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The War Below: The Story of Three Submarines That Battled Japan

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Bell, an established and well respected historian of the twentieth-century Royal Navy, explores the subject by a balanced and stimulating chronological review of Churchill's direct and indirect association with the Royal Navy from before the First World War to the end of the Second. Churchill generally emerges quite well, in much better shape than his detractors would lead us to expect. But this is no hagiography. Churchill's limitations, mistakes, and misperceptions are pointed out as well as his achievements. Bell shows Churchill to have been realistic and pragmatic about naval construction in the period before the First World War; not wholly and solely to blame for the disastrous outcome of the Dardanelles campaign of 1915; and capable of recognizing, even in political exile, that the battle of Jutland *had been* in fact a strategic victory for the British. In the First World War, and indeed the Second as well, Churchill was an "ideas man" who continually pushed for offensive schemes, running up against the staid and conservative counsels of his service chiefs.

His was one voice, but there were many others. Occasionally too, his ideas now seem extraordinarily ill judged (most obviously that of sending a "surplus" fleet into the Baltic to attack the German coast without defeating the German fleet and air force first). Normally, though, Bell shows that there was sense in what he said, and certainly his restless pursuit of action that could help bring victory was a necessary, though sometimes much resented, goad to his military men. Many were less than happy with his infatuation with, and pretended expertise in, military technology. "Machines save life," he said in 1917; "machine-power is a substitute for manpower." Hence his enthusiasm for the airpower in the

First World War, an enthusiasm that, when allied to his push for offensive action, led to the British strategic bombing offensive of the Second World War but also the relative neglect of the all-important Battle of the Atlantic.

This is rich fare. Many of Churchill's conceptions of sea power are thoroughly and sensibly considered in this book, which deserves to be read not just because it is about Churchill but also for its secondary topic (which the author could well have better developed)—the balance struck between the military and its political masters in the direction of war. To what extent should civilian leaders like Churchill "interfere" in the planning and conduct of military operations when their motivations are more *operational* than political or diplomatic? It was on this very point that Churchill's service chiefs really had objections during the war. Churchill insisted that his operational ideas about what the Royal Navy could and should be doing were good enough to be taken seriously, even if not accepted in the end by professional sailors. Christopher Bell shows us that in the main they were taken seriously, and deservedly so.

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Scott, James. *The War Below: The Story of Three Submarines That Battled Japan*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013. 420 pp. \$28

The War Below is a remarkable historical analysis of submarine warfare in the Pacific during World War II. It interweaves stories of submariners (especially their skippers) with comprehensive description of naval warfare from Pearl Harbor

to the liberation of American prisoners of war. Author James Scott chose three diesel fleet boats (*Silversides*, *Drum*, and *Tang*) and their crews to narrate his eloquently crafted tale of the significance of America's submarine force in cutting off vital supply lines and strangling Japan. These three submarines alone sank a confirmed sixty-two Japanese freighters, tankers, and transports.

Scott's first book, *The Attack on the Liberty* (2010), won the Samuel Eliot Morison Award, and his experience as investigative reporter shines throughout this new work, in its arguably unequalled research, which involved interviews with over one hundred World War II submarine veterans and several thousand pages of unpublished letters, diaries, and memoirs of commanding officers and crew members. Scott's riveting narrative brings these submariners to life and draws readers into the naval strategies of the Pacific.

A primary strength of *The War Below* lies in the personal stories of these American heroes. These anecdotes provide the book's spine. In a Tom Clancy-like style, Scott portrays insiders' views about serving in the silent service while at war with a powerful enemy. Displaying his unusual gift of combining storytelling and research (detailed in seventy-six pages of endnotes), Scott portrays various leadership styles and decision-making processes, as well as fear and pure bravery. Submarine commanders, qualified by prewar experiences and on-the-job training, often trod the fine line between taking risks too great for their boats' safety and not accomplishing their missions. A well-trained crew, strong skippers, and pure luck contributed to the ultimate successes of these courageous submariners, many of whom lost their boats and lives.

Underlying this compelling tale is the importance of training and preparation for attack and the absolute necessity of creating teams whose members trust one another. Confinement to tight quarters for long periods of time, often below the surface, demanded teamwork. Scott follows the skippers' actions as they execute their orders with tenacity, competitiveness, ambition, patience, and brilliance.

Readers will experience a sense of excitement when the submariners succeed, as well as dismay over missed targets. Until the problem was solved several years into the war, U.S. submariners faced the likelihood of firing and failing because of defective torpedo design. Since the war, what lessons have been learned from this disastrous engineering mistake about preparedness for future wars and weaponry? Why had the Navy failed these men, who risked their lives for their country?

In the last, memorable chapters, the fate of American prisoners of war (including *Tang's* captain, Dick O'Kane, and eight of his crew) is recounted—one of torture and agony. Scott, with impeccable detail, writes of unimaginable circumstances in Japan's "hellships" that transported Allied prisoners to camps. Descriptions of the camps, based on hundreds of pages of war-crimes depositions, take the reader to hell and back.

This work is a must-read. It is a spell-binding narrative that transcends the simple historical genre and makes present and accessible the personalities and perils of submarine warfare during wartime. On behalf of the members of the Navy's silent service—past and present—and of their families, thank you, James Scott, for writing this history.

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