



# The Naval Officers Club of Australia

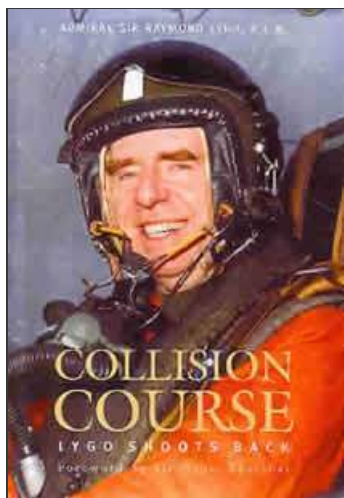
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## Collision Course

Posted on **Sunday 9 August, 2009** by **admin**



### **ADML Ray Lygo**

Book review by Fred Lane

Lygo R. *Collision course: Lygo shoots back*. The Book Guild: Lewes 2002. 551pp plus glossary, index and photographs.

Internet cost: \$50 incl postage.

Ray Lygo, worked as a printer's copyholder before joining the RN as a Naval Airman Second Class in 1942. He never sat for a School Certificate but coerced his way past the Recruiting CPO's desk by insisting that his Air Training Corps Cadet service was sufficient for aircrew. A distinguished career followed, as a Fleet Air Arm fighter pilot, Qualified Flying Instructor (QFI) and Commanding Officer of a number of ships and squadrons. He retired at age 51 as ADML Sir Raymond Lygo, KCB, First Sea Lord, joining British Aerospace and becoming chairman of a number of illustrious British companies.

### **CHOPPY START**

He starts his book with an unfortunate fancy-schmancy literary device used by writers of lesser ability of suddenly chopping back and forth from his collision as Captain of *Ark Royal* with a Russian destroyer in the Mediterranean to negotiating important contracts as Chairman of British Aerospace a couple of decades later. He also makes minor errors, like reversing the RN/USN Landing Signals Officer (Batsman) signals. Bear with him. The rest of the book is worth these painful Lorenz-style imprinting events.

Dozens of names familiar to Australians pop out of the pages. Ex-FOCAF Chas Eccles is mentioned and Mike Fell, 20th CAG Commander and Sydney CAG Commander in Korea, appears from time to time. Corky Corkhill is another. Barney Barron, later CO of RAN 805 Squadron in 1959-60, is correctly identified as one of those highly competent "terrible twins of Culdrose" in 1953.

Lygo's autobiography spans an important period in the RN's history. He describes how the RN finally shook itself clear of the 1930s Fleet Air Arm malaise, at considerable cost, then slumped from a potent carrier-backed force into a mere rump of its former self. He shows how the RN lost three of its four big aircraft carriers early in WW II due, in no small measure, to mismanagement. As a Seafire pilot in the Pacific during WW II, he learned the hard lessons about operating a land-based machine converted for carrier use, compared with American purpose-built carrier aircraft like the F4U Corsair.



*The Seafire (left), despite its Battle of Britain reputation, was inferior to American carrier purpose-built aircraft such as the F4U Corsair in durability, range, endurance and other important factors.*

He graphically describes the almost constant RAF aircraft versus RN carrier battles inside Whitehall that ranged from sniping to downright lies. Tragically, when the dust settled and the RAF won their case, the RN lost their proposed new aircraft carrier and the major capabilities that went with it, but the RAF did not get their TSR2 and other expected aircraft. Neither did the non-aviation admirals, who frequently supported the RAF position, get their anticipated cruisers and destroyers. The money simply disappeared into general revenue. "Aircraft carrier" became such a pejorative term that awkward semantics like "through deck cruiser" had to be invented.

Importantly, as Lygo says, the eminently obvious but overlooked solution was "a larger class of aircraft carriers, built to commercial standards and therefore much cheaper, concentrating all their build into the flying facilities, leaving it to the escort vessels to provide protection apart from point defence," (p315).

In Lygo's post-WW II era, frigates and destroyers not only performed their war-related duties but also important diplomatic missions. Lygo describes how he participated in at least three of these in command of ships as a LCDR and CMDR, during visits to Grenada in the Caribbean, Waterford in Ireland and Algeciras in Spain, all without a "Minister-for-Everything" peering over his shoulder.

#### AUSTRALIA, MOVE OVER

In one of the never-ending internecine Fleet Air Arm versus RAF carrier battles, the RAF claimed that they could comfortably conduct both surveillance and fighter duties over the oceans from existing (or planned) bases. Therefore aircraft carriers were unnecessary. The money would be better spent on RAF aircraft. This lie was exposed during Lygo's watch as Deputy Director of Naval Air Warfare when he found the RAF using deliberately doctored maps. They had moved Australia some 200 miles west to bolster their Indian Ocean argument.

Later, in command of *Ark Royal*, he was challenged with attacking an RAF base while on passage from Gibraltar to the UK. The RAF had ample surveillance and fighter forces to defend against this attack as well as a good idea about its timing. Lygo simply detached his support group of replenishment ships and some escorts to look like a carrier force attacking from the west. He even sent aircraft out to simulate touch and goes on a big tanker. Meanwhile, keeping radar and radio silence, he closed from the south and launched an unopposed "nuclear" strike with a Scimitar, in effect wiping out the RAF base.

#### BIASED DECISIONS

One questionable decision during his Ministry of Defence watch was an expensive industry-related policy to design and develop new afterburning Rolls Royce Spey engines to replace the tried, true and sufficient Pratt and Whitney J79s in the American Phantoms purchased for the RN and RAF. On the one hand, money was squandered for no real military purpose, while vital naval concerns, such as a replacement carrier, were obfuscated. Another time, a big team visited the USA to investigate an offer of three ex-USN carriers at bargain prices. Not one naval aviator was on the team. Not surprisingly, the team declined the offer. Crucial operations-related decisions were sometimes delegated to totally unqualified but politically-connected "scientists", contaminated by doctored or incomplete data.

He was also lucky. He was a passenger in a 12-seater naval DeHavilland Heron when the pilot flew it into trees during an instrument letdown to RAF Base Turnhouse, Scotland (p331). There was a "great deal of structural damage", the wings were "almost in ribbons" and a small electrical fire started in the fuselage. However, a hole magically appeared in the clouds, with a runway straight ahead, so the pilot threw it on, flapless at 120 knots, without inflicting further damage.

#### FLASH UP CHECKLISTS

Best of all, Lygo describes the era when flying was fun and the navy was not so much a bean-counter's profession as an adventure. Lygo was responsible for brilliant practical jokes and other stunts, which kept everyone on their toes and built morale. At the same time it was Lygo who introduced a now-standard check list, like a pilot's check list, for flashing up boilers. As an A1 QFI, Lygo adapted flying instructional techniques to the seamanship profession. As a pilot, he was always aware of the bottom line: know your limits, in the air and on the ground.

In civilian life he applied the lessons he learned as a divisional officer and commanding officer. Whether dealing with unions or negotiating major company takeovers Lygo always wanted to know what was the predominant aim and whether the data were true. He found no substitute for "clear lower deck" "eyeball-to-eyeball talks" and shop-floor "rounds".

# Vung Tau ferry

Posted on **Sunday 9 August, 2009** by **admin**



## **HMAS Sydney: the Vung Tau ferry**

book review by Fred Lane

Nott R.T. and N. A. Payne (2001) *The Vung Tau ferry: HMAS Sydney and escort ships. 3rd Ed.* Noel and Margaret Payne: Nerang. (168 pages plus 90-odd pages of addenda such as crew lists and escort ship details. Cost \$29.95. Self published hardback.)

This 258-page book is a very readable anecdotal history of the involvement of HMAS *Sydney* in the Vietnam War, ranging from her first voyage to Vung Tau in 1965 to her last in 1972. The main thrust and about a third of the book, by volume, never strays far from the political and legal struggle surrounding the award of the "Return from Active Service Badge" and other benefits for her crew. About another third lists details of Sydney and her ships company, also data about other RAN ships, including *Jeparit* and *Boonaroo*, who shared the logistics, escort and gun line burdens in Vietnam. Excellent photographs and charts illustrate the story.

Unfortunately, the Australian politicians of the day seem in retrospect to have been more interested in feathering their own nests, through generous pay rises and pension entitlements, than recognising the hardships and danger that went with the job of obeying their directions to maintain Australian forces in the field.

Some politicians even argued that granting honours to Sydney's sailors might risk some paltry millions of dollars to fund possible future Defence Force Housing grants. Other senior uniformed personnel seriously argued that any campaign medal would be devalued if it was awarded to logistics people, such as Sydney's crew.

The Australian government finally issued the Return from Active Service Badge in 1986 in response to sustained efforts by groups such as the Vietnam Logistics Support Group that formed in 1985. In 1992 they authorised the award of the Vietnam Logistics and Support Medal.

### **MISSED OPPORTUNITIES**

The authors criticise unnamed "academic historians" for much of the government's position. Unfortunately, they fail to present a detailed case and reasoned argument showing how they arrived at this conclusion or even rebutting the miscreants point by point. This is a pity. They probably had the ammunition.

The book seems to be not so much a substantially original work by Nott and Payne, but more an edited compilation of articles and data by a variety of authors, including Buster Crabb and Red Merson, with interspersed editorial comment by the nominal authors. Some accounts are very real, very personal and very exciting. Others lead to assertions which, without better supporting evidence, could be easily misinterpreted as reflections of paranoia at a number of command levels. Additionally, verbatim Reports of Proceedings and Temporary Memoranda are rarely riveting or necessarily convincing. Even Churchill, never the most erudite of authors, at least placed essential excerpts of these in appendices.

There is no doubt that the good ship *Sydney* performed to her usual "above and beyond" standards. Her crew, many of them young teenagers and barely out of recruit school, rose to the occasion under the able leadership of their NCOs and officers. It must have been sobering for them to see a massive real life firepower demonstration on their approach to anchoring at Vung Tau.



