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The Sailor's Bookshelf: Fifty Books to Know the Sea

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Bomber Mafia tried to do" (p. 198). What Gladwell does not understand is that warriors more readily follow a successful leader, particularly one who shares risks with those they command. Additionally, Gladwell—like others so clever—does not understand how wars, limited or total, truly are won. While he interviews and quotes a few selected authors from military colleges, he does not appear to have included in his research any classic thought on the subject—concepts that have endured across time. Such would include Clausewitz's dictum that "[w]ar is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will," or even a more recent American, but still classic, one from William Tecumseh Sherman, that "[w]ar is cruelty, and you can't refine it." And finally, here is another instructive Sherman observation: "Every attempt to make war easy and safe will result in humiliation and disaster."

At the end of the book, Gladwell recounts his meeting with current senior active-duty Air Force generals, who discuss just how accurate their precision weapons have become today. One gets the feeling that "shock and awe" was on Gladwell's mind as he was regaled with Tom Clancy-like precision examples. He concludes, "The genius of the Bomber Mafia was . . . *We don't have to slaughter the innocent, burn them beyond recognition, in pursuit of our military goals. We can do better. And they were right*" (p. 206).

Were they? Gladwell ignores Clausewitz's dictum that "[w]ar is thus an act of force to compel . . ." The sought-after precision? Instead of a "more moral" war, we just have more moral problems. We should remember that "you can't refine it."

PAT MCKIM



The Sailor's Bookshelf: Fifty Books to Know the Sea, by James G. Stavridis [Adm., USN (Ret.)]. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2021. 232 pages. \$24.95.

Admiral James G. "Zorba" Stavridis's story is well known; he needs little introduction. His career started with the U.S. Naval Academy class of 1976; he advanced through service and command at sea and headquarters tours at the Pentagon. He then was Commander, U.S. Southern Command from 2006 to 2009 and finally Supreme Allied Commander Europe, NATO, through 2013. His postservice roles have included vice-chairman for global affairs of the Carlyle Group, chair of the board of trustees for the Rockefeller Foundation, and dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

Stavridis has written ten previous books and numerous articles and papers, including *The Leader's Bookshelf* (2017). This is another book about books, but of a more personal nature, in that it covers those works that shaped his views of the sea—the nautical milieu that has been at the core of his career. For anyone who ever has been afloat, the experience often is awe inspiring.

Exposure to a plethora of professional reading lists seems to be a part of modern military careers. However, these lists usually do not explain how to differentiate a classic from a best seller. There appear to be so many books and too little time to read them; in fact, professional education often teaches the virtue of speed-reading, just to stay ahead of the volume of material to be covered. At present, it seems that while people know how to read, many choose not to, in favor of gaining "electronic

literacy” from a variety of platforms; audiovisual media appear to have become a substitute for print. Nevertheless, reading and viewing are not the same thing, just as doing is different from talking. (Stavridis has bridged this gap with this publication—it is available in both print and e-book formats.)

As the selections are based on the author’s opinion, I will not question his choices of fifty nonfiction and fiction works by providing an alternative list of my own. Doing so would defeat the purpose of this review: explaining why this book should be read and by whom. Stavridis emphasizes the criteria he used for selection in the fifty summaries he provides of the works and their writers. Topics include the oceans, explorers, sailors in fiction, and sailors in nonfiction. He also recommends additional works that expand on the topics chosen.

The book is not an anthology as such but rather a guide to literature by an English major with an MA and a PhD. I recognize most of the authors, but others are new and revealing. Some selections on aviation, amphibs, and naval support activities ashore could have been added.

This single volume constitutes a metaphorical book bag whose contents can be read by a novice seaman, a midgrade petty officer, or an experienced commander. Books do not substitute for experience, but they do provide insights when direct experience has not presented itself, and they also can support the later reflection that puts experience into context. It also is worth recommending that the books be read and discussed with others, to provide the broader understanding that a collegial effort offers. Lastly, a working definition of a *literary classic*

is that when reread it offers further understanding or amusement. Considering all these benefits together, Stavridis wishes us “fair winds and following seas” as we set sail on his recommended literary voyage, charted by a book lover for readers of all stripes.

CHARLES D. MELSON



China as a Twenty First Century Naval Power: Theory, Practice, and Implications, by Michael A. McDevitt. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2020. 320 pages. \$39.95.

There is no longer any question that China’s national destiny has become tied inextricably to the maritime domain. As distinct from *naval power*, the term *maritime power* denotes the projection of manifold instruments of statecraft—military, political, and economic—into the seas. Nevertheless, China has affirmed that its maritime strategy ultimately rests on the extent of its navy. The naval dimension of China’s maritime strategy is the central focus of Michael A. McDevitt’s new book, *China as a Twenty First Century Naval Power: Theory, Practice, and Implications*.

McDevitt is a retired rear admiral in the U.S. Navy and a senior fellow at the Center for Naval Analyses. Although unable to speak Chinese, he draws on a rich array of translated English-language primary-source documents, as well as secondary sources from leading contemporary scholars. The result is an analysis both compelling and novel. The book traces the development of the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), explores its role in defending China’s national interests, and hypothesizes its twenty-first-century trajectory.