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## The Boats of Cherbourg

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This book is the result of cautious competence toward the great issues of naval history. *The Price of Admiralty* is conventional wisdom, well expressed. For my taste, Keegan's portraiture of battle, like Bruce Catton's, is rounded out with quotes from too many letters and diaries from just plain John Does. It smacks of TV interviews after the disaster. But his is the equal of the stuff I still enjoy in Fletcher Pratt's works, Ernest Hemingway's anthology, *Men At War*, and Hanson W. Baldwin's *Sea Fights and Shipwrecks*.

Former Secretary Lehman wrote a more laudatory review in the *Wall Street Journal* about a less well executed book, Barbara Tuchman's *The First Salute*. I think Mr. Lehman was kind because the thesis of Tuchman's book is that sea power matters and is too lightly regarded. Keegan has given lay readers a fair sense of sea war as at once majestic and miserable, and if I were reviewing for *The New York Times* instead of for the naval community my praise would be less stinting.

Here and there Keegan strays about twenty degrees off course, and I want to show why that is important. He closes the book with a forecast of the capital ship of the future. First he gives us a limited choice between carrier and submarine and then casts his lot with the submarine with the belief that nothing on the surface will survive missile and torpedo attacks in the future. Hence, the title of the last chapter, "The Empty Ocean." But the title identifies the flaw: an empty ocean is intolerable to the United States, Japan, Nato and to the oil rich states of Southwest Asia. Submarines can take away but cannot provide. Something must protect shipping and Marines. Keegan writes that submarines have communications problems, but he does not say that communications for mutual support and concerted action are woven into the very essence and character of both capital ships and the escorts of ships which must ply their trade. A naval policy that is only twenty degrees off course is dangerously off course. Sooner or later its ships will have "went ashore," like the *Exxon Valdez* did last year off Alaska, or the flush deckers that smashed into Point Arguello in 1923. Naval policy must be better than that.

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Rabinovich, Abraham. *The Boats of Cherbourg*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988. 306pp. \$18.95  
*The Boats of Cherbourg* is so well written that the reader easily becomes witness to events of spell-binding international intrigue. Traveling from Cherbourg and Europe,

via the Mediterranean Sea to Israel and the Middle East, one finds a route replete with captivating accounts of the activities surrounding the central issue of this book: The escape from France of the German-designed, French-built "Saar" missile boats that became capital ships of

the Israeli Navy. The author explores the events of this operation with admirable detail. Moreover, he has made clear the impact of these boats upon present-day naval warfare.

Mr. Rabinovich is a senior feature writer for the *Jerusalem Post*. He claims access to hitherto highly classified information provided by the Israeli Navy and military industries, in addition to previously untapped sources in France.

On 21 October 1967, the Israeli destroyer *Eilat* was sunk by a salvo of missiles fired by Egyptian missile boats. For the first time in history, a naval vessel was destroyed by surface-to-surface missiles fired from a small, high-speed vessel by crewmen viewing their target solely on a radar screen. Three of the four missiles fired hit their target. The fourth missed only because there was not enough of the *Eilat* remaining above the surface.

The concept of missile boats was introduced by the Soviets in the 1950s. Their first missiles, the *Scrubber* and *Styx*, were carried on board *Komar* and *Osa*-class boats. These boats were to counter any possible approach to the Soviet Union by an American carrier task force, whose likely intent would be strikes on the Soviet homeland; they were to serve as an interim deterrent until a Soviet navy buildup occurred.

In 1962 *Komars* were exported to Cuba and Egypt, attracting the immediate attention of both the United States and Israel, respectively. At the same time, the

Israeli Navy needed a multipurpose craft capable of taking on destroyers and subs, and for both extended operations at sea and close-in shore bombardment. The solution proved to be the French-built missile boats with homemade *Gabriel* surface-to-surface missiles. Israel gambled the future security of its sea frontier and maritime lifeline on twelve of these boats. By December 1968 the *Amiot* shipyard in Cherbourg had delivered five of the twelve ordered. Two additional boats were prematurely sailed from the shipyard by an anxious Israeli Navy to avoid an anticipated French embargo on further delivery of military equipment to Middle Eastern countries during a period of increasing tension.

However, the remaining five boats that were ordered ultimately became entangled in the embargo. It took a fascinating Israeli scheme of international hoodwinking to extricate these boats from Cherbourg and deliver them to Israel. The risks taken to remove the boats from France were far exceeded by their future value to the Israeli Navy. Even by itself, this element of the story more than justifies the reader's investment.

The reader is left to decide for himself whether or not to praise or condemn the "rescue" mission. However, each nation will do what it must to ensure its survival, and this was merely an example of Israel doing exactly that.

The last part of the book is the most interesting from the oper-

ational and tactical points of view. The author recounts the invaluable role these boats played in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Although the ground and air battles have been well publicized, very little was reported on the naval engagements. This book accomplishes that task.

The Israelis were able to score unparalleled victories against both the Egyptians and Syrians with the boats of Cherbourg, armed with Gabriel missiles, 76-mm guns and electronic umbrella chaff systems. The EW system on board the boats performed perfectly against fifty-four Soviet missile challenges.

Making the best of the most important principle of warfare, surprise, the Israelis were able to forestall any challenge to their maritime well-being.

Rabinovich also offers an interesting discussion of the U.S. Sixth Fleet and Sovmedron roles during the 1973 war.

I highly recommend *The Boats of Cherbourg*. International mystery and invaluable examples of creative strategies and tactics combine to make this book well worth the investment in time.

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Hill, J. R., Rear Admiral, Royal Navy. *Arms Control at Sea*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989. 229pp. \$27.95

Until recently, little had been written on the naval aspects of arms control. Now the subject seems to be all the rage. A growing collection of material gives testimony to the amount of attention being paid to a wide range of proposals to reduce the inventories, operations and weaponry of naval forces.

The Soviet Union, especially under Gorbachev, has dedicated a large public relations offensive to the goal of cutting naval arms. In over 20 major public policy addresses in the past two years alone, Soviet leaders have made specific proposals to cut naval forces. Their list is all-encompassing, aimed at specific limits, such as the number of ships in the Mediterranean, ceilings on ship construction and establishing "zones of peace" which would prohibit the presence of warships.

In *Arms Control at Sea*, Rear Admiral J. R. Hill (Royal Navy, retired) has produced a complete review of this important and timely topic. He presents not only a framework to understand the modalities of naval arms control, but a critical assessment of what may be at stake. Admiral Hill is now editor of *The Naval Review*, and recently wrote another Naval Institute book, *Maritime Strategy for Medium Powers*. *Arms Control at Sea* deserves serious consideration, not just because of the author's naval credentials, but because it is the first volume dedicated to this subject.

Admiral Hill emphasizes the influence of international law. Multilateral agreements (such as the