

the First World War. After a series of engagements between battlecruisers and detached battleships, the two opposing columns of dreadnoughts bore down on each other, the Germans finding themselves in a disadvantageous tactical position because the British were “crossing the T,” which allowed them to fire full broadsides with all guns while not under the full weight of opposing fire. Sensing a trap, the German Admiral Reinhard von Scheer ordered the High Seas Fleet to turn away that put distance between them and the Grand Fleet while the battlecruisers and torpedo boats attacked in mass as cover. The German High Seas Fleet survived to remain a fleet in being but never really sortied again in force. The naval war instead shifted to submarines on the German side in 1917 and 1918. Maintenance of the German High Seas Fleet in a state of readiness until the end of the war tied up scarce personnel and material resources, and finally, in the face of defeat and starvation, German sailors mutinied in 1918.

This offering in Osprey’s Fleet series provides a very readable and visually pleasing primer on the German High Seas Fleet. A number of key battles are highlighted in text and graphics. The affordable book is recommended for readers interested in First World War naval operations, German naval developments pre-1918, and as a naval history reference source for wargaming and scale modelling.

Chris Madsen

North Vancouver, British Columbia

Xiaobing Li. *China’s New Navy: The Evolution of PLAN from the People’s Revolution to a 21st Century Cold War*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, www.usni.org, 2023. xv+285 pp., maps, notes, bibliography, index. US \$34.95, hardcover; ISBN 978-1-68247-775-5.

The People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), like China itself, has been an enigma for western scholars and analysts. Today, it is the largest navy in the world by number of ships, and is steadily growing to match China’s ambitions as a regional and global power. Tensions over Taiwan and territorial disputes in adjoining waters demonstrate China’s willingness to employ maritime and military power to back up diplomacy and policy, even when the United States, with its technically advanced and globally deployable fleets, draws a line in the sand. Since its official founding on 23 April 1949, the PLAN has evolved from a modest riverine and coastal naval force of cast-off warships into a balanced navy suited to a great power with nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, and a multitude of missile-carrying surface ships. Indeed, the United States Navy (USN) considers the PLAN a worthy rival and potential enemy in terms of

capability, strong on sea denial, and defensive offence. Xiaobing Li, a former Chinese army officer and history professor holding a chair in international studies at the University of Central Oklahoma, traces the PLAN's operational history by drawing on extensive research in several Asian countries, including China, Chinese-language publications, and interviews with top officials, naval and military officers, and analysts. The book represents a rare glimpse into the mindset of China's navy and how it might fight based on its historical origins and evolution.

The book follows a basic chronological framework divided into six chapters dedicated to particular periods of time important to China's national development and the PLAN. It begins with an introduction giving a literature review and ends with a conclusion bringing the narrative up to the present regime of Xi Jinping. Communist China's early naval forces were born out of the civil war against Chinese nationalists when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) required support for amphibious landings and a number of crews and officers brought their warships over to the Communist cause. In the midst of China's participation in the Korean War, leader Mao Zedong only wanted a limited navy for coastal defence and other tasks related to the army, leading to it being described as an army at sea. The PLAN's first three-year plan accorded priority to naval aviation, conventional submarines, and torpedo-carrying speedboats. The Chinese sought and received training and technical assistance from the Soviet Union. Fights and skirmishes around islands off the coast gave the PLAN its first operational experience.

Until the late 1950s, Mao pursued limited wars in the Taiwan Strait that saw the PLA and PLAN working together to contest several offshore islands through bombardments and landings, avoiding actions that might invite intervention from the United States. The PLAN performed badly during a first crisis, but additional Soviet aid in terms of equipment and advisors and greater attention to organization and professionalism meant a little better showing in the second crisis, although their performance is still described by Li as mixed. Mao's Great Leap Forward and the Sino-Soviet split impacted the PLAN directly and indirectly, by purges within the naval ranks and wholesale withdrawal of Soviet advisors and material assistance. Nonetheless, improvements in the command structure, land-sea communication, battle coordination, and offensive tactics led to successes employing small boats in close combat at night against Taiwan's higher-class naval forces. As China was consumed by the Cultural Revolution, the PLAN arranged the shipment of supplies by sea to Communist military forces in Vietnam and provided air defence, both artillery and interceptor aircraft, against American bombing attacks. Capture of the disputed Paracel (Xisha) islands from the South Vietnamese in the South China Sea in January 1974 signified the first time the PLAN conducted operations

away from the Chinese coast and against another foreign (non-Taiwanese) navy. China began producing its own indigenously designed warships and weapons that incorporated Soviet and Western influences and technology, with the first blue-water nuclear attack and ballistic missile-carrying submarines arriving in the late 1970s.

