

a glossy coffee-table book.

The 16-page filmography covering film and television productions between 1911 and 2025 is one of the most interesting features of the book. Each of the entries includes a short synopsis of the respective production as well as some information on its background and the names of the main actors. Finally, a well-done bibliography and an index complete the book.

Atkins' new book can easily be recommended to any historian with an interest in Antarctic history and to historians of film and television as it provides a most unique analysis of how coverage of a single historical event developed over the span of little more than a century. With a suggested retail price of US\$49.95 for the print edition, I would probably abstain from using it as a mandatory book in the classroom due to it being extremely specialized, but would include it easily in a list of suggested additional readings for any class on Antarctic or even polar history at large.

This reviewer must admit that reviewing volume two of a book without having read volume one is always somewhat problematic but assumes given the high quality of this volume that most of the comments made before will also apply to volume one, which deals mainly with the infamous Shackleton expedition.

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Bamford, Tyler R. and Hulver, Richard A., ed. *Best Beloved. The Wartime Letters of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz to His Wife, Catherine. Contributions to Naval History No. 11*

Naval History and Heritage Command, 2024

lii + 219 pp., bibliography, index

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Admiral Chester W. Nimitz was a famously reserved man. According to his first biographer, Elmer B. Potter (1976), when he was a young cadet at the Naval Academy he was so negatively impressed by the infamous Sampson-Schley controversy that he resolved never to publicly slander a fellow officer. Such a line of conduct logically extended to written statements as well, prompting him to refrain from expressing any kind of censure in those documents liable to become public.

The letters included in the present collection do not make for an exception: it is understood that writing to his beloved wife Catherine represented one of

the very few occasions when Nimitz truly spoke his mind, and for this very reason the missives were never supposed to be read by anyone else. Therefore, Catherine Nimitz dutifully burnt most of her husband's correspondence: the letters from November 1943 to November 1944, in which the admiral might have expressed his mounting frustration (especially in dealing with General Douglas MacArthur) are entirely missing. Hand-copied extracts of approximately 73 letters have been preserved, together with original pages from 75 more. Therefore, what was entrusted to the Naval Historical Center (now the Naval History and Heritage Command), between 1966 and 1982, amounted to a somewhat sanitised collection: one in which any critical judgement of facts or people, hence any pretext for a public controversy, was carefully weeded out. True to such premises, the terrible disappointment vented by Nimitz because of Halsey's failure in locating and sinking the two Japanese hybrid battleship-carriers of the *Ise* class in January 1945 represents virtually the only instance of censure levelled at an officer in the surviving correspondence (118).

What is extant makes for a rather mundane recounting of the often dull everyday routine at the headquarters in Hawaii and later in Guam; as Nimitz himself wrote on 31 May 1942, at the height of the feverish planning that would lead to the battle of Midway: "some day the story of our activities will be written and it will be interesting – but not for now" (24). The best insight on such a pivotal moment of the Pacific War he provides the modern reader with is the conviction, stated just before springing the trap for the *Kidō Butai*, that the U.S. forces were "better prepared than ever before" (25). He was quite right.

That said, material of considerable import still seeps through the cracks of the recital of prosaic activities such as the walks with Spruance, the meals with the Walkers at Muliway, the cocktail parties, and the horseshoe games with the officers of his staff. Episodes of profound emotional significance are included: whilst touring the battlefield of Tarawa after the conquest of the atoll, Nimitz conveys his astonishment at the level of destruction he witnesses – "not a coconut tree, of thousands, was left whole" (51) – quite comparable to that of the battlefields of the Great War. Similarly, after the most critical phase of the Battle of Leyte – that is, Kurita's surprise attack on Taffy 3 off Samar – he singles out the story of USS *Johnson* written by her senior surviving officer and, evidently impressed by the selfless heroism of such a sacrifice, he intends to have it published. (56)

Of even greater importance, especially in view of Nimitz's philosophy on the unity of command conducive to a real "jointness," are the reiterated references to his efforts aimed at maintaining a harmonious relationship

with the sister service. Consequently, Admiral Hart's article is frowned upon because it is liable to strain once again the "fine relations" established with the army. Likewise, Drew Pearson, a journalist "well known for breaking sensational stories" (64), is harshly criticised for trying to stir up troubles between the admiral himself and MacArthur. After all the efforts made by such a measured man, as Nimitz was, in order to maintain a working relationship with the usually egotistical and self-serving MacArthur, his frustration with the yellow journalism's attempts to sabotage him is palpable.

