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## Tin Can Sailor: Life Aboard the USS Sterett

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## 150 Naval War College Review

The bibliography was surprising in its total lack of reference to accepted works on cover and deception, with the exception of Anthony Cave Brown's *Bodyguard of Lies*. Even if the author's intent was merely to illuminate a small, relatively unknown group of personnel, he could have placed their frequently creative and often brave efforts more clearly into context, which would have contributed greatly to making this work a genuine history rather than a mere narrative. Michael Dewar's *The Art of Deception in Warfare*, editor Michael Handel's collections *Strategic and Operational Deception in World War II* and *Intelligence and Military Operations*, and Charles Cruickshank's *Deception in World War II* are but a few of the more comprehensive treatments of strategic and tactical cover and deception operations of which the exploits of the Beach Jumpers were a part.

It is evident that the author holds the Beach Jumpers, especially the World War II prototypes, in high esteem, and it is true that they contributed to Allied victories in Operations HUSKY, AVALANCHE, BRASSARD, and others. Clearly it is no discredit to the individuals involved to express the opinion that the *real* history of their exploits is still out there, waiting to be written.

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Calhoun, Raymond C. *Tin Can Sailor: Life Aboard the USS Sterett, 1939-1945*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1993. 198pp. \$23.95

To know war may now be of peripheral interest to retired navy captain Raymond Calhoun, but for serving naval officers and petty officers, it is a powerful reason to own and read this book. This unvarnished, true story of what befell the destroyer USS *Sterett* (DD 407) begins in 1939, continues through World War II, and ends in 1947, when the *Sterett* was decommissioned.

With the publication of this book, the Naval Institute Press has done a great service for its readers. From beginning to end, this saga of wartime surface action, and antisubmarine and antiair attacks is told in the plain language of seagoing destroyermen. Some were wounded or killed in action against the enemy. Each and every crewman served with distinction.

To this day the crew meets regularly to recapture their fidelity of purpose to their nation, their ship, and to each other. Calhoun has described well the terror and comradery of the crew of the USS *Sterett*. Here, then, is an excerpt from the opening page of *Tin Can Sailor*.

"The searchlight from the Japanese battleship swept down our column from the *Cushing* to the *San Francisco* where it came to rest. Every ship ahead of the *San Francisco* having been disclosed to the enemy in the one rapid sweep of blinding blue-white light. Everyone opened fire at once. In the waters of Iron Bottom Sound the world exploded. Tracers whistled overhead so close (to the gun director) that I felt I could touch them if I raised my hand. The noise and concussions were deafening but even in that din I recognized the sound of the *Helena's* 6-inch guns as it blasted a salvo straight into the Japanese searchlight. . . . Enemy

shells splashed on both sides of *Sterett*. Our own tracers hit squarely on the forecastle of our target (the battleship). It was illuminated in a most unique way: the *Sterett*'s guns had been loaded with star shells for our first salvo and we had fired them to hit rather than to illuminate. Hit they did and when they detonated the star shells burned brightly on the deck of the target. She soon caught fire in the vicinity of number two turret. Seconds later, there came a second blinding flash. The whole gun director shook and we were showered with shell fragments. I could feel them and hear them bounce off my padded talker's helmet. One of them neatly clipped the telephone button out from under my finger leaving me just a stub of a pin to press in order to keep my microphone open. I asked whether anyone in the director crew had been hit . . . . 'Yes, I am . . . Yeah, I think so . . . Yes, in the back.' I asked if anyone felt they needed immediate treatment. Instantly, all three answered with a loud and definite NO. So we sat there more alert than ever, looking for fresh targets."

When a sailor meets the enemy face to face, be it in a small or global war, the challenge to personal courage and professional training is direct and immediate. Each hopes and expects to be equal to that challenge. Honest accounts like those of *Tin Can Sailor* depict what shape the challenge may take and reaffirm that the U.S. Navy has met those challenges and prevailed.

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Grove, Eric. *Sea Battles in Close-up: World War II, Vol. II*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1993. 224pp. \$24.95

In 1988 Eric Grove edited an updated version of a popular collection of monographs, originally published by Ian Allan, Ltd., in the early 1970s and entitled *Sea Battles in Close-up*, which dealt with ten significant naval battles of the Second World War. The motivation for the reissue is that significant new information has recently come to light—particularly relating to Ultra—which renders some of the original work inaccurate. The battles included in the initial volume were intended to "reflect accurately the changing nature of this most challenging of naval wars." In this second volume, the author has chosen nine more episodes. Seven involve sea battles, while two—the campaign against the *Tirpitz* and Operation NEPTUNE, the naval side of the Normandy invasion—concern important naval operations during World War II.

Grove's sustained theme in this series is that "World War II came at a time of decisive change in the nature of naval warfare." This volume focuses in particular on the idea that "the gun-armed warship was no longer supreme." However, as will cheer the hearts of surface warfare officers, "it was still important and sometimes decisive." In examining these propositions, Grove describes the battles of Narvik, Crete, the Java Sea, and Sirte, and various actions of the Malta Striking Forces, in which the roles of surface warships were particularly important. However, to emphasize the huge changes that had occurred in naval warfare since the start of the war,