The reforms of Deng Xiaoping brought stability back to China, ending the divisive Cultural Revolution, and laying the basis for diplomatic rapprochement with the United States and opening the country up to the world for economic trade. The PLAN's chief, Admiral Liu Huaqing, envisioned a new ranking and role for the navy in China. Liu introduced a three-step plan for development of a true blue-water navy able to secure China's immediate sea space and expand outward to protect vital sea lines of communication in peace and war. Chinese technological advances and training approached those of other comparable navies. Liu gained notoriety by suppressing pro-democracy demonstrations at Tiananmen Square in May 1989, thereby proving his loyalty and commitment to the Chinese Communist Party.

Changes in the strategic environment after the demise of the Soviet Union as well as China's growing global stature and economic might generally favored the PLAN, which received a greater share of China's annual defence budget and laid down an ever-growing number of ships and submarines. Naval reforms emphasized educational credentials, greater professionalism, and proficiency in joint warfare amongst personnel. The PLAN deployed naval forces to push Chinese interests during the lengthy third Taiwan Strait crisis, to face off with Japan over disputed islands, and to combat pirates off the coast of Africa and in the Gulf of Aden. By 2009, the PLAN was one of the most modern and capable navies in the world, imbued with a fighting spirit and doctrine that aligned with China's political ideology and global aspirations. China renewed ties with Russia for military and economic exchange, including direct purchase of Russian aircraft and other wares. Chinese naval planning and exercises focused on maritime active defence against the USN or any other comer who might threaten Chinese territorial and resource interests. As Li states, the PLAN has a long history in defensive offence and could be counted on to fire first if necessary.

The book provides a solid overview of the PLAN's operational history and mode of operating from the Chinese perspective. Li provides considerable background details on otherwise obscure individuals and draws extensively on interviews and firsthand professional opinions, some of which are quoted directly. Six maps grace the pages but there are no photographs except the colour one gracing the front cover. The endnotes and bibliography identify Chinese sources in characters with English translation in square brackets. *China's New Navy* appeals to professionals seeking a better understanding of

Chinese naval developments and readers interested in the historical background behind contemporary Asian military affairs, as China and the United States once again dance over Taiwan.

Chris Madsen

North Vancouver, British Columbia

Brett Mason. *Saving Lieutenant Kennedy: The Heroic Story of the Australian who helped rescue JFK*. Sydney, AUS: University of New South Wales Press, www.unsw.press, 2023. 272 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index. AUS \$34.99, paper; ISBN 9781-74223-787-9. (E-book available.)

On the evening of 7 August 1943, two Allied naval officers met on the shoreline of Gomu Island, in the Solomon Islands, and shook hands for the first time. One was a middle-aged Australian coast-watcher, operating behind enemy lines providing information to the Allied forces then locked in bitter fighting with the Japanese. The other was a young United States Navy lieutenant whose PT boat (PT 109) had been rammed and sunk by the Japanese destroyer *Amagiri* in Blakett Strait a few days before. At the time, both men had no inklings of the importance of this meeting. The Australian was Royal Australian Navy Lieutenant Arthur “Reg” Evans, and the other was Lieutenant John Fitzgerald Kennedy—a future President of the United States of America.

Evans had seen the explosion on the night 2 August when PT 109 was rammed, and the next morning dispatched groups of Solomon Islanders to investigate. Meanwhile, Kennedy and his surviving crew members swam to a nearby island with Kennedy, a strong swimmer, towing one of his badly injured crew members behind him. Eventually, on the morning of 5 August, two Solomon Islanders (Eroni Kumana and Biuki Gasa) found the survivors of PT 109 on Naru (Gross) Island. Kennedy scratched out a message on a coconut and requested this be delivered to Allied forces. This coconut with the words “Nauro Isl Commander. Native knows Pos’it. He can pilot. 11 Alive. Need small boat. Kennedy.” It later sat on Kennedy’s desk in the Oval Office as a reminder of his service in the Southwest Pacific.

On the morning of 7 August, Evans sent another Solomon Islander who spoke excellent English, Benjamin Kevu, to Gross Island with a note for the Senior Officer – Gross Is. On arrival, Kevu met the tired and dishevelled Kennedy and handed him Evans’s note detailing the rescue plan with the polite words, “I have a letter for you sir.”

Lieutenant Evans arranged for Kennedy to be brought to his island hideout and the two men then discussed the details of the plan to have the survivors extracted by PT boat. On the morning of 8 August, PT 157 rescued