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Non-Fiction Pocket Book Reviews

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Armistead, Leigh: *AWACS & Hawkeyes: The Complete History of Airborne Early Warning Aircraft* (2002)

A well-researched yet nonetheless disappointing book.

On the plus side, it includes a lot of interesting details, especially about the early US Air Force AEW aircraft and the missions they flew.

On the minus side, it's not very engaging; the author's writing style is fairly dry. He presents a lot of facts, but not always in a well-

developed context. And I really wish he had more about AEW procedures and tactical use, especially on the naval side; he gives brief snippets of this, but he basically assumes that the reader understands those points. For instance, he'll say "such-and-such a mod added umptyfratz capability," without explaining what umptyfratz is, how it was used, and why it is important in the larger context of the AEW mission.

Bova, Ben: *Welcome to Moonbase* (1987)

This is an examination of a hypothetical moonbase community, written as an orientation guide for new employees. Neat moonbase design, although I personally would have preferred a little more meat regarding technical issues.

Cahill, Thomas: *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (1996)

A fine example showing that history need not be dry and boring; this book was truly a delight. Starting with the end of the Roman Empire, it is a book about the transition from the Classical to the Medieval, the bringing of Roman-influences (read: religion and literacy) to Ireland, and the subsequent use of those newfound passions by the Irish to preserve the great works of the West from the general chaos following the fall of Rome. I'm not a specialist in this time period -- my historical interest generally ends sometime in the late Roman Empire, then picks up again around the Peace of Westphalia -- but this book seems well-researched, despites its meager pagecount. It is not hard to see why this book is a bestseller.

Cave Brown, Anthony: *Bodyguard of Lies (1975)*

A very enjoyable book describing not only the strategic deception campaigns used by the Allies in World War II, but how those campaigns interwined with the anti-Hitler conspiracy in the German military. This books raises some disturbing questions regarding the necessity of D-Day, questions which will not be answered until the sealed records are opened in another twenty years or so. I have heard that Brown's scholarship is somewhat questioned, and that the certain aspects are painted in much

clearer terms than is really appropriate. I'm afraid I can comment either way on the veracity of that claim; regardless, it was very enjoyable book. [It was purely coincidental that I finished this book on D-Day.]

Clancy, Tom: *Carrier: A Guided Tour of an Aircraft Carrier* (1999)

I've written a couple of harsh reviews of Tom Clancy books on this page, specifically for *Submarine* (poor editing and inaccurate illustrations) and *SSN* (bad prose, bad technical information, and boring to boot). I am pleased to say that *Carrier* is free of the problems I found in those other books. It is well-written, well-researched, and overall a very enjoyable read. For anyone wanting an introduction to aircraft carriers, this is about as good as it gets. Well worth the US$16 price tag.

Clancy, Tom: *SSN: Strategies of Submarine Warfare* (1996)

Marketing professionals often speak of the concept of "synergy," whereby the excitement of a major event, such as a movie, can carry over into other fields (e.g., action figures, games, breakfast cereal, books), and vice versa. I am not sure what the antonym to synergy is, but I have found an example: Tom Clancy's *SSN: Strategies of Submarine Warfare*, published at the same time as the computer game of the same name. This book manages to take a topic that I find inherently interesting -- military submarines and submarine warfare -- and turn it into a book so bad that I finally started failing morale checks 100 pages from the end.

The book is a fictional account of the combat tour of the USS CHEYENNE, a late model LOS ANGELES-class attack submarine, during a near-term conflict with the People's Republic of China over the Spratly Islands. (The U.S. was involved because American property was seized and U.S. allies threatened.) The American boat, under the control of future Medal of Honor recipient (I read the ending) "Mack" Mackey, goes on a rampage, racking up 60 kills in three months. The book isn't really a novel; it's more of a war diary, told from the point of view of the captain. (ndeed, Mackey is the only member of the sub's crew to even have a name.