*HMAS Sydney unloads at Vung Tau.*

They were also reminded of their responsibilities by precautions such as the blackout as they approached the coast. In harbour, they had armed lookout sentries, boat patrols trolling anti-swimmer harpoons, divers inspecting the ship's bottom and random scare charges detonating. Maybe *Sydney* was not attacked because the Viet Cong were just not interested in her as a target. Others might argue equally forcefully that the danger was there but the ship's aggressive defence posture deterred the enemy from even thinking about attacking.

Not mentioned was the last *Sydney* Vietnam logistics trip, when she loaded retiring Australian troops and equipment from Singapore, rather than Vung Tau, in 1973.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY PROBLEMS**

The book has a short bibliography but, oddly, no citations to these references in the main body. Furthermore, in contrast to Steve Eather's book, *Get the bloody job done*, which is mentioned in the text, but not listed in the bibliography, there is no index or systematic analysis of both sides.

In short, this is a series of great anecdotal yarns about a great ship and her even greater crew. The tale is worthy of greater effort and scholarship. With just a little more work it could have been made into something much more memorable. It is perhaps a reflection of the political and publisher apathy that surrounds the subject that such a book is yet to be written and published.

#### **REFERENCES:**

Eather, S. *Get the bloody job done*. Allen & Unwin: St Leonards, 1998.

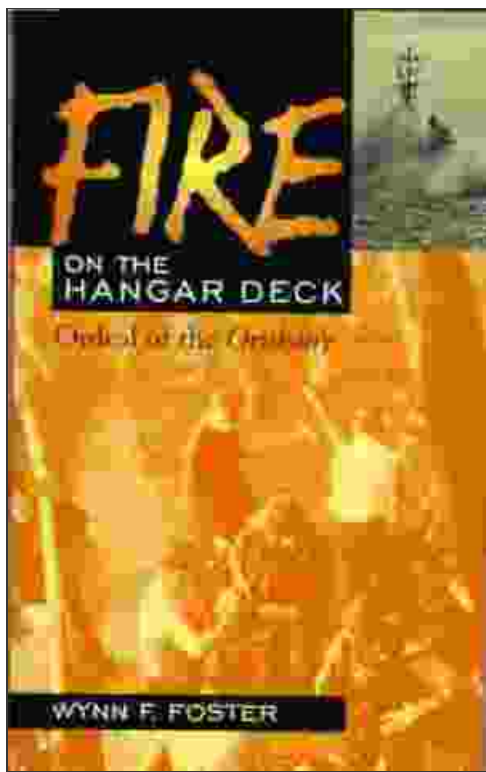
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## **Vietnam: Fire in the Hangar**

Posted on [Sunday 9 August, 2009](#) by [admin](#)



### Fire in the Hangar

Book review by Fred Lane

Foster, W.F. (2001) *Fire on the hangar deck: Ordeal of the Oriskany*. Naval Institute Press: Annapolis. 175 pages including index, photographs and schematic drawings. US\$26.95.

"Fire, fire, fire, fire in the hangar," must be one of the most feared tannoy broadcasts ever in any ship that carries aircraft. It generates more anxiety in experienced aviators than the oft-called "Crash on deck". With tonnes of volatile aircraft fuel, high explosives and aircraft oxygen nearby, it is almost axiomatic that more lives are about to be lost. The ship herself is in mortal danger. Only disciplined, fast and expert reactions can save a ship with a serious fire in the hangar. In the USS *Oriskany* fire, starting about 0720, 26 October 1966, many officers and sailors not only did the job they were trained to do, but also displayed superb individual and team initiative and bravery. This book by Wynn Foster should be required reading for every person in any ship operating an aircraft.

Wynn (Captain Hook) Foster, made two combat deployments in Vietnam aboard *Oriskany*, but was shot down in an A-4E Skyhawk and lost his right arm on 26 July, three months before the fire. His gripping account reflects his intimate knowledge of the ship, her systems and her crew. He also captures the drama of stark terror and confusion and the heroic responses to those challenges by his ex-shipmates.

#### ESSEX CLASS

*Oriskany* was an Essex class fleet carrier, modified to 27C standard, and nearly twice the size of the RAN Light Fleet carriers. She first saw action in Korea and in 1964, at the start of the Vietnam War, she was the youngest of the still-active WWII-era Essex class carriers.

In her 1966 Air Wing 16, she carried two squadrons of A-4 Skyhawks, one squadron of A-1 Skyraiders and two of F-8 Crusader aircraft. She also mounted detachments of E-1B Tracer AEW aircraft, A-3 Skywarrior tankers and UH-2 Seasprite SAR helicopters. She was on the second night shift, a midnight-to-noon operating cycle employing a 90-minute deck turnaround. At the time of the fire she was working up to launch her breakfast time 0730 strike.

Like the fires in *Forrestal* (134 dead, nine months later), and *Enterprise* (61 dead, 14 January 1969), the initial fire was probably caused by a breakdown in safety procedures, training and supervision. Bad weather cancelled *Oriskany's* scheduled night operations, so dozens of Mk 24 magnesium parachute flares and other ordnance were being unloaded from the night strike aircraft. A pair of young ordnance handlers were stowing the 25-pound flares into a ready use flare locker on the hangar deck when they inadvertently activated one. The seaman reflexively tossed the primed and hissing flare into the locker and slammed the door shut. Magnesium flares require no oxygen supply to burn, so the single flare ignited some 650 others in the ready use stowage locker.

#### SHARED VENTILATION

The locker shared ventilation ducts with nearby officers' cabins, so the resulting fireballs and explosions not only created havoc in the hangar, but also killed many officers in their cabin area. A total of 44 men died. At one stage the forward part of the ship, including the bridge, lost all electrical power (with 28 degrees of rudder on, of course).

"No great genius was required to deduce that under the pressures of round-the-clock combat operations, expedient departure from ordnance safety and handling was likely to occur," says Foster (p 154).



*USS Oriskany on fire, 26 October 1966, off Vietnam.*

The prescribed flare stowage in this essentially WWII carrier was unsuitable for the tempo demanded by Vietnam War operations. A ship-level decision to stow flares in a designated rocket-motor stowage was not unusual. However, this failed to take into sufficient account the increased danger of handling the more volatile flares and the shared ventilation trunk system that spread the fire.

#### IMPROPER DOWNLOAD

It was also likely that proper safety precautions, including making the flare safe for handling, had not been taken as it was downloaded from its aircraft. In this regard, the MK 24 flare design, its manuals, crew training and supervision all came in for criticism.

From the moment the flare's fuse ignition sequence started, the handlers had some 18 seconds before the main charge ignited. This suggests that there was time to throw the flare overboard.



*As the USS Forrestal was readying for a launch over Vietnam, on 29 July 1967, nine months after the Oriskany fire, an even more serious fire claimed 134 lives and 62 injured (above, USN photo).*

Damage to aircraft and the ship was severe. The primary cause, never conclusively established, was presumed to be a stray voltage input into a loaded F-4 Phantom's firing circuit that fired a Zuni rocket into an A-4 Skyhawk's drop tank. The A-4, incidentally, was hurriedly evacuated by the pilot, LCDR (later Senator and Presidential candidate) John S. McCain.

ADML J.S. Russell, a highly respected retired ex-aviator, headed a panel that reviewed the *Oriskany* and *Forrestal* fires. "Serious deficiencies (existed) in weapons technical publications and handbooks and munitions load-out specifications," quotes Foster from this report (p160). "The problems were navy-wide," summarises Foster. "(There are) dangers inherent in having to fight a full-time war with a peacetime manpower structure."

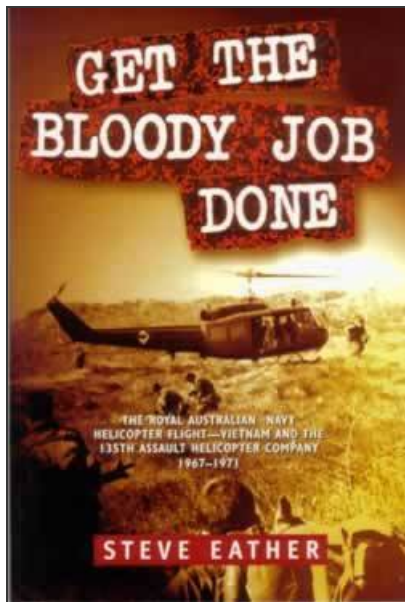
However, there are two positive conclusions that must flow from these tragedies. Firstly, USN carriers can take a lot of punishment and still survive. Secondly, in an emergency, young sailors can be relied upon to distinguish themselves by unflinchingly risking their lives to save their shipmates and even the ship herself.

#### REFERENCES:

Carlin, M.J. Trial: *Ordeal of the USS Enterprise*, 14 January 1969. Tuscarora Press: West Grove, 1993.  
Freeman, G.A. *Sailors to the end: The deadly fire on the USS Forrestal and the heroes who fought it*. Morrow William and Co.: New York, 2002.

## Vietnam: Get the bloody job done

Posted on [Sunday 9 August, 2009](#) by [admin](#)



### [Vietnam: RAN helicopter flight](#)

Book review by Fred Lane

Steve Eather *Get the bloody job done*. Allen and Unwin: St Leonards, 1998. 160pp, including index and references, \$19.95 (paperback).

“Get the bloody job done” might be a great squadron motto and an even better book title. Except in Vietnam. The “bloody job” did not “get done” and the RAN Helicopter Flight Vietnam (RANHFV) lost five outstanding young men killed and others seriously injured in the process. Another entire crew died when their RAN helicopter flew into the ground at Beecroft Range during a Vietnam workup.

