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Patrick J. Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2011. Pp. xvi, 608. ISBN 978-0-253-35593-5.

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Patrick J. Kelly (Adelphi Univ.) has written a narrative of conflict, but not the conflict many will expect after seeing the dust-jacket photograph of SMS *Nassau* steaming along with a bone in her teeth. *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy* is an excellent scholarly study of the German Grand Admiral's career as State Secretary of the Imperial Naval Office. From 1897 to 1916, Alfred von Tirpitz used his high position to influence and dominate German naval policy. By his successes in bureaucratic battles with those who opposed his vision for Wilhelmine naval construction, he, more than any other individual, shaped the Imperial Navy with which Germany entered and then fought the First World War.

Kelly's intimate knowledge of his subject, particularly his work in office, is apparent throughout the book.¹ He opens with a brief family history, then turns to Tirpitz's professional life, especially his maneuvering within a fairly narrow circle of high government officials and parliamentary leaders, and finally treats the admiral's loss of influence during the immediate lead-up to World War I.

Kelly's Tirpitz is remarkably single-minded in his pursuit of a long-term program of naval construction meant to give Germany a larger, more modern, and coherent fleet. For Tirpitz, *coherent* meant a fleet limited to appropriate standard ship types and purged of the ineffective "museum pieces" (83) of his early years. It also meant applying a strict discipline to the Kaiser's desire to play at naval design. Kelly portrays Tirpitz as a consummate bureaucrat who managed to balance or cancel out the often conflicting demands of Kaiser and Reichstag to achieve his own as well as others' goals.

Tirpitz came of age in a time of great change. Kelly gives a discerning account of the good timing and good fortune that rewarded the admiral's dedication with high rank and power. After he entered the navy as a young man, Tirpitz's career followed a standard path until he was assigned to the Torpedo Arm, where he impressed several senior officers. One of these was the Chief of the Admiralty and later Imperial Chancellor, Count Leo von Caprivi, known to Tirpitz as "Uncle Leo." A measure of Caprivi's high regard for Tirpitz is his response to Vice Admiral Wilhelm von Wickede's complaint about Tirpitz's independence in action during the 1886 naval maneuvers: "Caprivi replied icily: 'My dear Excellency, there is only one indispensable man in the navy, and that is Tirpitz'" (62).

Later, when Tirpitz seemed destined for duty as a mere dockyard director, Caprivi brought him to the Kaiser's attention as a good candidate for the much more important post of Chief of Staff of the Baltic Station. As his tour of duty in that post was ending, Caprivi next recommended him for Chief of Staff of the Naval High Command (Oberkommando or OK), though the final appointment was clinched by Tirpitz's articulate presentation of some of his ideas during an evening meeting with the Kaiser.

Albrecht von Stosch, the old soldier who commanded the Admiralty before Caprivi, was the mentor who eventually led Tirpitz to the Imperial Naval Office (Reichsmarineamt or RMA). Stosch, who clearly understood the real source of power in government, told Tirpitz, "Even the Emperor cannot coerce the State Secretary [head of the RMA] when the latter presents his opinion. His financial responsibilities make him a force.... In your place, I would strive to become a powerful State Secretary myself" (101).

By 1892, as the Chief of Staff of the Naval OK, Tirpitz believed fleet development ought to be guided by his office, but observed that "the OK can provide not a penny to any officer or office" (101). Further, the

1. His interest in Tirpitz goes back to his student days, which culminated in a 1970 Georgetown dissertation, "The Naval Policy of Imperial Germany, 1900-1914." Kelly has been a regular at US Naval Academy history symposia over the years, speaking on various aspects of Imperial Navy history. Most recently, he discussed "New Interpretations of Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz (State Secretary of the Imperial Naval Office 1897-1916)" at the McMullen Naval History Symposium in 2011.

more powerful RMA blocked whatever OK proposed. Tirpitz eventually resolved to take power from within, though it required him to revise arguments he had earlier made favoring increased authority for the OK.

