

a U-boat pause on closing a convoy to attack” (64). Unfortunately, as Rob Fisher pointed out, U-boats equipped with an EW radar detector could identify the RCN corvette as a hole in the convoy screen (see Robert C. Fisher, “The Impact of German Technology on the Royal Canadian Navy in the Battle of the Atlantic, 1942–1943,” *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 7, no. 4 [October 1997]).

One can only hope that the Carney government’s commitment to defence spending is realized and continued with successor governments. That would create a future navy worthy of its heritage so carefully detailed here. The excellence of the authors’ work has been recognized by both CNRS with the Keith Matthews Award for the Best Book of 2025 and NASOH with a John R. Lyman Book Award – a rare achievement.

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**Grant, Rick. *Broadside: Halifax’s Wartime Pilot Boat Disaster*
Formac Publishing, 2025**

136 pp., illustrations, maps, index

ISBN 9781459508101 (softcover) CA\$27.96; 781459508118 (e-book)

CA\$16.99

The incident happened in late March 1940 near what was in the early war years, guardedly termed “an east coast port.” An incoming freighter, the Donaldson Line steamer *Esmond*, bound to join a convoy being assembled and destined for England, collided with a wooden pilot schooner, the *Hebridean*, leaving nine dead in the water, all pilots or crew aboard the pilot boat. The steamer was not damaged. The tragedy, lost in the clamour of war, barely remembered in Halifax and perhaps hardly known at all elsewhere, is the subject of *Broadside*.

In examining the story, Rick Grant tells us much about the ships and men involved and a good deal about pilotage. Harbour pilots seldom have lead roles in the dramas of the sea. At best they have brief cameos, moving the plot from scene to scene. Piloting is a skill requiring experience and knowledge and in the furious activity in Halifax with merchant and naval ships arriving, assembling in convoys, and departing every five or six days, the port’s 22 pilots were overworked. Thirty-one convoys had left Halifax in the six months preceding April 1940.

The author is a Halifax-based journalist with an ability to write a good story and a journalist’s nose to ferret out personal details which add to the

poignancy of the disaster. The bulk of the narrative comes from newspaper accounts and the testimony of witnesses at the hurriedly convened inquiry following the incident, supplemented by details provided from the accounts handed down within the families of the victims and survivors.

Grant is masterful in marshalling the chronology of the collision and its aftermath. The volume really tells two different but related stories: the first deals with the collision and the second with the resulting inquiry. The author is more successful in his account of the first than of the second. He describes the setting for the incident, complete with useful accounts of the background of the pilot service and of the relationship of the pilots to the massive effort to supply Britain through the convoy system. Grant is particularly sensitive to the human story of the closely-knit group of pilots, many of whom were related by blood and marriage, centred on the tiny fishing port of Herring Cove.

However, more than half of the short volume is dedicated to the inquiry following the collision and here Grant seems intent on finding a villain. He notes, but makes little allowance for, the fact that almost the entire military effort of Halifax was dedicated to maintaining the supply of vital shipping to defend Britain. Increasingly critical shortages of almost every commodity for the war effort necessitated a huge effort to provide shipping across the Atlantic. Grant has done a superb job of enumerating the procedures that were altered or ignored in the efforts at several levels to take shortcuts to speed up the investigation and inquiry. Whether directed from the top, where C.D. Howe was moving into his role as Minister of Munitions and Supply and was still Minister of Transport with responsibility for the pilots and marine accidents, or through the departmental chain of authority where Deputy Minister and the Director of Marine Services actually mandated the inquiry, it was made clear that time was of the essence. The matter of the inquiry should be dealt with in a way that did not affect the movement of shipping and that included ensuring that the freighter involved in the collision would not miss its scheduled departure in convoy HX31. Like many authors, Grant may have overestimated the importance of his subject. Without evidence, he suggests that C.D. Howe was of the opinion that the investigation into the collision was a significant factor in ensuring Canadian-British cooperation in the war effort.

Within a week a somewhat abbreviated and unorthodox inquiry had been held behind closed doors and although Grant argues that information and evidence were ignored and that some witnesses were not heard from, he is hard pressed to provide an alternate result to the inquiry's finding that, for unknown reasons, the *Hebredian* had attempted to cross the bow of the *Esmond* and that no fault could be attributed to the steamer's captain. In a chapter titled "Rewards and Plum Positions," he details the subsequent careers

of the Director of Marine Services, Robert K. Smith, and Supreme Court Justice William F. Carroll, who presided over the inquiry, suggesting, again without obvious facts, that their handling of the matter was the basis for their subsequent professional and political advancement. This is an unsatisfactory conclusion given by Grant to an otherwise well-documented account.

This is not an academic treatise and is intended for a general audience, but it does include a list of sources consulted. However, this list is frustrating to use with articles and documents mentioned but with no dates, volumes, or collections identified which would enable anyone seeking additional information the means to locate them. Remarkably for a volume of its size and format, it has an extensive index. While this well-written and interesting story contributes to the nautical history of Halifax, it is limited as a volume adding to the larger picture of the convoy system and the war in the North Atlantic.

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Hooten, E.R. *Franco's Pirates: Naval Aspects of the Spanish Civil War, 1936–39*

Casemate, 2024

256 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index

ISBN 9781636242750 (hardcover) US\$37.95; 9781636242767 (e-book)

US\$22.95

The naval aspects of the Spanish Civil War have enjoyed a surge in attention in recent years. The trend began in 2013 with Adrian English's *The Spanish Civil War at Sea*, which was followed eight years later by Michael Alpert's similarly-named *The Spanish Civil War at Sea: Dark and Dangerous Waters* (reviewed in *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord* 32, no. 2 [2022]), and most recently by Leonard Heinz in 2025 with *The Fleet that Fought Itself: The Spanish Navy and the Civil War, 1936–39*. E.R. Hooten states in the preface his belief that these earlier works make any further general histories of the war fought between the Republican and Nationalist navies unnecessary. What he focuses on instead in his book is foreign naval involvement in the conflict and “the largely neglected activities of the Spanish and foreign merchant marines” (xvii), which he argues were central to determining the outcome of the war.

This was due to the key role international trade played for both sides in the conflict. The Nationalist war effort was fed by a constant supply of weapons and equipment from both Italy and Germany, while the Republican government found the Soviet Union a willing supplier of much-needed