

cations necessary to allow B-25s to take-off from the *Enterprise*. The attack on Tokyo punctured Japan's sense of invincibility and restored the naval supremacy of U.S. carriers.

Russell's book is an important and detailed account of the Pacific War that that would appeal to anyone interested in the history of the Second World War, particularly in the role of aircraft carriers in the Pacific.

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Bernie Webber. *Lightships, Lighthouses and Lifeboat Stations*. Boca Raton, FL: Universal Publishers, www.universal-publishers.com, 2015. xxii+169 pp., illustrations, glossary, appendix. US \$25.95, paper; ISBN 978-1-62734-062-5. (E-book available.)

Bernard "Bernie" Webber is best known in popular culture as the main character in the 2016 film *The Finest Hours*, which tells the story of the 1952 Coast Guard rescue of over 30 sailors from the oil tanker SS *Pendleton* in a gale off the New England coast. Webber and his crew were awarded the Gold Life-saving Medal for the rescue operation. In 2012, the US Coast Guard cutter *Bernard C. Webber* was named in his honour. For Webber, the loss of *Pendleton* and the rescue of all but two of its crew was but one day of 45 years at sea. He became a Sea Scout at age 13, joined the US Maritime Service at age 16, and served with the US Merchant Marine in the Pacific and Atlantic during the Second World War. Webber then joined the US Coast Guard and served on cutters and lightships. In retirement, he owned a fishing boat and captained tug boats in Florida. Webber's life experiences are fodder for all sorts of narrative histories, but of all his experiences at sea, he

felt that the service of the United States' lightships was the most misunderstood and historically ignored.

Lightships, Lighthouses, & Lifeboats is both a memoir of Webber's experience in the lightship service and a memorial to him. Published posthumously six years after his death in 2009, this book presents a series of chaptered vignettes structured thematically and approximately sequentially that present Webber's personal experiences and perception of his lightship service and its place within the hierarchy of the Coast Guard Service. Peppered throughout the book are interstitial historical notes, lists of random facts related to notable events or incidents that happened to a particular vessel or at a particular station, and even a poem.

Webber begins by stating that this book is the story of the Nantucket Lightship Station boat LV112/WAL534, but it is really Webber's experience aboard the boat presented as an exemplar of the lightship service as a whole. Lightships functioned as floating lighthouses, visual and aural aids to navigation installed where building a lighthouse structure was impractical or impossible. They marked channel entrances and hazards such as shoals. The first lightship was installed in the United States at Chesapeake Bay in 1820. The last lightship in the US, *Nantucket I* (WLV-612), stationed at Nantucket Shoals, was decommissioned in 1985.

Webber describes the officers and sailors who served aboard lightships as "outsiders" in the US Coast Guard. The overarching impression within the military was that lightship service was degrading and that assignments to these vessels was used as punishment; it was below a guardsman's standards. Is a man a sailor if his ship always remains moored in place? Those assigned to lightships faced isolation, loneliness,

and boredom, punctuated by episodes of fear and terror. Their primary purpose, after all, was to mark hazards in all conditions including fog and storms. Webber describes in detail the feeling of knowing a large ocean liner is approaching unseen and the threat of collision in foul weather. Depression and anxiety were common. Sailors developed coping mechanisms and behavioural patterns such as learning to time the cadence of speech to the periodicity of the fog horn. Webber also describes the bonding activities of the sailors that filled their leisure time such as collecting plants floating on the water and cultivating them on board for amusement.

Webber states, “The excitement of saving lives and property—the type of work that produces heroes—was not a part of lightship duty.” (32) This is an odd and surprising statement from a man who is famous for doing just that! But this quote zeroes in on Webber’s true assessment of the purpose of lightship service—to prevent accidents and preclude the need to be a hero.

While this book is not a historical treatment of the lightship service, its importance lies in situating service aboard these vessels from the perspective of a sailor and officer who was there. Someone who manned these vessels in times of calm and utter boredom in addition to a great feat of heroism for which he became famous. Someone for whom the act of rescuing the crew of *Pendleton* was just a part of his job. We are not presented with an academic history of the lightships, but told what Webber himself considered important to know and why we should know it. This book puts Webber and the people who “sailed” the lightships at the centre of their history.

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