

(64, 105, 115, 132, 140, 160). The replacement of the more crude diagrams from the Naval War College with more detailed scaled examples would be greatly appreciated. Furthermore, the Japanese perspective was relatively lacking. The expansion of the analysis to better examine Japanese pre-war training, commanders, and their decision-making would further enhance the work and help account for why one nation's officers triumphed over another's. Finally, the foreword seems almost disconnected from the rest of the work, focusing more on the submarine war than dealing with carrier battles. Addressing these issues in a future edition would definitely strengthen the work.

*Carrier Battles* is a good resource for those interested in the role of American commanders in the Pacific Theatre. It is by no means perfect, with several venues available for improvement and expansion. For students of American naval tactics, however, or those interested in the actions of Admirals Fletcher, Nimitz, Kincaid, and Spruance, and scholars seeking a compendium of key carrier actions during the Second World War, the work offers a solid compilation of data and analysis. Hopefully Smith will further refine his work to improve on his relatively solid foundation.

Charles Ross Patterson II  
Yorktown, Virginia

**Jeremy Stoke. *More Lives Than a Ship's Cat. The Most Highly Decorated Midshipman in the Second World War.* Barnsley, S. Yorks: Pen and Sword Maritime, [www.pen-and-sword.co.uk](http://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk), 2022. 288 pp., illustrations, maps, appendixes, bibliography, index, US\$49.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-39907-1367-9.**

Most naval memoirs spotlight the exploits of well-known commanders who participated in one or several historic battles. In a refreshing departure *More Lives Than a Ship's Cat* focuses upon a young sailor whose Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) was not combat. He was a clerk, who earned the distinction of being *The Most Highly Decorated Midshipman in the Second World War*. Of obscure Ashkenazi roots, Gordon Alexander (Mick) Stoke was the last to be admitted into the Paymaster Branch Class at Dartmouth Royal Naval College, but finished with a first in his group. That was in January 1940. Paymasters spend much of their time ciphering and deciphering signals for the commander, and are concerned with accounting, distributing pay, secretarial work, victualling, clothing, stores, and performing secretarial work for senior officers. This MOS, although significant, was an unlikely path to become a highly distinguished naval officer. Yet Stoke excelled as a student, athlete, and valued junior officer, rising through the ranks from midshipman, the lowest

officer rank in the British Royal Navy, to lieutenant at an astonishing pace. His last “flimsy” (efficiency report) of 1945 typified what his commanders thought of him. “An outstanding Officer in every way, of marked ability, and assurance. Has a larger reserve of energy and has shown great initiatives in several jobs. He has an excellent knowledge of his many duties. . . a first-class Captain Secretary who should go far in the Service. Physically fit, keenly interested in games and has a good knowledge of French and Spanish. Thoroughly recommended for grant of seniority...” (235).

Mick, as he was known, was “Mentioned in Dispatches” several times early in his career, and later awarded an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) and DSC (Distinguished Service Cross for Gallantry), the Atlantic Star, Africa Star, Italy Star, Arctic Star, Arctic Emblem, the Soviet Russian Convoy Medal, and a Star and Silver Pacific Medal. The stars indicated the war theatres in which he saw action during the Second World War. Remarkably he survived multiple devastating torpedo attacks while serving onboard HMS *Glasgow*, *Queen Elizabeth*, *Carlisle*, and *Hardy*. The last event occurred in the icy waters about fifty miles south of Bear Island inside the Arctic Circle. He also survived extraordinary heavy and sustained bombing raids while stationed onboard these ships and acting as an onshore-based naval coordinator participating in the desert siege of Tobruk in 1941, at the bleak Algerian port Bone during Operation Torch at the end of 1942 on into 1943, and later supplying logistical support for the Sicilian and Salerno invasions. Stokes was stationed onboard HMS *Kempfenfelt*, the British destroyer that laid claim to being the closest to the shore delivering supporting artillery fire to the D-Day invasion at Juno Beach. He later acted as a liaison officer to the US Navy from a British aircraft carrier in the Pacific toward the last days of the war during which he had served from age nineteen to twenty-four. After his military service he became a successful businessman receiving the 1981 Queen’s Award for Export (for British businesses who excel at international trade, innovation, and development). The former navy paymaster died at the age of seventy in 1991.

Jeremy Stoke, the author and Mick’s son, had access to a broad array of primary source documents, letters to his parents and wife, and a variety of naval logs, newspapers, official releases, and other papers. Stoke skillfully takes his readers from his father’s induction into the navy and through 15 detailed, largely action-packed chapters that end with his deployment to the Pacific and marriage to Second Officer WRNS Doreen Le Poidevin. There are vivid descriptions of life at sea, clear sailing in the heat and sandstorms in North Africa, ice-filled pitching seas in the Arctic, or cruising upon the extremely far reaches of the war in the South Pacific. All of this while enduring multiple attacks on his ships by planes strafing decks, bombs dropped on or

around them, avoiding mines, U-boats, suffering torpedo attacks, and a few unfortunate sinkings.

Lieutenant Stoke makes frequent prideful references in his letters to his family about winning rugby matches and other sporting competitions amid the serious terrors of war. All the while the young man was advancing his academic studies and earning praise from his superiors, thus advancing his naval career at a rapid pace. There are occasional breaks in the narrative where he describes his thoughts in personal letters while keeping within the confines of wartime security. In turn, Mick very humanly yearns for letters from his family and from Doreen, later his future wife. He has strong opinions about the German enemy, but also waxes mildly polemical about the French, Algerians, Egyptians, Italians, and the Americans. He expresses dismay at American racial prejudice he observed and particularly their attitude to the war. "They are mainly preoccupied with Japan and consider Germany is mostly a subsidiary war.... The newspapers concentrate so much on American news that British achievements only get attention if they are really startling and then it will be headlines for only a day" (222).

Cleverly titled, well written, fast moving, *More Lives Than a Ship's Cat* is a riveting look at British naval history from an unusual, intimate point of view. Mick Stoke's extraordinary life appears as an uncommon version of everyman. I highly recommend Stoke's work for maritime historians concerned with the Royal Navy during the Second World War.

Louis Arthur Norton  
West Simsbury, Connecticut

**Colin Thubron. *The Amur River: Between Russia and China*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, [www.harpercollins.com](http://www.harpercollins.com), 2022. 304 pp., map, index, US \$19.00, paper; ISBN 978-0-06309-969-2. (E-book available.)**

If one factors its source stream into the equation, as geographers routinely do, the Amur River is the tenth longest in the world, coursing 2763 miles from west to east. It originates in remote Mongolian bogs and carves a pair of broad, graceful arcs before finding its outlet in the Strait of Tartary, behind Sakhalin Island. For 1100 of its miles, the Amur forms the border between Russia and China, a region freighted with a difficult history (Genghis Khan, Stalin, purges) and a tense present (Putin, watch towers, live-fire exercises). Westerners rarely travel there and if they do, it is at their peril.

Colin Thubron knew this as well as anyone. An acclaimed travel writer with numerous books and awards to his credit, he owns extensive experience in both Russia and China, and at eighty-four has lost none of his grit. Indeed,