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Robert B. Davies, *Baldwin of the Times: Hanson W. Baldwin, A Military Journalist's Life, 1903-1991*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011. Pp. x, 399. ISBN 978-1-61251-048-4.

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In *Baldwin of the Times*, historian Robert Davies¹ (Minnesota State Univ.–Moorhead) explores the life of one of the most influential American military correspondents of the twentieth century. This biography of Hanson W. Baldwin, editor at the *New York Times* for almost four decades, will appeal widely to an audience ranging from general readers to scholars interested in US national security policy, journalism, and the intersection of the two.

Baldwin, a Baltimore native, graduated in 1924 from the US Naval Academy. He wrote eighteen books² and a plethora of articles, winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1943 for his compelling series about Guadalcanal. He reported from three different combat zones: Guadalcanal, Tunisia, and Normandy. Throughout his long career, he earned the respect of most readers, including military and civilian policymakers. However, on certain occasions, he also earned their ire with his blunt critiques.

Baldwin's life personifies the significant national security dilemmas that America faced in the twentieth century: "Baldwin's writings, taken as a whole, serve as a public diary that followed the changing public perception of the role of the American military in our national life during World War II, the Cold War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. In the 1930s, the American public ignored the military; in the 1940s and 1950s, they admired it; and during the late 1960s and early 1970s, they often despised it" (2).

Davies organizes his book into eighteen chapters tracing five general phases of Baldwin's life, starting with his early life as a youth in Baltimore, formative experiences as a midshipman, and leadership education as a young naval officer. Second, Davies chronicles his transition from the US Navy into journalism at age twenty-four as an intern at the *Baltimore Sun*, then as a general assignment reporter for the *Times*, and subsequently as its naval and military correspondent beginning in 1937, a novel assignment for any major American newspaper at the time. Third, Davies narrates Baldwin's maturation as a military correspondent, as he traveled across Europe to survey the militaries of the major powers, advocating greater preparedness prior to the Second World War, and later writing realistic—albeit sometimes unwelcome—assessments of the Allies' principal successes and failures. Fourth, Davies recounts Baldwin's life following the war, including his role in debates about such critical issues as Universal Military Training, unification of the armed services, communism, and atomic energy. Baldwin's writings on the Korean War culminated in his recognition as "dean of American military analysts" throughout the 1950s. Fifth, Davies follows Baldwin's life during the Vietnam War, his often pointed criticisms of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and his increasingly contentious relationship with the *Times*, in part over their diverging views of the war.

Davies's implicit purpose is twofold. First, to stress the contributions Baldwin made to informed public debate regarding American national security policy,³ especially his perceptive analysis of the battle of Savo Island, Guadalcanal, the U-2 spy incident, and the Cuban missile crisis. Second, Davies asks just why Baldwin was so influential. His answer has three parts: first, he enjoyed good fortune in his family connections

1. His earlier work includes *Peacefully Working to Conquer the World: Singer Sewing Machines in Foreign Markets, 1854-1920* (NY: Arno, 1976).

2. Representative works are *The Caissons Roll: A Military Survey of Europe* (NY: Knopf, 1938); *Great Mistakes of the War* (NY: Harper, 1950); *Battles Lost and Won: Great Campaigns of World War II* (NY: Harper, 1966); and *Strategy for Tomorrow* (NY: Harper, 1970).

3. For other valuable works on the influence of the media on the military, see Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1986); Jonathan Mermin, *Debating War and Peace: Media Coverage of U.S. Intervention in the Post-Vietnam Era* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 1999); William M. Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 1998); and Michael S. Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory: The Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Pr, 2001).

and a wide readership that included many policymakers. Second, simply, “Baldwin was very good at what he did” (127). He was an astute intellectual, fluid writer, and phenomenal journalist. Third, and most important, “He raised rhetorical questions for which there were no answers. Will atomic bombs reduce the frequency of wars? Will mass armies of conscripts, large navies, and piloted planes be weapons of the past? Will future wars substitute ‘push buttons for cannons’?” (189-90).

Davies provides personal insights into Baldwin’s family connections and their role in starting his career in journalism. Hanson’s father, Oliver, had worked with Carr Van Anda at the *Baltimore Sun* during the late 1880s. Even though Van Anda worked at the *Sun* for only two years as a night telegraph editor, he later became managing editor of the *New York Times*. When young Hanson was seeking to move from the military into journalism, his father wrote to Van Anda on his son’s behalf. This helped Hanson gain employment at the *Times* in the first place, thus launching his long, highly successful career in journalism.

Second, Davies well illustrates Baldwin’s prowess as a journalist. He vividly recounts his tense meeting with Brig. Gen. Albert C. Wedemeyer of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee and thirty other military officers. Baldwin offered a critical analysis of the dire situation at Guadalcanal and revealed the heavy US naval losses at the battle of Savo Island, something senior naval officers had kept secret from their army counterparts in the room. The incident attests to the unflappable courage shown by Baldwin, even at the risk of his own career. He always strove to balance the “military’s need for security, the public’s right to know, and the press’s duty to inform” (144).

Third, Davies demonstrates Baldwin’s ability to influence public debate. His series on the Battle of the Bulge, for example, evinces a knack for asking probing questions: Baldwin criticized the dearth of American patrols and minefields, the shortcomings of the M-4 Sherman tank, and the lack of operational jet aircraft. His acute, often uncomfortable questions about national security policy induced leaders to articulate more explicitly the benefits of their proposals and anticipate more carefully their potential drawbacks, thereby helping to ensure more coherent and effective policies. An often-described realist, Baldwin was fond of saying “keep your feet in the mud of the world you live in ... but your eyes on the stars of tomorrow” (195). That balance between grasping present realities and contemplating the probable shape of things to come lent an undeniable relevance to his writings. Equally important for the book, are cases where Baldwin was simply wrong, as in his “ill-considered” (95) assertion that a large Army and conscription were unnecessary heading into World War II.

The book is very well-researched; no small accomplishment, since Baldwin was a prolific public writer who, ironically, “never wrote about himself” (ix). But Davies has benefitted from personal interviews with Baldwin and his family in their home in Roxbury, Connecticut. These infuse the work with personal insights and a familiar candor. Davies also uses interviews that John T. Mason conducted with Baldwin as part of the US Naval Institute’s oral history program. He draws, too, on manuscripts written by Baldwin’s family members, colleagues, and even critics. Rounding out the sources are many books and articles contemporary with Baldwin’s life that shed light on crucial security policy debates of the time. Detailed endnotes and an appendix listing Baldwin’s many books are most useful as well.

Hanson Baldwin’s life, besides its own intrinsic interest, exemplifies the vital role that civilian analysts can play in the national security arena. Although he had fourteen years of combined active and reserve military experience, his constant study, analysis, and often criticism of American security policy are his best legacy. In this long-overdue biography, Robert Davies has made a welcome and valuable contribution to a better understanding of both Baldwin’s life and, more importantly, the dynamic role civilians can play in the military affairs of a democracy.