

and need from it. And yet, as he demonstrates throughout the work, there have always been those voices advocating for change but not always the follow-through. I sincerely hope, as a woman who grew up next to the ocean and is now a lake-goer in Ontario, that we can find balance going forward between our “right-now” socio-cultural urges and long-term environmental needs.

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**Maclean, Roderick G. *Never to Return: Convoys to Russia in the Second World War***

**PointMedia, 2025**

224 pp., illustrations, diagrams, maps, bibliography, facsimiles, index  
ISBN: 9781036903268 (softcover) CA\$36.00

This is the story of a few young people from the west of Scotland and their vessels in the Battle of the Barents Sea during the most perilous convoys to Russia, when the outcome of World War Two hung in the balance and when weather was most dangerous. It is also an incisive history of that last great sea battle in the Arctic Ocean, which helped decide the fate of the Allied effort to supply Russian forces on the Eastern Front. The impetus for writing the book is given by the author while tracing his connection with the major character, David MacDonald, by recalling his mother’s statement that she repeated each New Year’s Eve: “David was lost tonight.” The book is a result of that quest to know what happened in his last hours.

The scene of David’s death, destroyer HMS *Achates*, is introduced early in the book. That story begins with its construction and continues through its war service, including being mined prior to the Russian convoys and reconstructed. A photograph of *Achates* being towed backward gives mute testimony of brutal violence of sea warfare, with the ratings’ quarters in the fo’c’sle completely blown off. A connection is made also between the people and islands of Scotland and one location in particular, Loch Ewe, which was selected as a safe anchorage and became the UK terminus of what was known as “The Murmansk Run.”

Chapters are short, dealing with the stories of the actors and their vessels and the events of the battle in their strategic framework. The story of the merchant ships and their organization is told by focusing on the person of the Commodore. Somehow this book knits together the strategic and tactical levels of the battle and most detailed, personal experiences of individual sailors and the vessels they sailed in, specifically *Achates* and the rescue ship

*Northern Gem*. The story is made gripping by the portrayal of the characters in the unfolding tactical situation in the battle, which was a crucial defeat for the Kriegsmarine after which the surface fleet was to be dismantled. The text follows the personal involvement of Hitler and others in controlling and animating the opposing forces through the use of “reconstituted” signals. These replica typescripts simulate the product of a teleprinter and give an air of similitude while communicating the story and raising questions.

Following the sinking of *Achates*, there are first-hand accounts of survivors and key people in their rescue, including crew members of the *Achates* and the cox'n of the *Northern Gem*, who picked them out of the sea. The brutality of sea warfare is underlined during the carnage when the ship is hit and sinking and again when most of the survivors remaining in the water, fighting cold and oil, are killed by depth charges exploding among them. Once on board the *Northern Gem*, the fight to save them was continued by medical staff. One related theme the author touches on was the parsimony of the British Admiralty and merchant marine companies dealing with survivors of sinkings, demonstrated by such decisions as stopping pay on the day the sinking occurred and not providing clothing for survivors.

The book, which starts as a family history, combines the deeply personal stories of actors at all levels and becomes a well-written and excellently illustrated description of action at the strategic and tactical levels. The story is made more engaging by being of young people, some of whom grew up together, in a fight for their lives and for their country. David is brought to life through photographs of growing up on a croft with his dog. His service life is recorded in photographs and facsimiles of personal letters and official naval records. His service record opens with his induction into the training ship HMS *Ganges* on 16 June 1941 and ends with the notation on 31 December 1942 as being “DD” (“discharged dead”). At the instant of his death, he was a radar technician and was able to see and report the approaching shells fired by KMS *Admiral Hipper*.

The book becomes a successful oral history through letters and reminiscences. It is also a memorial for the people on the ships, with a long section devoted to letters of condolence and official congratulations from the Admiralty. The “Conclusion” gives the outcome of the battle as being explicable only by Hitler’s interference in permitting the German officers to accept no risk to the major vessels. *Achates*’s role in keeping the heavy ships away from the convoy by continuing to lay a smoke screen while sinking after being hit by shells is portrayed as instrumental in the facsimiles of letters from the Admiralty.

The physical book is designed to combine text and graphics. Illustrations

are profuse and include very high-quality photographs, as well as plans and drawings. Many photographs are from non-official sources, showing daily life, such as the “regatta” at Murmansk. Some are colourised, like the picture on the front cover looking forward over the snow-covered foredeck of a battleship. Colourisation confers a positive benefit in transmitting information about the ships.

Perhaps it succeeds so well because the author’s search for sources began with people who were related to the actors and only ended in the archive and library. The fact that descendants were literate and owned cameras make them more able to transmit the story. This work is a high-quality product and especially so for such a small team of people. In the case of the author, he is an expert communicator telling a story that is engaging because it draws a clear line to the significance of the actors in the overall tactical and strategic outcome.

At CA\$36, this book is a bargain. It belongs in every library of naval affairs and history. Finally, it is an academic treatise. With a creditable, clearly organized bibliography, the author gives us tools to follow and explore his work. Scholars in modern history will want this in their library as a concise description of the strategic and tactical situation at sea in the Arctic during World War Two. Anyone with an interest in Scottish history will also want to read it.

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**Medina, Ana Maria Rivera, ed. *Ports in the Medieval European Atlantic: Shipping, Transport, and Labour***

**Boydell Press, 2021**

222 pp., illustrations

ISBN 9781783276158 (hardcover) US\$120.00; 9781800101685 (e-book)

US\$24.00

Increased colonization of the Atlantic littoral in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries brought about concurrent commercial development because of a shift in activities from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and European expansion into Atlantic spaces. Ports and their associated maritime communities that developed in the Medieval period were generally born, evolved, and functioned in similar ways as both in earlier and later periods – with available opportunities and local needs.

Port spaces typically had facilities for cargo handling, ship repair, and/