When Eduard von Knorr, Tirpitz's boss at the OK, convinced the Kaiser to consider "a well-defined, coherent, long-term" alternative to the RMA building plan that would provide additional battleships and cruisers, Wilhelm secretly sent Tirpitz a copy of the plan for review. His reply "amounted to Tirpitz's job application for the position of State Secretary of the RMA" (112). After the Kaiser suffered a funding defeat at the hands of the Budget Commission, Tirpitz was posted to the job in March 1897, replacing Rear Adm. Friedrich Hollmann.

Tirpitz now had to persuade the same Reichstag that had forced Hollmann's resignation to pass not simply a one-year appropriation but to bind itself to a fixed program of increasing naval expenditures for the next seven years.... For the first time Tirpitz showed himself to the Reichstag and to the country as a master politician. He overcame his inner nervousness with a remarkable outward display of charm, confidence, moderation, and apparent flexibility. Hindsight gives an unwarranted sense of inevitability to the First Navy Law. In less than a year ... he brought home a very long shot. He turned chaos into order within the navy and defeat into victory in the Reichstag. He harnessed the erratic Emperor to his agenda and rode him to get the support of a government apparatus mostly indifferent to naval expansion. With [Cdr. August von] Heeringen's very capable help, he galvanized a mostly apathetic nation into one that was aware of and keen on its maritime and naval interests, and he sowed the seeds of future large-scale agitation that might be difficult to control. (140, 153)

Although, before World War I, Tirpitz consistently bested his bureaucratic rivals, his predominance, as Kelly makes clear, did not always yield the best outcomes for Germany. For example, once enough modern ships had been built to warrant appointment of a permanent fleet commander, Tirpitz successfully opposed the idea. "Once again, Tirpitz defeated a sensible measure for a known fleet command[er] in advance of war, which would have benefited both training and readiness. Tirpitz acted out of fear that a powerful fleet chief would become a formidable bureaucratic rival within the navy" (239).

Simply put, Tirpitz resisted whatever might interfere with his naval construction program and promoted whatever might advance it. Thus, until forced to do otherwise, he opposed the building of dreadnoughts for fear the added costs would strain his relationship with the Reichstag. He also deemed U-boat construction and commerce raiding to be distractions. But, in order to justify the fleet he envisioned, he supported a propaganda effort painting the British Royal Navy as Germany's enemy and capitalized on international incidents like the Boer War and the Moroccan Crises.

When war came, Tirpitz offered to assume the position whose creation he had long worked to prevent, but his many years away from active fleet duty unsuited him for a fighting command (386). He remained in service as an imperial advisor, in part because the Emperor wanted to keep him from causing trouble from outside the government; his advice was less and less welcome at court. Finally, in March 1916, after he was excluded from a discussion of U-boat policy, Tirpitz reported sick and then resigned (402). After the war, he tried to ensure that the historical narrative of the navy's war would not diminish future naval prospects and, consequently, his own reputation. Though he was associated for a time with Wolfgang Kapp and his legacy was later used by the Nazis, he avoided such embarrassments as Erich Ludendorff's participation in Hitler's failed Beer Hall Putsch.

Kelly's thoroughgoing research in archival materials and historical literature has enabled him to draw such a strong and persuasive portrait of Tirpitz that he seems to personify German naval policy and the resulting modernized fleet, so much so that even Wilhelm II fades into the background, not something easily imagined. Of course, since *Tirpitz* is, after all, a biography, its subject must be central to the narrative. But it is also a study of bureaucracy and policy-making in an arena that transcended the influence of any single individual. Kelly well integrates these two elements, with occasional compromises. As important as Tirpitz was to the formulation of German naval policy, he operated in an environment that shaped him as much as he shaped it.

Kelly adopts three different political science models² to enhance his analysis of Tirpitz's behavior: the Rational Actor Model, the Organizational Behavior Model, and the Governmental, or Bureaucratic, Politics Model (10). Fortunately, he does so in a way that seems intuitive and never descends into the jargon of political science modeling methodology. Tirpitz fought his battles on multiple fronts. His genius was that he nearly always found, right to the end, the compromise that furthered his own agenda. The tragedy from a broader perspective, Kelly writes, is that Tirpitz's naval program was fatally flawed and could not, despite his assurances, ensure success for Germany.

Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy will naturally interest naval historians but also those general readers with some understanding of the labyrinthine character of the Imperial German government.

2. See, esp., Graham T. Allison's *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).