This book fails for several reasons. First, it's just plain boring. American submarines and their crews are good, real good, but for the CHEYENNE it's like shooting fish in a barrel. At one point, for example the she single-handedly takes on *seven* AKULA II-class submarines, top-of-the-line Russian submarine manned by Russian "advisors," and dispatches six of them in about three pages. The greatest threat to the CHEYENNE appears to be that she might wear out her torpedo tubes from all the successful launches. Yawn.

Second, the book is poorly written, full of stilted, inane prose that serves no purpose than as filler. For example: "The [sonar] consoles, which looked like computer screens with green lines running through them, were often the sonar operator's most important ally." [p. 20] Gee, that's a surprise -- the sonar operators depend on the sonar equipment to do their job. And is "ally" really the correct explanation of this relationship? (Compare with "The stoves, which had small jets of flame for heating pots, were often the cooks' most important ally.")

Finally, the book is sloppy from a technical standpoint. Under one photo, for example, is a caption claiming the picture to be of a LA-class boat "with its sails extended." Now, the sail of a submarine is the tall structure on top of the sub, what was often referred to as the "conning tower" (although I believe that the more correct term is "fairwater"); the British refer to this as the "fin." The horizontal control surfaces mounted on this submarine's sail are called "sailplanes," and are used to maintain attitude control (and hence depth). Even saying that the sub had "its sailplanes extended" would be incorrect, as it implies that they can retract, which is not true for that class of submarine. (Later model LAs do have retractable bowplanes, but no LA had retractable sailplanes.)

Categorizing all the examples of bad writing in this book would take more effort than I am willing to spend. Suffice it to say that Tom Clancy needs to do a better job of supervising his ghostwriters; his name is obviously a valuable commodity, but it will cease to be so if we, the reading public, are not assured of getting our money's worth when he uses his name to sell a

product.

Clancy, Tom: *Submarine: A Guided Tour Inside a Nuclear Warship* (1993)

I had been looking forward to this book for some time, and having recently read Norman Friedman's *U.S. Submarines Since 1945: An Illustrated Design History*, the subject was fresh in my mind. I must say, though, that I found Clancy's book disappointing, not by its introductory nature -- on that level it works quite well -- but by the numerous inaccuracies and poor editing.

Inaccuracies, for example, include the following:

1) The side illustrations of the submarines are just plain unreliable: the SKIPJACKs are shown with a parallel midbody section, when the hull form was actually a teardrop (see Friedman p. 132 for an excellent illustration of this); the PERMIT, STURGEON, and LOS ANGELES classes are shown with exagerated sails (note that the illustration of the LA class does not match other illustrations of the LAs in the book!), and all are shown with bows that are far too square.

2) Clancy states specifically in one section (p. 59) that the cylindrical midbody of the later attack boats generates less drag than the pure teardrop hull form of the earlier SKIPJACK class. This simply isn't true. Every book I have ever read on the subject, including some fairly technical descriptions (for example, Friedman, previously cited, and Burcher and Rydill, *Concepts in Submarine Design*) indicate that the parallel midbody of the later fast attack subs was a compromise designed to aid manufacture, and that "it is only slightly less efficient than the true teardrop shape." This is a long way from being more efficient. Note also that what we are discussing here is form drag, the drag caused by the shape of the hull and its appendages; there is also drag caused by the friction of the area of the wetted surface, which in turn is modified by the "smoothness" of the skin.

I must say, though, that there are some things that it appears to have gotten correct, that many other books have gotten wrong. The conventional wisdom in the civilian press appears to be that

every attack submarine design has been more capable in all categories than its predecessors, when more credible sources state otherwise. Clancy does manage to notice, for example, that the PERMITs and STURGEONs are slower but dive deeper than the SKIPJACKs, and that the LAs are faster than the PERMITs and STURGEONs -- indeed, are even faster than the SKIPJACKs -- but that said speed was bought (in part) by thinning the hull, thereby decreasing maximum depth. Of course, the exact numbers are classified, but the general information is available through congressional testimony and other sources. Interestingly, another Clancy book, *SSN: Strategies of Submarine Warfare* (released in conjunction with the computer game of the same name) does not get this correct, which makes me wonder how closely he supervises his ghostwriters.