As Eather explains, there were four RANHFV contingents totalling 192 men and other RAN helicopter pilots served in Vietnam with RAAF 9 Squadron. The RANHFV, like the RAN's 805 Squadron in the Korean War, reported the highest casualty rate per unit strength of any Australian unit engaged. In Korea, lives and aircraft might have been squandered under an American-led Joint Operations Command strategy, Operation Strangle, that in effect traded Australian naval aircrew and aircraft for farmers and ox carts. In Vietnam, it may be equally ironic that the American-driven strategy traded Australian lives and aircraft for a few more months' life of a corrupt South Vietnamese regime. Yet, Australian professionalism, dedication and valour shone through in both theatres.

### [US ARMY 135TH ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY](#)

Between October 1967 and June 1971, as Eather explains, the four RANHFV year-long contingents of 45 or so integrated with the US Army's 135th Assault Helicopter Company as an Experimental Military Unit (EMU). The 135th was one of 70 or more US Army helicopter companies in Vietnam and it was the 135th that initially introduced the “H” model Huey to the Vietnam theatre. RAN pilots filled only about ten per cent of the company's aircrew billets but contributed significantly more with their operational skills and experience.

The US Army's initial integration plans were perhaps not well thought out, but this may be understandable given the tempo of the Vietnam operations. Just before deployment from the USA the fully worked-up company had its commanding officer changed. Instead of a major, like all the other US Army equivalents, the company was now commanded by a lieutenant colonel. This was chiefly to accommodate the RANHFV commander's rank and seniority. Normally the second in command, or Executive Officer (XO) in a US Army helicopter company, was responsible for administration. In the 135th, the RANHFV commander was appointed as the company XO, but instead of administration he took on a much more operational role and typically shared Command and Control missions with the Company CO.

There were other internal changes made to accommodate the generally more highly skilled and experienced equivalent-rank RAN personnel. The Australians were usually placed into higher supervisory and technical positions for their rank than normally found in both the US Army and the RAN. Australian groundcrew, like their American counterparts, frequently flew by day as door gunners and maintained their aircraft at night.

Deep strategy considerations do not impinge much on the mind of helicopter pilots performing difficult flights under concentrated enemy fire in marginal weather. Deep strategy considerations also cannot gainsay the Australian's outstanding bravery and skill. On the ground

and in the air many of them performed at levels well above and beyond their American counterparts. Of course, most of the Americans were not career volunteers, like the Australians, but conscripted men, many straight out of school.

#### NIGHT INTERDICTION

Initially, the 135th was in the thick of the action, working with Australian, American and South Vietnamese divisions. They developed new tactics and standard operating procedures around their more powerful and larger H model helicopter. They explored night interdiction work. The Australians were at the forefront developing and evaluating new tactics.

As Eather describes, they also came under enemy fire now and then from security-compromised operations. Some South Vietnamese groups they supported were excellent. With others they had to adopt a policy of firing on their own South Vietnamese troops should they attempt to return, with their arms, to the helicopter after an insertion into a Landing Zone.

The RAAF started replacing their Number 9 Squadron UH-1B helicopters with the larger and more capable UH-1H (H-model) in 1968. They remained in relatively comfortable Vung Tau quarters throughout the war but their aircrew, both RAN and RAAF, often flew with the 135th to gain experience. They found the 135th pilots flying many more hours and sorties per month in more intensive and risky missions and with larger numbers of aircraft.

In time, as the RANHFV's casualties mounted, some of the RAN pilots serving with 9 Squadron were loaned to the 135th until replacements could be flown up from Australia. "Thus, 9 Squadron, to some extent acted as an 'in country' reinforcement holding unit for the RANHFV," observes Eather.

#### ONCE WERE THE LEAD COMPANY

Once the lead helicopter company with the latest model brand new aircraft in Vietnam and always in the thick of the fighting and developing new tactics, the 135th drifted off into comparative genteel, but no less dangerous, obscurity as priorities changed. Concomitant with Vietnamisation, brand new aircraft started to go to South Vietnamese squadrons. The 135th received reworked aircraft requiring a heavier maintenance effort. The Australian Government also objected to Australians operating inside Cambodia, but evidently not clearly enough or early enough to prevent at least one Australian sailor being shot down there.

The 135th gradually lost its "cutting edge" reputation and finally drifted off with its RANHFV component to Dong Tarn, a huge complex in the Mekong Delta area, in September 1970. There they operated mainly in support of three ARVN divisions. In June 1971 the fourth contingent of Australian sailors farewelled their US Army comrades for the last time, a little earlier than originally planned, and flew back to Australia without replacement.

Steve Eather takes no extreme position about Vietnam but seems convincing when he presents operational facts. He quietly lets readers draw their own conclusions and correctly points out the many instances of extraordinary bravery and skill of RANHFV personnel. His prior RAAF experience helps him to select and present the essentials, including direct quotes and photographs. However his final recommendations that peacetime RAN and Army Seahawk/Blackhawk aircrew should train so that they are virtually interchangeable seems to echo a fond but amazingly simplistic RAAF dream.

On the other hand, he evenhandedly discusses the problems of small components, including the RAAF's Empire Air Training Scheme aircrew, integrating with other forces. He also correctly criticises the RAAF's original operational instructions not to "unduly risk" their rare and precious Australian helicopters. We can't fight wars with kid gloves. If we are not willing to risk a bit of machinery when Australian lives are at stake, perhaps we should not be there.

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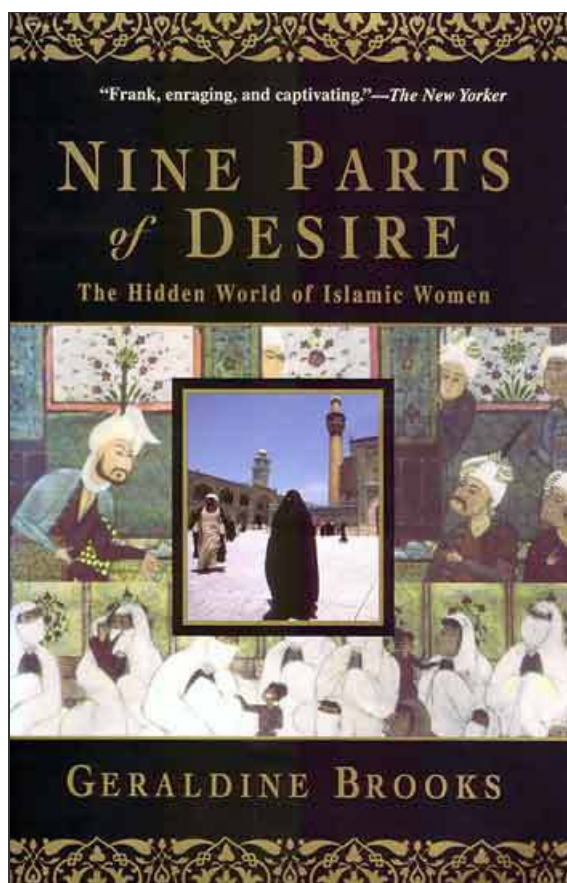
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## Nine parts of desire

Posted on [Sunday 9 August, 2009](#) by [admin](#)





### The women of Islam

Book review by Fred Lane

Brooks, Geraldine. *Nine parts of desire: The hidden world of Islamic women*. Anchor Books: New York 1994. 255 pp, \$17.95 (paperback)

Contrary to Norma Khouri's reportedly faked *Forbidden love* reports, *Nine parts of desire* is based on the authentic experiences of Australian author Geraldine Brooks. After growing up in Sydney and working for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Brooks became a highly respected prize-winning journalist for *The Wall Street Journal*. She spent many years in the Middle East observing and recording the often contradictory political, religious and cultural forces that shape modern Muslim women's lives. She shows how selective interpretations of holy texts are used to oppress females in this, the fastest-growing religion in the world today.

Of course minority oppression is not the sole prerogative of this particular religion. It also happens perhaps as much outside religion as within it, and it is a very rare religion or social group that can rightly claim to be entirely free of sexist bias. However, it is usually the fundamentalists and extremists who preach the strongest bias and the same people are usually the ones who most strongly urge their followers to oppress.

#### THE PROPHET'S OPPOSITE EARLY BEHAVIOUR

The denigration of Muslim women is particularly oppressive because the Prophet's own words and original example reflect an entirely antithetical position. The modern forms of Muslim oppression are particularly barbarous because the customs and laws that go with this denial of human rights encourage cruel genital mutilation, punishment and even murder on the specious grounds of a feudal-based "family honour" system. The same code of laws allows child marriage, polygamy and wife-beating.

In seventh-century Arabia, the illiterate, orphaned and poor Muhammad married Khadija, ten years his senior, his employer and his only wife for 24 years. She was never required to wear a veil or seclude herself. She guided him into a position of power within his tribe, but died some nine years after Muhammad's first vision of the angel Gabriel pronouncing the word of God. Six years after Khadija's death, Muhammad reported a series of "revelations" that at first permitted him four wives, then eight or nine. As Brooks reports, after taking multiple wives into his household, "Soon there was jealousy, intrigue and scandal." Coincidentally, another "revelation" led him to seclude his wives "to protect them".

#### POLYGAMY AND SECLUSION

Other followers quickly adopted his polygamy and seclusion rituals, some more fundamental than others. The veil and seclusion recommended by the more militant clerics and observed by many women today in Muslim countries are by no means universal, even in adjoining Middle East States. The Emirates, for instance, have been training fully emancipated female soldiers since 1991 while neighbouring Saudi Arabia stones selected adulterers to death.

Brooks's title comes from a quotation by Ali, the founder of Shiite Islam, who was also the husband of Fatima, one of Muhammad's four daughters. "Almighty God created sexual desire in ten parts, and he gave nine parts to women and one to men," Brooks cites him saying.

Therefore, it may be reasoned, this “nine-part” sexuality must be controlled, for the good of society (and protection for those men unable to control themselves).

Brooks argues that the veil and seclusion of women, while seemingly innocuous at first glance, lies at the root of much of the discrimination in those nations that practise it. It goes with fundamentalism. It is a visible sign that one group of human beings is different from another and those wearing the visible sign soon find themselves assuming lesser roles in society. Hitler employed the same strategy with Jews.

