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Destroyer Skipper: A Memoir of Command at Sea

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Don Sheppard

simply give up, or worse, allow guerrillas to transform themselves into a regular army. "Serious guerrilla movements cannot be defeated on the cheap," and the country that attempts to do so will fail. Guerrillas, for their part, should act in combination with regular troops, or wait and protract the conflict until they can become regular troops. In this same vein, Joes emphasizes the importance of foreign assistance to guerrilla movements. The American revolutionaries had essential strategic help from the French navy, but counterrevolutionaries in the French Vendée were isolated and doomed. The Spanish resistance to Napoleon both aided and was aided by the British. The American Confederacy never succeeded in gaining foreigu allies.

Joes concludes most powerfully, asserting that "rectitude is worth many battalions." Such a statement recalls that war is a matter of politics and diplomacy as much as of tactics. Abraham Lincoln's generous treatment of the defeated rebels is the best explanation of why a post-Appomattox guerrilla war never materialized. Conversely, the French Convention's policy of genocide for the Vendéens in 1793–1794 not only failed to defeat the insurgency but helped spawn the 1815 uprising against Napoleon's return from Elba—a rebellion that took thirty thousand troops to suppress at a time when the rethroned emperor had only seventy-two thousand men at Waterloo.

Bonaparte himself had once been offered the opportunity to command artillery in the Vendée but refused the assignment. Little wonder then that when his turn came to suppress Spanish guerrillas fighting French hegemony, Bonaparte repeated the mistakes of the early Revolutionaries—his brutal policies guaranteed that the resistance would have no choice but to continue to death or victory.

It is also little wonder that the Central Intelligence Agency put Joes's book among its top ten must-reads for 1997. Even if one did not agree with Joes's conclusions, the book is a superb one for any history buff. Each chapter may be taken as a unique case, even if the author argues otherwise. And each reader can no doubt find his or her own worthwhile lessons in the four histories. The value of those lessons, and of Joes's conclusion, will depend upon whether the reader agrees with his central assertions: that guerrilla warfare is a "specter . . . haunting the Post Cold War world," and, quoting C.E. Callwell, that "guerrilla warfare is what regular armies have most to dread."

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Sheppard, Don. *Destroyer Skipper: A Memoir of Command at Sea.* Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1996. 270pp. $24.95

Destroyer Skipper is an engaging recounting of the author's experiences while serving first as the executive officer of one destroyer and later as commanding officer of another during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Sheppard started his career as an enlisted sailor in 1948 and served nearly thirty years, until 1977. He has previously described the earlier parts of his career in two other books, *Blue Water Sailor* and *Riverine.*

This is actually a semi-autobiographical account. As the author notes in his foreword, the characters are a composite of various people he served with during his career; "The events are real, but not always the sequence." He no doubt did this to avoid embarrassing some of his actual shipmates, and it does not detract at all from his impressionistic account of "tin can" life a generation ago.

Not surprisingly, Sheppard's executive officer and commanding officer tours were filled with various incidents, some hilarious, some of them the nerve-wracking, edge-of-disaster ones that most line officers will be familiar with from their own experience, and many of the humdrum, routine events that inevitably fill the great majority of time at sea. The best parts of the book are composite character sketches of various kinds of officers and sailors, both good and bad, showing how their interactions with their shipmates affected shipboard life. Sheppard illustrates how bad commanding officers can destroy the morale and efficiency of their units by being martinets, afraid to delegate the slightest authority; how good officers can inspire confidence by placing trust in those subordinates who earn it; and how the pressures of the real world efface the initial arrogance and bravado of many young officers. Throughout, there are memorable depictions of sailors from a wide range of backgrounds who variously do well and not so well.

This reviewer recently assumed command of a destroyer, which made *Destroyer Skipper* an especially timely, enjoyable read. There is no comparison between the destroyers of Sheppard's era and today's DDs, which have three times the displacement and far greater capabilities, carry weapons of national-level significance, and are, in short, different platforms altogether. Yet importantly there are continuities as well, particularly at the human level. The leadership requirements, the endless array of problems great and small, the paperwork (!), and other basics have remained remarkably unchanged despite the plethora of trendy programs, management tools, and fads of various kinds that have been foisted on the fleet in recent years—supposedly because the culture, "the younger generation," the Zeitgeist, you name it, are different now. Yeah, right. Commander Sheppard's memoir is a refreshing reminder that despite the inevitable changes in the particulars of the naval profession, certain traditions and leadership fundamentals, especially as they pertain to integrity and *character*, have remained remarkably constant over the centuries. We change them at our peril.

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Curry, Cecil B. *Victory at Any Cost: The Genius of Viet Nam's General Vo Nguyen Giap*. Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1997. 401pp. $25.95

To American military officers and the Western community in general, General Vo Nguyen Giap remains an enigma. In the latest biography of the architect of America's defeat, Cecil Currey portrays his subject as one of the most talented generals in the twentieth century and the greatest living expert on