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## Admiral Arleigh Burke, by E.B. Potter

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Potter, E.B. *Admiral Arleigh Burke*. New York: Random House, 1990. 494pp. \$24.95

Professor E.B. Potter is well-known for his biographies of Admirals Nimitz and Halsey. This latest work on Admiral Arleigh Burke, the navy's last living icon from the glory days of World War II, should prove no less popular. It is not, however, the comprehensive account that Admiral Burke's career certainly merits.

Potter begins with a description of Admiral Burke's wartime exploits and concentrates on his actions as a destroyer squadron commander in the 1943 Solomon Islands campaigns and later as Task Force 58 chief of staff. This is followed by Burke's postwar activities, many of which are widely known but are undoubtedly more important in their impact than his glorious but not very significant small-unit actions in the Solomons.

Among other things, Burke was involved in the late 1940s with the drastic and hasty postwar cuts in naval readiness and the severe interservice rivalry over missions. He played an important role in the introduction to the fleet of radical new technologies such as nuclear submarines, sea-based ballistic missiles, large-deck carriers, and guided missiles during his three terms as chief of naval operations. Burke's detailed views on these matters would have been of particular interest and relevance; the issues now emerging of major postwar armed forces shrinkage, service missions and roles, and of the dramatic impact of new technologies on warfighting bear a

strong resemblance to those Burke and the navy confronted in the late 1940s and the 1950s.

Potter writes in a folksy, conversational style, and so this biography fails to satisfy. It has been said that the best biographers are conscientious enemies of their subjects: scrupulous when sifting evidence, unenthralled, and disposed to suspicion. In this work, Professor Potter is clearly a "company man," wholly sympathetic to his subject and the navy.

Admiral Burke was associated with many controversies involving important issues during his long career. Those who did not agree with him often had valid reasons for opposition. A historian or biographer ought to examine those disagreements critically.

Potter states in his preface, however, that rather than write a multi-volume comprehensive work, he chose to write "a sensitive, one-volume biography . . . to attract general readers, acquainting them with Arleigh Burke's character, his major achievements, and his contributions to the navy and to his country." This he has done. However, a career as distinguished and controversial as Arleigh Burke's still awaits a comprehensive, dispassionate examination.

JAN VAN TOL  
USS *Gallant* (MSO 489)

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Mason, Theodore C. *We Will Stand by You*. Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1990. 269pp. \$24.95  
"We will stand by you" was the message sent by the commanding officer