Once the socially inferior Nietzschean *undermensch* have been identified, it is easier impose arbitrary and harsh penalties if they transgress a host of laws that might not apply to the *ubermensch*.

#### GENITAL MUTILATION, SEXISM

In many Muslim cultures this dichotomy supports female genital mutilation, on the specious grounds that the operation will discourage women from becoming prostitutes or exercise the same sexual freedom permitted to males. It has not discouraged prostitution. It allows some Muslim men, but not their wives, to initiate a divorce by simply saying, “I divorce you.” It condones some men, typically a relative, murdering a woman for suspected extramarital sex, while allowing the male partner, even a rapist, to go scot-free. It allows fatwas (directions to murder) against academics and authors who are perceived to have encouraged the faithful merely to question their religion (or the men in power).

Many advance excuses for this anti-humanitarian behaviour. As Geraldine Brooks points out in her final chapter: Presented with statistics on violence toward women, or facing the furore over the Rushdie fatwa, progressive Muslims such as Ali Allawi, Rana Kabbani and others ask us to blame a wide range of villains: colonial history, the bitterness of immigrant experience, Bedouin tradition, pre-Islamic African culture. Yet when the Koran sanctions wife-beating and the execution of apostates, it can't be entirely exonerated for an epidemic of wife slaying and the death sentences on authors (p 231).

Other Muslim women have a contrary view. Brooks points to Moroccan Fatima Mernissi, who is unusual in that she is a renowned Koranic scholar. She makes a powerful case for sexual equality and dignity based on the Koran. Her work is very popular in Western universities, but is rarely addressed in male-dominated Islamic establishments. This suggests yet another prejudice against yet another woman who does not know her place in Islamic society.

#### GOOD JOURNALISM

Richard Glover, discussing this book in the influential Media, Entertainment and Arts journal, *The Walkley*, says:

*Read this and you'll not only learn a lot about Islamic women, you'll be convinced that journalism should always begin like this, with a reporter, a notebook and real people.*

*Nine parts of desire* is an important primer for those seeking to understand the Muslim religion and some of the mind sets behind modern terrorism.

Misogynists will not understand it.

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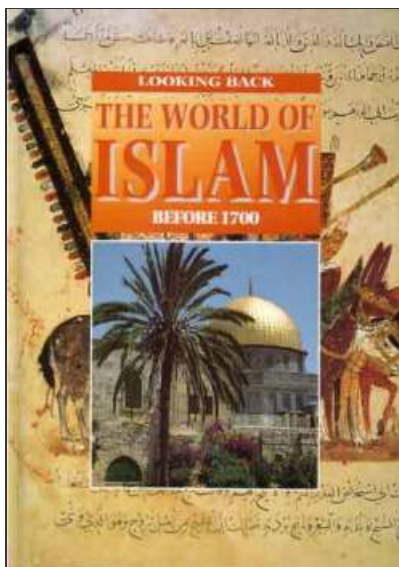
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## Islam before 1700

Posted on [Sunday 9 August, 2009](#) by [admin](#)



### Islam pre 1700

Book review by Fred Lane

Martell, H.M. *Looking back: The world of Islam before 1700*. Evans Brothers Limited: London 1998. 62 pp, hardback, \$19.99.

(But check the remainders box for a bargain.)

Indonesia, our near-north neighbour, has by far the largest population of Muslims of any country in the world. Some, like the Bali bombers, seem to be as fundamentalist and fanatical as the Islamist extremists found in Afghanistan, Iraq or Palestine. In recent years Australian civilians, as well as servicemen and women, have been targets for people who, encouraged strongly by their religious leaders, seek to destroy them. It is our responsibility, it may be argued, that we understand at least a little of what they claim to be a chief motivating force, their religion.

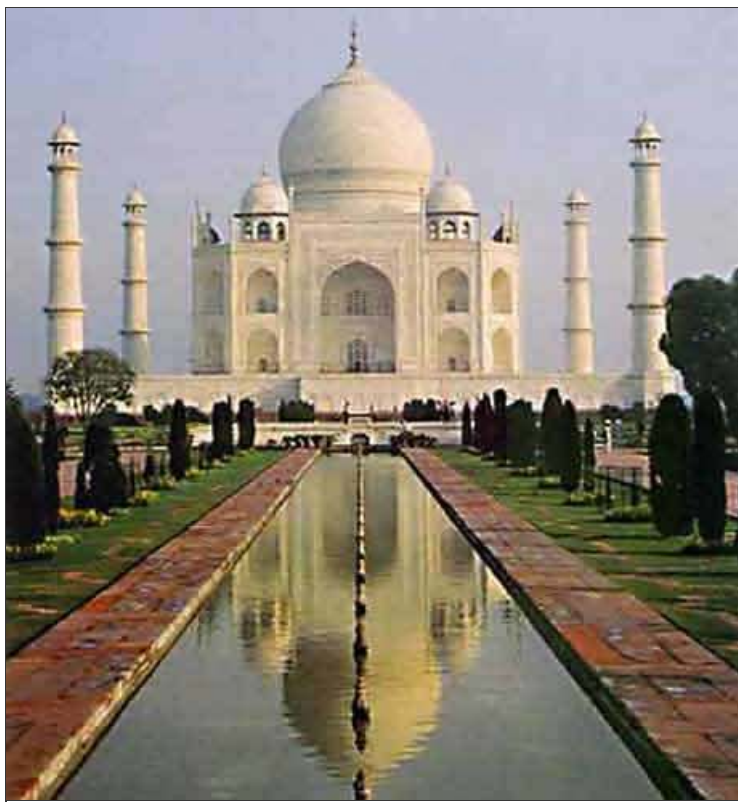
Martell's primer, often found in bookshop remainder sections, is a handy illuminating guide showing how the religion started and some of what it achieved in its first 1100 years. Many of us, particularly those who grew up in the first half of the last century, have a very poor understanding of the rich Muslim culture and its important influence on the history of the world.

#### BATTLE OF LEPANTO

Indeed, had the close-fought Battle of Lepanto in the eastern Mediterranean gone the other way in 1571, many more of us might well be facing Mecca more often.

Martell reminds us how, despite initially excelling in science and technology, and despite establishing highly respected centres of learning, open to all, including Jews, the Islamic Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal Empires disintegrated over the years in the face of internal dissent and aggressive competition, particularly at the hands of European Christian nations. This book gives another perspective to some of what Muslim extremists are trying to claim.

Martell describes the fundamental Muslim values of learning and tolerance. She also points to some of the world's most precious architectural jewels, such as the Taj Mahal, that were created by Muslims. These attributes are in stark contrast to the violence expounded by the militant extremists.



*The Taj Mahal at Agra, one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, is a mausoleum built 1633-1650 to honour Arjumand Bano Begum, the wife of a Mughal prince.*

On the other hand, there is no glossing over the betrayals and treachery of the early years, just after Mohammed's death. Factions struggled murderously with one another for power, gold and prestige, in much the same way the Popes and European kings struggled for similar goals about the same time. Unfortunately, for the Muslims, their fratricide was more deadly than the Europeans'.

It is odd how popular texts, such as Curtis's *The great political theories*, gloss over the Muslim influence. Anything east of Jerusalem is virtually ignored. To argue that the Muslims or Asians produced nothing relevant betrays abysmal ignorance. Consider Schulze's *A modern history of the Islamic World* for another version. On the other hand, Geraldine Brooks's *Nine parts of desire* paints yet another picture of cruelty and inhumanity flourishing with the tacit blessing of the Muslim clerics.

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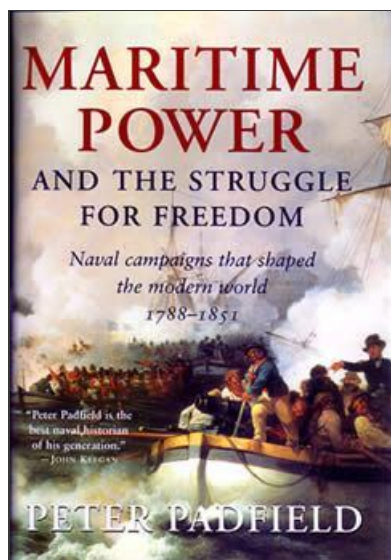
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## Padfield: Sea Power 1788-1851

Posted on [Sunday 9 August, 2009](#) by [admin](#)



### Sea Power: 1788 – 1851

Book review by Fred Lane

Padfield, Peter. *Maritime power and the struggle for freedom: Naval campaigns that shaped the modern world 1788-1851*. The Overlook Press: Woodstock, 2005. 467 pages including a comprehensive index, glossary, 16 pages of illustrations and another nine pages of maps. RRP is US\$35, but unmarked used books are available on the internet for about AUS\$20 plus \$7 or so postage.

This great Christmas present book follows *Maritime supremacy and the opening of the Western Mind: Naval campaigns that shaped the modern world 1588-1782*, by the same author. It covers a vital period when Royal Navy ships, led by officers such as Jervis and Nelson, established a maritime supremacy that permitted trade expansion and colonisation on scales that had never before been contemplated.

Padfield also discusses the bucket of cold water administered by the USA in 1812-13. Importantly, he describes the last days of naval warfare before steam and iron trashed the rules. He explains how Jack Tars, in wooden sailing ships at the pinnacle of their development cycle, fought battles that led to the destruction of entrenched geopolitical ideologies.

Correlated with a Europe-wide struggle to define and govern an emerging “freedom of the masses”, Padfield shows how the Royal Navy and a British civilian population of about 20 million radically reshaped society in a little over 50 years.