It also makes me wonder about his editor, for *Submarine* has numerous flaws in that department as well. In addition to the inconsistent illustrations mentioned above, we have:

1) Identical illustrations presented more than once (e.g., pages 47, 53);

2) Illustrations unrelated to the section of the book being discussed; for example, do I really want to see a plan of the galley while reading about the Vertical Launch System? (page 101);

3) Duplicative prose; compare, for example, two passages concerning the ship's laundry:
"About the size of a phone booth, it handles the laundry for the entire boat, with a washer and dryer that would seem small in most apartments." [p. 102-3]
"At about the size of a phone booth, it has a tiny washer and dryer that would hardly be satisfactory in an apartment unit." [p. 145]

4) Typos and/or inconsistent prose: For example:
Is the phrase "diving the tube" (p. 95) or "diving the tub" (p. 169)? (It's tube.)
"Following the war, Italy [singular] began to build up a substantial-force of diesel-electric boats [plural] with units constructed in their [plural] own yards." [p. 299] So, is the possessive plural pronoun

supposed to refer to the boats or to Italy?

5) Erratic prose; for example, think about whether these sentences, taken from page 111, seem to be in the correct order:
"The obvious one is the question of how to protect the men aboard from the harmful effects of the reactor's radiation. As we mentioned before, the early Soviet nuclear boats scrimped on shielding and became cancer incubators for the naval hospitals of that now-defunct nation. The answer, in a word, is shielding. The entire structure surrounding the reactor is layered with a variety of different shielding materials."

Overall, as a cheap ($15 or so) primer on the subject, it is an okay book, as it introduces the reader to some basic fundamentals regarding how submarines operate and what it is like to live on one. It also devotes much of its length to the other premier Western submarine power, the Royal Navy, which I view as a plus. It is not as good a book as it should have been, though, and I wouldn't trust its technical details. There has been a new edition, but I do not know how much it has been revised.

Compton-Hall, Richard: *Sub vs. Sub: The Tactics and Technology of Underwater Warfare* (1988)

On the surface, this book appears to be just another late-1980s military book in the vein of Salamander's "Modern Combat" series. This book is much more sophisticated than that. Compton-Hall, a submarine commander turned historian, sprinkles his book with interesting tidbits I had not read elsewhere (e.g., the machinery raft in RN submarines "apparently has to be locked at higher speeds") and perspectives that could only come from a former practitioner of the submarine arts. Overall, this book is very informative.

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de Camp, L. Sprague, & de Camp, Catherine Crook: *Science Fiction Handbook, Revised* (1975)

There are plenty of science fiction "how to" books out there, but this onefocuses as much on "how to be a science fiction writer" as "how to write science fiction." This 1975 revision of the 1955

Science Fiction Handbook shows its age in a number of places, but offers some valuable insight into how to approach the idea of writing science fiction. Well worth the effort.

Dunham, Roger: *Spy Sub: Top Secret Mission to the Bottom of the Pacific* (1996)

This is the first person accountof the mission of a US submarine to locate the wreck of a Soviet submarine on the floor of the Pacific ocean. The book is long on the details of submarine life and low on the details of the mission, the goal of which most of the crew (including the author, who was a reactor operator) was unaware of at the time. I found it a very interesting book, because I'm interested in submarines in general; those who are looking for technical details about the mission will be disappointed. This should reflect more on whomever named the book rather than the author.

Forward, Robert: *Indistinguishable from Magic* (1995)

I would describe this book as "mostly enjoyable." Overall, I think Forward is a better science writer than science fiction writer, and this book of scientific essays covers some very interesting topics, from FTL drives to orbital beanstalks and semi–magical power sources. Definitely worth the effort.

Friedman, Norman: The *Illustrated Design History* series

Perhaps the definitive history of modern warship development, at least in the US. Very thorough, well researched, well illustrated series about the major warship classes of the United States Navy. There are only two problems with the books. First, some of them are ten to fifteen years old now, and while that really doesn't matter as far as battleships are concerned, *U.S. Aircraft Carriers* (1983) could use an update. Second, at $65 a crack (for 450 or so 8.5x11 inch pages), these books could be considered a bit on the expensive side (although no more so than the majority of the Naval Institue Press' selections).

