

grain of truth or be used to reinforce a certain group culture. For example, the beliefs surrounding respect of the dead dictate a rapid burial at sea to avoid upsetting the sailor's spirit or ghost (45). This serves a practical purpose as well: rapid burial means less risk of disease spreading from the deceased body. As an historical note, it is strange that this custom was ignored for Horatio Nelson, one of the most beloved sailors of his age, when his remains were stored in a cask of brandy following the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

Traditions also create a visual language within a community. The most obvious of these is the practice of tattooing among seamen. Some symbols stood for good luck, like the pig and rooster, and helped a sailor keep good fortune on his side. The origins of the tattooed words HOLD and FAST, shed a particular light on sailing culture. It is thought to have a biblical origin in Deuteronomy 10:20: "Fear the Lord your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name" (141). While sailors considered it bad luck to run into a preacher, or have one on board, it is interesting that religion was still an inspiration for such a permanent reminder of a sailor's profession. Tattoos separated sailors from the general population: a sailor could literally carry his resumé with him with symbols like a dragon, turtle, and anchors all indicating service at a specific destination, or with a particular service—yet another method of maintaining a maritime identity.

Overall, this book is a comprehensive collection of sailors' beliefs and superstitions. Unfortunately, it does not go much beyond that. While it is informative, it lacks analysis or description about the origins or potential impact of such beliefs. A fuller study would lend the book an extra layer of credibility when explaining the origins of such strange facts of maritime life. *Never Say P\*g* is a good introduction to sailors' mental attitudes but does not delve much beyond the initial offering of information.

Ivor Mollema  
Alexandria, Virginia

**Alastair Mars. *Unbroken. The Story of a Submarine*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen & Sword Maritime, [www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk), 2021. (Originally published 1953.) 224 pp., illustrations, map. UK £12.99, paper; ISBN 978-1-84415-793-8.**

Books on the U-Boat war in both World Wars are many; so, too, are books on the American submarine war in the Pacific during the Second World War. Less well-known are the efforts by the British submarine fleet in that second conflict. In *Unbroken. The Story of a Submarine*, this reprint of a 1953 memoir of Royal Navy (RN) operations details the first months of its career by its first

commander, Alastair Mars.

As a young man, Mars joined the RN in 1932 and had many postings, including service in Hong Kong. The outbreak of hostilities in 1939 found him in a position for wartime advancement. In 1941, at the age of twenty-six, he was picked to command HMS *Unbroken*, a submarine under construction. It must have been a heady moment for the young officer, recently married, now in command of a submarine.

Mars' narrative begins with the dreary wartime scene of November 1941. Though British forces had achieved some military success in North Africa, Syria, and East Africa, Britain was still under aerial bombardment and the recent German invasion of the Soviet Union had that nation's forces on the defensive. Added to that were the Imperial Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor in the American (then-) territory of Hawaii, the attacks on Hong Kong, the sinking of HMS *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* off the Malayan coast by Japanese aircraft, and the invasion of Malaya by the Japanese army.

With that background, Mars and his crew put *Unbroken* to sea to interdict Italian and German shipping in the eastern Mediterranean. He tells a great story – attacking shipping destined for German and Italian forces in North Africa, escorting ships in *Operation Pedestal*, the convoy that was sent to bring supplies to the beleaguered island of Malta, successfully avoiding attacks by enemy surface ships, and also landing commando units for raids on enemy-held areas of the North African coast.

The virtue of this book is that it is a first-hand account of submarine warfare written soon after the actions it describes. Mars wrote in a straightforward manner, without embellishment – he preferred to let the actions themselves speak to the reader. He shows the fear of a submarine crew under attack by enemy destroyers (and indirectly relaying the tenacity of the Italian destroyer fleet in seeking out *Unbroken*), the pain of wartime separation from his spouse, and his inability to be present at the birth of his child, the incredible austerity imposed upon the people of Malta and those stationed there during the bombardment.

Mars gave up command of *Unbroken* in spring, 1942, and returned to Great Britain. There he was reunited with his wife and met his 15-month-old daughter for the first time. After a period of leave, Mars was assigned a desk job at the Admiralty—which did not please his fighting spirit. *Unbroken* was never far from his thoughts, as he constantly watched for news of its exploits. Happily, Mars was allowed to greet *Unbroken* and its crew when it returned to Britain in summer 1943. Mars was assigned to command another submarine, HMS *Thule*, in December 1943, and took the boat and its crew to the Pacific theatre of operations in 1944. Returning home for good in autumn 1945, Mars held several posts prior to his departure from RN service in 1952.

As for *Unbroken*, it was sent to the Soviet Navy in 1944, as a part of lend-lease to the Soviets and returned in 1949. Sadly, a ship which had defied depth charges and all kinds of seas could not remain unbroken – it was scrapped in 1950. Mars's final words regarding his submarine are poignant ones – he was saddened that his boat was reduced to scrap, but at the same time, he was glad that *Unbroken* had not rusted away in some dockyard. He hoped, that, through the use of scrap metal, *Unbroken* would continue to serve the RN in some vastly different form. Perhaps *Unbroken* still sails today, more than 70 years later, in an even more vastly-changed form.

This book is worth reading, as it brings to the reader the immediacy of submarine warfare. The reader feels the crew's fear undergoing depth charge attack. Mars communicates life on board a submarine and ashore in a high-danger zone. The book fills in another gap in the history of the Second World War, but could have been improved by photographs of *Unbroken* and Mars. A brief biography of Mars could have been included, as the back cover merely states that Mars left the RN due to differences of opinions over postings and service. As a straight reprint, however, such inclusions might have increased the price of the book. Those suggestions aside, this book is recommended.

Robert L. Shoop  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

**Stephen McLaughlin. *Russian and Soviet Battleships*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, [www.usni.org](http://www.usni.org), 2021. xviii+496 pp., illustrations, drawings, tables, notes, bibliography, appendix, index. US \$120.00, cloth: ISBN: 978-1-68247-726-7.**

The Naval Institute Press has reprinted Stephen McLaughlin's classic study of Russian/Soviet battleship design. First published in 2003, *Russian and Soviet Battleships* immediately became the standard reference on Imperial Russian/Soviet capital ships. Quickly out of print, it was soon only obtainable at a steep premium with second-hand prices quoted as high as \$1,000 US. Although the author did not have the opportunity to revise the text, this volume is a welcome reprinting of a definitive design study.

*Russian and Soviet Battleships* follows the well sailed track for warship design studies with a chapter for each new (or proposed) vessel or class of ships. Indeed, some of the best chapters deal with the proposed Soviet battleships and the modifications to surviving Tsarist dreadnoughts. The author understands that the Imperial Russian/Soviet Navy generally played second fiddle to the Army in both financial terms and in prestige. The army was a necessity while naval development was cramped by geography and an underdeveloped