Youngsters interested in only the blood and guts of battle might find Padfield’s sociopolitical arguments a little long-winded as he reprises the theoretical concepts of Sociology 101’s “usual suspects”. Nevertheless, this is an essential prerequisite and there is enough blood and guts to satisfy even the most bloodthirsty. All the important sea battles are there, including a thrilling virtual shot-by-shot report of Howe’s 1794 Glorious First of June. “Howe had shown the way,” Padfield asserts. “Within a few years Nelson would follow and lift naval warfare to greater heights of daring and destructiveness” (p. 103).

In the contexts of their respective officer corps, Padfield cleverly analyses the socioeconomic development and promotion of major personalities, like Napoleon and Nelson. Both were “... of small height and slight build ... who had raised (themselves) through similar extraordinary ambition, flare (sic) and audacity to heroic status” (p 129). With equal dexterity and attention to detail he shows how British superiority in gunnery, seamanship, signalling and fleet tactics determined battles.

#### GEOPOLITICAL MOVEMENTS

Padfield illustrates how maritime supremacy shaped crucial geopolitical movements. He acknowledges the devastating land warfare clashes, but correctly points out that these armies were financed by nations. His bottom line: It was the maritime nations that controlled trade, therefore they had the deeper pockets and won the final battles.

How was this fiscal success achieved? As Padfield asserts, all the warring nations were deeply in debt but after Jervis’s singular 1797 St Vincent success, “News of the victory restored British government credit practically at a stroke. It was more than ever clear that, however many ships her enemies might bring against her, they would be no match for British fleets” (p 128). Of course, had Nelson not broken from the British line without orders and acted on his own initiative, capturing two much larger ships than his own, and had Collingwood not come to his old gunroom messmate’s assistance, St Vincent might well have had a vastly different outcome.

Napoleon commanded an army ostensibly to invade England in 1798, but he had broader aims. He saw the impossibility of achieving his primary task without first destroying the Royal Navy, but first his country’s crippled treasury needed money. He looted the Vatican’s coffers, then Switzerland’s. Then he stripped the money vaults of the wealthy Knights Templar of Malta on his way to invading Egypt. There, he planned to interdict Britain’s access to India and other Asian trading nations.

#### UNDERESTIMATED RN

Napoleon underestimated the Royal Navy and Nelson who, at Aboukir, inflicted “... the worst ever French defeat and unprecedented in naval history. Strategically it was decisive. France had lost control of the Mediterranean. Bonaparte’s army was imprisoned in Egypt ...

“(p 166).

Trafalgar in 1805 was the last, biggest and most decisive major battle under sail. It was an overwhelming victory for Nelson, but also a tragedy. The nation at once rejoiced in the victory and mourned their gallant hero's death.

These and other Royal Navy victories changed the world. Britain's subsequent buoyant economy was based on unparalleled growth of colonial trade protected by a strong navy. This commerce supported the development of a truly accountable democratic government system that led to advances such as the abolition of slavery. All this shaped the “freedom” that we take for granted.

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## Titanic: Letters

Posted on **Tuesday 4 August, 2009** by [admin](#)

### [Titanic followup letters](#)



*Cutaway sketch of Titanic. Note the “smoke” from number four funnel.*

Tom Fisher writes of the *Last Log of the Titanic*: [book review \(Newsletter 54 September 2003\)](#):

The stated fuel consumption of 650 tons of coal an hour must be in error. Southampton to New York is some 3000 miles. At 22.5 knots the ship would have to consume some 86,000 tons of coal. She displaced only 46,000 tons. I would suggest that the ship would have consumed less than 850 tons of coal a day and even this figure would have kept the 270 or so stokers very busy.

Of poignant interest is that not one of the engineer officers survived the collision. The electric lights, however, were still burning as the ship plunged to her doom. This was possible because at least some of the 17 massive Merchant Navy Scotch boilers, each of which held probably 20 to 30 tons of water, had enough stored energy to keep up steam as the ship slowly flooded.

*(Ed. Note: Tom is correct and reviewer John Ellis agrees. The “per hour” figure was an egregious typo. It should have read “650 tons ... per day.”)*

Ron Robb contributes to the *Titanic* discussion:

Browsing over Tom Fisher's comments re John Ellis' review of David Brown's *The Last Log of the Titanic* stirred some half-forgotten observations about the seemingly never-ending fascination with that ill-fated liner and brought to mind a few other stories, both mythical and real, about other maritime disasters. It's also worth noting that horrific disasters at sea still occur today. It may also come as a surprise to know that the “golden age” of liner travel was less in the 1920s than it is today so the opportunities for disasters are as present as ever. A few comments follow.



*Photo showing smoke from Number three, but not number four funnel.*

The first thing I noticed about the cutaway illustration of the legendary ship at the top of Tom's letter was that it has a very common error in non-photo pics of *Titanic*: smoke coming from the after smokestack. In fact, that structure was there mainly for show but was used as a ventilating trunk, as John mentioned.

The public of the day equated power and speed with multiple funnels so the White Star line went along with the fad. The *Last Log of the Titanic* has a painting on the front cover actually showing smoke coming from No 4 stack (p 10 Newsletter No. 54 and here). John picked up a few errors and contradictions in David Brown's book and this one appears even before one opens the cover.

The Riddle of the *Titanic* (Gardiner and Van der Vat, Orion, 1995) has good photos of both *Titanic* and *Olympic* (first of the class) with a big head of steam and plenty of exhaust smoke, but with No. 4 stack showing none; that book also notes that No. 4 was for ventilation only .

#### FITTING-OUT PHOTO

*Titanic* (Leo Marriot, PRC Books: London, 1997) specifically describes the three boiler rooms exhausting into funnels 1, 2 and 3. It also shows a photo of her fitting-out with only the three active funnels in place at that stage and specifically draws attention to the fact that the dummy fourth was to be fitted later. Moreover, it shows a number of famous paintings of *Titanic*, all correctly showing smoke from the first three stacks only (and also a painting of *Brittanic*, the third and last of the class, likewise showing no smoke).

Perhaps the most famous artist's painting of the ill-fated vessel is Simon Fisher's *The Last Sunset*, viewed from the port quarter and depicting *Titanic* sailing west after leaving Queenstown, having worked-up to to full speed to meet Lord Ismay's determination to break all records, with voluminous smoke belching from the first three stacks, but nothing from the fourth.



*Titanic* contemporary RMS Lusitania did have a number four funnel chimney.

Tom Fisher was right about the coal usage, as was John Ellis' subsequent correction: *The Last Log of the Titanic* does indeed state that she was fed 650 tons of coal per day, and that was by human muscle and shovels. Each stoker shifted five tons of coal per watch, of which there were two of four hours per twenty-four.

Also confirmed is Tom's note that not one of the engineer officers survived. According to Brown there were 35 of them under Chief Engineer Joseph Bell. Gardiner and Van der Vat list 32, though if deck engineers, electricians, carpenters and boilermakers are included then the number is greater than either. Whatever, the main two investigative enquiries did not manage to elicit much about the last hours of the Marine Engineering/Electrical Department but what evidence there was indicated that those who survived the first engulfment stuck to their posts right to the end.

No doubt most of them would have eventually been overwhelmed in the flood as it began to overtake the lower regions, with menacing inexorability once No. 5 bulkhead at boiler room No. 6 gave way, having been weakened to the point of red heat by the just recently extinguished ten-day old bulk coal fire.

Bunker fires were common in those days, due to the unstable coal dust atmosphere and, rather than the bulk explosives cargo claimed by the German Government, a likely reason for the mysterious second explosion after the single torpedo that went into the *Lusitania*. (However, that point is still to this day being hotly argued).

#### PRESS ON REGARDLESS?

The whole confluence of events was all the while being rapidly exacerbated by Ismay's insane determination to press on regardless and CAPT Smith's reckless disregard for caution after the impact.

Of Bell's enlisted engineering department, comprising 271 firemen, trimmers and greasers, only 47 survived. Probably only NOC members of a bygone age, such as those who worked in boiler/engine rooms of the big warships like the County class cruisers, the carriers and other such big steamers, can imagine what the last hour or so down there in *Titanic* must have been like.

As an ex-birdie I sometimes used to go down into those spaces and to me they seemed like a precursor of Hell. At least ships soon after *Titanic* were oil-fired but even then life in the bowels was no picnic. When one considers conditions where 650 tons of coal per day had to be shovelled by hand I must confess I have a mental picture something akin to those terrifying orcs working in that ghastly middle earth in the Tolkien's Lord of the Rings movies – an eerie half light, punctuated by blazes of angry firelight from roaring furnaces, suffocating heat, black dust everywhere, sweaty bodies covered in grime.

#### WHY NO ENGINEER SURVIVORS?

I sometimes wonder why at least some of the *Titanic* engineers didn't survive, as there would have been plenty of time for them to climb the ladders out of the partitioned compartments (which were open at the top but with the watertight doors now closed). Marriot in *Titanic* actually draws a comparison between *Titanic's* uncapped compartments and the contemporary Cunarders *Lusitania* and *Mauretania* with their independently compartmentalised watertight integrity (warship style). Tom Fisher and John Ellis were both steam plumbers so they may care to elucidate.

Tom also noted that the ship's electrics continued right to the end. People often remark on that and sometimes assume that it was artist's or film director's licence. We know that in fact there was a good head of steam available right to the end because launching of the lifeboats quite some time after the accident was made all the more difficult by the deafening roar of venting steam.

The sudden extinguishing of all that light and hideous grinding-and-shearing noise as the vessel finally broke up and plunged must have left a dramatic contrasting silence and a terrifying switch into starlit darkness. At that point the horror of their position would have become starkly obvious to the survivors, many more of whom were yet to perish.

Notwithstanding the errors by Brown in *The Last Log of the Titanic* as pointed out by John Ellis, in my opinion the book does make a good case for what happened during those few critical moments and suggests that the vessel grounded rather than collided with the iceberg. The initial damage was not all that great. Many passengers and crew were unaware of the impact and Brown goes to some length to explain what a grounding feels like, as opposed to a collision, and how different a vessel behaves in each case. He convincingly reconstructs the technical aspects of the accident to show that the first damage probably amounted to just a few metres of opening-up and that not more than a few centimetres wide.