To date I have read *U.S Submarines Since 1945* (1994); the books

on battleships, carriers, cruisers, destroyers, and small combattants are queued and waiting.

Gantt, Michael: *A NonChurchgoer's Guide to the Bible* (1997)

Here is Ray Olson's review from Booklist, which does a better job than I at explaining this book in a single paragraph:

> By "nonchurchgoer," Gantt means someone who barely knows Adam from Steve (or is that Eve?). He assumes no acquaintance with the Bible at all and considerable trepidation at cracking the covers of what looks like a formidable tome. He means to make the big book approachable by first discussing what it is like (an anthology rather than a novel); the imposing look, feel, and scholarly impedimenta of most editions of it; and the differences in style and culture between the Bible's writers and contemporary people. He then turns to the books of the Protestant Bible, not so much outlining each of them as characterizing by evoking main themes and tone. He concludes with some tips on getting started as a Bible reader, advice on how to read it, and his own belief that "The Bible is a compendium of moral thoughts designed to nourish moral minds." Perhaps the best part of Gantt's presentation is his manner. Although ingratiating enough, he never talks down to readers but strives to be as accessible as he hopes to make his subject.

A good introduction to the subject, well worth the money.

George, James: *History of Warships* (1998)

The author says he decided to write this book because, while there were numerous books about individual types of warships (such as the Friedman series cited above), there was no general history of warships as a type. This book seeks to fill that void, and generally does a good job. George first discusses the various timeperiod groupings usually considered relevant by naval scholars, (Age of

Galleys, Age of Fighting Sail, Age of Steam, etc.,) and then proceeds to methodically describe the development of warships in each of the timeperiods. Especially useful are his efforts to tie together the evolutionary threads between the various timeperiods, often by discussing the analogous missions warships of different periods were called upon to perform. Overall, a very solid book, which provides a valuable overview of the subject. If it has any weakness, it is in the treatment of modern vessels, and in his (very limited) thoughts on the future of warship design and acquisition.

Hughes, Wayne: *Fleet Tactics: Theory and Practice* (1986)

Naval tactics is often thought of as being the art and science of maneuvering a ship. Hughes, a retired naval officer, shows that it is much more. With analysis of the various elements that make up tactical theory (e.g., massing, scouting), Hughes examines both historical and contemporary examples. Along the way, he illustrates how the technology of the day was reflected in the characteristics of the various dominate platforms (e.g., sailing ship of the line, battleships, and aircraft carriers), and the assumptions underlying their use.

This book is a must-read for any one who wants to understand naval tactics, ship design, and force structure, especially those science fiction authors or game designers who wish to extrapolate naval conflict into a future age.

There is a newer edition entitled *Fleet Tactics and Coastal Combat*. Aside from a shift in contemporary focus from blue water combat against the Soviets to littoral operations, it is largely the same.

Luttwak, Edward: *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (1976)

Very good -- almost makes me wish I had pursued that history doctorate after all. While some question Luttwak's historical details, this is a must-read for anyone who wants to write or even understand military strategy, whether in the distant past or the far future.

Maccoby, Hyam: *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (1986)

Maccoby starts by pointing out something that is obvious, yet is usually forgotten -- that Jesus Christ did not write the New Testament, any more than the historical Hamlet wrote the play which bears his name. Paul, argues Maccoby, is Christianity's equivalent of Shakespeare, and like the Bard, Paul and his disciples were more concerned with telling a good tale -- in creating a myth -- than they were about historical accuracy.

The details, while important, are too long for this forum, so let me say something about the method. Historians (which I am by inclination, if not by complete education) study history by examining the primary documents and pulling out details and nuances which might otherwise be missed. They do this while keeping in mind the idea that the primary documents themselves are often subjective and inaccurate. Good historians are able to balance all of these concerns and figure out the story underneath.

