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***
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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

armaments. While all three regimes valued the use of the war as a testing ground for their munitions, they did not provide them for free. Financing these purchases and obtaining the fuel and other raw materials unavailable at home required both sides to sell minerals and transfer assets abroad which, with the closure of France's border throughout most of the war, could only be done by sea. Thus, maritime trade became a vital part of the war – and an extremely profitable one for the merchants who participated in it.

The importance of this trade was underscored by the activities of the naval forces on both sides at the start of the conflict. With neither one capable of sustaining fleet operations with the respective portions of Spain's poorly-maintained navy that they had inherited, they turned instead to blockade operations and commerce raiding to attack their foe. This was complicated by questions of law and geography. The most important zone, the Strait of Gibraltar, was under British protection, which complicated Republican efforts to seize merchant ships destined for Nationalist-held ports. Hooten notes that the Republicans' decision to cede control of the strait proved a major error, as it denied the Republic access to a major portion of its merchant marine. This left them dependent upon those of other nations, primarily Britain and Greece.

From the start, the Nationalists benefited greatly from the support of Germany and Italy. This made the success of any international non-intervention effort impossible, especially as Britain and France worried that attempts to establish a robust patrolling regimen might trigger a conflict with the fascist powers. This paved the way not only for the Germans and Italians to provide vitally necessary aid, but naval support as well. Ships were transferred to the Spanish ensign, with some officered or almost completely crewed by German and Italian sailors. And starting in October 1936, the Italians and then the Germans deployed their own submarines to attack merchant vessels supplying the Republican side. By contrast, the Soviets limited their maritime involvement to shipping weapons, for which they demanded Spain's gold and other resources as compensation.

Given the considerable risks involved, it might be difficult to imagine shipowners jeopardizing their ships and crews by sailing into an active war zone. Yet they did just that in order to benefit from the profitable opportunities created by the war, for which they were desperate. Thanks to the ongoing global economic depression, merchant shipping was mired in stagnation, with freight rates steadily declining. War meant business, with the demand and the risks involved in providing it allowing them to charge a premium for their services. Hooten notes that in 1937 the Abbey Line Shipping Company vessel *Neath Abbey* made a profit on their initial voyage to the port of Alicante that was equivalent to their profits for the entire year prior. Many of the seamen

enjoyed bonuses on these trips, yet ship captains often dealt with protests from their crews at the risks being taken – especially if the side being supplied was one with which they disagreed politically.

The protests proved no more effective in ending the trade than the toothless efforts of the Non-Intervention Committee were in halting arms shipments. Even more decisive were the events of the war itself. The increasingly overt use of Italian submarines to attack shipping in the Mediterranean prompted the convening of an international conference in Nyon in September 1937 that established safe routes through the Mediterranean, patrolled by British and French warships, yet the growing Nationalist success in the war prompted both powers to seek a *rapprochement* with Franco's regime. By the start of 1938, Nationalist blockade efforts had largely succeeded in cutting off Republican access to foreign armaments, while the Munich Crisis in September ensured that the attention of Britain, France, and Germany shifted elsewhere. By February 1939, Joseph Stalin told his defence commissar that supplying the Republicans "was no longer important," conceding to the Nationalists and their fascist allies the victory in the naval war.

The lessons of the war were studied by both sides, who applied them in the far larger European-wide conflict that broke out just a few months later. Unfortunately, Hooten does not offer any consideration of what they were, preferring to limit himself to an accounting of the losses and brief summaries of the subsequent careers of the major figures in the war. This is consistent with the book as a whole, which is rich with details yet short on analysis. Despite Hooten's claim for the importance of the logistics provided by the maritime trade, there is no effort to fit it with their larger war efforts or to correlate events on the seas with possible consequences on land. Instead, it is left to the bias of his reader to assume that his argument is naturally correct, with his focus instead on recounting the ebbs and flows of this trade over the course of the war. The resulting book offers much information of value, but the author's narrow lens limits what might have otherwise become a truly indispensable contribution to the study of maritime trade and its importance to the Spanish Civil War.

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