the British attack on the French warships at Oran. The whole episode is an extraordinary episode, or series of episodes. No dramatist could ever have conceived of it. The human dimensions run deep and are charged with pathos and sympathy. There is the sense of the inevitable, too. If the end result was never in doubt to Churchill, to almost everyone else the whole was problematic, fraught with difficulty and even regarded as morally reprehensible. Marder had always wondered if a more skilful handling of negotiations might have avoided all the bloodshed and the bitterness. 'It was an absolutely bloody business to shoot up those Frenchmen who showed the greatest gallantry,' commented Admiral Sir James Somerville of Force H which steamed from Gibraltar to execute orders from London (if last attempt naval diplomatic relations with the French admiral failed, which they did). Did Churchill really have realistic fears about Germany using the French warships? Marder makes a convincing case that the respective governments and their respective naval negotiators could not avoid the calamity. Churchill was ruthless. Perhaps he exaggerated the danger of the French fleet falling into enemy hands. He acted under the pressure of circumstances and at a time of great British weakness. Britain's fortunes and prestige were then at their lowest ebb. The attack was 'a cruel necessity.'

In all, Marder provided a well-proportioned analysis of the diplomatic background with a detailed account by the sailors on the spot. Churchill, in his history of the event, described the arc of the story as a Greek tragedy and in his analysis Marder follows equally strongly. Here is Marder at his best – a master of his sources,

specific in his definition of the historian's tasks, organized in his narrative, and capable of telling a story with conviction and appeal. Incidentally, it may be noted that this work on Oran was followed on by another dynamic work, this time in book form: *Operation Menace': The Dakar Expedition and the Dudley North Affair* (1976). After this he turned to his study of the Royal Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Marder died in 1980 in his seventieth year. He did not see *Old Friends, New Enemies* in print. His friend Peter Kemp, naval officer and historian of note, paid him the great compliment of calling Marder the supreme historian. What Kemp identified in Marder, many others had witnessed first hand: first, Marder's great courage in redoing that segment of *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* lost to the incinerator in consequence of janitorial error, and, second, Marder's great happiness in his work. Kemp stated that Marder demonstrated a marked modesty, and he was right, for modesty was the handmaiden of Marder's simplicity of approach and his insistence on forming no preconceived notions, let alone conclusions. He had opposed military historians 'of the drum and bugle type' and had sought something much more comprehensive, something more substantial. He liked to cite Homer's 'After the event any fool can be wise.'

Right to the end Marder defended his historical method of using details and particulars to sustain a powerful narrative. In his journal articles and book chapters he was necessarily more constrained, owing to circumstances. Resisting any desire to tilt at historical windmills or take on the theories of other historians, Marder stuck to the historical records. Of course, he was not faultless in the selection of materials, and on occasion he failed to weigh correctly the testimony of various informants; in certain cases or episodes, he may be said to have gone overboard by the needless recounting of supporting evidence. In disputatious matters he liked to have the last word. But these, his critics noted, did not appreciably weaken his great work. It is a fascinating fact that those who endeavour to rework his historical corpus deal almost exclusively with only the first three volumes of *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow* and then only on specific aspects. The feud between Marder and Roskill may provide titillations for the naval historians who know those times or have followed these by reputation. But it is not the essential factor in how we judge historians of Marder's elevated class or Roskill's either. Roskill had put it best, in 1966, when he wrote graciously about Marder: 'fortune had smiled on the Royal Navy when a scholar of Marder's

distinctions and abilities had come along to write its history.' That is why Marder still commands our attention.

[Sources: Reviews of *From the Dardanelles to Oran* include Paul Halpern, 'Naval Topics, 1915–1940,' *Reviews in European History*, September 1976; Bryan Ranft, 'Naval Historians at War, '*RUSI Journal*, March 1975; and Stephen Roskill, 'Naval Engagements,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 December 1974. Marder's letter to Geoffrey Hunt, 31 March 1971, is in the Marder papers, University of California, Irvine, as is the Seal-Marder correspondence of 1971 on the Pound-Churchill relationship. Stephen Roskill's rejoinder to Marder's 'Winston is Back' (as it first appeared in the *English Historical Review*, Supplement 5, 1972) is published as 'Marder, Churchill, and the Admiralty,' *RUSI Journal*, December 1972. See also, Roskill, *Churchill and the Admirals* (1977). Discussion of differences between Marder and Roskill (and also Roskill's difficulties with Churchill over the Norway campaign and other naval operations) may be followed in Barry Gough, *Historical Dreadnoughts: Arthur Marder, Stephen Roskill and Battles for Naval History* (Barnsley: Seaforth, 2010). This last contains a comprehensive bibliography of Marder's works and, necessarily, one of his sparring partner Roskill.]

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