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## Convoy

S. D. Landersman  
*U.S. Navy (Ret.)*

Martin Middlebrook

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Middlebrook, Martin. *Convoy*. New York: Quill, William Morrow and Co., 1976. 378pp. \$9.95

*Convoy* by Martin Middlebrook is a highly professional, accurate, thoroughly researched reconstruction of what was first called, "the greatest convoy battle of all time"—it is a book that contemporary naval strategists and planners should "revisit." After three years of war, with the Allies winning on every front, but with the survival of Britain hanging on the tenuous Atlantic sea line, adequate protection was still not provided to the convoys. Too few escort ships with ineffective capabilities struggled against heavy weather and overwhelming numbers of German U-boats. Commanders were faced with rescue of survivors versus prosecution of an unseen enemy. The arrival of patrol aircraft was a most dramatic influence on the battle and the entire campaign. The author takes us through a careful description of World War II events leading up to this major battle. He explores with us the backgrounds of the men in the merchant ships, the escort vessels, the land-based command centers, and the flight crews. He looks into the backgrounds of the German U-boat crews and staffs ashore. The book does an excellent job of creating for us a clear picture of the four participants of a convoy battle: the ships, the crews, the commanders, and the intelligence systems.

In early 1943 the German Commander in Chief, U-boats, Gross Admiral Karl Donitz, with a small staff operating in a Berlin hotel,

supplied with a continuous flow of decoded British signals, sent 42 of his submarines against two convoys consisting of 141 ships. The convoys, protected by a handful of escort vessels, moved slowly into the "air gap" of the North Atlantic to face the greatest concentration of U-boats that had ever threatened the convoy routes.

In this air gap, which was an area not covered by land-based antisubmarine aircraft patrols, Donitz planned for his U-boats to attack the convoys. The description of the battle is as exciting as a good novel. Middlebrook takes us from the bridge of a corvette, to the deck of a sinking merchant ship, to the conning tower of a U-boat, with eyewitness descriptions of the action. We share in the panic, frustration and discipline, the success and failure, the right and wrong decisions of officers on both sides, of sailors, of observers, and of ashore commanders and staffs.

*Convoy* is far more than informative and exciting reading. It is essential reading for Navy people involved in planning, policy, and decisions related to strategic sealift, control of shipping and protection of shipping. Middlebrook asks some basic questions after he describes the battle. Why was there an air gap and did it have to exist? Why were there insufficient numbers of ineffective escort vessels and why were escort force commanders ill-trained? Why did the enemy know of almost every convoy? These are questions of interest to World War II historians, but most importantly they represent

questions which could be as relevant today and in the future as they were in 1943.

In a future conflict—if the NATO forces are not to relearn the lessons of two World Wars—we must pay attention to what Martin Middlebrook is telling us. Systems for protecting merchant shipping must be developed. Resources must be provided. Procedures for this protection must be documented, taught, and practiced at sea. Secure communications with properly staffed and equipped command centers must be provided. The tactics, rescue procedures, salvage methods, control and routing of merchant ships must be practiced in peacetime.

There are many lessons for us in *Convoy*. One concerns the CHOP (change in operational control) line encountered by Atlantic convoys as control changed between British and U.S. staffs. In 1943 there was one such change encountered by North Atlantic convoys. This caused considerable problems in control and protection of the convoys as policy and resources varied on each side of the CHOP line. Today, NATO plans provide for five such CHOP lines, with each NATO commander responsible for a segment of the convoys' transits. Having experienced the difficulty created by one such change we now plan on five.

*Convoy* is an excellent book, a valuable addition to the library of lessons hard learned in that dirty unglamorous part of war which cannot be overlooked again. Written ten years ago about a battle fought 45

years ago, it is more important today than ever.

S.D. LANDERSMAN  
Captain, U.S. Navy (Ret.)

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Dibb, Paul. *The Soviet Union: The Incomplete Superpower*. Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1986. 293pp. \$26.95

Paul Dibb—a senior research fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, The Australian National University at Canberra—has not created an innovative or original interpretation of the Soviet Union, but this is hardly likely given the extensive writings presently being poured out which look at every aspect of this country. However, his book is a sound and balanced examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the Soviet economy, especially as it affects the foreign and military activities of the U.S.S.R.

*The Soviet Union* is particularly useful as a collation of the judgments of Western observers on the reasons for Soviet exploitation of its power—political, economic and military—within the international system. It is Dibb's conviction that the Soviet Union has failed to attract any countries in the Third World to the Soviet model. Politically and economically the U.S.S.R. has not inspired emulators; only its military strength, aid, and weapons have had impact. However, there is a political influence that I believe Dibb and many other scholars have ignored. The Leninist organizational model