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Tin Can Titans: The Heroic Men and Ships of World War II's Most Decorated Navy Destroyer Squadron

Blake I. Campbell

John Wukovits

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Tin Can Titans: The Heroic Men and Ships of World War II's Most Decorated Navy Destroyer Squadron, by John Wukovits. Boston: Da Capo, 2017. 352 pages. \$18.99.

In this, his newest work, distinguished naval historian John Wukovits traces the history of USN Destroyer Squadron (DesRon) 21's Pacific theater operations from 1942 to 1945. According to Wukovits, DesRon 21 was one of the most highly acclaimed and decorated squadrons in the entire U.S. Navy during World War II. DesRon 21 destroyers are noted for advancing on the Solomon Islands in the Pacific and holding back the Japanese navy until U.S. reinforcements arrived. The squadron also launched assaults against the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, into the Philippines, and at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. During the squadron's three years of service, these exploits and more—including dozens of minor clashes, countless patrols, and naval escort missions—earned DesRon 21 “three Presidential Unit Citations, one Navy Unit Commendation, and 118 battle stars” (p. 5), making it a most worthy subject of this exceptional book.

However, while Wukovits's work is a study of DesRon 21, it is the people, rather than the ships, who brought about the unit's wartime success. Wukovits states that “[w]hile DesRon 21's achievements were impressive, it was not a squadron of ships that registered an inspiring resumé, but the people serving aboard those destroyers” (p. 5). Subsequently, this particular emphasis on the men of DesRon 21—Commander MacDonald, Doc Ransom, Seaman Chesnutt, Seaman Whisler, and so many more—is what makes Wukovits's book so uniquely engaging for the reader. This

historical study—like all history—is, at its core, a story about people.

Wukovits tells the story of DesRon 21 and the sailors who served on its vessels in their various battles and campaigns in the Pacific. He introduces the reader to the squadron and its sailors circa mid-1942, in the midst of a gloomy period of operations within the Pacific theater. The reader is taken on a journey throughout the entirety of the squadron's wartime operations up to its ultimate triumph, including having the honor of leading the U.S. Navy, under the guidance of Admiral William F. Halsey, into Tokyo Bay to receive the Japanese surrender in August 1945. This honor was bestowed on the ships and sailors of DesRon 21 by Admiral Halsey, who credited victory in the Pacific to the courage and skill of DesRon 21 and its personnel.

Wukovits divides his work into three parts, with each part containing roughly three chapters, making the reading of this book quite manageable. Part 1 covers the origins of DesRon 21 and the beginning of its campaign in the Solomon Islands, including the battle of Guadalcanal (Operation WATCH-TOWER). Wukovits also does an excellent job of describing the squadron's function and its organization, as well as the origins of the various vessels. Wukovits's attention is well spent here, given the length and difficulty of USN operations in this geographical subset of the Pacific theater during the war. Then, as the book moves forward through parts 2 and 3, the reader is drawn into DesRon 21's bloody and hard-fought campaign that extended all the way from Guadalcanal to Tokyo—and, of course, the lives of its crewmembers, which perhaps constitutes the highlight of the book.

In telling the fascinating story of DesRon 21 and its crew, Wukovits demonstrates without a doubt that, as a scholar and historian, he rivals such naval historians of the Pacific theater as James Hornfischer and Samuel Eliot Morison. The book might have included more maps to ensure correct and continued orientation to the events, places, movements, and battles it describes. Nonetheless, Wukovits has compiled an excellent study of DesRon 21, one that is demonstrably the product of lengthy research into wartime naval records; academic research; and personal oral interviews with those DesRon 21 crewmembers still living, which bring an intimate and personal quality to this historical study. In sum, *Tin Can Titans* unquestionably is a must-have addition for any armchair World War II history buff or student of naval history.

BLAKE I. CAMPBELL



The Official History of the UK Strategic Nuclear Deterrent, by Matthew Jones. Vol. 1, *From the V-Bomber Era to the Arrival of Polaris, 1945–1964*. London: Routledge, 2017. 547 pages. \$155.

The Official History of the UK Strategic Nuclear Deterrent, by Matthew Jones. Vol. 2, *The Labour Government and the Polaris Programme, 1964–1970*. London: Routledge, 2017. 559 pages. \$155.

No inquiry into British nuclear history can be undertaken in isolation from the presence of an intimate U.S. involvement. It therefore is worth taking notice of the publication of the two-volume *Official History of the UK Strategic Nuclear Deterrent*. Matthew Jones, professor of international history at the London School of Economics, was granted unprecedented access

to hitherto unavailable materials to produce this official history.

At the beginning of both volumes, Professor Jones graciously pays tribute to the pioneers of British nuclear historiography, Professor Margaret Gowing and her associate Lorna Arnold. Gowing, official historian of the United Kingdom (U.K.) Atomic Energy Authority and professor of the history of science at Oxford, authored the studies that set the scholarly standard: *Britain and Atomic Energy, 1939–1945* and, a decade later, her two-volume *Independence and Deterrence: Britain and Atomic Energy, 1945–1952*. Arnold assisted Gowing, then in 2001 published her own book, *Britain and the H-bomb*. Jones's two new volumes are worthy sequels.

America's initial monopoly over the atomic bomb fed the British sense of technological exclusion. Determined then to "go it alone," Britain asserted an initial nuclear doctrine of sovereign and independent control over its nuclear weapons. It was only *after* Britain had demonstrated a unilateral mastery of thermonuclear weapons development in May 1957 that the United Kingdom was granted access to specific U.S. nuclear weapons technologies. For Jones, the ensuing 1958 U.S.-U.K. mutual-defense agreement remains "one of the most remarkable examples of pooling of sensitive national security information by two sovereign states, and has rightly been seen as one of the fundamental pillars of the post-war Anglo-American relationship."

The United Kingdom's capacity to inflict assured nuclear destruction, independent of the United States, allowed it to behave as a "second centre of decision." In this position, Britain