

William Geroux. *The Ghost Ships of Archangel: The Arctic Voyage that Defied the Nazis*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, www.penguinbooks.com, 2019. 268 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index; US \$18.00, CDN \$24.00, paper; ISBN 978-0-52555-748-7.

Most of us have heard of the wartime convoy PQ-17 to Archangel, Russia in July 1942 and the fact that many of the ships in the convoy were sunk after the convoy was ordered to scatter because of the perceived threat of being attacked by the *Tirpitz* and/or other major units of the German Navy. As much as this book deals with that decision – taken in London – it is not the *raison d'être* of the book. Rather, the book provides the personal accounts of sailors who survived that event, their experiences while in Russia, and their trip home.

In the first chapter, after introducing the reader to some of the major interviewees, Geroux explains the history behind the need for Arctic convoys and the general war situation. In chapter two, the reader meets most of the other interviewees and starts hearing about the make-up of the convoy, the weather and sea conditions (even in July), the seaworthiness of the merchant ships, the cargo, the financial incentives for crewing, and life on board. As much as there were shadowing capital ships and a nearby cruiser force to oppose the major German ships, the convoy's close escort comprised six Royal Navy destroyers, four corvettes, four armed trawlers, two anti-aircraft ships, three rescue ships, three minesweepers, and two submarines. The convoy departed Hvalfjord, Iceland, on 27 June 1942 with 36 merchant ships flying the flags of at least five nations and carrying roughly three-quarters of a billion dollars' worth of war supplies – more than \$11.2 billion in today's dollars (31). Ice, not an enemy attack, was the first thing to damage three ships, which left the convoy to return to Iceland. A German long-range reconnaissance aircraft spotted the convoy about noon on 1 July. Torpedo-carrying seaplanes (Heinkel 115s) made the first enemy attack 24-hours later, but it was not until 3 July that the *Christopher Newport* became the first victim – sunk by an aerial torpedo attack. As the convoy passed Bear Island the next day, Heinkel 111 and Junker 88 bombers came within range to deliver bombs and torpedoes.

The *Tirpitz* also was on the move, but only along the Norwegian coast and not out to sea. The British didn't know where the *Tirpitz* was, and the Germans weren't about to risk her until they knew for certain that there were no British aircraft carriers guarding the convoy. But the English feared that the *Tirpitz* was at sea and first ordered the nearby cruisers to withdraw once they were 150 miles east of Bear Island. After much deliberation, on 4 July at 9:11 pm, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, in London, sent a message to the cruiser force to withdraw westward at high speed. The order to all escorting ships for the convoy to disperse and proceed to Russian ports came 22 minutes later.

Then at 9:36 pm (13 minutes after the second signal), the fateful and most criticized “Most Immediate” signal for the convoy to scatter! “Scattering” and “dispersing” were not synonymous!

With that signal, most escorts turned about and abandoned the near-defenseless freighters. The latter headed in all directions – those that headed more or less directly to Russia were picked off by U-boats and aircraft, while those that headed north into the icefield fared better. The armed trawler *Ayrshire* and three ships (*Troubadour*, *Ironclad*, and *Silver Sword*) painted themselves white and became ghosts (hence the title of the book), practically invisible in the icefield. The story line of the book, as seen through the eyes of their sailors, tells of their exploits in the ice and along the coast of Novaya Zemlya, a dash to Archangel with a few other ships which had found their way to that island, and then their experiences in the Russian port.

I recommend this book because, not only does it tell the full story of PQ-17, but also provides the human element of wartime experiences and of life on board ships and in Russia. The “Notes on Sources” is not just “end notes” but a much fuller rendering of information and *obiter dicta*. The book concludes with a chapter called “The Reckoning.” Need I say more?

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Henri-Pierre Grolleau. *French Naval Aviation*. Stamford, Lincs: Key Books www.keypublishing.com, 2022. Modern Military Aircraft Series Vol. 7. 96 pp., photographs. UK £15.99, paper; ISBN 978-1-80282-195-6.

France’s Marine nationale is the largest and most capable navy in the European Union post-Brexit that by default has assumed a clear leadership role in common defence and naval matters, minus the Royal Navy. It operates a modern naval force comprised of nuclear submarines, the nuclear aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, state-of-the-art surface combatant ships, support ships and auxiliaries, and significant naval aviation assets, deployed close to home and abroad. French defence industries and companies produce amongst the most technologically advanced military and defence wares in the world, marketed for domestic usage as well as export to other countries that brings considerable prestige, foreign business, and self-sufficiency to the French state. In its existing structure and organization, the Marine nationale also has a longstanding track record of operationalizing platforms and weapons systems as a contemporary navy with outstanding training, tactical doctrine, and operational command. Henri-Pierre Grolleau is a photojournalist specializing in naval and military aviation subjects, with insider access authorized by the