On the other hand, not much of relevance emerges from the letters concerning the strategic conduct of the war, or Nimitz's application of the principle of calculated risk. This lack of relevant insights was due to understandable security concerns and it should have affected a substantial share of the original correspondence, even before the weeding out process. Nimitz himself acknowledged it, and on 31 December 1944, he apologised, stating: "I am very aware how unsatisfactory those letters are – but there is so much that cannot be said – that when I mail letters from places other than my own HQ – they are necessarily lacking in news" (92).

Still, the overall strategic picture can sometimes be gleaned from scattered details. For instance, the need for clothes suited to cold climates, mentioned by Nimitz with regard to China in his letters of the 2 and 4 January 1945, can be linked to the planning of the Operation Longtom: this was meant to be executed after the conquest of Okinawa, and envisaged the seizure of the Chusan Archipelago, south of Shanghai, together with the Ningpo Peninsula. This way Longtom would have severed the lines of communication between metropolitan Japan and the Japanese forces operating in China.

Nimitz's aims, though, in line with the sensibility for economic warfare that one may reasonably expect from a former submariner, were remarkably more ambitious. In a rare elucidation of his approach, provided by his letter of the 10 January, he stressed that ships operating "towards the China Coast" were meant to "cut the shipping lanes to the Netherlands East Indies – where the Japs look for the bulk of their oil" (115). The general concept just outlined brings to mind the image evoked by George C. Dyer in his 1972 biography of Admiral Richmond K. Turner: that of "a whole fleet which ... was in effect an offensively minded logistical octopus bent on garrotting with its many tentacles the Japanese logistic base."

In conclusion, *Best Beloved* provides an interesting collection of primary sources, albeit more useful to understand Nimitz as a family man rather than elucidating his innermost ideas and opinions with regard to the war effort in the Pacific and its key actors. The flawless editing delivered by Tyler R. Bamford and Richard A. Hulver represents the publication's main strength:

in the introduction the editors offer a succinct, yet up-to-date biographical profile of the admiral, taking into account the conclusions of the most recent scholarship.

Equally commendable is the decision to annotate each letter with copious footnotes, the notes providing exhaustive biographical profiles of all the individuals mentioned by Nimitz, thus amounting to a virtual who's who of the Pacific War as seen from the admiral's headquarters. All in all, *Best Beloved* is a commendable publication enriching our understanding of the psychology of one of the key figures in the Allied war effort: although it does not provide any new information capable of challenging established historical interpretations, it still makes for a genuinely intriguing read.

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Barcia, Manuel. *Pirate Imperialism: Trade, Abolition, and Global Suppression of Maritime Raiding, 1825–1870*

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It is a fact that the line between horrible piratical criminals and daring, if not downright dashing, privateering heroes frequently comes down to the political alliances of whoever is making the distinction. Ask a nineteenth-century Englishman who Sir Francis Drake was, and they would almost certainly sing his praises as an explorer and defender of the realm. Ask them what they think of John Paul Jones, and there is a good chance his name would be among the foulest of blackhearts to ever put to sea. In recent decades, historians such as Marcus Rediker, Peter Linebaugh, and Jaime Goodall have further delved into the multiplicity of push and pull factors that brought people into piracy and incentivized communities not only to tolerate but also to welcome and protect them.

In *Pirate Imperialism*, Manuel Barcia examines the imperial side of piracy in the nineteenth century, arguing that “suppression of piracy” was often a proxy for both formalized and informal imperialist efforts by Western and non-Western powers. Specifically, he argues that imperial powers would use phrases like “suppression of piracy” (2), “commerce protection” (92), “anti-slave trade enforcement” (57), and “civilizing efforts” (31) to justify military actions against amphibious communities. These communities, which resided