

1982

The American Submarine

John E. Jackson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Jackson, John E. (1982) "The American Submarine," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 35 : No. 3 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol35/iss3/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

military reform, just as there are for the progressive movement as a whole. Nevertheless Professor Abrahamson has drawn a lesson well worth pondering from the earlier successes of the military reformers: "Their modest, adaptive approach, which gave full attention to both the international and domestic dimensions of military policy, established a pattern suitable for emulation by subsequent generations of military leaders."

MICHAEL K. DOYLE
ARINC Research Corporation

Polmar, Norman. *The American Submarine*. Annapolis, Md.: Nautical & Aviation Publishing, 1981. 172pp. \$17.95

On a cold February night in 1864, the first successful submarine attack in history was carried out by the surfaced Confederate submarine *Hunley* against the Union steam sloop *Housatonic*. Inside the 40-foot boiler-plate craft, a crew of 8 men manually turned a crank to propel the submarine towards its target. *Hunley's* "torpedo," mounted on a spar extending in front of the boat, rammed the *Housatonic* and the ensuing explosion sank both the attacker and the attacked. From that night forward, naval commanders knew that the enemy could attack not only from the four points of the compass, but below the surface of the sea as well.

The American Submarine, by Norman Polmar, provides an authoritative overview of the history, current use, and future potential of sub-surface craft. Polmar, one of America's most highly regarded defense writers, has written a profusely illustrated book which follows the growth of submarines from David Bushnell's one-man *Turtle* of 1776 to the mammoth *Ohio* of the 1980s with her crew of over 130.

One of the more interesting chapters in the book describes the contributions of

the "silent service" during World War II. As one measure of the success of US submarine warfare in the Pacific, the author notes that American submarines sank 55 percent of the total merchant tonnage and 29 percent of all warships lost by the Japanese during the war. This record was amassed by a force that comprised only 1.6 percent of the entire US Navy.

Despite the unquestionable success of submarines during the war, the fact remained that they were not true submarines, but were really specialized surface craft, submersibles, that could dip beneath the waves for what we now consider to be short periods of time. This remained true until 17 January 1955, when the age of the true submarine began with the USS *Nautilus'* report that she was "Underway on nuclear power." The *Nautilus* was the result of a program which began in the closing days of World War II. The head of the super-secret "Manhattan Project" formed a committee to investigate postwar uses for atomic energy, with nuclear ship propulsion emerging as the principal recommendation. Polmar traces the development of the "atom-powered" submarine from drawing board to building ways.

The development of the nuclear submarine was in itself a remarkable achievement, but of equal significance was the marriage of the nuclear-powered submarine and the long-range ballistic missile.

The author salutes Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Arleigh Burke and Special Projects Office head Vadm. William Raborn for leadership in developing the Polaris missile and the fleet ballistic missile submarine to carry it. In just over 5 years, the Polaris concept went from blue-prints to blue-water in what is still regarded as one of the most successful weapons procurement pro-

jects in history. Polmar details the Polaris story, and then brings the sea-based ballistic missile program up to date with his coverage of the massive *Ohio* class submarine, which, with the Trident missile, will provide the seaborne leg of the long-range nuclear weapon "triad" into the 21st century.

The public has always been fascinated by the submarine, from Captain Nemo's "Nautilus" in "Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" to the true life adventures of men such as Captain Edward L. Beach, who commanded the USS *Triton* on her historic *submerged* circumnavigation of the earth in 1960. Norman Polmar's excellent book is filled with enough information and photographs to take away some of the mystery, but none of the glamour, of the American submarine.

JOHN E. JACKSON

Lieutenant Commander, Supply Corps,
US Navy

Wallin, Jeffrey D. *By Ships Alone: Churchill and the Dardanelles*. Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1981. 216pp. \$12.95

For most of us, the story of the attempt on the part of the Allies to storm the Dardanelles in 1915, was a sideshow to the real action which took place in Europe. If we know anything at all of the story, it is probably the Army side of the action, popularized in a book, *Gallipoli*, by Alan Morehead, or, more recently, as told in a popular Australian film of the same name. That the action was principally a naval action, and that it failed, and that it was something of a disgrace to Winston Churchill, who was then serving as First Lord of the Admiralty, is less well known. Churchill in fact was wholly blamed for the failure and was forced to resign his position. After the disaster at the Dardanelles, his reputa-

tion and political fortunes went into decline for the next twenty-five years.

The military and political situation in 1915 which led to the decision to attempt the action at the Dardanelles is well known. After a year of stalemate in the trenches of France, it had become obvious to the Allied military planners that the war would not end quickly as had been envisioned by the helligerents in all the capitals of Europe. Thus, even given the combined efforts of the British and the French, sufficient forces simply did not exist, either in numbers of troops or in weapons and equipment, which were capable of dislodging the German armies entrenched from the lowlands to the Swiss border. Reality then was the appalling picture of years of set-piece battles back and forth over a few yards of mud. In addition, the possibility that Russia would weaken and quit (as she eventually did) seemed real enough. Linked with that was the Western fear that more German troops, freed from the eastern front, might sway the balance in France in favor of the Central Powers.

To Churchill, the Army faith in yet another offensive seemed suicidal. To him, the only solution to this dilemma was some alternative plan, completely separate from the Army notion that victory could be won in the trenches if only enough men and equipment could be amassed to break through the German front. Thus, the First Lord concentrated on some sort of innovative idea such as a flanking movement, or the creation of an alternative front.

Churchill's first plan was to formulate a combined amphibious invasion from either Borkum Island or Helgoland in the North Sea. The advantage there would have been a complete outmaneuvering of the Germans behind the western front, and a breaking of the stalemate in the trenches. The Germans