Maccoby appears to be a good historian. I say "appears" because I am not an expert in this area, and hence do not have the knowledge necessary to judge the accuracy of some of his claims, e.g., proper translations of documents written in a millienia-old variant of a language I do not comprehend. With that caveat in mind, when Maccoby is discussing his research, and not his assumptions, I think that he makes a good case for the argument that:
• the early Christians did not see themselves as members of a new religion, rather as the followers of a prophet entirely consistent with established Jewish tradition;
• the New Testament's portrayal of the Pharisees is highly biased, and is due more to the split between Christianity and Judaism which occurred in the second half of the 1st cenutry AD (when the Gospels were actually written) than to the actual relationship between Jesus and his "Nazarenes" and the Pharisees at the time;
• similarly, the authors of the New Testament played up the religious elements and played down the political elements of the Nazarene movement, obscuring the role of the High Priest (who was NOT a Pharisee!) as the quisling of the Romans;
• Paul essentially lied about his own background, including his

religious training;

• Paul "borrowed" some of the major elements of Christianity from pagan religions and radically reworked the vocabulary of the Jewish parts, thus de-Judaizing the movement and essentially creating a new religion, which brought him into conflict with Peter and the Nazarene movement, a conflict which the authors of the New Testaments -- who were Pauline Christians -- strove to cover up; and

• this split between the Pauline and Petrine branches of Christianity was resolved in the former's favor by the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, a blow from which the Nazarene movement never recovered.

For such a slim book (237 pages, including footnotes and bibliography), there is a lot of detail in there. My main criticism is that Maccoby makes certain assumptions -- e.g., that Paul's "conversion" was a psychological breakdown rather than an encounter with God, that Jesus himself was simply one of a series of people the Romans executed for preaching sedition -- that are not germane to the central argument. This is aside from whether you or I or anyone else believe in the divinity of Jesus. Why he does this is not entirely clear. As a Talmudic scholar, it may be self-evident to him that Jesus was just a man. Or it may be that he is trying to avoid the issue of divine inspiration, although it is hard to see how he could accomplish that by taking a position that is guaranteed to alienate a portion of the people reading the book. (As you may gather from the description above, such alienation is almost inevitable.) Regardless of the reason, one could easily ignore those assumptions and still affirm both belief in the divinity of Christ and the accuracy of Maccoby's historical scholarship.

In conclusion, this is an interesting book, well worth the time and money spent on it. I look forward to exploring the topic in greater depth, and in attempting to track down Maccoby's more academic treatment of the same material, Paul, Pharisaism and Gnosticism, which he lists as "forthcoming" in 1986 when this book was published.

McPhee, John: *Looking for a Ship* (1990)

An excellent little book about life in the US Merchant Marine.

Pulitzer Prize winner McPhee (whose many previous books include such notables as *The Curve of Binding Energy* and *The Deltoid Pumpkin Seed*) spent forty-two days aboard the S.S. *Stella Lykes*, one of the few US-flagged merchantment remaining. Worth reading for the description of the captain alone.

Musicant, Ivan: Battleship at War (1986)

This is about the American battleship Washington during the Second World War. Commissioned on the eve of the war, the Washington was the only American battleship to ever sink another dreadnought in combat -- and she hit with her first salvo, an unheard of event in battleship warfare. She was present at every major battle the USN fought in the Pacific. Overall, an excellent book in terms of getting an idea of what life aboard a battleship was like.

O'Connell, Robert: Sacred Vessels: The Cult of the Battleship and the Rise of the U.S Navy (1991)

A very disappointing and amateurish book. See my [Sacred Vessels page](#) for details.

Paul, Jim: Catapult: Harry and I Build A Siege Weapon (1991)

From the back cover:

> *It all started when Jim Paul found out he couldn't bring a grapefruit-sized piece of two-billion-year-old quartzite onto the plane because, the attendant said, it could be used as a weapon. That's ridiculous, he thought, holding the rock in his hand. And then he realized that, at one time, such a rock had been a weapon, and a catapult had launched it. So was born the idea to build a medieval catapult, exact in every detail.*

Well, that's not quite what happened in the end (unless medieval catapults were built with torsion arms made out of truck springs), but this book is a delightful little romp that touches on history,

sociology, and, oh yeah, catapults. In tone, it reminded me a lot of Thomas Cahill's How the Irish Saved Civilization. A lot of fun -- I recommend it.

