

REVIEWS

Richard Woodman & Dan Conley, *Cold War Command: The Dramatic Story of a Nuclear Submariner*. Barnsley, Seaforth Publishing. Glossary. 280pp. ISBN 978-1-848-32769-6 (Hardback). Price £20.

Although direct quotes from Captain Conley are few, this would seem to be an autobiography of this officer, with Captain Woodman contributing additionally. With this in mind, and especially as the bulk of this book relates to the former's time as a submariner, the book can be split into two parts.

Dealing with the main element first, as an ex-submariner, I found this a *most* interesting study that when read in conjunction with Iain Ballantyne's 2013 *Hunter Killers: The Dramatic Untold Story of the Royal Navy's Most Secret Service* gives an excellent general overview of subsurface Anti-Submarine Warfare during the Cold War. Concentrating on one officer's career has also allowed for personal opinions that are missing from other accounts.

As the operations of these craft were often exceedingly highly classified and the files remain unreleased to public scrutiny, the amount of detail is truly staggering. Assuming that the Ministry of Defence has vetted these recent books, I am surprised that the disclosure of much of this has been allowed.

The descriptions of inherently technical subjects are generally well written, both in terms of operations and also *matériel*, at least for those that already have a good understanding of such matters. The addition of diagrams, such as those in training courses, might prove useful in making points clearer in future versions.

One of the real strengths of this work lies in Captain Conley's detailed descriptions of equipment failures. I know that most submariners will, when in the company of others that have also served, speak of their own experiences of challenging situations arising out of equipment failures and in my time some boats were widely known as 'wrecks'. However, unless accidents, near or actual, escape into the public domain, such stories remain strictly private. So, this book opens up the concept of poor submarine design that unfortunately, results in the risking of the lives of submariners all too often.

Another aspect that I greatly appreciate is the criticism of naval training. Of course, Captain Conley is not the first naval officer by any means to have voiced concerns. For instance, in his private letters published posthumously in *A Message from the Falklands* (1982), David Tinker complained of just how haphazard junior naval officers' training was in this same era. Captain Conley's reflections on the submarine

officers' qualifying course betray a frustratingly common backward-looking attitude. Allied to this was the dispersal and dispersion of hard-learned skills that also occurs both to officers and ratings. This has the not infrequent result of de-motivating individuals to the point of leaving the Service.

Unfortunately, there are also parts of the book that detract from the overwhelmingly excellent standard. This mostly relates to the first third of the book.

There are weaknesses that should have been identified and dealt with in the production stages. Many terms are not explained properly. For instance, early on the two types of nuclear-powered submarine are introduced as those carrying ballistic missiles and those that do not (p. 3). That is fair enough, but these boats are then stated as SSBNs and SSNs, without explaining these official designations as Ships Submersible Ballistic Nuclear and Ships Submersible Nuclear. Also, concepts, such as cavitation (p. 48), are neither explained, nor shown in the glossary. Linguistic errors also seem to have been introduced after the original drafts were submitted, possibly for the benefit of a non-specialist readership. For instance, 'air-conditioning' and 'ventilation' (p. 68) are not one and the same and, therefore, the former should not have been used. And, better editing may have shortened the chapters on Daniel Conley's career in General Service. As an example, accurate as his insights into poor performing anti-aircraft missiles are, it can be argued that these are peripheral to this particular study.

Finally, although atmospheric, the background information is weak and faulty. The Cold War became a gigantic nuclear standoff. However, it did not begin this way. Initially, it was NATO that deployed nuclear weapons against the Warsaw Pact's conventional forces and it was not until the Soviets developed their own strategic nuclear weapons that the so-called Mutual Assured Destruction occurred (pp. xi-xii & p. xv). Even then, this led to supposed ways of using tactical nuclear weapons to get around MAD. And, although considered twice, the fifth SSBN never was ordered (p. 3).

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