The damage, he claims, was more a gentle crushing and rupturing of the rivet integrity rather than the ice acting as a can-opener.

#### NEAR SUCCESS

First Officer Murdoch attempted to “port” the ship around the iceberg and came within a whisker of pulling it off. He had successfully executed a similar manoeuvre in another ship and he understood the dynamics of multiple screw/single rudder ship handling. Brown seems confident that no “full astern” order had been given and that is consistent with Murdoch’s skill.

If Brown’s reconstruction of events is right, a “full astern” order would have been counterproductive. I would be very interested to read a fish-head’s review of Brown’s book and would be happy to lend both that book and my Gardiner and Van der Vat’s *The Riddle of the Titanic*, which gives a scathing review of Lord Ismay and CAPT Smith for that purpose. Brown examined two aspects of the *Titanic* disaster in great detail: the technical aspects of ship design (including the current state of metallurgy) and the seamanship attitudes and actions of CAPT Smith and his duty bridge officers.

If Ismay had not been so obsessed with getting under way again, and CAPT Smith had exercised his better, and legally obligatory, judgement, the ship might well have survived what was almost certainly a manageable situation for which, after all, she had been designed. Murdoch achieved a fair salvaging of the situation but his superiors squandered the chance to recover.

*The Riddle of the Titanic* is a damning review of the cavalier attitude within the whole of the White Star top management. A disaster by *Titanic* or some other White Star liner, seems inevitable. There had been plenty before, including CAPT Smith’s collision in *Olympic* with an RN cruiser, HMS *Hawke*, for which he was found culpable. He had grounded another liner at least once before and one wonders how he rose to be Commodore of the White Star line.

Even as *Titanic* departed Southampton, Smith’s gung-ho attitude nearly caused a collision with the *New York*. The British Board of Trade was uneasy about White Star’s record, even though safety-at-sea regulations were appalling by today’s standards. White Star must have been a right slap-dash outfit.

To give them some due, White Star never claimed *Titanic* was “unsinkable”. The company quite reasonably trumpeted her superior construction but the “unsinkable” adjective was a media beat-up that took wing. In fact, the “unsinkable” description had virtually no currency until after the fact.

Why the fascination?The *Titanic* seems to cast a never-ending fascination over the lore of the sea and various theories have been put forward why, since it was by no means unique in terms of circumstances or numbers of fatalities.

It had, in fact, nearly faded from the scene until the 1953 movie *A Night To Remember* came out and then, more recently, Dr Robert Ballard finally found her so it leapt back into the public’s imagination. After the 1953 movie there was a rush of *Titanic* movies, the most fanciful being *Raise the Titanic*, of which one critic remarked that the movie was so expensive and such a flop that it would have been cheaper to drain the Atlantic.

One theory on the saga’s fascination is that it signified the end of the era of innocence and brought everybody up with a round turn to the realisation that mankind was not as smart and invincible as had been imagined towards the end of the golden Victorian age. My own guess is that, because many of the professionally qualified-to-comment officers perished and the log was lost, little evidence of what really happened was available to the two Boards. Additionally, uncorroborated stories by terrified and confused survivors who were unskilled in maritime affairs were accepted at face value.

The enquiries thus generated more heat than light and mystery still surrounds much of the case. The loss of the log raises some interesting questions since its impounding and preservation should not have been difficult, given the time available and the number of bridge officers who survived.

Suffice to say that Lord Bruce Ismay emerged from the enquiries with a less-than-glowing reputation and went into seclusion (he died in 1937 bearing the shameful epithet ‘Brute’ Ismay).

The pathos of survivors’ stories add an overtone of fascinated horror. All of these things are ingredients for a gripping yarn, as indeed *A Night to Remember* and the more recent *Titanic* were.



One positive effect of the heightened interest in the sinking of the *Titanic* is some very interesting research. For instance, Captain Stanley Lord of the *Californian*, who was the only convenient scapegoat that the British Board of Enquiry could dredge up, is now being steadily exonerated and reinstated as a sensible officer who acted in a professional manner after all.

Closer to home, a local researcher in the Morling College Archives discovered a postcard reference from a Rev. John Harper, who declined a Sydney ecclesiastical post. Instead of sailing to a new job in Australia, he became a *Titanic* passenger headed for America. He perished after heroically giving his lifeboat place to a young mother and child.

The last purported Australian survivor from the *Titanic*, William Hall, lived in Sydney, perhaps Castle Hill, but he died in 1997 and some doubt has been cast on the authenticity of his claims.

Australia is the only place known to have monuments to the band that played as the *Titanic* went down. The three bands of Broken Hill erected a pillar in December 1913 and people of the silver city claim it is the world's only such monument.

However, it is not so well known that a bandstand memorial to the *Titanic* band was built at the lower end of Sturt St, Ballarat, in October 1915. The funds were raised by the Victorian Bands Association and the people of Ballarat but the plaque engraver got it wrong and listed the sinking date as 1913.

#### MUSIC PLAYED?

Speaking of bands, popular legend has it that the ship's band played the hymn *Nearer My God to Thee* as she went down. It's doubtful that they did and while some survivors claim to have heard the hymn being played, reliable eyewitnesses such as Second Officer Lightoller, passenger A.H. Barkworth and retired U.S. Army Colonel Archibald Gracie all aver that the band was playing cheerful ragtime music. Moreover, the band had long since abandoned their instruments before the ship began her final plunge.

However, the band did achieve a later record that takes its place amongst the "biggest" in the *Titanic* corpus. The body of band leader Thomas Hartley, of Colne, Lancashire, was recovered and returned to his home town. His funeral, a symbol for all the ordinary working class people lost in the sinking, was held on the 18th May. Colne's population was only 26,000 but some 40,000 people lined the procession route and packed around the Methodist Chapel. It was therefore the biggest single event, by far, then or since, that commemorated the tragedy.

One *Titanic* coincidence was a Morgan Robertson 1898 story, *The Wreck of the Titan*, published originally as *Futility*. Although a good fiction yarn, some precognition and similar psychic believers find it startlingly prescient in its detail for the *Titanic*. Robertson was a former Merchant Navy officer responding to a perceived disregard of the danger posed by icebergs to the new steamships, with their rapidly growing size and speed. A similar story is claimed to have been published by an even earlier author, W.T. Stead in 1892.

There are poignant stories aplenty arising from the *Titanic*. One concerns stewardess Violet Jessop, who survived both the *Titanic* and *Britannic* disasters. However, the most determined survivor would have to be Fireman John Priest, who served in all three Olympic class ships and who also outlived the loss of both the *Titanic* and *Britannic*.

There are also amusing anecdotes. An American naval historian, Kit Bonner, recounted in a recent USNI *Proceedings* how he had been engaged as a technical adviser by the producers of the recent *Titanic* movie (starring Kate Winslett and Leonardo di Caprio, directed by James Cameron).

#### TITANIC MOVIE

The producers painted some rocks black to simulate coal. It was heavy stuff and was really tiring out the burly extras who had been hired. Bonner suggested that they use real coal because it was much lighter, but the company declined on the grounds that painted rocks looked more realistic.

John Ellis (Newsletter September 2003, p 10) drew attention to the gap between reality and life aboard *Titanic* as depicted in that movie. One example given by Bonner was his advice that having a "scantily clad" Kate Winslett at the prow of the ship enjoying a gentle breeze was silly. "My remark that the windchill factor in the North Atlantic at that time of the year was probably 15 degrees (F) went ignored," he said.

On the other hand, his young granddaughter solved one vexatious problem. "My contribution to this film pales in comparison to my seven-year-old granddaughter Sarah's," Bonner proudly reports. "She accompanied me one day to Skywalker Sound Studios, where she suggested that we use the dinosaur foot stomps from *Jurassic Park* to emulate the rhythmic thump of the *Titanic's* engines." So next time you watch machinery space scenes in a *Titanic* re-run, think *Jurassic Park*.

#### THE REST OF THE CLASS

*Titanic's* two sister ships went on for some years. *Britannic* was the last of the three Olympics and on completion was requisitioned as a hospital ship for WW I. A German mine sank her on her sixth voyage in the Mediterranean on 21 November 1916.

Interestingly, she received almost identical damage to *Titanic* and her Captain Bartlett made the same mistake as *Titanic's* Smith. He attempted to move on again although, in fairness, he aimed to beach her on a nearby island. However, as with *Titanic*, the forward surge was too much for the damaged plates and rivets. They gave way so she, too, went down by the head. Only 21 lives were lost in the

*Britannic* sinking, and those mostly by lifeboats tangling with the still-turning propellers. The warm Mediterranean water was also much more forgiving than the Atlantic's icy grip around *Titanic*.

Robert Ballard has dived on *Britannic* and regards her as one of the best preserved wrecks he has ever seen. Underwater pictures show her lying on her starboard side with the bow and stern sections generally in good shape.

RMS *Olympic* served at Gallipoli and as a passenger ship until broken up in 1936.

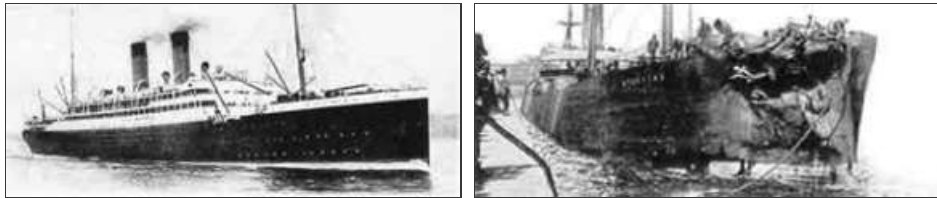
The *Olympic* actually completed a full service life until eventually broken up in 1936. Of interest to Australians is that she took part in the 1915 Gallipoli landings.