Ponting, Clive: Armageddon: The Reality Behind the Distortions, Myths, Lies, and Illusions of World War II (1995)

The author, a former assistant secretary at the Ministry of Defence during the Thatcher administration, is a professor of politics at University of Swansea (Wales), and is presumably familiar with the traditional standards of historical research. I say "presumably," because this book offers little evidence in support of that proposition. There is not a single footnote or citation in the entire work, nor is there any commentary on the sources used. One gets the distinct impression that he simply collected whatever interesting tidbits from whatever secondary sources he happened to come upon, and then organized them into a separate book.

In fairness, though, the book isn't really intended as a scholarly work; rather, its purpose is to shed light on topics often lost in more traditional works. Rather than organizing the books as a traditional chronology of the war, Ponting divides the war into subject areas, spending a chapter on each. These areas are, in order of presentation: Origins, Neutrals, Allies, Mobilization, Strategy, Technology, Combat, Civilians, Occuptation, Liberation, and Aftermath. While this would not work in a book that aimed to be a general history of the war, this book aims to be a supplement to such histories, and so the scheme works fairly well.

Unfortunately, though, there are problems; I know more than a little about the Second World War, and on a couple of occasions I remember thinking that Ponting either misreported his "fact" or related it out of context, giving the impression of caprice or incompetence when there was, in reality, a much more charitable interpretation. This is turn led me to wonder about his sources; as I mentioned earlier, there is not a single citation in the entire work, which leads me to treat all of the "facts" with a great degreee of skepticism. Footnotes, of course, do not have some mystical ability to make an assertion the Truth; they do allow one to explore the matter further, however, or shed some light on the authenticity of

the assertion. To paraphrase Ronald Reagan: "Trust, but verify."

Overall, I feel I got my money's worth (having purchased it out of the discount bin at my local bookstore), although the publisher should have included a label reading "Warning: Must be taken with salt."

This book should not be confused with Armageddon: The Battle for Germany, 1944–1945 by Max Hastings.

Preston, Antony: Submarine Warfare: An Illustrated History (1998)

A very nice introduction to the subject, full of some interesting tidbits that are, unfortunately, unsourced. (Example: Preston claims that the "rumours of a diving depth of 900m put about in the West were nowhere near the truth. The 'Alfa' had a designed operating depth of 320–350m, and a crush-depth of 400m.") Overall, worth the money, if you can stand the greater-than-usual number of typos.

Roberts, John: Battlecruisers (1998)

Battlecruisers is, first and foremost, a design history of the British battlecruisers developed immediately before and after the First World War. As any student of naval history knows, battlecruisers combined large guns with high speed (and, consequently, light armor) in a package which some felt would eventually replace the battleship. This, of course, did not happen, and even 80 years later there is a considerable disagreement over these "greyhounds of the sea."

As somone who likes getting into the gritty details of ship designs, I found Battlecruisers to be an interesting book. Unfortunately, though, it's also a short book, a mere 128 pages (plus fold-out blueprints). This is a shame, as while the book of necessity mentrions some of the controversy surrounding these ships, it does not delve nearly deeply enough into the basic rationale for the ships as expressed by their creator, Lord Fisher. On the other hand, one could make the argument that such details are out of

place in a design history, and furthermore that Fisher himself was never able to clearly articulate their rationale in anything other than pithy phrases such as "speed is armor."

Overall, a worthy addition to my bookshelf.

Savage, Marshall: The Millennial Project: Colonizing the Galaxy in 8 Easy Steps (1992)

I enjoyed the first thirty pages of this book so much that I called up the Living Universe Foundation (website) and ordered a second copy in hardcover. I'm not sure I buy all of Mr. Savage's calculations, but the man sure has vision, and the book is definitely worth the $25 (hardcover) price tag.

