

MacCannell describes deployments, summarizes battles, and recounts the lives of important military commanders without providing any encompassing understanding of how British planning for possible naval assaults or defensive constructions reveal general military practice during that era. This is all left for readers to sort out on their own, even if MacCannell does not provide sufficient information for them to do so.

There is no better example of this than in the author's coverage of the Martello towers that were the principal British coastal fortifications built during this period. His book is filled with references to them, as well as proposals for their construction, descriptions of their layouts and operations, the programs for building them, and full-colour photographs of surviving examples. Yet nowhere in his book does MacCannell explain, even briefly, the actual history of the Martello towers themselves or what it was that distinguished them from other types of coastal fortifications. Whether he regards such information as irrelevant or simply assumes his audience already knows about it is unclear, but the lack of such context leaves one wondering why that design in particular was chosen to serve a central role in British coastal defence preparations and why a beleaguered British state was willing to invest so much time and funding in their construction.

This issue also raises the question of who is the intended audience for this book. MacCannell makes no claims of having undertaken archival research for his work, which rests almost exclusively on previously published works by other authors. The sense that this is meant for a general audience is reinforced by MacCannell's frequent meanderings into loosely-related events in the Napoleonic Wars, which can be entertaining but serve little additional purpose. Yet any notion that his book is geared toward the lay reader is offset by his in-depth technical descriptions and his periodic assumption of his readers' familiarity with different aspects of his subject. The combination suggests a book that might serve well as a gift for someone's dad who has run out of Horatio Hornblower or Aubrey-Maturin novels to read and looks to delve further into the era they describe. For scholars of the period, however, this work has little to offer.

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**John R. McKay.** *Surviving the Arctic Convoys. The Wartime Memoirs of Leading Seaman Charlie Erswell.* Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen & Sword Maritime, [www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk). 2021. xvii+181 pp., illustrations, maps. UK £19.99, US \$39.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-39901-303-1. (E-book available.)

In his book, *Surviving the Arctic Convoys. The Wartime Memoirs of Leading Seaman Charlie Erswell*, author John R. McKay explores one sailor's experience in the Second World War, and the challenges faced by those who sailed on the Arctic convoys during that conflict. The book is a straightforward presentation of Charlie's experiences during the war. After briefly touching on his childhood and upbringing, McKay quickly arrives at a discussion of his motivations for joining the Royal Navy, his service during the Second World War, and what came after. The author does not dwell on Charlie's childhood or family life, beyond how they influenced his joining the Royal Navy. Vivid descriptions of the conditions and challenges of serving on a ship in wartime allow the reader to get a sense of what it was like to experience those events. Charlie discusses his impressions of the ups and downs of the Second World War, and briefly comments on the feelings of those around him as the conflict evolved. One of the more interesting aspects of this work is, while it focuses on Charlie's service escorting convoys, he also touches on other activities aboard ship during the war, touching on events across the Atlantic, France, and North Africa. The memoir concludes with his postwar activities. Though Charlie is a gunner, he does not explore the technical aspects of how the guns work, or any of the equipment he used later in his career. Readers looking for detailed examinations of the mechanics of how the guns worked and the structure of how convoys were assembled should look elsewhere. What the author provides here is an account of everyday life aboard a Royal Navy warship during wartime. Several anecdotes not only break the tension of combat but also assist in illustrating that sailors had drives and motivations outside of their jobs. One important contribution is the exploration of what sailors did when they were not at sea. What happened while the sailors were on leave or between convoys or missions is not often discussed in technical accounts of battles and campaigns. This provides a layer of background that is important for a more complete understanding of both the sailors and the events in which they participated.

The book is an easy read and very accessible to readers who are not students of maritime history or the Second World War. An extensive knowledge of the circumstances and events surrounding the convoys to Russia is not required. On the other hand, because it is a memoir and not a biography, written by an author who is not the subject of the book, it leaves something to be desired as an academic source. The lack of citations or bibliography means there are no additional sources for context. This leads to the author potentially taking events out of context, or framing events in a way that could be misunderstood. The fact that the author was not a direct witness to the events depicted, leads to the possibility that they injected their own preconceptions and biases into the work.

While not the best option available for those looking for academically reliable sources, the work does have something to contribute to studies of the Second World War, and maritime history. It gives new readers a place to start, providing a solid account of events and circumstances that one can relate to without having to be on a ship or a member of the military. For students, this work provides a firsthand account once-removed of events that can be explored in greater depth elsewhere. While the events depicted should be cross-referenced using cited sources, the background and colour provided by personal recollections reminds readers that these events were witnessed and endured by real people with their own feelings and motivations concerning what was going on around them.

While not a conventional academic source, *Surviving the Artic Convoys the Wartime Memoir of Leading Seaman Charlie Erswell* provides a personal account of events during the Second World War that are often forgotten, or not explored in great depth. The writing offers clear and easy access, a useful background and a worthwhile read for anyone interested in these events.

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**Chris McNab. *Dreadnoughts and Super-Dreadnoughts*. Havertown, PA.: Casemate Publishers, [www.casematepublishers.com](http://www.casematepublishers.com), 2021. 224 pp., illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. US \$49.95, hardback; ISBN 978-1-63624-086-2. (E-book available.)**

Even the names dreadnought and super-dreadnought speak of power and strength at sea, representing the embodiment of physical strength and the ability to project power. Their massive size moving at speed and, of course, the raw firepower of the main batteries imply dominance. They are inherently fascinating and definitely capture the imagination of young and old. Chris McNab provides an account of their development in his book *Dreadnoughts and Super-Dreadnoughts*. This history will certainly kindle an interest for many readers not already intrigued by this subject.

Six chapters break down the subject clearly for the reader. The first four explain the development of HMS *Dreadnought* and the key features of these ships. Starting with the naval revolution that *Dreadnought* produced, the author then proceeds to analyze the design and engineering, the guns, and the living conditions aboard the ships. The combination presents a well-rounded picture of the dreadnoughts their crews. The final two chapters deal with the development of dreadnoughts internationally, the rise of what are called “super-dreadnoughts,” and finally, the experience of this class of ship at war.