The class were actually well-designed ships and the two that were lost could almost certainly have withstood their damage if they hadn't been driven so hard immediately after the disasters.

Brown makes a good case in *Last log of the Titanic* for her being not terribly wounded and he concludes that she should have survived if Ismay and Smith had not been so impatient. The ships were the epitome of their day for sound design and excellent workmanship. In fact, some marine engineers have remarked on the White Star line's ships being sleek and "right-looking" compared with Cunard's propensity to build bulky "top-heavy-looking" liners.

#### A REALLY BIG MYTH

*Titanic* by no means holds the record for number of fatalities, at an estimated 1523 or so. There have been a number of ships, both merchant and naval, that lost as many and in some cases far more souls, some in recent years, even with safety standards and navigational equipment far superior to that in 1912. The *Lusitania* disaster (some 1,198 fatalities) just a couple of years after *Titanic* was just as spectacular and to this day is surrounded by many unanswered questions.



*The Empress of Ireland (left) sank after colliding with the Norwegian collier Norstad (right, showing her damaged bows.)*

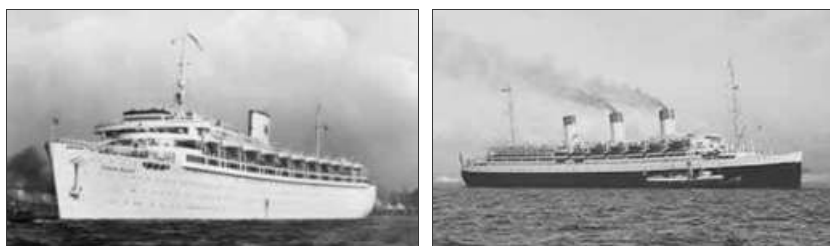
On the 29th May, 1914, the *Empress of Ireland* was struck by a collier in the mouth of the St Lawrence. She was especially designed for superior watertight integrity and boasted 24 watertight bulkheads. Nevertheless, she sank in 14 minutes within close sight of land and 1,014 people went down with her. In December 1987 the super-ferry *Donna Paz* (mentioned by John Ellis) collided with a small tanker in the Philippines and somewhere between 4,341 and 4,500 lives were lost, well eclipsing *Titanic*.

However, the greatest sea disaster of all time, in terms of loss of life, could be the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, 25,484 tons, sunk in the Baltic by a Russian submarine on 30 January 1945, evacuating German civilians from Gdansk (Danzig) towards the end of WW II. The actual number of people who perished remains in doubt because of an unsubstantiated number of refugees aboard, but Robert McAuley conservatively records a loss of 5,200, Irwin Kappes says 5,348 and Mark Weber reports 5,400. A more recent work by Gunter Grass claims 9,000 lives lost, mostly women and children, but all agree that only about 1,239 survived.

The ship was one of Hitler's "Strength through Joy" workers' cruise ships built in the late 1930s but requisitioned by the Kriegsmarine in September 1939 as a hospital ship. She was designed to carry fewer than 2,000 passengers and crew but was grossly overloaded, maybe by a factor of more than five, in a desperate attempt to evacuate civilians from the advancing Russian Army. Heaven only knows how close her metacentric height was to the C of G.

#### NEAR-FREEZING BALTIC

At that time of the year the Baltic temperatures were even worse than *Titanic's* Atlantic. Many people were lost after skidding across the ice-covered sloping deck, while a number of lifeboats could not be lowered because they were frozen to their davits.



*The German ships Wilhelm Gustloff (left) and Cap Arcona sank with great loss of life in WW II.*

Other German ships to sink with great loss of life about that time include the 14,666-ton *General von Steuben* on 10 February 1945, with the loss of 3,500 refugees and the 5,230-ton *Goya* on 16 April with perhaps 7,000 refugees and soldiers killed. The 27,000-ton *Cap Arcona* sank on 3 May with perhaps 5,000 concentration camp prisoners perishing in Lubeck Harbour after a British aircraft attack. The

2,800-ton *Thielbeck* was also sunk in the same 3 May raid, killing another 2,800 prisoners. Only 200 survived.

Grass is a well respected German-Polish writer. His work appears to be well researched, particularly on the *Wilhelm Gustloff* topic. He was born in Danzig, now Gdansk, in 1927 and was a member of the Hitler Youth. The *Wilhelm Gustloff* tragedy was kept quiet by the Germans for a long time and only recently are the circumstances being slowly rediscovered.

The Pacific War also saw its share of tragedy. The *Toyama Maru*, 5,400 tons, was torpedoed by USS *Sturgeon* on 29 June 1944, with the loss of 5,400 troops and POWs. On 18 September 1944, HMS *Tradewind* torpedoed the *Junyo Maru*, 5,065 tons, killing 5,620 POWs and slave labourers.

#### THE NEW GOLDEN AGE

Finally, we tend to think of the 1900s to the late 1930s as the golden era of great liner travel. In fact, more people are travelling by ocean liner and recording more ocean liner passenger miles right now, in 2004, than ever before in history. In 1999 some five and a half million people travelled by sea but by 2002 this figure had increased to more than seven million. About 250 large liners are in operation, filled to 90 per cent or beyond capacity. More than 40 others are building or on order from mainly European yards and orders stretch out for some years ahead. (The Finns, French, Italians and Germans have the game sewn up. The British have evidently lost their manufacturing, marketing or government support skills.) It is sobering to realise that Great Britain, once the world's leader in mega-liner construction, now has its flagships built by others.

The P & O Star *Princess* was a big ship but the new *Queen Mary 2*, launched at St Nazaire in March 2003 and commissioned in January 2004 is now in service. She weighs in at 150,000 tons and carries over 3,000 cruise passengers.

However, even larger vessels are on the drawing boards with tonnages of a quarter of a million under consideration. That equates to a large town with all its infrastructure.

The ocean cruise is the main reason for this shipbuilding surge and evidence of this may be found in any recent photo of any of the bigger Caribbean ports. There will be several giant liners alongside. The Mediterranean and Alaskan cruises are also big business and many Australian ports are used to cruise ships coming and going.

#### HARLAND AND WOLFF

The Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast that employed 30,000 in its heyday is still building big tankers and freighters, but it is hardly a household name today. Wistful reminders are the twin slipways where the Olympics were built. They're still there, unused and derelict alongside an equally unused and derelict car park.

With these new behemoths regularly plying the oceans in large numbers it may be confidently forecast that it will be only a matter of time before one of them faces a disaster. That won't happen in this age of sophisticated technology? Think again of *Andrea Doria* and recall *Queen Elizabeth 2* ripping her bottom open in December 1975 on a Nassau reef. Technology is no guarantee. Consider the latest super-technology in aircraft where sometimes the technology itself was actually the cause of disaster. Never mind the destruction of the mighty New York World Trade Centre by terrorists wielding nothing more lethal than Stanley knife box cutters.

A Cunard spokesman at the 2003 launching of *Queen Mary 2* was asked if he saw any similarities between *Titanic* and the first voyage of the new luxury monster setting out on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic. The Cunard man grandly asserted that no such thing could happen these days. *Queen Mary 2* is double hulled, with the latest in construction methods and metallurgy, 21st century navigation gear, Iceberg Watch, and so on. He actually declared the new Cunarder "unsinkable". There are also plenty of lifeboats, that are well fitted-out, self righting, seaworthy and enclosed.

But pay close attention to the life jacket and abandon ship drills as you leave harbour.

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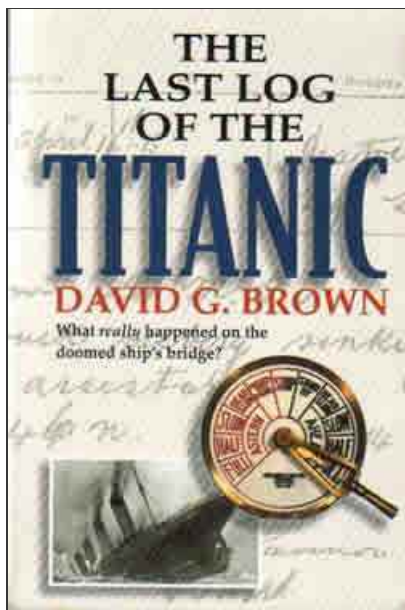
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## Titanic's last log

Posted on [Tuesday 4 August, 2009](#) by [admin](#)



### **The sinking of *Titanic***

Book review by John Ellis

Brown, D.G. (2001) *The Last Log of the Titanic*. Maine International Marine: Camden. 234pp \$36 (used).

The many closet *Titanic* aficionados out there will be fascinated with David Brown's re-creation of the ship's deck log for the first watch of 14 April 1912. Brown holds a US Coast Guard master's licence and teaches professional level USCG licensing courses. He also writes monthly columns for *Boating World* and *Offshore* magazines and is a regular contributor to many other marine-related publications.

Brown leapt to his keyboard following the Hollywood spectacle that he saw more concerned with period costume and a fictional romance than fact. He seeks to debunk many of the myths from that and other feature films, documentaries and stories and to establish just what did occur on the bridge and record these events in his "deck log". He has used the reports of the British and American investigations into the tragedy, 30 books and several websites as references as well as discussions with the Titanic Historical Society.

One of his website references argues, though not convincingly, a quite different sequence of conning orders associated with the collision. Indeed, the websites visited by this reviewer seemed to be a jumble of "facts" submitted by self-proclaimed experts, often in such appalling prose that it led to questioning the value of any of the information.

#### **OOW WATCHBILL**

Bridge watchkeepers will be interested in the anchor clankers' watchbill. After the master there was a chief officer and six officers. The chief, 1st and 2nd officer kept one in three while the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th officers were watch about, ensuring three officers on watch at any one time. The junior officers kept conventional watch hours, but the senior officers changed half way through a watch so that 2nd Officer Lightoller, the senior survivor, went on watch at 1800 and was relieved by 1st Officer Murdoch at 2200. Lookouts stood two hours on and four off and quartermasters were watch about with two hours at the helm and two hours as OOW's runner when on watch.