Sontag, Sherry, & Drew, Christopher: Blind Man's Bluff: The Untold Story of American Submarine Espionage (1998)

In the 1980s Drew wrote a series of articles for the Chicago Tribune about US submarine espionage missions during the Cold War. After a decade, those articles have been rewritten, expanded, and updated into this book. This is the definitive book on the subject -- run, don't walk to your nearest bookstore.

Sumida, Jon Tetsuro: In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology, and British Naval Policy, 1889–1914 (1989)

Very interesting book. Absolutely necessary to understand the Royal Navy in the time of the First World War and immeditaely before. The book focuses in large part on fire control issues, and the non-adoption of particular fire control technologies. I would like to have seen much more on other technologies, such as engine development, etc.. I would also like to have seen a little bit more background; Sumida mentions the fued between Admiral Lord Charles Beresford and Admiral Jackie Fisher, for example, but does not explore its causes or full ramifications. Overall, a good book, worth tracking down, but not a complete picture.

Thomas, Elizabeth Marshall: The Tribe of Tiger: Cats and Their

Culture (1994)

Thomas is an anthopologist by training, and sometimes I can't help but wonder if she is anthopomorphizing just a bit -- a charge that I believe was leveled at her regarding her last New York Times bestseller, The Hidden Life of Dogs. Nevertheless, I do agree with her central premise -- that cats of all sizes, like most animals, have a culture; that is, they learn behavior regarding the proper way to interact with each other and the rest of the world, including humans. This book is an absolute must for all cat lovers.

Tyler, Patrick: Running Critical: The Silent War, Rickover, and General Dynamics (1986)

Based on interviews with the three men and secret tape recordings, this book tells the story of three men obsessed:

• Admiral Hyman Rickover, the "father of the nuclear navy," who insisted on having his own way, for good or ill, and who would destroy all who opposed him;

• David Lewis, chairman of defense contractor General Dynamics, whose concern for his own reputation led him to take actions that would eventually destroy it; and

• Takis Veliotis, the general manager who saved GD's Electric Boat division, but who was brought down by indiscretions in his past. There are no heroes in this book; there are no villians, either. Each man is presented as a complex figure, with good intentions but tragic flaws. Lewis, I think, comes off the worst, as his flaws focus on his inability to take responsibility for his own actions. Veliotis comes off the best, even though his flaw -- he accepted over a million dollars in kickbacks before he moved to Electric Boat -- is the most damning. Rickover remains the most interesting figure; he frequently destroyed the lives of those who opposed him, and could be mean and petty, but one gets the feeling that he really believes what he is doing is for the best of the country. I read this book because I am interested in submarines, particularly postwar attack submarines. This book confirmed a few conclusion that I had tentatively reached before: that the LOS ANGELES class submarine may be the most overrated submarine in postwar history; that the security of the United States was materially damaged by Rickover's actions; and that Eisenhower's warnings about the military-industrial complex were well-founded. Overall,

a very good book.

Wildenberg, Thomas: Gray Steel and Black Oil: Fast Tankers and Replenishment at Sea in the U.S. Navy, 1912–1992 (1996)

To be honest, I came away from this book unable to determine if I liked it or not. It is certainly an authoritative (perhaps the authoritative) treatment of the subject, but it was somewhat colorless; a good author can present facts about a dry topic, but a great author can make the experience a truly enjoyable one. (I actually think that this is a very interesting topic, but I can see where others might not share that opinion.) Part of the problem, I think, is simply that the author assumes an awful lot of knowledge about naval terminology, so some of the technical descriptions were tedious to get through. Other problems can only be attributed to poor or dry writing, or bad editing, or both. For example, consider the following footnote:

> *The Cimarron was the only tanker equipped with a main battery of 5-inch DP guns as main battery, Mark 37 director, and secondary battery of machine guns. The only other Cimarron-class tanker so equipped was the Platte. However, by the time the Platte was converted, the secondary battery of .50-caliber machine guns had been replaced by other weapons.*

Huh?