#### **THREE PROPELLERS, 17 KETTLES**

The description of the propulsion system is minimal, not quite correct and will disappoint engineers. *Titanic* had three screws and one rudder. The outer screws, 7.2 m diameter with three blades, were driven by triple expansion reversible steam engines that had one high pressure, one intermediate pressure and two low pressure cylinders. The centre screw, 5 m diameter with four blades, was driven by a steam turbine fed from the exhaust of the two reciprocating engines. It had no astern capability. All were coupled directly to the propeller shafts so that 75 rpm achieved 22.25 knots, the speed reported at the time of the grounding.

Full power delivered 80 rpm. There were four 400 kW generators and two refrigeration compressors. Saturated steam at 200 psi came from 12 double-ended and five single-ended fire tube cylindrical boilers that together consumed 650 tons of coal per hour. There were six boiler rooms, an engine room for the reciprocating engines, another for the turbine and another for the auxiliary machinery. All this required 30 officers and 271 men.

Brown is critical of the findings of both the American and British investigations. The American report, chaired by Senator W.A. Smith, demonstrated his panel's lack of seafaring experience and Lord Mersey, the British Wreck Commissioner, was mindful of current rivalry between Great Britain and Germany on the Atlantic passenger run and tension leading up to World War I.

#### **SCAPEGOAT**

Neither report found Mr J.B. Ismay or Captain E.J. Smith to blame but found a live scapegoat in Captain Lord of *Californian* for failing to react to distress signals. Brown lays the blame with Ismay and Smith.

Ismay was the general manager of both International Mercantile Marine and its subsidiary, the White Star Line. He was aboard *Titanic*. He sought to attract passengers to his ships and indeed had secured finance for the three super liners, *Olympic*, *Titanic* and *Britannic*, to

be built at Harland & Wolff. He also saw to Smith's appointment as master, seeing him as compliant to business-oriented outlooks that sometimes overrode good seamanship. This led to Titanic sailing with a smouldering bunker fire and maintaining near top speed into seas reported to contain field ice and icebergs. Brown maintains that because of First Officer Murdoch's skilful conning of the ship on sighting the iceberg, the ship could have remained afloat until assistance arrived, even though the bottom was holed. Ismay's desire to proceed to Halifax after the grounding aggravated the flooding beyond the capability of damage control facilities, and the rest is history.

For an account that seeks to correct others, a few errors seem to remain. He refers to ships in the current politically correct neuter although his contemporary quotations use feminine participles. For one who gives an excellent appendix of nautical terms and is at pains to explain the nuances of terms less familiar to landlubbers, Brown seems to be one who is on, not in, a ship. This reviewer's divisional officer would squirm.

The cover depicts the ship going down with smoke coming from all four funnels. In fact, only the first three exhausted boiler flue gas while the fourth improved symmetry and ducted ventilation exhaust. The cover also portrays Captain Smith with an "unknown" officer. One of Brown's references identifies the officer as Purser McElroy.

#### [PROP BLADES?](#)

When discussing engine vibration, Brown states that all three propellers had four blades. In fact, from photographs and descriptions of machinery in his references, the arrangement was as described above. Brown gives output from the three engines at about 45,000 hp. One of his references clearly states there was 15,000 hp available from each of the reciprocating engines and 16,000 hp from the turbine. He also suggests that Murdoch did not order full astern for fear of snapping propeller shafts, yet another of his references states that during builder's trials, Titanic did apply full astern from 20 knots ahead, stopping in just over 780 m.



*The Titanic propellers*

Interestingly, Brown calculates that the iceberg was 835 metres ahead when the lookouts rang down the warning to the bridge and then compliments Murdoch's ship handling to avoid a head-on collision. In a summary of key survivors, Murdoch is ranked second officer instead of first and fifth Officer Lowe is recorded as dying in 1964 aged 61. This suggests that Lowe was aged nine when Titanic went down. In fact, Lowe died in 1944 aged 61.

#### [HARLAND & WOLFF](#)

Brown describes Thomas Andrews, travelling aboard, as a representative of Harland & Wolff. His other references all have Andrews listed more specifically as managing director of the shipbuilding company.

Nevertheless, anchor clankers who are *Titanic* buffs will find much of interest and value. Of course, the loss of *Titanic* would be named by most people as the worst peacetime maritime disaster of all time, with over 1500 of the 2200 souls on board lost. Yet in 1987 a ferry went down off the Philippines with a loss of over 4,000 pilgrims. Would Hollywood see box office potential in that story?

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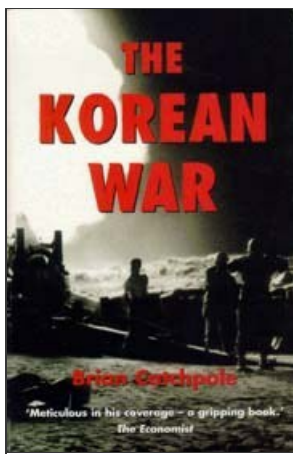
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## **Korean War**

Posted on [Monday 3 August, 2009](#) by [admin](#)

### [The Korean War](#)

Book review by Fred Lane



Catchpole, B. *The Korean War 1950-53*. Robinson: London, 2000. 368pp, \$22.68.

Written from the viewpoint of a British National Serviceman, this book gives very detailed blow-by-blow descriptions of most of the important land actions in Korea. The author is clearly Army-aware but he is also very much cognisant of the naval and air contributions to the war.

The soft cover version of this book includes a thoroughly detailed index, notes and references for each chapter, together with thoughtful appendices listing common Korean language place name suffixes, national casualties in UN forces and the principal USA civilian and military leaders.

It starts logically at the beginning, with the notification to President Truman of the crossing of the 39th parallel border on Saturday 25 June 1950. It deals with actions as late as 1988, with an admission by North Korea that one of its submarines, caught in fishing nets, had been engaged in clandestine operations against South Korea. It shows how China asserted itself to international military

prominence with decisive and surprising Peoples Liberation Army participation in the conflict.

#### WELL-ILLUSTRATED

The book is well-illustrated with photographs and reproductions of propaganda pamphlets. There are many maps and diagrams, but some of them fail to include all the place names used in the nearby text. This leaves the reader hunting from map to map seeking to obtain a better grasp of the action.

The army actions described are in strict chronological order and the author pulls no punches with well-documented criticism of sometimes poor leadership. He makes up for this, in one sense, by unstinting praise for units, including Australian units, who held on or took ground despite the odds or despite the ultimate strategic logic of the particular action.

#### OPERATION STRANGLE

He attempts to analyse the effects of naval and air contributions to the war. However, while correctly detecting shortcomings in the Operation Strangle strategy, to interdict supplies moving to the front line using land-based and carrier-based aircraft, he seems to record without adverse comment the overly optimistic claims of damage caused by destroyer and frigate naval gunfire support.

Not mentioned in the book are the losses in action of RAN pilots LEUT Keith Clarkson, SBLT Dick Sinclair and ASLT Ron Coleman, all 805 Squadron Sea Fury pilots from HMAS *Sydney*.

It is a tough job to keep track of all the ships involved, but the book contains a number of internal inconsistencies with ship deployment. There are even errors with major warships such as aircraft carriers. His RN/RAN sequence and aircraft identification is erratic. On page 315 Catchpole says on "29 October 1952 Fleet Air Arm Seafires machine-gunned the enemy". On that date these must have been Sea Furies from the British carrier HMS *Ocean*, not the Seafires that were briefly employed only at the very start of the war.

Other than a brief description of *Valley Forge*, American aircraft carriers get very short shrift, despite them contributing by far the major share of naval ordnance and reporting greatest losses.

Indeed, many might argue that it was the USN's decision to strike "strategic" targets, previously reserved for the USAF, that finally unstalled the Panmanjong Peace Talks.

#### HMAS SYDNEY

Catchpole also makes no mention of the outstanding East Coast deployments by HMAS *Sydney* and her aircraft, one of which, on 10-11 October 1951, sucked in a probable whole division to defend against an amphibious landing feint in the Kojo area. The enemy received a severe mauling from the Sydney Air Group and big guns from ships including *New Jersey*, the 16-inch battleship.

While the battleships were both accurate and devastating, at ranges of 20 miles or more inland, the destroyers and frigates achieved little. The battleships were rarely more than 50 yards off target with their first ranging shot. The destroyers and frigates shot a lot of shell, but even after painstakingly getting their ranging shots to fall somewhere near the target, their fire for effect broadsides would typically fall in 150 by 50 yards patterns. Even then, it could be practically guaranteed that the centre of the pattern would drift randomly fifty yards or more during the fire for effect sequence. Fortunately, spotter RAN Sea Furies also carried three-inch rockets with 60-pound heads and 600 rounds of high explosive and incendiary 20 mm cannon. Between the aircraft and the ships most designated targets received at least a nominal pasting.

#### MIG 15S SCOUT OCEAN

Strangely, in the short "Naval Operations" chapter, despite noting the claimed Mig 15 shot down by LEUT Carmichael and his flight of four Sea Furies on 9 August 1952, there is no mention of the subsequent "pay back" that included a flight of Migs scouting *Ocean*. This at least contributed to, if not triggered, the wise decision to withdraw *Ocean* from her unnecessarily provocative North Yellow Sea position, back to the usual RN/RAN West Coast carrier spot, below the 39th parallel, out of Mig range.

The attention to detail and dramatic descriptions of land battles lend authenticity to Catchpole's tales of action in Korea. The naval and air errors are disappointing, but they do not detract much from the book's primary thrust, a meticulous description and analysis of the land

battles of the Korean War. Catchpole's expertise is clearly land-oriented and he makes the most of his Army-source material.

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